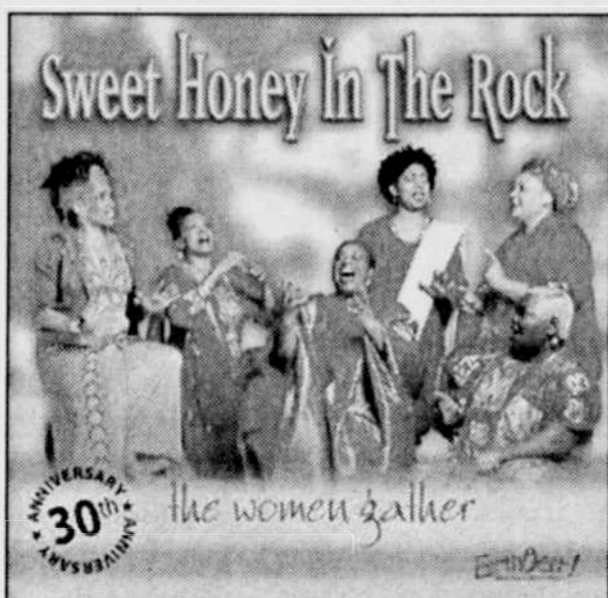


REVIEWS

THE WOMEN GATHER *Sweet Honey in the Rock* • EarthBeat!



Fields (with whom he has recorded and toured). These are love songs for the forlorn and hopeful.

Beautifully realized by a large roster of musicians, this melancholy set of derangements such as "Like Is a Strong Word" prove there is a

spark of cynicism left in the world. The track is an adjectival diatribe about the fleeting brevity of passersby and other acquaintances. The acidic "School of New York"—complete with glockenspiel, harmonium and other varied stringed things—is a searing misanthrope watching the ships passing poison in the neon-lit night.

Painstakingly wry, this journey seems as if it were pent up and plotted for years.

"If/Then" is a Beatles-esque self-portrait of a man in the throes of love's great indifference and the larger recognition of questionable identity in another's eyes. Newman's lovely piano keeps things moody and longingly paced. In its saddening, harsh reality the song dares to ask the questions we all wonder about when fielding the boundaries of relationships in transformation.

Throughout *Hung* are a multitude of macho street images and questioning reflections. There's a certain grounding to the duo's attitude on this, their sophomore full-length disc—a beer-around-the-block-and-back-again sensibility.

"(Don't Like) The Way We Live Now" is a contemporary reflection on technology's omnipresent takeover of all forms of personal communication masqueraded as a drunken conversation and a possible blind date gone awry. Drama is the key component of the fare on this rare melodic record.

Flare adds Magnetic Fields' Stephin Merritt on "Glitter," which starts with a nursery rhyme as read by a bewildered child. Its acerbic refrain, "Watch me glitter and be gay, watch me piss it all away," speaks volumes about the venomous and loaded double-entendres packed to the gills throughout.

The overtones of well-worn emotions are in apparent abundance on *Hung*, a record to be reckoned with.

—TJ Norris

There ain't no stoppin' Sweet Honey in the Rock. Their newest CD, *The Women Gather*, celebrates the 30th anniversary of this African American female a cappella group.

The latest is an 18-track collection of mostly original songs, produced by dyke musician Toshi Reagon, daughter of founding Sweet Honey member Bernice Johnson Reagon. The CD includes songs by each of the five women in the group as well as three Reagon-penned tunes.

Like Sweet Honey's past 17 albums, *The Women Gather* delivers an energy-filled, emotionally moving musical experience. You can hear the depth of the women's message both lyrically, through poetic words of love, pain, hope and social responsibility, and stylistically, as five powerful, passionate voices intricately interweave, forming layers of musical intensity.

"Let Us Rise in Love," written by Ysaye Maria Barnwell, and "Fly," by Reagon, are songs inspired by the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Nitanju Bolade Casel's "Give the People Their Right to Vote!" is a six-minute history lesson on the absence of voting rights for citizens of Washington, D.C.

Carol Maillard's "Somebody Prayed Me Over" reflects on the prayers of our ancestors, and "Prayer at the Crossroads," by Aisha Kahlil, is for those facing the demon of addiction.

Johnson Reagon contributes "The Voice of the Innocent," sung in English and Spanish, which tells the story of those who live surrounded by violence. She also arranges "Come Unto Me," based on a biblical verse, and "Ballad of Harry T. Moore," based on the Langston Hughes poem.

With *The Women Gather*, Sweet Honey in the Rock gives us a musical gift once again. Happy anniversary!

—Jamie Bolyard

HUNG

Flare • *Le Grand Magistry*

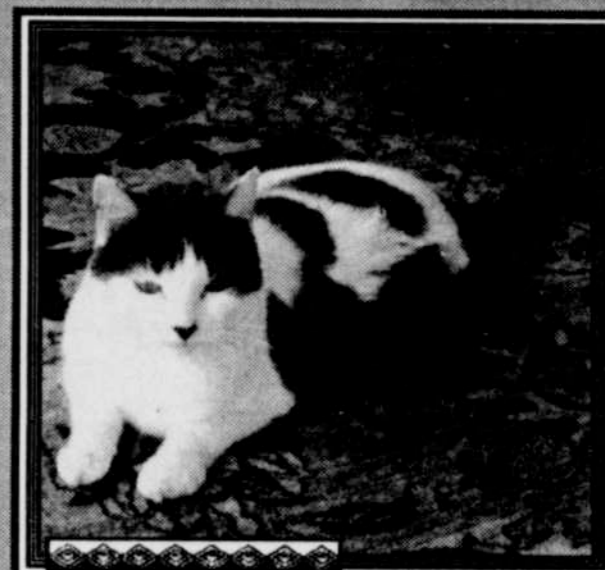
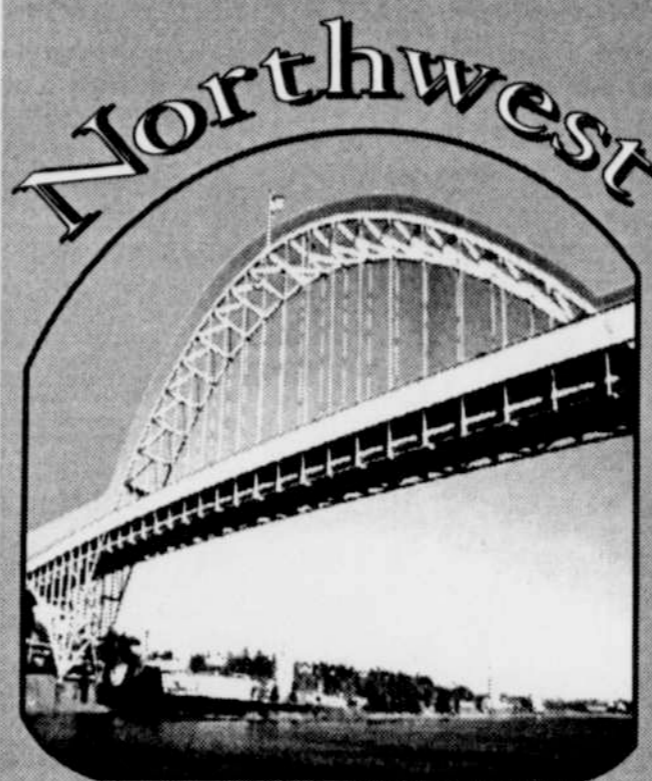


Flare are New York's neo-alterna-folk duo Charles Newman and LD Beghtol, whose latest effort is a set of a dozen haunting tracks wrapped up under the moniker *Hung*.

Beghtol's shimmering voice clashes quaintly with his hirsute, beary frame and has flavors of random planets as inhabited by the likes of the Beach Boys, Morrissey and Magnetic



LD Beghtol (left) and Charles Newman are New York's neo-alterna-folk duo Flare



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