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PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHELLE LEATHERBY (THOMAS); RUSSELL JENKINS, COURTESY OF RAVINIA (LAWNCIERGE); CAROLINA MARIANA RODRIGUEZ (DISH)

## GIRL ON FIRE

WITH SUMMER CONCERTS AT STEPPENWOLF AND AN UPCOMING ALBUM WITH JON LANGFORD'S FOUR LOST SOULS, AWARD-WINNING SINGER/ACTRESS **BETHANY THOMAS** IS MOVING BEYOND MUSICAL THEATER IN A BIG WAY. **BY JOHN DUGAN**

Bethany Thomas has talent for days—and serious range, with credits ranging from Second City and Chicago Shakespeare to the Marriott Theatre, where she won a Jeff Award for *Porgy and Bess*. Now, the Kenosha, Wisconsin, native is garnering serious attention as a rock and soul singer, with the recent release of her debut EP, *First*; an upcoming album with her band, Jon Langford's Four Lost Souls; and a five-night run of concerts this summer at Steppenwolf Theatre.

Thomas's musical hustle? "It's out of necessity," insists the Humboldt Park resident. "I love singing and storytelling, and interpreting songs is my best way [to do that]." That has meant singing anything from Linda Ronstadt to Bowie, anywhere from a bit part on *Empire* to a church that met at a Days Inn—and now, one of the most respected stages in Chicago. Stardom may be just around the corner, but Thomas still appreciates the joys of simply performing. "Here I am in a hotel conference room singing a James Taylor song for \$75 because 'Oh my god, I need [to sing]," she says. "And you get waffles, which is wonderful." *"An Evening with Bethany Thomas and Friends" runs June 16–17; "How to Be a Rock Critic," featuring Bethany Thomas, runs July 6–8. Both at Steppenwolf Theatre, 1650 N. Halsted St., 312-335-1650; steppenwolf.org* ■

All ears on her: Chicago singer/actress Bethany Thomas—pictured here in performance at Humboldt Park hot spot the California Clipper—is proving that she can belt with the best of them.

