

Is Women's Music For Lesbians: A Review of Berkeley Women's Music Collective

Berkeley Women's Music Collective played Saturday night during the conference---
Expanding Lesbian Culture: A Spring Surge of Sapphic Spirit. After talking with several lesbians about the band, I began to realize that I was alone in my opinion. Most of the women I have talked to really liked them---loved them in fact. Those who were disappointed had expected dancing music rather than a concert. My expectations were different.

The band members write most of their own material. Debbie Lempke (electric guitar and hand drums) has written and sung her own songs for several years. I had the opportunity to hear her two years ago in California at a lesbian conference and a woman's music festival. Her songs are lesbian identified, political and emotional. She sings of her experiences as a lesbian. I expected the band to be similar but on a larger scale.

A lesbian concert inspires a lot of lesbian energy. A lesbian band playing to a lesbian audience should also. But this was more like a woman's band which just happened to be composed of lesbians. I expected lesbian music but heard woman's music.

This was the first weekend they had done two concerts in a row. They had played in Cleveland, Ohio on Friday. Saturday, after a 5 to 6 hour drive to Lansing, they had four hours to prepare for their concert. It was too bad we had to experience the second half of their weekend.

Our weekend was hectic also---by the time Saturday night came, we were pretty much exhausted. A tired band playing to a tired audience makes for tired energy. But suprisingly, when the band took their break, some lesbians from the music workshop sang. The audience seemed to come to life---clapping and shouting. I was hearing songs about myself. When the band came back for their second set, I felt myself fading. At first I thought their music was apolitical. Then I realized it was that their music was politically straight. They sing about sexism and capitalism and woman hassles---and they blend in humor---but what about lesbianism? - an occasional love song---a song of lavender rage (where was the anger?)

The only song which brought us (and them) out was Debbie's Gay and Proud, their finale. But it was too late.

As musicians, these women are talented. Their music is good and enjoyable. Their instrumentation alternates guitars, piano, bass, hand drum, tenor sax, alto recorder, and harmonica blending together to make some fine sounds. They play to mixed audiences and gear their music to women. But as lesbian musicians, they left me with something to be desired.

I should have assumed from their poster, "Berkeley Women's Music Collective---all Women Welcome" - with no mention of lesbians - that they played women's music. I was optimistic because I knew they were all lesbians and I'd heard Debbie's music before.

It is time for lesbian musicians to come out of their closets. Lesbians need good lesbian music as much as women need women's music. We must make our commitments and support each other as lesbians.

If you are planning a women's concert and need a good woman-identified band, then this is a good band for you; but if you want a lesbian-identified band, I suggest you look elsewhere.

--Goldi

EDITOR'S NOTE: This review is written not from a musical point of view but from a personal one. We invite other lesbians with opinions concerning lesbian music, or specifically the Berkeley Women's Music Collective, to send them to:

Ambitious Amazons
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ANSWERS TO THE CROSSWORD PUZZLE

(From page 6)

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NOTE: The band mentioned above can be contacted at:
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