

lifeblood

the unofficial go-head journal

december 7, 1993

issue #20

LOOKING BACK: PART TWO

With Emily and Amy still in the studio, this issue picks up Indigo history where the last left off, in May of 1989. I want to thank everybody for their positive response to the last issue, it's nice to give some of these articles and press releases a chance to see the light of day.

With Christmas just two and a half weeks away, this will be the last issue of Lifeblood for 1993. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody for their help and support in keeping this publication alive and growing. Each month it not only goes out to Go-heads across the United States, but also to Go-heads in Canada, England, Germany, and Russia.

I hope you and your loved ones have a safe and happy holiday season, and 1994 is a year of happiness for you. Take care and be well -

CAROL ❖

From Rolling Stone, May 4, 1989:



★ ★ ★

INDIGO GIRLS

Epic

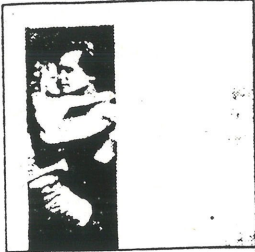
AMY RAY AND EMILY SALIERS ARE ideal duet partners. Their voices soar and swoop as one, alternately raucous and soothing, and when they sing together, they radiate a sense of shared purpose that adds muscle to their lanky, deeply felt folk-tinged pop songs. These ten tunes, framed by the acoustic guitars of the two Georgian women, make a worthy major-label debut.

Not that they haven't already been noticed by many fellow performers. The all-stars that support them on this album handle the songs as if they were wearing gloves, careful not to make any unnecessary changes. Fellow up-and-comers Hothouse Flowers help them subtly nail down a pair of songs, Michael Stipe offers up a few vocal lines on "Kid Fears," and all of the members of R.E.M. push the pair through the midtempo jangles of "Tried to Be True."

But Ray and Saliers must learn to let their songs relax more. Because they mean each song to be "serious," they feel compelled to drop lifeless "meaningful" lines, like "Darkness has a hunger that's insatiable" (from "Closer to Fine"), that frequently undermine the power of their delivery. The Indigo Girls are a young, promising duo that could grow into something even more special if they don't think maturity has to be somber. — JIMMY GUTERMAN

From The Toronto Metropolis, May 25, 1989:

NEW RELEASES



JOHN COUGAR MELLENCAMP
Big Daddy
(Mercury/PolyGram)

FEATURE LP



ANNETTE DUCHARME
Blue Girl
(Capitol)



SIMPLE MINDS
Street Fighting Years
(Virgin/A&M)



INDIGO GIRLS
Indigo Girls
(Epic/CBS)

Bill Reynolds

Great artists toil in obscurity for years, then record a brilliant first LP, then slowly fade. Their entire lives are boiled down to that first piece of work. Repeating the performance is tough. JCM does just the opposite. He used to really stink! Now he and his truly great band are unstoppable. *Big Daddy* is even more rootsy than its predecessor, but it's as good as it gets — a mature and personal, self-deprecatingly honest document of the man's political catharsis, and a symbol of awareness held up to a nation in obvious decline. Is Kenny Aronoff not the Charlie Watts of the '80s?

Reed Forster

How do you follow a smash hit record? One of two ways: clone the former product or break out with something different. Mellencamp chooses the safe route and delivers *Big Daddy*, which closely mimics the successes of *Lonesome Jubilee*. Mellencamp removed his teen-star status as John Cougar when he re-adopted his given name, but you can't help feel he may have donned a new disguise, that of a symbol of national conscience. Somehow the politics seem insincere and the energy artificially high.

Kevin Byrne

Some decent rock-out potential here even if it does repeat much of the style and production of *The Lonesome Jubilee*. Songs like "Theo and Weird Henry" and the R&B soaked "Pop Singer" reflect, once again, Mellencamp's knack for melody and catchy songwriting. His now familiar approach wears slightly over the course of the record, but it is the band playing with force and dexterity who carry Mellencamp where he fails to stretch out.

She's been produced by one of the UK's finest, Mike Howlett, and her music has been placed in the capable hands of Tom Cochrane's right-hand men, but this stuff is for the most part precious syrup. There are exceptions, like "No Such Thing," but the blatant veneer of ultra-commercialism hides originality.

The title track is a winning soft pop song, but the rest is too innocuous. Duschene is scrambling for an identity on this LP, sounding at times like a poor imitation of a Pat Benatar, or a Tiffany. A hint of future AM potential, but needs focusing.

An arduous and relentlessly punishing listening experience. Inspid, spineless gushing from a girl pushing for mall-rock status. Particularly abysmal is "I Will Remain". Her bio sheet states that she spent some time touring as keyboard player with John Lee Hooker. The mind becomes unhinged.

Maybe it's because Jim Kerr's been listening to, and not understanding, Van Morrison's records. Maybe it's his politically correct views. Maybe it's his age. Whatever, this half-baked panorama reduces the band to a New Age shadow of their former selves. What happened to "I Travel", "Love Song", etc.?

Simple Minds' bland offering dilutes their effort to the point where it has no flavour at all. Songs drone on, sticking to each other by their sameness until they all blur together. A whole unlistenable album.

Street Fighting Years marks the emergence of Simple Minds as arbiters of social consciousness (purported by Virgin to be a "brave move"?). More of the same pompous overblown production, coupled with shallow songwriting buried in a swamp of crappy synth preambles. Should sell billions.

This Athens, GA female duo is good to a fault. Too much clever harmonizing and wickedly intense adult pop/rock song structuring can be harmful, but their innately sublime melodicism saves the day, even with overkill on the lyricism and metaphor. The high-priced (REM & Hothouse Flowers) help doesn't hurt either.

The two voices blend together to form a smooth harmony. Overly dramatic production drive home aggressively written lyrics of painfully soulful personal insights that tend towards melodrama. An honest folkie feel fueled by strummin' acoustic guitars that rekindles a '60s spirit.

Sensitive singer-songwriter stuff which flows effortlessly and draws out the essence of the emotions that are expressed. The compositions are imaginative, combining breathy vocals, not unlike Tracey Thorn, with acoustic sounds altogether thick and resonating.

This week's guest reviewer is Kevin Byrne, guitarist/vocalist for Heimlich Maneuver.

From YM, June/July 1989:

INDIGO GIRLS

There is something about the Indigo Girls that makes you think they've always been together. That's practically true. Friends since the sixth grade back in Decatur, GA, Emily Saliers, 24, and Amy Ray, 23, have brought the freshest brew to coffee-house music since '60s singer Joni Mitchell.

And they've done it together. The Indigo Girls have created lyrics and harmonies as intimate to the listener as they are to each other. Their self-titled debut album on Epic Records already has critics buzzing and record store registers ringing. REM was so impressed with the dynamic duo that they asked them to open one leg of the shows on their spring tour.

But while they've always been lumped together, they couldn't be more different. Even when they both wound

up at Emory University in Atlanta, red-haired, blue-eyed Saliers would be tucked behind a book, while dark, brown-eyed Ray could be found hanging up posters announcing their gigs.

Their influences are so different, they probably couldn't even be heard on the same radio station. While Ray leans to the Stones, Patti Smith, and the Replacements, Saliers' collection includes 13 Joni Mitchell albums.

At one time Saliers wanted to be a teacher. But now that she's an Indigo Girl, there's no looking back.

"I can't think of doing anything else, at least not in my younger years," she says.

Judging by the sales of their first album, Saliers shouldn't have to worry about career counseling.

Jonathan Gross has had a thing for southern girls ever since he saw Holly Hunter in Broadcast News.

From The Boston Herald, June 7, 1989:

Indigo Girls' music takes off with help from friends

By JULIE ROMANDETTA

NOT many unknown bands can attract R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe and members of Hothouse Flowers to perform on its major label debut.

But Indigo Girls, a little ol' duo from Georgia, did just that.

The Girls — Atlanta natives Amy Ray and Emily Saliers — are making some big noise on the charts thanks to some help from their famous friends.

The Indigo Girls' eponymous release, their second full-length effort and first for Epic Records, is a mix of acoustic rock, country and folk that is quietly firing a niche on the pop charts.

While its album steadily climbs up the charts, the band has quickly become an in-demand live attraction, winning

opening slots for R.E.M. and the Violent Femmes. After a solo tour, which pulled into T.T. the Bear's in April, the duo returns Friday as the opener for Neil Young in the first half of the Great Woods Folk Festival.

Ray and Saliers, longtime school friends who began writing and performing together while at Emory University, had been working the Atlanta club circuit for seven years when a friend passed a tape along to a CBS label representative. The Girls' mix of intelligent, probing lyrics and acoustic pop/folk won them a contract with Epic, a CBS subsidiary.

During the recording sessions, the Girls called on their friends to work on some songs. The R.E.M. connection is an easy one: Georgia.

"It's a very close-knit community," Ray says of the music scene down south. "Michael Stipe came to hear us one night at the Uptown Lounge in Athens and really liked us. He said he wanted us to write a song with him for PETA (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals), so we did it."

Indigo Girls' friendship with Stipe paid a big dividend when he showed up for backing vocal duties on "Kid Fears." Stipe's R.E.M. bandmates — Bill Berry, Mike Mills and Peter Buck — lend instrumental support on two tracks.

"(R.E.M.) likes to play on other people's records, so it was

no big deal to ask them," Ray says simply.

It was also no big deal to ask Hothouse Flowers to sit in on a few numbers. Ray and Saliers became friends with the Irish group after opening for the band in New York.

"When they came down through Atlanta, we hung out and got to be friends," Ray says. "We had a couple songs that we thought we might like them to play on just for fun. They were in Los Angeles while we were there in the studio and they came in on their day off and put some tracks down."

Hothouse Flowers — which adds a Celtic feel to the Girls'

current hit "Closer to Fine" — showed up again in Atlanta for the filming of the video.

After their dates with Neil Young, the Girls go back on the road for more solo dates in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Japan. Although touring will keep them busy until the end of the year, Ray says she and Saliers are already working on material for the next album.

"We have a bunch of songs written," she says. "We go on the road for 10 days and have all this stuff running around in our heads and then we go home and write."

"This is all happening a little fast. We want to take our time and enjoy it."

Indigo Girls take serious beyond limits

By BOB KEYES
Argus Leader Staff

If the rest of the Indigo Girls' self-titled album matched its opening track, *Closer to Fine*, the duo might well be sitting atop the pop music world right now.

It doesn't, though, and our first impressions are of a talented folk and rock band who border on being pretentious.

"The best thing you've ever done for me/Is to help me take my life less seriously, it's only life after all," sings Emily Saliers on *Closer to Fine*.

But instead of heeding the advice, Saliers and Amy Ray spend the rest of the album delving into a vague, philosophical and religious search for answers to some of life's most perplexing questions.

Perhaps the band is taking itself a little too seriously.

More often than not, the muddled and cryptic lyrics get in the way of the Indigo Girls' soothing vocals and crisp guitar work.

Center Stage offers perhaps the best example of the murky writing: "Laughing in a crown of jewels/numbness from a sceptor's wound/Toss and Turn, I spin and learn 'catch yourself before you burn.'"

REVIEW

Say what?

There seems to be some sort of revival among the up-and-coming bands of the '90s to pose difficult and meaningful questions. Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians have done it, and so do the Indigo Girls.

And that's good.

They deserve credit for tackling weighty issues. The criticism here lies in the Indigo Girls' inability to do it without sounding pretentious.

Dylan can get away with invoking thoughts of Verlaine and Rimbaud in his music. But when Saliers and Ray do the same with Rasputin, one has cause to pause.

Given those drawbacks, the Indigo Girls nonetheless have put together an entertaining record full of uplifting harmonies and textured acoustic guitar interplay.

Both women sing with conviction.

On *Closer to Fine*, for example, you can sense the joy of resurrection in Saliers' voice when she brings the song to its triumphant peak on the final verse, singing, "We go to the bible, we go through the workout/We read up on revival and we stand up for the look-out/There's more than one answer to these questions pointing me in a crooked line/The less I seek my source for some definitive/The closer I am to fine."

Religion is a recurring theme. Ray's *Secure Yourself* urges us to hold fast to heaven, and *Prince of Darkness* bemoans the destructive influences of society.

R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe sings background vocals on *Kid Fears*, and the entire R.E.M. crew adds punch to *Tried to be True*.

Scott Litt, who produced R.E.M.'s *Document* and *Green*, handles production detail on this album, and does well in bringing out the women's strong vocals and guitars.

If only he could help them define their writing.

From an Epic press release in England, June 19,1989:

INDIGO GIRLS

NEW SINGLE: CLOSER TO FINE

RELEASED: 19th JUNE 1989

- * Atlanta based singer/songwriter/guitarists Amy Ray and Emily Saliers are collectively known as the Indigo Girls.
- * Amy Ray and Emily Saliers first met as sixth-graders in Decatur, Georgia, the twosome took their first stab at recording in 1985.
- * In 1987, The Indigo Girls made their first album STRANGE FIRE released on the duo's homespun Indigo label.
- * Recording their Epic debut with producer Scott Litt at Los Angeles historic "Ocean Way Studio".
- * Their self-titled Epic LP Indigo Girls is due for release on the 3rd July.
- * Indigo Girls features contributions from an impressive supporting cast fellow Georgians REM. Hothouse Flower provide subtle backup on "Closer to Fine". Also featured is guitarist John Heare.
- * Amy Ray and Emily Saliers possess a unique musical vision as well as the talent to bring that vision to life.
- * For further information contact:-

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Portrait



From Music Connection, June 26, 1989:

Indigo Girls

The Roxy
West Hollywood

Never mind that their live debut became one of the most tensely anticipated this season. Indigo Girls Amy Ray and Emily Saliers took The Roxy stage as two down-home though nervous-looking naturals, not entirely sure what was expected of them or what to expect from the hungry crowd. So, when in doubt, just be brilliant.

From their opening number, "Closer To Fine," the Indigo's hypnotic arrangements and edgily perfect harmonies had the audience not only on their side, but one step from awe. By the time electrical problems cut the Monday night show in half (after sending a charge or two through Ray), the Indigos had made their stunning first impression and it was obvious that all in attendance would accept Saliers' invitation to return the following night.

The first half of the show lost nothing the second time around on Tuesday. Saliers and Ray, in a good-natured attempt to put the electrocution incident behind them, blazed through two separate solo tunes and then returned with a shopping bag full of joy-buzzers to give as gifts commemorating the previous night's mishap. Ray's solo song, "Blood And Fire," was an emotion-packed opus that certainly seemed to bring tears to Ray's eyes, if not every pair in the house. Saliers chose a quieter delicacy with the touching, "Girl With The Weight Of The World In Her Hands." The duo then proceeded through most of their current self-titled Epic release, each song presenting a new level of sincerity and vocal/guitar artistry. When the set arrived at "Kid Fears," Melissa Etheridge showed up to sing backing vocals on the song and stayed on for a three-acoustic guitar blues jam.

The Indigo Girls could've left a satisfied crowd at any point during the last half hour of the set, but stayed on long enough to rip through a cover of "All Along The Watchtower" for which Saliers had been saving her best guitar solo of the evening, plus an a capella rendition of Paul Simon's "American Tune."

Watching these two earthy, self-effacing souls pull off the ultimate showcase gig with total aplomb was almost like watching history in the making. —Kenneth B. Giles III

From Stereo Review, July 1989:

INDIGO GIRLS. Amy Ray, Emily Saliers (vocals, acoustic guitars); vocal and instrumental accompaniment. *Closer to Fine*; *Secure Yourself*; *Kid Fears*; *Prince of Darkness*; *Blood and Fire*; and five others. EPIC FE 45044, © FET 45044, © EK 45044 (44 min).

Performance: *Unrestrained*
Recording: *Good*

The two women of Indigo Girls, Amy Ray and Emily Saliers, make music with great passion. I imagine them standing upright, lifting their chins, and singing to the rafters, strumming mightily at their acoustic guitars all the while. Their husky altos threaten to shatter our feeble resistance as they belt out strong words and stronger feelings. This is red-blooded folk music with no holds barred.

Ray and Saliers are Romantic romantics, and their solipsistic lyrics are "poetic" in a variety of ways. Saliers stitches metaphors together in *Closer to Fine* when she writes, "I wrap my fear around me like a blanket/I sailed my ship of safety till I sank it." *Secure Yourself*, written by Ray, is a clot of disparate images: "In the ink of an eye I saw you bleed/through the thunder I could hear you scream/solid to the air I breathe/open-eyed and fast asleep." And Ray's *Blood and Fire* boils longing down to its brutal essence with a verse that repeats, four times, "I am intense, I am in need, I am in pain, I am in love."

Producer Scott Litt knew enough to get out of the way of Indigo Girls. The accompaniment is dominated by the duo's pounding guitar work, augmented by occasional rock touches. Members of Hothouse Flowers and R.E.M. provide support, but without obscuring the two headstrong lead voices. Recommended. *R.G.*

From The Atlanta Journal, July 1989:

Indigo Girls Glad for Respite From Road

"We're just a couple of local girls with guitars — the same ol' goofy people we've always been," Emily Saliers says, trying to make it appear she's about to get into a huff after being asked how she and Amy Ray, the other half of Indigo Girls, feel about apparently being en route to fame and fortune.

"We certainly don't feel rich and famous," she says, pointedly adding, "I know for a fact we're not rich, and I don't think we're famous at all."

But the truth is that Ms. Saliers is speaking from Brussels, Belgium, last stop for the Indigo Girls before flying home to play for capacity crowds of about 900 twice Saturday and once Sunday at the Roxy in Backhead. (Some tickets will be available at the door for shows at 11:30 p.m. Saturday and 8 p.m. Sunday, \$11.50, 233-8205).

They have been in Belgium — and four other European countries — for two weeks during a promotional tour. It has basically been a series of showcase performances for the media and record company personnel, although the two vocalists and guitarists did open a ticketed concert for Mojo Nixon in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and they ducked into a few British pubs to sing and play.

While they were building good will and perhaps some recognition in Europe, their eponymous debut album was moving up to No. 46 on this week's Billboard pop chart and its sales were passing the 600,000 mark, according to a spokesman for Epic Records. However, Ms. Saliers seems more pleased by the response to their hometown concerts.

"It's unbelievable that so many people have bought tickets for our shows," she says, adding that while sales may indicate they could have successfully played the 1,800-seat Fox Theatre, they are happier at the Roxy.

Their acoustic pop-folk show has changed very little since they performed twice in The Omni in April during a series of arena dates with R.E.M. "We haven't had much time to work up any new things, but we'll see what we can sneak in for Atlanta," Ms. Saliers says. "Amy has been writing some things, but I like to come home to write, and I can't wait to get home."

The highlights of their trip abroad — their second since signing with Epic — included playing at Ronnie Scott's jazz club in London and being joined onstage in Amsterdam by hard-rocking guitarist-vocalist Melissa Etheridge. "We had met her when she was playing in Atlanta and she'd played with us once before [at the Roxy in Los Angeles]," Ms. Saliers says. "To have her come up and play with us was, well, we're just starting to meet people in the music business and that means a lot to us."

From Time, July 17, 1989:

INDIGO GIRLS: INDIGO GIRLS
(Epic). *Love's Recovery* and *Land of Canaan* are the winners here, in an album full of saline nouveau folk songs sung by two gifted writer-performers. The Indigos have their roots in the up-front message music of the early '60s and the more abstruse lyrical digressions of the Georgia rock band REM; it's an intriguing combination and one that merits nurturing.

From People, July 24, 1989:

THE INDIGO GIRLS' MOOD ISN'T BLUE; THEY'VE GOT A NEW ALBUM AND THEIR VERY OWN TOUR

LOOKOUT A GUIDE TO THE UP-AND-COMING

In their younger days, neither Amy Ray nor Emily Saliers looked like a sure bet for pop stardom. True, they both took up music early. "When I was 13, I performed at my grandmother's boss's cocktail party," says Ray, 25. "But then Grandma wrote to *Hee Haw* to ask if I could be on the show, and they never wrote back. She was bummed."

"I started writing songs when I was 9," says Saliers, 26. "I wanted to be a big star—but my songs made no sense."

Luckily, Ray and Saliers got together. Today they're the Indigo Girls, and their major-label debut album, *Indigo Girls*, seems bound for the Top 40. Their distinctive, updated folk sound—"Peter, Paul and Mary, the New Seekers and an acoustic Jefferson Airplane all rolled into one," as one critic put it—has won them

high-profile fans like R.E.M. and Hot-house Flowers, both of whom helped out on the LP. A video of the first single, "Closer to Fine," an earnest song about the search for personal fulfillment, plays regularly on MTV, and the Girls are currently on their first solo U.S. tour.

It's all a far cry from Shamrock High School in Decatur, Ga., where Amy, daughter of a radiologist and a housewife, and Emily, daughter of a theology professor and a librarian, became friends. They had met years earlier, "but we didn't hang out," says Emily. "We had this unspoken competition because we both played guitar." In high school they strummed and sang as a duo, but it wasn't until they moved on to Emory University in Atlanta, where Amy was a religion major and Emily studied English, that they hit the lo-

cal club circuit and decided to go pro. Their name was a whim of Amy's. "I found it in the dictionary," she says. "It's a deep blue, a root—real earthy." In 1987, after putting out an album called *Strange Fire* on their own label, they landed a contract with Epic Records.

These days Amy lives in an Atlanta apartment, Emily in a house she owns nearby. "Amy listens to rock and roll and alternative bands," says Emily. "I like Joni Mitchell, Joni Mitchell and Joni Mitchell. She's a genius."

Someday aspiring folkies may be saying the same about the Indigo Girls, though not everyone is convinced—yet. "My parents have been very supportive," says Emily. "But my dad still says, 'When this short-lived career is over and you go back to grad school . . .'" □

From The Toronto Metropolis, July 27, 1989:

LIVE AROUND TOWN: The door has been opened and it seems there's no stopping them now. Armed with acoustic guitars and spiritual finesse, Chapman, Vega and Shocked burst open the obtuse lock that had been confining urgent "intelligent women" music to the local scenes. It is through this opening that **Indigo Girls**, who are on the same bill with another promising folk act, **Show of Hands**, Thurs. July 27 at the **Rivoli**, have stepped out, proving themselves quite worthy of the distinction.

The Atlanta-based Indigo Girls' (Amy Ray and Emily Saliers) complex, harmony-filled melodies soothe as much as they kick you in the butt. They are a band with something to say. Ray, weened on a diet of the **Replacements** is self-admittedly the starker side of the duo, supplying the edge that complements Saliers' introspective, tender vocals and lyrics.

"There is anger in my songs," says Ray. "I have a lot of anger. Some of it is weird deep-rooted psychological things that you're not aware of, I guess. I think it's from wanting the world to be a perfect place."

Amy and Emily first met in sixth grade and began playing for fun in high school. Their first recording was a self-released single while attending university. In 1987, they put together their first LP, *Strange Fire*, on their own Indigo label. Then the big time beckoned and



Indigo Girls: a band with something to say. their self-titled major label debut on Epic was released this past spring. The album, which features some help from friends **Hothouse Flowers** and "neighbours" **REM**, has been a surprise success, making solid inroads onto the *Billboard* charts.

While Ray understands the categorization of female musicians as point of reference, she believes it is unjust, adding that the trend is more the result of the resurgence of the singer-songwriter and the greater importance placed on lyrics. "Michelle Shocked and Tracy Chapman are very different. You wouldn't say that Bon Jovi and REM are the same just because they're male bands. We get our inspiration from two women in Atlanta who are like Bonnie Raitt and Joan Armatrading. They've been around for like 10 years and never signed. I guess it's like that in every town."

Indigo Girls music is not overtly political, but political on a personal level with self-awareness the main tenet. "Our message subconsciously, I think, is self-esteem. A lot of problems are caused by people feeling insecure and paranoid which is often the cause of sexism, racism and so on. Kids have to believe in themselves and love themselves." The Rivoli, 334 Queen W., 596-1908. July 27.

From Spin, August 1989:

Bally's Grand is one of the ritziest casinos in Atlantic City, and its outdoor Grandstand books the biggest, Atlantic City's talent: Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Liza Minelli. Tonight, though, the Bally's banner flies above the heads of one of the sincerest of all Sincere New American bands, Atlanta's Indigo Girls. "We're gonna play the slots later," announces Girl Emily Saliers with barely suppressed glee. She and her best friend Amy Ray strike up the acoustic guitars which are their only stage props and spring into "Closer To Find," a darkly moralistic tale about self-discovery and inner truth. Not your normal dish of salt water taffy, these Girls. The crowd loves them.

Saliers, with frilly strawberry blond hair and belted blue jeans, looks like the archetypal Southern collegian; you know she's got good manners, if only by the way she stands up straight behind her microphone. Ray, with a Hüsker Dü T-shirt and a rogue's gallery of rag bracelets on her left arm, is a study in unruliness. She storms across the stage like no one ever told her acoustic guitars aren't "axes." The single orange spotlight silhouetting her frame makes her head look like it's on fire.

Offstage, Ray quotes Paul Westerberg and Walt Whitman in rapid succession, while Saliers seems perfectly at ease expounding upon the Biblical imagery in her songs. The pair have a little joke between them about why their contrasts work together as a whole:

Saliers: With your talent and your good looks, we can't go wrong.

Ray: Sonny, with your intellectual knowledge of the world, we can't go wrong.

Indigo Girls is Epic Records' fastest-selling album. The record company picked up the duo after a single, an EP, and an LP on the Girls' own Indigo label, and proudly flaunts their statistics: Gold with virtually no radio play; growing steadily by virtue of word of mouth and the "Closer To Fine" video on MTV. And it hasn't hurt to have friends in the right places. Long-time associates R.E.M. invited the Girls to open a leg of their recent American tour, including the Madison Square Garden stop; R.E.M. and Hothouse Flowers both appear on *Indigo Girls*, an emotionally articulate, stunning work produced with subtlety and dynamic discretion by Scott Litt.

Saliers: We met Michael Stipe at the Uptown Lounge in Athens in the spring of 1988. Amy asked him to listen to us—she had written "Kid Fears" somewhat with his voice in mind—and he liked us. So we started hanging out with him, and he's a great guy. He's a little eccentric, but we all are in our own ways.

Ray: Scott Litt's a master. I mean, *drums*? We don't know anything about drums. We were like, "Scott, you do it." And then with electric guitars, we were trying to figure out what tone we liked the best. I was like, "Well, what about the tone Slash gets?" Scott gave us direction, he just wasn't heavy-handed.

Saliers: We plan to always have our songs be the focus, and the acoustic guitars and vocals right out front.

Those voices and the way they work together—harmonizing, sliding and crisscrossing in complex patterns and rounds—are Indigo Girls' greatest strength, an asset they exploit by using almost no vocal overdubs on their records. Unlike most current folk-rock, Indigo Girls' roots go deeper than the Byrds, way down into the early ashes of folk's fire and groups like the Kingston Trio, with a heady dose of church-choir upbringing thrown in.

By the time they started playing together in high school, they'd already put in time with family singing groups. Saliers—who'd sung with her sisters (Roches comparisons end there)—always had a knack for figuring out harmonies. Ray's sister—who's a doctor now, but studied opera then—introduced her to the guitar. (Saliers took her first guitar lesson at the local YMCA when she was 9.) The first place they played was a grungy Atlanta bar called Good Ol' Days on open mike night. "We were underage, we really weren't supposed to be there," says Saliers. "It was a rowdy, beer-drinking place."

"It's a meat market," says Ray.

When Saliers went off to college at Tulane, Ray went to Vanderbilt. The whole time they were apart, they continued to play; they'd see each other on weekends or during the summer, when Saliers wasn't a counselor at camp. "That was a big point of contention, me being gone every summer," says Saliers.

"I had to play solo. When she came home, I was a star," says Ray.

Eventually, they both transferred back to Emory at the same time. By early '85, they were calling themselves Indigo Girls and started playing more rock-type clubs.

"I was scared of being called 'folk,'" says Ray, "because I didn't want us to be classed with that era of folk-pop, like James Taylor, who is, I think, a really great songwriter. We had to know that we could play a rock club and be accepted. I was listening to a lot of underground bands, thinking, 'I want to be rock 'n' roll, I want to be Billy Bragg.'"

"Her style changed drastically," says Saliers.

"Then we became Bob Dylan fanatics," Ray continues, "and it became important again to recognize that we were folk players."

Saliers' "Closer to Fine," which opens *Indigo Girls*, contains enough allegorical images—posters of Rasputin, doctors of philosophy, higher minds and beards down to knees—to place it firmly in the Dylan songbook but for the most part their imagery remains self-consciously simple, universal, purposefully non-narrative. Both Saliers and Ray dip freely into the Bible (Saliers' father is a minister and theology professor at Emory, and Ray majored in religion), although their songs adopt its language more than its message.

Saliers: We both grew up with religion, and when you're exposed to the Bible over a long period of time you have the language in your head. When you're writing songs that are very personal, and you have spirituality as a very important part of yourself, you can't help but bring that out in the song.

Ray: Some people might say—a fundamentalist Christian probably wouldn't, but somebody might—that we're preaching-our-own-message type thing. We do have a message, but not in that sense. Our music has saved us. Like I've had points in my life when I felt like I didn't want to live, and I was in self-destructive mode, and Emily's music, or singing a song myself, might have helped me.

Saliers: We write about personal experiences, but we know they're oftentimes universal. "Love's Recovery" is a personal song, because a lot of my friends were going through troubles at the time. All the songs on this album are personal.

Ray: But they become a lot more than that by the time we finish writing. "Kid Fears" is about the difficulty of growing up, getting into a world where people know where your hiding places are and what your secrets are. In the third verse, when I say, "Skipping stones/We know the price now," that's specifically about the music industry. I used the image of skipping stones because the flatter and smoother the stone is, the better it skips, and the more spin you put on it the farther it goes. When I say smooth, I'm talking about being polished and dressing right. "We know the price now/Any sin will do"—there's a lot of things you can do to get further in the industry, and a lot of them, to me, are sins, because they're compromises. I stick to principles too much. I have a real short temper and tend to be outspoken. It's like, one person who says something like, "Oh, when the paychecks start rolling in, you'll change your mind about that," can make you say, "Well fuck you, because I'm never going to change, I'm always going to feel this way and I know I am." You have to be really strong, and remember that you're getting to play and that's really what you want to do.

Saliers: We love to play.

Ray: Playing's not really work. Taking showers, putting makeup on—that's work. ☺

From The Boston Globe, August 3, 1989:

Indigo Girls find perfect harmony

By Jim Sullivan
Globe Staff

A lot of magical things have happened recently to Indigo Girls, an unpretentious, non-glamorous,

MUSIC REVIEW

engaging acoustically based female duo from Atlanta. Why has everything been falling into place for Amy Ray and Emily Saliers?

Well, there's the R.E.M. connection. Indigo Girls - childhood pals, former singer-songwriter-guitarist rivals, and a team for eight years - benefited from a tour with R.E.M., and singer Michael Stipe joined them in concert and on their eponymous major-label debut LP. There's the path paved by Tracy Chapman - the notion that personal, penetrating folk-based pop can be part of the mainstream. And there's the complex beauty - harmonic, melodic, lyrical - of Indigo Girls' first single, and the concert kickoff at the Paradise Tuesday, "Closer to Fine."

But, still, it is a trifle odd to watch acoustic artists enjoy such acclaim . . . unless, of course, you're thinking way back to Bob Dylan days. And, near the end of their 100-minute set, the Girls did remind us of those days with a brilliant encore of "All Along the Watchtower." Dylan's line about those who think "life is but a joke" also circled back to a poignant aside near the start of "Closer to Fine," an introspective, spiritual quest in its own right.

The sellout crowd greeted Ray and Saliers with very un-folklike whoops and hollers. You couldn't help thinking a decade back to the Roches - a female trio Saliers says she loves - and their heady artistic successes, harmonic happenings and folk-pop crossover. At any rate, Indigo Girls are in the spotlight now, and they're wearing it well. Unaffected by hoopla, they're committed to communication; able to travel dark alleys in song and emerge with an uplifting, spiritual message. Where does it come from? "I hate to sound trite, but from the heart," said Saliers:

Their covers included George Gershwin's "Summertime" and a moving, a capella rendition of

INDIGO GIRLS - In concert at the Paradise Theater, Tuesday night.

Paul Simon's "American Tune," which, not for the first time, brought thoughts of Simon & Garfunkel. Darkness in some songs, redemption in others - the two often intertwined and imbued with soaring harmonies.

Indigo Girls strike a lot of proper chords, figuratively and literally. Personalized songs such as "Prince of Darkness" attain universality; acoustic guitars mesh and achieve a chiming, full-bodied resonance; cross-cutting vocals - lead, backup and harmony - cast a mesmerizing spell. Christian references are scattered throughout; near the end, Ray made them clearer when she talked about our role vis-a-vis a higher power - "not so much reaching up as reaching in."

Anger occasionally found a home amid the reason. Each Girl had a solo spot, but neither dominated; the best stuff was done together. These folks work as a team, and a loose enough team to even turn a bit of the set over to old friend and current Bostonian singer-guitarist Gerard McHugh. A friendly, passionate performance.

Why Indigo Girls and not Indigo Women? "It sounds better," said Ray. "'Women' sounds sort of lofty." She also likes the alliteration. What about Indigo? "We needed a name and went through the dictionary."

From The New York Post, August 3, 1989:

COLOR THEM INDIGO

Hot-selling pop duo hits Town Hall tonight

By LISA ROBINSON

ONE of them can fall asleep only in total silence, but she writes songs best in the midst of road chaos. The other can sleep in noise but needs absolute calm to write her songs. They're Amy Ray and Emily Salliers, collectively known as Indigo Girls, and when they step on stage at Town Hall tonight for their big headline show it is with the backing of an intensely devoted fan following that bought close to 400,000 copies of their self-titled debut album and made them this year's delightful surprise success story.

Considered by many rock critics to be the female Simon and Garfunkel of the '80s, Ray and Salliers play acoustic guitars and sing extraordinary harmonies, and yet, perhaps because of these two perfectly acceptable facts, they are considered unique.

"I can't think of another group right now that has that same kind of combination," said Salliers, talking this week in the conference room of Epic Records. "My style is softer, more mellow, and Amy's is rock, and we play acoustic guitars really hard. Also, we're women, but we're not singing in your normal 'female' style of acoustic music. Normally the style of stuff that we're doing would demand a band."

"Sometimes when I hear a band," says Ray, 25, "I want to be in a band. But it passes. It is fun to sing in a band and not hold the guitar sometimes; just really bounce around all over the place. I did that one night; I kind of lost my head and just went all over the place and felt really free. Having the guitar hinders you a bit — if you move around too much, you might miss your chords."

The two knew each other in grade school in Georgia and started singing together while at Emory University.

Salliers, who was born in Connecticut, recently bought a house in Decatur, Ga., Ray's hometown, but the pressures of success are such that she probably won't move in officially until February. On the road virtually non-stop until then, with only a few days off every couple of months, they admit to feeling homesick.

"I miss my parents a lot," said Salliers, 26, "and I miss going to my church. When we do get home, it's only for a week or 10 days, and there's no time for much. Friends expect to see you, and you can't just breeze into town and not see anybody."

Adds Ray: "It's no fun to go back home if you can't see your friends. I send postcards a lot, but even though I have close friends and it's really intense, at some point along the way I learned to focus in on what I was doing because I used to get so desperate about missing people. I got tired of

feeling like that, so I stopped. All it is is a matter of security. If you're secure within your friendships and you have them in your heart you try to hold them inside of you wherever you are. I try not to have

cranky sometimes, but, says Ray: "We talk about it. We'll blow up at each other and we talk about it as soon as possible afterwards, and never hold grudges against each other."

As for their larger musical message, Salliers says: "Our personal politics are really to work from inside. To work from yourself and try to better yourself. We try to better ourselves to be more effective in the world, to make the world less alienated and to do some good work if that's possible. And our songs are really personal and we aren't afraid to talk about our struggles and to talk about how far we have to go because everybody is really in the same boat. If we can just get people to think about that a little bit — not because we're better than anybody else but because we're going through it, too — to use our music as a tool to have that community."

"Our songs are really personal and we aren't afraid to talk about our struggles."

EMILY SALLIERS

friends who don't feel the same way," she laughs.

As for the Ray-Salliers friendship, they say they get along pretty well considering that they've known each other for so long. They get tired and

From The New York Post, August 5, 1989:

Sweetness — with an edge

By ROBIN J. SCHWARTZ

SUZANNE Vega brought folk to the '80s and gave it back its heart. Tracy Chapman gave it back its soul. The Indigo Girls gave it back its ~~heart~~.

The Indigo Girls, Atlanta-based Amy Ray and Emily Saliers, have been a musical item ever since they met in sixth grade, when they raised eyebrows at each other upon discovering that both were singer/songwriter/guitarists, then buried the competitive hatchet and paired up as an acoustic duo. They gained local fame playing clubs around Emory University, where they were students, then released two independent records on their own Indigo label. Along the way, they picked up fans like Ireland's Hothouse Flowers and Georgia's R.E.M. And they are currently the proud voices behind Epic Records' fastest-selling LP, simply titled "Indigo Girls."

Ray and Saliers blend sweetness with an edge — kind of like a knife laced with honey. On Town Hall's stage Thursday night, with only a row of guitars and a black curtain

FOLK ROCK review

as a backdrop, the pair played an acoustic set that had enough spunk and fire to make Janis Joplin proud.

Ray is a cauldron. She sways and two-steps as she sings, as if all that emotion were trying to get out of her body. It does — in her voice, a throaty alto that has enough street in it to make the edges crack. Ray uses dynamics with an inborn understanding, sliding from a sandpapered howl to a breathy whisper in "Blood and Fire" and growling the title line of "Kid Fears" with such

pained ferocity that it makes your spine tingle.

Saliers' voice, by contrast, is sweeter and more plaintive, like a gentle, scented breeze that stirs the fire under the cauldron. And her guitar playing is, in a word, terrific. Between the jazzy tones of "Crazy Game," the flamenco-folk strains of "All Along the Watchtower," and the more country-tinged "Center Stage," she can hold her own in any picking contest.

Since Ray majored in religion and Saliers is the daughter of a theology professor, there's a lot of Biblical imagery in the Indigo Girls' songs. But there's nothing

preachy about them. Their show is intimate, comfortable — like friends sharing bits of learned wisdom. (In fact, the way Ray and

Saliers chatted with a crowd calling out requests and compliments, you'd think they were in a living room, not an auditorium.)

From The New York Times , August 7, 1989:

Review/Pop

2 *With Much to Tell*

Earnest pretentiousness has new standard-bearers — the Indigo Girls, Emily Saliers and Amy Ray, who performed on Thursday night at Town Hall. Their music revives the strummed acoustic guitars and close harmonies of early-1970's arty confessional songwriters, and their lyrics push obscurity and preciousness toward hyperbole.

Still the Indigo Girls are currently a success on the college circuit. Their opening song on Thursday, Ms. Saliers's "Closer to Fine," drew a cheer with a line about being "free" at graduation.

The two Indigo Girls, from Atlanta, both play acoustic guitars and sing in tremulous, breathy altos. They can harmonize to gorgeous effect; their unaccompanied version of Paul Simon's "American Tune" sounded complete with just two voices.

Each Indigo Girl has a slightly different style of pretension. Ms. Saliers

is the more verbose songwriter, capable of such phrases as "while these moments are still called today"; Ms. Ray, whose songs are a little terser, sings every line with exaggerated ardency and performs with stagy self-congratulatory gestures. It's hard to tell which one thought Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower" could be improved with the additional verses they sang on Thursday.

What draws listeners, apparently, is not just the folksy sound of the music with its warming harmonies, but also the songs' promise of a healing spirituality. The lyrics are full of biblical imagery, and when songs can be deciphered, they often allude (like U2's lyrics) to a search for something to believe in, which may or may not be Christianity. Yet atop what may be heartfelt beliefs, there's a nearly impenetrable layer of flowery bad poetry.

JON PARELES