

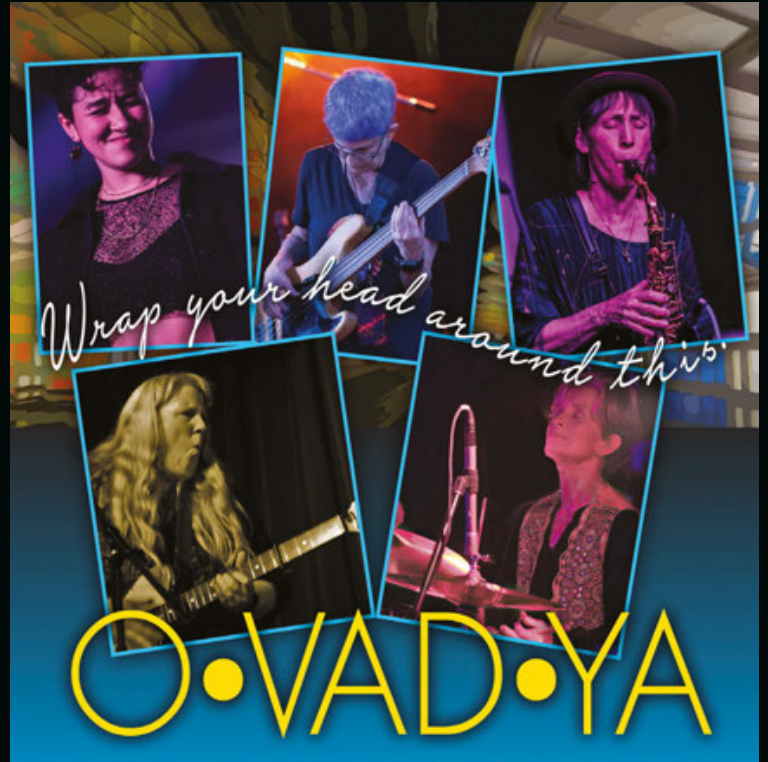


# Local Music Makers

## OVADYA

### Wrap Your Head Around This!

By Peggy Ratusz



**D**iversity and choices are important to me. And thank goodness when it comes to live music around here, there's plenty of both.

When I started noticing this 5 piece band with the funny name appear in my social media feeds, and then spotted that 3 well-acquainted peers are in this group, I tuned in.

The band members are M Hurley, band leader/songwriter/lead guitar/vocals; Derian Blane, lead vocals; Robin Borthwick, drums/vocals; Kim Butler, fretless bass/vocals; Linda Shew Wolf, sax/electric violin/vocals.

As I sat down to write a worthy introduction for you readers about this quintet, I happened to find my friend, Alan Graf's perfectly written post about OVADYA (Oh-Vaad-Ya) that successfully addresses the elements that make them so intriguing:

"I saw OVADYA last night and it was an out of body, other-worldly experience. There were moments when M's guitar playing and Linda's heavenly violin transported me to a different time and place. Kim's pounding, lyrical bass, Robin's steady hand on the skins and Derian's soaring vocals...I closed my eyes and saw myself sitting at the walls of the old temple in Jerusalem. It was as if I had been taken back to Biblical times."

As I prepared the day before for our zoom interview (and before seeing Alan's post), I took a deep dive into their live videos and recorded music. I wrote down the words: Ancestry. Homeland. History. Transcending. Psychedelic.

How did they get here?

M explains: Linda and I met in 1999 in Chicago. We played together in what we refer to now as "old OVADYA." When she moved here, I made the decision to join her. This is the Asheville incarnation that Linda affectionately refers to as Ovadya'll!

One of the more obvious takeaways is that lead singer Derian Blane is in her 20's and the rest of the group members are over the age of 50 and 60.

Linda: We've never had trouble appealing to multi-generations but there's something satisfying playing music with someone much younger. The energy and freshness Derian brings is precious and it opens us up. It can be challenging singing in pitch, clustered harmonies and ending phrases together.

Derian: We have fun arranging vocal parts together. Our harmonies are dissonant and abundant!

Kim: It's the way Derian uses her instrument. Having that hint of Appalachia in her voice adds another layer.

Robin: We're the grandmas but we pay attention to her ideas. As a drummer, I'm particularly thankful for her vocal cues.

Derian: Each of the women in this band inspired me before I ever joined OVADYA. As a young musician it's surreal working with people I look up to. The age gap helps to keep the sounds evolving and growing.

The appreciation for one another is undeniable. Everyone is eager to give a compliment or point out something they especially admire about the other.

Kim about Robin: When I coaxed her into the OVADYA fold, I thought, 'there's only one person I can think of that can play these polyrhythms and that's Robin.' What Robin does on the drums reminds me of Bo Diddley on polyrhythmic steroids.

Robin about M: M gives us artistic license. I'll listen to her initial recordings and learn the songs beat for beat and then when we meet to rehearse it, she encourages me to make it my own.

Derian about M: I am blown away by her lyrics. Her songs challenge me. I am grateful to her for letting me view the material with fresh eyes, and trusting me to run with it.

M about everyone: What typically happens is I write the tunes and they're fairly complete when I present them. The bottom line though, is that the dynamics come from each collection of players playing the songs. If you have the right combination of people, it just happens. So I don't go around saying "these are my songs," because they develop and merge and become a collaborative effort that's way beyond what I initially put down. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Linda: We're not a jam band but we could be if we wanted to be. We choose to be choreographed more often than not but what we do live, is expand our solos and take more liberties. Robin: I see the songs as a framework. Within that framework I incorporate signature licks that serve as cues of course, but then live we have the opportunity to explore and immerse ourselves in the moment.

Kim: The term "unique" doesn't begin to fully describe the music. Various late 19th-early 20th century composers of Western classical music created music focused on mood and atmosphere, designed to evoke feelings of pleasure, sorrow, pain, anticipation, nostalgic feelings, etc. I believe that OVADYA is the modern day evolution of what was then called "Impressionism in Music," and I'm grateful to be part of this.

Linda: I've been supporting and collaborating on M's music for over 20 years, and my biggest reason is still the same—her passionate vision. Of course, it's awesome to play great original music infused with modalities and rhythms from around the world. But it's the message of her lyrics that inspires me the most: The yearning of the human soul to love, to trust, to understand, and to transcend.

M: In my more transcendent moments, I take the big view. I came close to dying a few years ago and I feel I have been given the remaining years as a gift. It's easy to take music for granted, or even to take for granted that we have the talent to make meaningful music and connections while we are around. So for this, and the people that are in my life, I thank G-d.

Derian: There is always a new idea stirring. There are always sounds changing. It keeps us all on our toes and excited to find out what will come next. This music isn't predictable, even to us.

<https://ovadya.net/>

<https://www.facebook.com/OvadyaTheBand>



*Peggy Ratusz is a vocal coach, song interpreter, and songwriter. For vocal coaching email her at [peggymarie43@gmail.com](mailto:peggymarie43@gmail.com)*