

Sirenflower (band) was a grunge/goth rock band active in Binghamton, NY and the state's Southern Tier region from 1990-1993.

### Formation

Sirenflower was formed in 1990 in Binghamton, NY. The four original band members included David Hatt, vocals, Eric Roth, guitar, Steve Hine, bass guitar, and Lou Massa, drums and percussion. In 1992, the band added keyboardist Carol Mapes. The four original members all attended Susquehanna Valley High School and later, SUNY Broome. Previously, Eric was a founding member of Cannibals Gone Trendy, a punk band, and briefly played bass for Thelonius Funk, which was the earliest incarnation of Yolk (arguably the most successful band to come out of Binghamton).

### Origin of Name

The name Sirenflower was taken from the Dungeons & Dragons game. This particular creature is described as a large carnivorous plant similar to a Venus Flytrap that lures live prey by emitting lights and fragrant scents. All of the band members played Dungeons & Dragons at the time and liked the sound of the name as well as the allusions to fantasy, adventure, mythology, and nature.

### The Binghamton Music Scene

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Binghamton rock music scene was dominated by three types of bands: mainstream/classic rock, heavy metal, and punk. Sirenflower grew out of the punk scene. The lineups of the band's earliest shows included local punk stalwarts such as Abalienation, Akademy Shred, The Meat Department, and others. Before long, however, Sirenflower joined a small group of other bands including Yolk, Tate's Baby, and Mind at Large (from Elmira) that were seeking to provide a contrast to the usual nightclub fare in the Southern Tier. These bands often paired up to play shows together and developed a largely mutual local following (including some dedicated friends and fans who frequently volunteered to work as roadies and run lights and sound). The band played venues in Binghamton such as The LIE, The Taz, West Side Cheers, Bourbon Street, and the SUNY Binghamton Student Union Building, as well as The Haunt and Max's in Ithaca and The Lost Horizons and Fuoco's in Syracuse. Sirenflower also played at the legendary CBGB in New York City.

### Style and Development

In its short three-year history, Sirenflower experimented with and incorporated a variety of music styles, including punk, prog metal, funk, grunge, goth, art rock, and avant-garde. Major influences included Voivod, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Dead Kennedys, Jane's Addiction, Soundgarden, Danzig, Fields of the Nephilim, Sisters of Mercy, Christian Death, Bauhaus, and Sonic Youth, among many others.

The first year, while the four members were still in high school, was the band's most eclectic and haphazard era. During this early phase, the band attempted to incorporate a bewildering mix of styles. By the second year, however, the band had started leaning heavily toward grunge in order to take better advantage of Dave's strong voice that was to become the band's trademark. Other important stylistic characteristics include Eric's harmonically adventurous guitar playing, Steve's inventive funk-inspired bass lines, and Lou's tasteful and often virtuosic drumming. It was during this period that the band wrote its two most memorable songs, "Somewhere" and "Sounds." The former begins with loud, dissonant harmonics on guitar, followed by a slow but driving riff punctuated with forceful yells by Dave. This song, which the band often used to open its shows, became a beacon call to the band's fans at the start of its concerts. "Sounds" juxtaposed softer melodic passages with heavy, technical rhythmic stops in what was becoming key characteristic of the emerging grunge style nationwide and beyond.

In 1992, Carol Mapes joined the band as keyboardist as the band sought to mellow out its sound further toward goth, with longer passages of slow, ethereal-sounding music to accompany Dave singing dark melodies in his low baritone voice. At this time, the band started phasing out the heavy, fast and rhythmic sections prevalent in its earlier songs. Carol played several shows with Sirenflower before the band broke up in 1993. Her playing is featured on two of the band's extant recordings (the live show at the LIE and the recording of "Silence."

## Recordings

There are five extant recordings of Sirenflower's music. The first was a rough demo of two songs engineered by Andrew Kirchner in 1991. "Drew" had also played drums in Tate's Baby and was close to the band at this time. The demo may have featured as many as four songs, but extant copies are damaged and only the songs, "Quiet Room" and "Somewhere" are still accessible, although the quality is very low.

The band recorded its next demo at Pyramid Studios in Paramus, New Jersey. The recording was made by Lou's father, who owned the studio, and who also played electric saxophone on one track (untitled). The recording, which came to be known as the "white tape," featured three songs. One of these was the funk-inspired "Why did you leave," while another was a short instrumental based on riffs that would later be used in the band's song, "Withered."

The third recording was done live at the LIE in 1992. The recording includes eight songs, although the final, "Fairy's Tear's" is cut off partway through. While the songs "Somewhere," "Sounds," "Withered," and "This is Heresy" (cover of the song by Christian Death) are of fair to good quality, the "Intro," "Begone" "Silence," are marred by tuning issues with Eric's guitar. The song, "Sounds," on this recording is noteworthy for the intriguing live sound effects added by engineer, Mike Shonk.

The fourth and highest-quality recording of the band's output was engineered by Bob Hughes in 1992. This recording included five songs, "Somewhere," "Reflections," "Where Night Reigns," "Sounds," and "Fairy's Tears." All of these songs, excepting "Fairy's Tears," are now available on YouTube. This recording remains the best example of Sirenflower's music to date.

The final recording was engineered by James Apicella in late 1992 or early 1993. It includes only one song, "Silence," a slow and dark ballad. The song featured Eric playing classical guitar and Carol on keyboard as an accompaniment to Dave's introspective vocals. Although Lou and Steve tended to play on this song live, they are not featured on this recording, which was intended as an acoustic rendition of the song.

### Press and Publicity

In 1992, Sirenflower was featured prominently at least three times in the local Binghamton press (excluding paid ads, which the band took out frequently to promote its shows). The first of these articles was published in the March issue of The Music Press and featured a review of the five-song demo recorded by Bob Hughes. The Music Press was an important music publication in Binghamton at the time. This monthly newspaper, published by Josh Ribakov and distributed free of charge, was a godsend for local bands and fans alike. It provided a calendar of local shows and included feature articles, interviews, concert and demo reviews, and space for paid ads made available to bands at reasonable prices.

The review of the five-song demo by Bob Hughes in The Music Press was penned by Mike Shonk, who also ran sound at a few Sirenflower shows. Here are a few choice quotes:

"This is one of the more interesting tapes that has crossed my path lately. If you mix "Grunge" rock (Nirvana, Sonic Youth) with a healthy dose of psychedelia (Jane's Addiction) and add a touch of theatricality (Doors style), you get a good idea of what Sirenflower sound like. ... If alternative music is your bag, you should definitely check out the Gothic Grunge of Sirenflower. They're one of the most original, interesting bands in our area right now."

The second article was a concert review written by Josh Ribakov and published in The Music Press in May 1992. This concert was a double bill with Mind At Large at the LIE. In the review Ribakov provides a colorful description of Sirenflower's stage show. The band had always been proud of the energy and creativity it put into its stage shows, which at times included background video as well as artistic dancers (Lisa Copland, Carrie Eames, and Cathy Hill). Ribakov's review is presented in here in full:

"Sirenflower are the kind of band that draws a strong love/hate reaction from a crowd. There is no Chuck Berry influence whatsoever in their music. They're loud and thrashy, very tight, with a frontman who appears to be tottering on the edge of sanity. They're not really a metal band, not really a punk band, and they don't play tunes you can hum along with. If you like well played, painful, screaming gothic music, this is the band for you. If you like the Archies, don't bother."

The final extant article about Sirenflower appeared in the July 10, 1992 issue of the Good Times section of Press & Sun Bulletin, Binghamton's premiere daily newspaper. The article, headlined, "Siren Flower follows rock's less-traveled road," was written by Andy LoTempio. It describes the band's style, influences, history, and includes quotes by band members.

"The term 'alternative' was coined to classify every type of music that can't be classified. Some is fast and loud like a runaway chain saw; some plods along slowly and aimlessly. Siren Flower brings both speeds to the stage with slow-going vocal soliloquies that suddenly shift gears to high-speed guitar frenzies. This approach appeals to listeners who like to sidle over to their mellow, psychedelic side but who also want to get their knees up in a healthy slam-dance called a 'mosh.' ... On stage, The Susquehanna Valley High School graduates present a young, radical image. New angry rock bands like Soundgarden and Sisters of Mercy influenced the band's direction. ... Although outcast original bands are fewer in number and perform under a dimmer spotlight, they enjoy a kind of defiant satisfaction that comes from standing tall and doing their own thing. 'If we wanted to be a tribute band we could make money around here. We only play what we feel,' drummer Lou Massa said."

Like so many other bands at the time, Sirenflower created handmade, DIY-style flyers to promote its shows and plastered them around the city. These flyers featured original drawings and other artwork, collage-style cutouts from magazines, and anything else the bands could think of to attract the eye. Many of the flyers that were created to promote Sirenflower's shows are still extant and scanned images of them occasionally surface in today's social media newsfeeds.

#### Breakup in 1993

In 1993 the band found itself at several crossroads that caused tension and uncertainty between the members. Some of this pressure resulted from the band's stylistic direction as it leaned more and more toward goth and minimalistic art rock. However, other tensions were driven by other intrapersonal and external factors. Dave was pushing for the band to become larger and more ambitious, even while college loomed for the other members. Eric was becoming more and more enamored with classical guitar and composition. The band struggled to write new songs during this period and also changed studios multiple

times, causing further disruption. External issues with some of the band members' romantic relationships also added complications.

Steve left the band first, openly frustrated with the push and pull between all of these tensions. The three remaining members briefly and unsuccessfully sought to find a replacement bass player, and disbanded a short time later. Initially the breakup strained the relations between the band members, but it didn't take long before they repaired and reenergized their long-lasting friendships.

#### Intervening Years and Reunions

After the band's breakup, Lou played with several other local bands, most notably Pink Furnace and Timid Demon. He then moved to New York City, where he has led successful career in the film industry. Eric earned a degree in music and has been an active classical guitarist in New York's Hudson Valley Region for many years while also pursuing a rewarding career in the nonprofit sector. Steve became a music teacher and has taught at multiple school districts in the Binghamton area. Dave moved to North Carolina, and later Pennsylvania, and has had a successful career in multiple construction-related industries.

Despite the distances, all members kept in touch and saw one another periodically over the years, occasionally sharing original musical ideas. In 2014, Eric, Dave and Steve visited Lou's home studio in Yonkers. It was the first time the four members had gotten together since 1993. They held a marathon informal jam session that weekend in which they explored a variety of musical styles and ideas.

In 2021, in the (hopefully) waning days of the Covid-19 pandemic, all four agreed to a reunion show, which has since been scheduled to take place at The Cave (formerly the LIE) in Binghamton on July 15, 2022. The band will play a number of their old songs, some of which may be revised. The band also plans to unveil some new songs and play a few songs by other artists. Stay tuned for more developments.