



Music

December 18th, 2013

# WOMEN OF THE YEAR: The Renaissances and Reunions Of 2013

*by Allyson Polsky McCabe*

In a year in which the pop charts have been dominated by the manufactured likes of Katy Perry and Miley Cyrus, we have also enjoyed an unprecedented, and unexpected, resurgence of women from the indie scene. For me, this has been a lot like getting a call from an old friend who's been out of touch for a while and remembering how much you like her.

It all began in June, when the *New Yorker* published a profile of Kim Gordon which was at once a testament to her musical contributions as a founding member of Sonic Youth and a declaration of her second coming. Following her highly publicized split from Thurston Moore in 2011, Gordon started work on a new memoir, and in September she released an album with Bill Nace as the experimental noise duo Body/Head. White Columns gallery held a survey exhibition of Gordon's art practice, and Sternberg Press will soon publish a book of her art criticism and essays. You can also catch her in an upcoming guest spot on the new season of HBO's *Girls*.



Luscious Jackson. Photograph by Doug Seymour.

Kathleen Hanna, who toured with Gordon when she was the lead singer of the iconic '90s riot grrrl band Bikini Kill, also experienced a rebirth of sorts in 2013. Collaborating with former Bikini Kill bandmate Kathi Wilcox, Kiki and Herb's Kenny Mellman, Carmine Covelli, and Sara Landeau, Hanna's new band, The Julie Ruin, released *Run Fast* in September. The project has its roots in a solo album written and produced by Hanna under the pseudonym Julie Ruin in 1998. Traces of *Julie Ruin* can be heard in Hanna's post-Bikini Kill dance-punk outfit Le Tigre's self-titled debut, which came out a year later. More recently, Hanna's career was sidetracked by her long struggle with undiagnosed late-stage Lyme disease (she is now in remission). Hanna's life was chronicled in the documentary *The Punk Singer*, which premiered in March at SXSW, and on November 21st she

appeared as a guest DJ at Body/Head's MoMA show.

Another survivor to resurface is Patty Schemel, former drummer for Hole. Immensely talented but hobbled by an increasingly serious alcohol and drug problem, Schemel left Hole after producer Michael Beinhorn replaced her with a session drummer for the band's 1998 album *Celebrity Skin*. Schemel would eventually become homeless before finally getting clean in 2005. Her first major public appearance came last year as the subject of P. David Ebersole's documentary *Hit So Hard*, where she is depicted as now leading a quiet life as a wife, mother, and proprietor of a dog-walking business. Well, not so fast—this year Schemel is back behind the kit with Upset, a pop-punk trio she formed with Ali Koehler, former drummer for Vivian Girls and Best Coast, and Jenn Prince, formerly of La Sera. The band's debut, *She's Gone*, dropped in late October, and Schemel is sounding better than ever.

Also back on their game are the women of Luscious Jackson, whose eclecticism perfectly captured the zeitgeist of the '90s. Jill Cunniff and Gabby Glaser pooled money from crummy restaurant jobs to record the three-song demo that got them signed to the Beastie Boys' then-fledgling Grand Royal label. Joining forces with Kate Schellenbach and Vivian Trimble, they released the widely lauded debut EP *In Search of Manny* in '92. The band went on to make three full-length albums including 1996's *Fever In Fever Out*, which went certified gold with the Top 40 hit "Naked Eye."

At its height, Luscious Jackson was as much a meme as a band. It appeared at Lollapalooza and the Lilith Fair, on the *Clueless* and *Good Will Hunting* soundtracks, on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, in a question on *Jeopardy!*, and even in its own Gap ads. But by decade's end, a cultural shift away from female musicians towards the more macho sound of bands like Korn and Limp Bizkit tanked radio play and album sales. They went their separate ways, pursued new career paths, and started families.

The story of Luscious Jackson might have ended then and there, but if there is any silver lining to the decline of the old industry model, it's that major labels, radio stations, and retailers no longer have the exclusive power to make or break a band. Harnessing social media to reconnect with their fans, Luscious Jackson crowdfunded their new album *Magic Hour* in only 48 hours via PledgeMusic. Recording and self-producing on their own label, City Song, Luscious Jackson didn't break new ground with the November release, but that isn't the point. The tracks "Are You Ready?" and "Show Us What You Got" are among the best in their repertoire. "We Go Back" is a spot-on reflection of where the band—and its fans—are these days, both musically and philosophically.

All of the artists I mentioned here have been out on fall tours—look for new dates extending into 2014. Also touring is the twenty-something band Haim, whose full-length debut *Days Are Gone* came out this year to rave reviews. The trio of sisters has been playing together since they were kids, and they're now proving themselves capable multi-instrumentalists, deftly incorporating elements of radio pop, folk, R&B, and hip-hop. I'm looking forward to seeing where Haim goes

next, and how all of these bands fare in the coming years.

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