



## STANDING ROOM ONLY

« Kansas-based indie band the New Amsterdams perform tunes from their latest CD, "Story Like a Scar," when they appear with the Weakerthans and Raising the Fawn at the 9:30 Club, 815 V St. NW, Washington. Doors open at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$14. Call 202-265-0930.

## LISTENING POSTS

### Amadou & Mariam

The Birchmere, 3701 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria, Va.; 6 p.m.; \$25; 703-549-7500

### ✓ The Women of New Indie Artists, featuring Abigail Kiser, Alexe Colbus and Amanda Wilkins

Jammin' Java, 227 Maple Ave. East, Vienna, Va.; 7:30 p.m.; \$8; 703-255-1566

### Conshafter, with Breaking Laces

Iota Cafe, 2832 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, Va.; 8:30 p.m.; \$10; 703-522-8340

### Pagoda, with the Antiques

Black Cat, 1811 14th St. NW, Washington; 9 p.m.; \$8; 202-667-7960

### Acid House Kings, with the Legends

DC9, 1940 9th St. NW, Washington; 9 p.m.; \$8; 202-483-5000

## LECTURES

**"The Art of Hip Hop Performance"** by Frank Ejara and Neils "Storm" Robitzky - 6 p.m. **Venue:** Kennedy Center Millennium Stage, 2700 F St. NW, Washington; **Tix:** Free; **Info:** 202-467-4600

**"From the Big Bang to Black Holes: The Coming Revolution in Physics"** - 6:30 p.m. **Venue:** Freer Gallery of Art, Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Auditorium, 12th Street and Independence Avenue SW, Washington; **Tix:** \$25; **Info:** 202-357-3030

**"Is English Becoming Our Second Language?"** - 7:30 p.m. **Venue:** Leesburg Executive Airport, 1001 Sycolin Road, Leesburg, Va.; **Tix:** Free; **Info:** www.novatownhall.com

## BOOK TALK

### 'LONDONSTANI'

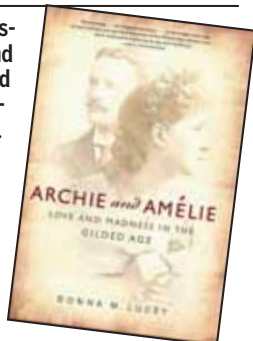
**Gautam Malkani discusses "Londonstani"** - 7 p.m. **Venue:** Olsson's Dupont Circle, 1307 18th St. NW, Washington; **Tix:** Free; **Info:** 202-785-1133

### 'FRIENDSHIP: AN EXPOSE'

**Joseph Epstein discusses "Friendship: An Expose"** - 7 p.m. **Venue:** Politics and Prose, 5015 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington; **Tix:** Free; **Info:** 202-364-1919

### 'ARCHIE AND AMELIE'

**Donna M. Lucey discusses "Archie and Amelie: Love and Madness in the Gilded Age"** - 7 p.m. **Venue:** Olsson's The Lansburgh/Penn Quarter, 418 7th St. NW, Washington; **Tix:** Free; **Info:** 202-638-7610



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## ON STAGE

**"Assassins"** - 7:30 p.m. **Venue:** Signature Theatre, 3806 S. Four Mile Run Drive, Arlington, Va.; **Tix:** \$31 to \$55; **Info:** 703-820-9771

**"Little Women, the Broadway Musical"** - 7:30 p.m. **Venue:** Kennedy Center Opera House, 2700 F St. NW, Washington; **Tix:** \$36 to \$94; **Info:** 202-467-4600

**"All the Great Books (abridged)" by The Reduced Shakespeare Company** - 7:30 p.m. **Venue:** Kennedy Center Terrace Theater, 2700 F St. NW, Washington; **Tix:** \$40; **Info:** 202-467-4600



The cast of "Assassins" at Signature Theatre

## STAGES » MUSIC

# Jump, jive and Whalen

## Ex-Zippers singer goes solo with a less antique sound

By Brian Truitt  
Examiner Staff Writer

Katharine Whalen has joined the MySpace generation. Which is more than slightly ironic since she became known in the 1990s for singing an old-timey kind of music, she lives on a farm in North Carolina with her 6-year-old daughter, Cecelia Mae, and doesn't even own a computer.

"I know I'll have to. I'm just a little behind on that," says the former singer with the Squirrel Nut Zippers, the retro hot-jazz collective that started jamming in Whalen's farm house in Efland, N.C., in 1993, became a national hit during the swing movement in the mid-'90s and then had a "Behind the Music"-ish meltdown including — but not limited to — legal bickering, lost money, drug overdoses, splintered friendships and broken hearts.

The latter happened to Whalen, whose husband (and fellow Zipper founder) Jimbo Mathus left her; and those emotions are one of many that can be found on her new solo album, "Dirty Little Secret," which trades in her jazz penchant for more country, pop and electronica.

Whalen does, however, have the same day job she did when the Zippers broke in 1995 with "The Inevitable Squirrel Nut Zippers." She's now waiting tables in Hillsborough, N.C., but was doling out Tex-Mex at the Flying Burrito in nearby Chapel Hill, where her mom still works ("We're Burrito girls").

"I had good shifts at the Burrito, and when the band broke, I was like, 'I don't know! I don't want to give up my shifts!' I had some questions there," Whalen says. "Then the band started making more money."

That's what having a hit on radio will do for you — it came in the form of the calypso-gone-wrong single "Hell" in 1997. And then everything went to hell.

"All of us had had more than enough of each other's company at some point, and the movement we



Former Squirrel Nut Zippers vocalist Katharine Whalen makes her Washington-area debut as a solo artist on Wednesday in Vienna. - Conqueroo photo

### KATHARINE WHALEN

Katharine Whalen appears with the Finals at 8 p.m. Wednesday.

**Venue:** Jammin' Java, 227 Maple Ave. East, Vienna, Va.

**Tickets:** \$10

**More info:** 703-255-1566

were luckily enough to be riding on, the wave of the swing movement, and it was petering out," Whalen explains. "And that is bound to happen, because it is such a novelty sound. We had a good niche in it but it was a novelty sound and people's ears want to hear something fresh. Or else they want to hear the Rolling Stones, which you never get tired of."

"It didn't hurt my feelings. I thought we got a long ride. I'm very proud of it."

Still, after all was said and done, Whalen found herself divorced and out of money, having to pawn two of her banjos and her good tenor guitar. "I had a cheap-o and a good-o, and I sold the good-o," she says,

laughing. "I've got the Harmony and I sold the Gibson. I got through another month, you know."

Her life turned around, though, when she met San Diego producer David Sale, who runs her MySpace page and was introduced to her through a mutual friend when in North Carolina and needing demo vocals. He was intrigued by the Zippers' rise and fall, and inspired her to wrap her emotions around emotional songs that were "ready-made" for her.

"I didn't have any — ANY — plan to dominate the world or anything," Whalen says. "It was a real cathartic thing — I was having a lot of pain in my life with personal stuff, so it was really awesome to have these wild songs to sing and push out on. My mom's particularly thrilled. She thought it was a really big help to me, and I think she's right. Looking back on it, it really was."

"It's all universal stuff. Everybody gets their heart broken or their marriage fails. It happens to everybody — probably not [on] as public a scale."

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## A Zip off the old block

Before she helped form the Squirrel Nut Zippers, Katharine Whalen had never sung or played an instrument before. And her daughter is getting a similar introduction, though not on a national touring stage.

Whalen gave Cecelia Mae a fiddle early and has even played with her at school, or when somebody comes around and can tune her instrument.

She's being taught in the same vein as Whalen's ex-husband, Jimbo Mathus, introduced the banjo and guitar to her mom.

Jimbo taught me 'Jesus is on the Main Line,' which you play on one string and you sing it on one note basically," Whalen says. "As soon as I could do that, I was like, 'Oh, I can do that!'"

"That's what I'm doing with her. Suddenly it'll get up on her and she can realize she can play and then I'll get her lessons."

Whalen was told in school that she couldn't sing, yet she had friends in bands growing up and listened to a lot of music. Her dream was never to be a musician, and then she became an accidental superstar with the Zippers.

"It was crazy for me because the guys, they'd always wanted to be musicians," Whalen recalls. "They had already thought it through and for them it was realizing a goal. And for me, it was pretty terrifying. I had just started to sing that year, had never sung or played an instrument my whole life, and I had to do it in front of people — and then do it in front of a LOT of people, with a record company involved and pressure."

"It was stressful for me — I could see the beauty in it and I understood what an incredible gift we were being given, but I was trying to catch up all the time with my stress level." — Brian Truitt