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DRESS REHEARSALS GETTING EASIER//GUITARIST LEARNS TO LIVE IN A MAN'S WORLD

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When Emily Remler began to play guitar professionally, she was self-conscious and often felt awkward among mostly male musicians. She'd wear a sweatsuit or some other kind of bulky outfit to minimize her female frame. But when she appears this weekend at the Jazz Party as the annual event's first female musician, Remler just might wear a dress.

"In the beginning, I tried to be more of a boy than I do now. I used to really dress down to hide the fact that I was a female. Or I'd hide behind my amp," explains Remler. "Now, I'll even wear a dress onstage."

The 31-year-old Remler has become so comfortable, in fact, that she recently removed her shoes during a concert - but only after asking the audience's permission. "It was in St. Louis," she recalls, "and there were about 500 people in the audience. I was wearing really high heels, and after standing for a while in those things, the guitar became pretty heavy. So, I asked the audience if I could take off my shoes. They said fine, and I did."

The dress, the shoes, both are indicative of how Remler, who's been performing for about 14 years, is beginning to feel about her audience. "It's best for me when I treat the audience like they're friends and they're in my living room. Otherwise, I'm too frightened by them. I'm getting more comfortable with audiences now, because I'm beginning to believe that they're there to like me, as opposed to judging me."

And, unlike so many self-indulgent musicians, Remler wants to please her audience. "It may sound trite, but the goal of music for me is to reach people with a positive, creative energy and to try to have it reciprocated. I

use my music to get away from the troubles and anxieties of the world, and so my music is like that. I want the audience to be relaxed and enjoy the music. I want them to smile.”

Remler came from folk music and rock 'n' roll and wasn't interested in jazz - didn't even understand it - until her late teens when she enrolled at the Berklee College of Music in Boston because, she says, she couldn't get into other schools.

“It's not that I was stupid. I just wasn't interested in anything but music. Basically, I was a hippie who didn't do much studying.” She became obsessed with music at Berklee and committed to becoming a great jazz guitarist, she says, adding, “That's what I'm still trying to do.”

Another guitarist at Berklee turned her on to the music of Dave Brubeck, Paul Desmond and Wes Montgomery. “As a child of the late '60s, I didn't understand jazz at all. It was just a bunch of notes to me - that's why I'm tolerant now as far as people understanding jazz is concerned.”

After hearing Montgomery, she unabashedly copied him. “I wanted to sound like Wes. I wasn't afraid of imitation being a problem, either, because I reasoned that I'd get as good as Wes, then change my style. Well, my style is evolving; I'm getting my own voice. But I'm not sure I ever got as good as Wes.”

Remler has made six albums for Concord Records - her newest is ‘East to Wes,’ a tribute to Montgomery. She's performed with Wynton and Branford Marsalis, Sonny Rollins, Freddie Hubbard, Cedar Walton, Buster Williams, Eddie Gomez and Bob Moses. She's played with just about everybody who's anybody among guitarists - Herb Ellis, Barney Kessel, Tal Farlow, Charlie Byrd, Joe Pass, Stanley Jordan, John Scofield, Jim Hall, Pat Martino, Mike Stern.

And she has accompanied singers Astrud Gilberto (four years), Rosemary Clooney, Nancy Wilson and others.

At The Jazz Party, Remler will be playing with 23 other musicians - all but one male (singer Margaret Whiting is the only other female performer). But this is not a new situation for one of the few women guitarists in jazz.

“Hey, there were 2,000 men at Berklee and only 40 women,” she says.

But there's no question that being female has caused her to lose some concerts. "There have been cases where the leader didn't think a woman could support him or wasn't comfortable with a woman on the bandstand. It made me sad, but I had to keep going. It's their problem, not mine."

The fifth annual Jazz Party, 8 p.m.-12:30 a.m. Friday, noon-5 p.m. and 8 p.m.-12:30 a.m. Saturday, and 5:30-10:30 p.m. Sunday, Grand Ballroom, Marriott Hotel City Center, 30 S. 7th St., Minneapolis. Tickets, \$150 (for all four sessions), \$20 for the Sunday finale. Tickets on sale at Dayton's and Great American Music Stores; phone orders at 989-5151. For information, call 542-8140.

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