

## Arts and Entertainment

# Blues singer gives credit to past legends

by Jordan Toronto

Koko Taylor, Etta James, Bessie Smith and Ruth Brown were her inspirations but the woman touted as the next Queen of Blues says it all started at home.

"I had music around me my whole life," singer Shemekia Copeland told Voices in a recent interview. "I was always making noise around the house." Copeland, who has been nominated for a 2010 Blues Music Award in the Contemporary Blues Female Artist of the Year, will be playing the State Theatre in downtown State College March 29.

That same house in Harlem entertained musician friends of her father, the late blues guitar legend, Johnny Clyde Copeland. But as a child, she didn't see them as the famous, important musicians they were to the music world. They were just guys who came over with their guitars to hang out and play music with her dad.

A young singer who has already earned numerous blues awards, a Grammy nomi-

nation and with a resume that includes work with film giant, Martin Scorsese, Copeland began her career with her first professional gig at 10 years old. She sang at the Cotton Club every Sunday during the Sunday brunches. She also began doing little gigs, opening for her dad, who had started to get sick.

"It felt good, being up there in front of people," Copeland said. "It just clicked that this was something I wanted to do."

In addition to the huge impact her father had on her, there were many other legendary performers, such as Taylor, Smith and others who ignited Copeland's passion for the blues.

"These are such wonderful ladies who have been so kind to me," Copeland said. "And seeing them perform was absolutely incredible."

"If you saw Koko Taylor sitting in a chair, you'd think you could break her,"

see Blues, pg. 23



Photo by Joseph A. Rosen  
Shemekia Copeland, called the next Queen of Blues, was recently nominated for the 2010 Blues Music Award Contemporary Blues Female Artist of the Year. She comes to State College March 29.

## Woman-led local band makes plans for new CD

by Tunomukwathi Asino

The snow did not stop people from flocking to Café 210 West in State College to hear the Keena Band perform Feb. 13. The band performs mainly county music, but they throw in some rock as well.

"I love it: great, energetic, catchy and talented," said Mary L. Osif who was hearing Keena perform for the first time.

The Keena Band is made up of Keena Corbert, the lead vocalist; Fred Metzger, on drums; Max Magliaro, guitar/vocal; Chris Kepler, on bass and Larry Boggess, on guitar. The band was started two and a half years ago.

"The music that we choose is musically more difficult to play and play well," Corbert said. "Along with that, we perform songs that not all singers can sing and sing well. We pick powerful songs, from Carrie Underwood to Melissa Etheridge. Martina McBride is my favorite, and we perform her songs every chance we get. There is

absolute power behind those songs."

One of the songs that the Keena Band performed at Café 210 is "Romeo and Juliet" by Taylor Swift. Corbert said the band has original songs that they perform and the band is planning to record them. She said they have been talking with Marc Frigo, who has a recording studio in Boalsburg. The band expects to be working with him soon.

Corbert explained that they perform a variety of songs for all ages. She said they try to reach a variety of audiences.

"We choose more difficult songs, musically and vocally. We want to do the songs that most bands do not attempt to do. We also choose songs that will entertain as well as touch the audience. We do the songs that show our talent and connect with the crowd," Corbert said.

She added that there are so many amazing bands in State College, and "We just want to be one of them."

"We all have other careers, but music is

our passion," she said. "Anyone can perform any song, but selling it and making people believe it is a whole different thing. We put heart into every song, every word and every note."

"My experience with Keena Band has been amazing," said Corbert who has been singing since she was 3. "To sing with a band that has all of the magic and passion that this band holds is absolutely a dream come true. Singing is my dream, and now, with this band, my dream is coming true," Corbert said.

Corbert started out in churches around her hometown near Roaring Spring with her brother. After college, she moved to Nashville to pursue her dream of becoming a country singer, and worked at Opreyland Park.

Fans Michael Flanagan and Megan Flanagan have been hearing Keena per-

see Keena, pg. 23



Photo by Diane Kearney  
Keena Corbert and her band at Cafe 210.

# Nu. Musical Theatre finds national and international stages

by Jordan Toronto

This March, the Penn State Nu. Musical Theatre festival will present a series of new musicals, including *Steam*, *The Scottish Musical* and *All Fall Down*. The festival selected the best musicals submitted from across the country and—this year—the world.

“This is the fourth year of the festival,” said Artistic Director Raymond Sage, “and I’m thrilled to announce that it has gone international.”

To stage *Steam*, Nu. Musical Theatre is working with the Danish Academy for Musical Theatre and the musical’s Danish writers, who presented a shorter version of *Steam* at The Uterus Theatre in Denmark.

*Steam* is based on Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and was originally called *A Midsummer Night’s Steam*. “Our version takes place in New York City

in the 1960s,” said Helle Hansen, the composer and lyricist. “The main characters are mobsters, or children of mobsters, and the fairies are, well, different.”

“We did a 60-minute showcase of *Steam* in both Denmark and Edinburgh, Scotland,” Hansen said. “We’ll present the entire musical for the first time at Penn State, which is going to be really exciting. It will be a chance to find out what works and what doesn’t.”

Hansen recalled the different audience reactions in Denmark and Scotland, where the same joke would be funny in one place and not so funny in the other. She is looking forward to seeing how the audience responds to it here.

Hansen traveled from Denmark to State College at the end of February to attend some of the rehearsals and introduce the material to the students.

“To me, teaching it to the performers is

the fun part,” Hansen said. “When I see it take form, when they start to bring it to life, that’s the most exciting time for me.”

Hansen will be back in State College with the rest of the writing team for the week before the performances.

The *Scottish Musical* is an adaptation of Shakespeare as well. It was conceived by librettist, Darin DePaul, who ironically had always hated Shakespeare. One night, DePaul’s wife, who was the dramaturge for a production of *Macbeth* at the Classical Theatre of Harlem, was watching Roman Polanski’s version of *Macbeth* as research.

“I was making fun of it,” DePaul admits, “making little Mystery Science Theatre-type comments throughout the show. My wife told me to get up and write something. So I went into the other room and started writing.”

At first, DePaul, who had a successful career as a performer in New York, invited

some of his Broadway friends to read it as a musical, even though it did not have any songs.

He brought his friend Mark Waldrop on board to write the songs, a lyricist who wrote *When Pigs Fly* and has directed *Better Midler* on tour. Then Waldrop brought his friend, Sam Davis to the project, a composer, who is currently working as music director on the new *Dreamgirls* tour. Davis and DePaul already knew each other, so there was some serendipity at play in the way the creative team was formed.

“I kept pushing my non-musical theatre ideas on them, like my *Family Guy*-style asides,” said DePaul, “and they were very kind.”

DePaul now loves Shakespeare and is an avid reader of any books about him. He has

see *Musicals*, pg. 23

## Waiting for the job market to recover?

**Voices can help you build skills for the new economy!**

Become a section editor, writer or photographer with *Voices* and learn how to:

- ▷ organize your time effectively
- ▷ work with volunteers to accomplish a goal you can see every month
- ▷ interview people to gain reliable, interesting information
- ▷ shoot photos that tell a story.

Contact us today at [voices@voicesweb.org](mailto:voices@voicesweb.org)



**Discover Your Inner Artist**

At the  
**Art Alliance**  
of Central PA

**For Adults**  
Art classes and workshops beginning the week of March 29. oils, acrylics, pastels, watercolors, drawing water-based collage, digital camera, stained glass

**For Children and Teens**  
Weekly Summer Camps  
June 21- August 27

**For Art Lovers**  
Go Figure Show  
March 19-28  
Recycled Art Show  
April 16-18

**Art Alliance of Central PA. 818 Pike St, Lemont**  
For more information: [www.artalliancepa.org](http://www.artalliancepa.org) or 234-2740

from **Musicals**, pg. 22

since visited Shakespeare's grave, apologized and thanked the Bard for his plays.

DePaul asserted that people don't really understand what Shakespeare was doing with his plays. "They perceive him as some hoighty-toighty author, but he was a playwright for the people," DePaul said. "He really understood what it is to be human."

DePaul imagines that Shakespeare would really enjoy *The Scottish Musical*, which has turned out to be a little like "Mystery Science Theatre" itself, complete with the character Evil Emily Dickinson.

All Fall Down is a show about a perfect family trying to figure out why their perfect only son attempted suicide. It blends past and present, reality and fantasy as it follows the family's journey.

"It's very psychological," said director Robert Schneider, "and very fun."

The cast of four plays ten characters. Three of the cast members are Penn State

seniors and the fourth actor is Spence Ford, dance faculty member in Penn State's School of Theatre.

"The students are doing really well, completely throwing themselves into the process," Schneider said. "They are all trained for the professional world, so this is a great test. And Spence is a pro. It's wonderful to have her up there."

Composer/lyricist Selda Sahin came to State College with script and song revisions for the first two rehearsals. She and librettist Greg Turner will return for final rehearsals, making changes until the performance.

"We're really excited for the audience to see it," said Schneider. "They're going to learn a lot about their own families and about themselves."

The Nu. Musical Theatre festival gives its musicals a good start, and some of them have gone on to great success. After the workshoping at Penn State, *Ordinary Days* by Adam Gwon was performed at bigger

venues, including an Off-Broadway run at the Roundabout Theatre. In January, London's Theatre at Great Russell Street did a reading of *Preface*, the second musical by Gwon that debuted at Penn State.

This year's festival will open on March 17 with *Love Lost, Love Returned*, an evening of one-man shows at the Palmer Museum. The shows include *Love Returned*, written by and featuring Sage, and *Ecoute* with Norman Spivey, a show from last year's Nu. Musical Theatre festival which was performed at 40 schools and universities across the country this fall. Nu. Musical Theatre festival will also showcase *YouTube Idol* by Gilbert Bailey (senior in Penn State's musical theatre program) in April.

For more information about show times, visit <http://www.numusicals.psu.edu>.

from **Blues**, pg. 21

Copeland recalled. "But when she performed, she'd become She-Ra, the superhero of the blues!"

Ever humble and appreciative of her status in the blues world, Copeland posted a letter to fans on her Web site the day Koko Taylor passed away.

"The blues world just lost a TRUE legend in the passing of Koko Taylor. She paved the way for all female blues artists, not only here in the US, but around the world," she wrote. "If it weren't for Koko, I wouldn't be able to do what I do. I have lost a friend, mentor, and my 'Blues Mama.' I will think of her everyday, and she will live on in my heart for the rest of my life. Koko Taylor is now — and will always be — the undisputed Queen of the Blues."

In February, Copeland released the album, *Never Going Back*, her debut on Telarc. This album inspired a new sound for Copeland, a sound that isn't all blues. Producer Oliver Wood helped Copeland uncover another side of herself as a performer.

"I think he just helped me to relax more," Copeland said. "When you come from blues and gospel, you sing! But he showed me a different way to get that across."

"At first, I was always teasing him, saying 'You're doing that lazy singing,'" said

from **Keena**, pg. 21

form for about six months and described them as wonderful and talented and they get people dancing.

Terri Nelson-Bunge, who attended the Café 210 show, liked Keena's performance because it was energetic. "I like her choice of music, she mixes it up," she said.

The Keena Band is working on getting bookings for fairs and festivals throughout central Pennsylvania for this summer. The band will be doing the Central PA 4thFest up at the Bryce Jordan Center again this year and has some private functions scheduled as well.

More information about the Keena Band can be found at [www.keenaband.com](http://www.keenaband.com).

Copeland. "But it's actually a very cool thing. I love it. This is an amazing way to enjoy and approach a song."

Oliver Wood co-wrote the hit song, "Never Going Back to Memphis," with John Hahn, which is also nominated in the Song of the Year category. He laid down guitar tracks for all 12 songs, and even provided some back-up vocals. Copeland loved collaborating with Wood, she said, and expects to work with him again.

"I've had success in my career, and I'm happy with that," said Copeland about the release of *Never Going Back*. "But that doesn't mean I don't want to grow. In order for an artist to grow and for a genre to grow you have to do new things. I'm extremely proud to say I'm a blues singer, but that doesn't mean that's the only thing I'm capable of singing, or that's the only style of music I'm capable of making."

Like her father who went to Africa to work with musicians there, Copeland loves world music.

"I could see myself singing Indian or West African music," Copeland said.

Her father was one of the first blues singers to venture out beyond the blues. Copeland said she would like to follow in her father's footsteps by continuing to be innovative in her approach to her singing and her career.



**Teamsters**  
**Local 8**  
PRIDE - UNITY - STRENGTH

PROUD TO SUPPORT OUR TROOPS  
OUR COMMUNITY AND YOUTH SPORTS

Please help support the

**march of dimes**  
march for babies

The March of Dimes is a leading nonprofit organization working to improve the health of pregnant women and their babies.

A local walking event for the nationwide **March for Babies** will be held on **April 25, 2010** in State College, PA.

For more information please call **1-814-696-9691**

**Registration Time at the State College Spikes Stadium: 12:00 PM**

**Start Time: 1:00 PM - Walk Distance: 3.5 miles**

**The Men and Women of Teamsters  
Local 8 are happy to support the  
March of Dimes**