

Virginia and the Wolves, Vermont's All-Women's Rock Band

Sage Russell

Being part of Virginia and the Wolves is a lot of work. The band members all have full-time day jobs. They live all over the state, from Burlington to Putney, and they see each other all the time: a midweek rehearsal, two weekends of gigs a month, often out of state, and an all-day Saturday rehearsal once a month. This doesn't leave a lot of time for doing the laundry, much less reading a book or having a social life.

Being in Virginia and the Wolves won't make them rich either. Live bands aren't paid much these days. At a recent gig in Massachusetts, they estimate that they netted about \$35 apiece after all the expenses were paid: paying the crew, travel expenses, equipment rental, phone calls, gas, duct tape and the like ("More money than you'd ever think you could spend on tape we spend on tape.").

The obvious question becomes, so why do they do it? Answers vary, but for most of them — Sabine on bass, Sue on drums,

San and Joanne on guitar and keyboards, and Renne on percussion — it all comes down to the music and the audience. These women take their music seriously, and they're good at it. Says Sue, "For me it's the physical feeling of drumming. I started when I was in the fourth grade. There's nothing like the feeling of just working really really hard for something. There are times when the nights are not really good. But there are other times when you're right there with the music. I don't know how to explain it. It's like you're right in the lines of music, and no matter what you do, you're right there. The band is so tight that I can just close my eyes and sit back and my body just goes, and I'm not even thinking about it. And those times — that's an incredible feeling."

Their musicianship and their professionalism may be what really set them apart from other bands, but most people see their novelty first. This is something band members are very aware of. According to Sue, "We're the only all-women's band out there right now, and I think people really like that. Every once in a while you see that a band has a woman vocalist or a woman guitar player. But it's pretty rare to see a whole band, and roadies and sound people. From start to finish our whole production is put on by women."

They feel that this may help them get the initial booking ("guy bands are a dime a dozen"), but has no effect on whether they're hired back. That happens because they play so well together and they're fun to dance to. Virginia and the Wolves has developed a loyal following among both gay and straight audiences and does a lot of repeat business at places like Pearls, and the Charlemont Inn in Massachusetts.

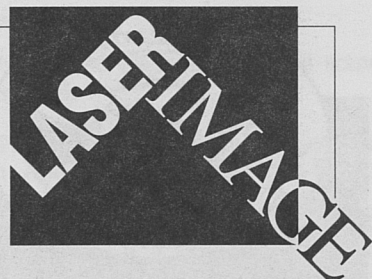
Being a women's band sets them apart behind the scenes too. They have no formal leader (although they're looking for a manager/booking agent. If you're interested, call Joanne at 485-6244), and make most of their decisions by consensus. Every member can suggest new songs to add to their repertoire, and any member can veto them. Many of them have played in mixed bands before, and feel that men tend to be goal-oriented, while women are just as (or more) interested in process. This can be frustrating at times because decision-making takes longer, but it's something they're committed to.

The band is also very appreciative of the contributions of their roadies (the set-up people) and sound and light crew. They're sensitive to the fact that these women work as hard as they do, but don't get the applause or the recognition. The crew returns their appreciation. Kara, one of the roadies, says, "I feel like my job is making sure that the band is happy. If the band is happy, they're going to perform well. My next job is to make them sound as good as they are. The other thing that I really enjoy is seeing the reception of the audience and the people having a really good time. It's a lot of hard work, but I really like it. I'm usually exhausted by the end of the night, but it doesn't matter if it was a good gig and the people were having a good time and the band performed well."

Virginia and the Wolves has been together since April 1990. By now they have developed a repertoire and a following, come together as a group, and learned each other's musical tastes and abilities. They seem poised to move in some new directions. Future hopes include an album, primarily of original material by San. They would like to play a couple of festivals next summer. They want more control over where they will play. They would like to make more money. In essence, they want to keep doing what they're doing and continue to get better at it.

And while opinions vary, at least some members want to keep their daytime jobs for the balance they provide. They don't, however, have any desire to be famous, and feel strongly that fame and glory are overrated. Joanne says, "I'm sort of over it with respect to fame and fortune. I'm in it to play the music and to make it sound as good as I possibly can, and that's all I really want out of it. That's my satisfaction. I'm not in it for the glory."

Asked for some final thoughts, Sue says, "I guess I would want people to know in general that we work really hard for this. I think sometimes people who are not musicians go, 'Oh, you guys are so lucky because you can do that.' Like we were born with this ability. And probably 3 percent is what we were born with, and the rest — there's an enormous amount of hard work that goes into it. And I think that doesn't change, whether it's a men's band or a women's band." ▼



DESKTOP PUBLISHING
GRAPHIC DESIGN
TRAINING & SUPPORT

- full service ■ self service
- mac-pc file conversions
- image and text scanning
- laser printing
- quality photocopies
- fax services
- great looking resumes
- color slide presentations
- mac training workshops
- professional, friendly service

187 St. Paul St. Burlington VT

802.863.1884