

localzine FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA

STORY: JENNIFER BAUMGARDNER PHOTOS: DAN KOECK



The Coen brothers knew when they made *Fargo* that the town was an enigma wrapped in a wind-chill factor. The sprawling burg is so unstudied, untapped and misunderstood (there's a reason the Midwest is known as "fly-over space") that the rest of America was shocked when Fargo was revealed to have a "culture." Now everyone knows that locals plug in their cars, the cuisine is all-you-can-eat buffet and we speak in an accent that fuses the diphthonged vowels of *uff-da* Norwegians with a cadence direct from the Indian rez.

Although the music scene wasn't documented in *Fargo*, that prairie town (with the help of its twin sister, Moorhead) bred the Nembutal-smoothness of blues grande dame Peggy Lee, fed the wit of classical clown PDQ Bach and nurtured the plucky cheese of '60s sensation Bobby Vee. And while it's fly-over space to some, it's stop-over space to musicians—what else is happening between Minneapolis and Seattle? Keep in mind, Fargo-Moorhead was the gig the Big Bopper, Richie Valens and Buddy Holly were heading to on the day the music died.

In Fargo, winter starts in September and it lasts 'til May, which sure sounds like the blues. That may be why Fargo is the hometown of two actual guitar prodigies in that reputedly expiring genre. **Jonny Lang**, who used to be Kid Jonny Lang until he got a major label deal and put away childish things in favor of opening for The Rolling Stones, and

Shannon Curfman, who is barely 15 and has a deal at Arista herself. Yeah, they're white and neither can get served in a bar yet, but damned if they're not bringing the tradition of Buddy Guy to the readers of *Seventeen*.

As in the movie, most roads out of Fargo lead to Minneapolis. The biggest talents move to the Twin Cities where there are more clubs, venues, artists, radio outlets and recording studios. Besides Curfman and Lang, other Fargo transplants to Prince's hometown include the excellent alternative a cappella act **The Blenders**. Having put out six records in a decade (the last on Universal), this dulcet quartet harmonizes like Boyz II Men and looks like part of the *90210* gang. Ani DiFranco has her Midwestern twin in the earth-pixie **Brenda Weiler**, a 22-year-old singer/songwriter who is a star in Fargo (she still plays there frequently) and is gaining popularity in "The Cities," as we call Minneapolis and St. Paul. When in town, Weiler plays at venues like **Zandbroz Variety** (420 Broadway), **The Fargo Theater** (314 Broadway) and **Atomic Coffee** (15 Fourth St. S., Moorhead), all of which host acoustic music.

The punk, rock and alternative scenes, whose acts don't play the huge FargoDome near the airport, are otherwise hobbled by the dearth of clubs. But the kids are resourceful. In the early '90s, local punk rockers made it possible for bands such as Nation Of Ulysses, Fugazi and Bikini



FOLKIN' UP ZANDBROZ VARIETY.

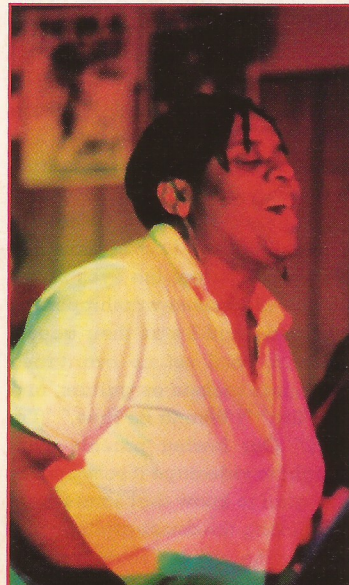


DOZER ROCKS THE BOWLER. ('YEAH, IT'S AT 11.')

Kill to play at **Fargo Eagles Club** (503 3rd Ave.) and the **American Legion** (505 Third Ave. N). (Indeed, Kathleen Hanna still remembers fondly her Bikini Kill show at the Legion: A circle was drawn on the ballroom floor with the words "mosh pit" inside it.) These places continue to house live music, and provide a perverse stodginess that makes punks feel all the more rebellious.

A more consistent venue is **Bowler's Ballroom** (2630 University Dr. S.), a '50s-era alley where the 21-and-up set can check out garage outfits like **Dozer**, **S.O.P.** and **Ded Walleyes**. A new venue for live music in downtown Fargo is the **21st Amendment** (520 1st Ave. N), and there's also live music across the river in Moorhead at **Kirby's** (315 Main Ave., Moorhead), a dive of the comfy sort, with \$5 pitchers of Bud. Across the street at **Ralph's Corner** (23 4th St. S., Moorhead), punk bands occasionally play and it's definitely the place to survey the kids who make the F-M alterna-scene. The regulars comprise hard-drinking one-armed Vietnam vets and sullenly gorgeous hipsters. There is a decent jukebox and a couple of pool tables, but get there early—last call in Fargo-Moorhead is a chaste 1 a.m. Yet another reason why Jonny Lang sings the blues.

Jennifer Baumgardner grew up in Fargo and, while she doesn't have that accent from the movie, her parents and her entire graduating class do.



SINGER DEB JENKINS.

LOCAL LOGIC FARGO'S BEST:

LUTEFISK (FISH PRESERVED IN LYE):
Sons Of Norway (722 2nd Ave.).

THRIFT SHOP:
Dakota Boys Ranch (1001 4th Ave. N.).

SOFT ICE CREAM STAND:
Moorhead Dairy Queen (24 8th St. S.).

CHOCOLATE-COVERED POTATO CHIPS:

Widman's candy store (21 8th St. S.).

SCANDINAVIAN ROSEMALING (TRADITIONAL FOLK PAINTING):
Trollwood Park Crafts Fair.

DANCE CLUB:
I-Beam (1021 Center Ave., Moorhead).

BIKER BAR:
Speck's (2611 Main Ave.).

VENUE FOR LIVE JAZZ BEFORE DARK:

Plains Art Museum's Rush Hour Concerts, Thursdays at 5:30 p.m. (704 First Ave. N.).

BOOKSTORE-CUM-COFFEEHOUSE:
Zandbroz Variety (420 Broadway).

RECORD STORE:
Mother's (2421 10th St. S., Moorhead).

FOLK MUSIC VENUE:
The Full Circle Cafe (69 4th St. N.).

FREE PAPER:
The High Plains Reader.
PLACE TO SPOT LOCALS:
Red Lobster (4215 13th Ave. S.).