

# lifeblood

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## INDIGOS TO PLAY STONE MOUNTAIN

Saturday, April 30th, Amy and Emily will be playing an Earth Day show at Stone Mountain outside of Atlanta. Also scheduled to appear are Mary-Chapin Carpenter, Nanci Griffith, Kristen Hall, Jackson Browne, and possibly Matthew Sweet. The show will be outside, and reportedly 15,000 tickets will be sold. Summer tour plans are also starting to take shape, in June Indigo Girls are scheduled to play at Wolftrap in Virginia, so right now the best bet is that the "Swamp Ophelia" tour will be very similar to the 1992 "Rites of Passage" tour both in venues and in dates.

The release date for "Swamp Ophelia" is still unknown, but should be mid to late April. A limited number of vinyl copies will be released. In other news, Emily and Amy were in Los Angeles recently on the set of an upcoming Whoopi Goldberg movie in which they will appear as a bar band. I don't have the name of the movie or it's scheduled release date. Also, the release a promo single for "I Don't Want To Talk About It" has been confirmed.

It seems like "Swamp Ophelia" and Indigo Girls have been getting a lot more media coverage than they have prior to the release their previous albums, hopefully Epic is gearing up to promote them both in a big way.

Take care and be well -

CAROLYN

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# The den mother for Atlanta's girls with guitars

From The Southern Voice, December 16, 1993:



gether for 3½ years," laughs Kennedy. "But I'm very proud of those years. We were making a living, and a lot of it was the hotel circuit."  
 With Kennedy on guitar and Vogt on guitar and mandolin, Rose did some original material, and a number of covers.  
 "But we arranged the hell out of them," Kennedy explains. "We did Led Zeppelin, Emerson Lake and Palmer, and DeDe would do Billie Holiday—not your basic Top 40 act. We got away with murder."  
 Vogt picked up at guitar at the tender age of 12—and knew right away that music would be her life.  
 "I just knew I wanted to play," she says. "I don't know what it was—I just knew."  
 In high school, Vogt joined a southern rock band called Southbound as the "chick singer," and her fate was sealed.  
 "My parents were extremely supportive," she says. "When I graduated high school, they asked me to go to college for a year and see if I found anything else I wanted to do, and if not...I thought that was fair."

So, after a year at Georgia Southern, DeDe embarked on the career in music she wanted. After meeting Kennedy, that career began in earnest.  
 After splitting with Kennedy, Vogt did some solo work around town, and then joined with Anne MacDonald, Cindy Diamond and Becky Gibson for the vocal trio Jessica. The three would later reunite to form the Fabulous Scallion Sisters, but first Vogt played bass in the Pretty Good for Girls band, with drummer Lou Eller and pianist/guitarist Caroline Aiken. When Aiken left, popular songwriter and pianist Fonda Feingold replaced her.  
 "I remember it as being a really good time," Feingold said from New York City, where she works as a musical computer sequencer for a

*As a musician, songwriter and producer, DeDe Vogt provided inspiration and aid to the women of Atlanta's music scene, including the Indigo Girls. Though she has watched some of her proteges eclipse her in fame, she says she feels "a lot of peace."*

by KC WILDMOON

Like any city its size, this town has a thriving local music scene, and it almost always has. And it's an equal opportunity music scene—women have always taken their place along side male counterparts, even before the folk revival of the 80s brought national attention to women like Suzanne Vega, Tracy Chapman and Atlanta's own Indigo Girls.

And Atlanta's women have not been relegated to folksters—the gutsy bluesy guitar and soaring vocals of Ellen McIlwaine in the 70s, the rock vocals of the Swimming Pool Q's Anne Richmond Boston and all-women bands like Pretty Good for Girls, Moral Hazard and the Paper Dolls. No matter how you look at it, women have been a mainstay of Atlanta's music community from the start. And one woman has had a hand in just about all of it for the past 20 years—DeDe Vogt.

Vogt arrived from Albany, Georgia, in 1973 with Cass Kennedy, who still performs around Atlanta, and the two performed in the city and across the country from Hilton Head to Sun Valley, Idaho as the duo Rose for four years. "I remember it as 1974 and we played to-

material ranging from the Andrew Sisters to the Roches, with original songs interspersed. Later the group added guitarist Missy Speert and Tammye Hurt replaced Bennett on drums, and the band took a turn toward a harder rock sound. "We were evolving as songwriters," Vogt remembers, "and we wanted a harder edge."

A name change—to the Paper Dolls—solidified the shift in musical direction, and the group put out an album in 1986, only to see the band dissolve not long after.

Since then, Vogt has turned her focus to production, and has started her own studio—Sound and Fury—and has produced or co-produced releases by Kennedy, Elise Witt, Bo Keichin, David Patterson, Boink Dee Deck, Ashley & Mark, Chief Seattle—and Vogt's own performance, a CD and cassette release called "The Willing Suspension of Disbelief."

It's Vogt's second recording—the first, "Goliath Dreaming," brought rave reviews but no contract from a major record label, once an intensely sought dream.

"I saw other people with record deals [at the time]," she said, "and you think, 'damn, I work so hard. What am I doing wrong?' But my mom told me something that I think is very important—she said 'make sure success is something you feel daily.'"

Today, Vogt says that she does feel that success. "So much is happening. I'm working hard and the results are right in my face. I feel a lot of peace, and now I'm open to enjoying my friends successes and not be pissed about it. It's a weird feeling."

It wasn't easy. Vogt recalls that in her early 30s—she's now 40—she began to realize she couldn't keep up with the hard pace of playing nightly in bars and traveling that came with the rock life.

**Vogt has started her own studio, Sound and Fury, and put together a new album, "Willing Suspension of Disbelief."**

Connecticut studio and still finds time to write and play. "We were pretty wild, always sick and contaminating each other with whatever we had. But we'd play anyway."

PGFG developed a strong following at shows at the Harvest Moon Saloon and the Moonshadow Saloon.

"We had a lot of great fans," Feingold remembers. "Some people were there every single time we played."

And most of those fans followed Vogt when PGFG broke up and she rejoined MacDonald and Diamond, along with drummer Caroline Bennett, in the Scallion Sisters. The band, like Jessica, featured tight harmonies, performing

"When I was 35 I started worrying about it," she says. "and when I was 37 I was full blown panicked. I had no education, and I was skilled at nothing."

Out of that panic, Vogt took a look at what skills she did have. And then, through a series of events that she characterizes as "fate and luck," she found that she had a knack for engineering recordings.

"Natalie Farr and Wendy [Bucklew] asked me to help them in the studio," she says. "And I was fortunate enough to be around Russ Fowler—he's a great engineer. That's the reason I stay in Atlanta—people are more apt to share their knowledge."

After helping Farr and Bucklew, Vogt decided to try her hand at starting her own studio. And that wasn't easy either. After being turned down for several loans, she finally put together two personal loans and a sizable Visa bill, and Sound and Fury was born. Despite the financial difficulties, Vogt says she's very happy with how it all turned out.

"In my position, you have to do it," she said, "and you can't look back."

Vogt doesn't look back, but plenty of other Atlanta area musicians do, and when that happens, they invariably see DeDe Vogt.

"DeDe and Fonda were two of the first couple of people I met when I came to Atlanta," said Missy Speert, former Paper Dolls guitarist who still plays but spends most of her time on a new business venture, the Flying Biscuit in Lake Claire. "Nothing came of that, but later DeDe was the person who asked me to join the [Scal-lion Sisters]."

Indigo Girls' Amy Ray—Vogt's newest release bears the imprint of Ray's label, Daemon Records—remembers those early days, too, and Vogt is a player in her career.

"I remember I was 18 or 19 and I was playing at Good Ol' Days," she recalls, "and DeDe

was there. I was freaked out because she was there and I was in awe of her."

Ray says Vogt had a "major influence" on her career.

"She encouraged us," she said from Nashville where the Indigo Girls are recording a new album. "She's sort of like the grand mama of Atlanta music."

Speert agrees. "She paved the way in a lot of ways, whether through her solo efforts or her bands. She's a real musician, not a poseur. That music speaks for itself."

But Vogt says she's not writing so much anymore, and she attributes it to getting older.

"I have less and less to say as I get older," she said. "But when I do have something to say, it's usually pretty solid."

Getting older has mellowed Vogt in other ways as well—she's no longer driven to get that major record deal, and is instead content to put out the music she's done for years—from boogie blues, to folk, to rock, and beyond.

"It just doesn't seem so important to promote DeDe Vogt anymore," she said. "When I was coming up, the kind of diversity I have was unheard of—it still is—and it's taken 20 years to feel just fine about having diversity in my songwriting."

A new band—Cowboy Envy—will debut this month, performing old cowboy songs. With former Gypsy Heart guitarist and vocalist Berné Poliakoff, Vogt hopes the band will draw the fans her previous work has drawn.

"With what we're doing, and me in cowboy drag, we're either going to be chased out of town with tomatoes or we're going to kick ass," she laughs.

Vogt's also taken steps to become more politically aware, and to put something back into the community that has backed her for 20 years.

"I know I've disappointed people by not focusing [on being a lesbian]," she said, "but I see [music and sexual orientation] as two very separate things. And I've always preferred for the focus to be on the music."



Vogt came to Atlanta in the early 1970s with Cass Kennedy, and they performed together as a duo called Rose.

But lately, Vogt has relaxed that rule just a bit. "I can't say it has nothing to do with my music," she said. "Most of my songs—well some have been inspired by a gentleman—but most of them have been inspired by a woman."

"I'm embarrassed to say this, but I voted for the first time last year," Vogt admits. "And I did it because I kept seeing so many people trying to do something. I started feeling like I needed to do something to affect change. Perhaps I'm trying to get less self-absorbed as I get older."

A 20-year career with no end in sight. Vogt's new release—which contains a song from the Paper Dolls and a song recorded with Fonda Feingold in the late 70s—is a testament to that career.

*I'm not the person I expected to be, Vogt sings in "Button Song." Things haven't gone necessarily as planned. But somewhere inside the dream stays true, even if it's lost somewhere inside of you. Someone will believe it when you no longer see it...*

"I'm learning," she laughs, and then adds what she guesses some may say about her: "hope she gets it before she dies!"

No problem there. Twenty years is a long time, and DeDe Vogt has made the best of them.

*A release party for DeDe Vogt's "The Willing Suspension of Disbelief" will be held at Eddie's Attic in Decatur on Sunday, Dec. 19, beginning at 9 pm.*

From Us, March 1994:

**MIXING IT UP:** Emily Saliers and her tattooed sidekick, Amy Ray, more widely known as the Indigo Girls, the queens of angst-ridden acoustic folk rock. The R.E.M. amigos from Atlanta are working on their sixth major-label release, *Swamp Ophelia*, due in late spring.

**THE SITE:** Nashville's Woodland Sound Studios, where Slim Whitman recorded "Home on the Range" in 1979. "His spirit," Amy muses, "is still within these walls." No ghostly yodels can be heard to bear this out.

**MOOD INDIGO:** Groovy as a college radio studio during a Joni Mitchell marathon. Inside the control room, the Girls bob and swivel in their easy chairs while keyboard player Chuck Leavell, just back from a recording session in Dublin with the Rolling Stones, lays down a gospelly piano track in the adjoining studio. "He's great," Amy whispers to Emily. "Did you know he's a conservationist?" "Really? Let's ask him about his trees," says Emily. Later, Amy scurries around like a free-range chicken, asking: "Did anyone see that padded envelope? We can use it again to, like, recycle." Traces of correct politics litter the studio: fat-free granola muffins, Throat Coat herb tea (Emily's just over a cold), copies of *Out* magazine and a fax asking the singers to play a benefit concert at an Arizona resort ("Some kind of a breast cancerish cause," Amy explains).

**THE PERFORMERS:** Emily's the dreamy, friendlier Girl, the one with the dusky soprano. She wears a baseball cap with an "E," which stands both for Emily and for the Newark Eagles, a team from the Negro League of yore. "When I was a kid," she says. "I wanted to be one of the Jackson 5." She explains that *Swamp Ophelia* is an important album for her because she wants her music to "matter more. I just turned 30 and realized I've gone through a change from when I would sit on my bed in college and write songs, not worrying if anybody ever heard them." Amy, the raspy alto, barrels around like a folkie Tasmanian devil. She's always moving, talking, phoning, faxing, FedEx-ing, tapping, munching or documenting the session with her Sony camcorder. "I'm kind of a hyperactive person," she says. Before singing, she psychs herself up by listening to the Clash and Hendrix. Summing



## Perfect Harmony

The guitar-strumming Indigo Girls fine-tune their new album one carefully considered note at a time

John, whose primary function seems to be to throw Bazooka bubble gum and tinfoil balls at Leonard.

**INDIGOSPEAK:** The group works at getting just the right blend of smooth vocals and driving piano rhythms. It requires an enormous amount of patience. Small sections of "The Power of Two" are repeated once, twice, sometimes 48 times before Emily or Amy will say, "Yesssss!" And though each version sounds fairly similar to the untutored ear — make that nearly identical to the untutored ear — these veteran music-makers can distinguish even the most subtle nuances. Variations of one chord that was repeated into oblivion were alternatively described as "chunky," "too pastoral and swirly," "gritty," "ornery," "muddy," "pretty liquid," "earthy," "sweet," "invisible," "too gospelly," "too country," "too dark," "rusty," "wooden," "woody," "woodlike," "groovin'," "frothy," "light," "heavy," "far too heavy," "punchy," "exciting" and finally "that sucked."

**FEELING THEIR OATS:** After about four hours of dizzying listening, the group breaks for an atmospheric candlelight snack of bulgur wheat, oats, salads and several whole-wheat pastas. Leavell tells war stories about his gig with the Stones, while Amy explains to Emily who Barney is. "He's that peaceful, loving purple thing," she says. "Oh," Emily says, "then he's probably cool." ■

up their differences as songwriters, Amy says: "Emily's songs are all about relationships with other people. My songs are all about relationships with myself."

**THE BOYS:** The goal for this session is to add Leavell's piano passages to the harmonies and instrumental parts the Girls recorded the week before. With Amy and Emily watching, veteran engineer David Leonard manipulates the massive soundboard. He simultaneously monitors 48 sound gauges, 32 light meters, 16 volume indicators and more red lights than on a back street in Amsterdam. As the song — "The Power of Two" — kicks into high gear, Leonard becomes increasingly frenetic, orchestrating a forest of plucking, chiming, clicking, schlanging, drumming and balalaika-ing, as a clock ticks off time by the 1/10,000th of a second. Nearby sits his assistant,

## From The Performing Songwriter, March/April 1994:

After a year of nearly non-stop touring to support *Rites of Passage*, their most musically ambitious album, Saliers and Ray took several months off last summer to rejuvenate their creative energies and develop their new songs for the latest Indigo Girls album, due to be released in April.

Since they first started performing in Atlanta music clubs in the early '80s, the Indigos have continued to move into larger and more demanding musical arenas while honing their songwriting skills with each new album — from their 1988 Grammy-winning debut through the more complex *Rites of Passage*, released in 1992.

From the beginning, the contrast of Ray's darker voice with Saliers' purer one has defined the Indigos' trademark sound, with performances that include everything from introspective ballads to rock-inspired songs of driving intensity that they bang out on their acoustic guitars.

Even though they write separately and acknowledge different musical tastes, the Indigos craft their songs into such dense arrangements of vocal harmonies and symbiotic guitar parts that it's hard to think of either's strikingly personal songs without the other's presence.

A few months ago, while they were halfway through recording their new album, *Swamp Ophelia*, Saliers and Ray took time to reflect on their musical and personal ties that stretch back to grade school, when they started singing together.

### *When did you first start moving away from cover tunes and maturing as a songwriter?*

**EMILY:** When I was 14 years old, I had songs that I felt were good songs. I thought I was doing quite well for my age, up until the time I went to college. Then my age caught up with my talent (laughs). And I never felt the same way again.

**AMY:** When we started playing together in '80 or '81, we learned cover songs like "Junkie's Lament" by James Taylor and "Wisteria" by Dan Fogelberg and a couple of Elton John songs. But Emily was already writing her own stuff, and I was writing minimally. After I had been away at Vanderbilt and Emily was at Tulane, we both transferred back to Emory in '84 — and

that's when we really started doing a lot of originals.

### *Have you ever studied songs by other writers to analyze the craft from a different perspective?*

**EMILY:** The big turning point in how I looked at songwriting came when I discovered Joni Mitchell. She is by far the biggest influence on my writing and how I think about songwriting. And then after her, Bob Dylan. Those two — the king and the queen. After listening to them, I started looking at my own lyrics and went, 'Oh my God, how did you ever sing this, especially in front of people?' They were the ones who made me want to become more succinct and more understated in my lyrics instead of just, "Here's my heart bleeding all over the page."

**AMY:** I never used to think about songwriting that way. But in the last couple of years, I've started looking more at songs and how they're structured because it decreases the limitations that you feel. It's helpful, I think, to analyze in a purely structural way what other people do — and then take it and put it in the back of your mind and not let it interfere with your inspiration.

### *Is there anything ritualistic about how you prepare to write?*

**EMILY:** I do always like quiet. I usually like to have a cup of tea. I have to be in a very reflective state, and for me, that requires peace and quiet. But up until just a couple of years ago, I wrote all my songs in my parents' kitchen, even when I lived on my own. That was a hard thing for me to break. It really was a strong pattern, but now I'm able to write in my house. My home environment has always been very loving and warm and nurturing and creative. Sitting there at that kitchen table, I felt completely comfortable and I knew no one was going to call me on the phone, so it allowed all the thoughts to come in unobstructed.

**AMY:** Normally, I write after one in the morning — I don't know why. That's when I finish getting all my work done, I guess. Most of the time, it's when I'm by myself and all my appointments are out of the way and no one's up and I can't do anything else.

So I sit down and write. And if I don't come up with something, I get a little bit frustrated and realize that I'm too tired. Emily writes in the morning — she really does. It's really bizarre, but she does (laughs).

### *Do you keep a journal or notebook of ideas?*

**EMILY:** No, I've never done that before. Now I've made a sort of loose commitment — if there's such a thing — to myself to start writing ideas down because I realize how much you forget. When we're on the road, I'm looking out the tour bus window and I'll feel very inspired and start coming up with ideas for lyrics that I think are original. And then I just forget them.

**AMY:** I have a book that I'm always writing lyrics down in that I take with me everywhere.

### *How do you typically get started on a song?*

**EMILY:** I'll have something that I've been thinking about and it gets to a point where it feels like my thoughts are going to come to the surface. And then I sit down with my guitar with no one else around and start finding a chord progression that I like and just sort of sing out lyrics aimlessly. Then that will take me in one direction or another.

**AMY:** If I'm feeling something inside me and I don't know what it is, I'll sit down in front of my notebook and I'll just read the last ten pages of what I've written. And I'll start messing around with some chords or something. Out of twenty sentences on the page, I may use one sentence. But the thoughts inspire me to go in a certain direction.

### *What are some of the internal obstacles you face when you're writing?*

**EMILY:** I have this problem of censoring myself before I really get anything out and I'm always trying to do better before I even allow myself to do anything. I start to have ideas and then I'll say things like, "Well, that's clichéd. Think about a more interesting way to say it." And I've always fallen short of the way I wanted to write, which is frustrating and inspiring both.

**AMY:** Songwriting totally wastes me. Once I start writing, I'm pretty much no good in the real world because I get all tied

up in it and it's painful — because you're tapping into things that you might not want to think about. When Emily and I start getting into a songwriting mode, I'm constantly saying to her, "God, I hate this — I love it and I hate it." I love doing it but I really hate it. Sometimes when I'm on the verge of writing a bunch of songs, I have trepidations about it and I almost don't really want to do it because I know I'm going to get really tired from staying up late and not getting enough sleep. And when I go out for a nice jog, the whole time I'm running I'm going to be thinking about one song over and over again. And it drives me crazy.

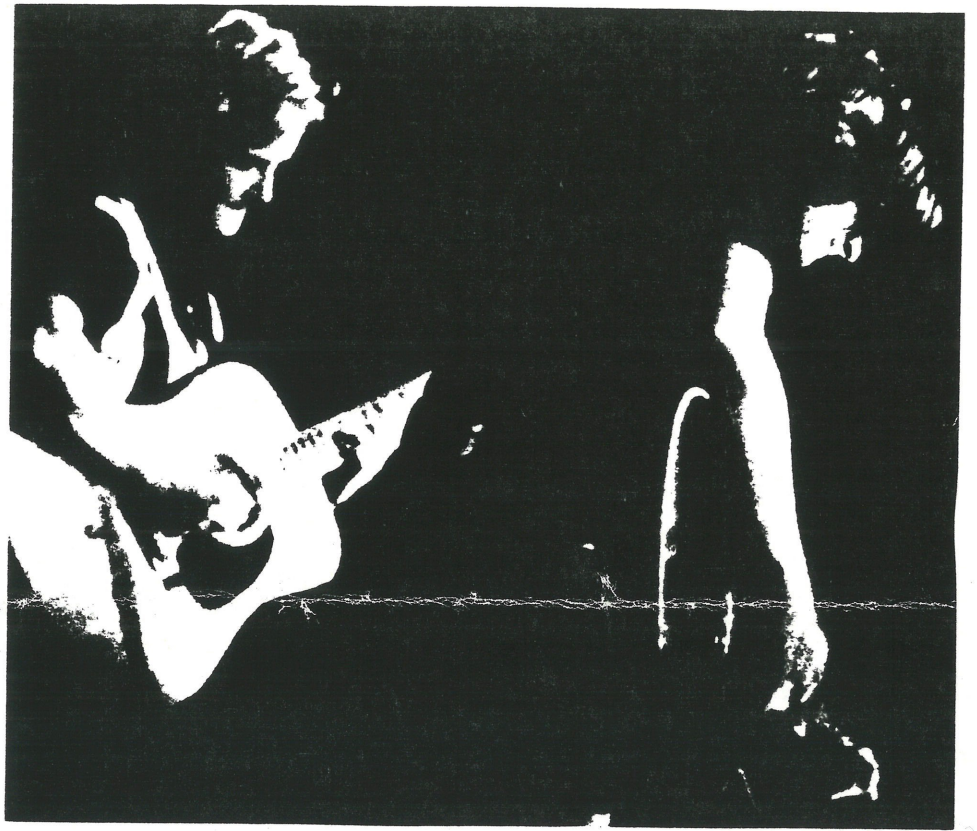
***Is it constructive for you to have a deadline or does it get in the way of creativity?***

**EMILY:** A little bit of both. In a way, it's constructive because you have to make a discipline of writing. This summer, I spent a lot of time telling myself, "I'm going to go out to my studio and I'm just going to sit down and play around with some ideas." I knew I had to. And then one idea would lead to another and it became fruitful after the discipline. On the other hand, you always have the feeling that, "If I weren't thinking about this deadline so much, then something could just hit me in life. Maybe it's going to happen six months from now — instead of having to happen within these two months. And maybe I'm going to be able to write a better song than I am now." So it's a combination of those feelings. Obviously, you can't be that spontaneous if you have a deadline. But I think the best writers have probably just had to force themselves to sit down and write.

**AMY:** Usually I wouldn't work well at all with that kind of thing. It would make me have a block. But the timing has always been perfect for writing for me. I've always written a few songs while I was on the road — and then been really sick of playing and not picked my guitar up. And then all of a sudden it just comes pouring out and I'm living and breathing songwriting for days. And it makes me sick, but I do it.

***Do you usually finish your lyrics in one sitting or do you spend a lot of time reworking and revising them?***

**EMILY:** I've started to do more revising



than I ever have done. A lot of these lessons I learned from writing papers in college. You get your creative spurt that's going to be the crux of your paper and then you go back and redefine and pinpoint and things like that. And that's my style of writing. I wouldn't call it stream-of-consciousness at all. It's very much trying to construct an idea and build around it. And it's very narrative.

**AMY:** There have been a couple of songs I've written in one night. One of them was this song called "Dead Man's Hill," but it was based on a lyric that I had written a few months before. That's very rare, though.

***How you would characterize your individual styles of lyric writing?***

**EMILY:** Well, one thing I like about Amy's writing is that it's sort of ethereal. What she's really doing is channeling her thoughts without getting in her own way. And I'm really much more specific. A lot of times, I look at my songs and I'm like, "Yuck" — because you really have to have a gift to be able to talk about something specific. I can only think of a handful of songwriters that are like that. Joni Mitchell has that gift and Ferron has that gift and Bob Dylan and Shawn Colvin.

**AMY:** A lot of times I narrate something that is happening, but I narrate it in an abstract way because there are things that I can express in a sensual way that cover more territory for me spiritually and emotionally. And it leaves things a little bit more open to interpretation. Sometimes I'll write something down in a concrete way and it sounds very bland and common-place. Like when I wrote this new song about the Holocaust, I wrote something that just really didn't capture the anger and the height of emotion. So I took the whole experience and I took myself out of it and removed anything that seemed too concrete. I would look at the sentence and I'd ask myself, "What appeals to the senses here? What is the most graphic, sensual thing I can think of for this?" And then I'd replace what I'd written with something more abstract.

***What about the role that your guitar skills play in your writing? Do you ever feel locked into a particular songwriting style because you feel limited by what you're capable of as a guitarist?***

**EMILY:** Yeah, to be honest, I do. Sometimes I would like to break out of my musical style. Sometimes I wish I didn't

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*— Amy Ray*

have the voice I have — because even when I try to put my most gut-wrenching punch into it, when I listen to it on playback it still sounds mellow in a way. And the same thing with musical style — like with guitar, I really only play guitar one way. If I were accomplished on the piano I think I could write differently. Or if I were able to open myself to other influences I would be able to write differently. A big problem is that I'm not very inspired by most new music and I keep going back to the same things. I feel like I could be a good electric guitar player. On this new album, Amy's got a song called "Touch Me Fall" where I'm going to play electric guitar. I'm really excited about it because I feel the parts I've found are truly expressive of what I want to do, and they're different from what I've done before. And if I'd played that song on acoustic guitar, it would have been a little bit more of the same.

AMY: I totally suck — I totally suck as a guitar player (laughing). I'm constantly battling that. Constantly! I'm totally limited. That's my biggest thorn and I'm really working on it. I'm slowly progressing. A lot of times I'll have musical ideas in my head and I won't be able to express them. Sometimes I'll sit down at a keyboard and mess around because piano is really great to write on. I relate more to a keyboard than I do a fretboard because that's what I learned to play first. But normally I'll pick up other stringed instruments — I'll pick up a mandolin, I'll play the ukelele. A lot of times I'll sit down with an electric guitar to open my mind up a little bit because for some reason I play different chords on an electric than I would on an acoustic.

*Which of each other's songs are your favorites?*

EMILY: I like so many of Amy's songs — and for different reasons. I love "Chicken Man" — it was always one of my favorite songs to play live on this past year of touring. And I love her old standby upbeat songs like "Land of Canaan." I'll never get tired of playing that song, even though she does. And the mystical power she gets in some of her songs like "Jonas and Ezekial," where you almost know what she's talking about but you're not sure. Those songs stay with you a long time because you can't figure them out. That's the great power of Amy's song-writing, that mystery. I take so much pleasure in her songs.

AMY: I love "Virginia Woolf" — I think that's a great song. And I've always been a really big fan of "History of Us." "Crazy Game" — I like that song a lot, and "Galileo" is an incredible song. And in "Watershed," I think the line that starts, 'Twisted guard rails on the highway' is my favorite line she's ever written. I don't know why — it just really pops out at you. It's so true.

*Which of your own songs are you happiest with?*

EMILY: There's only about three or four of them — "History of Us," "You and Me of the Ten Thousand Wars," "Ghost" and "Love's Recovery." It's much easier for me to write ballads. There was a time when Amy and I were playing in clubs and a lot of my material wasn't being covered because it was all ballads. And Amy was writing these great, uptempo rock songs. Now when I go to hear a concert, I don't want to hear all ballads — it makes a ballad that much more powerful if you only have two or three in your set. But I wasn't like that. And so I had to make a conscious effort to try to open myself up to writing things that were more upbeat. But there's something about that slow, introspective, moody, emotional thing that brings out my best writing. And with most of those songs — I was in pain when I was writing those songs. And I felt very specifically about what I was talking about.

AMY: "Kid Fears" captured a period of my life and it's a really important song to me, so I really like that one. And the

Joan Baez, Amy, Emily and Mary-Chapin Carpenter performing as "Four Voices in Harmony" at the 1992 Newport Folk Festival.





"Chicken Man" I really, really like a lot because it just says everything I feel — and it's a song about something that I'm totally preoccupied with all the time. And I'm glad I have it as a song. "Three Hits" is important to me because of the content. But those songs — I always enjoy playing them.

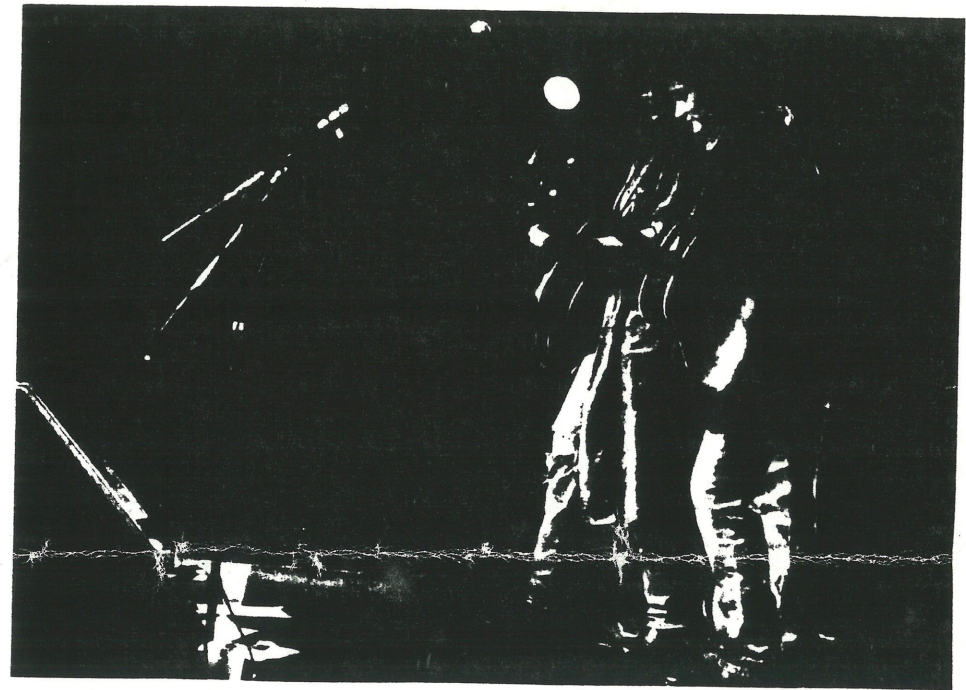
**Are there any situations where you like the song itself but aren't satisfied with how the recording came out?**

**EMILY:** Well, I really like *Rites of Passage* a lot. That's my favorite record that we've done. But having lived with it for a while, I think the tempo of the song "Let It Be Me" is too slow on the record. Because when we were doing it live it felt much more natural to play it a little more quickly. I don't think "Let It Be Me" is one of my better songs though, so it wasn't like, "Oh, we ruined this great song by playing it slow." But I was really happy with the production on the song "Ghost", which is rare for me.

**AMY:** On *Nomads\*Indians\*Saints* there's a lot of stuff like that. I felt like we didn't grow hardly at all on that record. We didn't experiment enough — we stuck to a lot of patterns that were similar to the first album. We were kind of tired and we just didn't do as good of a job as we should have. I mean, I like the record, but it doesn't hold up as well. I think "World Falls" could have been treated a lot differently. To me that song was really important — it had a lot more depth — and for some reason it just wasn't treated the way it should have been. That's the main song on that record that I really would have done differently. Then on the last album I liked the way we did everything, but after playing the songs for a year, I felt that if we'd been able to record the album a year later it would have been a better record. Some of the vocal nuances and intensity were lost because we didn't know the songs as well when we were recording. But on the whole, I was pretty happy with that record.

**What kinds of things do you draw from when you're trying to open yourself up to be inspired to write? Do you expose yourself to certain writers or listen to music?**

**EMILY:** A lot of my songs are about friendships and interpersonal relationships — most of them are. So I watch the way we



The Indigo Girls performing at a 1991 benefit concert in Nashville.

treat each other within my circle of friends, what we do socially, our basic philosophies and what we think about. Going out to hear live music is always inspiring. But for the writers that I really, really look up to, sometimes it's debilitating rather than inspiring. If I listen to Ferron's songs, it's like, "I'm never going to write a song like she does, so I might as well quit trying" (laughs). That happens to me a lot. I almost get this melancholy feeling when I'm moved by a performance. I was obsessed by Virginia Woolf's writing in a big way — I still have so much more to read of hers. I've been reading some Annie Dillard this year — I'm sure she'll have a big influence on me as time goes on. I have my favorite Southern writers — Lee Smith and Faulkner. And seeing a good movie is always inspirational.

**AMY:** The reaction that you get from books and movies really helps me to be inspired and tap into feelings. I read a lot of history books and I read William Faulkner and comic books. I love comics. If I'm not sick of music — I do get sick of music sometimes after we've been on tour — I'll go out and hear music every single night for a week and I just get renewed. It opens me back up again.

**Can you identify any recurring themes or philosophies in your work?**

**EMILY:** The critics would say, "The

*"I wouldn't call my writing stream-of-consciousness at all. It's very much trying to construct an idea and build around it.*

*And it's very narrative."*

*— Emily Saliers*

Indigo Girls — they're so serious, they're so heavy." But our experience at our concerts was not that at all. We found that people were uplifted you know, at times it was a catharsis, getting through pain to get to the other side and that sort of thing.

**AMY:** Well, we always write about death — that's a constant theme. We tend to dwell a lot on transitions, from one state of life to another. Life to death, marriage to non-marriage, those kind of things. I used to use more religious references but I tend to use more nature oriented references now. Emily tends to use a lot of literary references — and relationships are a recurring theme in Emily's songs, I would say. Not necessarily lovers — she uses her friends as points of reference a lot, what's happening among her circle of friends. Obviously, friends and family are an important thing to Emily.

**After you've finished a new song, does it help you to play it for someone?**

**EMILY:** Definitely. When I wrote these new songs this time, a bunch of friends and I went to a cabin and I was going to play these songs — and it was a very vulnerable thing. All of my confidence rested upon their opinions. As it turned out, it was favorable and I thought, "Okay, maybe these songs are alright." But it's become much more difficult — ever since we started on a major label and our career got rolling with all the touring and time restraints — for me to just look at a song without trying it out on anyone else and know, "This is good" or "This is not good." And a lot of times my confidence can just be broken very quickly by someone's response. I used to really be interested in what reviews were saying. When we first got reviewed in Rolling Stone, I was about to die I was so excited. It felt like a dream back then. To see critics reviewing your work is both thrilling and scary as hell. But the more I read reviews and the more I think about the way people are, the more I think it's just opinion. You cannot truly be objective about pop art. You can't. Now it's gotten to where I



**Amy and Emily in the studio working on their guitar parts to "Touch Me Fall"**

feel, 'Why is it I have to know what other people think of them right away when I didn't used to do that?' I'm sure some of it's ego — most of it, in fact. But really, since our music has been more in the public eye, I have tended to scrutinize it more than ever before.

**AMY:** For some reason, it does. It's not like, "Do they like the song or not?" as much as that it's helpful in learning dynamics. Because when you have an emotional backboard, you just do things that you might not have done when you're sitting there by yourself. You play a chorus and all of a sudden you really want to sing it again because it feels right for some reason. And so you just do it spontaneously and it tells you whether or not it's going to work. Even playing in front of a couple of people does that.

**How do you benefit from getting specific feedback on what you're working on?**

**EMILY:** I remember I played the first song I'd written when I came home this summer for a friend, and she told me it reminded her of "Watershed." And I was like, "Thank you for telling me that! (laughs) I've got to rework this song." I'd much rather know something like that. I mean, it's hard because it means, "Oh God, back to the drawing board." And I don't mean to sound

dramatic about it, but songwriting can be excruciating.

**AMY:** Critiques open my eyes to something that I think I would have discovered in time, but it just makes it a lot easier to go, "Yeah, buck up. I need to work on this song a little more. It's not done yet." Because sometimes I get over-excited and I want it to be finished. I'm like, "No, it's done — this is done. This is the way I want it." Just because I want the song to be done so badly.

**Do you have a strong instinct that tells you whether or not you should follow someone's suggestions or stick with your original idea?**

**EMILY:** Well, on "Least Complicated," I had a line that said, 'I'm just a mirror of a mirror of a mirror of myself,' and Amy said that reminded her too much of "Ten Thousand Wars" — 'I see my eyes in your eyes through my eyes.' And at first, I said, "I don't feel that way." But I changed it to 'I'm just a mirror of a mirror' instead of saying it three times and I've really become quite comfortable with that. There will be other times when she'll say something and I'll say, "No, I like it this way." So both of those things happen. Those things come up, where it's just a matter of personal taste. Ultimately, it's up to the writer to decide. I'm actually fairly objective about my work in that way. Someone can make a comment and I can decide whether or not that's truly a good suggestion or whether the original thing is the best thing to stick to.

**AMY:** It's so subjective. Some people may think it's a really bad line and I may think it's a really good line just because it expresses what I'm feeling — that's ultimately what's most important to me. If every time I sing a certain line it doesn't really feel right, then I know I'll change it eventually.

**In retrospect, is there anything about your older material that bothers you?**

**EMILY:** Looking back on my earlier songs, my lyrics are embarrassing because they're very blatantly bleeding-heart emotional. And I still have a little bit of that

in me, but I try to control it now because I find it much more satisfying to hear a song that's not like that. I've found as I've grown older that it's much more powerful to be understated. I wrote a song called "High Horse" that was on the original *Strange Fire* release — I hate that song. That's one of my worst songs because I took the imagery too far — "If you want to saddle your high horse ..." It was so forced. First of all, I wasn't writing it about anything — I was sort of making up anger toward someone and it was a completely imaginary scenario and that came out in the writing too. There's no emotional attachment to it. Usually when I feel really very strongly emotionally about something, that's when I'm able to write my best songs.

**AMY:** I think when I was writing "Land of Canaan" type stuff, my chord vocabulary was very limited. And I wrote a lot of upbeat songs because I felt that was the best way to express anger and I tended to go for that — go for the noise factor. I think I've grown and I've moved away from being very introspective and melodramatic into realizing that it's not always good to be that self-involved in a song. And that if you want a song to reach out to somebody, you have to reach out within the song.

*Are there any songs you've wished you could go back and revise after the fact?*

**EMILY:** I sort of let a song go once I've written it. There are songs that I look back on and I go, "That's not one of my better songs" or things like that. But I never really think, "I'd love to rework that." It's always, "What's the next group of songs going to be like?" And if you feel that way about that song in the past, remember that the next time you're sitting down to write.

**AMY:** Golly, there's tons, I'm sure. That song, "Keeper of My Heart," I wish I had written a different chorus for that because I really like the verses. But the chorus is kind of immature and a little too introspective and kind of melodramatic. And the chorus was too reminiscent of "Blood and Fire." It's just that you change as you get older and you would say things differently.

*What are the most important songwriting lessons you've learned?*

**EMILY:** You have to be thankful for your gift and take pleasure and solace in it. And recognize it for what it is and not be tortured by what you think are your inadequacies. And I'm also speaking to myself because this is something that I'm going through. For me, it's a matter of just teaching myself a little more to let go. Don't try to control where everything is going.

**AMY:** You really just have to let yourself go and not be worried about what other people are going to say or the things that might come out. No one else has to hear it if you don't want them to. Just jump right in full force and be as silly and stupid and adolescent and introspective as you want to be. Then sit down and edit it. And always finish what you're working on, even if you're never going to play it. Develop the idea as much as you can and don't automatically go, 'Oh, this sucks,' and put it away — because you never know what it's going to turn it into.



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From The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, March 15 1994:



# Peach Buzz

TALK OF OUR TOWN

By Maureen Downey

## Atlanta bands to re-record 'Superstar'

In a move that sounds too divinely bizarre to be true, a group of Atlanta-based bands is re-recording the legendary rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar" for a Christmas release. The cast includes



JEAN SHIFRIN/Staff

**Amy Ray** (left) and **Emily Saliers** plan to tackle rock opera.

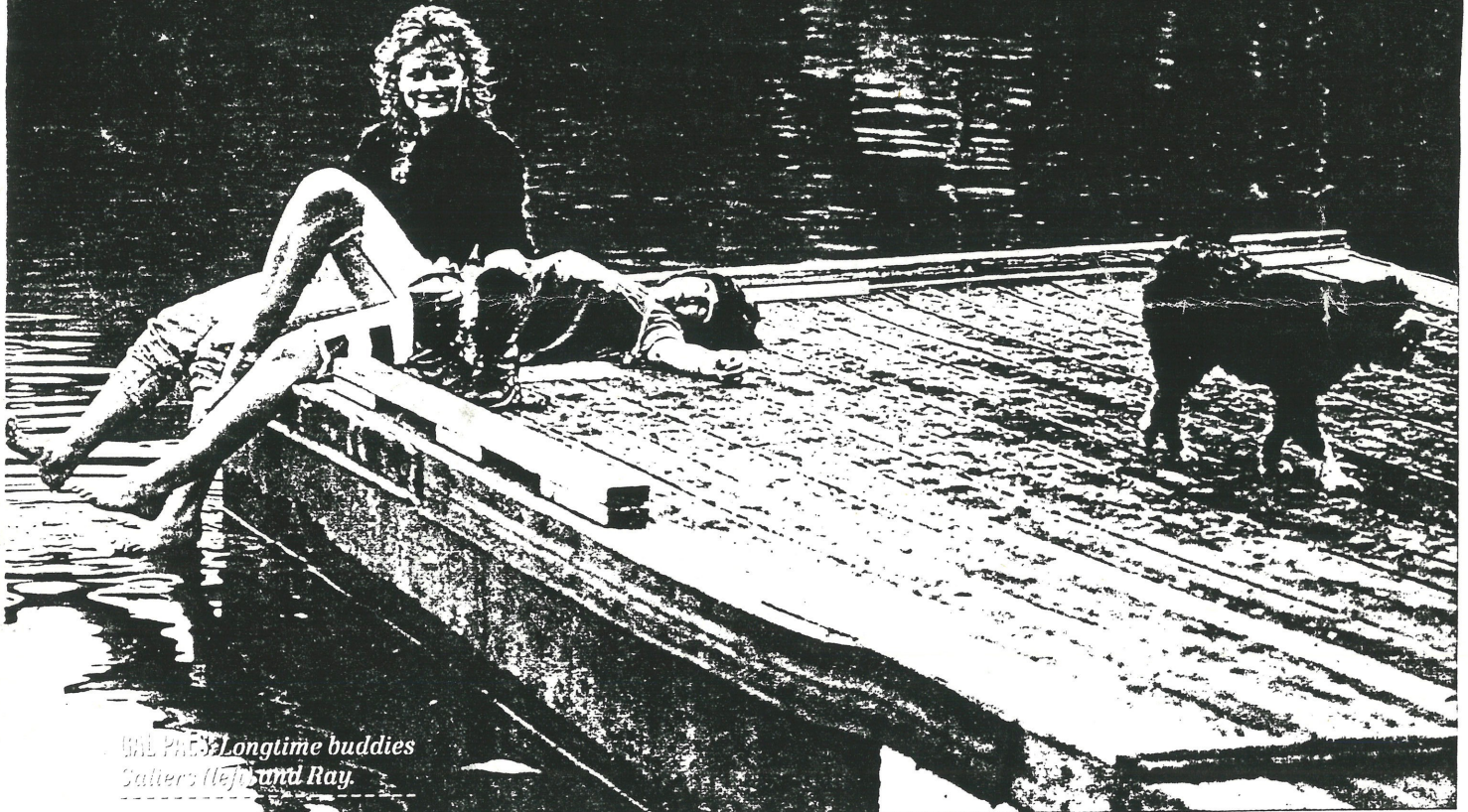
Indigo Girls **Amy Ray** as Jesus and **Emily Saliers** as Mary Magdalene. "It started off as kind of a joke," said Big Fish Ensemble drummer **Michael Lorant** (a.k.a. Judas), who dreamed up the project with local solo artist **Gerard McHugh** (Pilate). "We loved the original version. And so many people, their eyes light up when you mention it. They'd come out of the closet as 'Jesus Christ Superstar'-heads." Other musicians involved include Uncle Green, Five-Eight, **Kelly Hogan** and the cacophonous 10-piece Opal Foxx Quartet. "I haven't seen the Broadway version of 'Tommy,' but it seems like they're taking the rock out of these operas, and it's kind of sad," said Lorant.

"We're hopefully putting the grunge back into this . . . Imagine Emily singing with the Opal Foxx Quartet." The album will be released on Ray's Daemon Records as a gun control benefit, said Lorant, who was shot during a robbery attempt in Little Five Points two years ago.

From Out, April 1994:

"I ask, have we been discriminated against? Realistically, I think we *have*."

Music



LONGTIME buddies Saliers (left) and Ray.

## Indigo Girls: Unplugged . . . and Outspoken

IT WAS LIKE AN OUT-OF-BODY experience," laughs Emily Saliers, one-half of the Grammy Award-winning Indigo Girls, recalling her performance with partner Amy Ray in front of millions at last April's March on Washington. "We walked up those rickety old metal stairs onto that high stage and looked out at all those people. We closed our eyes and took a leap of faith to sing that song. I was so nervous I thought I was going to throw up—I don't even know if we stayed in pitch."

That monumental gathering was a long way from the the small Atlanta clubs where the Indigo Girls first presented their intense, introspective songs, performed with a complex interplay of their two acoustic guitars and voices. Beginning with their 1988

Epic debut, the duo have continued to reach beyond their acoustic, folk-oriented roots, a creative journey that culminated with *Rites of Passage* in 1992, a critically acclaimed album that showcased their eclectic swirl of offbeat instrumentation and confident songwriting.

To record their new album, *Swamp Ophelia*, the Indigos settled in Nashville during the waning weeks of 1993. Once again they've teamed up with producer Peter Collins and longtime side players such as Sara Lee (bassist of the B-52s and Gang of Four) and noted session drummer Jerry Marotta. Bold forays into electric guitar work and other unexpected embellishments come from guest musicians such as The Roches and multi-instrumentalist Lisa Germano, from John Mellencamp's band.

"The new songs reflect what I've been going through, which is coming off the road and getting in touch with people," Saliers says. "So a lot of them have to do with interpersonal relationships. And also my age—having turned 30 and looking forward to the next part of my life." Ray adds, "This album's very moody, and I think some of it is kind of a stretch for the listener."

Case in point is "This Train (Revised)," where Ray molds her stark impressions from a visit to the Washington, D.C., Holocaust Museum with a refrain inspired by an old Woody Guthrie song. That kind of topical outspokenness—an Indigo Girls constant—will continue through their summer tour of Europe, Australia, and the United States, including benefit concerts for several Native American groups. "And we'll continue fund-rais-

## "I decided it *is* important to come out publicly."

ing for organizations that deal with AIDS, pro-choice issues, gay rights, environmental stuff—all those knee-jerk liberal causes, as my conservative friends say," jokes Ray.

Despite being openly gay in their personal lives, the Indigos haven't been publicly identified as such by the mainstream media. Ray laughs when told there is still lingering confusion about her sexuality. "I always thought it was funny when people would ask me if I wanted to come out, because I already *am* out, I've always talked about it very matter-of-factly because, personally, I never felt the need to be in the closet." She's been in a committed relationship for five years, a fact she's not about to hide. "That's my life," she states.

Saliers, who's more reserved, admits that she's been reluctant to discuss her sexuality publicly. "I've always thought of myself as a very private person, and I'd be that way whether I was straight or gay," she says. "I object to sexuality becoming a focus. I just basically did not want to be thought of as first of all gay, and then secondly as an Indigo Girl, so that the music was always secondary." Yet over time, she says, "I finally decided that it *is* important—for the cause and for understanding—to come out publicly."

Both are quick to acknowledge that strong support from lesbian fans was essential in launching their career. Ray feels, though, that some misperceptions endure from an earlier conflict with the separatist community

stemming from the Indigos' refusal to play shows that barred men from the audience. "I can see a place for separatism in history, especially in the growth of the gay movement," she explains, "But I thought that was defeating the purpose of what my music was about."

The Indigos say that being lesbian has also played a positive part in countering pop music's notoriously fickle nature. "I think it's brought us a very closely knit network of fans who tend to be very loyal," says Ray. "But Emily and I always struggle with the question, Have we been discriminated against? Realistically, I think we *have*." Not, she's quick to add, by their record label or, in general, by the press, but by radio programmers and the powerful music video market.

"I think MTV is in the Stone Age as far as gay rights are concerned," Ray states. "And I'm not just saying that because I want them to play our videos. I just get a real sense when I watch them that gay women are not going to get much of a chance on MTV. They're very far behind—and if they want to be on the cutting edge, they should do something." From the vantage point of an Indigo Girl, that's an exciting place to be.—HOLLY CRENSHAW

*Holly Crenshaw is an arts writer for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and has contributed to Bass Player, Acoustic Guitar, and The Performing Songwriter.*

## Shades of k.d.

FOR "TOUCH ME FALL," Amy Ray's frave-up on the *Swamp Ophelia* album, both Indigos set aside their acoustic guitars for an aggressive electric sound. Saliers just bought her first Les Paul and admits she's a fan of classic rock guitarists Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page, and Joe Perry. "When we started playing these two electric guitars, I saw new things happening," she says. "So, who knows? We may shed our acoustic guitars a little bit more and rock out."

On the softer side, Saliers has penned a song for her favorite country star, Wynonna Judd, the big-boned Republican. "The song's not about her, but it was intended for her voice—I just love her voice," Saliers says, laughing. "I've sent it to her, but I haven't heard anything, so either she hasn't listened to it or she doesn't like it." Undaunted, she adds, "But I will write a song for her someday that she will record."—H.C.

