



Ditty Bops

Dance for the Environment

Remember when cigarettes were good for you? Remember when women sporting short hair and dresses above the ankle were considered risqué? So do **The Ditty Bops**. Only The Ditty Bops' jaunty ragtime tunes and soprano harmonies aren't just an attempt to bring back the Charleston.

The speakeasy sweetness almost masks the music's real function as an environmen-

talist's call to arms, and vaudevillian jazz minstrels Abby DeWald and Amanda Barrett harmonize just as much about picnicking in pesticide-drenched parks and aluminum cans as they do about love and angst.

Unlike so many other major-label bands (The Ditty Bops are on Warner Bros.), The Ditty Bops don't pretend that it's enough to play a couple benefit shows, then languish in a gas-guzzling tour bus and hope that performing a ditty about smog was enough to inspire somebody else to do something about pollution. Last summer, DeWald and Barrett traveled the country by bicycle, promoting

the virtues of person-powered wheels right along with their 2006 album, *Moon Over the Freeway*. This year, they've opted for a biodiesel-powered Farm Tour in support of local, sustainable agriculture. And if that wasn't enough, they've started a nonprofit organization, You and I Save the World. Their first goal: a tax on that oh-so-pervasive and invasive urban species, the plastic shopping bag. Until 4,000 more people sign The Ditty Bops' petition to tax the use of plastic shopping bags, Barrett and DeWald will wear plastic bag outfits to every performance, integrating the cause into their usual costume-

changing, prop-wielding routine.

All this activity almost overshadows the usual reason bands go on tour: their new EP, *Pack Rat*. But it's more important that The Ditty Bops' ballads breathe some optimism into a movement that's becoming increasingly fatalistic. And even if you're sure we'll all drown in melted glacier no matter what, there's still a little comfort to be had in an organic cotton grocery bag that says "The Ditty Bops."

The Ditty Bops perform with Ice Cream Truck at 8 pm Wednesday, Aug. 8, at the WOW Hall. \$15 adv., \$17 door. – *Sara Brickner*



In the Mellow Light

Yes, **Chico Schwall** plays often in the town where he lives. Yes, that happens to be none other than our little burg, aka a rather small almost-city. Does that mean we should be indifferent to the Luka-Bloom-like charms of his picking and vocals? Does that mean we should head to Luna for out-of-towners but ignore our local guy and his newish album, *driving by moonlight*?

No, it does not. OK, so if you're on a press music email list, you see a bunch of bands and folkies claiming to have mastered things like Celtic, klezmer and world music (seriously, we get them all of the time. People, get creative with your PR, eh?), but then if you go and listen to Schwall's CDs, you'll hear his range of instrumental abilities. The man plays slide guitar and finger picks brilliantly; he hits up the mandolin, banjo, fiddle and flute (he's like his own band!). And that Luka Bloom comparison wasn't idle; sure, he doesn't have Bloom's gorgeous Irish burr, and sure, Schwall's music isn't as produced or the lyrics nearly as polished, but his sound recalls the warmth and emotional honesty of Bloom's fine work. Songs like "Here on Earth" sound fairly crunchy-Eugene-granola-yoga-New-Agey, but that's OK; we *know* there's an audience out there for that type of song (we know all too well from the Saturday Market, where admirers turn out in droves to listen to Schwall and dance dreamily in front of the stage). And the blended sounds of "An Phis Fhliuch" wash away any sarcastic thoughts about the nostalgic sweetness of the title track.

You're a fan of Windham Hill? You liked the energy of the Tonn Nua young'uns but long for a bit more relaxed a Celtic set? You can't afford to jet to Luka's next gig but you wouldn't mind popping into Luna for a Sazerac and some pleasant, mellow hometown buzz? Chico's the man for you.

Chico Schwall plays at 9 pm Friday, August 3, at Luna. 21+ show. \$6. – *Suzi Steffen*

got that swing

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