

LINDA SMITH

DINA HORNREICH TALKS TO ONE OF THE FIRST LADIES OF HOME RECORDING

Linda Smith has been making music not to make a living, but simply by living. Linda isn't aspiring for stardom; but she is inspired by her own fandom. She has been influenced by the historical musical contexts she's experienced, from the Beatles and AM radio rock to the pre-riot grrl innovators of LiLiPUT, Patti Smith, The Raincoats, and Nico.

"I've been recording my own music since 1985," the 46-year old Baltimore native says. "Before that I played in various bands. [But] I don't like performing live since I've never been able to make it sound the way my recordings sound. Most of the time I do all the tracks on my recordings myself."

Her charming twist on pop music originally found an audience in the "twee" indie pop home-recorded cassette-swapping movement, fueled by K Records and *Option Magazine* in the mid to late '80s. Yet she continually manages to transcend the confines of that surprisingly male-dominated scene. (A scene that features some of indie rock's more original minds: Chris Knox, Alastair Galbraith, East River Pipe, and Stephin Merrit.)

Home recording began as a convenient means to explain her musical ideas, a practice that Linda has since turned into its own art form. She perfects a recording much like an artist perfects a painting. As Linda explains, "recording is not something I do in order to get to something else -- such as doing shows or trying to get a record contract so I can record in a 'real' studio -- it is an end in itself." Each recording is a masterpiece in its own right.

Linda takes steps to avoid maintaining a public image such as those created for some schmaltzy public relations campaign. In fact, she avoids being boxed-in to any niche simply because she stands out on her own. "I don't want to be seen as the women's home recorder even though most of the home-recording musicians are

men. [Simply] because we haven't evolved to the point where women are doing it. Even the indie people don't! It's like, 'C'mon girls! You can take a lot into your own hands without being attached to some boyfriend or producer.' You just don't have to, but women still do."

From the bottom up, Linda owns her music. Her musical style is distinctly



hers. It is an acquired taste for its off-kilter patterns of pop melodies. It is the result of her idiosyncratic process of creating, of laying down tracks, which resembles the personality in traditional women's crafts such as knitting and quilting. She carefully weaves together the fabric of her music -- each component is a sonic pattern -- as she assembles her songs. And the resultant sound is simplicity at its finest, with her particular guitar melodies laid down next to eccentric percussive patterns or soft, comfortable vocals.

Her recordings resist the kinds of categorical labels that we tend to want to fit her into. It is this approach that allows her to slip past the assorted musical labels that muddy the waters of pop/rock music. And it is this unusual approach that shapes her sound. As Linda explains, "I know I tend to do things in a reverse order anyway. I tend to do things the harder way and in a way that may be why [my music] has [that] particular uniqueness [to it]."

Often musical genres seem to dictate the kind of audience one envisions, or the kind of sound an artist

wants to achieve, when creating. Especially with women, who get pigeonholed even more easily simply because they happen to be doing it. "One thing I've always resisted is being labeled a lesbian musician," Linda says. "That has a definite connotation to it. And it is not something that I feel has anything to do with whether the music is good or interesting. And it puts you in a certain category that I don't want to be in! I don't like a lot of so-called womyn's music. I never have. So that's the problem I have with the labeling thing. [What happens] if they can't put you in the bigger consciousness -- whatever that is? It's like you don't exist."

As she wishes to regain ownership over her songs, Linda has recently decided to avoid the record label game altogether -- even the indie one! Instead, she uses the network established by

www.homemademusic.com. The site allows artists to distribute their music for themselves -- a practice that has been dictated by record labels and their network of contacts -- by providing artists with a specified number of CD-R copies of their work on demand.

This is a new freedom that Linda is learning to enjoy. "While I do appreciate the distribution provided by the small labels -- and working with other small labels in the future is still a possibility -- I've mostly been frustrated by sometimes not being able to get copies for myself. After the initial 1,000 or so are made and distributed, I can't get anymore! It is my hope to one day have small quantities of each of my albums made by a CD manufacturer and sell them myself, but until then it is good to have some kind of presence on the Internet [at] [Homemade Music](http://HomemadeMusic.com)."

Linda Smith has just completed a new recording called "Something New!" and it is put out through [Homemade Music](http://HomemadeMusic.com), on her own recording imprint, "Preference." For more information, visit www.homemademusic.com or you can contact Linda directly at misssmith@att.net.