

Datebook

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The Beth Custer Ensemble *New music*

Beth Custer doesn't make it easy for music critics, who are by nature prone to convenient categorization. But for listeners, especially those as adventurous as the composer-vocalist-clarinetist herself, there's no need for categorization with her ensemble's latest album, "Roam," whose title summarizes the dizzying stylistic variety of its 12 cuts. The title song evokes the traditional strains of the classic "Caravan," while "Jackrabbit" (among the seven songs featuring lyrics by playwright Octavio Solis from their collaborations "The Ballad of Pancho & Lucy" and "June in a Box") bounces to a rockabilly rhythm, and "God Made Night" keens like a lonely country waltz. Custer, who celebrates the CD release Oct. 19 at Yoshi's San Francisco, contributes her own unvarnished vocals and brilliant clarinet work, as well as lyrics for the five other songs on the disc, which were composed during residencies at the Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga and Civitella Ranieri, Italy.



**THE BETH
CUSTER
ENSEMBLE
ROAM
BC RECORDS
\$12**

— David Wiegand