



Monica Lee plays viola — when she's not playing piano or guitar — with her band at the Libra Room.

# Lee feels Drive to make CD

**ON COMMERCIAL:** 10 years after first album, Monica's raring to record

## Club show

### Monica Lee

**Where:** Libra Room,  
1608 Commercial Dr.,  
604-255-3787

**When:** Thursday  
evenings from 8

Monica Lee has a house gig at the Libra Room on Commercial.

Each Thursday since February, Lee and her small band of Jesse Waldman (guitar) and Marc L'Esperance (drums) set up at the restaurant on the Drive and find out a little bit more about who they are.

In that time, Lee has developed a word-of-mouth reputation for her weekly sets at the Libra Room. Before that, she wasn't so sure that she wanted to make music.

She had worked in the film industry as a chef and that was paying the rent until she found an opening at the Libra Room.



### Tom Harrison

ON MUSIC

"I re-examined what I really wanted to do for a career," Lee says now. "I realized deep down that I'm a musician, not a chef.

"I thought I would give it a go and did," she says. "I made some money, got a few gigs."

She had some believers. There was her band and there was Steven Drake. Since leaving Odds, Drake moved into sound engineering and record production. He liked Lee's songs, which she characterizes as mostly about love and which

have an understated bluesiness about them, and started to amass an album's worth of material. That was two years ago. Lee doesn't know if the album will ever materialize but the house gig has allowed her to test her songs in public with Waldman and L'Esperance, and she won't be as naive as she was when she made her first album in 1997. The studio was offered, she took up the offer.

"I didn't even know what a studio was," she says. "The whole thing was done in four hours. I didn't know I was making a record.

"The stuff I'm writing now has more feeling. I have more on my palette with which to express myself."

Although it opened a few doors, got her gigging and introduced her to a few musicians, the experience with the first album showed that she had a lot to learn and turned her toward being a chef.

"Margaret Atwood says that in order to make original art, you have to waste time," Lee says.

When Lee made her album nearly 10 years ago, she admits she wasn't ready. Now, after wasting time, in a way, she is.

"We really want to get the songs recorded," she says.

Lee grew up in Edmonton and Calgary, moved to Victoria then came to Vancouver. Her mother was a piano teacher, her father from Trinidad. She was brought up in a musical environment and learned to play viola, her first instrument. Piano and guitar came next. When she isn't at the Drive, she's a music teacher.

"It's so rewarding," she exclaims. "So much more rewarding than feeding a bunch of film stars."

Making music "is not work to me. It's fun. I'm surrounded by music all the time."

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news



CD Release  
Thursday Feb 21, 2008  
The Libra Room  
1608 Commercial Drive

CD includes bonus CD-rom content  
**monica lee at the libra**  
"the second set" Nov 1, 2007  
'one shot' film by Jordan Barnes-Crouse

Call **604-255-3787**  
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Three songs are up on  
[YouTube](#) ...  
Mama's MC  
One More Day  
What if?



Recorded live at Vancouver's renowned Libra Room between March and October of 2007  
ten tracks from The Monica Lee Band's growing and ever-varied catalogue of captivating, or

Produced by Marc L'Espérance

Publicist Joée Brassard Desjardins  
[joebrassard@hotmail.com](mailto:joebrassard@hotmail.com)

Monica Lee returns to her regular gig at Commercial Drive's Libra Room

# Chef/singer ends her hiatus from music

By Heike Kilian

MONICA LEE LIVES MUSIC. Whether she's performing in front of a packed crowd at Commercial Drive's Libra Room or relaxing at JJ Bean, it comes spilling out of her. Over a cup of tea, while telling the story of how a message she left on a friend's answering machine developed into a song, she belts out the chorus of "Judy Lea," the resulting song.

When performing live, she often seems completely wrapped up in her music as she bends over the piano keys and sings, eyes closed. But when she launches into her sing-along song "Down On De Drive," Lee stands up tall, laughing and interacting with the audience.

After a year-long break, Lee is back at the Libra Room. Every Thursday night, the Alberta native and her band—guitarist Jesse Waldman and drummer Marc L'Espérance—play Lee's mixture of jazz, blues and folk.

"We've developed a great crowd that's coming every week," she says proudly.

When the singer and songwriter isn't performing live or teaching piano and music theory, she works on new songs. In September, she heads into the studio to record a new album. It will be produced by L'Espérance, who previously produced albums for Po'Girl, and Ray Condo and The Ricochets.

"There'll be a great difference between my first CD, which was based only on the guitar I'd taught myself and my musical instincts. As I've developed and learned stuff, now when I get that sense of urgency to write a song I have more tools on my palate. I have more ideas about how to use the musical language to accentuate what I'm trying to say."

Lee came from a musical family. Her mother taught piano and her father was a singer and cuatro player from Trinidad. "I think I may have started making music as soon as I could make a noise," says Lee.

Growing up in Calgary and Edmonton, she learned to play the piano as soon as she could reach the keys. She also learned how to play the cello after hearing it at the Edmonton Symphony. As much as that instrument piqued her interest, she eventually switched to the viola, an instrument she still plays. In Grade 12, though, she realized that classical music wasn't her calling.



Monica Lee: "Right before [the Libra Room] had the fire I had been asked to take over Wednesday and Friday nights, and then my venue disappeared, and my will to do it disappeared, so I disappeared."

photo Dan Toulgoet

"I wasn't very good at practising, I would go downstairs and just make things up, so my mum bought me a guitar."

In 1991, Lee left Edmonton and moved to

Victoria, where she worked as a home support attendant and chef. In 1998, she moved to Vancouver.

"Victoria is a very small place. I didn't feel

I had a venue or place for me to make music," she says.

In 1997, she recorded the CD *Feeling Fences*. "It helped me open some doors. I got some gigs, I joined a community of people who were doing what I was doing," she says.

During that time she met numerous collaborators, including L'Espérance and Waldman, who also is playing for Josh Martinez. Lee also started playing at the Libra Room's Sunday brunches.

At the beginning of 2005, however, the singer decided that she needed a break. The Libra Room had just burned down.

"Right before they had the fire I had been asked to take over Wednesday and Friday nights, and then my venue disappeared, and my will to do it disappeared, so I disappeared."

Before her decision, Lee had already worked as a chef for a movie catering company and then decided to switch to working full-time. "The work is there and the money's coming in and it seemed like a good idea. I decided I needed to re-examine what direction I want to go in," she says.

For more than a year Lee worked long, physically demanding hours on film sets, leaving the world of music aside. In the end, her "experiment" swung her back to music again.

"I realized that I couldn't handle the regular world. I felt that my musical spirit was crushed there."

When her catering contract was up last December she plunged straight back into music and started playing at the Libra Room in the beginning of March, soon after it reopened.

With her CD expected out in early fall of 2007, Lee hopes to tour the country soon. "We'd love to do a cross-Canada tour and European tour, [and an] American tour. Because I cross genres so much I see no reason why we wouldn't be accepted in a blues festival, a country festival, folk festival or jazz festival. I'm excited to get a record finished and present it to communities and see if they would like to have us come."

Until her dream of hitting the festival circuit happens, Lee can be heard every Thursday night at the Libra Room (1608 Commercial Dr., 604-255-3787) from 8 p.m. to midnight.