

# HARD MUSIC

**T**estosterone tops the hard rock charts, where bands like Pantera, Metallica and Slipknot are kings of the aggro rock world. While '70s doyennes the Run-aways were coined the Queens Of Noise, and the '80s saw a glut of image-conscious-but-rocking women impacting, where are today's metallic-leaning female mavericks? They're out there, a vocal minority, but mostly an underground aggregate that doesn't account for a huge market share or any seeming trend...yet.

Understandably, many female musicians bristle at gender segregation of their music. "When people say 'I love girl bands,' it's as stupid as saying, 'I love bands with red pants,'" says guitarist Anna Kjellberg of Swedish all-female quartet Drain STH. "I mean, 'girl band' is not a genre; it's not like there's punk, blues, metal and girl bands."

## SPIT AND SCAN

Regardless, there remains a division created by radio, record labels and the press, while fans remain more accepting of female rockers. However, new aggro metal Canadian quartet Kittie seems to be breaking down barriers, although its heavy-hitting Artemis Records debut, "Spit," was just released in January. Still, it has SoundScanned 260,000, and the all-female lineup has toured with Slipknot and earned a spot on Ozzfest 2000. Sharon Osbourne, integral to booking and running the highly successful Ozzfest tours, is supportive of Kittie and female rockers in general, once managing Lita Ford and Roadrunner act Coal Chamber, whose bassist Rayna Foss is a visible and popular member of the potent lineup.

"I always go out of my way to find women for Ozzfest—we had Drain STH on twice. That's why I really wanted to have Kittie on this year," explains Osbourne, also manager and wife of metal's original madman Ozzy Osbourne. "They've been a breath of fresh air. It's so different to find young girls this cutting-edge, not singing lollipop songs about falling in love."

Kittie, one of 12 artists on the Artemis roster, is getting a big push from the newly formed label. "I've worked with a lot of women, but I don't think there's been an all-female band this heavy before," says president and CEO Danny Goldberg, who has worked with Pat Benatar and the Go-Go's, among others. "In general, rock 'n' roll has been a male bastion, and this is a moment in rock 'n' roll that's particularly male," he observes. "Most of the hard rock stations that are playing Kittie aren't playing any other current females. It's been a struggle getting them to be taken seriously by the hard rock people."

Kittie's quarter-million sales are impressive, especially while a male counterpart like Pantera, whose record was released two months after Kittie's, has sold 367,000. "I think we're over the hump now," says Goldberg. "It was clear to me that there was a vacuum of women in the heavy metal/hard rock arena, and that this was a record that was strong enough to break through, and that we would get a disproportionate amount of publicity for trying. We knew what we were in for." Case in point: *Rolling Stone* and *Spin* ran pictures of Kittie before the album was even released. "On the other hand," continues Goldberg, "it's been a fight, station by station, to get radio play and normal rotation on MTV and to really beat down people's prejudices against the cultural viability of women in this genre."

## STRUGGLE FOR RESPECT

Skin, lead vocalist of British band Skunk Anansie, which has toured with bands like Machinehead and Sevendust, concurs. Before getting a deal on Virgin in America, indie labels were interested in the dynamic group, but "at the time, major labels didn't want to sign us...they had no idea what to do

with a band like us and said, 'No one's going to buy this.'" Skin says that A&R folks also tried to mold the aggressive front-woman into a "black Sinead O'Connor or Terrence Trent D'Arby." She was told by labels that "They don't play females in heavy music on radio...but I thought that was their excuse for not working our record," chuckles Skin. "Eight tours later, though, I'd heard that from so many bands in America."

Past, present and future, however, finds numerous hard-working female-fronted or all-female heavy-music bands. Still, it's a tiny amount compared to their male counterparts. Bands like L7, whose 1992 "Bricks Are Heavy" album sold 327,000, and new German lineup Guano Apes, who are up to 90,000 with their RCA debut, are among the top sellers, while European acts The Gathering, Drain STH and Lacuna Coil and American bands like Nashville Pussy and indie acts such as Acid King, Beaver and L.A.'s Betty Blowtorch, are making noise.

Indie all-female trio Bottom is starting to attract attention in New York. And guitarist/vocalist Sina voices a common gripe: "Now that we are talking to labels, the female issue comes up more. It's a dorky A&R marketing thing, which we back away from. We're rock gods, not rock chicks."

Ditto the word from Stephanie, the 5-foot-tall drummer with Kid Rock. "Every day I've decided to stay a musician, it's a battle. If not with my father, it's a battle with someone down the street who thinks they've gotta be better than me, even if they've never heard me play, just on the fact that I'm a chick." The most common refrain? "'You're such a good drummer for a girl.' And I'm like 'what the fuck are you talking about? I'm a good drummer, period!'"

Drain STH, whose Mercury release "Horror Wrestling" sold 44,000 domestically (the band is no longer on the label), were a big

hope for female-driven metal. "There is a reason why we called the second album 'Freaks Of Nature,'" Kjellberg says. "It seems like it's not OK for a girl to play heavy music, but it's easier now that we are successful. It's always been kinda weird; people don't think we write the songs ourselves, or even play on the album. People think we are a record-company product only because we are girls. And we're tired of reading reviews that say more about our looks than our music; I think it's a bit unprofessional." That's not to mention the early days when a booking agent told the foursome he didn't want to book them "because he already had a girl band. But he had 25 guy bands," Kjellberg notes.

## MOMS CAN ROCK TOO

Ruyter Suys, guitarist and one of two women in wild and gritty Nashville Pussy, finds that industry types were scared of both the band and its name. The foursome's new record, "High As Hell," is due soon onTVT, and Suys says, "We're so easily marketable. It hasn't been tapped at all." Suys, who engages in lesbian foreplay onstage with bassist Corey Parks, notes that the label feels "they've got a handful already, and no one has ever altered what is going on. I don't mind playing up my femininity at all. I used to work on a farm and the guys took off their shirts, and I'd work in my bra. This is normal for me."

Although it's undeniable that women playing heavy rock is still somewhat of an anomaly, German singer Doro Pesch, who fronted Warlock in the '80s before going solo, echoes the sentiments of few female musicians. "I've never, ever encountered prejudice, and we've toured with Megadeth and really heavy bands," she says. "I never felt [like] a woman, just a regular person who loved music and was ready to give my whole life for it. But the press would always ask about and talk about [my gender]."

Foss of Coal Chamber, a new mother who took maternity leave but quickly returned to the band, concurs, "I haven't had anything negative happen to me in the six years I've been in the band, except a few drunk hecklers, but I get that [gender] question all the time."

Bassist Rana Ross, who has played with Vixen, Phantom Blue and recently appeared on the cover of *Bassics* magazine, has seen both sides of the coin. "I've worked in artist management and there's really a huge stigma with all-girl rock bands. I think the labels see it as a novelty thing." And, as a player, Ross has found that "you have to be as good as or better than the guy players to be 'almost as good.'"

## OPENING FUTURE DOORS

German-based label Century Media, whose biggest-selling act is American rock band Stuck Mojo, has two metal bands featuring women. Cristina Scabbia is the lead singer (and sole woman) of Italian quintet Lacuna Coil, which plays dark metal. Scabbia wonders if there will be an all-female band as successful or heavy as Metallica. "We have so little space in [heavy music]. Metal has been created by men and is listened to especially by men," she says.

Another Century Media act, Holland's heavy but atmospheric The Gathering, shipped 18,000 albums in North America and is fronted by Anneke van Geiersbergen. She notes, "There will always be assholes that think of you as a sex object purely because you are a girl in the rock scene and, of course, the label would rather see me looking 'sexy' in order to sell more records. But, generally, I am treated very nicely, just like one of the guys. But I think you control that yourself."

As Osbourne concludes, "It's the reality of the world we live in that all women are judged by the way they look. I don't care what anybody says. In a perfect world, it shouldn't be that way."

If the world's not perfect, the music world, for women who play heavy rock, isn't a bad place to be in 2000, and signs indicate that doors and minds are opening. As Pesch notes, "In general, women aren't in huge power positions, like in politics. There's definitely some work to do, but it's on the way. Suddenly a female-led heavy rock band will be so hip; it could happen any day. The possibilities are endless, especially in America."

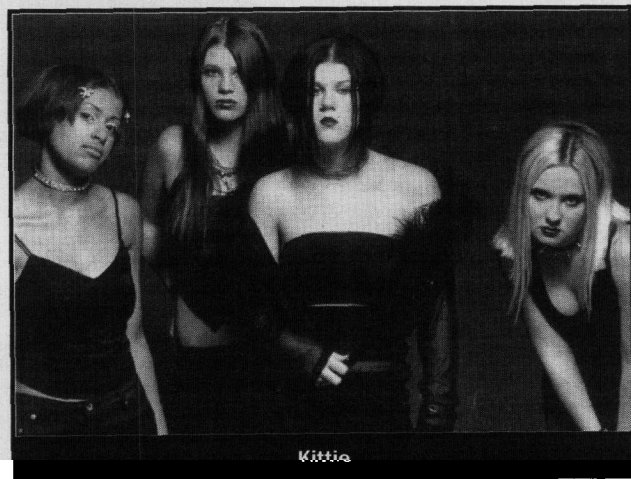
Eighteen-year-old Kittie singer/guitarist Morgan Lander agrees. "When we formed this band, it never occurred to us we were an all-female band. We were four friends who got along well and played really good aggressive music. I think we've been treated fairly," she says. "I don't think it's 'we've been oppressed because we're women' or anything. We never thought we would be some anomaly." ■



Drain STH



Skunk Anansie



Kittie

# CHICKS WITH PICKS

## A New Breed Of Women Rockers Is Ready To Lead The Way

BY KATHERINE TURMAN