

Scrawl refreshes with effective blend

By Michael Deeds
Senior Editor

Scrawl "Smallmouth" Rough Trade

Scrawl couldn't care less whether they got lumped into the "all-girl" category or the "all-rock" category. It makes no difference to this Midwestern trio that sounds like the stuff the Bangles are afraid to think about, even in their dreams.

Scrawl are drinkers, thinkers and most of all reactionaries to the pop sound most women go for in the music



business these days. In a post-Go Go world where Joan Jett has to get a full facial make over in order to sell albums, it is anything but dull to see good female musicians strutting their stuff without commercial, sell-out attitudes pushed upon them by record company executives.

Though Scrawl still is quite radio-ready, their third album, "Smallmouth," takes nine originals and one Eurythmics cover and slickly pushes them slowly down the mainstream throat, ready or not.

Bassist/vocalist Sue Harshe uses the sweetness of her voice advantageously, blending it effectively with guitarist Marcy Mays in a folk/country honey that oozes richly over the Sonic Youth-style music. This is post-punk influence being twisted into yet another form. Mays' guitar is a clean distortion at times, an out-of-tune, dissonant contrast at others -- a Dinosaur Jr. sound check with the fuzzbox off.

Generally, Scrawl doesn't move far from their favorite and effective jog-ahead style, rarely experimenting with tempo or wide dynamics. But Harshe's lyrics, though simple, keep a human interest over the semi-rough tunes.

In opening track, "Begin," she sings of a doubtful affair: "I think it's gone/He said go on/He says he's happy/He's always happy."

But her wistfulness never grows submissive or stereotypical to any extent.

In "Charles," Harshe and Mays blend effective harmonies in explaining a boyfriend who gets impatient at the band's all night practices.

And the list of rather personal topics goes on, as the songs continue to play on.

But although Scrawl never gets close to anything worldly meaningful, they still manage to refresh.

Meshing and grinding are techniques few bands do effectively, and few women musicians attempt to break stereotypes by doing so. Scrawl, though a little too safe song-wise, effectively has broken this annoying fallacy that undoubtedly will haunt bands for a long time.

"Smallmouth" is another link on their journey to expertise. A little more time will be interesting if Scrawl hangs in there for a while.

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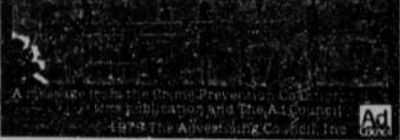
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