

FRIDAY

August 17, 2012

Marin Independent Journal

PRESS PLAY

Reviews of releases by local artists

Beth Custer Ensemble*"My Grandmother"*

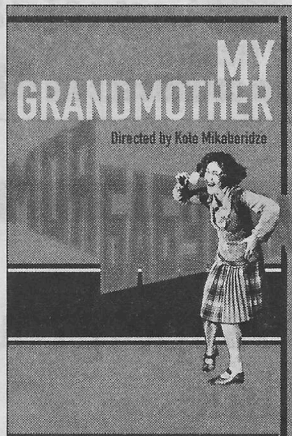
Composer and clarinetist Beth Custer made a name for herself in the early '80s scoring classic silent films that were played by her San Francisco-based Club Foot Orchestra. In her latest cinema project, she has composed a soundtrack for this DVD release of "My Grandmother," a 1929 silent film considered a masterpiece of the Soviet "eccentric film movement."

It's such a scathing and daring satire of the then nascent communist bureaucracy that it's hardly a surprise that it was banned by Soviet authorities for four decades.

Filmmaker Kote Mikaberidze follows the misadventures of a hapless paper pusher — modeled on the bespectacled American silent film star Harold Lloyd — after he's fired from his job.

Originally commissioned by the Pacific Film Archive and recorded with an Aaron Copland Recording Fund award, Custer's soundtrack is an American take on this long-forgotten foreign film, incorporating blues, rock and avant-garde jazz as well as strains of Eastern European and world folk music.

The comic action includes stop-motion photography, puppetry, crazy camera angles and animation, and Custer's clarinet weaves through it all in a style that re-



calls cartoon music.

Her eight-piece Beth Custer Ensemble features top flight musicians from Spearhead, Bitches Brew, Tom Waits' band, the Afro-funk Experience and the Flaming Groovies, among other groups.

She'll be screening the film and performing the soundtrack live in Marin for the first time on Aug. 26 at the 142 Throckmorton Theatre in Mill Valley.

If you're looking for a serious piece of work that's musically and intellectually stimulating, you need look no further than Beth Custer's "My Grandmother."

Buy it: "My Grandmother," Beth Custer Ensemble, www.bethcuster.com, DVD \$20, mp3 \$10

Here it: 7 p.m. Aug. 26, 142 Throckmorton Theatre, Mill Valley, \$15 to \$18, www.throckmortontheatre.com

— Paul Liberatore

If you're a musician or band from Marin with an album or EP that readers can buy or download and want to be reviewed, send your CD and contact information, (if you have an upcoming gig, let us know that, too) to Press Play, 4000 Civic Center Drive, Suite 301, San Rafael, CA 94903.

marinij.com

Watch a video of the Beth Custer Ensemble online at marinij.com