

INTERVIEW

For 16 years, Amy Ray and Emily Saliers, known as the Indigo Girls, have built a reputation as the queens of pop-folk music. With their politically correct, hearts-on-their-sleeves persona, they have been undaunted and uncompromising in their dedication to produce musically satisfying songs with a message.

While others sing sappy songs with forgettable lyrics and be-bopping melodies, turning out

MUSIC

albums that go platinum, Ray and Saliers have remained true to that which they believe in: social and political causes, such as the environment and the fight against hate crimes. In turn they've traded top-charting albums for integrity.

"We're songwriters who grew up in the folk tradition in the true sense of word. Musically we were influenced by a lot of stuff from folk and pop to world music to soul and jazz. And we're very political in how we think. Everything we see is political. We don't get mellow; we get mad. It's not all anger, but it is what it is," says Ray.

"We're intense. We get a little melodramatic and self-involved," she says. "It's hard to write about anything except things you know, and what you know a lot of times is things you're going through or are passionate about."

"Our fans key into what we are about. They appreciate what we do and allow us to go our own way. They're pretty open-minded about the changes we go through and appreciate us for that."

Saliers adds: "I think it would suck to be known for a few hit singles—to have this fame and burn your career out. The way we've done things, we've built a solid fan base and that's been a lot more gratifying."

Ray and Saliers, 33 and 34 respectively, are back on tour after a nearly year-and-a-half-long hiatus to promote their newest Epic release, *Shaming of the Sun*. The new opus, which is neatly grounded in Bob Dylanesque '60s folk rock with a '90s sensibility, tackles some of today's headline-grabbing issues, including homophobia, Mexican immigrants and attacks on African American churches.

Shaming of the Sun also finds the Indigo Girls less stripped down than on earlier releases. They still have their acoustic guitars and sweet harmonies, but tossed in amongst the tracks are electric guitars and a looser, more rock sensibility.

"I'm very happy with this album," says Ray. "Usually after I make a record, I have to give it up and let it go. It's never quite right for me. But this album feels really good. I didn't have to compromise. I don't feel as if we quit before it was done. We did as much as we could have. If it isn't good enough, it isn't from a lack of trying."

THE MUSIC IS THEIR MESSAGE

The Indigo Girls talk about being an out, political band and how it feels to be dissed by the mainstream media

by Jeffrey L. Newman

While the Indigo Girls are open about being an "out" band, a somewhat mainstream group fronted by two openly gay musicians, the road to get there was not an easy one. While Ray was less reserved or concerned about the public's image of her and her sexuality, Saliers was more uneasy about being public about her sexual preference.

"Emily and I grew at different speeds when it came to what we wanted to say [about being lesbians] and when. It's never been that big a deal to me. I've never felt limited by it. I think it has helped us gain a sense of community," says Ray.

"There was a time when Emily didn't feel comfortable about being open. She felt like there had to be something in her life that had to be private and she wanted to keep it out of the public eye," she recalls. "My concern was that if we didn't talk about it, I didn't feel as if we were being honest. We were asking people to be individuals and stand up for themselves, so I felt like we had to also."

The duo reached a compromise. Ray talked about being gay, and Saliers talked about the things she felt comfortable talking about. But about three or four years ago, after doing radio interviews and seeing the need to be open, Saliers changed her tune.

"I don't regret coming out. I only wish I had done it earlier. I was just afraid of the stigma. I didn't want to be identified as a lesbian band first and a musical band second. It was also my personal fear of rejection," says Saliers, who has been with her lover for three years. "Once we were both out, I was like, 'Why wasn't it always that way?' It's better in the long run for more people to be out."

Ray and Saliers met when they were in the sixth grade and teamed up musically during their junior year of high school. (Contrary to speculation, they've never been lovers.)

Since they started, Ray and Saliers say they've

never compromised their values. They haven't gone the mainstream pop route, and conversely have never had a hit single. They also get little to no coverage outside the folk or gay press, unless it's an article criticizing their overt political stance. But while mainstream media have ignored the Indigo Girls over the course of their career, they've learned to turn the other cheek and not allow it to undermine what they are about.



The Indigo Girls

"I don't feel pigeonholed into being anything. If anything, we're given so little recognition from the mainstream press—or it's negative press if we get any—the pressure to conform isn't on. It's not like we have had all of this praise in the past that we have to live up to," says Ray.

"It's one of those things that if we had it, we wouldn't want it. We've learned that it can never really please the ego. I try to look at it in a realistic way," she adds. "I used to get bummed when I didn't feel mainstream gave us a chance musically. If they do talk about us, they make fun of our politics or our audience. I'd rather have some constructive criticism that has some clarity. I'd rather know why they don't like us or our music than have them just be nasty. To me, music

journalism is at its finest when they tell you what the music is like. It's supposed to teach us something about the music. They talk about our lives, never the music. I feel like we've been together for 16 years and recording for 10—it's time to give it a rest. At some point we want someone to talk about the music."

Unlike their musical lesbian peers, k.d. lang and Melissa Etheridge, Ray and Saliers feel they aren't mainstream enough to cause the type of sensation the other women did when they came out.

"Their music is a little more accessible and mainstream," Saliers says. "K.d.'s crooning and gorgeous ballads don't irritate people the way political or social issues do. Melissa's songs are about relationships and love. It's rock 'n' roll. It's very mainstream. It's a lot different from what we do."

While their music is serious in nature and socially conscious lyrically, not everything is life and death, gloom and doom or even politically involved for the Indigo Girls. They say people have a big misconception that they are always serious and never lighthearted.

"People think that we are totally serious, hard-core women. We're not always that way. We are in our lives, when it comes to the things that we feel strongly about. And if you focus on that one thing, that picture comes across," says Saliers. "But the truth is, we laugh a lot. Life is hilarious."

And while they know that being out lesbians in a male-dominated industry is difficult, they plan to remain true to themselves and their music, and along the way help fight social and political battles that are important to them.

"I don't get tired of being identified as being gay. The gay movement is important to us. It always has been. I see a lot of positive things and a lot of negative things going on in the

fight for gay rights, which is the way it is in any revolution. I see progress, though. I see progress just in our audience alone and in the understanding we get around us," says Ray.

"Different things make the movement work. It's an evolution. I think one part is when people in the public eye come out. Because of our culture, it trickles down. It makes homosexuality more acceptable to the mainstream," she says. "People relate to famous people in a weird way. If we're going to use our being in the public eye, we're going to use it in a good way in terms of the gay movement. But we are just one of many. There are many others fighting the fight. People have died in this fight. It should never be about a small group of people, it's about everybody."

Want to Know How to Invest Wisely and Support Growing Companies that Support Your Lifestyle?

For a free consultation or more information, please call Ann Van Mele, Investment Executive, at (800) 245-0900, ext. 9258 or (503) 225-9258.

PaineWebber
Invest With More Intelligence.™

1000 S.W. Broadway, Suite 2100
Portland, OR 97205

<http://www.painewebber.com>

© 1997 PaineWebber Incorporated. Member SIPC



**For me?
You shouldn't
have!**

ESSENTIAL
lotions & oils

710 NW 23rd Ave. • 248-9748
3638 SE Hawthorne • 236-7976



**See my
Exclusive
Listings
on our
webpage**

<http://www.StanWiley.com>

JEWEL A. ROBINSON
Multimillion \$ Producer



1730 N.E. 10th
Avenue
Portland, OR
97212

OFFICE
(503) 281-4040

VOICE MAIL
(503) 323-2221

E-MAIL
Jewel2U@teleport.com