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VISITING ACT | Always Room For Cello **Brooklyn's Rasputina get moody with strings**

BY SHAWNTÉ SALABERT



All decked out: the elegant and mysterious Rasputina

Rasputina

Wed. Dec. 13 9 p.m. \$15 (all ages) Village Tavern 1055 Johnnie Dodds Blvd. 884-6311 www.village-tavern.com www.rasputina.com

Rasputina's beautifully eerie cover of Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here" conjures up images of what that girl from Evanescence might do if she wasn't so stuck in Hot Topic goth-land and obsessed with craptastic, neo-Christian

metal; the softer side of dark pop rock, if you will.

The sometimes-duo/sometimes-trio from Brooklyn have the kind of pedigreed magic and maturity that the VH-1 vixen lacks, and it's mostly due to Rasputina's co-opt of the cello as a righteous instrument of alt-rock. Toss in some borderline creepy Victorian costumery, heavy on the corsets and wan makeup and a host of historical influences, and you have a bona fide under-the-radar wonder quietly making music that they might just as easily keep in their heads.

Vocalist, first-chair cellist, and sole static member Melora Creager formed the band in the early '90s, playfully dubbing it the Traveling Ladies' Cello Society. Performing a mix of self-described "cello rock" and vastly reinterpreted cover songs, the outfit transformed into Rasputina, a name inspired by Creager's love of history and literature and paying homage to the Mad Monk himself.

"[Historical] literature inspires me a lot more than other music, or certainly popular music, because when I read a good book — and usually it's nonfiction — that book gets me inspired a lot of times," explains Creager. Her knack for turning odd historical footnotes into songs can be seen throughout the band's modest catalogue, reflected in their signature spooky, melodic songs like "The Donner Party," "Howard Hughes," "Herb Girls of Birkenau," and "Momma Was an Opium Smoker."

All of this vintage eccentricity brings an air of fairy tale to Rasputina, and Creager doesn't deny that it is intentional. "So many years ago when I started the band, I felt like we can't move around on stage and I'm pretty shy, so let's have some sort of visual thing going on that also expresses the idea of an iconic or fantasy image of what we're trying to do," she explains. "As time has passed, that interpretation has gotten looser and feels kind of like superheroes and cowboys and Indians stuff."

Despite a lack of conventional commercial success, Rasputina's unusual repertoire has over time caught the attention of some influential ears, leading to an album remix by shockmaster Marilyn Manson and tour partners that have ranged from Belle & Sebastian to Nirvana. The band also recently appeared on the Rough Trade Records compilation *Colours Are Brighter*, a benefit album for Save the Children spearheaded by Belle & Sebastian's Mick Cooke, which Creager chalks up as a "fun experience."

The current lineup, consisting of Creager and drummer Jonathan Tebeest, are also releasing a full-length album in early 2007, and Creager just released a new solo album, *Perplexions*, on Rasputina's own Filthy Bonnet label. Kind of summing up her band's whole mythical ball of wax is Creager's own description of one particular track on that album: "Take one measure from *West Side Story's* 'Somewhere.' Add four cellos and the Pitcairnian women's chorus. Rinse. Repeat."