

The Corresponder



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Fan Letter on Minnesota Writers

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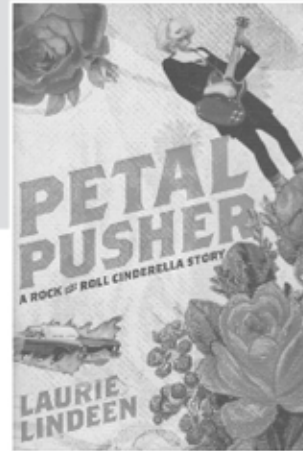
Joni Tevis

Petal Pusher

By Laurie Lindeen

Atria, 2007

Price (Hardcover): \$24.00



Reviewed by Catherine Hooper

Laurie Lindeen is used to dealing with off-target press. The media once regularly accosted the girl-band-rocker during her musical heyday, not to inquire about her rock passions and talents, but instead to ferret gossip about her then-famous boyfriend (and now husband), former Replacements front man, Paul Westerberg. Lindeen's memoir *Petal Pusher* describes the author's journey through her twenties and thirties as a founding member of the band Zuzu's Petals. The book has met with similarly not-spot-on press; according to interviews with Lindeen, some retailers are marketing the book as a straight up rock-and-roll memoir, a distinct oversimplification of this coming-of-age story.

While *Petal Pusher* certainly explores the cowboy-boot-wearing, sometimes rat-infested, and frequently stoned 80s and 90s Minneapolis music scene, the book offers more than an all-girl band chasing after the cliché rock image of sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll. Lindeen details failures and triumphs from every aspect of her musical development with honesty and openness, willingly laying out her challenges and embarrassments for full viewing. She depicts learning to play guitar in her twenties with only a modified variation of the "Think System" touted in the *Music Man* as her guiding principle. She shows the grueling and financially un-rewarding realities faced on tour by her not-particularly-famous band. She lays out exact reprints of reviews both praising and—often painfully—criticizing the band.

But it's the personal angle in *Petal Pusher* that really captures readers' interests and hearts. Lindeen freely explores difficult personal topics including her parents' messy divorce, her struggle to recover from a near-debilitating bout with multiple sclerosis, and her daily challenge

to face the fear that this same disease might reappear and cripple her. While Zuzu's Petals and the grunge-dominated musical scene of the late 80s and 90s play an integral part of Lindeen's memoir, the book also paints poignant pictures of her attempts to determine who she is, what she wants, and whether or not an avalanche of determination and persistence is enough to generate fame and happiness.

In *Petal Pusher*, the stage is where Zuzu's Petals members explore such intimate questions as these and where their musical and personal lives collide. Lindeen and company spill out personal struggles, fears, and hopes through abused drums, bleeding fingers on guitar strings, and belted anthems of rage, fear, and joy. As the group's eventual disbanding grows likelier, Lindeen muses, "Pieces of my life have been ugly, felt ugly. Performing is purifying, a nightly sweat, a detox... I'm not a victim of anything except unrealistic dreams and believing in musicals." This could be the anthem of the book, a summation of how living the rock life can both enslave the rocker and set her free. *Petal Pusher* is a complicated, well-written, emotional ride that explores Lindeen's internal struggle to translate the personal into the musical.