

MUSIC

The band Rebecca Riots is so grass-roots, you'd think it was planted on earth by some hippie gardener on a political mission—and now its influence is growing like a rampant lawn.

This folksy Berkeley, Calif., three-piece—comprising Eve Decker, Andrea Prichett and Lisa Zeiler—is raring to begin a 15-day tour of the Northwest to promote a new record, *Gardener*. The first stop is April 21 at St. Johns Pub in Portland.

Rebecca Riots certainly marches to the drum Ani DiFranco began beating in the 1990s; the group is activist-based, queer-intensive and self-run. Despite its deceiving

Says Prichett: "We're not going to get famous. If it's possible for the music to feed us and pay the rent, that's all we can ask for."

Despite their grass-roots principles, that all-too-elusive rent check and hearty dinner might be a little more attainable now that the Riots girls have been recruited to put out their new album, *Gardener*, on a small label called Appleseed. The label seems to move at the band's

speed; it's a political outfit that releases albums by socially conscious artists, such as Pete Seeger.

"They don't seem all about business," Prichett says.

The Rebecca Riots songwriting dynamic is interest-

Quiet riot

The folksy Berkeley-based group Rebecca Riots eases into Oregon to promote a new record

BY KATY DAVIDSON



PHOTO BY NICHOLE ROBERTS

From left: Eve Decker, Lisa Zeiler and Andrea Prichett are the women behind Rebecca Riots

name, however, Rebecca Riots sounds a little less angst and a little more lovely than good ol' DiFranco. The group tucks its important messages into elegant layers of harmony and pretty guitar work.

One of the most heartening aspects of Rebecca Riots is the obvious friendship that exists among the women. After a recent practice to prepare for their approaching tour, I was able to speak with the band members, one by one, via patchy cellular phone connections—and the background chatter and laughter was incessant. The sense of camaraderie was refreshing, to say the least.

Prichett says she met Decker eight years ago while working as a summer camp counselor. The two sang together there, then began to meet and write songs back home in Berkeley. At the time, Prichett was taking guitar lessons from Zeiler, so she invited her to join the duo. Soon after, Rebecca Riots performed its first show in the comfort of Zeiler's living room.

"It wasn't our intention to be a band," Prichett says.

Four albums and several tours later, Rebecca Riots is anything but a living-room novelty act. Admirably, the group has achieved its success without the help—or manipulation—of a mainstream record label.

"We're very wary of labels; we've done everything from scratch," Prichett says. "Major labels pretty much run everything. That's how people get exploited, when they don't know what's going on."

The women released the first three Rebecca Riots records themselves. They've distributed some through women's bookstores but have achieved the most success with post-show sales from the edges of various concert stages.

Decker tends to write music and lyrics at the same time, then bring her songs to the others to arrange. Zeiler, who considers herself more musical than lyrical, likes to collaborate with Prichett, who is the most unreserved activist of the group. (The latter two are also the lesbians of the group—"Out, out, out," they reiterate.)

"Only earth-shattering events get me to write lyrics," Zeiler says.

One of those aforementioned events was coming out when she was 14 years old. Many years later, Zeiler wrote a song called "How I Feel," detailing the experience. Decker says people weep when the band plays it live.

Zeiler says she began playing guitar when she was a child, growing up in a suburb of Chicago.

"My dad pulled a guitar out of our neighbor's dumpster and said I should learn how to play," Zeiler recalls. "I hated it at first."

All the women in Rebecca Riots are professional teachers. Decker teaches music to grade schoolers, Prichett is a high school physical education instructor, and Zeiler gives guitar lessons. How, I ask them, are they able to tour so extensively?

"This coming tour is during spring break," Decker says. "But we had to quit our jobs last year to go on a longer tour."

When they returned from that one, they were all rehired.

"It's a gypsy living," Decker says.

■ REBECCA RIOTS plays at 8 p.m. April 21 at St. Johns Pub, 8203 N. Ivanhoe St. in Portland. Tickets cost \$10 and may be purchased from the pub or from Fastixx. For more information, call (503) 283-8520.



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