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Two local fans' love for Cincinnati's Over the Rhine results in an impressive tribute CD

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By Mike Breen

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The boundlessness of the Internet has been both a wonderful and (some might say) threatening advancement in modern technology and culture. The cyber-frontier has been deemed an outpost for pirates by some in the music industry, as anyone who has read about the rise and fall of Napster over the past few years can attest.



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One of the more intriguing outlets in cyberspace from a music lover's standpoint is the fan-site. Within many sites set up by fans are online forums that allow for a free exchange of ideas about favorite artists.

The beloved Cincinnati-based Folk/Pop group Over the Rhine has built up a cult-like following in its decade-plus of existence, so it's not surprising that the band has a few very active sites dedicated to them. Bruce Lachey was sharing thoughts through an OTR newsgroup back in 1997 when the subject of how to raise the band's national profile arose. While message boards and newsgroups can be fairly informative, they can also get somewhat irreverent and slap-happy. Some of the promotional ideas fans came up with: commemorative plates, wax figures and lunchboxes.

Luckily, Lachey latched on to a better idea -- a tribute CD. Lachey put the call for participants out through the newsgroup and interested musicians poured forth. Lachey kicked the idea around for a few years, then enlisted friend and fellow OTR fan Drew Vogel to help with the production and organization of the project. The end result of their hard work is the recently released, impressive two-CD set, *What It Takes to Please You*, featuring artists

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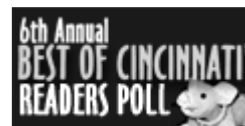
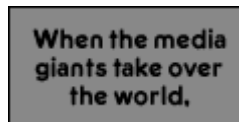
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from Cincinnati, Texas, Oregon, Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, California, Illinois, Oklahoma, Nebraska and New Jersey.

"I've been an Over the Rhine fan for just about 10 years now," Lachey says. "I moved here to go to UC and went a few times with friends to see them at (Corryville music venue/laundromat) Sudsy's and have been following them pretty well ever since. It's not the typical music I get into, but somehow it's stuck in there for this long."

Originally, the project was conceived as a single disc set but, from the start, Lachey was adamant about utilizing all the submissions, causing the collection blossom to two CDs.

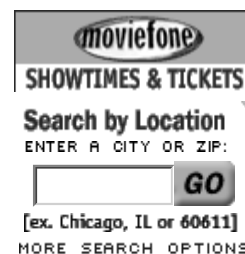
"We didn't want to be put into the position of deciding whose song got onto the project -- we might have cut what could have been someone's favorite, some of the musicians paid to record their songs, etc., etc.," says Vogel. "For a lot of reasons, we decided not to 'judge' the songs and decide who got on and who didn't, but rather put all of them forward as a collection, warts and all. Sure, some of the songs could have been cut out to make a single, *really* strong disc. But that wasn't the point."

The point, Vogel says, was to honor the way Over the Rhine's music has impacted individual lives. Many in OTR's loyal fan base have been deeply touched by the group's music, so *What It Takes* gave the musically-inclined ones a way of saying thanks and "retelling a familiar story," Lachey says.

"It seems a lot of people are really passionate about OTR," Lachey continues. "Opinions are always extreme regarding them, it seems, more extreme than for most bands. Love 'em or hate 'em. They have this huge following that seems to 'get it.' I get to a lot of local shows, and in no other fan base have I seen such community."

What It Takes features takes on songs from each of the band's albums (except for last year's *Films For Radio*) and also spotlights a few cuts that were on the band's rarities and live collections. All of the cover versions aren't winners (some treat the tunes a little too preciously), but there are some pleasant surprises and, as a whole, fans will feel comfortable about putting it in their record collections next to the real deal.

Highlights include Cincy's Ashley Peacock and his soulful take on "Etcetera Whatever" from the home-recorded *Good Dog Bad Dog* (the most represented album here), a rootsy "Go Down Easy" by Michigan's Piers Plowman and an energetic Pop/Rock take on "Miles" by Louisville's



Ellipsis. Elsewhere, the more experimental, electronic-based versions of "Murder" by HyperSomnia and "Jack's Valentine" by DiJit, lend the disc some diversity. Other Cincinnati-area participants include Pay the Girl's Mike Georgian (who has played bass with OTR in the past), Stop the Car's Mark Utley, and the organizers themselves. Local Michael Wilson (a regular OTR collaborator on the artistic end) provided the photography.

Both organizers are pleased with the end product, and it already appears to be selling well at local retailers. Vogel has set up a link on his Web site (drewvogel.com) with information about the project as well as online ordering directions. Keeping in line with Over the Rhine's community spirit, proceeds from the sales of *What It Takes* go to the Greater Cincinnati Community Shares program, which raises funds for 21 local charities.

So what do the honorees themselves think? The collection has the group's blessing -- Vogel says they communicated with OTR's Karin Bergquist and Linford Detweiler about why it was a good idea to have an album celebrating their music.

"What makes all these people think they could possibly redo a loved song into a version that still holds merit?" Vogel asks. "We're not sure we know the answer to that, but as we explained to Karin and Linford, perhaps it's that every singer or musician has a short list of songs he wishes he'd written. Maybe it's the melody, or maybe the lyric strikes a personal chord. Covering the song seems to make it your own, or even to continue telling the story. And then perhaps you can affect people anew."

WHAT IT TAKES TO PLEASE YOU is available now at various local music-friendly retailers.

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