

# DISHAWALLA

J.R. Richards -- vocals, keyboards

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Scot Alexander -- bass

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Rodney Browning -- guitars

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George Pendergast -- drums

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In a remote village of India, a pack of entrepreneurial nomads known as Dishwallas are altering the lives of the simple folk there by purchasing satellite dishes and wiring pirated cable to their neighbors. As a result, impoverished villagers who had once barely known of the existence of television are being exposed to a wide range of commercial stimuli. "There are people living on dirt floors, spending whatever money they have on entertainment," says vocalist J.R. Richards, whose band Dishwalla has what it takes to be nearly as big a breakthrough in the west as the cable poachers are in Asia.

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Dishwalla is comparable to a TV viewer with an itchy trigger finger--the kind that changes channels just as the program he's watching begins to unfold. Its music is a cunning combination of pop, alternative, soul and classic rock that shifts in tone and timbre nearly every song, but remains cohesive throughout. "We have so many diverse influences it's mainly just a challenge to make all those styles work together, and to get an album worth of material that flows," says Richards. "I usually have a hard time sitting down and listening to a whole record because I get tired of it half way through. I want to make music that holds up," adds guitarist Rodney Browning.

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The band's debut album, PET YOUR FRIENDS, holds up better than a set of matching curtains, alternatively weaving buzzing guitars and buoyant grooves through pristine pop melodies. It's a push-pull affair where each instrument playfully competes for supremacy. And since the band members are all equally skilled, the results are enthralling. "Most bands tend to sound like they all listen to the same things. We definitely don't, and I think that's apparent from the record," says Richards.

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Indeed, at different times PET YOUR FRIENDS is reminiscent of a wide range of bands. "[Haze](#)" starts with a soulful wah-wah groove in the style of Isaac Hayes, before ending in a glorious guitarfest that owes more to Led Zeppelin; "Explode" shimmers like the best '80s Brit-pop, then bursts in a shower of noisy distortion; and "[Charlie Brown's Parents](#)" starts like a Queen ballad and ends in a driving power rock furor.

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Dishwalla thrives on dynamics, building tension by raising and lowering intensity level, then climaxing with a burst of excitement. "I think the tension comes from fitting a lot of the different styles into one song. A lot of times I'm influenced by that tension, and it inspires me to come up with things lyrically that match," says Richards.

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Many songs have serious, even sobering themes. "[Haze](#)" is about alcoholism and the effect it has on a victim and her family, "[Charlie Brown's Parents](#)" discusses the inability people with different views have communicating and "[Counting Blue](#)

[Cars](#)," which features the lyrics, "Tell me all your thoughts on God... I'd really like to meet her," approaches religion from an alternate perspective. "It examines it through the eyes of a child. It must be so confusing to children to always refer to god as a male Caucasian. I figured, why not refer to god as a woman. We're such a male-driven society, but being a man doesn't mean having to oppress women or immerse yourself in everything that's masculine."

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While Dishwalla sings about meaningful subjects, Richards doesn't consider the band to be political. "We just question what we see around us, but that doesn't make us political. These are things that everyone should think about, whatever their beliefs may be."

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And the group has a lighter, more pop culture side as well. "[Charlie Brown's Parents](#)" was named after the celebrated cartoon series and is a reference to the indecipherable banter of Charlie's parents, and "Miss Emma Peel" makes a tongue-in-cheek nod about a crush on a character from the "Avengers" television series. "There's a serious angle to the whole thing we do, but we don't want people to get overly dramatic and be too serious," says Pendergast. "It's just music."

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Dishwalla formed three years ago in Santa Barbara, California, but the band members had all played in other groups prior to forming. Richards met drummer George Pendergast in a music store when the two were in their early teens, and shortly after, they started a band. Guitarist Rodney Browning, who had been recording at a studio in Richards' house came onboard next, followed by bassist Scot Alexander, who was playing with Pendergast in a different group at the same time. Within months from their formation Dishwalla was making a buzz on the local scene, which had previously produced such diverse outfits as Toad the Wet Sprocket and Ugly Kid Joe. "There's no real Santa Barbara sound. They have everything from speed metal to coffee house folk. I think by not being a part of any one scene we've been able to do our own thing," says Richards.

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Although Dishwalla has been tearing it up in their home town for several years now, the band only recently came into the public eye when it recorded a track for the Carpenters tribute album. "That was no gimmick," insists Richards. "I'm a big Carpenters fan. We read in the LA Times that they were doing it, so we got a tape to the executive producer Matt Wallace, and he liked what we did. People might think it's weird that we would do a Carpenters song, but that's the cool thing about this band. We can do whatever we want."

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Or as he sings in the beginning of "[Haze](#)", "Untie the hands that bind your mind." Dishwalla are better than Pay Per View. Tune in.

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