



BASIL CHILDERS

Patrick Lamb, sax player and singer

## sound check

notes from the Northwest music scene | By LYNN DARROCH

**LIFE AS A "FREE MAN"** — That was it, right there.

Patrick Lamb stood onstage at the Waterfront Blues Festival in 2005, surrounded by R&B, gospel, jazz and blues players in the Ray Charles Tribute he'd helped organize, and realized he had found his way at last.

"I'm in love with music all over again," says Lamb, 36, who will present the fruit of his rediscovered passion at a CD release performance Saturday. "I was really getting tired of what I was doing, so for me it was about reinvention."

Yes, the irrepressible Lamb is living a new dream with the same enthusiasm he's brought to all of his endeavors, from union organizing to an upcoming gospel CD, from playing the blues with Norman Sylvester — Lamb has won three Cascade Blues Association awards — to world tours with jazz vocalist Diane Schuur.

And though he remains the same R&B-flavored sax player, he's now singing for the first time on his new CD, "Soul of a Free Man."

"Four years ago, I was in a negative place. I'd been a mercenary artist," he says, referring to lucrative sideman roles that included a stint with the Tom Grant Band, "and I was grateful for the work. But I found myself inadvertently stuck in the smooth jazz zone, and it was really uncomfortable."

Then came the Ray Charles Tribute.

"It opened me up to other circles, and it was an opportunity to get outside my comfort zone," says Lamb, whose business part-

ner and wife, Amy Maxwell, produced the show. And now they've created a version that will open the Oregon Symphony Pops season in October, with arrangements by Charles Floyd, the Pointer Sisters' musical director and esteemed conductor.

Lamb's new approach is built on collaboration.

"I went from a place where I wanted to be in control and do everything myself, to seeking out the best people, who are much smarter than me, and letting it happen," he says. Lamb's colleagues on his new CD include songwriter Lee Garrett (co-author with Stevie Wonder of "Signed, Sealed, Delivered" and "Isn't She Lovely") and powerhouse guitarist Eddie Martinez.

Besides the help, though, this project also took courage. Not blessed with natural vocal talent or a big voice, Lamb has worked for years to develop his skills, including lessons with noted Los Angeles vocal coach Seth Riggs.

The result is an album of tough Motown backbeats, Tower of Power horn arrangements and a smooth, Earth Wind and Fire patina supporting upbeat, sunny melodies. And in this context, Lamb's vocals work fine.

"My mission was to do something I love and could pull off authentically. I didn't make the CD for any particular format," says the newly free man. "With the way the industry has changed, your best bet is yourself now; everything else is just a . . . crapshoot."

Lynn Darroch

is a Portland freelance writer.

### coming

*Patrick Lamb*

**What:** Concert for release of Lamb's new CD "Soul of a Free Man"

**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Aladdin Theater, 3017 S.E. Milwaukie Ave.; 503-233-1994

**Admission:** \$13 advance, \$15 door; box office or Ticketmaster outlets; 1-866-448-7849

**Also appearing:** Scott Fisher & 1 a.m. Approach, Liv Warfield

**Web site:** [www.patricklamb.com](http://www.patricklamb.com)