

# Blowtop's music spun from friendship



STEPHANIE A. CASOLA

How many people can you name from your first grade class?

I'm one of a few because I'm still friends with Miss Angie Burnett, who I first met in Mrs. Kovern's first grade class at Rochester Hills' Brewster Elementary School. Many years later, we can still call each other up and talk endlessly about our lives. We became close friends in journalism class, actually.

If there's anyone out there who can relate, I know Patrick Shanley and John Jacobs are among them. As founding members of the

Detroit-based band Blowtop, Shanley and Jacobs met in first grade at Bishop Gallagher School in Harper Woods. But their friendship emerged in high school due to a common tie — music. As students, they were involved in high school theater and played in the pit band. After school Shanley and Jacobs hung out and played music. That's how it was.

In a way things haven't changed. Jacobs, who was influenced by his father's music like Louis Prima and Frank Sinatra, admitted: "I was always fond of the older stuff." In high school, he and Shanley discovered they shared a love for the blues, The Beatles and Led Zeppelin, while their classmates rocked out to Van Halen and Journey. "We were listening to stuff no one else was," said Shan-

ley.

That mutual taste in music led to a career. It started out with Shanley brought a bunch of musicians to Detroit's Cadieux Cafe for an open mike night dubbed "The Hootenanny." When he found himself in need of a guitarist, he "seized the opportunity" to bring Jacobs into the band. From that collaboration, two old friends began writing new material. The

band was the result of their first songwriting collaboration.

Just as true friends can finish each other's sentences, Shanley and Jacobs complete each other's musical ideas.

"We always keep it very level-headed," said Shanley. "We want to do this to have fun."

"It's not just to have fun," clarified his cohort. "We take it serious-

ly."

The combination shows on the band's self-titled debut. Shanley and Jacobs consult each other with ideas, but now write independently. Still, the songs share a cohesive quality that is the band's rooty, melodic sound.

Tunes like *Catch You Later*, the Beatlesque *So Sad and Out Of the Question* are just three reasons to give the band a listen.

"The hardest thing is getting the first one under your belt," said Jacobs. "It's hard to put out there, it's something for people to judge."

Blowtop describes its music as eclectic. It's not alt-rock, said Shanley. But it can be, insisted Jacobs. There are no boundaries once Blowtop starts spinning. "We don't like to confine ourselves to any one category," said Jacobs.



Blowtop: Patrick Shanley and John Jacobs collaborate in music that's hard to define but sure to please.

This is just the beginning for Blowtop. It's not about striving for success as much as it is pursuing a career both musicians are passionate about. And Blowtop isn't about image, or multi-media-hyped performances. If you love music for music's sake, without the splashy costumes, smoke and mirrors, give this disc a spin. Find it at Harmony House, Tower Records, Car City

Records and Record Time.

See *Blowtop live*, Saturday, May 6, *The Berkley Front*. (248) 547-3331; Sunday, May 7, *Cadieux Cafe*. (313) 882-6565.

Stephanie Angelini Casola writes about popular music for the *Observer & Eccentric Newspapers*. She can be reached at (734) 953-2130.

## Mary Timony uncovers musical netherworld with 'Mountains'

BY STEPHANIE ANGELINI CASOLA  
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Mary Timony speaks with a hushed sweetness that shows almost no signs of someone who was raised on a strict diet of Washington D.C.'s thriving punk scene. At home now in Boston, Timony was preparing to go out on the road in support of *Mountains*, her solo debut on Matador Records.

Known as the voice of Helium since she replaced Mary Lou Lord in 1992, Timony took a step sideways with friend and drummer Christina Fife to make a musical landscape that stretches into the depths of the imagination with its subtle tones of murky guitar, wispy vocals and moody piano. Tracks like *The Bell*, *Tiger Rising*, and *Valley of One Thousand Perfumes* possess a pervasive and quite personal quality best achieved on a visionary solo effort such as *Mountains*. "It is something I've wanted to

do for awhile," said Timony. "I wanted the next time I recorded to be kind of mellow, low-key, not a big production. I didn't want to make something like Helium."

Timony moved further into the depths of prog-rock with this album, drawing on the surrealistic levels achieved by Helium on 1997's *The Magic City*. But Timony was first drawn to music through early inspiration from her brother, Pat. "He used to write songs and I would beg him to be able to sing songs he wrote," said Timony.

From home, to the punk scene surrounding her hometown and the instruments of preference — namely guitar and keyboards — Timony has made her mark in bands like the short-lived, girl-punk group Autoclave, The Spells and alt-rock supergroup Mind Science of the Mind.

But Timony uses words like "bare" and "sparse" to describe the aesthetic of this collection with its 16 shiny new songs. She

said the album, released in March, comes from a "slightly different" place than her work with Helium. "It's a little sadder, a little more raw."

*Mountains* was written over the past few years and recorded last summer at a Chinatown loft in Boston. "I wanted to focus on getting a good performance," said Timony. To get that relaxed atmosphere, she called on friend and musical cohort, Christina Fife.

"She lives in this really cool loft with huge ceilings," said Timony of the space. Songs like *The Hour Glass* hold tones of natural reverberation in a hallway of that building. Five different

microphones captures subtleties that add to the mystique of *Mountains*. "We were lucky to have that space," she said.

Lucky indeed. The music is all that's left of that loft these days. "It was knocked down about a month ago," said Timony.

What remains is bound to sound quite different as Timony and Fife take it on the road. "The shows have been really rocking," she insisted, despite the soft nature of the album. "There's a lot of noise improvisation."

While audiences might not expect it to be so rock, as Timony puts it, when was the last time someone called her "pre-

dictable?"

See *Mary Timony and Christina Fife*, 9 p.m. Friday, May 5, *Magic Stick*, Detroit. Tickets \$8, call (248) 645-6666.



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