

MUSIC!

A large silhouette of a person playing a guitar is the central focus of the cover. The person is shown from the waist up, facing right, with their arms raised as if strumming. The background is a dramatic sunset or sunrise over a body of water, with a sky filled with orange and yellow clouds. The horizon line is visible in the distance, with some palm trees silhouetted against the bright light of the sun.

THE SOUNDS OF **SANTA BARBARA**

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If there has been a musical situation involving a cello, chances are, Jody Redhage has experienced it. While Redhage took to the piano at the age of four, since the age of ten she has been playing cello. And while her home-base of New York City might not be easiest locale to be getting around with the oversized instrument, it has afforded her a diverse and never-ending array of musical adventures. Along with masterminding her own ensemble, Rose and the Nightingale, the list of artists Redhage has worked with reads like a who's who of modern-day music. She recently completed a fourteen month touring engagement with Grammy Award winner, Esperanza Spalding and her Chamber Music Society. Over the years she has collaborated with an array of artists including Neil Diamond, Sufjan Stevens, Jay-Z, Beyonce, Meatloaf, Clay Aiken and Enya. As well as being an acclaimed and highly demanded cellist, she is also a composer, arranger and singer, and nowhere are all of her collective talents better exemplified than with the magical realm of her ensemble Rose and the Nightingale. The female quartet

By Brett Leigh Dicks

first came together to perform a song

cycle she composed titled The Spirit of the Garden and they are bringing their enthralling undertaking to Santa Barbara on Friday, June 15th for a special performance at The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden. With the work inspired by Redhage's own garden experiences, the evening performance in the grounds of the garden will be a musical experience unlike any other. Jody Redhage recently spoke with *Music! Sounds of Santa Barbara* about her illustrious career and what it is like to be bringing inspiration back to its source.

Do you have much history with Santa Barbara?

I have very little history with Santa Barbara. I went there one time on a family vacation at age six and my second trip there was in January when I went to the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden for the first time.

Although I don't have much history with Santa Barbara, I do have a lot of history with California. I went to the University of California Berkley for my undergraduate studies.

How did the cello enter your life?

I was always very musical and began playing piano when I was four years old. I had actually been begging to play piano since I was three. I was already reading music and when I was a ten year old, in fourth grade in the public schools of St. Louis, Missouri, where and every child got to choose an orchestral instrument, I chose the cello because the range was so low. I was attracted to an instrument that was singing lower than my voice was ever going to be able to sing. I was maybe a little bit of ham at the time and was also attracted to an instrument that was so large. Of course it never occurred to me that I would be carrying the thing around with me for the rest of my life!

I read that your husband is a very accomplished trombone player, I hope the two of you don't have to travel together for work very often ...

No, no, no. [laughs] Very rarely!

You have played in numerous musical settings and across countless genera. Music is seemingly a very eclectic experience for you ...

That's really a function of being a cellist in New York City at this point in time. You may remember Melora Creager, she played with Nirvana in the mid-90s and, when she did that, all of a sudden the cello started becoming a very popular instrument in genres other than classical music. Also in the mid-90s Yo-Yo Ma started dipping into playing cello in all sorts of situations, bluegrass with Edgar Meyer and he started doing The Silk Road Project, so the cello has gained a lot of popularity during my profession lifetime across a wide spectrum of genre. I'm just lucky that I happen to live in New York City which is a hot bed for all genres of music.

Such a varied musical existence must offer you an invaluable creative insight ...

It's been fascinating for me to see what the creative lives are like for all those different artists. But, it's also been interesting to see the commonalities. Even though I'm drifting between different genres, it's fascinating to see that there's this under-pinning of really hard

Rose and the Nightingale

The Spirit of the Garden

work and an under - pinning of brilliance that all these artists share, no matter what style they're playing.

Is it at all unsettling working in the freelance realm and being thrust from one project to the next?

For those of us who are really successful freelancers, we have figured out that we need to have the ability to go into any situation, whether it is this beautifully laid out chart that's been written out in advance for us or a totally different situation where we are coming in and working with nothing at all and having to listen and make up our own parts on the spot. I think those of us that are making it successfully are people who can float and make the best of all situations. So it comes down to a combination of our musical skills and having good ears. It comes down to versatility.

Is that then the experience you crave from music?

That's an interesting question because now we're talking about it I think I thrive on the versatility because that is what I chose to do when I'm making my own personal statement in music as well. I'm definitely not the personality that would ever be happy playing in the cello section of an orchestra. I like to be on the creative end of things which means I'm composing and singing and playing cello. With *Rose and the Nightingale* the fact that it does allow me to express myself in various ways, as a composer and a cellist and a singer and an arranger, is there that I feel most inspired.

Tell me a little about Spirit of the Gardens, the work you are bringing to Santa Barbara ...

I've been writing this song cycle since 2009 that I'm writing as a token of gratitude to a really special experience that I had. I'm not a religious person, but gardens are where I go to feel a sense of connection with something greater and they're truly my muse and source of inspiration. So I started writing these songs that are taking poetry by living American poets that celebrate the nexus of spirituality and nature and the sublimity of gardens and I was using the poems as the lyrics for the songs.

And Rose and the Nightingale evolved around the song cycle?

I knew I needed some very special musical personalities for the project. I have recently toured with Esperanza Spalding's Chamber Music Society for 14 months. It was a break for me from being in New York City doing all the vast things that I do here. It was fun just to focus on her music and be part of a band that felt like extended family. Sara Caswell who plays violin and mandolin in *Rose and the Nightingale* was a violinist in the Chamber Music Society and Leala Cyr, our singer and trumpet player was singing backup for Esperanza. The three of us got really, really close on this tour. We played 120 concerts together over 14 months on five continents. They are my sisters now. I got so well acquainted with their musicianship that I started to think about arranging the *Spirit of the Garden* song cycle for these women.

And how did Laila Biali join the fold?

I realized I needed a chordal instrument, either a guitarist or pianist. When I was thinking about the thousands of musicians I know, I kept coming back to thinking that Laila Biali would be perfect, she sings amazingly well and also plays piano and, as I was arranging the song cycle for the other two women, I started to realize that I really wanted three part vocal harmonies. I sing and Leala sings and Laila sings beautifully. Our vocal ranges and the quality of voices blend really together so we got together and started rehearsing and from moment one it was a beautiful musical fit.

What is like to now be performing this song cycle in the locales that inspired it?

When we first started getting interest from Santa Barbara Botanic Gardens and San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers as a venue for performance, I could feel a real power. I don't mean the sort of power that comes with financial wealth or fills up your ego, but the power where you're a conduit to experiences and inspiration. By being in the gardens and being open to that energy and then putting it out there, I hope the listeners will be open and aware and react to it not just as an artist statement, but be inspired also seek out their own experiences and maybe come back to the gardens more often and be open and aware and responsive. That energetic connection is true power.

What role does music play in your life as a listener?

For me, music reflects nature so purely. There's something about the vibration and resonance itself that offers a greater wisdom. In going and listening to an incredibly inspired live concert I have a similar experience as I do going to a garden. Those are the two most sacred experiences life can offer me. So it makes sense for me to combine those two experiences in a project like this.

Rose and the Nightingale will also be performing on June 16th and 17th at Center Stage Theater in benefit for the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden.