

Simply the Best at West Van's Harmony Arts Fest



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It was while entertaining a party of wealthy Wall Street bankers and Manhattan's mega-rich that Luisa Marshall knew she had to change her act. It was all going too well.

"Never in my wildest dreams..." the petite Vancouver-based Tina Turner impersonator was maybe singing and definitely thinking.

Cutting her set short of an encore, Marshall climbed down off the stage, scared and on the verge of tears.

Her security detail — there only to heighten the realism of the act — surrounded the big-wigged, sequined singer but were fast overwhelmed by a frenzied swarm of suits.

"I thought, 'This is great,'" Steve Marshall, Luisa's manager-drummer-husband, tells *The Outlook* in a sitdown interview at the Burnaby film studio where Luisa tapes her Shaw cable access TV show, *Simply the Best*. "I thought,

'I'll be able to hand out some business cards after.'"

Luisa scowls.

"I started screaming at him, 'We have to go! We have to go now!' I knew then that if they find out I'm not Tina Turner, they're going to beat me up."

Apparently Chaka Khan had played the same party the year before, and the crowd, it seems, were used to getting the real deal. They hadn't been told this year's act was a tribute.

"It was creepy," Luisa says, using the word that comes up more than any other during our interview.

"It was very, very scary," her husband concurs.

"I pulled off the wig and ran to the dressing room. I did not feel good," the 2003 World Rock and Roll Tribute Artist champion says. "I used to be known as Tiny Tina but I stopped right then and put my own name on the show as Luisa Marshall's Tina Turner Tribute," she explains.

It's helped quell some of the zeal of her fans during her performances, but off-stage, while still in costume, it doesn't make much difference.

"People will see me in elevators and they start to well up," Luisa says. "I say, 'Save your tears, I'm not really Tina.'"

'Dead arms' and Dubai

It was a question first posed in 1995 that would prove a fateful one, even some 17 years later: "Where the hell do you find a Tina Turner wig in the Middle East?"

The answer — an exceptionally upscale Dubai shopping mall — is important only so far as the mall was reachable by car from where Luisa and her band were then doing a four-month stint as the house band at a private members club in a new five-star hotel.

Tina Turner's 1970 hit "Proud Mary" — itself a Creedence Clearwater Revival cover — had been a staple in the band's repertoire for some time, but so were dozens of other rock standards by dozens of other artists.

"Then this guy — this British guy — kept begging me to get a wig and do the makeup and everything when we do 'Proud Mary,'" Luisa says.

So, the next night, with 10 fewer dollars in her pocket and one certifiably Turner-esque wig on her head, Luisa found her calling.

Or rather, it found her.

"Tina Turner chose me. It was never actually my choice. I really didn't want to do it — the hair, the high heels — it wasn't me," Luisa says, noting that the whole Tina Turner transformation is a gruelling two-hour process. "I'm more of a jeans and rock-and-roll kind of person."

But on that first night, the 500 or so people in the audience — mostly expats from Britain, the U.S. and Canada who'd watched Luisa and her band play most nights with half-attentive applause — erupted in adulation.

"Then it was four Tina songs," Luisa says. "And then four songs became six, then seven, then eight."

It would become the genesis of [Tina: A Rock N Roll Journey](#), a live musical revue Luisa would eventually write and tour across North America, learning all the soul singer's signature moves along the way.

"Tina is known for her dead arms," Luisa says, showing off some fancy legwork while keeping her forearms rigid at her



sides. "I didn't even know I danced with dead arms but apparently I already had that naturally. And the whole bowlegged thing," she adds, leaning back with legs astride.

The moves are immediately recognizable and it's little wonder Luisa's been able to fashion a career from their emulation, but they've also opened a window for her onto an unlikely community of copy-cat artists.

North America, I love

"If I was still in Manila, I don't think I'd be doing Tina Turner," the 55-year-old Filipina says.

"When you're dark-skinned in the Philippines and you have big lips, you're looked down on by other people. But here, all these features turned to gold. North America, I love."

And from Vancouver to Vegas, a certain segment of North America loves her right back.

Using her fingers, Luisa counts two Neil Diamonds, a Michael Jackson, the members of ABBA and "quite a few" Elvises among her "dear friends" in the impersonation industry. And that's just locally.

On the road, there's a whole circuit of crooning, costumed chameleons we rarely, if ever, get to see out of character.

And many, like Luisa, have at some point been able to parlay their mimicry into an in-the-flesh encounter with their idols.

Luisa did, twice. And not just with the leggy Queen of Rock but with the reigning Queen of Talk, Oprah Winfrey, too.

In 2003 and again in 2008, Luisa sang on The Oprah Winfrey Show before the real Tina Turner performed, kicking off two out-of-retirement world tours.

But for a tribute artist, your namesake's return to the limelight can spell death for your own career, at least temporarily.

"We had a whole European tour all booked for that year [2008]," Luisa says, half sneeringly. "We were all set to start and then *she* came out of retirement and ruined everything."

Catch Luisa Marshall's Tina Turner Tribute this Friday at the [Harmony Arts Festival](#).

Harmony Arts Fest Highlights

Now in its 22nd year, this season's 10-day festival of music and arts promises to be the biggest event yet. With hundreds of artists, performers and culinary attractions it's tough to know

where to start. Here are some surefire concert attractions:

RE/MAX Garden Concerts and Grosvenor Waterfront Lounge (Nightly at 8:45 at 17th & Argyle Ave.)

- Aug. 3: Nearly Neil & The Solitary Band (Neil Diamond Tribute)
- Aug. 4: Jim Byrnes (3 Junos, blues legend)
- Aug. 5: Mazacote (Latin dance)
- Aug. 6: Ali Milner (rockin' R&B)
- Aug. 7: John Mann (Spirit of the West singer)
- Aug. 8: The Dynamics (hi-tempo soul)
- Aug. 9: Maria in the Shower (punk cabaret)
- Aug. 10: Soulstream (funk/soul/jazz staple)
- Aug. 11: Redgy Blackout (alternative rock)
- Aug. 12: Adam Woodall Band (folk-rock)

BA Blacktop Sunset Concert Series (Nightly at 7:30 in John Lawson Park):

- Aug. 3: Luisa Marshall's Tina Turner Tribute
- Aug. 4: Santa Lucia (Latin funk)
- Aug. 5: Acres of Lions (pop rock)
- Aug. 6: The Matinee (rootsy D.I.Y.)
- Aug. 8: Roy Forbes (acoustic Canadiana)
- Aug. 9: Babe Gurr (eclectic singer-songwriter)
- Aug. 10: Tambura Rasa (8-piece world)
- Aug. 11: Good for Grapes (alternative folk)
- Aug. 12: Locarno (Central American folk)

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