

LEWISTON NIGHT AT ARTPARK: Femmes of Rock founder NINA DIGREGORIO returns home to kick-start outdoor concert slate

Multi-instrumentalist has mastered rock classics in unconventional, fun way

BY JOSHUA MALONI
GM/Managing Editor

Though Femmes of Rock founder/string leader Nina DiGregorio was nice enough to sit down for a full interview, a preview of her July 10 Artpark concert could simply be summed up by this statement:

You won't believe your ears. Nina D. has taken some of the most iconic rock songs of all time – including “Comfortably Numb” (David Gilmour guitar solos) by Pink Floyd, “Do You Feel Like We Do” (full solos, talk box and guitar) by Peter Dinklage, “Stairway to Heaven” (Jimmy Page guitar solo) by Led Zeppelin, “Eruption” by Van Halen, “You Shook Me All Night Long” by AC/DC and “Limelight” by Rush – and reconfigured them for violin.

But that's only half of it. When Nina D. and Femmes of Rock hit the stage in Lewiston, “it's not going to be like your grandmother's Beethoven,” she said. “You're going to see electric strings with singing – with us (DiGregorio, Christina Rose and Sarah Chaffee) singing the vocals with a rock band behind us – with a multimedia experience with video and lights – and it's going to be a full-on rock show with arrangements in a very unique way like you've never heard them of your favorite classic rock bands.”

As an added bonus, “We actually have a few of us who are, or used to be, local to the area – because sometimes those are the best musicians you can find.

“Our guitar player still lives in Niagara Falls. His name's Jason Neubauer, and he's one of the most absolutely virtuosic, bad@ss guitar players I have ever performed with, and I've played with a lot of famous



Femmes of Rock: Christina Rose, Nina DiGregorio and Sarah Chaffee. (Photo courtesy of band management)

people over the years. So, he's with us not because he's local, but because he is the best person for the job. I mean, end of story – he's that talented musically.

“Our bass player (Michael Kelly) went to Kenmore East. He now lives in the Philadelphia area, where he's a professor of music, but he's originally from the Buffalo area.

“We also have some guest artists: our opening band, the Fabulous USA Band, and Second Hand News from the Buffalo/Niagara Falls area. And also, Michael Licata, who's going to guest on drums with us, also graduated from Kenmore East. So, a lot of us are semi-local. Our drummer (Jeff Tortora) is from Syracuse originally, so cousins in snow.

“I just feel like they're going to see a hometown group of people, mostly, but not because they're from the

hometown, because they are really that great of musicians. My band is amazing. Most of them currently play in Blue Man Group Las Vegas with us, but we travel all over the place.”

For Nina D., the inspiration for what she uniquely does first came when watching her father admire another world-class musician.

“It all kind of started when I was playing violin at Lew-Port,” she said. “I played – I think it was probably the middle-school orchestra at the time – and I saved up my money and bought my first electric violin on eBay. My dad had an old guitar amplifier sitting around at home. So, one day, my dad was watching Jimi Hendrix do ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ at Woodstock, and I was like, ‘I want to try and do that – only I don't play guitar; I play violin.’ So,

I plugged my violin into his amp. I messed with all of the effects and patches and distortion and stuff like that. And when my parents came home from work the next day, I was like, ‘Hey, look what I could do – play like Jimi Hendrix,’ and that was kind of the beginning of the whole thing.

“And from there, I learned more guitar solos of more of my favorite players, until I could play a lot of them – until I could play David Gilmour and Jimmy Page and Eddie Van Halen and Alex Lifeson and numerous guitar players. And so, that's what I really loved. I loved classic rock music, but I played the violin, so that was really the only thing I knew how to do, was what I'm doing.

“And then, of course, as I got older and I started to work in the industry, I was hired as a violinist, and I would tour with people or perform on the Las Vegas strip in shows. But I'm just a violinist. The violin plays in the orchestra – they kind of back people up. Sometimes you take a solo, but it's really a backing job for a singer. I decided that I wanted the strings to be out of the pit orchestra and front the show. That was why I created the Femmes of Rock show, so that the string players were actually the stars of the show, and not just the decoration helping out the singer.”

Nina D. and Femmes have received rave reviews from the likes of Frampton, Five Finger Death Punch, Michael Anthony and Danny Seraphine. Together, they have shared a stage with Kansas, Bad Company, Ted Nugent, Cheap Trick and Lynyrd Skynyrd, while she has played with Stevie Wonder, David Foster, The Killers, Beyoncé and

Deep Purple.

Though Nina D. has performed around the world, the July 10 concert holds special meaning.

“I've never played at Artpark,” she said. “When we've come back to the area, we've played the Riviera; we've played UB; and we've played the Bears Den; but I've never played Artpark – even though I graduated on that stage and walked across it, graduating from Lew-Port. I've been to shows there when I've gone home to visit my family in the summer, but never played there myself; so, it's very exciting. First time.”

She added, “I'm really excited, because I've said many times, ‘Oh, I'm coming to play my hometown,’ but that meant Amherst or North Tonawanda or Niagara Falls. It never really meant my hometown. This is the first time I could actually say I'm playing my actual hometown of Lewiston, New York, where I was born. I know everybody there. ... My family is all there; my friends are there; teachers that I had growing up are there.”

Nina D. said, “I really miss just the small-town vibe, the safety of it, the restaurants, the people. Of course, my family and friends. And just that feeling of, ‘This is home.’ You can't duplicate that anywhere else.

“Vegas has been home for a very long time for me, and when I leave Vegas, I'll defend that, too. I'll be like, ‘Don't you talk crap about Vegas. I could go get my pants tailored at 2 in the morning if I want to here!’ This is still my hometown, but it's not the same as my hometown that I grew up in.

“There's just a safety and a comfort – like a warm hug – when I go back there every time.”



CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2026

Niagara County Legislator – Jesse Gooch 7th District



Rebecca Rebmann



Niagara University
Master of Science in Education

**Congratulations
Becca!**

We are so proud of you!
Love, Mom, Dad, Matt & Megan

Eli Berak



Niagara Wheatfield
Senior High School

Congratulations on your
High School Graduation Eli.

Love, Gram, Mama Lori,
Mom, Patrick, Jaylee,
Phil, Sprout,
Uncle Eddy, Aunt Jen

Kayla Wylie

Grand Island High School

So Proud Of You!

Can't wait to see what's next.
Grandpa, Grandma Honey



Paige Edwards

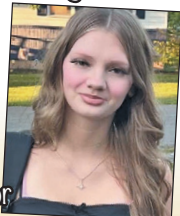
Lewiston-Porter High School



Kindergarten

Congratulations, Paige!
Enjoy the journey ahead.
There's no limit to what
you can achieve.

Love,
Your Big Sister



Senior

Kelsey Lachowski

Niagara University



Congratulations Kelsey!

We are so proud of you
for completing your
Master's Degree in Literacy.

Love,
Dad, Mom & Lori

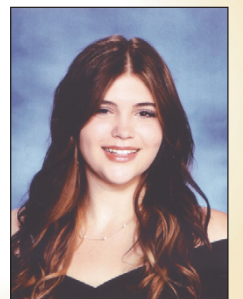
Lilah Skurski

Lewiston-Porter High School

Congratulations,
we're proud of you
and excited for your
next adventure.

Good luck at
SUNY Niagara!

Love,
Grandma & Grandpa



CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF '26

NEW YORK STATE SENATOR – ROB ORTT

