

Ara Lee brings gospel, soul, blues to the peninsula

LONG BEACH, Wash. — Ara Lee, when pressed, calls herself a singer-songwriter. But the image of a wispy, soft-voiced, guitar strummer that might come to mind couldn't be farther from what she does. Call it soul, call it folk, call it gospel, Lee sings like a woman with something to say, in a voice that makes you stop and listen, with lyrics that make you remember why you decided to be human once upon a time. Known for her commanding stage presence, Lee's shows, often called "musical church," cut straight to the gut.

Hear her perform at 7 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 8 at the Peninsula Arts Center. Lee

will perform gospel, soul and blues with bassist Julio Appling.

Raised in the deep South, in a church where instruments were not allowed, Lee grew up shape-note singing, learning to make music only with the voice.

"Harmonies were a part of daily life. Music wasn't music without three parts. We would sing songs from our old blue church hymnal — it was the one place where everyone could meet without agreeing on dogma," she said.

A move to New York City as a teenager gave her the chance to use her vocal chops beyond her front porch, and she began a 10-

year incarnation working as a backup singer and studio vocalist.

Now based in Portland, Lee's roots in Appalachia color the songs she writes. "People say I sing gospel, and maybe that's true, but I prefer to call it secular gospel. I don't identify with a specific faith; I sing about the things that I think are simply human. To me, live music is the place where you taste something truly sacred. It's why I sing, it's why I write, it's why I do what I do."

Double bassist, educator, techie and coffee shop loiterer Appling lives in Vancouver, Washington. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in music from the University

of Redlands and a Master of Music in musicology from Bowling Green State University. As an educator, Appling has served as an instructor of both music and technology courses at BGSU Firelands, Tiffin University and Clark College.

The Peninsula Arts Center is located at 504 Pacific Ave. N. Wine, beer, and other refreshments will be available for purchase. Admission is \$12 at the door, online through brownpapertickets.com, or by calling Bill at 360-901-0962.

Concerts benefit the Long Beach Peninsula Acoustic Music Foundation, a 501(c)3 nonprofit charitable organization.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Portland musician Ara Lee will perform Oct. 8 in Long Beach.

coast weekend

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The Astor Street Opry Company's production of Neil Simon's "Barefoot in the Park" centers on newlywed couple Corie, played by Alicea Settlemoire, left, and Paul, played by Ben VanOsdol, adjusting to married life.

PHOTO BY DANNY MILLER

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