

She Hit Me (And It Felt Like a Priss)

The Prissteeens reinvent the girl group, with a little help from their friends. by Stephen Pitalo

LORI YORKMAN'S HAND, at the end of an arm that sports a tattoo of a Robbie the Robot fair-maiden rescue, holds a big glass of ice water. No beer this afternoon for Lori's laryngitic pipes; H₂O serves as part throat therapy, part post-binge rehydration: "Last week I got sick, so I thought it would be smart to go out and get really wasted every night."

The three girls and one guy who form The Prissteeens are recovering from their role in a ferocious Tramps gig the night before, part of a Joey Ramone-sponsored meeting of the sweaty rock minds that was, hands down, the best show of the year. With Ronnie Spector and Blondie on the bill, it was the perfect slumber party (the Dictators and Independents as the

boys sneaking in the upstairs window).

Witness the finest chick harmonies since Phil Spector had Ronnie under his thumb. Lori Yorkman lays down the bass groove under her lead vocals (imagine Joan Jett with syrup); guitarist Leslie Day plugs holes in her defenseless audience with sharp chords; Tina Canellas fills the rhythm smoothly; and lone male Joe Vincent bangs the skins. Twentysomethings all, they rock against a world of mediocre, radio-friendly alternachords—but in a cool, girlie way.

The Prissteeens' debut *Almo Sounds CD, Scandal, Controversy and Romance*, pours the wall-of-sound production and heartbroken-but-asskickin' lyrics over the listener like bad-girl candy. With producers Richard Gottcher (The McCoys, the Go-Go's, Richard Hell) and Jeffrey Lesser

(Lou Reed) at the helm, it's a record with classic written all over it.

And to think the band formed out of sheer boredom.

"We would look around at 5 in the morning," says Leslie, "and there we were," on both sides of the bar at Avenue B's Lakeside Lounge. "We decided after many flaming shots that we could do something a bit more productive."

STUPID QUESTION #1: Where did your girl-group sound come from?

ANSWER: We're girls.

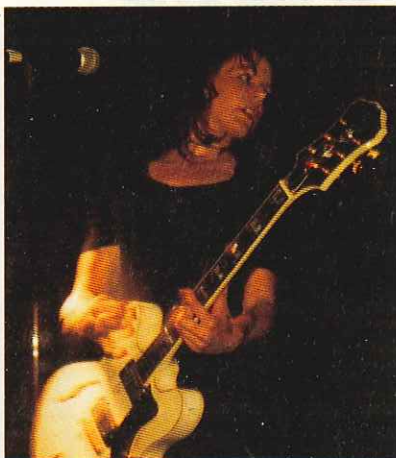
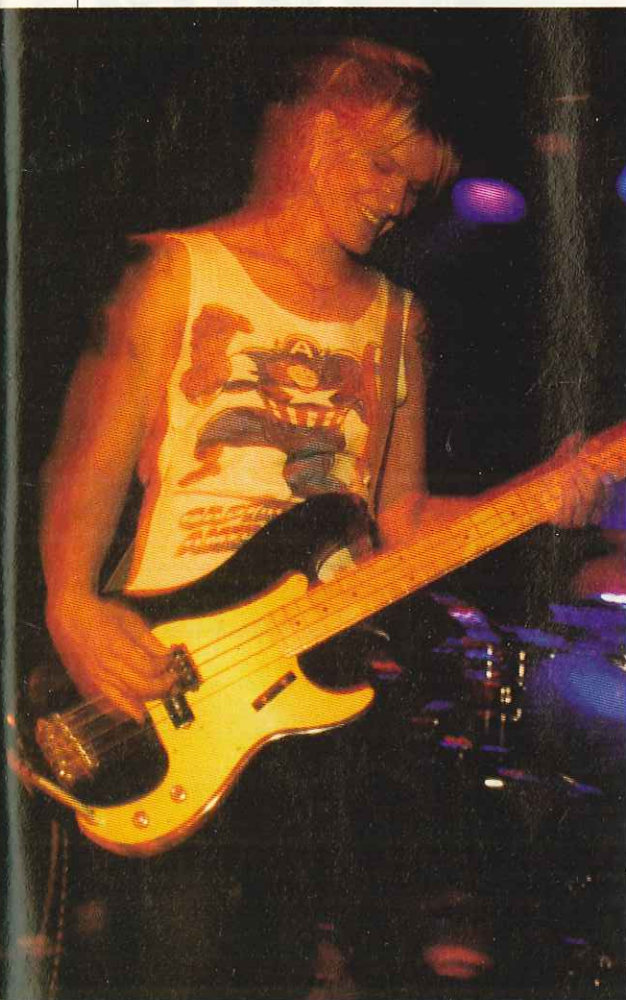
ON THE PRISSTEEN home stereo, Hank Williams, Creedence and David Bowie vie for space, Bobby Fuller and Kiss also make appearances, along with Pavement and Beck. "And no A&R guy gave me that Pavement CD," Leslie vows. "I bought it myself. No coaxing, I swear."

Glee club, orchestra class and marching band gave these musicians their seeds, but a love of vintage equipment and style saved them from the East Village-punk-band-that-can't-play syndrome. A short romance with straight punk left them bored; they soon found that old-school infatuations with scratchy 45s die hard.

The stage was set for the Teens' crybaby chord rock with their '96 indie single "Beat You Up." Crying-waiting-hoping laments alternate with tales of puckish schoolgirl backseat shenanigans, and bounce through some common diary entries. When The Prissteeens sing "I don't cry for you," you know it's a lie at its worst; when they sing "I just fucked the meanest boy in town," it's nyah-

PRISSING IN ACTION: Lori Yorkman, Leslie Day and Tina Canellas (clockwise from left) at the Mercury Lounge

Photographs by Louis Melledy



nyah at its best. Joe wrote that one: "It's a bad-ass thing for a girl to say, and guys love to hear girls say 'fuck.'"

Even so, the Priss chicks have changed lyrics onstage when their parents or little kids are around. "I'll blow you down on my knees" doesn't play too well with the tots in Freehold, N.J., nor with the folks. "Someone put a puppet that looked like a penis up on stage and I put it in Tina's face," says Lori, "and Tina said, 'Watch it, my dad's here.'"

STUPID QUESTION #2: How did you and Joey Ramone find each other?

ANSWER: He found us. It would be easy to find him because he's famous. See?

THE LEAD RAMONE WALKED out of Coney Island High one night in 1996 and found an MTV News camera in his face. Said Joey: "I just saw the best band playing in New York City—The Prissteeens." Thereafter, he helped the band in ways only an East Village Rock God can.

Picture the Brady sisters shagging the Kinks in a tour bus and then stealing their amps, with Peter driving the getaway car.

A slot on the East Coast leg of the Warped Tour this summer exposed skate punks to a righteous dose of the Teens' cracked-nail anthems. Lori hopes audiences understand that even though the band has a sense of humor, they're not a joke. "With most people, it's not whether they get it or they don't," she says. "If they like us, they get it."

Picture the Brady sisters shagging the Kinks in the back of a tour bus and then stealing their amps, with Peter driving the getaway car.

STUPID QUESTION #3: Are the stories in your songs true?

ANSWER: Well, they happened to somebody, and we happened to be there. What, you thought we were kidding?

LORI'S THROAT NEEDS stronger healing remedies. Joe suggests a McDonald's chocolate shake, but Lori thinks if she drinks one she'll look like a bloated Krusty the Clown. Leslie says a Cartman power shake might do the trick.

It's seems only natural that additional mind-numbing in the Prissteeen household occurs courtesy of repeated viewings of *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* and *Carrie*. "I've got two copies of *Carrie*," says Leslie. "I'm not sure what that says about me."

The Teens love horror flicks, although they're partial to the real thing—no Gus Van Sant remake of *Psycho* will cut it, and certainly no lame *Scream*. "Ultimately, our goal is to make a really-great horror movie," says Joe. It doesn't sound like he's kidding. ■