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Final

Fong feels renewed by shrines in Japan



Singer Paula Fong says she is looking forward to exploring more of Canada. **ARTURO GARCIA-AYALA**

By Jae-Ha Kim
TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY

Musician Paula Fong said her multiracial background has always influenced who she is and the music she creates.

"My father is a Chinese immigrant who grew up in Taiwan and Hong Kong," Fong said. "(He) came to the United States for college where he met and married my mother, a Midwestern Hoosier with family roots in Kentucky. I asked my grandmother to teach me traditional Chinese folk songs and lullabies, and eventually would end up taking classes in Chinese opera and playing the dizi — wooden flute — in the Chinese orchestra during my time in undergrad at UCLA."

Fong is on tour behind her new album, "A Bird on the Wing."

This interview with Fong has been edited for clarity and length.

Q: Were there any elements of "A Bird on the Wing" that were created while you were on the road?
A: I actually wrote the majority of this album while I was touring with Abby Posner. I forced myself to find the time and inspiration to do it while we were traveling. "River Run" is a song that I wrote while sitting on the banks of the McKenzie River while traveling through Oregon, and it speaks to how the peace and calm we find in nature can help recenter us and ease the heaviness weighing on our minds. "What Are We Running From" is perhaps most directly about being on the road. I wrote it while on tour in Georgia, and it deals with how sometimes we use travel or just a good drive to escape from the overwhelm of life, and how comforting it can be when you're going through it with someone who is present for you through it.

Q: What is your bucket-list venue that you have yet to perform in?
A: I would love to perform at the Freight in Northern California. I performed there as a young musician as a backup vocalist in a band that was opening for Jack Tempchin. The theater felt like just the right amount of intimate and grand, with a great deal of history. It left a lasting impression on me.

Q: Does the music you hear in a particular city or country inspire your own work?
A: I draw inspiration from old-time Americana music as well as Celtic music of all kinds. I've also felt inspired by Japanese pop and folk music from China and various European countries. Really, if it has soul, I think it has the potential to inspire anyone who's listening with open ears.

Q: What is your favorite vacation destination?
A: I have such a strong affinity for Japan. I lived and worked there one summer while I was in college and the family I stayed with gave me a very broad traveling experience, but my absolute favorite places were the shrines and temples. I love old buildings and traditions, anything that has what feels like real weight and history paired with peaceful beauty moves and revitalizes my heart. Other than that, I'd have to say the Sierras. I'm always up for a beautiful mountain camping trip.

Q: What was a trip you took as a child that stands out?
A: Perhaps the most significant trip I took as a child was the first time I flew to France alone at 12 years old. It was difficult at first being in a country where I didn't speak the language well. I didn't know anyone but my aunt and uncle.

Q: What's the most important thing you've learned from your travels?
A: Short answer, to see how wide and varied we are as a human race and to value beauty in the many ways people walk through life. And from a practical standpoint, I learned how to be a quick and efficient minimalist traveler! My bandmates always laugh at how light I pack, but I'm always thinking about efficiency, how to get smoothly through airport security and how I want to be able to travel around the towns we're in. If I can get away with just a guitar case and a backpack, I'm happy as a clam.

Q: What are your five favorite cities?
A: London, Tokyo, Asheville, Montreal, New Orleans.

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