



Singer to perform in S.F. after crossing Delancey

BY **EMILY SAVAGE** | JULY 16, 2010

Due to her rigorous tour schedule, singer-songwriter Rachael Sage will be away from home during the High Holy Days this year for the first time in a decade.

The only other time the New York-based pianist missed her family's Rosh Hashanah gathering was when she was on tour with Eric Burdon and the Animals in Germany — but she still managed to make it to a synagogue.

Though the holidays are still a few months away, Sage already has squared away her plans. "I'll be in England," she says, "and I have a generous offer from my [press representative] to join her family's dinner."

Until leaving for the U.K. in August, Sage will be continuing on her current U.S. tour, which brings her to Café du Nord in San Francisco for a Wednesday, July 21 performance.

A 30-something Stanford University graduate with a degree in drama, Sage has a special affinity for the Bay Area.

"I loved it out there — the pace and the history of the Haight-Ashbury district, the political and social dynamics," she said of her time living in the Bay Area. "People were more interested in the musical process than the finished product, and that rubbed off on me."



During her upcoming visit, Sage will play piano and sing impassioned tunes off her new album, "Delancey Street," which has an Americana-meets-Broadway sound. She'll also preview her upcoming Edinburgh Fringe Festival production, "Stop Me If I'm Kvetching."

Sage's productions, often compiled for the yearly Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland, typically include songs from her current album, along with conversation and gimmicks. For Chanukah last year, she put on "Chachkas and Latkes" at Joe's Pub in New York City, during which the flame-haired singer dispersed latkes from a rhinestone toaster.

"Stop Me If I'm Kvetching" will include plenty of audience participation. "It's about the myriad of ways people complain," Sage says. "I examined my own material and realized I owe a lot of my lyrics to the act [of kvetching]."

“Delancey Street,” Sage’s ninth studio album, is tied thematically to change. “It’s about looking at what you want to hold onto from your past, your heritage and being proactive by taking hold of your life.”

Sage’s biggest personal change last year was a cross-town move to Manhattan’s Lower East Side — she subsequently named the album after a well-known street in the area.

As a youth, Sage used to go on Hebrew school trips to Lower East Side, once the center of Jewish immigrant life in New York. While the neighborhood has gone through many gentrifying changes over the past 60 to 80 years, Sage says she still sees glimpses of its former life.

“It’s pretty diverse,” she says, “but there’s still a nostalgic sense of it being a treasured Jewish neighborhood of the New York past.”

While Sage grew up in Connecticut, she considers herself a New Yorker at heart. As a child, she traveled to New York City every day after school for ballet practice, and after graduating from Stanford in the mid-1990s, she moved to the city for good.

Ballet wasn’t Sage’s only childhood pastime. She began tinkering with the family’s piano at age 4 and started writing her own “nonsense pop songs” by age 5. But it was the double whammy of cantorial guidance at Hebrew school and a chance collaborative family bat mitzvah gift that really got her musically motivated.

Sage cites the cantors at her Conservative synagogue in Connecticut as being her first examples of true musicianship. At the same time, they noticed a spark in young Sage and encouraged her to pursue music.

As for that bat mitzvah present? An uncle also recognized her artistic ability, and he got some relatives to pool together and give her a four-track recording device. Using the four-track, she learned to layer her voice dozens of times and create complex compositions.

“By the end of the year I was bringing it to middle school talent shows,” Sage says. “I owe that uncle a great deal.”

Rachael Sage opens for Joe Firstman and Jay Nash at 8 p.m. Wednesday, July 21 at Café du Nord. \$12. Information: www.rachaelsage.com.