



THE CROWD AT LADYFEST MIDWEST CHICAGO'S CONGRESS THEATRE IN AUGUST 2001

# LADYFESTS

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**P**erhaps a few words -- an e-mail message, even -- is all it takes to inspire an entire festival. Bratmobile's Allison Wolfe sent an e-mail to a group of women that said, "Let's have a festival of ladies ... a Ladyfest." The rest is herstory.

"We started Ladyfest based on an idea that Allison Wolfe and Corin Tucker had," said Tobi Vail, one of the organizers of the Oly Ladyfest, which took place in the summer of 2000 in Olympia, Washington.

"In late 1998, the Experience Music Project interviewed a bunch of us for a riot grrl retrospective. Part of that included a roundtable discussion with Molly Neuman, Sharon Cheslow, Allison Wolfe, Erin Smith, Corin Tucker, and myself. It was moderated by Candace Pederson, formerly of K Records. During that roundtable something happened. By recounting the history of what we had done, we all seemed to realize that something needed to be happening along those lines today. For me, Ladyfest came out of the spark of that realization."

The Olympia Ladyfest was a success, drawing approximately 2,000 people -- mainly women -- from around the world to experience a week of music, activism and D.I.Y. workshops, spoken word, and visual art.

Attendees in other cities were so inspired by the punk-fueled fest that they decided to organize their own for the following year. Four Ladyfests took place in 2001: first in Bloomington, Indiana; then Glasgow, Scotland; Chicago; and New York City.

Each of the four Ladyfests developed their own flavors. Glasgow's emphasized an intimate atmosphere with about 200 attendees, while Ladyfest

Midwest Chicago was the *mama* of 2001's Ladyfests, featuring about 100 music acts that drew some 4,000 people.

With a few exceptions, the majority of Ladyfest organizers -- in every location -- don't have professional experience in organizing major events. Instead, the focus of Ladyfest is on teamwork and the D.I.Y. learning experience.

Although the five Ladyfests to date have been successful and raised thousands of dollars for charity, there are definite challenges in the organizational process.

"One of the challenges was getting people to stay involved through the tough times," said Ladyfest East organizer Erin Siodmak. "Money also was a huge issue."

Through it all, a core group of women stuck together for Ladyfest East, which drew at least 600 people.

"I got chills a few times," Siodmak said. "The feeling of community was incredible. Ladyfest renewed my faith that there is hope for a strong and supportive community of women -- and not only women but all independent artists and activists."

While Ladyfest Olympia inspired four more fests in 2001, this year's fests have inspired even more Ladyfests for 2002. At print time, eight are slated to take place next year.

Teresa Carmody, one of the Olympia Ladyfest organizers, said she wasn't surprised that groups of women in other cities organized to host their own Ladyfests.

"Though I didn't realize there would be so many and in such places as Lansing, Michigan," she said. "Part of our original goal was to provide opportunities for ourselves to learn something

that we might not otherwise have the opportunity to try, and I think that the attitude and belief permeates the festivals. It's catching. And it's time. I know I'm sick of corporatized festivals and events marketed to my demographic, and that I actually can't even really afford. Look at the growth of the anti-globalization/capitalism movement ... putting on a Ladyfest falls into the type of direct action encouraged by that movement. It's creating your own media."

**AMY SCHROEDER**

## LADYFESTS 2002

LADYFEST ARIZONA (not yet confirmed)  
Tentative date: not yet available  
e-mail: etileed@aol.com

LADYFEST ATLANTA  
Tentative date: not yet available

LADYFEST BAY AREA  
Tentative date: not yet available  
e-mail: guitargrl@earthlink.net

LADYFEST FRANCE  
Tentative date: not yet available

LADYFEST LANSING,  
MICHIGAN  
Tentative date: April 2002  
e-mail:  
ladyfest\_lansing@yahoo.com

LADYFEST LONDON,  
ENGLAND  
Tentative date: summer 2002  
e-mail: ladyfestlondon@hotmail.com

LADYFEST PHILLY  
Tentative date: summer 2002  
e-mail:  
amyhirsheybar@yahoo.com

LADYFEST D.C.  
Tentative date: August 2002  
e-mail: ladyfestdc2002@hotmail.com



THE TROUBLE DOLLS AT LADYFEST EAST IN NEW YORK CITY

## LADYFEST EAST 2001 IN NEW YORK CITY

BY KAT LONG

SEPTEMBER 6-9, 2001  
NEW YORK CITY

**B**y now, the recipe for Ladyfest is familiar: throw about 60 bands, 30 films, and workshops on everything from self-defense to drums together--and stand back.

Ladyfest East might have been lo-fi compared to its sisters in Olympia or Chicago, but the mission was the same: tear shit up, grll style.

Like its name, Ladyfest East featured (mostly) East Coast bands. The headliners ranged in style from the bike-positive metal of the Haggard to the girly candy-punk of the Hissyfits, with the pussy power of Bitch and Animal, tribal child Ari Up, and BETTY's

righteous rock falling somewhere in between. Spoken word junkies had slammin' Spit East, divine Penny Arcade, and mildly pornographic Gynomite to choose from. That was the beauty of Ladyfest East -- a wide variety of styles in music and messages, outfits and orientations.

The performances were held in legendary -- read: tiny, sweaty, and grimy -- downtown venues. Need to find a show? Just follow the groups of tattooed grlls with the free issues of Bust magazine sticking out of their patch-covered army bags.

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," is how one organizer of the grass-roots effort put it. "We had about 10 ambitious ladies at any given time

doing everything from mastering our benefit CD to handing out fliers at schools." Members of the Trouble Dolls, One and Twenty, and other local bands pitched in between tours and gigs.

The only problem: you could only be in one place at a time. If you caught the theremin-flavored queercore of Crowns on 45, you missed the set by Doria Roberts; if you bought a ticket for the screening of "Live Nude Girls," you had to skip the workshop on guitar instruction. Those of us with day jobs had to bail on the workshops, but the late-night entertainment more than made up for that.

As previous Ladyfesters know, sisters have to do it for themselves. The feminine fury has been unleashed!

## LADYFEST SCOTLAND

BY AMY BELL

AUGUST 12-14, 2001

**A**fter the fantastic accomplishment of Ladyfest Olympia, 2001 saw the baton passed across the Atlantic. Ladyfest Scotland in wet, windy Glasgow was the product of a year's hard work from 17 volunteers who managed to organize workshops, art exhibitions, bands, and performance poetry into 72 hours.

Participants came from Europe and the United States, eager to join forces at this proudly feminist event. The performers and attendees created a warm, entirely inclusive atmosphere, getting even the most reserved to talk about the first time they got their periods.

As for bands, disco terrorists Bis and ex-Babe In Toyland Kat Bjelland's Katastrophy Wife trod the floorboards on the opening night. Bis played a strong, tight set, including catchy crowd screamalongs "Starbright Boy" and "Kandy Pop."

Katastrophy Wife were the big draw, people flocking to venerate

Kat for services to grrlkind.

Red Hot Secret opened the second night, their belligerent thrash-punk setting the venue alight. Electrelane enchanted despite being lyric-less, breaking their lengthy debut "Rock It to the Moon" into bite-size, Farfisa-fueled chunks to help it go down. And the short but sweet Bangs' set went down a storm; encores were only after half the audience appeared as backing dancers and Sarah Utter blasted out some Black Sabbath.

To say there was a party atmosphere on the final night would be an understatement; even without Beth Ditto of the Gossip stripping in the name of fat-positivism, their storming Deep South punk-blues alone would have ensured a rapturous reception. And Bratmobile were absolutely adored, throwing in sharp new(ish) songs like "Gimme Brains" with a frantic "Panik," and keeping all the ladies, women, and girls delighted.

It goes without saying Ladyfest Scotland was a resounding success for coordinators and attendees alike -- now could someone be so kind as to organize Ladyfest Barbados for next year, please?



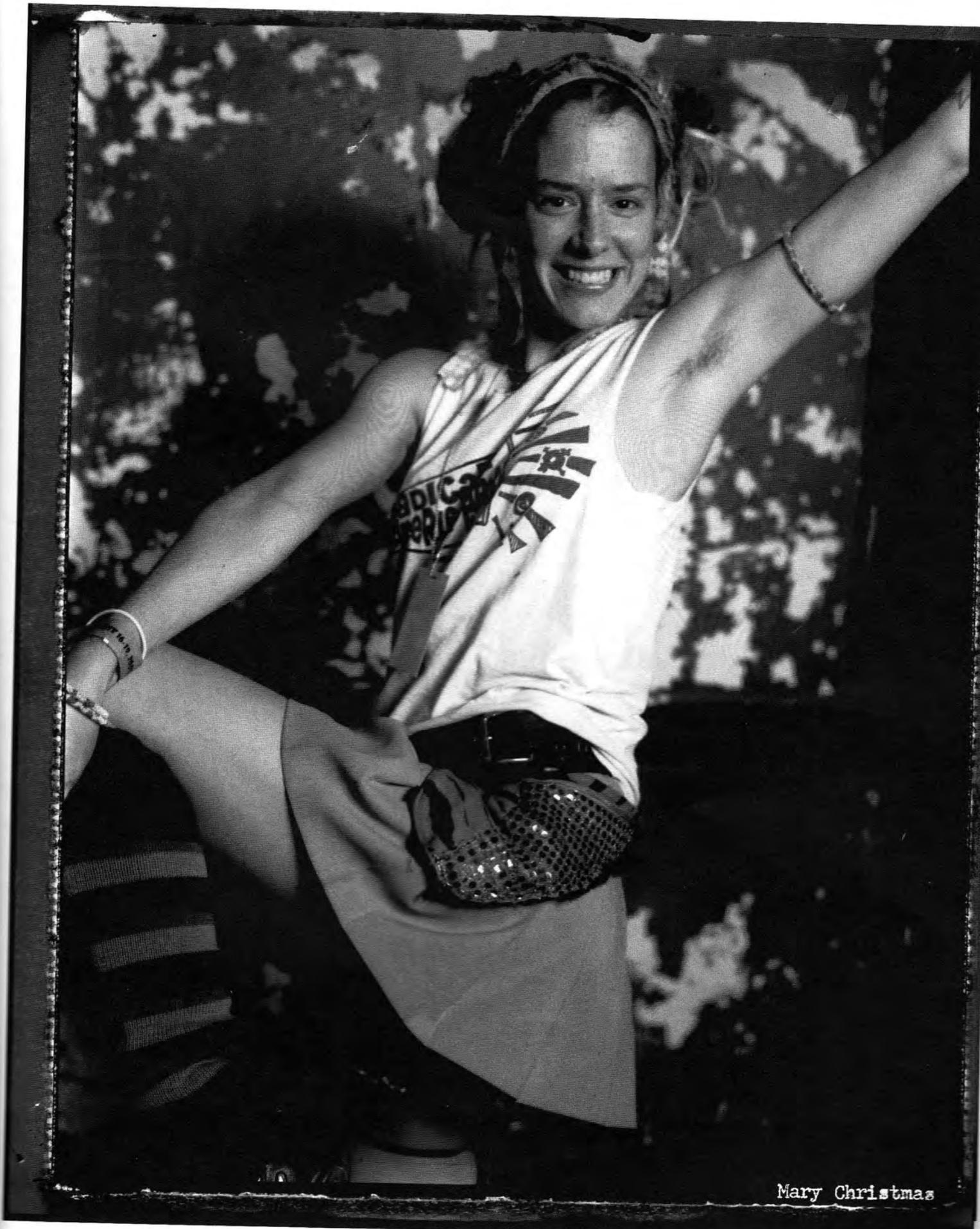
HEATHER HELLSKISS AT LADYFEST SCOTLAND



Pirate Cheerleaders

## PORTRAITS FROM LADYFEST MIDWEST CHICAGO

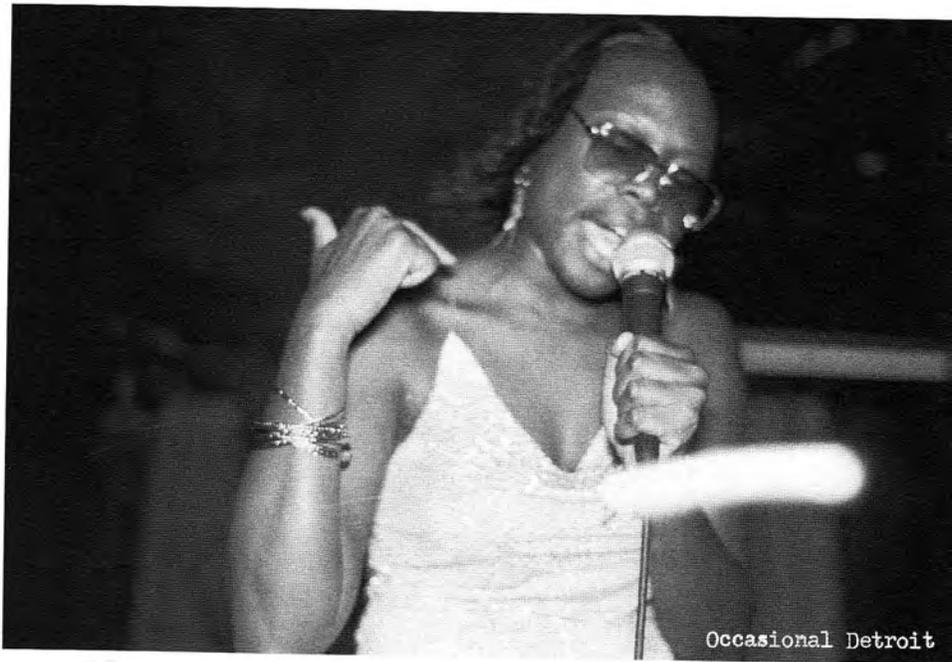
BY NICOLE RADJA



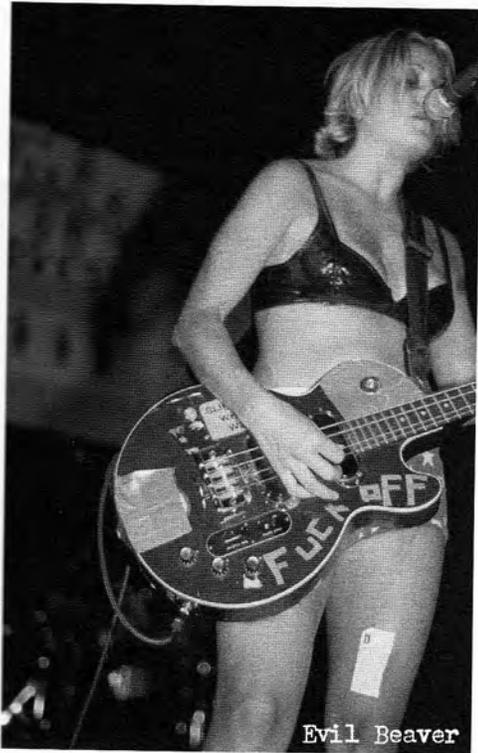
Mary Christmas



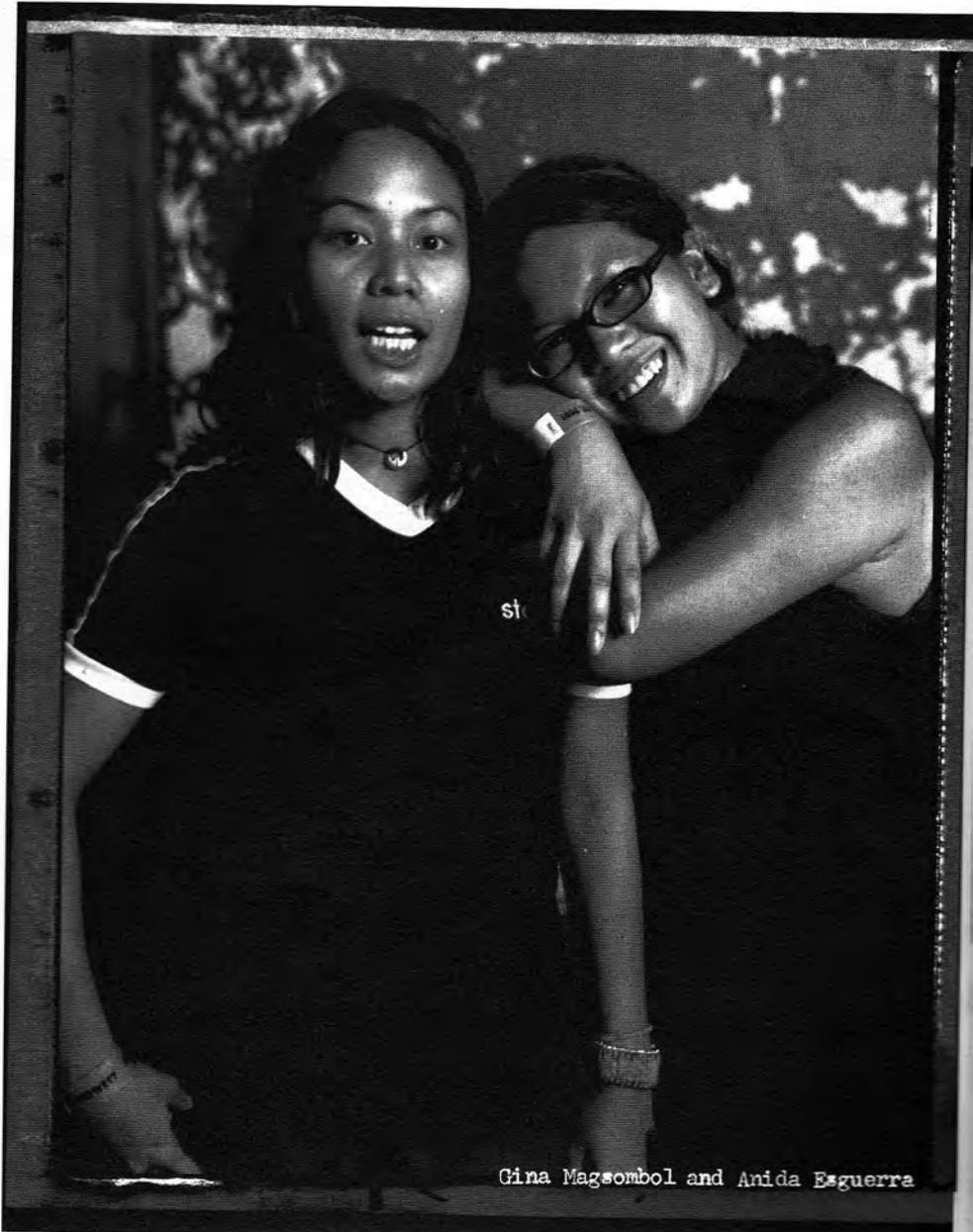
Lara Oppenheimer



Occasional Detroit



Evil Beaver



Gina Magsombol and Anida Esguerra



Radical Cheerleaders



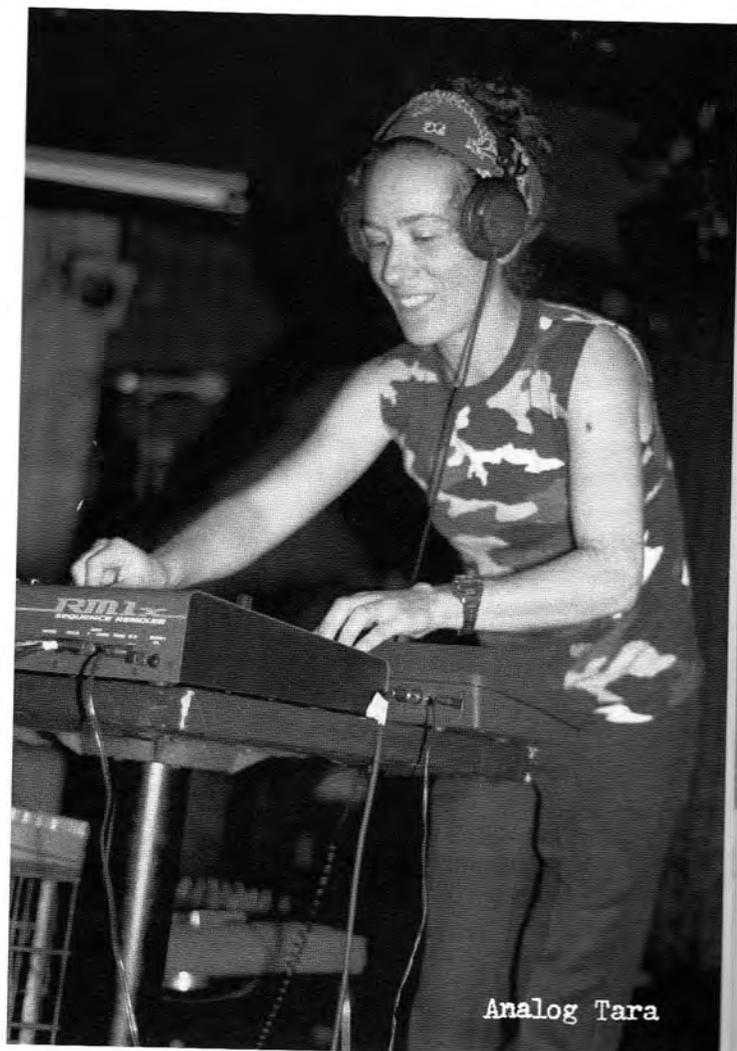
The Long Goodbye



Le Tigre



Bratmobile



Analog Tara



## RAINBOW SUGAR

STORY BY LAUREL ROHDE. PHOTO BY NICOLE RADJA

**W**hen I introduced myself over the phone to Cindy Wonderful, the charismatic lead rapper of the Denver-based group Rainbow Sugar, she replied in a confused, groggy voice: "I thought you were my mom calling to tell me we're dropping bombs." Nope. Unfortunately, I had cruelly woken her from a deep sleep induced by a long road trip, so we connected later via e-mail and Wonderful dropped her own bomb: Rainbow Sugar -- composed of Wonderful, the recently added guitarist Toshimi Ichiki, bassist Amy Fantastic, and drummer Germaine Bacca -- just broke up.

Rainbow Sugar has unleashed their bold fusion of rap and pounding rock upon audiences since 1998. Armed with an infinite arsenal of stage antics such as elaborate costume changes, nudity, mid-set wrestling, projections, and even pillow fights, the band kept fans happily never knowing what to expect. What influenced the group? Wonderful (a.k.a. Sugar Loaf) wrote, "We embody the spirit of FUN, anything fun is our influence."

Veterans of Ladyfest 2000 in Olympia, Rainbow Sugar said they had a good time playing an afternoon show in Chicago at their last Ladyfest together. "Maybe a reunion will happen one day, but we are kind of interested in different things right now," said Loaf.

So what is at the end of this Rainbow? Fantastic and Bacca have a warehouse in Denver where they do shows, Ichiki is in school, and Wonderful, who is getting into video, is preparing to tour as a solo artist in the near future. Ease your Rainbow Sugar cravings (ouch, second bad pun) by getting hold of their 7-inch, soon to be released from Wonderful's own Wonderground Records ([Wonderground.htmlplanet.com](http://Wonderground.htmlplanet.com)). You can also find Wonderful tour dates and her mp3 on the web site.



## THE NEED

STORY BY MARISA KULA.  
PHOTO BY ELEANA WHITESELL

**T**he Need has been called many things in its five-year existence -- including a "satanic Disney cartoon" and, courtesy of the unflappable *Rolling Stone*, "militant lesbian" -- but never, ever dull. The Olympia-based threesome reside in a *Star Wars* via Queer Nation parallel universe where artists do things like write rock operas with Nomy Lamm (see *The Transfused*), where genre-bending is the only way of life (see any and all music by the Need), and where Ladyfest is like a Vulcan mind meld (see *Ladyfest 2000* and *Ladyfest Midwest Chicago*).

The Need was always drummer-keyboardist-vocalist Rachel Carns (formerly of *Kicking Giant*) and guitarist-noise Radio Sloan (also of *The President's Daughters*), until last June the stork shot bassist Dvin down their chimney.

"We found Dvin in the woods, frozen in ice ...," Rachel clarifies.

"...and by our devilish flame did we thaw her. She is a Leo," adds Radio.

"Like us ...," Rachel chimes in.

"... the Third Element," Radio finishes.

What? Exactly. The bizarre love triangle's first show, at Ladyfest Midwest Chicago, was an orgiastic, out-of-this-world demonstration of the power of three.

"[At the time of] Ladyfest 2000 in Olympia, I was living down the hall from an art gallery. I'd be stumbling to the bathroom in the morning to brush my teeth and open the door to find 30 Ladyfesters waiting for their workshop to start," remembers Rachel.

"The streets were crawling with girls. There was this sense that something big was happening, something without precedent," she continues.

By contrast, Rachel says, "Ladyfest Midwest was so spread out. [It] didn't quite catch that one-big-punk-ass-slumber-party feeling that Ladyfest 2000 did -- it was a much bigger event. I think the organizers did a great job."

Dvin agrees: "My first show with the Need couldn't have been more supportive and exciting."

And things can only get better, weirder, or -- as Rachel cryptically says about the band's new album, due out in June 2002 on Touch and Go Records - "heading in the direction of MORE."

# LORAXX

STORY BY DEENA DASEIN

Ladyfest was as much about the spirit of D.I.Y. as it was about feminism. My nominee for the band best evincing the ideals of both, as well as the one that played my favorite fest set, is Chicago-based noise rockers, Loraxx.

The power trio's vortex, Arista Strungys, embodies the iconic mascots of the festival -- the Powerpuff Girls. Strungys is a veritable Buttercup with her guitar and voice as weapons of choice. Blossom-like, she writes the songs and leads Loraxx with well-planned and tightly rendered passionate precision. Her Bubbles-persona shows up in her charming off-stage manner and keen aesthetic sensibility.

An accomplished and versatile axe-wielder, Strungys was a devotee of distortion and a doyen of dynamics. On drums, Elliott Talarico was a relentless propulsive. Jeff Lauras, on bass, was

making his official debut with the band. "We were all really happy with the set," Strungys reflected some weeks later. "It was a great crowd and the organizers were some of the best people we have ever worked with."

Former bassist Santosh Isaac cheered on the group from the audience. "There is no bad blood between any of us," Strungys said. "No drama, no gossip. This was a really easy transition for us."

It is Strungys's vocals that drop jaws. No one would call her mighty screams singing unless that word has evolved in the same sense as the term "lady." Her voice is pure exuberant power, an



intense experience made more so by the band's precision. The title of Loraxx's sophomore release, the aptly named *YELLVILLE*, says it all.

And what is she screaming about? Well, that's somewhat of a mystery. "A lot of people ask me for them," she responded when I asked for her lyrics. "It's a 'thing' I have -- no problems committing them to tape and no problems performing them live, but god forbid I put them on paper for people to read."

# PUERTO MUERTO

STORY BY BECKY VLAMIS. PHOTO BY HOLLY WYANT

Puerto Muerto's *Your Bloated Corpse Has Washed Ashore!*, a 19-song epic about swashbuckling and harlotry, is niche indie at its best. With a Spanish-folk-guitar-meets-German-cabaret sound, the husband and wife duo have enough quasi-historical references to make arcana-craving hipsters beam. But pretensions aside, they really are *really* into pirates. So much so, the band name comes from a bar residing in the mind of Tim Kelley, half of Puerto Muerto, whose patrons are pirates in search of cheap beer and a good jukebox.

It is precisely this sort of melodrama that allows Puerto Muerto's Christa Meyer to flex her vocal muscle. Meyer's voice can pack a punch as easily as it can provide the sonic massage of a chanteuse's croon. Hussy or heroine, she becomes the characters in the songs she sings.

Both marital and musical unit, the Chicago-by-way-of-St. Louis duo requires little external influence. Both share vocal responsibilities, and both play a slew of instruments including guitar, banjo and drums. The band's latest project, *Elena*, has yet to be released. *Elena* is an aural leap from the Poguesese-esque belligerence of *Corpse*, more oompah, less spaghetti western, with a rather surprising elec-

tronic element. However, the requisite theme element remains -- this time it's "don't mess with disjointed and insane girls," says Meyer. The album, laced with bizarre topics like molestation and infanticide, provides a suitable platform for her vocal meanderings.

Meyer assumes the identity of Elena, a little girl "no better than a poodle," according to the Welsh schoolmaster whose diatribe chastising sexuality sets the stage for the album. On *Elena*, her voice ranges from ghoulish to smoky to strong, but Meyer never does the bubble-gummy indie-rock thing.

"I guess I never understood why some women chose to use that sort of ultra-vulnerable voice in their music," she muses. "I don't think singing 'Jean Lafitte,' a pirate song about pillaging and the like, in a whispery voice would make much sense, although it might be interesting."



# ELLEN ROSNER

STORY BY CHARLOTTE ROBINSON  
PHOTO BY NICOLE RADJA

**E**llen Rosner has such a charming, down-to-earth stage presence that it's hard not to like her. Nevermind that she's got a fabulous voice, which has prompted two of my friends, on separate occasions, to proclaim, "Wow, does she have pipes!"

The native Chicagoan possesses typical Midwestern earnestness without the big-city pretension, as exemplified in her onstage banter. She jokingly introduces her band, which features Tom Valenzano (guitar), Tony Stompanato (bass), and Chuck Harling (drums), with "We, collectively, are Ellen Rosner."

Jokes aside, Rosner realizes the important role her talented collaborators play in creating her soulful folk sound (which garners frequent comparisons to Joan Armatrading), and even asked me after we spoke about this article, "Did I give credit to my band enough?"

The "collective Ellen Rosner" cer-



she tries to accomplish through her music -- building community. She stresses that what matters to her most is "the doing of the music by myself and with others, the connection made musically with the musicians, with the audience, with whatever force it is that gives me this

tainly deserves credit for their Ladyfest Midwest Chicago performance at Schuba's. Playing on a bill topped by youthful Canadian sisters Tegan and Sara, the seasoned Rosner and company faced a younger audience than usual, but bowled them over nonetheless. The set was a particular triumph for Rosner since she was a member of Ladyfest's organizing committee.

Rosner views her role in the grassroots festival as an extension of what

thing in the first place."

This winter marks the release of Rosner's second album, *Count to Three*, the follow-up to 1999's *Perfect Malcontent*. With typical honesty, the musician admits, "[W]hile of course I would want to be on Letterman, my focus needs to stay on the doing, and being the best I can be at what I do for myself -- not on whatever destination I may want to get to." To keep up with Rosner's "doings," check out her Web site, [www.ellenrosner.com](http://www.ellenrosner.com).



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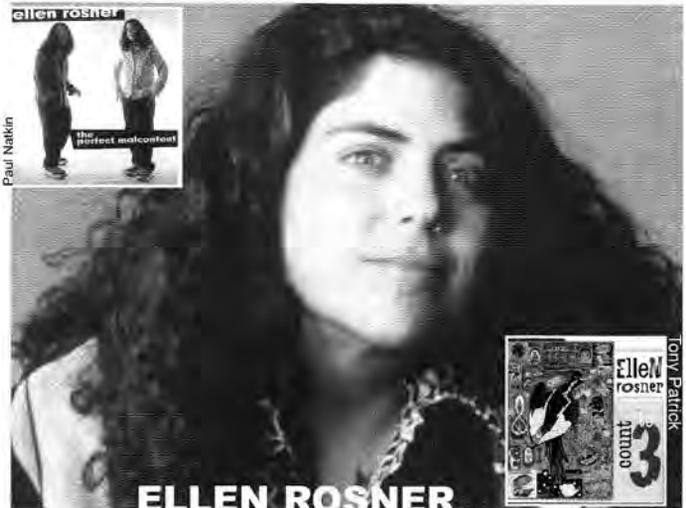
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-- VERN HESTER, *WINDY CITY TIMES*

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