Lauper sings the blues tonight

Pop diva joined at Peace Center by New Orleans institution Dr. John

By Paul Hyde
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Cyndi Lauper has got the blues in a big way.

Lauper, the pixie pop diva performing with Dr. John at the Peace Center tonight, is best known for such 1980s megahits as "True Colors," "All Through the Night," "Time After Time" and "Girls Just Want To Have Fun."

But Lauper, 58, lately has been embracing her roots, a past firmly grounded in the blues. Her earliest memories are of her family listening to old soul-searing songs of love, anguish and biting wit.

"On Saturday, when my mom was off from work, she would play a Fats Waller and Louie Armstrong duet called 'All That Meat and No Potatoes,' " Lauper says in "To Memphis With Love," a live concert DVD coming out in a few weeks.



Cyndi Lauper plays tonight at The Peace Center.

"There in the living room, my sister, my brother and I would dance wildly with my mom," she says.

Lauper will be joined tonight by the gravelly voiced pianist Dr. John, 70, a gale-force figure in New Orleans music, known for his 1973 hit "Right Place, Wrong Time" and for exploring an array of styles from zydeco to jazz and rock.

Lauper, even during her heyday as an MTV baby and playfully punk fashionista, longed to sing the music of B.B. King, Janis Joplin and The Allman Brothers Band.

Her very first gig as a lead singer, in fact, was in a Janis Joplin tribute band.

In 1988, she had a dream in which she was encouraged to sing the blues by none other than Fats Waller.

"He was sitting at the piano, playing, and said that he really liked what I did with Marvin Gaye's 'What's Going On,' " says Lauper in the DVD. "He told me that I should do the old songs and re-interpret them in my

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own way."

It was only last year, however, that she released an album of blues covers called "Memphis Blues," collaborating with such musicians as B.B. King, Allen Toussaint, Charlie Musselwhite, Ann Peebles and Jonny Lang.

Included on that album, the 11th in her singing career, are sassy and sultry classic songs such as Little Walter Jacobs' "Just Your Fool," Lowell Fulson's "Shattered Dreams," Albert King's "Down Don't Bother Me" and Muddy Waters' "Rollin' and Tumblin'."

Lauper is following up the album with the DVD, debuting Oct. 25, which follows the singer both in the studio as she records "Memphis Blues" and on stage at The Warehouse in Memphis.

The songstress also has worked as an actress, guest-starring in the TV series "Mad About You" and appearing as a contestant on Donald Trump's "The Celebrity Apprentice."

In addition, Lauper has an autobiography coming out next year, and she wrote the music for the upcoming Harvey Fierstein Broadway show "Kinky Boots."

Dr. John and his band, the Lower 911, also released an album last year titled "Tribal," a follow-up to the good doctor's 2008 Grammy Award-winning "City That Care Forgot," about his beloved New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The critically acclaimed "Tribal" features a mix of funk, R&B and smooth soul.

Born Malcolm John "Mac" Rebennack Jr. and nicknamed "The Night Tripper," Dr. John has been a tireless performer for more than half a century and earlier this year was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

YOU CAN GO

What: Cyndi Lauper and Dr. John in "From Memphis to Mardis Gras."
When: 7:30 tonight.
Where: Peace Center.
Tickets: $40-$55.
Information: 864-267-3000 or www.peacecenter.org

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