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## ON THE TOWN



SCOTT DADELSON/GETTY

**What were you doing when you were high school age?** The Regrettes, fronted by 16-year-old Lydia Night, above, are on tour behind a tidal wave of buzz that, for a refreshing change, is deserved. This group is a whip-smart blend of punk, new wave and power pop that strikes the ear a lot like when you dump a bucket of Mentos into a tub full of Coke — all fizz and wonder. The Regrettes talk with Greg Kot in advance of a much-anticipated Chicago gig. **In Turn It Up**

# TURN IT UP

BY GREG KOT



JEN ROSENSTEIN PHOTO

The Regrettes — Sage Nicole, from left, Lydia Night, Genessa Gariano and Maxx Morando — merge punk, pop, surf and girl group harmonies in an irresistible blend.

## Regrettes worth the mention

The Regrettes' "A Living Human Girl" is a spitball of an anthem, a song that every girl needs to hear — and every guy too.

"Yeah, definitely the guys," the song's author, Lydia Night, says. "I wrote it for me, but once we started playing it, it struck a nerve." It became a song for and about everybody.

Sassy harmonies evoke the girl groups of the '60s and then transform into a feminist garage-rock memo to the world. Night owns her "flaws," her physical imperfections, her mood swings and her fashion choices. "I'm not being bossy, I'm saying how I feel," she sings, "and I'm not a b--- for stating what is real."

"I remember sitting at the dining room table writing those lyrics on a laptop," says Night, a teenager who is finishing up high school in California. "It was just kind of a big mashup of all these different things I was feeling and trying to get them out. It started out as more something I was doing for myself, feeling s--- about myself when starting high school and needing a song to pull myself out of it, to shine a light on

**When:** 7 p.m. Sunday

**Where:** Schubas, 3159 N. Southport Ave.

**Tickets:** \$10 and \$12;  
[www.lh-st.com](http://www.lh-st.com)

some of these standards that women have to deal with constantly just to get through their day."

"A Living Human Girl" anchors the Regrettes' debut album, "Feel Your Feelings Fool!" (Warner). For Night, it represents the next step in a musical path she's been tracing since early childhood. She grew up around classic songs, with her parents' records playing constantly in the house. By the time she was 5 years old, Lydia had already seen the legendary New Orleans pianist Fats Domino and the Los Angeles pop-punk band the Donnas.

Seeing the Donnas "started my obsession to be a musician, a frontperson," she says. "It was one of my first big memories. It was just superpowerful; I'd never seen anything like that. Four women on a stage singing and

moving like that; it was a shock. Now that I think about it, my first main memories were concerts. My first concert was Fats Domino, and then the Donnas turned music into an obsession."

For her sixth birthday, Lydia asked for and received a guitar. "I was super into art, and drawing and painting, and I had an art teacher who also wrote music and played guitar, so it was an easy transition for me to start doing more music," she says. Within months she was cranking out songs and was in a band by the time she was 7. She estimates that she's been writing a song a week ever since.

When she was 12, Night met two future members of the Regrettes at the School of Rock in Los Angeles: guitarist Genessa Gariano and bassist Sage Nicole.

"I was sort of intimidated actually because I'm younger than they are," Night says. "They'd known each other for much longer, but it built a connection." In 2015, the trio reunited and added drummer Maxx Morando. The teenage band instantly found a chemistry with

Night's songs, which are built on a foundation of guitar-based melodies and harmonies from decades before the singer was born.

"I'm a huge fan of music from the '50s and '60s," Night says. "I love the soulfulness and harmonies in '60s girl groups, the boldness and lyrics of people like Buddy Holly and Elvis — they sang cheesy lyrics, but they weren't afraid to be that open. It's timeless music, and I can listen to it in any mood and it makes me feel good."

"A Living Human Girl" surfaced last summer as a prelude to the release of "Feel Your Feelings Fool!" in January. Many of the songs are drawn from Night's experience at a big art school in downtown Los Angeles, where she met students who constantly fretted about their physical imperfections, their inability to match the standards set by a patriarchal culture.

"At first it was really disheartening and really sad to me," she says. "I was pretty sheltered up to that point. I was raised by people who taught me to like

myself, so it was weird to walk into something like that. I got opened up to a whole world of s--- that I didn't know existed."

The songs helped Night process her feelings, and her bandmates gave them life. "I've been writing music since I was 6, and it was my biggest tool for dealing with anything," she says. "I don't understand how those people who don't write music get through life."

The response from fans who were going through similar experiences proved gratifying, and it opened up a bunch of possibilities in her life and music.

"I feel so grateful to that school because I met so many powerful people through that," she says. "I have become a stronger person because of it. I love myself so much more now than I ever did."

Greg Kot co-hosts "Sound Opinions" at 8 p.m. Friday and 2 and 11 p.m. Saturday on WBEZ-FM 91.5.

Greg Kot is a Tribune critic.

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