

# TOP OF THE POPS LIFE'S A TREAT FOR FREEZEPop SINGER JUSSI GAMACHE

**A FEW YEARS BACK**, Freezepop vocalist Jussi Gamache found herself on stage in a large club in Stockholm, in front of almost a thousand dancing fans. "I'm halfway around the world, and all these people are singing along to my music," says Gamache (CFA '94, '00). "It was kind of surreal." That's a good way to describe it, especially for a synth band that had only one instrument in its formative years and gained its biggest following from, of all things, a video game called "Guitar Hero."

On stage, Gamache is Liz Enthusiasm. Despite the name, she's a bit detached up there, with the curl of a smile on her lips, her voice more cool metal than raucous cheer. But Freezepop is just what you'd expect: icy, sweet, colorful, not exactly filling, and with a dash of humor. The group's songs, with lyrics by Gamache, are a mix of missed romantic connections and party fun set to peppy, dance-friendly electronica, with echoes of eighties teen idols Duran Duran filtering through. What's not to love with song titles like "Duct Tape My Heart" and "I Am Not Your Gameboy"? The band's new CD, *Future Future Future Perfect*, is out on the hipster Rykodisc label and netting impressive media coverage.

Not many would have predicted that success back in 1999, when Gamache — a former *Bostonia* graphic designer and now a freelancer — was recruited by a friend of a friend to help create an anachronism: a synth pop band. Boston has always been a rocker's town, and synth pop was very much not the flavor of any month in the late nineties. Undeterred, the group, which included Gamache's pal (and now husband) Sean Drinkwater, began playing gigs around town, with Gamache on vocals and the only instrument a small, boxy Yamaha QY-70 synthesizer.

They played first slots on Tuesdays at T. T. the Bear's Place in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and at the Skybar in nearby Somerville — "the kind of place you only take shows at if you're just starting out and are desperate to play," she says — and soon acquired a Goth following, a bit hard to fathom, given their frothy music. But they didn't complain.

Through connections with video game developers, their songs landed in games like "Amplitude" and "Dance Dance Revolution," and gamers soon started showing up at concerts. They struck pay dirt when their song "Get Ready 2 Rokk" was in the hit video game "Guitar Hero." And yes, they added a guitar track to that version. But the "Guitar Hero 2" Freezepop song "Less Talk More Rokk" is pure synth.

The band gets around, too, despite their day jobs. "We try to take long weekends to play places where we have pockets of fans — Florida, Texas, Arizona, Seattle, Pittsburgh — we always have a fun time in Pittsburgh," Gamache says. "It's kind of random. You never really know where the fans are."

Turns out, fans can be found in some surprising places. Gamache was taken aback a year ago by a call from a promoter in Turkey. "I didn't know what kind of reception I was going to get," she says. "I wondered if I should dress more modestly." Still, off they flew for a two-city mini-tour. "Once we were in the club, it was just like a bunch of indie kids — you could be anywhere."

Freezepop's popularity seems to be solidifying. They're selling well on iTunes, concerts are packed, teen-aged girls have taken to copying Gamache's trademark streak of magenta hair, and Freezepop tattoos are showing up at concerts. (Gamache is impressed; she hasn't even pierced her ears.) "How did this happen to me?" she muses. "It's weird, but awesome." **TAYLOR McNEIL**



PHOTO BY PHIL RALLOS

"People sometimes recognize me on the street now," says Freezepop vocalist Jussi Gamache. "It's kind of crazy."

alum  
profile