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Album review: Portland's LKN gets grrrrly on *Postulate I*

2006-04-03

Danielle Sottosanti

Despite the mainstream success of pop divas like Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera during the late '90s and early '00s, the Riot Grrrl movement is still alive and kicking.

Given the success of acts like The Yeah Yeah Yeahs and Cat Power, women-fronted rock bands may be reaching a peak not seen since the days when Kathleen Hannah and Courtney Love were getting into catfights backstage. The Tucson band The Beta Sweat know this, as do female rockers nationwide, including Portland-based indie songwriter Lauren K. Newman (LKN).

LKN has already made a name for herself as a musician, as her work in several indie rock bands has already brought her some degree of indie fame. She's relatively well known as the drummer for the Portland-based math rock band Avenue of the Strongest, for example. LKN's jill-of-all-trades quality enables her to play in a variety of bands in the somewhat incestuous Portland scene. Such is the life in a thriving scene that's not New York or L.A.

LKN's solo effort of *Postulate I* (Greyday, 2006) will undoubtedly please many listeners, especially fans of The Gossip, The Beta Sweat and Le Tigre. Rather than worrying about their next manicures, LKN and other female rockers are concentrating on crunching out heavily distorted power chords on their beat-up electric guitars... just as LKN does on *Postulate I*.

The album has already received a relatively large amount of critical acclaim and many reviewers compare LKN to P.J. Harvey and Cat Power. As justified as this is, when looking at the larger scope of the past and present Riot Grrrl movement, LKN is much more similar to Minneapolis-based band Babes In Toyland. Like Babes in Toyland's 1992 debut album *Fontanelle*, *Postulate I* features sometimes sweet, sometimes banshee-like female vocals over chaotic guitar riffs. LKN's "I Can Think of A Better Question" is by far the most Babes in Toyland-like song on the album, though much of her record could easily be mistaken for a new release from the former Minneapolis act.

"Circumstance" is by far the best song on the album, as everything from the vocals to the musical arrangement is reminiscent of Kim Gordon during Sonic Youth's *Goo* and *Washing Machine* days. LKN begins the song by alluding to The Clash's famous question, though not verbatim. "Do you want me to stay or go?" She asks before immediately deciding, "I want to make that choice alone." The lyrics are undoubtedly "Gordonian" and, in fact, "Circumstance" couldn't sound more like Sonic Youth if Gordon herself had written it.

Given the equipment list in the liner notes, LKN's similarity to Sonic Youth's tone seems intentional. Remarkably, LKN plays all the instruments in each of the album's 13 songs, and the ones she uses show a keen sense of indie rock sensibility that Sonic Youth themselves would appreciate. A Big Muff Pi, Japanese re-issue Jaguar, Squier Jagmaster Vista series and Marshall JCM 800 - ahhh, the true staples of any indie rocker's equipment list. Moreover, the fact that



✦ Two Gallants

✦ Will Elliott

she distinguishes between Japanese- and Korean-made Fenders proves that LKN really knows what she's talking about, which is something that any Fender-obsessed guitarist would appreciate. (Fenders made in Japan tend to be higher quality than those made in Korea. The difference is significantly noticeable in Squier's Vista series.)

All in all, LKN's decision to include a full equipment list (and a cool one, at that) is a nice touch that will undoubtedly earn her respect among indie musicians "in the know."

To sum up:

Perfect for fans of: Cat Power, The Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Babes in Toyland, Hole, Le Tigre, Bikini Kill, The Beta Sweat, The Gossip and Sonic Youth.

Who will hate it: People who aren't into the whole "Riot Grrrl" thing.

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Comments?

1. this is bullshit. i do not resemble riot grrl in any manner. pull your head out of your riot grrl world and you'll hear don cabellero, chavez and the like in my music. just because i have tits and i have balls does not stipulate riot grrll. jesus, i'm trying to get ahead with my music, this kind of review puts all my effort to shame.
thanks

— **lauren** Apr 5, 11:15am #

2. No, this is a review. Unless there's an interview involved, a reviewer can't possibly know the artist's every influence. So, just like an average listener, whatever the reviewer hears in a record is a legitimate reflection of that record.

I think it's cool for an artist to clarify her influences or intentions to her audience, but no need to be all crazy. Sounded kinda like a riot grrrrl response to me.

— **G** Apr 5, 12:51pm #

3. Hi Lauren.
You sound defensive. I thought this article was very unbiased and pro you. Keep up the good work!

— **Hopeful** Apr 5, 4:14pm #

4. Dear Lauren,

When I used to play in bands and be compared to music outside of my comfort zone, I always welcomed the input.

Based on your response, I have to ask you, "What are you so afraid of?" Are you stuck in the "I don't like it if it's mainstream" mentality that the rest of us outgrew in high school?

When you put a piece of art (like music) out there, you're opening it up to interpretation. If you only want to be compared to artists that you cite as influences, that's not going to happen ... unless of course only your PR staff write about your work and you avoid getting any press ... Hey, with an attitude like yours, you just might be working toward that.

I'm an independent reviewer, not your publicist. You sound like Babes in Toyland, whether or not you not want to. List your influences on your web site and tell all your My Space friends how cool and "unique" you are. Maybe a few of them actually believe it.

Good luck to you in you effort to try to get ahead with your music like you say you are ... You're going to need it, especially with your tendency to burn bridges. I pity your publicist. Your pugnacious attitude is a PR nightmare.

— **Danielle** Apr 5, 4:46pm #

5. I am Lauren's publicist and there is no need to pity me. I am a musician myself, and I love what I do. I pick my clients by their talent and intentions, and I believe in Lauren's



Dante Febraro



Club Crawl, the biannual showcase of local bands and musicians, hits downtown Saturday. Of the following bands playing the event for the first time, which are you most excited to see?

Cosmic Slop

Dropsphere

Feta and Shiraz

Found Dead on the Phone

Provocative Whites

Stonewall Betty

The Ten Percenters

music. So artists are sensitive about reviews. We all know that. But in Lauren's defense, she works her ass off recording and going on the road, and she makes my job that much easier by being incredibly good at what she does. As for her reaction to the review, to each her own- I try not to be one of those publicists who's spinning everything, and to Danielle: thank you very much for the review, I'm glad you liked the album.

— **Becki Carr** Apr 7, 8:40am #

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