



Grassroots festival celebrates women, art and community
by Tony LeTigre

What's better than women in rock? Queer women in rock! The Siren Nation festival might be about women in music first and foremost, but it's also a safe haven for creative queers of every stripe.

Although the grassroots effort has been in the works for about two years now, a late-breaking development added some unexpected drama to the well-planned event: Headlining band The Gossip canceled at the last minute, but the hard-working organizers announced an exciting replacement act Oct. 15. Portland-based groundbreaking and seminal queercore band **Team Dresch** has agreed to do a reunion show. In addition to that hot ticket, Siren Nation will showcase these exciting queer artists:

Swallows is one of those cute-as-a-button indie bands with which the Northwest is so abundantly blessed. Describing and labeling a band's music is like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall, but Swallows is roughly branded as experimental indie-pop with a post-riot grrrl vibe. It describes its own music as "postmodern psych-emotive rock" and itself as "awesome rock and roll fag/ettes." Other musical influences include blues, indie-rock, surf-rock and "the rejection of preconception." The duo consists of Em Brownlowe on guitar and vocals and Jonathan Miller on drums, melodica and miscellaneous other instruments.

Brownlowe hails from San Diego and was drawn to Portland by the Northwest's burgeoning music scene, the best in the country for women in rock. While still in San Diego she saw Sarah Dougher and Corin Tucker's band Cadallaca perform and was inspired. Miller made the trek to Portland from Massachusetts and met Brownlowe on a message board seeking bandmates; they both arrived in PDX on the same day, and the dynamic duo was formed in the summer of 2003.

Swallows' first recording was an EP released in 2004 under the name Dirty Shirley, limited to only 126 copies and recorded in a musty Portland basement. This was followed by a single later that year under the new name Swallows titled "Physical," a sinewy, radical reworking of the Olivia Newton-John song of the same name from the '80s. Then came another EP in 2005, *We Love to Be Astonished*, plus a single featuring a remix of an earlier Swallows song by local indie superstar Radio Sloan, who has worked with The Need, Kathleen Hanna and various other indie girl bands as well as mainstream rock ladies like Courtney Love and Peaches.

The big fruit finally fell from the tree last October with the band's first LP, *Me with Trees Towering*, fittingly released on Dougher's up-and-coming label, *Cherchez La Femme*. Also in 2006, Miller and Brownlowe rounded up 14 local bands to produce *We Made This*, a homemade compilation CD distributed for free that drew accolades from the Portland



Swallows

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