

**MUSIC**



Jody Bleyle (second from right) reunites with Hazel in Portland April 21

## Which Hazel?

As she prepares for a reunion show, Jody Bleyle returns a different drummer

BY KATY DAVIDSON

Any young lesbian living in Portland during the 1990s probably caught wind of Jody Bleyle's name somehow—not only was she the spunky, balls-out, in-your-face drummer for Hazel (an otherwise all-male rock band, a group she still fondly describes as “grunge”), but she was one-quarter of the now-legendary dyke entourage Team Dresch. Besides knowing all of this, I felt an odd sort of personal connection with her because 1) someone once told me I look like her and 2) another someone once told me she had a dream that I had a crush on Bleyle, so she punched me in the stomach.

Although I lived in Portland at the end of the '90s, I somehow managed never once to see Hazel or Team Dresch play, so my perception of her was formed merely through friends' stories of her onstage high jinks (“I was on a mission; I used to yell a lot,” she says) and the tastefully topless photo of her and her band members on the cover of the Hazel record.

So, what the hell was I supposed to ask this sort-of-familiar stranger? This, my friends, was not the task of the journalist. It was the task of the human being.

I approached Bleyle in anti-interview style: We just hung out.

Interestingly, I met her away from the wet stomping grounds of Portland, at her “deceptively nice” apartment in San Francisco's Mission District. She made this disclaimer as the man living upstairs loudly, forcefully and repeatedly attempted to clear some lodged debris from his throat. “It's compulsive,” she says.

After discussing San Francisco's freaky housing situation (soon to flee Portland for Frisco myself, I admittedly eyed her apartment's extra bedroom like a hawk), Bleyle reminisced for a while about playing in Hazel. “It seems funny to talk about it now because things have changed so much, but it really was odd to be a girl in a band then,” she says. “It was kind of lonely, scary at times.”

At one point she was spending so much time with Hazel, she never saw any women. In fact, she was driven to co-found Team Dresch because she wanted to meet other dykes and collaborate musically.

“I wanted to hang out with girls, kiss

girls,” she says. “I needed a way to combine music and dykes.”

She managed to strike a balance throughout the mid-'90s by keeping active in both bands. She also started her own record label, Candy Ass, which co-released records by Team Dresch and small handful of Portland's trip-hop acts.

Bleyle relocated to the Bay Area at a seemingly odd moment: It was 1997, and her two bands were rockin' and gaining prominence. She describes her departure as a kind of escape.

“I ran away from Portland,” she says. “I wanted to take everything apart and put it back together in a different way.”

What exactly does this mean? Well, four years ago, Bleyle fell into synch with the San Francisco punk-reggae scene.

“It was a direction I was already mentally heading in—polyrhythms, polyphony, the spirituality of certain chordal structures,” she says. “This was what was really exciting me about music.”

Bleyle befriended several punk-reggae bands. Inspired by their commitment to music, nature and womanly love, she began collaborating with the five members of Reggae Mentality.

Despite the name, Bleyle assures me the group is “120 percent punk.”

“Even though we play punk music, we do it with a reggae mentality,” she says. “That's how we came up with the name.”

Reggae Mentality recently recorded a three-song demo in Bleyle's home studio and completed a comprehensive tour of California's central valley. Despite her admitted “new direction,” she says she's excited to take a short break from these musical endeavors to prepare for a Hazel reunion in Portland, the band's first show in two years.

However, she promises the crowd will find a much calmer, more spiritual drummer behind the set. “I just want to spread love and absorb love,” she says. ☐

HAZEL plays with Quasi and Harvey Danger 9 p.m. April 21 at Pine Street Theater, 215 S.E. Ninth Ave. Tickets—\$10 in advance, \$12 at the door—are available at the venue, 503-231-1530, or through Fastixx.

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KATY DAVIDSON is a musician and free-lance writer.

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