



IT'S DIRTY WORK, BUT SOMEBODY'S GOTTA DO IT

You can find cellist Rebecca Roudman rockin' a hard place

By David Templeton

A weather-beaten man is listening to **Rebecca Roudman**, as she plays Jimi Hendrix' "Purple Haze" on the cello. "Awesome!" the aged gentleman murmurs, the moment he recognizes the familiar melody. Clearly a man of the streets, he is seated in the lobby of the Hotel Cadillac in San Francisco's seedy Tenderloin District. He's a guest at the hotel's weekly Concerts at the Cadillac series, staging free performances of classical, jazz, and world music for residents of the low-income residential hotel.

As Roudman, backed up by guitarist Jason Eckl, finishes the Hendrix piece with a robust thrust of her bow into the air, her shoulder-length brunette hair moving rhythmically as she bobs her head, the gentleman leaps to his feet and applauds.

"Even better than last time," he shouts with a grin.

Indeed, Roudman, a member of the **Santa Rosa Symphony** and the **Oakland East Bay Symphony**, has played the Cadillac recently, though last time it was as a piano-cello duet, and she played mostly classical music. But today, as part of the Gypsy-jazz-rock ensemble **Dirty Cello** (dirtycello.com), Roudman is

glad to be back, playing for an audience that rarely gets to hear live music.

"I love classical music," Roudman says, "but I grew up listening to all types of music, and I wanted to play *that* music on my cello. So I decided to just go for it. I formed Dirty Cello to give me a way do something different from my other playing."

Created with the primary intention of having fun, and to play for as many people as possible, Dirty Cello, formed in 2010, has a few rules that guide them.

They remain flexible, able to perform as a duo, or as a full band with drums, stand-up bass, and additional strings.

And having a good time takes precedence over making money.

"Though we are making money, as it turns out," Roudman says.

They also take as many gigs as they can handle.

"We've done over 50 shows this past summer alone!" she says.

And, most importantly, Dirty Cello will perform just about anywhere.

"It's true! We will play just about anywhere!" Roudman laughs. "We've played

everything from a San Francisco Marathon, where we performed in a tunnel while 10,000 people ran by us. We played at a flash mob in Golden Gate Park for hundreds of bicyclists at 2 o'clock in the morning. We're about to play in a field for a bunch of people having a picnic before seeing a show at Jack London State Park (in Glen Ellen, California, in Napa County's wine region). We really will play anywhere!

"And when your goal is to have fun first and make money second," she adds, "it opens you up to opportunities you might have otherwise passed on!"

There's also a solid business strategy to all this hard work. According to Roudman, by playing everything, from house concerts (heavily promoted on the group's website) to major gigs at festivals and concert halls, they increase the opportunity for folks to hear their music and spread the word.

"Word-of-mouth, that's the secret," she says. "The more people who see us playing in all these unusual places, the more people there are telling their friends about us."

Of course, there have been drawbacks.

"Sometimes we'll play a concert we don't know enough about, and it's not all that much fun," she admits. "We played a club lounge recently, and for some reason they made us play in absolute darkness. That wasn't so much fun. We like to be able to see when we perform!"

There's another useful rule. The band should always be able to see the audience—and vice versa.

Staying visible, and getting the word out—in other words: promotion—does not come naturally to all performers, Roudman allows, which is why she had to teach herself how to negotiate with promoters, how to promote concerts, and hardest of all, how to talk about herself.

"When you're trying to promote yourself," she says, "you have to be willing to tell people why they should hire you. It's weird, at first, but artists eventually find out it's useful to learn how to do that."

There's at least one aged gentleman in San Francisco's Tenderloin who is glad that Roudman has learned to do that, and who is happy to know that some bands really will play just about anywhere. ■