

Awaken to the somber-pop of Slumber Party



STEPHANIE A. CASOLA

Slumber Party doesn't ask for much.

Detroit's premier women of pop just want to meet Eminem. That's all. Maybe tour as his opening band. Whether the rapper would agree to

juxtaposing his no-holds-barred hip hop stylings with the sounds of such genteel guitar work and downright lilting harmonies, that I don't know.

But I do know it would be a mistake to decline any invitation from this Slumber Party. Three of the band's founding members — Alicia Berg, Gretchen Gonzales and Leigh Sabo — met me at Detroit's Cass Cafe on Jan. 11 to talk about the real Slim Shady, a penchant for pink frosty beverages and, of course, the future. First, here's a bit of the past.

The band met and formed through mutual friends within the Detroit music scene around 1998. And despite a general boys-club atmosphere existing around the city today, this girls-only band is creating a buzz. "We never really thought about it," said Gonzales. "We're friends with a lot of the other bands."

Sabo agreed: "There's a lot of camaraderie."

Pet Sounds to the Party

As a young girl, guitarist and Ferndale resident Gretchen Gonzales remembers making dance routines and prancing around to the pet sounds of the Beach Boys — no doubt a musical influence on the sub-dueled sugary harmonies offered by Slumber Party today. Backed by the gently sweeping beats of drummer Leigh Sabo and bassist Marcie Bolen and brushed with the delicate hushed vocals of singer Alicia Berg, the sounds of Slumber Party call for attention. If you haven't already heard the band, it's time to wake up and take

notice.

Slumber Party got its name from a telephone conversation Berg had with Kim Fowley a few years back. Fowley is best known as manager extraordinaire for The Runaways — an all-girl band that spawned the careers of Joan Jett and Lita Ford. "I couldn't believe it wasn't taken," said Berg of the moniker. "It was so ideal for us."

Growing up listening to public radio, Berg never dreamed of becoming a singer. "As a kid, I wanted to be a novelist." Choosing to write three-minute pop songs rather than 300-page books, she now fills her days with recording and touring.

Simply put

"The reason I started playing guitar was because I could pick up boys better," admitted Berg with a smile. Guess it worked. When she moved from her hometown in Minnesota to attend Michigan State University, she met her boyfriend Matthew Smith — a well-known local music producer (The Go) who also worked on the band's album.

If not behind the drums, Leigh Sabo said she'd still be teaching kindergarten. Luckily, her bandmates agreed they can sometimes act like kindergartners, so she's remained on familiar ground. "I played guitar before I played drums," said Sabo. "There were two guitarists when we started." It was decided early on she would lay down the beats.

"I just wanted it to sound good," said Berg of her early vision for the band. "When I started to play with folks, before (Leigh) came by, before the idea of a band, I played with other drummer types. It never sounded right. There was just sort of an understanding."

That simplistic sense of sound translated into a record on Kill Rock Stars. "They're really easy," said Gonzales of the indie label. "They don't tell us what to do. We give them what we have."

They're happy with it."

"They" aren't the only ones happy with the band's latest release. Slumber Party recorded it in one week: "There was no stress," said Gonzales. "It was fun. There were no surprises. We knew what we wanted. That's what we got."

With songs like the engaging *Why Do I Care?* and *I Don't Mind*, which is featured in video format on the band's Web site, www.slumberparty.50megs.com, it's the sort of record that captures your attention from the moment you press play. The dreamy quality that pervades Slumber Party's music drifts far from a musical landscape otherwise permeated by taunting rock riffs, hip hop posturing and political sentiment.

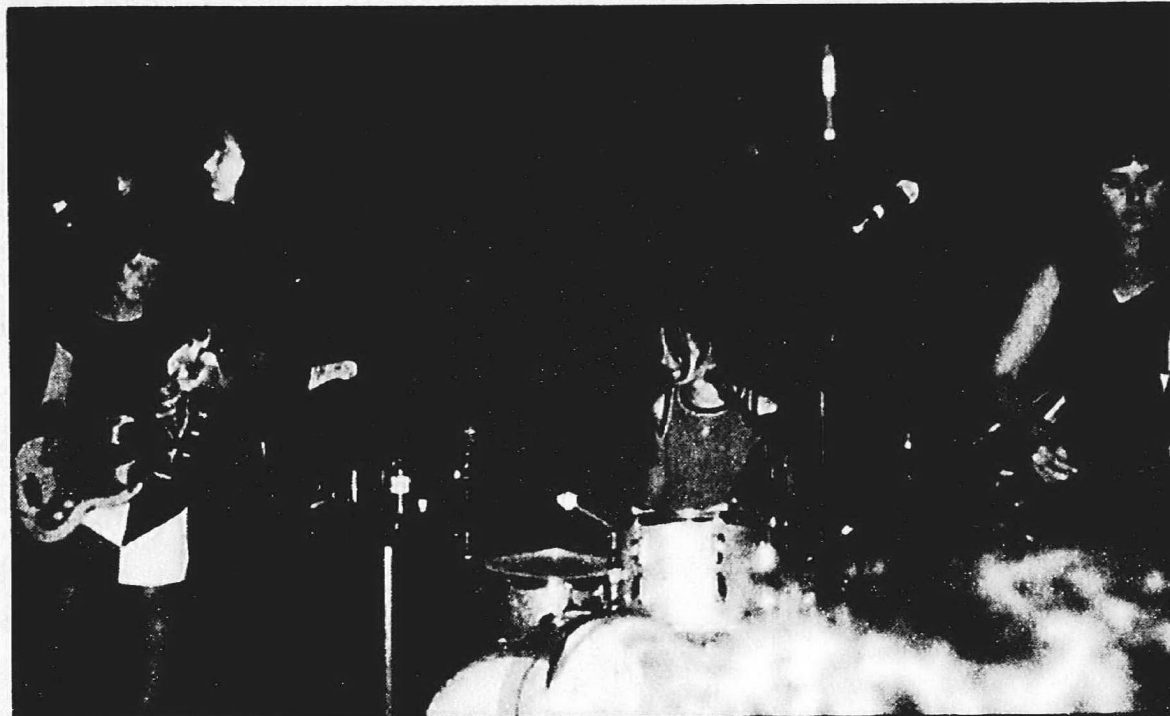
Engineered by Michael Nehra (Robert Bradley's *Blackwater Surprise*) at Detroit's White Room Studio, the record evokes a sleepy, sometimes shiny '60s pop vibe.

This year, Slumber Party looks forward to a European release of the album. It's been picked up by Poptones, a new label launched by British music mogul Alan McGee (Oasis, Primal Scream). A European tour will likely follow this summer.

For now, though, the band is practicing, writing new material and planning to record in early March. This time the Party moves to Ghetto Recorders to work with another well-known Detroit producer, Jim Diamond. "We'll maintain the vibe," promised Gonzales. "We're moving forward."

Join Slumber Party when the band performs with openers Ansonia, 10 p.m. Friday, Jan. 26, at Gold Dollar, Detroit. Call (313) 833-6873.

Stephanie Angelyn Casola writes about popular music for the *Observer & Eccentric* newspapers. She can be reached at (734) 953-2130 or at scasola@oe.homecomm.net. To send a fax, dial (734) 591-7279.



The Party: Slumber Party is Marcie Bolen, Alicia Berg, Leigh Sabo and Gretchen Gonzales.

Protest seeks radio attention

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
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Detroit Hip Hop's got a new catch phrase — "Don't say it. Play it."

As a founder of the Detroit Hip Hop Coalition, Rob Gill hopes to get the word out that local artists deserve more radio time in the Motor City. With help from fellow coalition founders Brandon Wilkens and Lee Martin, he has organized a protest and boycott of one urban station, Detroit's WJLB FM.

Supporters plan to protest from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday, Jan. 19, in Suite 633 of the Penobscot Building on Fort Street in Detroit. The boycott of station listeners is planned for the same time period, said Gill, and will continue each Friday afternoon.

The Detroit Hip Hop Coalition, a conglomeration of Michigan hip-hop artists, promoters, disc jockeys, magazines, designers, entrepreneurs, and supporters, formed in late 2000 to bring together the hip hop scene in the

■ **'The true answer to this problem is a Hip Hop station.'**

Paradime
Livonia native

Midwestern United States. Gill, a Sterling Heights resident and publisher of the weekly music newsletter *Scriptures Hip-Hop*, hopes the protest will open some eyes and ears and bring about support for local artists.

"For several years now, WJLB has neglected artists from the metro area," said Gill. "WJLB claims to be the 'voice of the community' and 'the place where hip-hop lives,' and they continue to ignore requests for area artists."

Representatives for WJLB radio did not return phone calls or answer e-mail messages in response to the matter.

One hip hop artist, Paradime (Freddie Beauregard), said the issue goes beyond more exposure for local music and beyond just

one radio station.

"I see this from both sides," said Paradime, a Livonia native. "I know people in radio, and I know people who make music. As an artist, I would love to see more support from local urban radio, and that's what this protest is about. However, cats need to realize that radio will play music that sells. If your product isn't making noise, radio isn't going to touch it. In that case you need to focus on college radio and clubs."

"The true answer to this problem is a Hip Hop station, period," said Paradime. "And until we get that in Detroit, we need to work on street promotion, club play and making quality music. WJLB should play more hip hop, yes. I agree, but us Detroit emcees need to create a more acceptable product too."

For more information, call WJLB at (313) 965-2000. For more information on the protest and boycott or the Detroit Hip-Hop Coalition, call (248) 797-991.

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