

The Chico SCENE

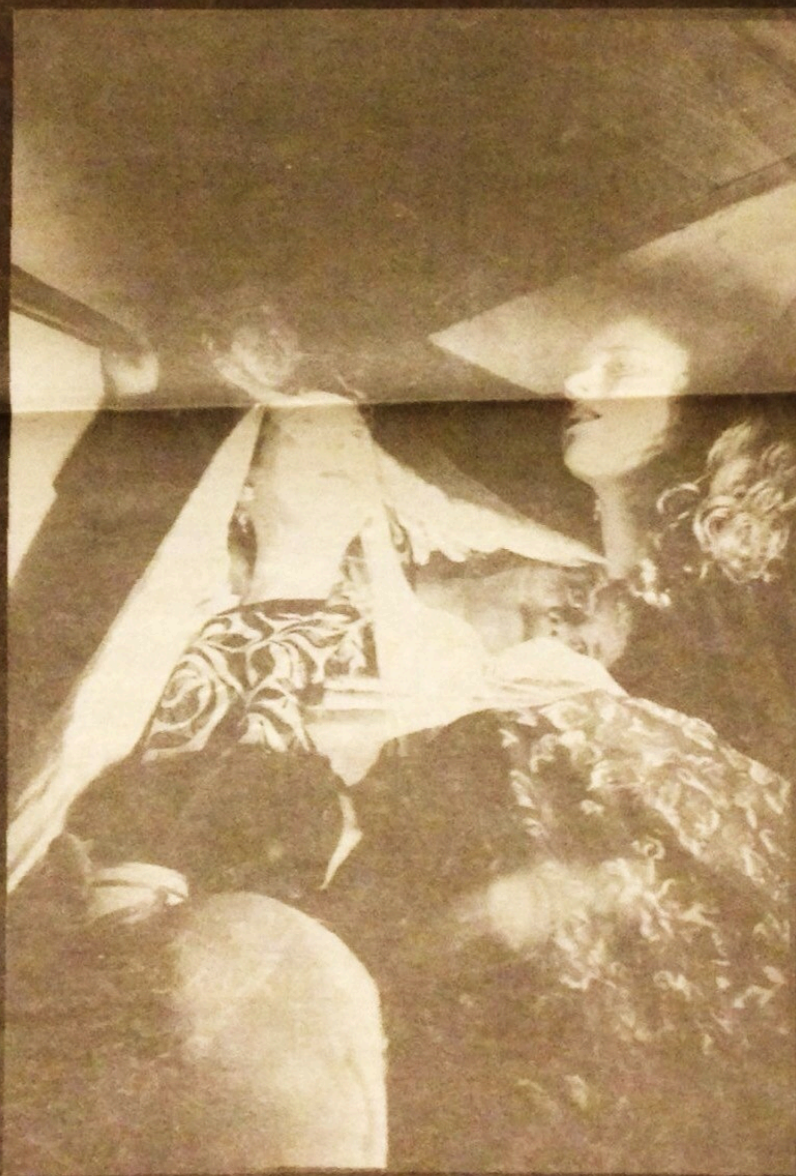
A WEEKLY GUIDE TO AREA ENTERTAINMENT

PREVIEWS OF:
Music...Film...Video...
Events...Plus a Daily
Calendar for the Week.

FOR THE WEEK OF:

APR. 3rd - APR. 9th

VOMIT LAUNCH



VOMIT LAUNCH

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PRESENTS

CABLE TV COMEDY

FRI. & SAT. APRIL
5th & 6th

BOBBIE DEAN

WITH

EUGENE BROADNAX

SUN. APRIL 7th
DAN WEDEKING

WITH

JON BOYLE
KEVIN KATAOKA

LIVE MUSIC
THURS. APRIL 4th -
SAT. APRIL 6th
STEEL BREEZE

303 MAIN ST.
UPSTAIRS

DOWNTOWN
CHICO

PROFILE

Vomit Launch

BY MONICA COCHRAN

Like its members, the music of **Vomit Launch** is smart, funny and enigmatic; it's sometimes mean, sometimes melancholy, but never lazy. They play pretty, yet tough music that you don't feel like you know all about the first time you hear it.

Vomit Launch is going, but it's coming back. The band - Steve Bragg on drums, Lawrence Crane, bass, Patricia Rowland, vocals and Lindsey Thrasher, guitar - left on its first extended tour Tuesday. It's traveling to Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana - "and URANUS," says Crane.

They are still on the way up after about six years, with two full-length recordings still to come in a three-record **Mad Rover Records/Rough Trade** distributing deal. The new 7-inch, *Boltcutters and Beer*, recorded just a few weeks ago in Sacramento (and due at record stores any day now) is live, and "evil" in the band-members' ears and to their delight.

The current **Vomit Launch** release, *Mr. Spench*, has received good notices in the music journals, to chart fairly high in the College Music Journal's Top 100. It's the first album that was not self-produced, and it shows more sophistication in the song-writing and recording techniques. Now that the band knows how to do it, they say, they're going to try to do it more spontaneously, and "rougier," in the future.

They'll end up their brief tour April 14, at San Francisco's Chameleon, on Valencia. On May 5, that Vomit-band will play the Burro Room right here in Chico.

What is "Vomit Launch?" It seems obligatory to say that they won't puke all over you if you see the show. In fact, at an L.A. show this month, some of Rowland's relatives pulled lawn chairs right up to the front of the stage, as if it were a bluegrass festival. Apparently, these foolhardy souls left the show intact.

VL won't give it to you easy, even if they're not outright dangerous. Band members each contribute to the sound of the group. Rowland writes lyrics that often zero in on loathing and the lost, and

the music may sometimes be lovely, but it's rarely carefree.

At the free-beer/recording session for "*Boltcutters...*," about two months ago in Sacramento, the band launched into their "theme song," from the earliest days. It's a diatribe against those who think life is a party. "*You make me want to vomit...*" Patricia sang.

At some point in that drinking session (for the audience, not the band, which was reining itself in over fear of being caught stupid on tape), she zeroed in on the people who were just there for the beer. "Do we have any felchers in the audience tonight?" she asked. They didn't get it.

"I always write about the same thing," she said, somewhat grimly, before that show, while the band sat killing time, watching the rain fall through a window in the big warehouse where they record. "*I will recreate a love in my mind/just like this...*" one new song goes. "*One full of anger/I'll chain myself to this one thing...*"



The music is not punk, metal or pop, really, but it does take from the aloneness of punk and the sparseness of experimental music, while it layers on basic melodic elements of the rock/pop song. It's really plain-spoken in a way that makes it surprising.

Live, Thrasher pulls out pearly notes in a **Byrds**-esque way or hits the strings fast and again like some other modern minimalists. Rowland's uses her warm alto, sorrowing and hard at the same time, as like another instrument that on the first, and subsequent, listens, words are secondary to the sound.

It takes effort, Rowland says, to find out the lyrics to her songs - the band does not include them with its records. "I've never been into happy, I-love-you lyrics - anybody can do that," she said. "I'm... propelled by ugly things. Maybe I'm actually singing about something that people might not want to explore."

Crane is as much a part of the string sound as an anchor, borrowing from the minimal styles of **Joy Division** and successors, adding his own sense of melody in a moody, caressing way. And Bragg is very - right - in his drumming, which neither barges in or leaves the music to the other participants. Just as the members insist, most performances are all of a piece.

Thrasher compares Rowland's lyrics - and it applies to the music too - to her paintings. They seem very warm and inviting, Thrasher says, until you move close. Then you see something frightening in them.

Crane says one reason **Vomit Launch** (one of their t-shirts reads, "You got a problem with that?") doesn't sound like anyone else is that when he, Rowland and Thrasher (that's her real name) got started, shortly after they met working at radio station KCSC, they really didn't know how to play music. They just worked at it and came up together.

Drummer Steve Bragg joined the group about four years ago. The band was playing with a drum machine, and DeRowland said it was "horrible." She would always apologize for not having a drummer, and Bragg, hearing one show, offered to give it a try.

From the first, Rowland said, Bragg was one of the group. "He gives us as much a part of our sound as anyone."

Bragg, who's a native of England and has been on the circuit before - with traveling carnivals - doesn't have much to say to interviewers. He has a lot to say to his fellow band members, however, especially about the running argument over who moves the most equipment. "Now you get to see the true side of **Vomit Launch**," he said, at their recording party. "Who does the real work in this band? The drummer."

In the van on the way to Sacramento, Bragg warned the rest of the band about the tour they're now on. "The first time is never as good as the second," he said.

Vomit Launch fit right well into a new revival of the melody that has been assumed by Bay Area musicians like Penelope Houston and Mark Eitzel (**American Music Club**). It's not that they have changed to fit into the trend (if you can call it that when it involves only a few underground bands), but more that the trend has some connection with them.

"That's just lazy," Rowland said about labeling **Vomit Launch** members say their music comes from the person.