

GLITTER BOMBED

Queer punk duo PWR BTTM rises to the top

Following the demise of the late, lamented G.L.O.S.S., New York duo PWR BTTM is a strong contender for the title of most visible — and thus most important — queer punk band in America. Mixing rock-duo slop with drunk-Beatles hooks and heart-on-sleeve (but mercifully unaffected) lyrics, this is pop punk that doesn't sacrifice pop for the punk, or vice versa. Your queer buddies — and some of your straight buddies too — may be bugging you about this band for a long time.

The band's rise has been fast, and the band members' fascination with this rise is among the many things making them so lovable. One of PWR BTTM's best tweets is a photo from a SiriusXM showcase in New York City. A digital screen behind the stage states "SiriusXM presents PWR BTTM" in stodgy Helvetica; the contrast between the formal presentation and the band's delightfully dirty name was not lost on guitarist Ben Hopkins, who tweeted "lol wtf."

It's worth wondering whether PWR BTTM

would be even bigger if not for its policy on only playing spaces with gender-neutral bathrooms.

"Gender-non-conforming people are coming to our shows, and we need to create a place that's safe for them," Hopkins says. "We've always been able to make it work in one way or another."

They hope to cultivate this at The Boreal, where they perform Monday, Nov. 7, with Bard College buddy band Bellows and Seattle one-woman punk project Lisa Prank.

A PWR BTTM show is proudly, provocatively a queer affair. Hopkins and drummer Liv Bruce, with whom he shares mic duties, drench themselves in glitter onstage. The lyrics they write together — enunciated loud and clear — are replete with references to lipstick, drag, dresses and the agony and ecstasy of living outside the rigid boxes used to define gender and sexuality.

They clearly don't care much if people peg them as a "queer band" — "queercore" is a genre description on their Bandcamp page, but Hopkins finds that it's not so much a deliberate choice as

something that comes naturally to the duo. As the old adage goes, "the personal is political."

"Our identities are very much built into our music," he says. "They kind of go hand in hand. I feel particularly confident that our own work speaks for itself."

Although Hopkins says he's proud of the band's debut, last year's critically acclaimed *Ugly Cherries*, he's often struggled with self-doubt as a queer person playing rock 'n' roll music — a genre notorious for not giving much room to people who don't conform to the white, cis, straight-male norm.

"It's so traditionally spaced in music that it's occupied by cisgender or straight people," he says. "When you feel othered, you feel you can't be a part of this thing. But the muscles in your head say: 'I'm worth my own fucking time. I'll express myself to the world and put on great shows.'"

PWR BTTM, Bellows and Lisa Prank perform 7 pm Monday, Nov. 7, at The Boreal; \$7. All ages.

