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Combing through The Pübes

Phoenix's original queercore comedic rockers dish on making music, aging and redheaded sluts

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Photo courtesy of The Pübes.

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By **Art Martori**, November 2016 Issue.

Jealously, summer is releasing its grip one August night at Cash Inn Country, one of Phoenix's LGBTQ mainstays. But each person who walks through the door lets in an abrupt dragon's snort of monsoon air. And lots of people are coming to see the band tonight. Nighttime temps might've plunged into the high 80s, but it's getting pretty warm and moist in here as everyone slithers around for a good spot.

Setting up onstage are The Pübes, Phoenix's original masters of queercore comedic rock, with such notable songs as "Cameltoe," "Snatch" and "Oops, I Caught the Gay." Tonight the lesbian power trio is releasing a live album, *10/10 Live Again at the Cash Inn Country*, a 13-track homage to the venue they've played regularly throughout a career spanning more than a decade. In that time, The Pübes have become somewhat of an artifact of Phoenix's LGBTQ scene, a name you drop signaling you're no newcomer to the gayborhood.

These days, The Pübes are in their prime. Members might now be pushing into their 40s, but still they're clearly a band's band. They're seasoned performers who get onstage, melt your face and leave everyone talking about the show for days while they're scrambling to find the next one. In maturing, they've also become adept recording artists.



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On Nov. 5, The Pübes are releasing *better, Better. BETTER!*, the studio album that demonstrates a dedication to music making often overlooked at their raucous live sets.

"We are definitely, I think, a live band," explained Baretta Lynn, who handles lead guitar and contributes vocals with both her bandmates. "When we go into the studio we kinda don't know what we're doing ... Well, not that we don't know what we're doing; what we really want to do is get drunk and play music and have a good time. When you're in the studio, you can't do that. You have to get it right."



Ivana Pluchya. Photos by Mr. Nice Sky.

Having Fun in LoFi

Ahead of this particular performance at the Cash Inn Country, The Pübes take a break from setting up for the show to join me at a table behind the stage. Baretta, an outgoing blonde with spiked hair and earnest brown eyes, is joined by Ivana Pluchya, bass and vocals, and Roc Smith, drums and vocals. (Band members prefer to use their stage names for all Pübe-related activities.)

Ivana is far more gentle than her mullet hairstyle suggests, always quick with a friendly smile in a girl-next-door kind of way. Roc, who just turned 40, is the band's wunderkind, a former heavy-metal drummer who lends her technical skills to keeping time, mixing songs and other wizardry. Ivana and Baretta were founding members in 2005, while Roc joined the band in 2009.

The drummer remembers being attracted to The Pübes' laid-back approach to making music, as before she'd been in a serious metal outfit where everything, from songwriting to practicing, was very structured.

"One of things drew me to this band was, 'Oh we don't care; get drunk have fun ...'" Roc says. Then she can't help but take a shot at her bandmates' laid-back attitudes: "Do you know what that word means, practice?"

In addition to the live album they're releasing tonight and the studio album set for November, The Pübes have cut two other albums: *Pretty Fresh*, recorded in 2011 at Studio Analog in Tempe; and *Live & Unruly*, a DIY recording done in 2007 in a house. Baretta and Ivana chuckle remembering the latter album, noting they used pillows to deaden sound and had different instruments set up to record in different rooms throughout the residence.

"It sounds like it was recorded in a house," laughs Baretta.

Ivana is a bit kinder, explaining, "I like to call it LoFi."

Spawned from Douchebaggery

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Offstage, it's easy to see why The Pübes are so good onstage. They have those old-friends' habits of completing each other's thoughts and injecting offhand remarks or inside jokes. If you recorded the band's banter between songs, and then dubbed it over a Judd Apatow movie, it would likely work pretty well. (I mean, c'mon, they call themselves The Pübes.)

"We don't take ourselves seriously," admits Baretta. "We were like, 'Wouldn't it be funny if we were a bunch of women in a band called The Pübes? And it's still going, man. It spawned from our douchebagery, I'd say."

And that, explains Roc, leads to a special relationship with fans. You're either a die-hard from day one, or mortally offended and day one is the only day.

"You're gonna think we're funny. Or you're gonna think we're awkward and funny," Roc says. "Or you're just gonna leave because you're gonna be like, 'Uh, your song's called "Cameltoe"?! I can't.'"

That's not to say it's always so cut and dried. At a meetup over beers some weeks later, also at Cash Inn Country, Baretta is telling me about a show from years back: They were playing at a straight establishment, and standing right in front of the stage was a creepy-looking guy with a hoodie drawn over his face. Baretta says she immediately thought of all kinds of unpleasant scenarios.

Baretta remembers announcing, "Alright, this next song is called 'Cameltoe,'" to which he replied, "FUCK YEAH," she reenacts, throwing up a sign of the horns to illustrate their new fan's enthusiasm.

A more recent encounter was harder for them to deal with. At a show last summer at Crescent Ballroom in downtown Phoenix, the band was approached by a woman who said she was forced to leave because she found the band offensive toward women. That, obviously, didn't sit well with The Pübes.

"I talked to her a while and said, 'Just give me an explanation of the lyrics that are offensive,'" Baretta says. "And she couldn't come up with one. I said, 'If you listen to us tonight, I'll happily have a conversation with you. And she did not. And that's fine. That's fine. People are not all gonna love what we're doing.'"



Baretta Lynn (left) and Roc Smith.

The Creative Process

The Pübes' creative process is collaborative, with ideas for new songs often coming when one member comes up with a riff the others like, and then everyone builds on it. For example, Baretta might be noodling around as the rest of the band gets ready for practice, and then Roc jumps in with a backbeat. Ivana, who typically comes up with lyrics in their final form, joins in on bass.



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"She's like, I dunno, just making something up and two weeks later it's a song," Roc says, summing up the creative process.

But how does the band ... *go there*? How do they decide to write music about body parts and functions and things other groups usually avoid? It's a whiteboard process, where somebody might just be thinking out loud, the idea gets jotted down, and then later at some point it becomes a song.

For example, at a recent practice someone pondered that, scientifically, you might call the removal of a lesbian a dyke-otomy (get it?). And so now they're working on a track about getting kicked out of Cash Inn Country. It's all born out of the band's commitment to not take itself too seriously, Ivana explains.

"Part of it is women playing music on our terms. A lot of that has to do with fact we already played bands before," she says. "Our mission is to be play music and be happy and have fun and never take ourselves too seriously."

Blue-plate Specials

The band is pretty open about getting older. Everyone has a daytime job. Baretta has a 4-year-old child. These days, they're not hustling to book shows so much as carefully picking out weekend gigs. Preferably ones that start earlier, like around 9 p.m. They joke about drinking a lot, but in truth they're no longer hitting it that hard. If a fan happens to send over a round of redheaded sluts, well, so be it.

"Baretta parties. When Baretta is here, she parties," explains the guitarist. "It's the persona of the band. When we practice, we have a couple beers. When we play, it's no holds barred, let's do this. Were not partiers normally, we all have fulltime jobs. But when Baretta is here, it's on like Shelley Long."

And as far as keeping up with the fast-paced lifestyle of a rock star, Ivana explains that now they've reached a point where they're no longer desperate to book gigs. These days, taking it as it comes works just fine for the band.

"It's so nice to be in our 40s now and just enjoying what we're doing," she says. "We can say, 'Yes, we'll do that,' or, 'No, we don't wanna do that.'"

So when does the ride end? According to Baretta, not any time soon.

"The minute it's not fun anymore, we'll know it," she says of energy the band feels, even when they're alone jamming. "It doesn't matter if there's anyone near us, something magical happens ... When that stops we'll be done."

"I would love to be taking my fuckin' AARP card out and being like, 'Don't you have a blue-plate special, bitches? Because we're playing here tonight at 5:30!'"



A Look at the Lyrics

Most Existentially Philosophical line: It seems to me ... that the truth ... is true. ("All By Myself")

Best Fall Fashion Tip: What is it about the way people act when they think they 'bout to catch the gay? Cuz we all know gay is in the genes and Mama don't stitch no ratty-ass seams. ("Oops, I Caught The Gay")

Sexiest Line: Purpose...I got a purpose. I'll sink my teeth into your jeans ... folding, my legs are folding and now your scolding ... makes me scream! ("What I Need")

Most Likely to Remind You of The Menses: But what should come on my trusty TV but a long distance love affair that really can't be! Into my kitchen, my diet is shattered; gimme chocolate, any kind, it really doesn't matter! ("Red Riot")

Most Likely to Marry Google Maps: What's the capital of Tanzania and how did you get in my bed?! ("Nice to Meet You")

The Pübes album release party

8 p.m.-1 a.m. Nov. 5

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Art Martori is a Phoenix-based freelance writer who contributes to various newspapers and magazines.



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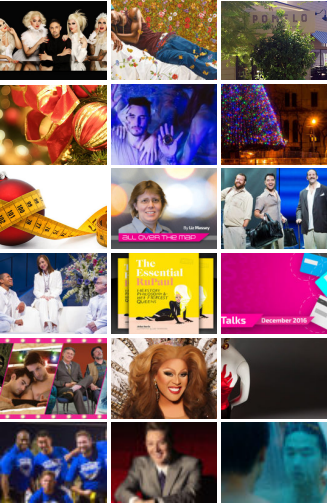
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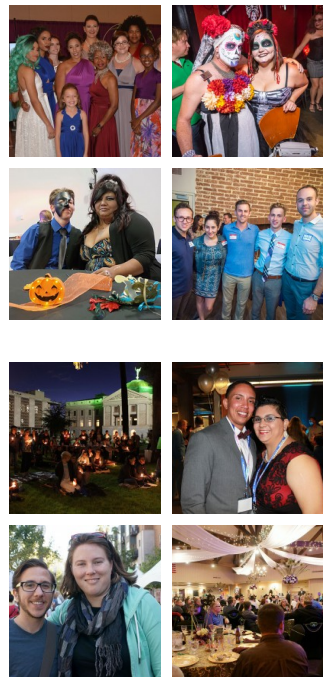
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