

listen up!

by sharon macdonell | photo by daniel lippitt

# Wei Cool

CHINESE MUSICIAN-  
TURNED-DETROIT-  
INDIE-PERFORMER  
DRESSES UP METRO  
MUSIC SCENE

**X**iao Dong Wei (“she-ow dong way”) thrives on variety.

When she plays Chinese music on her erhu (“are-who”), a two-stringed Chinese violin, Wei is dressed in delicate silks, her back rigid, her face peaceful. But catch her at the Magic Bag in Ferndale and you might think you’ve stumbled upon her wicked twin sister. As her leather-mini-skirted, garage-band persona Madame XD, Wei rakes furiously at her erhu while rapping in Mandarin.

“Music is my personality, and there are many sides of me,” says Wei, 39, of St. Clair Shores.

She’s no novelty act. In 1990, Wei graduated as an erhu master from the prestigious Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. After freelancing, then performing with the Chinese Motion Picture Orchestra for four years, Wei wanted something different. She accepted a translating position at an American trading company.

Traveling between China and the United States, she performed occasionally, and cut a solo CD on a Chinese label. In 2005, she married her boss’ nephew, Ken Hottmann, an automotive engineer from St. Clair Shores. Becoming a suburban housewife was tough. “When I first moved here, I thought about leaving all the time,” she says. But her husband, a former bassist for an indie band himself, suggested she try performing. Doubting anyone would like erhu music, she reluctantly played a coffee house.

“I was surprised,” Wei remembers. “They loved it.”

Since then, Wei has taken every chance to expand. She’s performed with the DSO and built four projects of her own, including the band XD Wei, which plays world music with an occasional Led Zepplin riff. Hottmann is involved, too, co-writing songs, playing bass for Madame XD, and designing her eye-candy graphics.

“Everyone is so into music and so supportive here,” Wei says of her new hometown. “Detroit has been really good to me.”

