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## Arts & Culture

# The Weapon They Have Is Music

Siren Nation takes Portland women's community to the next level

by Tony le Tigre

Portland's very own women's music festival is in the works. The project, dubbed Siren Nation, is moving toward fruition thanks to the work of co-founders Tamara J. Brown and Natalia Kay and has already taken on the look and feel of a full-on community event.

The project's compilation disc features a stellar lineup including Virginia Lopez of the Mambo Queens, Kaia Wilson of The Butchies and Team Dresch, Stolen Sweets, Sugar Shortwave, The Gossip and Pink Martini. Voices from the Siren Nation, spun from Sarah Dougher's Cherchez La Femme label, comes out Dec. 15 with a spectacular release party featuring performances by many of the contributors and an "all-girl mini-bike dance troupe" dubbed The Sprockettes.

The CD release, however, is only the first step toward the festival itself, slated for November 2007 at Crystal Ballroom and other venues. "We're just starting to do booking," Kay says. "In about a month we'll know our headliners."

Brown and Kay, business partners with their own company, Tough Titties Productions, conceived the festival during a dinner conversation that took place in the summer of 2005. They then hooked up with December Carson, head of the Siren Music booking company, and the three of them formed the core of the developing project.

Kay—a self-described dyke who is "not afraid of the F word" (feminist)—met Dougher while booking music for Mississippi Pizza Pub. "I approached her because she was involved with Lady Fest, and she suggested her label sponsor the CD."

Dougher recalls: "I asked, 'Why isn't it Lady Fest?' And they said,

'We wanted to reconfigure it for Portland.' " She adds, "Lady Fest has never been super high on diversity."

Siren Nation is not the first women's music festival to come out of the Rose City—there was a short-lived predecessor called the Daisy Chain Music Fair in 2001—but based on the sheer lineup of talent and local names involved, all signs point to its potential as a major new hub of Portland's diverse women's community. Kay promises the fest will encompass "a broad range of music including, but not limited to, punk, indie, folk, electronica, hip-hop, jazz, Americana, old-time and bluegrass."

"Diversity is the key to the success of the festival," Kay adds. "Siren Nation will reflect the reality that women are playing all different kinds of music."

The festival's main fiscal sponsor is In Other Words, a nonprofit women's bookstore in North Portland. "I think it's going to be sort of like the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival but with an indie, queer, DIY sensibility that reflects Portland," co-manager Rebecca Luxenberg says. "I think of [Michigan] as a staunchly second-wave, feminist, lesbian, goddess event, but Siren Nation is part of the third wave of feminism, and it's different."

Brown agrees. "We're looking for a very urban setting, rather than sitting around naked in the countryside," she laughs. "Not that I have anything against that."

In addition to music, Siren Nation will include film, performance art and a marketplace geared toward local women-owned businesses and nonprofits that will help raise money to put back into the festival. "We're looking to create partnerships within the community, offer services to women and girls, support women-owned businesses and make sponsorships," says Kay. "We really want to do it up."

Dougher says the festival will provide a valuable portal into the local women's rock community. "Even though Portland is known for its support of women rockers, there aren't so many systems where people can get enfranchised," she says. "As someone who runs a label and is devoted to women and queer people, this is a really great opportunity for me to support my people and the infrastructure of music-making."

Another notable local involved with the festival is Marie Fleischmann, proprietor of See Jane Run Productions. An advisory board member and consultant for Siren Nation, she is organizing a "really big pancake breakfast" slated for Jan. 14, 2007.

"It's great to see how much community support we've had," Fleischmann says. "We're glad to provide something the community

has been asking for for a long time.”

Far from a one-shot event, Siren Nation is envisioned as an ongoing annual festival that might even eventually expand beyond the borders of Portland. Kay hasn't ruled out the possibility of touring.

“I'm open to being successful,” she says.

Holocene celebrates the release of Voices from the Siren Nation 9 p. m. Dec. 15 at 1001 S.E. Morrison St. Cover is \$8. For more information visit [www.sirennation.com](http://www.sirennation.com).

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