

'A lot of people hide behind the fact they're a girl. If I screw up I can grin and get away with it — there's no macho to get in the way.'

Kitty Moses
X-Teens member

Female musicians break down traditional barriers

By RANDY WALKER

It's a hot, sticky Saturday night, ideal climate for a high school keg party. With a garage for a stage, a band of 16- and 17-year-olds plays while partiers crowd around the keg.

The singer gyrates and fondles the mike stand. The lead guitarist thrusts his hips against his Stratocaster.

The drummer sweats and huffs, pounding his tom-toms with macho force.

Male sexual frustration: this has been the traditional image and power of rock music. In rock's early days, a female drummer or bass player would have been laughed at.

But like everything else, rock 'n' roll has been affected by the changing attitudes of recent years. Today, a woman who wants to play in a band finds possibilities that didn't exist in the days of Elvis and the Beatles.

The Beatles were just hitting America when Sara Romweber was born. Romweber, 17, plays drums for the Chapel Hill group Mondo Combo.

"I started playing when I was 15," she said. "My little brother played the guitar, he had a band and they didn't have a drummer."

Romweber said she encountered surprise, but rarely out-and-out prejudice, when she performed.

"A lot of people say, 'I can't believe y'all have a girl playing drums.' You get remarks like that, especially from boys."

When she's not playing with Mondo Combo, Romweber occasionally jams with other female musicians, including Kitty Moses of the X-Teens.

"I've played with her, and another girl who plays guitar, and also the two girls from the Dead Baggers. There's nothing real serious right now. A lot of times when you jam with guys, they're too serious. It's more fun with girls."

Fun is the key for Romweber, who said, "I don't have any (musical) goals, I just really like playing."

For now she's content to go to Chapel Hill High School in the day and play for Mondo Combo at night.

Kitty Moses badgered her boyfriend Robert Bittle into starting the X-Teens some three years ago.

"He'd been playing guitar for forever," she said. "He taught me how to play bass. It was real simple."

One musical inspiration for Moses was bassist Tina Weymouth of the Talking Heads.

"I saw the Heads back in '78. I was so amazed, this scrawny woman playing the hell out of a bass."

Like Romweber, Moses says people are often surprised to see a woman playing rock 'n' roll.

"Women are allowed to sing but not to play instruments. If I were a male I don't think I'd get as many complements."

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Moses, 26, said she would not mind being a role model for other women who want to play in bands.

"I'd love to see more women. Sara (Romweber) tickles me pink. She's 17, been playing for two years, and she's hot as hell."

"There's been a lot of chat about an all-female,

just-for-fun band. But I love the music (the X-Teens) do, and I couldn't get it anywhere else."

If the 'Teens make it big it's a safe bet Moses will give up her daytime job as a computer programmer.

"I'd like to see the band get famous and/or rich. To be able to go into the studio when we had material and not sell our souls."

"But I don't want to tour 300 days a year."

The X-Teens are not the only group Moses has ever played with. Most rock musicians have been in a number of bands. The Dead Baggers are the sixth group for UNC junior Schell Ponder.

Working with male musicians has not been as easy for Ponder as it has been for Romweber and Moses.

"I've always worked with guys, and I've always found it kind of uncomfortable. It's never really said, but it's always there — I'm the girl. I've always wanted to get up an all-girl band, something to challenge the male dominance of rock 'n' roll."

Ponder has no plans to form a new band at present. But all-woman bands, though still rare, are becoming more common.

Lynne Jaffe is a singer/guitarist for one such group — the Chapel Hill band Venus Rising.

"I was in Sunny Daze, a Top-40 lounge band on the road. It was five guys and me. I was so tromped on; I had no support. I dropped music for about four years after that."

Venus Rising "sort of evolved from a women's music group who met to sing together," said flutist Laurie Lindgren. "We played together for over a year as friends."

The group cannot be pigeonholed, Lindgren said. "Sometimes we'll call it folk-rock, sometimes 'new age spiritual.' We do one reggae and one blues, some Irish and some country. We're primarily acoustic; only the bass is electric."

"We have about an hour and a half of material. Probably 85 percent or more is original."

The group is in no way anti-male, Lindgren and Jaffe emphasized. The exclusion of men is more a matter of convenience.

"There is a rapport we have as women that men and women don't always have in the context of a band," Lindgren said. "We're not a feminist band at all."

"We're conditioned by the fact that we are women; we have this in common," Jaffe said.

The members of Venus Rising are not counting on getting rich, Lindgren said. "We're performing as a sharing, as a love offering. We're not in it to make money."

"Nobody's opposed to it, but we're not out to sweep the country" Jaffe said. "We want to be a band that is self-expressive for us."

In keeping with their concern for self-expression, Venus Rising refuses to electrify their guitars, just to become more commercial.

"It seems that women who play lead guitar are trying to fit the male image," Jaffe said.

"We're not trying to mold ourselves to fit male values," Lindgren added.

"The band is a vehicle for growth for us. We play for ourselves, and if the audience likes it, great."



Jennie Knoop, Lynne Jaffe, Laurie Lindgren, Val Rosado
... members of Chapel Hill band Venus Rising.

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