

Get the 'Low'-down on Minnesota's meekest trio



It's just hours before she has to head out on tour and Mimi Parker is ... doing laundry. Of course. As one-third of Duluth, Minnesota's Low, Parker doesn't lead a flashy, rock star existence. And

Listen like Low

Here are a few artists Low's Alan Sparhawk is bound to pop into the CD player:

Olivia Redding
Neil Young
The Dirty Three
Neutral Milk Hotel
Pedro The Lion
Moby

that's OK.

Along with her husband — guitarist and singer Alan Sparhawk — and Low's bassist Zak Sally, the band has been a well-kept secret in the world of minimalist melodic music. Low ventures into the quieter side, slowing it down with hushed melodies and intense performances.

"This is kind of my dream band," said Parker, who was raised on country, not pop radio. "This band is natural."

It wasn't always so. Parker claims she didn't want to join at first. "Alan and I had been talking about it for years, getting a band together. It never happened. Finally things just kind of came together."

They came together in the form of a self-titled EP and a full-length album, *I Could Live In Hope*, both released in 1994. But Sparhawk never predicted a career in music. Despite growing up on a musical diet of Van Halen and '80s punk, the guitarist claims "it never really made any sense. Even with Low I don't think we ever really intended it to be something until we realized 'Wow, someone wants to put out our record.'"

"When we started out, even

before I convinced Mim to join the band, we were playing slow, quiet music," said Sparhawk. The experiment began with one question: How low can they get away with and still make music?

Seven years later, the band prepares for the Feb. 5 release of its eighth full-length album, *Things We Lost In The Fire*. Like 1999's *Secret Name*, *Things We Lost In The Fire* was recorded with producer Steve Albini (Nirvana).

"I'd say this is the pure exploration of who we are," said Sparhawk. "It's still kind of has one foot in the punk rock ethic. It's more in the approach."

You might not hear anything remotely resembling *Anarchy in the U.K.* on *Things We Lost*... but songs like *Dinosaur Act* boast plenty of fuzzy rock distortion.

"We kind of see it as a progression of sorts," said Mimi. "The songs are a little more orchestrated. It's definitely our most pop record — if Low were to do a pop record."

Low brought in some friends to work on the album — friends such as violinist Ida Pearl from Ida and samples by Mark de gli Antoni, formerly of Soul Coughing.



(Left to right) Alan Sparhawk, Mimi Parker and Zak Sally are Low.

"It felt like the songs were bigger than us," said Sparhawk. "We were trying to catch up with these songs — to let them do what they wanted to do."

Along with new album, Parker and Sparhawk welcomed the birth of their first child, a baby girl named Hollis. She's become quite an inspiration, Parker said.

"One (song) in particular, *Embrace*, is about the childbirth process," she said. "We got a remarkable (response) playing that live. In *Metal* is kind of

about her, too.

"We're definitely in baby mode. All the time. I guess it's made us think about touring and the band in a different way."

No fear for Low fans — at 6 months, Hollis had already secured a passport and seen the Eiffel Tower. "She ends up kind of taking my mind off of other things," said Parker. "We all kind of help out. Zak loves babies, too."

Sparhawk said the experience

has made him "want to be a better person."

Baby and all, the band is headed for Detroit. "It's one of our favorite places to play," said Sparhawk. "I think it's a great town. So bombed out, but it's got so much character. I compare it to Texas. There's no pretension. You just come out and enjoy the music."

He did share some concerns about the venue, St. Andrews Hall. "It's kinda big."

Come out for Low and fill the place, 9 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 10, St. Andrews Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Tickets are \$10 for this all ages show. Call (313) 961-8961.

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CD REVIEWS

Clamp It Down

The Brothers Groove
Little Fortissimo Music
Anyone who frequented Detroit's Music Menu on Mondays in 2000 did so for one reason — The Brothers Groove. This Detroit-based trio and former BEAM grant winner released its flawless debut *Clamp It Down*, just before the turn of the millennium. But chances are, fans of blues, jazz and rock will be grooving with them well into the

new year.

A fine work beginning with the relentless sing-along *Pressure Cooker*, the high energy *My Girlfriend Too* and the always infectious *You Got That Thing*, the CD explodes with the energy that could only come from vocalist Chris Codish — who explores the very depths of his own voice and truly wails on the keys. Add in equal parts of soulful bass guitar by Clarkston native Jim Simongon and an unparalleled

backbeat by drummer Michael Caskey, and The Brothers Groove dive in and out of raucous rhythm and soulful style. From *Space Invader* to the engaging *She's a Dancer*, *Clamp It Down* defines The Brothers Groove as an innovative and inspiring addition to the local music scene. Check them out every Thursday at the Music Menu in Detroit. See www.thebrothersgroove.com. — BY S. A. CASOLA

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