

Kristin Hersh

After founding her influential art-punk band Throwing Muses, at age 14, Kristin Hersh went on to spend the next 25 years confounding expectations and breaking rules - both her own and others'. From life as the reluctant front person for the Muses, to the solo career she swore never would happen, through the founding of an ambitious and altruistic non-profit, and in her most recent foray into a surprisingly successful new career as an author, Kristin, like so many of us, didn't see much of this coming.

Throwing Muses first gained traction in Providence, RI, the beneficiaries of a close-knit and supportive music scene they quickly outgrew. After a move to Boston, the band soon found they'd made the right decision, playing on bills with similarly singular artists like the Pixies, Mission of Burma and Dinosaur Jr.. Eventually, word of the Muses got back to highly regarded British indie label 4AD and the band became the label's first American signing. What followed was a series of albums and a period of growth that'd kill most bands. Signing to Warner Brothers Records was both the best and the worst thing that could have happened to them. After six releases and glimpses of the gold ring the band released their crowning achievement, *Limbo*, and promptly disbanded for 7 years — not for the typical rock and roll reasons, but for a lack of funds.

In 2003, the band reformed for a blitz of weekend recording that resulted in the wild and wooly "Uses" album; widely regarded as a precursor to Kristin's louder, faster - and newer - trio, 50FootWave, founded the following year. Since 2004, 50FootWave has released a series of frighteningly intense mini-albums, all available for download free of charge and licensed for sharing via Creative Commons.

Kristin's solo-mostly-acoustic career spun off in 1994 and has lived in parallel to the Muses and 50FootWave. Her first solo release, *Hips and Makers* was widely acclaimed and achieved her best sales numbers to date. Of course, the fact that it included "Your Ghost" - a duet with REM's Michael Stipe - made it a bit easier for the masses to get their heads around. Since *Hips*, Kristin has released a steady stream of solid and distinctly individual solo albums. Her latest release, 2010's *Crooked*, is an entirely listener-funded recording, written and demoed in public and in full conversation with the audience meant to consume it.

Crooked was conceived in 2007, when Kristin co-founded the non-profit Coalition of Artists and Stake-Holders (CASH Music), originally for the purposes of experimenting with alternative economic models for artists. Over the past few years, CASH has not only completely funded Kristin's own output, but has also powered dozens of other artist and label projects and has grown into a widely-recognized powerhouse of technical tools that enable commerce, communication and sustainability for artists — all in the open source and free of charge.

Kristin began her writing career several years ago, while living in Portland, OR. Beginning with essays and tour diaries which she published on her own website, and as a guest blogger on Powells.com, the website of the legendary independent bookseller, the Portland-based Powell's Books, it soon became apparent that Kristin possessed as unique a voice as a writer as the one she was known for as a singer. Friends in the Portland literary scene encouraged her to begin writing in earnest, which she most certainly did. Over the next 3 years, waking at 1 or 2 in the morning and writing until dawn, Kristin pieced together a book based on her teenage diary entries from 1985 and '86, a period during which the teenage Kristin lived in her car, crashed on friend's floors and in empty apartments, unable to sleep for hearing the strange songs for which she is now known.

The book is essentially a love story. A love story absent of romance, but with plenty of passion: for the conflagration that is her songwriting process, for her beloved, quirky bandmates and for her friendship with aging movie star, Betty Hutton.

The story chronicles a descent into mental illness and the subsequent unraveling of the young woman's personality and follows her through an arduous yet inspiring recovery. We come to know the idiosyncratic heroine as unconventional yet sympathetic as we follow the rise of Throwing Muses in the early days of indie rock and Kristin's subsequent unplanned pregnancy. Alternately harrowing and hilarious, the diary entries are interspersed with impressionistic memories from Kristin's hippie childhood in the sixties and her visceral, poetic song lyrics that serve as windows into a fascinating world.

In between musical projects and writing, Kristin's also managed to raise four home-schooled sons, ages 25, 20, 15 and 9 - along with her manager, co-conspirator and husband of 21 years, Billy O'Connell. Each child began life on the road, appearing onstage in utero and living their childhoods on tour buses, in vans and backstage at festivals, theaters and rock clubs. But these kids are no rock-brats - to say they're kind, well-balanced and adaptable would be an understatement.

These days, 50FOOTWAVE has finished another Ep, the emotionally wrought, "With Love From The Men's Room" and Throwing Muses is putting the finishing touches on their own listener-funded album, clocking in at 38 songs or so, at this stage. That record should see release in late 2012.

Lots going on. It's been quite a 25 years. The teenage Hersh could never have seen it coming; so many changes, so many variations. But at its center, perhaps driving it all, is a happy and self-deprecating artist who has remained true in her passions, pure in her vision, and always unexpected.

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