



PERFORMER CORNER

Jessy Greene

by Colleen Bertsch

Listen carefully to her first solo album *Blue Sky*, and you can hear Jessy Greene imitating a guitar lick on her violin, weaving a beautiful counter-melody or providing a fiddle-style rhythmic motion to a song. With a background in Middle-eastern music and the help of electronics, her music sounds futuristic and ancient at the same time. It is brand new ear candy that is comfortably familiar.

Jessy, the former Suzuki violin student from Massachusetts, is now a pop-rock and hip-hop singer, violinist, guitarist and composer. Before her move to Minneapolis, she was a studio musician in Los Angeles, playing violin and singing backup for other people's projects. Her collaboration credits include the Geraldine Fibbers, the Jayhawks, and Wilco. Currently, she is concentrating on a second solo album *A Demon and Her Lovers* with the help of an American Composer's Forum grant.

In order to make the violin work in this genre, Jessy had to learn how to create lines that were supportive, repetitious, and flavorful. In pop music, loops, reoccurring rhythmic ideas, and short, catchy melodic licks play the most important roles. Earning an undergraduate degree in ethnomusicology from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) taught Jessy those skills. Although Cajun music got her into the program, it was the middle-eastern style — the tritones, Hijaz scales*, and cyclical rhythms — that she gleaned the most from. Bits and pieces of what she learned in her classes infiltrated her repertoire of licks and lines while playing with various music groups. Experience taught her the rest. "There are certain things you do and certain things you just don't do," Jessy says. "You don't overplay and make it cluttered; you don't step on the vocals. You do want to be present but not overpowering; you do want it to sound fuller and not thin or nasal."

Working with electronics is a necessity to play this style of music and therefore has made Jessy somewhat of an expert on amplification gear for acoustic instruments.

Jessy has had experience with both pickups and clip-on microphones on her violin. Through years of trial and error she has found that the following system produces the nicest tone with a minimum occurrence of feedback on her violin. She uses a Baggs bridge pick-up — which literally replaces a standard bridge — and plugs it's cord into a direct box. The direct box in turn is plugged into a tube amplifier, which, like a guitar, gives the instrument a warm full tone. Foam, the soft kind you would use for a shoulder rest, is tucked into the f-holes to lessen the chance of feedback. Lastly, she says, be mindful of volume. Playing in an electric group should be just as dynamic and pleasing to your ears as an acoustic one.

It was after her move to Minneapolis from Los Angeles that Jessy decided to write and record her own music. With the help of musician friends, Jessy began to learn the ins and outs of creating music track-by-track on a computer. Part of her composition process was to create the song structure by taking drum tracks from a computer processor. Using a processor gave her the freedom to experiment with rhythm and structure in order to match with the song style and mood she had in her head. She added tracks of guitar, keyboard, and horns recorded for her by other musicians. Her improvised violin and cello lines were also recorded live along with the melody and harmony vocal lines. For icing on top, she would record a sound (e.g., a water bottle shaken in rhythm), loop it on the computer, and edit it with other looped and tracked sounds.

Most recently, Jessy has been playing with the Minneapolis hip-hop band Hei-

rusp. Using a different approach, the songs on her second album were written and recorded with the full band. Jessy is now in the process of adding strings, sound effects, and backup vocals to the full band tracks. "With hip-hop, it's repetition. You find one cool little simple line and you play it over and over and over again. Then when you record in the studio, it's" — imagine Jessy playing air violin in fast forward motion — "and you're done!" Can this be fulfilling? "Oh yes, I'm really into hip-hop right now, so I dig it! I suppose

it could be considered boring, and to play big, extravagant violin lines is more exciting. But playing something simple is beautiful too. I find it very fulfilling to add my part to music styles that I enjoy." Precisely why her violin playing works so well in pop and hip-hop styles: Jessy lets the music dictate what is required of the



violin.

Check out Jessy's website www.jessygreene.com for performance updates, video and audio samples, background, where to buy CDs, and more.

* Hijaz scale: 1 b2 3 4 5 b6 b7 8 (C, Db, E, F, G, Ab, Bb, C)

Hijaz tir scale: 1 b2 3 4 5 b6 7 8 (C, Db, E, F, G, Ab, B, C)

A former public school string educator in the Twin Cities area, Colleen Bertsch now maintains a private violin studio in northeast Minneapolis. She performs with the Ethnic Dance Theatre and is the fiddle player for Orkestar Bez Ime, an international folk-dance band that specializes in Balkan and eastern European music. You can visit their website at www.rogaria.com. ‡