

Wild Bells

Rachel Coddington: vocals; **Sean Farrell:** keyboards; **Pete Ficht:** vocals, guitar;
Scott Pettitt: drums; **Jeff Porter:** lead guitar; **Sean Tichenor:** vocals, bass

A word to the wise: think twice before you put away those “childish things” (or even abandon them to Craigslist). There’s no statute of limitations on one’s right to rock despite what those blemishless TV faces would like us to believe. With age comes not only wisdom, but chops and perhaps a sense of humility that wasn’t present during the young and restless years of first-launch inspiration.

You don’t need to put ‘em under a microscope to discover that the Wild Bells is a ... ahem ... “mature band.” The shameful lack of bedazzled jumpsuits and glossy hair product attests to a universal cavalier disregard of focus-group generated flair. Instead, all of that carefully measured consideration goes into **Pete Ficht’s** songs, that are then airdropped directly to you, the lucky listener.

You know Pete, how could you not? He’s that lanky guy from New Orleans, who moved here (Portland, duh!) in the mid-90s after a stellar stint down south with his group the **House Levelers**, a freewheeling folk-punk outfit that recorded an extremely promising record (Collectible? Sure, why not?) with Memphis legend **Jim Dickinson** (Hello? **Big Star? Replacements, Screamin’ Jay Hawkins?** Any of these ring a wild bell?)

Pete’s played guitar and bass in a ton of Portland groups over the eons, a characteristic he shares with his bandmates. **Noisecandy, Joy Pop Turbo, State Flowers**, and **Lisa & Her Kin** are some of the names on his crowded resume. Worthy bands all, Pete dabbled in everything from confectionary pop to desolate, bittersweet Americana to bang-and-twang trailer-park hootenanny. The man is a well-seasoned pro, one that usually takes a backseat to his costars. Not this time.

Pete sings and plays guitar with the Wild Bells, and most importantly, he’s writing the kind of infectious tunes that we would normally expect from people named **Matthew Sweet** or the **dB’s**. A little shimmery jingle-jangle, a yearning voice, and maybe a stray tumbleweed or two, all fixed to choruses so catchy they’re practically terminal. Now let’s meet the band!

Bassist **Sean Tichenor** and keyboardist **Sean Farrell** (the Seans!) were both members of **King Black Acid**, another ensemble that contained Pete Ficht for a time. Certainly one of Portland’s most distinctive and influential groups, KBA, under the direction of (rumored) time lord **Daniel Riddle**, had a lengthy and fruitful career bridging the chasm between the tremblingly sublime and utter chaos. It was from this boiling cauldron of mad genius that many versatile and formidable Portland players emerged.

Drummer **Scott Pettitt** is an in-demand studio timekeeper as well as a hit man for hire with combos like **Small Souls** and the **State & Standard**. Lead guitarist **Craig Stahr** has wowed the locals with his fleet fretwork in the **Quags** and **Mission 5**, while new singer **Ellen Louise** served memorable stints with **Shee Bee Gees** and faux French popsters **Les Etrangers**.

The Wild Bells manifest a whole that’s definitely greater than the sum of its disparate parts. All of the lessons these folks learned over the years in bands of every shape and description are now ripe and ready for a listen. And listen you will—the band’s full-length debut is currently being recorded with veteran producer **Tony Lash** (**Heatmiser, Sunset Valley, Dandy Warhols**) as well as KBA mastermind Daniel Riddle. Expect to see it fall from the sky some time in October.

Post-script: This note is obviously designed to whet your appetite with a bit of tasty rock ‘n’ roll hyperbole, but there is already keen interest in the Wild Bells. The album was financed with a successful \$5,000 **Kickstarter** campaign that came from music-lovers just like you and me. Peace.

– John Chandler, August 2013

UPDATE 12/31/14: New guitarist **Jeff Porter** (Riviera) has replaced Mark Pickett (who replaced founding member Craig Stahr at the beginning of 2014). And **Rachel Coddington** has replaced Ellen Louise as our harmony singer (and occasional lead vocalist).

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