

LOCAL ARTIST



Aziza Poggi is quietly becoming one of the more fascinating figures in west Michigan music. She's in rare company as a female lead singer in a heavy metal band, and plenty has been made of that distinction. Her offstage interests are far more compelling, however, as her's is not a typical heavy metal resume. Poggi is currently studying music theory and classical voice at Grand Rapids Community College with plans to attend a four-year university soon. She considers opera singers to be the best singers in the universe, has studied the art herself, and she's very interested in nonwestern music.

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This last kernel of trivia comes as no surprise to Dendura fans. Poggi's been the lead singer of the metal band since its inception in 2004, and plenty of Poggi's Egyptian and Lebanese heritage and influences have bubbled up between the heavy guitar licks and drumbeats. With the band on hiatus, she is exploring her softer side.

Essentially, Poggi has joined Ensemble Al-Asdeka, the west Michigan four-piece that melds Arabic music with modern jazz. Poggi said she and AA founder Kathy Roberts

had always wanted to collaborate. Ensemble Al-Asdeka flute and saxophonist Daniel Giacobazzi and original guitarist D. Adam Estner round out the new project, which is now called Aziza as its proper for middle eastern bands to adopt the name of their lead singer. For the world fusion band's first show on Aug. 28 during the Grand Rapids Museum of Art Summer Concert Series at Rosa Park Circle in Grand Rapids, Poggi will sing vocals created from the instrumental melodies of existing Ensemble Al-Asdeka songs.

Poggi said she's excited to shock Dendura fans with her new style. "I really, really enjoy Lamma Badda," she said of the song, which is in a difficult 9/8 time signature. "That one, it's very sultry and very sensual. And that's what I do love about this project is I can showcase more of that in my vocal style with this kind of music than I can with metal."

Aziza will play about 15 songs, with Poggi singing on 10 of them. A few required extensive translation. Just reciting songs in Spanish would have been acceptable, and Poggi is very capable of that as she's studied phonetics, as many opera singers do. It's important for her to emotionally connect with songs she sings, however, and that meant many hours on websites like www.freetranslation.com.

Poggi admitted to being excited and nervous about her first show with Aziza. She expects she won't be as exhausted afterward. "I'm not going to be able to whip my hair around," she said, laughing. "It's not metal, I'm used to that."

"I'm one of those people that if something's working, I go with it," she said. "Right now Dendura is not working for me. I'm not saying I'm leaving, it's just we've had a lot of financial burden trying to get that album done." Her fans and her band have been very supportive of the new project, and she expects many Dendura fans to come see her perform as Aziza.

"I'm not quitting; [Dendura's] my baby. But I need to be



away from it right now and therefore this is going to take precedence over Dendura for the time, and we'll see what happens."

In the future Aziza will find time to write new material, and Poggi said she expects to add vocals to AA's self-titled album. Neither project is likely to bring her riches, which she is fine with. It's always more about the journey for her.

"I dream big, and I just want to be a really great singer. I don't care if I ever get famous, I don't care about that. Being great at something is so much more important." Visit www.azizaworld.com for more information on the band and their future shows. —Nick Stephenson