

# SWELL

Volume 1, Number 1

June 1991

# SWOLLEN

NOISE FROM THE 'LOIN



**SWELL's**

**PREMIER ISSUE**

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- ★ LOCAL REVIEWS
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# Impressionistic Urban Dirt Rock Has Been Recent Cause for Alarm

GUEST EDITORIAL With Mike LaVella

San Francisco, April 1991

The Tenderloin District of San Francisco breeds some strange things. Having lived there for nearly two years myself, I have observed many extremes of human behavior and condition:

A misguided BMW cruises slowly past the Drag Queens holding down their corner. Two men, one in a wheel chair, one on crutches engage in a surreal fight to the death. Well dressed theater-goers scramble to get out of the way of a homeless man on an 8' freight dolly being pulled by his four dogs. And above all this, in their Turk St. warehouse, Swell rehearse, record, eat, drink, (are sometimes merry) and keep one microphone out the window.

When you take in this kind of information on a daily basis, an interesting thing happens. You are forced to take a long look at yourself. You go inside your own mind and the results can be scary, or in the case of Swell, somewhat miraculous.

## The Record

Their songs, while introspective and enlightening, put forth a certain optimism that keeps the listener coming back for more. After a few spins, you realize that you have a rare recording in your hands. Rare in the sense that you know in 20 years you'll still be enjoying it.

## The Live Set

Swell has the ability to climb inside an audiences' head and poke around like rats in a dumpster. And you can be damn sure if there's anything good in there Swell is going to find it. Believe the press, believe the hype. This is one of those occasions where credit is given where credit is due.

# SWOLLEN

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1

JUNE 1991

ART DIRECTION  
SWELL

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# SWELL

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Some reviews in this  
issue have been shortened  
for the readers sake.



GOT A PROBLEM, MAN? / By Dettlers

## When was the last time you thought anything was worth anything?



Adam Bullwicky, 43.  
Liquor merchant, Eddy st.  
The economy may be down, but  
sales are up. Why? Who are you?



Chuck Tree, 70,  
Barfly, 6th st.  
Well, I was at the Charleston  
last night...I found a carton a  
smokes outside GrandView  
Market, too, you punk.



Joey Headbone, 67,  
Unemployed migrant  
Undoubtedly the Tenderloin  
Street Fair was the pinnacle of  
the year. I can't remember a  
thing.



Jerry Jaw, 57,  
Peddler, Mission St.  
A made me a killing on 'late  
nights' yesterday, but only a  
few bought satellites. Why?  
You need work?



Gossamer McFearson, 65,  
Mechanic, Golden Gate st.  
We heard some racket comin'  
from some attic on Turk St.  
We had a few Old English 800s  
on our hands. I always loved dirt  
rock... Shit yes!



Walter Shagmuff, 36,  
Lost, Mason st.  
Dunno. I took the wrong exit.  
Some guy was showerin' 25 cent  
tokens all over out front of The  
Gaiety. I done got me a free  
booth. That must of been worth  
something.

# SWELL

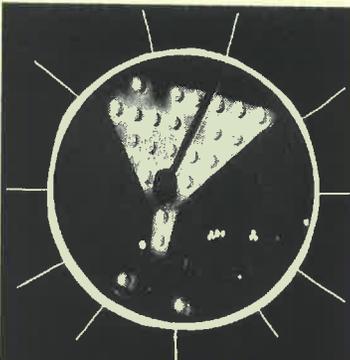
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B/WITH  
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## SWELL

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- "...Kicks ass" - Gavin Report
- "...cool" - Bay Guardian
- "...way cool" -STREETSSOUND
- "...Kneipenhitpotential" -SPEX
- "...etc." - OPTION

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### SO SORRY

Dear David,

Sorry it took so long to get back to you this time. I just flew in from New York. I was at the CMJ convention by the way, and I have been giving SWELL decent airplay But I couldn't find your letter! Isn't that a shame?

I am really excited about your music and the production work is just fine. Have you been doing anything else before? Sometime it reminds me of FUGAZI, although your music is very specific and more melodic, and soft. I'm enclosing info about labels, distributors, and radios. Feel free to contact any of those on behalf of me and let me know what happens then. I'd be glad to help you out if you plan to tour here. Once again, sorry for the delay.

Yours truly,

Jose Ruiz

Bourdeaux, France

### GUU GLUEY GLUE HEAD

Dear SWELL,

Hi. Fangush etc. Not a bad record at all. So far 'Sick Half of a Church' It's cool, remarkably restrained smart atmospheric sense and a sustained "mood" like one of those Holger Czukay/Jah Wobble/Can kinda groove thangs. I edited the 'All shook up' comic of Earthquake stories and the #28 issue of "Rip-off" (buy it quick. It's already out of print, Rip-off under-printed by several thousand copies) and have been a DJ for the last 13 years. I think your band is good. I'm looking for stories & art & music. I'm putting together lotsa different kinda anthologies of comics/music/sound/text in several projects. There's a CD compilation of alternative music and "a comic book" of photographs, comics, narrative. etc...I'm such a hot shot boring heap of skin and fingers living in a tin can baking in the sun and smelling like a convent in the summertime in Ireland. Hey, 'Dan, a son of God' yeah...makes me think of Daniel Johnston. Or Dan White. 'Think about those days' you know about magic & atmosphere. The quiet is everything. This is nice. My main interest is DREAMS. I'm tired now and my eyes GuuGluey Glue together like your Uncle's magnetic scottie dogs. "Wooden Hippie Nice" keeps me going. You guys are good and you can quote me.

Peace and intensity,  
George Parsons  
Nevada City, Ca

### THINK ABOUT THOSE SONGS

Dear pSycho-sPecific,

Thank you for sending me the SWELL album. I like it very much, will play it all the time. 'Think About Those Days' is one of my favorite songs of 1990, if anyone asks. Send me anything you release.

Sincerely,  
David Wisdom, Nightlines/CBC STEREO  
Vancouver, BC

### HOMESTEAD HOMEY

SWELL,

I heard your record on WFMU, and really dug it. I don't know what your deal with "pSycho-sPecific" is, but I could certainly use a copy of your record, so I could hear more than one of your songs.

I'm the guy who replaced Gerard Cosloy at Homestead.

Thanx,  
Ken Katkin  
Rockville Centre, New York

### USUALLY BE SLAGGIN'

Hello Sean, The odd thing is I like it. The tape. Good drum sounds and playin'. Usually I'd be slaggin'...but it stayed on the deck till the end. (I'm just old and abusive.)

Anyhow, we just got back from another tour over there. I let my brother come over and open for us for two weeks. He ended up crowding into our bus and then drove it into a highway sign in Austria.

If you want to tour there, you've got to get something out over there. Check out all the Indies in Germany like EFA or NORMAL. And there's some in Holland I don't know about. Booking Agencies: Paper clip in Holland, Foundation in Belgium, Sweatshop in Berlin, ABS in London. But it's useless unless you get a tape out over there. As far as our label goes, it's just a vehicle for us to deliver our own goods. You might want to check with Pat Thomas in your area. He has Heyday Records. Although you won't see any cash probably, he'd get the thing out there and that's what counts for ya now. He can also get some distribution in Europe through Rough Trade. Or just call Rough Trade yourself. The whole thing is a headache. So have some kind of fun with it. Talk about headaches, look out for our new mess... "SWEERVE". CD ONLY.

And yeah, I'd love to see some of those shots by the ocean that night of blur and thin rain in Northern Spain.

Take care,  
Howe (of Giant Sand)

### BAD NEWS FIRST

Dear Cynthia,

Good news! SWELL is #1 here at WEGL! It got 28 plays in two weeks (90 hours of mainstream programming a week) and was tied with major label fags Gene Loves Jezebel. The DJ's here have really taken to it and are enjoying it. The bad news is I was out of town and did not have the opportunity to report. I promise I'll make it up to you all some way or another. Keep up the hard work. It will pay off in the end. Big SWELL & pSycho-sPecific fans here at WEGL.

Chris Klein  
Auburn University, Alabama

### EL PASO FIASCO

Dear SWELL,

I've got your debut tape and I love it. You mentioned your follow-up record would be out soon. Please send information on ordering(cost, etc.) as soon as it's ready. Thanks!

Brian Glenn, El Paso, TX

## Chemically Altered States, Unfillable Love!

Barbed Wire Magazine  
Spring 1991  
San Francisco

Definitely one of the better bands to hit the music scene in the Bay, Swell proves that simpler is better in its self-titled debut album.

The group's sparse lyrics and heavy, driving beats combine to give its songs a hypnotic quality. Singer David Freel's vocals are gentle yet sometimes yearning, as if relating a painful story, whether it's one of urban life, chemically altered states or unfulfillable love. Even the sounds of the street that are heard between cuts help flesh out those stories. The highlights include the foreboding psychedelic sound of "Get High", the hypnotic, reverb-laden guitars of "A Town", and my favorite song on the album, "Dan, a son of God", a profound, rockin' fairy tale. The group mixes bass, acoustic and electric guitars, drums, keyboards, harmonica, and a toy piano to create its sound. Swell asks in one song: "Are you ready?" The answer the Bay area is definitely prepared for the beautifully simple, driving music that Swell has to offer.

## This Album Is A Real Enigma

Ben Is Dead Magazine/April 1991  
By Kirk  
Los Angeles

This album is as real enigma. I like it, but not really. It's really well recorded, has some really nice guitar sounds, but it's just too slick or something.

It kinda sounds like a cross between Tones on Tail and The Church. Some of it's acoustic, some of it's not.. A real

mellow album for the most part. I don't know...it just leaves me scratching my head (Sure that's not dandruff? Use some Tea Tree Oil in your shampoo.-Kerin). They will probably get signed to a major, make some bad records, and be the rave of college radio. But on the other hand...I don't know. I don't think I'd tell anyone that they've got to hear this, but I keep listening to it.

## These Guys Are Just Swell

Mean Streets Magazine/March 1991  
By Quasar

Los Angeles

Somehow, somewhere between Tony Bennet and Rice-a-Roni, San Francisco's Tenderloin district was forgotten. The sophisticated, neo-european image of S.F. doesn't mix well with the old run down tenements and corner drug traffic and abject poverty.

Two floors above one of the worst streets in the Tenderloin, David Freel, singer and guitarist for Swell lives with five other people (including another swell guy, guitarist, Jawhn Dettman) in a 6,000 sq. ft. loft that also doubles as the groups rehearsal/recording studio. In every note Swell plays, San Francisco's slum presents itself in a dark, mysteriously subtle (almost patient) musical tour of a forgotten, forlorn place. It's the kind of record that has so much going on that the listener is compelled to listen over and over again to find out just what the hell is going on (like the screaming homeless man Freel recorded from the warehouse window, found woven on the album's third track, "Sick Half of a Church"). After a few listens the album sucks you in and chews on you a bit with its asphalt tongue, only to spit you back out. But you'll go back because it's a great album.

Freel plays a clean loud acoustic that rolls along with the drums and bass (Sean Kirkpatrick and Monte Vallier, respectively) while Dettman, in his own words, "I weave in and out with the

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## The Bay Guardian Says: "Didn't Quite Connect"

By Kurt Wolf

The Bay Guardian/April 1991

### The Chameleon, San Francisco

Though I've listened to Swell's debut record of last year through and through, this was my first time seeing them in the flesh.

JC Hopkins made the point that the record is like a soundtrack to an urban landscape. There's street sounds and chatter in between some songs, which helps the record flow together almost as a single cohesive unit. Live, the band is not the record, which is not to say they're no good, because I still liked the music a lot. It's just that the songs didn't quite connect: They lacked the tight punchy energy I'm used to from the recording. They could've played louder as well. But taken out of their album context and competing against the busy atmosphere of a nightclub, the songs just didn't jump. "Get High," which is being released as a single on

Spirit/pSycho-sPecific, is a great pop song, propelled by simple percussion and bass, laid-back acoustic strumming, and some sweet psychedelic electric guitar licks on top is capable of waking you up like a morning jolt of spiked lemonade. Live, it just needs tightening. (So maybe we had a few -JD).

Acoustic guitarist and vocalist, David Freel, who co-founded Swell with drummer Sean Kirkpatrick, told me this is his first band and that the four of them have been together about a year. Pretty amazing, and it also explains why no one I talked to that night had ever heard them live before. Watch for the single and for a somewhat re-mixed CD release of their first self-titled album (with one extra track).



# Village View Says: "Undeniably Connected With The Audience"

By Mark Woodlief  
Village View Magazine/March 1991  
**Best show of the Month**

On Saturday, February 23, at the Dead Horse Fascination, local popsters The Black Watch and the promising Bay area quartet Swell both turned in quality sets.

Swell's dynamic leaps into intriguing rock proved the band, with a debut record to its credit, has surprising maturity. Acoustic and electric guitar interplay meshed wonderfully with

Swell's playful sense of meter and tricky rhythms. Swell's set was filled with music that seemed steeped in openness, was decidedly non-conventional, yet undeniably connected with the audience.



BRANDO PIMENTA

A sample of Swell-inspired groovers from their recent west coast excursion.

## JACKPOT!

College Music Journal  
June 1990  
New York

Naturally we're just gushing with superlatives for the debut waxing from the Bay area's SWELL.

Light, breezy, kinda T.Rex-y guitars and big, crunching living room drums reverberate with all the ambience and homey charm of a studio built in a quonset hut; genuine in emotion and attitude (what's that?) At last we are proud to report another band with enough mop-shaking Beatle-ish strums and cardboard box drums to rival even the Sex Clark Five. Because somewhere inside Swell's sound is that very hard kernel of greatness we'll gladly sift through sandstorms of demo tapes to find.



## San Francisco Does It Again!

San Francisco  
Gavin Report/June 1990

'Swell' maintains a diverse, simple and pure rock sound with music that kicks ass with clean, non-abrasive, nor over produced delivery.

## A Rare Exception Of Odd Ball Romantic Soulsearching

Flipside Magazine  
July/August 1990  
Los Angeles

Not many acoustic albums I'd admit to enjoyin, no matter what the singer looks like. That's what makes this lp such a rare exception.

All male odd ball/soul-searching/romantic/pop with an admirable dose of obscure noise 'n song structures which conform to few of the many paths normally taken by bands in this genre. If you're a sensitive artist with taste, check it out. Way weird silk screened cover.

## The Bay Guardian Adds Their Two Cents (One Of The Years Ten Best)

San Francisco  
By Kurt Wolf  
January 1991

Where the hell this band came from I don't know.

Their debut on pSycho-sPecific records is a cool blend of pop melody-making psychedelia, guitars, and just a hint of clangy percussion to add a delicious edge. I can't stop playing it. It rocks!



## Deceptions Abound!

Option Magazine/Oct. 1990

By Fred Mills

Los Angeles

Deceptions abound in this San Francisco band's debut. Early Violent Femmes comes to mind thanks to a minimalist acoustic ambience; thus indoctrinated, listeners suddenly get a plethora of electric curve balls tossed in their direction. The music can shift from warm folk-pop to icy, forbidding film score stuff. For example, in "Get High," images of Itchycoo Park are conjured when the the folkish, pastoral arrangement twists arrogantly into a psychedelic blues number. Similarly, the words can be direct and scathing in their indictments of organized religion, personal apathy, etc., yet they also lend themselves to more tentative and cerebral interpretations of one's relationship to the internal and external world. Finally, Swell's penchant for black humor makes this disc all the more enticing. The closing track 'Wooden Hippie Nice' borrows (just a smidgen) from Brian Wilson for the set-up but then throws the pie, amid some heavy guitar slide noise, with "Wouldn't it be swell to send this useless drama back to hell?"

*continued from page 4*

volume low and the effect on high." The Freel vocal style is REM-ish but without the contrived murmuring.

Now it seems to be good news for Swell. After a few select club dates in S.F. and a west coast tour; not only have they scored rave coverage in major mags, but they also have gotten one hundred percent response from all college radio stations that have the record (the record went to #1 at several stations and as high as #4 in Canada). In a more bizarre kind of response to the record, several of the stations have called "asking for another copy, because someone took it from the station," says Vallier who also doubles as the Swell publicist.

With a CD release of the LP (which has of yet only been available on cassette and vinyl) and a seven inch EP out, Swell will be taking their musical beast on a more global stroll. Hopefully it will only be a matter of time before the world is let in on the secret hidden in the Tenderloin. It'll be interesting to see the reaction.

## Way Cooler Than Even The Mecca Of The Moment Can Offer

Street Sound Magazine/March 1991  
Canada

On a rather optimistic sounding kind of plane, San Francisco's oddball band SWELL have a self-titled album out on pPsycho-sPecific.

This might be appealing to the gutsy acoustic set. The word "swirl" comes to mind. But some moments like "Dan, a son of God" and "A Town" are way cooler than even the massive exports from the mecca of the moment, Manchester. Lotsa potential. Enjoy 'em before they get huge.

## Have A Slice Of Moody Pie, You Romantic Souls

Spex LP Kritic

Januar 1991 Nr. 1

Germany

First, two discoveries, SWELL from San Francisco and Spasmodique from Amsterdam.

Swell serves a portion of moody pie for romantic souls. What I really get high on are the semi-acoustic guitar riffs and street-noise they use to introduce their more folk orientated songs. "Dan, a son of God" and "Get High" both have bar-(scene) hit potential. Real catchy...

## Swell And The Elevator To Your Mind

Howl Nr. 9 Februar 91

Germany

We highly recommend a great new discovery from San Francisco, naturally. SWELL. Period. And nothing else.

Where sophisticated bells ring with acoustic guitars. Where the drummer is playing a confusing game of suspense. Where the singers voice is whispering in your ear that somebody is getting into the elevator to your mind. Where Swell is the sun that dries the cow pies in the meadow...peace. Freedom. Semi-electric.



*Swell playing the streets of San Sebastian in midst of their first European tour.*

## One Of The Strangest Bands

Musik Express

NR. 3 Marz '91

Germany

San Francisco has a tradition for breeding the strangest bands and this is one of them.

Swell mix raw guitar sounds with electronic percussion and hypnotic-ambient themes to arrive at their own "experiment". Take a secret tip from us and look for this band...★★★★★



*Mr. Freel at the helm.*