

Bands

Ten Ten's smokin' sound better the second time around

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Ten Ten is coming around again. They're pared down, roughed up and hotter than ever. They've rid themselves of an extraneous guitarist and an overbearing record label. They've ditched the slick pretty-boy image imposed on them by pop producers. And they've bled their sound of the pseudo-British synth stylings that had homogenized their music and deadened their originality. In short, Ten Ten is now the powerful, original trio it was meant to be.

Unfortunately, the comeback trail this band is traveling is an uphill climb, marked by indifferent record companies and forgetful fans.

It all started four years ago in Richmond with four local guys and a few rough ideas. They took their name from the date they formed the band: October 10. By the following October, Ten Ten had released the independent album, *Ordinary Thinking*, toured the U.K. and signed on with Chrysalis

Records in London.

In the next year, Ten Ten released their first Chrysalis album, *Walk On*, in England, Europe and Scandinavia, as well as the United States. They toured both sides of the Atlantic to support the album, opening for the likes of Simple Minds, The Alarm, Paul Young, INXS and The Cure. They even produced a video for "When It Rains" which aired on MTV.

Ten Ten's success was not without its price, however.

"Record companies are real success-oriented," said singer and guitarist Mark Lewis. "They make you start thinking in that mode."

Ten Ten didn't mind the success, but they did mind Chrysalis' interference with their creativity, interference which the company seemed to think necessary to ensure Ten Ten's rise to the top.

"They kept giving us tapes of pre-published songs, wanting us to record them," Lewis said. "I don't have anything against doing other people's music, but it was nothing I would even listen to, much less record."



A new Ten Ten brings its hotter-than-ever brand of rock to Raleigh's Fallout Shelter Friday night

The label wanted, reasonably enough, to come up with a hit single that would propel the band to the top. Unfortunately, the company's idea of what that single should be had little to do with the high-energy band Ten Ten really was.

The result of all this was an effort that no one was happy with, and it was never released. Soon afterwards, in June 1987, Ten Ten severed their ties to Chrysalis and went in search of a more cooperative label. They also dropped their fourth member, leaving Lewis, bassist Peter Bell and

drummer Lee Johnson to pursue their own direction as the revamped Ten Ten.

Since then they've received only tentative offers to be signed, but have continued playing out. No big arenas or MTV videos this time, just the hard roads of the club circuit.

"We were probably doing a lot better a year ago business-wise," said Lewis, "but the creative process is easier and more natural without the label. We've got more ideas and more direction than we've had before."

The commercial viability of their new direction is still a question mark, but nobody can dispute the quality of today's Ten Ten. With Johnson's compelling beat, Bell's burning rhythms and Lewis' new harder-edged guitar work, the band's live performances are riveting.

The comeback trail may be steep, but it's unlikely that this incredible band will pass unnoticed the second time around. With a little luck, Ten Ten should be able to parlay their past successes and their current reforms into a long career on the stage and on wax.

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