



Rachel Z gives a jazzy spin to Pink Floyd, Police

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Column by Jim Harrington

ONE OF THE MOST interesting jazz releases to cross my desk in a long time is the Dept. of Good and Evil's new eponymous CD.



On this disc, the group, led by keyboardist-pianist Rachel Z, tackles three original compositions, two standards and - here is where things get really intriguing - seven goth and pop covers.

The band delivers its own jazzy spin to such well-known rock hits as Death Cab for Cutie's "Soul Meets Body," Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb" and Neil Young's "Heart of Gold." The Dept. of Good and Evil also shows impeccable timing with its inclusion of the Police's "King of Pain." (Just in case you've been living under a rock recently, I guess I should explain that Police mania has been in full swing ever since the classic rock act announced it was reuniting for a tour.)

Given the unusual nature of the project, the Dept. of Good and Evil should generate a ton of press for Rachel Z. Yet, it probably won't endear her to some jazz fans.

There's a bit of a stigma around Rachel Z, one that - despite her overwhelming talent - makes it hard for many listeners to accept her as a real jazz artist. It starts with her stage name. I can understand why the woman formerly known as Rachel Carmel Nicolazzo would want a catchier name. But I wouldn't want to see other jazz artists adopt the same practice. Can you imagine seeing Wynton M or Ornette C listed on a marquee?

Not helping her cause is the fact that she's often lumped into the much-maligned contemporary mainstream jazz neighborhood. She's thought of as a jazz-pop fusion artist, which basically puts her on the do-not-listen-to list for straight-ahead fans.

Then, of course, there's her resume. Many people choose to take a selective look at her track record, skipping over her work with such jazz legends as Wayne Shorter and seeing only that she opened a tour for rocker Peter Gabriel.

Well, let me tell you that ol' Pete didn't pick Rachel Z for her catchy name. He selected her because **she can play with the best of 'em.**

Find out what Gabriel already knows when Rachel Z leads the Dept. of Good and Evil into Yoshi's at Jack London Square in Oakland for a CD release party on Monday . It should be worth your time, if for no other reason than to possibly hear a jazz rendition of "Comfortably Numb." For more information, call (510) 238-9200 or visit <http://www.yoshis.com>.