

"Wholesome" Jill Olson

RED MEAT THE MOVIE STARS



The **Movie Stars** were a favorite of the SF band scene - certainly they were one of the most fun -with influences as varies as folk pop, country, surf, polka, (and possibly a few more that I'm forgetting). they had a strong fan base and were able to record a couple of albums. HECK-OLA! and HEAD ON A PUTTER. before amicably disbanding in 1994. I have fond memories of first encountering them in an in-store performance back in 1990 and seeing them play at various venues . they even reunited to

insisted that they would perform another wedding), and as a result, played a couple of 'reunion' shows a year or so after the break-up. While the band was very much an ensemble effort, the main focal point was Jill Olson, songwriter, singer and bassist. She started her musical career in a folk-pop trio, **THE STOUTHEARTED** and performed with her own group, "Wholsome" Jill Olson and **The Norsemen**, even during her time with **The Movie Stars**. Currently a part of the honky-tonk band **RED MEAT**, she was kind enough to answer some questions.

Background:

How did I get where I am today? Well, I grew up in SE Iowa in a city (Ottumwa) close to MO. Went to college at the University of Iowa. In 1985, a friend of mine - we were just getting out of school & my friend said, "I've got a cousin who lives in the Bay Area - let's just go there." And I was definitely looking for some clues at that time in my life (laughs) so I thought, "What the hell." We had 3 adults and 2 cats stuffed in a Toyota to get out here; we housesat for a friend of the cousin's. I have to say I loved it from the minute I got here. I was happy to be living in Iowa, but I wanted to go somewhere else. The 2 people I came out here with ended up going back - they didn't like it at all.

How long have you been performing?

It's pretty much the traditional story - as a kid, I got a guitar for

Christmas. My parents pretty much listened to country music, so I grew up with that in the house; I had older brothers & sisters, so through them I listened to Led Zepplin & The Beatles. When I was about 16, I found out about Patsy Cline, Hank Williams and people like that and that really made an impression on me. So when I got into college, I started playing bass with friends - I'd played cello, so I was able to transfer what I knew about playing cello onto playing the bass. (We) started playing acoustic pop songs, originals - kinda folksy, kinda country and that sort of turned into **The Movie Stars**.

The Movie Stars

It's such a comball story... I went to open-mic nights at Freight & Salvage [well known venue in Berkeley, CA, for acoustic/folk music] & met a bunch of other people from other places who

moved here (SF) who wanted to play a combo platter of acoustic country pop music. SF is definitely the sort of place where the species comes to mutate - lots of different, strange people come to have their ideas breed.

The **Movie Stars** were a pop, country, surf, rockabilly-polka band. We came together in '88 - 3 of us met at Freight and Salvage open-mic & hung out to get some coffee and discovered that we all liked pop music & country music equally. I think we first played at somebody's party in Oakland; we'd ask friends of friends to play drums. We played our first official gig at the Starry Plough in Berkeley. There were lots of other - I don't know - kooky acoustic musical amalgamation freaks out there who liked to come to our shows (laughs). Nobody was more surprised than us to discover that we had fans. We ended up releasing one LP (HECK-OLA),

one CD (HEAD ON A PLATTER) & had some success in Japan, of all places. We traveled a lot on our own, also.

We'd been together about 5 years & a couple of people in the band felt we'd taken it as far as it could go - it was definitely the end of a relationship where we'd all liked each other, and it sort of ended the way all love affairs end... Brad (Williams) moved down to Austin - he's in a Tex-Mex band called **Los Pinkys** that have a couple of CD's out on Rounder Records. He wanted to completely focus on Tex-Mex music & he's doing well down there. Steve (Cornell) & I ended up going on tour with John Wesley Harding for 3 months, which was really great because we'd had this frustrating final 6 months with **The Movie**



Jill Olson...

Stars, then we got to go on tour with this guy on a big label & stay in hotels & be on the Tonight Show & stuff.

How was that?

It was incredible - getting paid real money, more money than I made at a day job, to play music.

Mare Winningham - Lonesomers
(from the **Razor & Tie** website - Tom Neff & others)

OK, here is the story on Mare Winningham... Musically, she has been performing with her own band, mostly in California, for about 12 years... I was impressed and intrigued by the songwriting, which combines a spare and classical folk-pop sound (she acknowledged Dusty Springfield and Petula Clark as childhood influences) with lyrics of solid intelligence and passion. I would put her somewhere on the field between Jill Sobule and Shawn Colvin, without the former's sometimes beugyed nuttiness. Mare's voice is not huge, but it is strong and clear; sometimes she uses a little Patsy Cline "catch."

All in all, I think Mare is definitely worth your time to discover... Given **Razor's** BMG distribution, you should be able to find **LONESOMERS** at your record store soon, or at CDNow, CD Universe, Amazon online, or toll free from **Razor & Tie** themselves at 1-800-443-3555.

Though she's achieved recognition as a major film actress, she has pursued music since adolescence and has been recording and touring for nearly two decades. In between acting jobs, she performed in clubs and coffeehouses, toured and, in 1992, made an album for an ill-fated independent label. That record's glossy, piecemeal production made her yearn for something more immediate.

Winningham hooked up with her current rhythm section, bassist Jill Olson and drummer Melanie DeGiovanni, while on tour with singer-songwriter John Wesley Harding; the two women were Harding's backing band, but they bonded heavily with Winningham. In addition to guitar and vocals, Winningham wielded the dulcimer on songs like "Are You Smiling?". Her bandmates contributed the rich harmony vocals that were a trademark of their performances.

Although she's made other records, **Lonesomers** is her first on a label that isn't doomed; **Razor & Tie** -- some also of Dar Williams and the Nields -- picked her up. Similar to albums by these labelmates, **Lonesomers** is a lightly sketched, deeply felt collection. Winningham's work is lyrical, playful and sad -- a friendly mixture of folk and pop with an occasional country flourish.

The album opens with "Miles," a song that draws the usual parallels between road trips and relationships. Then there's a down-home rendition of the Rolling Stones' "The Last Time" with a barroom diva's throaty wail and plenty of boogie-woogie piano. In "Are You Smiling?" she pays tribute to Joni Mitchell with chiming acoustic guitar and a story about two lovers travelling together by motorcycle across California. But Winningham does best with ballads. In "Silver Bullets" she sings about the age-old struggle between love of adventure and attachment to domestic comfort. "Quietly Tonight" marries Winningham's pretty voice with acoustic and electric guitars. The slide-work and religious allusions in this song would make it at home on country stations. On "Lonesomers" people get together to be alone. "I'm dying for the solitude/Can't take the test/I better learn to be alone//I'm ever going to learn to rest."

Then there's "Wake Up," a bouncy tune that deals with the temptation to hide one's mistakes and to sleep through the bad parts of life. At other times Winningham's peppy side can be downright annoying, as on "World That I Love," which sounds like something from the "Partridge Family." Overall, though, this album has the sound of a backyard jam or a kitchen-table-recording -- familiar in a most good way, imperfect and yet companionable.

But it was a fleeting thing... John Wesley Harding got dropped from his label. It was a wonderful 3 months, a lot of fun - it soothed my heart for awhile.

Red Meat

Some time passed; about 4 months - I sat around my house, not playing music & feeling miserable. Steve asked if I'd join this band, **Red Meat**. A couple of guys from the **Genuine Diamelles** (an infamous SF a-cappella group) decided to take some of their country songs that they did & expand upon that, go all the way country. They asked if I wanted to play in the band - for me, it was a way to get out of the house. I was in self-imposed exile, not playing music, working a temp job and feeling sorry for myself - and



and Lisa Loeb - Separated at Birth?

then, it turned into this great, fun band. There's been some confusion with **Red Red Meat**, a loud techno band, which has been amusing at times. They'll be people who'll go, "They're playing at the Hotel Utah... Cool!"