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Sofia Rei: A world's worth of rhythm and song – The Post and Courier

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Listeners can expect the unexpected during Sofia Rei's six Spoleto Festival performances. Depending on the day, audiences might witness a full octet, a stripped-down drums/guitar/vocal trio or any variation in between. The constant will be Rei's fusion of jazz, traditional Latin American folk music and electronic music.

Born and raised in Buenos Aires, Rei began singing at age 9 in a local children's choir. While she appreciated the classical education of her youth, she soon became interested in exploring new forms.

"I love classical music, but I didn't want to be restricted to that world," Rei said. "At first, I wanted to be a professional opera singer, but it felt narrow-minded and limiting." She started branching out in high school, including some dabbling in punk rock, but it was her exposure to jazz that sent her in a new musical direction. In 2001, Rei moved to Boston, where she later graduated from the New England Conservatory with a master's in jazz and improvisation.

"I moved to America to learn," she said. "I did not start writing my own music until I moved to the U.S. At that point I was more of a singer than a composer." With the help of her frequent collaborators, she began writing original compositions anchored by traditional folk drums and her soaring vocals.

"She has this pan-Latina voice that is such an important part of the African diaspora," said jazz vocalist Dominique Eade, who taught Rei at the New England Conservatory. "She knows the history and has a deep respect for the traditions. She's not ignoring it while innovating. She brings things in for a reason".

Rei's debut album, "Ojalá," was well received by critics and public alike, but it was not until "Sube Azul" in 2009 that her true sound emerged. She floated nimbly over the 12 tracks, weaving a tapestry of ethereal melodies over heavy rhythms, steeped in the folkloric traditions of South America.

She described her follow-up album, 2012's "De Tierra y Oro," as a series of "philosophical wanderings." These wanderings incorporated more electronic elements, including heavy layered vocals, drum loops and electric guitars.

This fine line between tradition and experimentation surfaces again in her latest album, "El Gavilán," a tribute to the Chilean folk artist Violeta Parra. Built around vocal loops, this album features a more political Rei addressing civil rights and the effects of geopolitics.

Rei continues in the tradition of Parra as an educator, having worked with the New York Jazz Academy for the past eight years. "No matter what style she's teaching, she digs deep and really helps each vocalist reach full potential," said Javier Arrau, the academy's founder and executive director. "Her breadth of expertise is also incredibly rich, and she moves seamlessly from Latin American to classic jazz to modern jazz and many other genres." These genres and many others continuously pop up in Rei's own music.

"It's successful when there's a genuine blend of styles, when it's not imposed but organic," she said. "The challenge is to keep the traditional grooves alive, but to not lose the flexibility and spontaneity." That spontaneity will be on full display throughout Rei's six different Spoleto sets. Each will feature its own unique set and structure, setting the stage for a series of performances that live in that moment – and only that moment.

Source: [The Post and Courier](#)

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