

Continental Drift

UNSIGNING ARTISTS AND REGIONAL NEWS
EDITED BY MELINDA NEWMAN

DENVER: Western Vogue has made a career of defying labels. Although "progressive Western rock" is the term lead singer and rhythm guitarist Shawna Strecker prefers, she concedes that the tag poses more questions than it answers. "Most people don't understand what Western music is," she says. "They go, 'you mean country?' [But we're] talking about a totally different region." Western Vogue's own musical idiom is a tuneful, often inventive range of Western, blues, rock, and country influences. That sound can be found on "Perils And Passions," the band's third self-produced CD. "I was intentionally setting out to get away from any sort of country/Western image," says writer/producer Strecker. "I didn't write any 'cut 'em up' songs." The band has broadened its sound by featuring guest artists. Josh Dubin, who has worked with Shawn Colvin and Holly Dunn, plays understated steel guitar on "If Tears Had Wings." Patrick Moraz, former keyboardist for the Moody Blues and Yes, shows up on two cuts. Since Strecker and bassist Mike Reid founded the band in 1991, it has received airplay across the Western region, and has been featured on two CD radio compilations by KBCO Denver/Boulder and KZON Phoenix. In 1992, the group was named one of the top unsigned bands of the year by Musician magazine. Among the way, Western Vogue has opened for artists as diverse as Joe Walsh, the Texas Tornados, the Rembrandts, and Dunn. Contact: Shawna Strecker, 303-232-3910, or Stagecoach Management, 303-934-4806. PETER M. JONES



WESTERN VOGUE

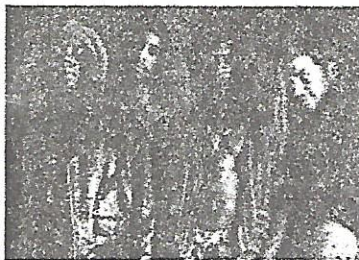
DENVER: It was back to roots night in more ways than one for Colorado singer/songwriter Lance Bendiksen. Four years after his national "Journey Home" benefit tour for the homeless, which culminated in a 1989 Carnegie Hall appearance, the musician revived the concept here Jan. 28. Proceeds went to Urban Peak, the city's center for homeless teens. Efforts to organize the Denver benefit began when Bendiksen opened an Eric Andersen concert last year. An Urban Peak volunteer took note of Bendiksen's issue-conscious lyrics; backstage discussions led to a booking at the Mercury Cafe. The artist first began writing songs about the homeless while working as a touring musician in the '70s; by the late '80s, he had amassed enough material to release the self-produced "Journey Home" concept album. As with past "Journey Home" shows, homeless teens were invited to attend. Rounding out the rock textures of Bendiksen's band the Radio Kings were several Colorado favorites, including blues/folkie Mollie O'Brien, and Runaway Express, led by Wild Jimbos' member Jim Ratts. Because of the members' diverse styles, the Kings' sound is often a simultaneous conglomeration of influences. Bassist Frank Baier, who formerly played with Hall & Oates and Chaka Khan, contributes funk/soul bass lines, while lead guitarist Adam Rey delivers mid-'70s hard-



BENDIKSEN

rock power licks. Steel guitarist Joe Oeser covers the folk/country base, while drummer Brian Mikulich brings eclectic musical roots. Bendiksen himself is both a prolific tunesmith and a versatile musician—alternating between keyboards, guitar, and melodia. The Radio Kings have finished preliminary work on a new CD, tentatively titled "The Playful Ones," which Bendiksen is currently shopping to labels. The new material is more produced than previous efforts; the lyrics are less topical. Regardless of any future success or changes in musical direction, Bendiksen promises to always keep portions of his touring schedule open for homeless benefits. "I'm a champion of the powerless," he says. "There's too much power in the world." PETER M. JONES

DENVER: Twenty of Colorado's best-known unsigned alternative bands converged here Aug. 14 for a scaled-back version of the Rocky Mountain Music Assn.'s Music Fest. In past years, the event has been a two-day coupling of music showcases and industry panels. But this time, financially strapped organizers nixed that format in favor of an all-day outdoor festival. Casualties of the so-called Rock Fest '94 were jazz, R&B, country, folk, and nonalternative showcases. The bands selected to participate were judged on a variety of factors, including musicianship, songwriting quality, media coverage, product distribution, and promotional packages. Despite lackluster industry attendance (the event competed with Woodstock '94), Rock Fest still offered up a respectable share of rising regional talent. Highlights included Denver mainstays the Jonez, a racially mixed quartet that continues to excite crowds with its seamless fusion of rock, reggae, and rap. It's common conjecture that the band (which now records for the Boulder, Colo.-based indie Rabid Records) may be the next



THE JONEZ

Denver act to get signed to a major label. Love Lies—also on the Rabid roster—was another audience favorite. Generating local industry praise were the politically charged Hippy Werewolves, rap/rockers with the slogan "Peaceful Messages From Pissed-Off People"—and Durt, a plugged-in conglomerate of former acoustic players. Other local favorites: the retro-punk Babihed, the metal-driven Body Of Souls, Auto No., and regional newcomers Flat Rabbit. In hopes of attracting label interest to Rock Fest, producer and RMMA board member Bill Thomas looks for the event to expand to a full weekend next year, with panels in the morning and an outdoor festival in the afternoon. "All the other towns are doing these kinds of music conferences," he says. "We're tired of doing it the same way." PETER JONES

DENVER: Being Melanie's daughters has its advantages. Leilah and Jeordie Schekeryk have already had opportunities that few struggling singer/songwriters can claim. At ages 8 and 7, they cut their first single, "Grandma, We Love You," which grazed the Canadian charts in 1982. As teenagers, dubbed the Mel-



SAFKA

anoids, they accompanied their mom as backup vocalists. Now, at 21 and 20, the Schekeryk sisters have established a career proper as the nucleus of the Denver folk/rock band Safka (Melanie's maiden name). The group plans to issue a remixed version of its independently released cassette in January. Meanwhile, the band is attracting enthusiastic club audiences who are mostly unaware of the lead singers' parentage. (Their father is record producer Peter Schekeryk). "If we're referred to just as Melanie's daughters, that's okay," Leilah says. "But to do a show (in Denver) and have that kind of response, and half the people not knowing we're Melanie's daughters, that's great." The Schekeryks list Counting Crows, Melissa Etheridge, and 10,000 Maniacs among their musical influences. Their songs range from uptempo rock to folkish acoustic fare, all laced with seamless family harmony. Although Safka is anchored in original material, the Schekeryks have no desire to break with family ties. Their sets are inevitably sprinkled with mom's "Brand New Key" and "Lay Down (Candles In The Rain)," and the duo will embark on a three-month European tour this fall as the opening act and backup vocalists for Melanie. "[Her fans] love it, and they listen to the words," Jeordie says. "It's kind of neat for them to see the other generation perform." Contact Tom Trainum at 303-575-1779. PETER M. JONES