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Unfortunately music styles like heavy rock or metal are still male-dominated, although bands like Girlschool, P.M.S. or The Runaways have proved that women can also unleash an amazing and untamed blend of rock 'n' roll. BOTTOM from NYC was another great all-female band, which created their own relentless and powerful sound, but sadly the band split-up in 2005. One of the original member is drummer Clementine, who didn't take a rest after that musical episode in her life. She was one of the co-founder of ZEPPARELLA and meanwhile Clem is trying something new with her project FRANCIS BAKIN, which doesn't have a lot in common with hardrock. So it was absolutely necessary for me to feature her work in the Cosmic Lava and to bring her creativity into focus.

Now it's eight years ago since we did our last interview, Clem. At that time you were in BOTTOM and your second album 'Feels So Good When You're Gone' has been released in May 2001. Since that interview a lot of things have changed, and maybe the most incisive one is that BOTTOM split-up in 2005. That was really a surprise to me, because you've played hundreds of shows in the USA and you've also done a tour here in Germany. So what was the reason for the sudden end of your band?

Well, as most band breakups go, it was a combination of divergent musical paths and a breakdown of interpersonal relationships. It was heartbreaking and painful and I'm sure the ocean of bad feelings still remain. We were a passionate, difficult group on stage and off. The day I decided to leave felt unreal and like a sudden death. It just

became apparent in a thunderbolt moment that it was never going to work again, and I needed to end the struggle. Not to minimize the weight of it, but there just ain't no drama like girl-band drama. It sucked. I believe that Sina is continuing to play as BOTTOM, with another rhythm section. But I'm not sure.

The last album was 'you'rNext', released through Small Stone Records in 2005. I can imagine that it was a big surprise for a lot of your fans, because it was a radical departure from your old sound. Well, there are still a few heavy riffs to find and a few conventional structures, but as a whole it was very experimental with its slight folk touch. I still like that album, because it's always a risk to open new doors. What was the bands intention to record such an album, and how was the recording process? Did you improvise a lot?

I love that you like that album, because lots of people HATED it. We dug it. We were in this window of time where we caught the feeling we had in the beginning, of inventing ourselves and feeling like anything was possible. Like it was us against the world. BOTTOM always did best when we had a common enemy, and that feeling carried us through a lot of rough times. That record was like an exploration of all the things that had brought us to where we were. It was recorded in a handful of days, and we improvised a lot of it in the studio. That process was surreal; we were in a very fragile, magical state. I guess the scales were tipping us towards continuing or not, but we didn't know it. We were breaking out of the rather tight musical constraints we'd put ourselves in and being pulled all over the place. I guess we were being pulled apart, so that's why it's so all over the map. Should have been called: Songs While Being Pulled Apart Limb from Limb. Anyway, I'm proud of it, but can't listen to it.

When you look back at your time in BOTTOM, how do you evaluate this musical chapter in your life? Is there anything you would change if you could or are you pleased with its entire course?

I really hate regrets, but I have quite a few with that band. I guess the most tangible one I have is that we had several offers from producers and companies to help us, and our egos always got in the way of taking the help. I wish we'd just done it all. As a female band, we were so afraid of losing who we were to someone else's vision, and we ended up doing that ourselves, so what would it have mattered? And I really regret not being able to stop the disintegration. I'm never good with endings, and as in most of my breakups behaved like a jackass a lot of the time, being reactive and not able to solve the problems. Hindsight is always 20/20 I guess. But above all, I'm really proud of that band. I had the opportunity to do those incredible tours, the 11-month one in 2000 especially, and the band made me the kind of drummer and songwriter I am. And to find two other people who wanted to live and breathe the road the way I do, well I'll miss that forever and doubt I'll find it again.



I assume that you didn't pause after the split-up, because you're a passionate drummer and musician. Maybe one of your most well-known projects is ZEPPARELLA, featuring Nila Minnerok and Gretchen Menn from BOTTOM. When was the band founded and was it intended right from the start to form an all-female Led Zeppelin cover band?

During the last few years of BOTTOM, I was in AC/DShe, the San Francisco tribute band. I started playing in that band because I wanted something to do in the down time of BOTTOM, something that wouldn't take my focus away from BOTTOM too much. I met Gretchen in that band, she was Agnes Young, and she did the final tour with

BOTTOM as second guitarist. I realized in AC/DShe that I had a lot of improving to do as a drummer. When you play the same style for 8 years, you get into major ruts, and I got on a mission to start to woodshed and improve my vocabulary.

Gretchen and I were frustrated with not playing often enough with AC/DShe, and I told her I wanted to learn Bonham's catalogue. She wanted to learn Page's, and once we started we thought we might as well do it on stage. I had approached Nila and Sina about doing a Zeppelin band a few years prior to that and they weren't into it, but when Gretchen and I started they said they would join. When BOTTOM broke up, about 8 months into Zepparella, Sina left Zepparella as well.

Why did you continue with a cover band instead of forming a "new" band?

When we decided to do Zepparella, I was in the practice studio for about 6 months before our first show, practicing for hours a day. I had crappy chops to play Bonham, and as he's my favorite drummer I had to do him justice as well as I could. I buckled down and just tried to get better. I didn't feel like I had much to give to an original project until I broke out of the box I'd been in playing with BOTTOM. Then, once Zepparella found our singer Anna, we pretty quickly decided to write original material. That project was called The House of More, and we recorded one record, played a few shows, and then shelved the project as everyone got busy with the bands they were supposed to be doing instead.

In my review of your last album I already mentioned how much I like the name ZEPPARELLA! Who had that bright idea and were there any plans for another name?

The spacey mind of Clem... I had this vision when I started the band that I didn't want to do the standard tribute thing...wigs, exact costumes, gestures, etc. To get away from that I thought of combining the look of Barbarella, the Jane Fonda movie, with Zeppelin's music. The name came from that. The visual idea ended up being cheesy, the name stuck.

When I watched the videos and photos on the ZEPPARELLA site, it looks as if you don't play in small venues. By the way, everything looks really professional with the white costumes, and the audience is very enthusiastic. Do you agree and is it possible for you do make some money from the band?

We play in large and small venues. Zeppelin fans are awesome, the songs are amazing and give us so much room for improvisation. That's a big reason I continue with this band...not only for the education of learning Bonham's parts, but the knowledge gained improvising on stage within an established structure. I don't know of many cover bands that give you that. I'm certainly not a fan of tribute bands where I go see them or pay much attention, but playing my hero's parts is just so much dang fun I can't let it go.

And to have it mean so much to people is really heartwarming. I put my head down every show and play as if I were 14 years old air drumming in my bedroom, and when I get off stage there's a whole bunch of people who were reliving their own 14 year old selves the same way. We have fans who've seen us 50, 60, 70 times. That rules. Money, nope. There's a glut in the States of these kind of bands, so while we make a little money, at the end of the day we're paying more than we're making. I only care in so far as if we can make a little money with it, then my band members will want to continue longer.

Have you ever met Robert Plant and Jimmy Page or do you know what they think about the band? If I were you my interest in their opinion would be huge.

Gretchen and I stood 10 feet away from Robert Plant for about 2 hours, and finally got up the nerve to hand him a package with wine, our cds, and a very thought-out, excruciatingly conceived 4-line note. So much for self-promotion. I've never been one to care about meeting my idols, and I couldn't get up the nerve. Standing close by was enough. I think Plant could care less about Zeppelin tribute bands. He seems to be very forward-looking.

But ZEPPARELLA isn't your only project. You've started a venture under the name FRANCIS BAKIN, where

you are the main songwriter and vocalist. In the meantime you've released the first album 'Conversation with Francis Bakin', where Gretchen Menn and Rob Preston support you. FRANCIS BAKIN is different from your other bands. I would describe it as a tasteful combination that consists of elements of trip hop, blues and elegant pop music. Please, tell me more about it. When did you feel the urge to start FRANCIS BAKIN and what was your main intention?

After Zepparella's project The House of More, I started wanting to sing. I wrote the words on all of the songs but one on the THOM record, and somehow I developed this driving desire to sing my own words. I have no idea where these things come from, but I go with it. So I holed up in the practice studio most free weekends for about a year and a half and wrote an album. Gretchen laid down some tracks, I played guitar that Gretchen later replaced in most places, bass that Rob later replaced, and the electronic and live drums. I'd go in Friday nights, often sleep at the studio all weekend, and just bang my head against the wall trying to figure out how to write a solo record. It sounds like it does because I love electronica and the combination of live drums with electronic drums, I love slide guitar, and I love words. That's just how it all came about. I'm so happy you dig it Klaus.



Apart of the music it seems as if the lyrics play an important part in FRANCIS BAKIN. I think that some of them are more tongue-in-cheek and you described each song in detail on your own website. What do you say?

I started life out as a writer, and when I started playing drums in my 20s I stopped writing words, and developed a block about it. When they started coming out again, I just didn't think too hard and let them live. My website does talk about the songs on the record, probably more than anyone cares to know.

What is the story behind the name FRANCIS BAKIN? The name sounds as if it would belong to an English writer who lived in the 18th century.

I was reading 'Interviews with Francis Bacon' while I was figuring out writing the record. Bacon was a painter in the 1900s (died in 1992) who believed that the true creative spark lies in the accident. I was all about that while writing the songs, making the most of the accidental things that happened as I was figuring out how to do it. I changed the spelling of the last name because I thought it was funny.

You're a passionate musician, who doesn't limit yourself to only one musical style. I think, that's a cool attitude. I've read on your site that you've done also various sessions. Please, tell me more about.

Thanks Klaus. After AC/DShe and BOTTOM, I started getting busy with some studio projects, mostly with my friend Rob Preston who owns GetReel Productions in San Francisco. I love doing that. I've played many different types of styles, from metal to blues to backing a 15-year old pop singer. I love getting a recording with an electronic drumbeat or no drums on it and helping the songwriter bring their ideas to life. The work in the cover bands helped not only my chops for that, but also taught me to learn songs quickly. It also taught me know how to work with people I was working with on my own project.

When did you start playing drums, and was it the first instrument which you've learned to play?

I started late, in my 20's, and it was just a fluke that it happened. I had played a bunch of instruments as a child, flute, guitar, piano, and all of them were a chore. I was singing, badly, in bands in my early 20's in New York, and on a whim started learning drums because I thought being a musician would be a career that would involve travel. Again, welcome to my little unreality. The combination of some natural ability, a psychic's advice and the best drum teacher in NYC and here I am.

What kind of music do you like? Do you have any favourite styles and what have been the last three albums that you've bought?

It may be easy to tell you what I don't like, but honestly, you can catch me at any given time liking anything. I love music. Period. I love words, so Bob Dylan, Tom Waits et al. drive me insane. I love groove so the wide expanse of electronica, rock, reggae, blues and on and on get me going. I love raw emotion so metal, punk, noise, I dig it. I love hooks, so I love Motown, pop songs, Top 40, classic rock. I love technique combined with feeling so jazz just knocks me out. Classical is transportive.

I guess I don't like it when people are faking it in some way. I'd say music where that happens is the kind I don't like. The last three albums I bought were two Lucinda Williams records, because I'd been reading her name for years and heard a cover she did that knocked me out, and a Zakk Wylde record because my new guitarist recommended it. Oh, I forgot to tell you, Klaus. I'm starting a new project, playing drums for a hard rock band. We're in the writing process, it's moving very quickly, and I'm really excited about it.

I realized I was off-kilter. I was playing someone else's drum parts in a band and getting an education. I was singing and being a songwriter. But I was really missing writing original drum parts in a rock band. It seemed like a waste to be learning so much playing Bonham and learning so much as a songwriter and not applying it. Above all, I really missed playing heavy rock! So I found this awesome guitarist who writes great riffs, a killer bass player, and now a singer. I'll let you know when it's ready to hear!

Ok, Clem, I hope you find that interview interesting and entertaining. I thank you for you time and wish you all the best for you and your music! Rock on!

You're the best, Klaus. Thanks for everything, you ROCK.

(KK)

www.Clemthegreat.com

www.myspace.com/francisbakin

www.Zepparella.com

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