



2002

## Underground

Ann M. Savage  
*Butler University*, [asavage@butler.edu](mailto:asavage@butler.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ccom\\_papers](https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ccom_papers)



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Savage, A. M. (2002, October). Underground. In K. H. Burns (Ed.), *Women and Music in America Since 1900: An Encyclopedia*. (Vol. 2, pp. 655-657). Phoenix, Arizona: The Oryx Press. Available from: [digitalcommons.butler.edu/ccom\\_papers/14/](https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ccom_papers/14/)

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Communication at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - Communication by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact [digitalscholarship@butler.edu](mailto:digitalscholarship@butler.edu).



## Ulali

Founded in 1987, the Ulali vocal trio consists of Pura Fe (Tuscarora tribe), Soni Moreno (Mayan, Apache, Yaqui tribes), and Jennifer Elizabeth Kreisberg (Tuscarora tribe). In describing the indigenous quality of their music, the group prefers the designation "First Nations" rather than "Native American" or "American Indian," taking note that the existence of the hemisphere's indigenous peoples preceded the word "America."

The group's vocal harmonies incorporate colorful dissonances and quartal and parallel interval relationships, and both gospel and Native American influences are heard in their eclectic blend of styles. Original song texts include traditional poetry, humor, and political material addressing Native concerns. Drums and rattles accompany their vocal colors as they perform music popular with audiences in concert and popular venues including rock concerts (notably with the Indigo Girls, 1997), film and video (*The Native Americans*, 1995; *Smoke Signals*, 1998), cultural centers (Smithsonian

Folklife Festivals), and native events (powwows and radio shows).

The group won the American Library Association's 1997 Notable Recording Award for *Lessons from the Animal People* (Yellow Moon Press 50) with Lakota/Kiowa Apache storyteller Dovie Thomason. Other notable projects to which the group has contributed include the album *Robbie Robertson and the Red Road Ensemble* (Cema/Capitol, 1994), the collection *Heartbeat: Voices of First Nations Women* (Smithsonian Folkways, 1995) and the Aboriginal Women's Voices Project recording *Hearts of the Nations* (Sweet Grass Records, 1997).

See also Multicultural Musics; Native American Musicians

### For Further Reading

*Ulali Home*. Available: <http://www.ulali.com>

Virginia Giglio

## Underground

The term "underground" commonly refers to the independent punk music and the zine counterculture with a political sensibility. With its beginnings in the

1970s, punk music has always been an anti-establishment music genre that set out to rebel against the rules of the music industry and the status quo that punk's adherents often felt deserted by. As in many other realms of Western culture, the field was largely male dominated except for a few woman artists such as Patti Smith (b. 1946) and Siouxsie Sioux. Nonetheless, these women set the stage for other women to follow.

In the early 1990s young women and teens initiated what eventually came to be known as the Riot Grrrl movement, an offshoot of the punk rock scene of the 1970s and 1980s. Women wanted to break free from an onerous identity as the band members' girlfriends. They took to the stage with a desire to be punk musical artists and performers in their own right. More important, the music and the artists embodied a leftist and feminist consciousness that was primary to the music. Many artists also fought against an identity that tied them to their mothers' and second wave (the period of the women's movement from approximately 1966 to 1979) feminist ideals. In turn, their raucous style and alternative dress were designed as a rejection of second wave sensibilities. In fact, this musical current is commonly considered a trajectory of third wave feminism (the period of social change beginning in the 1980s) and clearly part of a political social movement. Included in this aesthetic were lesbian politics and an awareness that was commonly referred to as hom-core or queer punk; it was expressed by such artists as Tribe 8 and the Butchies.

Olympia, WA, and Washington, DC, are commonly considered the birthplaces of the Riot Grrrl genre, with pioneers including artists such as Bikini Kill and Bratmobile. Upstart labels, out of neces-

sity and in an effort to shun corporate rock, began to surface. Early labels included Independent K Records and Kill Rock Star Records in Olympia and Dischord in Washington, DC. This inspired other labels throughout the United States, including Simple Machines in Virginia, Thrill Jockey Records in Chicago, Candy-Ass Records in Portland, OR, and Skinnie Girl in Minneapolis—all women-fronted labels. The Riot Grrrl movement successfully combined feminism with punk. There were clear efforts to sever patriarchal patterns and strengthen young girls' and women's individual identities, sense of self, and position within society.

During the mid-1990s the Riot Grrrl movement began to disband. In 1992 many riot grrrls were unhappy about the surging amount of mainstream press coverage the movement had begun to garner, including a *Newsweek* cover. The press spotlight propelled the style into a public position of privilege and activated a mainstream profile—precisely what the young upstarts had fought against. The mainstream attention led to contract offers from major record labels. Bands such as L7 and Babes in Toyland signed on the major record label rosters, but others refused. This created ideological differences within different segments of the alterna-culture of Riot Grrrl. Since the beginning of the movement it had been apparent that the shared mantra of “corporate rock sucks” was one of solidarity and unity. The newfound media attention spawned dissolution within the movement, which broke into factions throughout the 1990s.

Simultaneous to and intertwined with the development of punk rock feminism was the development of feminist counterculture zine production. Zines are

fiercely independent, leaf sheet flyers in which girls and young women—as authors and producers—express outrage and frustrations about various women-related issues, including rape, abuse, inequalities, and demeaning images of women in mainstream culture. Similar to the musical movement, these zines were an effort to dismantle patriarchy and male domination. Startup zines included *Girl Germs*, *Satan Wears a Bra*, *Quit Whining*, and *Jigsaw*. The zine movement focused on the development of community and solidarity for disenfranchised teenage girls. Teenagers found unity in the desolation, loneliness, and anger they felt living in the myth of suburbia. Similar to the musical movement, the zine movement was resistant to and refused to develop a structural organization, philosophy, or membership rules. The zine writers and publishers did not want to fall prey to an established and prescribed orthodoxy or misplaced dogma. This was exactly what they saw themselves as fighting against. Each individual was to determine her own role,

her own purpose, and her own form of resistance.

The advent of the World Wide Web coincided with the birth and development of the Riot Grrrl movement and the similarly focused zines. In turn, both communities have utilized the Internet as a creative transmission tool for the same feminist political purposes. Without the backing of major record label dollars, many independent labels have ventured into the Internet to broaden their reach and promote their message-laden music.

Currently, some critics, scholars, and even the originators suggest the Riot Grrrl moniker is passé today—with so many crossing over into and attracting mainstream attention. Despite this, a feminist punk rock existence remains.

*See also* Garage Rock and Heavy Metal Bands; Rock and Popular Music Genres

#### **For Further Reading**

Duncombe, Stephen. *Zines: Notes from the Underground and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. London: Verso, 1997.

*Ann Savage*