

# lifeblood

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## "DOWN BY THE RIVER" RELEASED

Late June/early July saw the release of "99X Live X For Humanity", an Atlanta radio station benefit CD for Habitat For Humanity. The disc features one Indigo Girls cut, a live version of "Down By The River", recorded April 18, 1993 at the Cabaret Metro in Chicago during the \$10 tour. Not only is it an excellent recording of a great performance, it also features Michelle Malone (although, strangely enough, she is not mentioned in the list of performers). As if "Down By The River" is not enough, the disc also features these live performances:

Believe	Lenny Kravitz
Mmm Mmm Mmm Mmm	Crash Test Dummies
Low	Cracker
It's A Shame About Ray	Evan Dando
Idaho	Bodeans
Divine Intervention	Matthew Sweet
Waiting For The Sun	The Jayhawks
Creep	Radiohead
Felt So Cool	Adam Schmitt
Superman Song	Crash Test Dummies

The CD is available for \$10 through most Atlanta area record stores. This is a can't miss deal - a great CD at a great price for a great cause.

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## From CD Review, June 1994:

### INDIGO GIRLS

#### Swamp Ophelia

Epic EK 57621 • 1994, 51:07

Performance . ★ ★ ★ ★

Sound Quality ★ ★ ★

Amy Ray and Emily Saliers of Indigo Girls have emerged as heroines of the contemporary folk movement by baring their souls where others merely beat on their chests. At their best, they offer thoughtful ruminations on life and their place in it; at worst, they come off as angstful overachievers who sometimes mistake earnestness for depth.

But with *Swamp Ophelia*, this Atlanta duo finally has made an album that aims as high musically as it does emotionally—and more often than not, it hits the mark on both counts. Saliers and Ray have tried to flesh out their acoustic-guitar sound on such past efforts as *Nomads Indians Saints* and 1992's *Rites of Passage* but often wound up sounding fussy and ornate. On this disc, however, producer Peter Collins helps them hone dense yet unobtrusive arrangements that enhance their poignant harmonies with a multitude of textures—including horns, mandolins, African drums, and accordions, as well as Lisa Germano's violin, Chuck Leavell's piano, and harmony vocals from the Roches and Jane Siberry—all touches that are more than cosmetic. The taut blend of electric guitars and strings on the hard-rocking "Touch-Me Fall" captures Ray's feelings of overwhelming anxiety and erupts into a riveting coda, while the shimmering guitars and harmonica on the uplifting "Power of Two" evoke a fuzzy warmth that wouldn't have been out of place on an old James Taylor album.

Ray and Saliers get extra mileage out of their poetic licenses: They drop references to everything from Shakespeare to the Bible; update Woody Guthrie's "This Train Is Bound for Glory" as a haunting condemnation of discrimination ("This Train Revised"); and address the complexities of coming of age—romantically ("Least Complicated"), spiritually ("The Wood Song"), and emotionally ("Reunion")—with a head-spinning volley of metaphors like "All I've heard has been in vain like water on a stain" and "You like to stand in the line of fire just to show you can shoot straight from your hip."

But what might sound precious or preachy coming from a lesser act sounds remarkably natural coming from Ray and Saliers, who—after five years of expanding upon the folkie tradition—are developing an intriguing sound all their own.

—David Okamoto

## From Crosswinds, June 1994:

### SWAMP OPHELIA

#### *The Indigo Girls*

*Swamp Ophelia* is a well-crafted blend of the gorgeous ballads of Emily Saliers, placed against the darkly Delphic invocations of Amy Ray. Though still on the fringe of "folk" rock, there's more than a little tension here, peaking in the final "This Train (Revised)," inspired by Ray's visit to the Holocaust Museum. Acid etched lyrics drive an electric guitar and churning violins to a fevered pitch, then dissolve into the chilling tinkle of a music box at songs end.

The album's first single, "Touch Me Fall," is as close to irresistible as it gets. Beginning with an electrically trippy, post-psychedelic tempo, Ray implores, "Touch me, I'm so beautiful." Sirens scream, and we are suddenly shunted into some sublime moments of discord, followed by the full unleashing of Ophelia's all-consuming final fury.

*What to see, what  
to read & what to  
listen for this  
month*

Saliers is at her eloquent best with "Mystery," telling of an inexplicable attraction between two opposites. Jane Sibery's caterwaul nicely underscores a passionate, undefined yearning, expressed in lyrics such as, "I could go crazy on a night like tonight/when summer's beginning to give up her fight/and every thought's a possibility."

Also noteworthy is "Fugitive," Ray's look at balancing one's own needs with competing demands of love, work and privacy. Saliers addresses a similar issue in "Language or the Kiss", creative success, both seductive and terrifying. She confronts the "unforgiving choice" faced by every artist: the experience as lived vs. the one worked out in our creative lives. Elegant harmonies play against the poignancy of lyrics such as, "I used to lie like that alone out on the driveway Trying to read the Greek upon the stars, the alphabet of feeling."

Admirers of previous Indigo Girls' releases will find the inspired ballads and fluent vocal harmonies pleasingly familiar. The edgy quality, along with the paring away of some of the drippy moralism, is sure to draw some new converts. *Swamp Ophelia* is an intelligent, thoughtful, and finely articulated piece, offering few answers, but raising a number of interesting questions.

Heidi Utz

## Swamp Ophelia Indigo Girls

O.K., so the album is finally out, and most of the critics have spoken-some favorably, some not. I figured my opinion is as valid or invalid as any other, so I am exercising my outspokenness once again. Remember, it's only my opinion. So without any further delay, here is my song-by-song analysis of "Swamp Ophelia":

Fugitive: A fairly standard Amy song. I can sense Amy's frustration "caught up in the whirl and twirl of it all", giving up basic freedom for even bigger fame. It must be quite a drag not to be able to go out for beers and pool, all the while searching for a quick exit when fans intrude.

Least Complicated: Emily has the most incredible gift in creating a pop-type song with a lyrical bite. Like "Closer To Fine" and "Galileo", the tune appears to be a happy sing-along, but upon closer inspection, some pretty weighty issues appear (loss of love, skepticism regarding relationships and death of an innocent way of thinking). The penny whistle that weaves it's was in and out of the song can't disguise the self-chiding tone that Emily has used so well in the past. A sure-to-be-hit at shows.

Language Or The Kiss: More questions asked by Emily, and in this one, not a whole lot of answers. Whispering voices (the first of many on this release) intermingle with a piano that seems perfectly suited for this song. A tentative tune, a style that really seems to suit Emily's questioning demeanor.

Reunion: Since I've never been to a class reunion (my ten year was happily forgotten when I learned that the Indigo's would be playing a mere 120 miles away on that very same evening), I can only imagine how these functions work. After listening to "Reunion" a couple of times, I think I've decided to forego any remaining class reunions that come my way. "All you pretty pretenders" makes me wonder if

Amy spent any time at my high school. The picture she creates is a fairly relentless one.

Power Of Two: Probably my least favorite cut on the album, it's a cheery sentiment, with more math lessons from Emily (remember "10,000 Wars", "one and one make one"?) I'll admit it's pleasant enough, but a bit too nice for my taste. The harmonica is a cool touch, though.

Touch Me Fall: Amy's ode to the stratocaster. Electric (gulp!) guitars abound, grinding and wailing amid strains of cellos and violins, creating the Indigos most rocked-up song to date. A lofty electric guitar solo from Emily, along with Amy's crunching rhythm guitar is sure to send the die-hard acoustic fans into orbit. Personally, I think it rocks. Not for the faint of heart, or anyone who hates feedback.

The Wood Song: My favorite Emily song on this release. Maybe a few years ago, I wouldn't have felt so strongly about this song, but the lyrics come too close to home. Going through the trials of life to arrive at a better situation has never been described to me in a more profound way than through this song. It's a very passionate and moving offering from Emily, who while dealing with very similar issues that she has in the past, is taking new directions in which to express her views. Enlightening and insightful, without being too preachy.

Mystery: Emily seems to be drawing from the mystery of life on this cut. Love, death, life, choices - all the big trials of living seem to be involved. The Roches offer up some well-rounded background vocals, and it's a pretty standard approach musically. I love the line about being "in the middle of impossibility". It applies to just about anything.

Dead Man's Hill: This song gets my vote for Amy's best on "Swamp Ophelia". By blending past images with present realities, Amy creates another "similar yet different" Indigo tune. Lyrically, the words jump from the past to the present and

then back again, and the flow is surprisingly uninterrupted. An edge of guilt, along with hopelessness seems to surround the song with melancholy memories, and current dilemmas. Amazing musical arrangement; intense song!

Fare Thee Well: Emily writes and sings about one of her favorite subjects - lost love - in this quiet, sparse arrangement. With her voice and her guitar alone, Emily relates the beauty and the sadness associated with a doomed relationship. Her understated delivery is almost as powerful as the song itself. An older tune that found it's way on this album, "Fare Thee Well" is a wonderfully crafted song, both lyrically and musically. I would suggest some additional Kleenex for this one live.

This Train Revisited: Amy's penned tribute to the victims of the Holocaust. Haunting images (most likely because they are all true) dealing with Hitler's lunacy in creating "the power race" fill this song with traits the victims most likely felt - fear, confusion, entrapment, and powerlessness. The musical break even feels like a runaway train from hell on the loose, with the raging strings accented by the clickity-clacking of the percussion. Scary stuff, when all things considered, it wasn't just the Jews that were persecuted in the insanity and paranoia that surrounded WW2. A warning to anyone that values the differences in our humanity.

Overall, the reactions I have received from people I have asked have been fairly varied. "It's pretty mellow" stated a long-time Indigo friend of mine. "It's so produced!" moaned another.

I shrugged and smiled. I know for a fact that not everyone will appreciate "Swamp Ophelia" with the same enthusiasm that I fell, but that is their problem. I think overall, it's damn fine.

Karin Dalesky  
Tacoma, Washington

Indigo Girls  
 Wednesday  
 June 8, 1994  
 Cambridge, England

1	Galileo	A2	E2	A-1st E-DC 5th fret
2	3 hits	A1	E1	-
3	Woodson	A2	E2	A-DGAGBD E-
4	Reunion	A1	E1	2nd
5	Va Woolf	A2	E2	A > DC E
6	Hand Me Down	A1	E1	2nd
7	Language	A2	E2	A-5th regular E-DC
8	Centre Stage	A1	E1	A- both E's → D E - low E → D
9	Power of Two	A2	E2	A > 5th fret E
10	Left it up to Me	A1	E1	-
11	Fugitive	A1	E1	-
12	Least Comp.	A2	E2	A- 2nd E-
13	This Train	A1	Dubro	2nd EADGAE
14	Prince	A2	E2	-
15	Chicken	A1	E1	A > low E's → D
	Touch ME Fall	elec	elec.	-
	1-2-3	A1	E1	-

**Indigo Girls**  
**Thursday**  
**June 23, 1994**  
**Wolftrap, Virginia**

**Openers:**

Kristen Hall  
Lay Quiet Awhile

**Set List:**

American Tune  
Fugitive  
The Wood Song  
Welcome Me  
Galileo  
Reunion  
Mystery  
Center Stage  
Least Complicated  
Dead Man's Hill  
Power Of Two  
Land Of Canaan  
Ghost  
This Train (Revised)  
Prince Of Darkness

**Encores:**

Touch Me Fall  
Closer To Fine  
Chickenman

Sue Waldner  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania



**Indigo Girls**  
**Friday**  
**June 24, 1994**  
**Wolftrap, Virginia**

**Openers:**

Disappear Fear  
Big Fish Ensemble

**Set List:**

The Wood Song  
Fugitive  
Least Complicated  
Virginia Woolf  
World Falls  
Power Of Two  
Reunion  
Watershed  
Hand Me Downs  
Galileo  
This Train (Revised) (w/Big Fish Ensemble)  
Language Or The Kiss  
Land Of Canaan  
Summertime  
Chickenman

**Encores:**

Touch Me Fall  
On The Way To Washington (w/ Disappear Fear)  
Kid Fears  
Closer To Fine

Sue Waldner  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

# INDIGO GIRLS

With Special Guests

## KRISTEN HALL LAY QUIET AWHILE

From The Mann Music Center Program, June 25, 1994:

In less than ten years, Indigo Girls have reached dizzying heights of success with the accolades of fellow musicians, critics and fans alike. The Indigo Girls released three recordings between 1985-1987 on the Indigo label before signing with Epic Records in 1988. Their self-titled label debut album was recorded in Los Angeles with participating musicians including Peter Buck, Mike Mills, Bill Berry, and Michael Stipe of R.E.M., Hothouse Flowers and Luka Bloom.

Released in February of 1989 Indigo Girls, the album, reached #22 and remained on the charts for 35 weeks. The single "Closer To Fine" entered Billboard's Hot 100 in July and reached #52. The Indigo Girls toured as club headliners, and also as support for R.E.M. and Neil Young. Indigo Girls was certified gold in September. In the 32nd Annual Grammy Awards, the Indigos were nominated for "Best New Artist" and Indigo Girls was voted "Best Contemporary Folk Recording."

By 1992 with the release of Rites of Passage, which was certified gold in just 12 weeks, the Indigos had added numerous charity efforts and causes to their list of accomplishments, raising money for Voters for Choice, Indigenous Women's Network, Habitat for Humanity, Humanitas, and the Children's Health Fund founded by Paul Simon.

Each new album by Indigo Girls presents new facets of their distinctive artistry. The Grammy-winning duo's latest Epic release, Swamp Ophelia, is no exception! Emily Saliers and Amy Ray, in partnership with producer Peter Collins and engineer Dave Leonard, have crafted the most musically and lyrically ambitious album of their nine-year career.

This album runs the gamut from Amy Ray's raging guitar on "Touch Me Fall," a two-part magnum opus in miniature to the nakedly beautiful "Fare Thee Well" which showcases Emily Saliers voice and acoustic guitar. Like "Ghost" or the 1992 Rites of Passage, orchestration is once again an important component as heard on the lush "Wood Song" featuring violin and woodwind. There's a new richness and detail in Swamp Ophelia's vocal arrangements as well, joined on various tracks by singers Michael Lorant, Jane Siberry, Sam "Shike" Anderson, and the Roches.

"This Train (Revised)" is Swamp Ophelia's closing song and will no doubt prove to be its most controversial. Not since Captain Beefheart's "Dachau Blues" has a piece of popular music addressed the subject of the Holocaust with such emotional force and searing detail.

A new breed of triple threat in the world of entertainment the Indigos have heart, soul, and talent!

**Indigo Girls**  
**Saturday**  
**June 25, 1994**  
**Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

**Openers:**

Kristen Hall  
Lay Quiet Awhile

**Set List:**

Least Complicated  
Fugitive  
Love's Recovery  
Hand Me Downs  
Wood Song  
Dead Man's Hill  
Virginia Woolf  
Reunion  
Power Of Two  
Secure Yourself  
Let It Rain? (Kristen Hall)  
This Train (Revised)  
Language Or The Kiss  
Chickenman  
Galileo

**Encores:**

Touch Me Fall  
Southern Man (Kristen Hall)  
Closer To Fine

**Additional Encore:**

The Water Is Wide

Sue Waldner  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

**Indigo Girls**  
**Sunday**  
**June 26, 1994**  
**Vernon Valley, New Jersey**

**Openers:**

Kristen Hall  
Lay Quiet Awhile

**Set List:**

American Tune  
Fugitive  
Least Complicated  
Dead Man's Hill  
Galileo  
Center Stage  
The Wood Song  
Reunion  
Mystery  
Pushing The Needle Too Far  
Power Of Two  
Watershed  
This Train (Revised)  
Ghost  
Chickenman  
Closer To Fine

**Encore:**

Language Or The Kiss  
Touch Me Fall

Sue Waldner  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

From unknown source:

## WOMEN ON THE VERGE

After five albums on Epic, numerous Grammy nominations, one Grammy Award ("Best Contemporary Folk Recording" in 1989, for *Indigo Girls*), more than three million albums sold, and lots of touring, the Indigo Girls appear poised for household-word status. The duo deserve it for their sixth album, *Swamp Ophelia* (pictured). Aptly named, it has a strong swamp feel, given the mostly minor-key approach to melody and the haunting accompaniment of the Girls' acoustic guitars and a truly stellar collection of backup musicians—Chuck Leavell on piano, Sara Lee on bass, Lisa Germano on mandolin, and the Roches singing background. As for *Ophelia*, the Girls certainly share her angst (an ines-



capable word in articles about them) and confusion about relationships (a great asset for college radio). Soprano Emily Saliers and alto Amy Ray expand into the realm of folk rock, starting slow and building to an all-electric assault in "Touch Me Fall." The song works surprisingly well as pure rock-and-roll aggression, but the main appeal remains the sweet vocal harmonies and contemplative lyrics that explore love, regrets, and reformist politics (the Indigo Girls are especially popular on the benefit circuit). The danger in folkie acts with similar introverted, bare-the-soul lyrics is that they'll topple into the abyss of preciousness and pathos. The Indigo Girls have seen the abyss and danced around the rim, but they haven't fallen in yet.

—C.M.Y.

From The Atlanta-Journal Constitution, July 3, 1994:

# KRISTEN *Hall*

By Bob Townsend  
FOR THE JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

**K**risten Hall bursts through the door of Manuel's Tavern at 5:45 p.m. "Sorry," she says. "It's hell out there."

She's late for work. But it's understandable. Hall has driven from her home in Athens to Atlanta through rush-hour traffic. And work on this Monday evening means baring her soul. Again.

Displaying her thoughts and emotions is something the 32-year-old singer/songwriter has always done easily and with great precision in her music. But in order to have a career as a performer, she has also had to fight crippling bouts of stage fright.

She's grinning. Still, it just barely conceals a hint of fear that creeps from somewhere up under her dark hair, crosses her face, and finally flutters back behind her even darker eyelashes.

Later Hall will have to take up her guitar and play a few new songs at a small recording studio across town. She'll drink a few slugs of whiskey. And she'll make it through the latest "meet and greet," organized by her new label, Windham Hill/High Street, to showcase her third album, "Be Careful What You Wish For . . .," released June 14.

So she gamely prepares herself for the uncomfortable glare of the spotlight. "My weird ascent to my new position in life, right?" She puts this as both a question and a good-natured challenge. "Let's get a pitcher of

beer. Yeah. And how about some fried mushrooms?"

Besides the grin, which has relaxed to more of her usual smile, Hall is wearing a black-and-white print top, black leggings and an interesting pair of ankle-high black boots. The boots are unzipped so that the tongues flap when she walks. It sounds like they're conversing with Hall in some sort of strange, secret language as she strides to a booth and sits down.

"It's totally surreal," she says. "That's the perfect word for it. Life these days feels like I'm walking in a Salvador Dali painting. Some things look really, really, real. But they're not."

Reality for Hall has, indeed, become much more like a melting timepiece. She's getting a lot of attention because of the new album. She's just signed with Frank Reilly, a highly regarded booking agent with Monterey Peninsula Artists, whose clients include Bonnie Raitt and Aerosmith. And she's about to sign a new music publishing deal.

All in all, it seems very likely that Hall will be the next artist to break out from Atlanta's burgeoning acoustic scene and rise to the next level of national pop-music prominence.

"Absolutely unique," is how Hall's manager, Russell Carter, — the Decatur attorney who also guides the Indigo Girls — describes her voice. "Only about every five or 10 years does somebody whose voice is that unique come along," Carter says. "Tracy Chapman, when she was signed, turned the world upside

Please see **HALL, N4** ▶

# Hall: 'Five years ago, I was a deadbeat'

Continued from N1

down. When people are driving down the road and the new Kris-ten Hall song comes on the radio, I think they'll be taken aback like that."

But despite the praise that others are heaping on her — in the persistence of her own memory, at least — Hall is still the young woman who, after she graduated from high school in 1980, in Venice, Fla., spent the next 10 years jumping from job to job with very little stability in her life.

She moved to Atlanta — from Detroit by way of Venice — in 1981. Among other things, she's made futons, worked as a waitress and been the art director for a gay men's magazine.

"Five years ago, I was a complete deadbeat," she says dramatically. "And things could have gone a very different way for me. But luckily they didn't." Mostly because she had begun writing her highly personal songs, which she says helped sustain her emotionally. And by 1989, she was trying to play a few gigs at (now closed) local clubs such as the White Dot and the Little Five Points Pub, with emerging Atlanta performers like Michelle Malone, Kevn Kinney and, perhaps most importantly, the Indigo Girls.

"When we first met her, she wouldn't even get up onstage," recalls Amy Ray of the Indigo Girls, laughing. "We'd be playing at the Pub or somewhere and I'd ask her to sit in on a song. But when it would come time to do it and I'd call her name, she'd be gone."

Later, as things worked out, Hall did end up sharing a lot of time in the spotlight with Ray and partner Emily Saliers.

"I realized that I really had too bad a case of stage fright to take my music any further," Hall says. "So I went on the road with the Indigo Girls as their guitar tech. For me it was a way to spend time on big stages and try to feel comfortable. Of course, at first I was so nervous, I was afraid to go out and hand them their guitars."

Hall put out her debut recording, "Real Life Stuff," in 1990. By then she was opening for the Indigo Girls as a solo performer. The stage was still a pretty rough place for her, though.

"I went on every night at 8," she says. "And every night at 10 minutes till 8, I would start vomiting. We did like 10 nights in a row without a day off. On the first day I had off, sure enough, at 10 till 8 I got sick. That was so out of control. But I read somewhere that John Lennon used to throw

up, which makes her immediately likable. During the recording of her latest album she convinced a woman who was singing in a karaoke bar to come to the studio and do background vocals on one of her songs.

Another is that she seems to be as amused by her own frailties as those she sees in the world around her. She frequently punctuates her concerts with monologues that border on stand-up comedy — including updates on her favorite TV show, "sensational Jerry Springer," which she calls, "a freak show... like the Weekly World News of talk shows."

Her new passion, which she took up "instead of smoking," is fishing. So she watches "all the TV fishing shows," though she's never caught a fish. "I want to catch a bass," says Hall, who angles at Lake Oconee, east of Atlanta, and Clarks Hill Reservoir, near Augusta. "I wanted to catch a catfish, but someone told me when you take it off the hook, it cries."

All of Hall's songs are written in first person; she says that's because she has spent the past few years in therapy, trying to figure out what makes her tick. "The dichotomy of my personality is that I'm this amazingly shy person," she says. "But I can still

*"I went on every night at 8. And every night at 10 minutes till 8, I would start vomiting. We did like 10 nights in a row without a day off."*

## KRISTEN HALL

up. So I figured you must be able to get over it."

"Fact and Fiction," Hall's second recording, came out on Daemon Records (the local independent label owned by Ray) in 1992 and was picked up for re-release and national distribution by High Street last year. In the meantime, Hall began pushing herself harder in the cause of her career.

"How she got from being unwilling to just walk in front of an audience, to being able to walk out and perform in front of 3,000 Indigo Girls' fans and have them standing up and cheering at the end, I don't know," says Carter. "Somehow she figured it out."

One thing that's helped is Hall's wonderful sense of the ab-

sit here and tell you all about my life.

"At the risk of sounding like a mental patient, sometimes it feels like there's two different people in here. In fact, there's more than two different people. I've got to do this interview, so it's like, 'Who can cope with this today?' And some little voice inside goes, 'I'll do it.' And I'm like, 'OK, you go.'"

Where Hall will go next is back on the bus with the Indigo Girls. She spent the past couple of weeks opening shows on the East Coast leg of their current tour, which included dates at Radio City Music Hall last week. And then she'll perform solo. Hall has no specific plans to play locally this summer; that time

will be spent promoting her album nationally. But she says there's always a chance she'll perform on a lark at some club in Athens or Atlanta.

"It's really nice," says Saliers. "It's come full circle now. She's got her own record deal, and we're touring together again."

Of course, Hall planned to be in the audience Thursday when the Indigo Girls played "Late Show With David Letterman," a thought that gave Saliers a laugh.

"At least I know I won't be nervous," she says. "You can never be nervous with Kristen in the audience."

*Bob Townsend is a free-lance Atlanta critic who writes about music and the arts.*

## THE HALL FILE

► **Age:** 32.

► **Birthplace:** Detroit, where Hall's father was the harbormaster on the Detroit River. He took an early retirement and moved the family to Venice, Fla., in 1979, at the end of her junior year in high school. "That was completely devastating," Hall says.

► **Education:** Graduated in 1980 from New Directions, Sarasota County's alternative high school, after being kicked out of the regular school. Attended Clayton State College in 1981 after her family moved to Peachtree City.

► **Getting kicked out of high school:** "I was skipping school to go to the beach. The principal came up in his golf cart — they drive golf carts in Florida, you know. I took off into these trees and he came after me. Then I circled back, got his golf cart and drove away in it. So he kinda had to kick me out, I guess."

► **Job:** Songwriter, singer, guitarist, and sometime piano player.

► **Residence:** Athens.

► **Early inspirations:** "I grew up on Alice Cooper," Hall says. "And I'm still a total Jackson Browne head."

► **Current favorites:** "I love Freedy Johnston. I can't wait to hear his new album. . . . Aimee Mann is a great songwriter."

► **Her first guitar:** "It was an Applause — one of those cheap Ovation copies. I wanted an Ovation because Cat Stevens had one, but I couldn't stand the job that long. I was working as a waitress in the Travis Family Restaurant ['Home of the Travis Burger' in Venice] and making payments. But I said, 'I can't serve old men poached eggs anymore.'"

► **Her beginnings as a musician:** "I really wasn't very good at playing guitar. I started writing my own songs because I was frustrated that I couldn't play anyone else's exactly right. Necessity is always the mother of invention."

► **Her music now:** "I would call myself a singer/songwriter. My label, High Street, is sort of the singer/songwriter division of Windham Hill, but I still see my CDs in the New Age section in stores. So I take it up to the front and go, 'See this? This is me. I'm not New Age.'"

—Bob Townsend



# Songwriter's daring 'Wish' bares all

By Bob Townsend

FOR THE JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

"One day I marvel at its beauty/ the next I marvel at its pain." That's how Kristen Hall introduces her concept of the world on "Nothing." It's a slowly strummed, gently unraveling plaint (à la Neil Young) that moves back and forth between external and internal reality before reaching its cathartic climax. Along the way, Hall defines much of the scope of her third album, "Be Careful What You Wish For . . ."

"The world is such a big idea," she sings. "And pain gets locked inside a child/ And there's a child in us all/ And that's such a big idea. . . ." Unlike her good friends, the Indigo Girls, Hall doesn't reach for the ethereal or the philosophical very often. She's more interested in gut-level experiences.

Her introspective songs, always written in first person, are made up of small moments of joy and suffering, frozen in flurries of precise feelings and sense memories. Because she writes so specifically and concretely, her compositions may appear to be

## ALBUM REVIEW

**"Be Careful What You Wish For . . ."**  
Kristen Hall. Windham Hill/High Street. 12 tracks.  
CD/cassette. \*\*\*

simply navel-gazing — or worse, overly simplistic. But because they spew forth from such a closely examined life, they always carry the ring of truth.

On "Proud Man," Hall begins with an impression of a friend's father: "You worked your fingers to the bone/ You sacrificed a happy home." Then she struggles to illuminate the conflicts she's had with her own father: "I waited on the doorstep down the hallway/ Ears ringing from the words you threw." And ends up conveying something of the absurd difficulty of all relationships: "You pace like an animal in a cage/ It must be something I said."

Musically, Hall displays a canny knack for the telegraphic rhythms and melodic hooks that are the stock in trade of all successful pop songwriters. Producer Jerry Marotta — who also plays drums

on the album and has worked with everyone from Linda Ronstadt to Peter Gabriel — helps fashion a sound that retains the raw acoustic edge of Hall's two earlier (homemade) efforts, while applying several translucent layers of studio sheen. Bill Dillon's guitar, Byron Berline's violin and Jane Scarpantoni's cello are particularly fine in that regard.

Ultimately, though, it's Hall's voice that drives this psychobiographical collection home. Baring her soul in reedy and raspy timbres of emotional energy, she finds strength in vulnerability and hope in glimpses of romantic love. "Maybe from now on I can be . . . happy," she whispers on "Cry Tomorrow," fearing there's danger in even uttering that word. But then she summons the courage to proclaim, "Let me die trying/ If I fall at least my heart will have been true."

Records are rated on a scale of one to four stars. To hear selections from "Be Careful What You Wish For . . ." call Soundline by dialing 511, then enter 8600 followed by access code 834. This is a pay-per-call service; the fee is 50 cents for five minutes in the local calling area.

## The Back Page

Hi! I hope all is well in your respective necks of the woods. I am in the midst of making final preparations for my western adventure, so things have been kind of crazy here. I am really stoked about the upcoming shows, from everything I have heard from all of you, this tour has retained the energy and the spontaneity of the \$10 Tour so they should really be something.

I don't think I have put in a plug for Atlanta's lesser known talent lately, one of our readers submitted this "Desert Island Disc" list to Pulse! magazine (who had the good sense to print it), and I think it pretty much says it all:

### Gems from Georgia

Dear PULSE!,

1. *Rites of Passage*—Indigo Girls.
2. *Indigo Girls*—Indigo Girls.
3. *Fact and Fiction*—Kristen Hall.
4. *The Survivors Parade*—Ellen James Society.
5. *New Experience*—Michelle Malone.
6. *Murmur*—R.E.M.
7. *Real Life Stuff*—Kristen Hall.
8. *Live at the Attic*—Caroline Aiken.
9. *Painting Sidewalks*—Wendy Bucklew.
10. *Not Dead (Yet)*—New Mongrels.

Debbie Slowinski  
Hometown, Ill.

I think I could survive quite nicely with those CD's (and maybe a case or two of Budweiser). That's it for this month, take care and be well -

CAROLYN ☺