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## THE 2010 METROTIMES BEST OF DETROIT PARTY

4/14/2010

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### ROCK/POP

## Potluck utopia

Glass Rock gains international momentum through a long-distance relationship



PHOTO: CLAUDIA BURLOTTI

BY CYNDI LIESKE

Kathy Leisen is browsing through a box of cassette tapes that sits on a small table in her sparse art studio. Less artistic types might've used this space as a living room if they lived in the Corktown house that Leisen shares with her boyfriend.

The many cassettes here chronicle the Glass Rock singer's various vocal styles — from ethereal to husky — as well as the musical experimentation she's done over the years, all recorded on the trusty Tascam four-track recorder some friends once bought her as a birthday gift. The box contains roughly two dozen compilations, and she's got another couple dozen stored elsewhere. Leisen jokes that one day she'll create a boxed set out of them.

"I've probably spent 10,000 hours with those [four-track] headphones on," she says. "The creation of a

song has always been like magic to me. I completely fell in love with [the process] — and it just seemed to be something I had a natural aptitude for. I was immediately hooked."

And now there's a growing international fan base that's beginning to feel that aptitude about Leisen's sultry, bluesy vocals, which she has merged with a moody, lounge-rock vibe in New York City-based Glass Rock. Britain's *Uncut* magazine called her "a confident, soulful singer in the vein of Chan Marshall." Other listeners have referenced her with Van Morrison, Suzanne Vega and Sinead O'Connor, with the sometimes almost ambient music described as "the sound of a dying decade, smooth, bleak but with an unerring beauty," as well as "rust dipped in honey" — perhaps the missing link between the Stevie Nicks version of Fleetwood Mac and Yukon Blonde.

Former West Bloomfielder Matt Kantor — Leisen's longtime friend, bassist and collaborator in local psychedelic pop band Soft Location, and now in Glass Rock — couldn't agree more with those raves: "Everyone loves hearing Kathy sing."

Following stints living in New York City, San Francisco and Florida, Leisen — who makes her living as a visual artist (she currently has a show at City Bird, midtown Detroit's trendy new gift shop) — has called Detroit home since 2003. The 1995 Grosse Pointe South High and Eastern Michigan University fine arts grad works for the Ox-Bow Art School and Artists' Residency in Saugatuck, traveling to art schools throughout the year; she'll be living at the camp as an instructor this summer.

Leisen also likes moving back and forth between the visual arts and music, as well as combining them, as she did last summer when she cleared and mowed the 60-by-100 foot vacant lot next to her home to host six art installations. Various musicians stopped by to perform throughout the exhibit. And a year ago, the singer played drums in the Trashers, a local band whose only show was at the UFO Factory art gallery in Eastern Market.

"One of the best things about living [in Detroit] is that almost everyone you know has a basement," she says. "That's why it's so easy to play music. You can just spontaneously say, 'Hey, come on over and let's play.' A lot of bands will just form for a couple of months. There's a real nice culture that grows out of that here because it makes it easy and fun."

In New York, where she lived from 2001-2003, most of the affordable living spaces were tiny and bands rented rehearsal spaces, which meant lots of advance planning and money.

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