

Sapphire A gem of a different gender

"All-American Cosmopolitan rock 'n' roll" is the way Sapphire's lead guitar player and vocalist Meredith Brooks describes the band's music.

"I think our music is sexy — it's feminine, but assertive," says Brooks, who coined the term "cosmopolitan rock" from Cosmopolitan magazine.

Sapphire has gained quite a following in the Northwest with their style of rock 'n' roll. They performed to a capacity crowd at the Paramount in Portland two weeks ago and audiences were enthusiastic at The Place in Eugene, where they played over Thanksgiving vacation.

The five women got together a little over two years ago. Brooks had quit her job with a Corvallis-based band, Odyssey, and wanted to form an all-women group. She met drummer Patti Drapela early in 1976. Drapela knew bass player Pam Johnson and keyboard artist Janis Gains.

They formed the band in September, 1976. Brooks' roommate, rhythm guitarist Cindy Larsen, quit her steady job at OSU's computer center to design and run the band's sound system. She later learned to play guitar and joined the group on stage.

Brooks has been playing guitar and singing professionally for five years. Pam Johnson, bass guitar, studied music at Lane Community College before joining the band. Janis Gains has a degree in music from the University. Drapela, who is also the mother of four, had played with Johnson previously.

"Cindy's story is the most amazing," says Brooks.

"She wasn't involved with rock 'n' roll at all until I moved in with her. She just knew a few chords until I taught her to play guitar. And when she quit her steady job to help us with our sound it was really good. She really believed in us."

"We were terrible our first year," Brooks admits. "We got all our jobs because we were an all-girl band."

"Then we realized that if we wanted to go back to these places we'd better learn how to play well. And I think we've managed to do that in a very short time."

"At first we played lounge music, Las Vegas show-tune stuff. We'd change our clothes every set," Brooks recalls. The group also played disco, funk and soul.

A little over a year ago the group met the rock group Kiss and took some advice from band member Ace Frehley. He told them to go rock 'n' roll.

"There's more of a market for it," says Brooks. "When it comes down to playing, writing and money — mostly money — I'll play rock 'n' roll." Brooks' first love is soul, but since she's not black, she says, she plays rock 'n' roll instead.

And rock it is. Their stage outfits are made of satin, but there is nothing smooth about their music. The band belts out selections from such groups as Foreigner, Toto and Boston. When playing in clubs they add disco tunes like those from the BeeGees and Yvonne Elliman to their repertoire.

"Janis just got a new grand piano so I think she'll be writing more rock 'n' roll, too," Brooks says.

Sapphire's performance is high-energy. The group's movements often seem choreographed as they dance about the stage together. Drummer Drapela seems indefatigable, still pounding her tom-toms with a smile at 1 a.m. The audience is delighted with the Peter Townshend-type antics of lead guitar player Brooks.

Brooks sings most of the lead vocals, but Johnson and Gains occasionally take over the microphone. All five women sing background, adding up to some nice harmonies.

Each member of the band gets a chance to shine by doing solos. The others try to direct attention to whoever is doing the solo.

"When we first started, I pretty much carried the band on my shoulders," recalls Brooks. "Now everyone holds their ground and it's great."

Brooks continues. Currently, Sapphire is playing all over the Northwest and in California.

"The last three months we've been playing about half concerts and half clubs," says Brooks. "We're phasing out smaller clubs, though, because we're not a quiet band anymore and we need enough space for our sound."

Brooks says the group has been playing a lot of colleges lately. They backed up Flash Cadillac at Mt. Hood Community College and played before Hendrix impersonator Randy Hansen at the Paramount in Portland.

"I really enjoyed playing before those groups. I learn a lot and it's always fun to steal a few licks," Brooks adds.

Sapphire will continue to play large clubs like The Place here in Eugene, said Brooks. She says she enjoys playing concerts the most but clubs like The Place are fun because of the challenge.

Sapphire will be out of town for the next two months but they'll be back in Eugene in February.

"Often our groupies end up as our roadies," says Brooks. "After they've seen the act 100 times they get bored with it and get involved instead of just watching."

But there are problems in being women rock 'n' roll players, according to Brooks. One was having no role models to look up to when she was learning to play.

"My stances onstage are masculine because that's all I had to look at," she explains. At first the group spent a lot of time just learning to move with each other, but Brooks says they've progressed past that point now.

"Physically, Patti just can't hit her tom-toms as hard as the average male drummer, but we've learned to get around those kinds of things, we make all her drums."



Sapphire also does an original set of about 14 or 15 songs. Most of the original music they use was written by Brooks, but Drapela and Johnson have also written a song together.

Brooks feels that Sapphire is no longer getting bookings because they are a novelty. We're earning it now, she says.

"We were the first local group that played at the Paramount in three years," she says proudly. "And it was sold out. Our manager, Ed Dougherty, isn't giving us any handouts, we've worked for it."

"Our goals now are to do a concert tour with a main act and to do an album with the right recording contract,"

The group makes major decisions together, though they all have separate roles. One is music manager, another handles finances, another bookings. Their Portland promoter is managing them presently and looking for potential concert dates. Brooks, however, does the band's local bookings.

Brooks says that their biggest fans are men, but that women seem to enjoy them, too. The band can serve as a role model for young women who dream about being rock stars.

They do have a few young male groupies, Brooks says, recalling a particularly ardent one with a smile.

In spite of the problems, there are advantages to belonging to a female band, Brooks believes. Communication is one of them.

"I guess the difference isn't that we argue less," Brooks surmises, "but that we're more understanding with each other."

Understanding within the band itself is eventually communicated to the audience, too. The band performs smoothly, professionally, but with emotion for their comrades and for their music.

"In other bands I was in, with men, they seemed to hold all their grudges inside until there was a big blow-up," says Brooks. But Sapphire handles their problems differently.

"When something bothers one of us we speak right up and talk it out immediately. We'll cry before we hit each other."

Story by Jennifer Greenleaf.
Photos by Dennis Hickok.

Coming

Maude Kerns offers gift sale

Want to avoid those "necktie-again-blues"? The Maude Kerns Art Center Annual Christmas Sale offers original hand-crafted gifts, created by local artists and craftspeople.

Jewelry, stained glass, pottery, weavings, toys and ornaments are just some of the gifts on sale at the Center Dec. 1-9, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily.

A special feature this year will be the decoration of three Christmas trees by area artists. Trees will be decked out with soft sculptures by Barbara Kensler, baker's clay ornaments by Kathie DeBord, and Origami, Japanese paperfolded ornaments by Kathy Hoy. The ornaments will be for sale.

A deli luncheon will be offered Friday, opening day, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., with a sandwich buffet for \$2.50 a person and a selection of homemade pastries.

Children's Shopping Night, Dec. 6, 6-9 p.m., gives kids a chance to find just the right gift to fit their small budgets. Crafts priced from 50 cents to \$4 have been specially created for this event.

The sale will include other merrymaking, too, with refreshments and entertainment. There's no admission charge.

Gallery features Rainbow film

They gathered for three weeks in the Umpqua National Forest, making temporary homes in tents and sharing lifestyles based on holistic healing and cultural patterns.

Since the late Sixties, an international group of people have met yearly at the Rainbow Family Gathering in various locations throughout the country, and this year it was Oregon's turn.

Experiencing the Rainbow, a 55-minute color video documentary of the gathering, will be shown at the Open Gallery Dec. 6 and 11-13 at 8 p.m. Tickets are available for \$3 at the Open Gallery, 445 High, Tuesday-Saturday, noon-5 p.m., 345-4857.

Ed Mellnik, of White Light Media Arts of Eugene, produced the film. The documentary was taken from nine hours of footage shot over the three-week period.

"I realized that I had to discard some of my assumptions and values as the crew entered the forest," says Mellnik about the project, "and to document the Rainbow Family whom were mistrusting of past experiences with media groups. I believe we captured a truly honest statement about these people and their attempt at an alternative to a life process."

ORT produces holiday classic

Yes, Virginia there is a Scrooge, and he's coming to the Oregon Repertory Theatre (ORT) next week in a special adaptation of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

The new version of this old favorite is set in an Appalachian hobo camp in the 1930s. ORT's own Randi Douglas along with Cheney Ryan and Linda Danielson adapted the play for Eugene audiences. The play will be presented "in the round."

"The setting provides for the inclusion of traditional American folk music and dance," says director Rick Milasich. "However, the play is not intended simply as a story about Christmas in Appalachia, but as a story about Christmas everywhere."

A Christmas Carol will play every Wednesday through Sunday, Dec. 6-24, at 8 p.m., with Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$4 for Wednesday evenings and Sunday matinees, and \$5 for all other performances. Student and senior discounts and group rates are available. For reservations stop by the ORT box office or call 485-1946. ORT is located on the second floor of the Atrium Building.

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