

Women Face the Music

Popular songs today often portray women as lovelorn fools. They're always chasing after men and pining away with unrequited love. Holly Near sums this phenomena up on her album, "Holly Near Live."

"Blues written for women are kind of hard to get behind," she says, "You know, 'hit me, kick me, and I'll follow you anywhere'."

Women musicians like Holly are trying to present a more positive image of women in their music. A catch-all phrase for that type of music is "women's music."

Holly Near, Meg Christian, Cris Williamson and a couple dozen other women performers are verbalizing positive and political images of women.

The recording companies of Redwood, Wise Women, Olivia Records, and Pleides were formed by these and other women. They are dedicated to getting the music of women artists with these feminist ideals into the music and bookstores across the country.

Feminists, lesbians and separatists can express their politics, loves and lifestyles through music to an audience that shares some of those ideals--or to those that have never been exposed to them before.



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Margie Adams, who organized Pleides Record Company last year, expressed a need for music performed by women to an audience of women when she appeared in a Willow Productions concert in Kansas City this past spring.

"The media so distorted the hearts and spirits of the women of America that we did not believe in the truth of each other," she said, "(Women's music) it has to always be defined in a fashion that allows for space for all

women's points of view and all women's priorities and focuses. There's got to be space for it and celebration and validation of those different kinds of women's music."

Margie defines women's music as music that is talking about what it's like to get real serious about creating change in our society.

Margie feels that she can also express these ideals through helping to create an economic system in support of talented women. She employs all women musicians and technicians. Her technicians, in turn, teach skills to other women.

"We need to create the healing environment and celebration and the bonding and re-charging space of a women's only concert and at the same time created experiences for women who have never ever had a cultural experience which is theirs by birthright."

Editorial Comment

by Kelly Lyne

Finding music that I relate to lyrically and instrumentally is important to me. Relating to other women in our common bond of experience is part of that search. That is where my passion for "women's music" comes from.

This music strives to strengthen women and struggles to lighten our loads. I want to get something straight though--positive energy toward women is not necessarily negative energy toward men. At the same time, we don't have to apologize for celebrating our own culture.

The need for music that is especially created for women as a means of bringing them closer together and creating a space just for women to be together--at concerts or at home--is important and valid.

These pages are an attempt to explain a little of what women's music is about--but these are only our impressions--by no means definitive.

Beth Scalet: "Songs That I Trust"

by Sheree Welch

"I guess I'm still a small town kid in a lot of ways." Beth Scalet may have grown up a small town kid, but she is now the best known woman musician in Lawrence. Beth has her own perspective on music and life. She sees her music as a sharing of herself. "I want my music to be a positive kind of influence on people--to make them feel better about something or--examine what's going on around them and see that some of it is not particularly nice and some of it is real fun."

Beth leans back, sends up another puff of smoke, and examines the lyrics she sings measured against her own philosophy. "I want my music to reflect who I am as a person, and part of me is a political person. To me, being politically correct means singing songs that I trust."

Sometimes she'll sing an "old schmucky '60's lovesong" just for foolish fun. She loves to do blues songs, but tries to avoid "those old, oh my man, he done me wrong, I'm gonna stick with him to the end songs."

At the same time, she insists she sings music, not politics. "I am an individual, and want to be regarded that way."

Although Beth feels respected as an individual musician, she believes that obstacles exclusive to women are present in the performing world. "Women have not been encouraged to do instrumental music in that out-front performing way that men have--I mean, how many flashy electric guitar players have you seen that are women?"

Beth finds working with male musicians definitely depends on the male. "I've been pretty fortunate," she nods her head, "Sometimes, they've made comments that I've thought were

insensitive, made me feel the obvious differences. But most of the problems have been problems with another human being."

She stretches and looks for her cigarettes. Her smoking doesn't seem to harm her rich voice, but then she's been singing for a

long time. At an early age, she was singing along with the records of Peter, Paul, and Mary, Bob Dylan and the Kingston Trio. Since her father runs a music store in Ottawa and plays trombone, she grew up with music.

"Somebody I knew went off to KU," she smiled, "which was like going off to New York to me, and brought back a Joan Baez album. So I was hooked!"

Although Beth has toured other places, she has predominantly played in this area since she began performing in high school

den meanings in them. "The kind of audience I like to play to is one that is willing to listen to something besides what's on the jukebox, but is not afraid to have a good time." Presently, Beth describes herself as transitioning. She plans to take a three month break from performing to launch a new phase in her career; songwriting.

Beth feels that the daily business of making music for a living conflicts with writing. "You have to clear your mind of a lot of clutter to write anything. Artificially-sitting down at a



Photos by Jolene Babyak

around 1964.

She has considered leaving, but feels comfortable in Lawrence, although she says "It's not exactly the home of the recording industry." Being near people she has common history with is important to her. "I have my roots here in a lot of ways. As long as I'm making progress here I don't see any reason to jump into an enormous pool of talent in New York or Los Angeles, although I've got confidence in myself."

Recently, Beth has been in a four-person group which disbanded, because they couldn't make enough money to support four people without going commercial. "The Big Sell-Out," she drones, and grimaces. "If you're doing it like you're a bankteller, then it's easy to do commercial music. It's like clocking in, and you do it because that's what you're getting paid to do." She flings her hands open. "But if your desires are different as mine are, then you have to make decisions."

Being free to play non-commercial music requires a receptive audience. Beth most enjoys singing to people who are interested in her lyrics, but not too serious about finding hid-

table and saying I'm going to write--often a lot of outward stimuli gets in the way."

Often songs come to her while she is in her car. "Driving down the road triggers that kind of response. Without sounding like some kind of Zen person, because I don't know much about that, driving can clear my mind."

"I'm paying attention to the road, folks." She leans back and chuckles. "I just want you to know that." Driving is "very rhythmic--different speeds, different beats."

While Beth needs solitude to concentrate on writing, she also believes that artists can encourage each other to be self-disciplined and create an atmosphere "smoking with energy and talent."

In order to foster this type of community, Beth plans to conduct a songwriting course in her home during August. All that talent "smoking" around Beth may inspire her to new ranges of musical creativity.

With every step, Beth comes closer to her dream of recording her own album. That would be taking a big chance, but, she says, "To me, that's what music is about--taking risks."

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