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excalibur

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The Violent Femmes, probably THE most popular underground band on the continent, are, well . . . hard to define.

Just listen to their four albums. You will definitely be asking yourself, 'Who and what are these guys? Where do they fit in the spectrum of rock'n'roll?'

Since their debut in 1983 on Slash Records with the self-titled album VIOLENT FEMMES (which went gold last year), they have garnered much critical praise and have gathered a large underground following on both sides of the Atlantic for a sound that defies description. Sometimes they're bluesy, sometimes they're country, sometimes they're punkish, other times they're spiritual. And sometimes they play just straight forward rock'n'roll.

The band is propelled by the songwriting and whiney voice of its 26-year old lead singer, Gordon Gano, the son of a Baptist preacher. His songwriting ranges from songs of teenage angst, spiritual songs and political songs to songs about violence and death. He also writes songs critical of mainstream religion and its sanctimonious hypocrisy.

Gano's combination of unique voice and straightforward lyrics has made the band's sound popular with a devoted legion of followers worldwide.

The Femmes' sound also comes from the inspired musicianship of 28-year old bassist Brian Ritchie and 34-year old drummer Victor DeLorenzo. Ritchie carries the burden of the musical responsibility in the trio, and he is indeed one of the most talented and innovative bass players of all time. His frenetic bass leads put him in league with rock bass luminaries Jack Bruce and John Entwistle.

Since 1983, the band has released three more albums: 1984's HALLOWED GROUND; 1986's THE BLIND LEADING THE NAKED; and (after a layoff that was almost permanent) 1988's current 3.

Currently, Gano et al are on a sold-out tour of North America. During their April visit to Toronto, EXCALIBUR's Daniel Wolgelerenter had a chance to chat with Ritchie about the band, and a week later had the opportunity to talk to Gano about what the Violent Femmes are all about.

Daniel talks to Brian and Gordon on p. 6