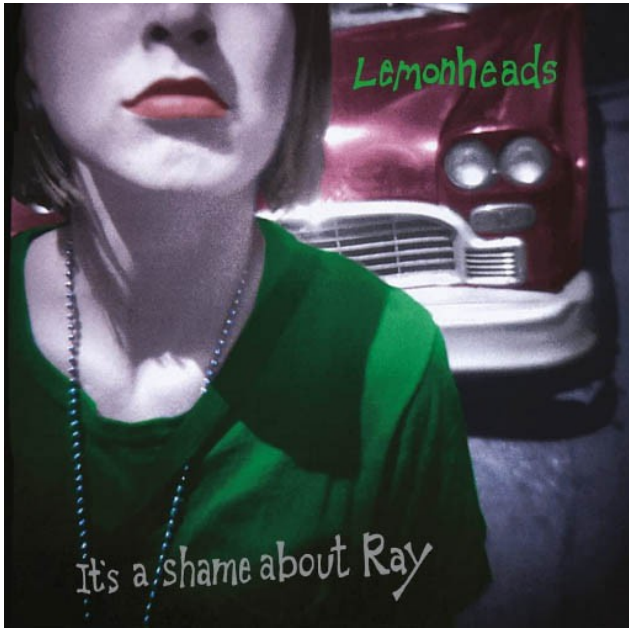


Cover girl relives 'Ray' before Lemonheads



By Thomas Conner

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What new can be said about the Lemonheads' classic modern-rock album "It's a Shame About Ray"? How about this: Polly's in town!

If you (like us) always assumed that was frontman Evan Dando's then-girlfriend and satellite band member Juliana Hatfield on the "Ray" album cover — buzzer! — thank you for playing. It's actually Chicago area actress Polly Noonan, who's now earning raves in the lead role of Sarah Ruhl's play "Dead Man's Cell Phone" at Steppenwolf Theatre.

Noonan enlightened us on how her visage came to grace the 1992 album — which the band will play in its entirety this week.

On the degrees of separation: "The Lemonheads were old friends of mine, through Jesse [Peretz], who used to be in the band and was a filmmaker and photographer. ...He made videos for the band and others, like the Foo Fighters. We made a lot of them together and hung out a lot. We enjoyed each other's company."

On the cool car in the background: "Jesse was visiting Chicago and took a bunch of photos of me in my car. Everybody loved my car, an old Checker Marathon, brown, with opera windows. It was kinda fantastic."

On the video for the title song: "Evan met Johnny Depp at a restaurant, and they became friends. He convinced him to be in the video. I was out on the shoot, somewhere about an hour and a half east of L.A., in the desert. They must have played that song 300 times for the cameras, just blasting it in the desert. But it didn't ever grate on me. I think that's what happened to the album, you know?"

On her appearance on an earlier Lemonheads album, "Lovey": "One day I left this message for some friends on their answering machine, and they wound up making it track 11 on 'Lovey.' I didn't know it. A friend of mine was dating Evan at the time, and we were giving him and Jesse a hard time, saying, 'You thank everyone in the sun on your albums but you never thank your friends and girlfriends.' They sort of laughed and said, 'Just go home and listen to the album. That was a funny surprise — but also kind of creepy.'"