

Many melodies of Kadria Puzon

By John McCurdy

Staff Writer

JMcCurdy@atljewishtimes.com

Some know Kadria Puzon best as a choir singer; after having the usual go-round with the piano and other typically-classical instruments, her beautiful voice was her instrument of choice and she made it a part of her high school's choral group, Washington and Lee University's JubiLee a cappella performers and, today, Temple Sinai's High Holy Days choir as an alto and soloist.

Others know her as a goddess of metal. As the lead vocalist and songwriter for Inviolat, she's recognized by her striking appearance; the wind-milling, head-banging and – believe it – belly-dancing that comes with it; deep lyrics and now for carrying the project on her back as other members have moved on.

These two aspects in a way contrast, but at the same time are in harmony. She demonstrates that a person can be both a model synagogue congregant as well as “the female Trent Reznor [of Nine Inch Nails]” (others' words, though the writer has come to see their truth). It was the sounds of Judaism that brought a Filipina-American woman born into a Catholic family to this faith; it is the sounds that still bring her to tears every year at Kol Nidre; and the different but equally musical sounds of industrial and electronic rock that empower her on stage and in the recording studio.

“It's emotional and it uses both sides of the brain,” Puzon said of her medium. “I like having each of those facets, because I get to express both parts of me; I don't know any other artists who get to do that.”

“I don't know any painters who do classical as well as graffiti. [Music] is the form of expression for my entire self.”

Called to Torah, tunes

Born in Falls Church, Va., Puzon grew up in various Southern locales including Roswell, Ga., Washington, D.C., and Dallas, Texas. The years she was in the nation's capital were those during which many of her friends

were becoming bar and bat mitzvahs, and thus she enjoyed quite a few ceremonies and parties.

One in particular remains vivid: After the young woman being called to the Torah read her Haftarah one morning, Puzon had what must classify as a “life-changing moment” as certain prayers were sung.

“I remember being struck by the chanting, the cantillation; it sent shivers down my spine unlike anything in the Catholic Church,” she recalled of the experience now more than a decade-and-a-half past. “It was like, ‘God is here.’ I was trying to figure out what it was; it was something I hadn't felt [before].”

She began to study with a rabbi after the family relocated to the Lone Star State, then participated in many hillel events at Washington and Lee Univ. The more she learned, the more the intellectual parts of Judaism fit, as much as the music.

What's more, during her time at St. Louis's prestigious school (from which she earned degrees in neuroscience, psychology and French), Puzon also discovered her taste for metal. Having listened mostly to top-40 and contemporary earlier in life, the sounds made by frontmen like Jonathan Davis of Korn and Phil Anselmo of Pantera took her by pleasant surprise.

“That's when it started hitting me, some of the more primal stuff about metal,” she said, then smiled. “I was at a school where Dave Matthews Band was a big thing – and that's alright, that's cool. [But whereas] as most people get older, their tastes seem to mellow out, mine actually got harder.”

Venues for the voice

As ambitious and creative as she is, Puzon's career path changed – as evidence by her triple-major – as she found what best suited her strengths. Upon completion of undergraduate studies, she moved to Atlanta and considered Georgia Tech's Ph.D. program in industrial organization, but



PHOTO/courtesy Inviolat

Trained in dance as well as voice, Kadria Puzon has established belly-dance as the form of bodily expression for Inviolat.

soon realized the largely theoretical work wasn't for her.

An internship at Georgia Power, great local friends and general love for the city kept her here, though, and she began both trying local synagogues and gigging around town with some cover bands. She eventually settled on Temple Sinai (“It was warm, it was home,” she said) and landed with the hard-rockers of Element 21.

She left the latter on good terms after a year as she increasingly took to incorporating electronics into her music. When searching for a group

with the right approach and combination of influences yielded no results, she took it upon herself to found her own, and with guitarist Bryon Brown and bassist Chris Farmer, Inviolat was born.

Together that original trio and various session drummers established a presence in the Southeast and released a self-titled EP.

“[This is] a very cool CD and one that I will no doubt re-visit quite often,” Tony Cannella of “Femme Metal” webzine said in a review of the four-track disc. “The band incorporates a healthy dose of metal to go along with the aggression, and the vocals of Kadria are also very powerful and a definite strong point.”

Both Brown and Farmer have since stepped away from full-time membership but remain available for some live appearances and most studio work, leaving Puzon to engineer new tracks and guide the band's direction (hence the Reznor comparison). The three are reuniting for the upcoming six-song album, “Feast of Ashes,” which features Mike Froedge of Black Label Society on drums.

And through it all, she's become a more and more integral member of the Sinai family, joining the High Holy Days choir first and now performing with “Rock Shabbat,” the temple's once-monthly musical Friday service. She stood in front of the bimah for her official conversion on Dec. 5, 2009.

“Every year I look forward to it now; it's fun to be aggressive, but it's also fun to get back to the reason I was interested in Judaism in the first place,” Puzon said of her participation in the choir. “And Rock Shabbat is the halfway point; there's elements of both metal and holy music.”

The growling and belly-dancing will stay outside the synagogue, she said with a laugh, unless Purim Shpiel presents the opportunity for the use of either. But regardless of where it occurs or how it sounds, music lets the world know every side of Kadria Puzon.