



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

IN THE ALLEY WITH WARPAINT — JENNY LINDBERG (LEFT), EMILY KOKAL, THERESA WAYMAN AND STELLA MOZGAWA

EVOLUTIONARY GRADUALISM

Being longtime Eugene gadabouts, Emily Kokal and Theresa Wayman ask me to meet the band at Sweet Life, where I find them surrounded by a throng of family and friends. The table is a carnage of coffee mugs and plates sprinkled with crumbs and hunks of frosting. I ask Kokal and Wayman how it feels to be home. “I have so much Oregon pride,” Kokal says. “I love it here. I love being from here.”

Hang out with Warpaint for any length of time and you quickly realize that these women are tight — as in blood-pact tight, in like Flynn, sisterly, connected. Often this sort of kinetic synergy can be off-putting for outsiders, but not so with Warpaint. They’re not cliquey or condescending. In person, I found their collective closeness touching. They exude a sweet-silly charm that belies the aural spookiness of Warpaint’s music.

“A word or a look can send any of us into hysterics,” says drummer Stella Mozgawa. “It really is a band of goofballs. It’s a nice contrast to how serious the music is. There really is too much to laugh at.”

It’s not such a cognitive cramp, really, to contemplate Warpaint as a band of goofballs. Laughter, after all, is organic, and I can think of no better way to describe Warpaint — organic, as in naturally occurring, alive and additive free, a single organism sprung among the various elements of its surroundings. From the ethereal unity of their sound, to the arc of their success, to the dynamic interplay that defines the band, Warpaint is a singularly unified organism, intrinsically greater than the sum of its parts.

“It was really meant to be,” says Wayman of the band’s current incarnation. “I don’t really know what that means, but that’s how it felt.”

Despite all the heated “look what I found” hollering of the music press, Warpaint is far from a new band. They formed in 2004, went through several incarnations — at one point,

bassist Jenny Lee Lindberg’s sister, Shannyn Sossamon, was on board — and self-released a critically acclaimed EP, *Exquisite Corpse*, that was re-issued internationally by Manimal Vinyl in 2008. When Mozgawa joined the band in late 2009, everything finally fell into place.

Unlike most bands these days, then, Warpaint was not stamped, sealed and shrink-wrapped overnight like some demographically targeted commodity readymade for the kids. Artistically, they’ve been patient, allowing their sound and their songs to germinate over time, and the band’s popularity has been a slow burn. Their gradual climb to recognition is something rare, almost extinct in today’s interwebbed music industry, where opportunity knocks once and the door slams shut. Instead, Warpaint’s success follows the model of such indie pioneers as R.E.M. and the Replacements. In the DIY lexicon of punk, ain’t nobody tellin’ Warpaint what to do. The game is on their terms.

“It’s old school,” bassist Jenny Lindberg says of Warpaint’s unhurried development. “I’m happy it’s gotten to that point.”

“There’s a vulnerability about growing up in public,” says singer/songwriter Kokal. “You learn how to use that.”

This sense of gradual artistic germination extends to every aspect of Warpaint’s music. Often, their songs evolve from extended jam sessions, with structures and melodies repeated and repeated until suddenly clicking into place. “You can feel the conversation is happening and we’re all communicating,” says Kokal of such moments. “I don’t think we have a process of intentional songwriting.”

At other times, Kokal or Wayman will come in with a song more or less ready to go, only to have it deconstructed, reiterated and revised several times before it feels right. Constant change is Warpaint’s musical currency. Wayman refers to this creative process as a “braid” of ideas involving every member’s input. “The songwriting

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