

MUSIC

Turning it On

Unabashedly "we're so gay" band Imperial Teen back in Portland for another slap-happy show

BY CORI TARATOOT

Two queer frontmen, a kick-ass girl drummer, a blond bombshell of a bassist—the power-pop indie rockers from Imperial Teen, who play The Blackbird on June 28, are all over the map.

Originally founded in San Francisco by Faith No More keyboardist Roddy Bottum, this West Coast-based foursome find themselves in a state of reorganization after temporarily losing drummer Lynn Perko to marriage, motherhood and the Midwest. Former Hole drummer Patty Schemel fills in the gap—expect big fun and lots of sweaty, happy fans.

Bottum and singer/guitarist Will Schwartz took a few secs to dish with *Just Out* about Le Tigre, day jobs and the ladies who love ladies who love Imperial Teen.

Cori Taratoot: Imaginations are running wild about Imperial Teen. Why don't more people know about you? You're sort of a hidden treasure.

Roddy Bottum: I've given up trying to second-guess people...I always get it wrong. I think it's just a matter of timing. I think if Imperial Teen was thrown in front of a huge audience, most people would clap. But what do I know? I saw Peaches...and I thought, man...if she were put in front of the right audience, she'd be as big as Celine Dion. [Laughs] I'm pretty confident in that opinion. If I worked for a big company, I would bring that information to a big board meeting.

CT: Is there a reason why the band doesn't tour more?

RB: For this last record [2002's critically acclaimed *On*]...our drummer decided she was going to get married and have a baby, so she bowed out for a while. It was a big process in finding Patty, learning the songs with her...and we do everything by ourselves. We drive...we sell our stuff, we set up, we sleep in the same hotel room. We're a very do-it-yourself sort of foursome. And it's really hard work. We figured we owed the country one tour.

CT: Has Patty changed the dynamic in the band?

RB: She's more prone to tour. She's a little bit more proactive.

CT: Patty rocks. She practically took a drum solo at the end of "Million Dollar Man" during your last Blackbird show. It almost seemed like an accident.

RB: Right, maybe it was. I'm gonna have to tell her to enhance that for the [next] Blackbird show. We'll get on that.

CT: What are you guys listening to?

RB: I have a real eclectic bunch of stuff I lis-



From left, Roddy Bottum, Lynn Perko (replaced on tour by Hole drummer Patty Schemel), Will Schwartz and Jone Stebbins are Imperial Teen

ten to. I love pop music. I like the Polyphonic Spree a lot... I like the Gravy Train record...Le Tigre, they're amazing. I love that band.

Will Schwartz: Me and Amy from the Aislars Set have been working on an album of hip-hop music...I wanted to go on that recent Le Tigre/Aislars Set stint, just for fun.

CT: Why didn't you?

WS: I don't know...not enough space in the van? [Laughs] The day the war broke out I was part of this group that shut down San Francisco, theoretically. It turned out...Kathleen Hanna [of Le Tigre] was in our little group, so I got to hang out with her that day... She's awesome.

CT: Did you have any hesitation about the decision to be out in the press?

RB: About 15 years ago or something

when I was in Faith No More...it came up in the press, and someone asked me an out-and-out question, and I was like, "Yeah." I'd never hidden that fact before... The illusion of San Francisco is that the rest of the world is like San Francisco. In some places, that's still a risky statement to make, so it felt good to...make the world a more acclimated place.

CT: Can we talk about the song "You're One" from your first album? I feel like people misinterpret those lyrics "Take it like a man/boy."

RB: I had a friend who died, and the last thing he said to me was "Kiss me like a man boy" so it sort of came from that...and to me it was sexy. "Take it like a man/boy" was not meant to be sexy. That was more about swallowing a bitter pill, like something a dad

would say to a son. Not necessarily a real sexual bent to it.

CT: That was written around the time Kurt Cobain killed himself, right?

RB: It was a weird year for me. A lot of people died in my life. My dad died. Kurt died, he was a friend. Another really good friend died. [It was] a crazy time when we got together and made that record.

CT: And Imperial Teen was really different from Faith No More. You chose to play instruments that you didn't know how to play. Was that in response to what was going on in your life?

RB: Right. It was a real experimentation sort of thing. I felt like I had to really strip down and leave myself open to a little bit of vulnerability and try things that I hadn't done before and go out on a limb and maybe not succeed.

CT: You've landed opening slots with the Breeders, the Go-Go's—the ladies love Imperial Teen!

WS: We're lucky like that... I've noticed that there seem to be more queer people in our audiences lately... There were a lot of girls when we just played in L.A. A lot of girls. The ladies who love ladies. [Laughs] Some of my best friends are ladies who love ladies.

CT: Who is the average Imperial Teen fan?

RB: Smarty-pants kids, in a good way, with attitude and some sort of book knowledge. A little bit of political savvy. Sharp dressers. [Laughs]

CT: So, how gay is Imperial Teen?

WS: Pretty gay. We make music for everybody but especially the gays. [Laughs] Imperial Teen is queer. Queer-positive and queer. Not everybody in the band is gay, but Imperial Teen is definitely queer.

CT: That's a pretty gay dance crowd in your "Ivanka" video. I thought I saw JD from Le Tigre in there.

WS: Nope, just a look-alike. Hey, that would be a good song! "Just Another JD Look-Alike." [G]

IMPERIAL TEEN returns to The Blackbird, 3728 N.E. Sandy Blvd., at 10 p.m. June 28. The Heavenly States and The Long Winters open. Tickets are \$10 at the door.

CORI TARATOOT is a free-lance music writer. She is currently losing sleep practicing the handclap part to "Baby" from Imperial Teen's *On*.

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