

Big Wheeler's Bone Orchard — Big Wheeler



The senior citizens of the blues community have been getting some long overdue recognition over the past few years and I'm the first to stand up and say that it's only fitting and proper. Not all of the accolades are deserved, though. Longevity hardly equals proficiency in any field of endeavor.

Sixty-four-year-old Golden "Big" Wheeler is one of those elder statesmen who deserves the attention. He first hit Chicago and worked his way into the busiest musical landscape out there, in the mid-1940s. As soon as the reality of just how intense the competition was and how much a family required to keep it afloat, he dropped back out of music for almost 35 years and took a day job.

Now that Big Wheeler is in retirement, the music finally gets back to the front seat, and one can only wonder at how good it might have been to him had he stayed with it all along. All of which, perhaps, sounds like preface to why the "old man" should have kept his day job, but I'm here to tell you that the man's got something to say and a wholly infectious means of doing so.

Certainly, Little Walter's class friend isn't in the same category in the chops shop, but he and Smokey Smothers' old band, the Ice Cream Men, are earnest about keeping the flame of classic Chicago blues burning bright. So, it isn't the tightest or rockiest disc you'll hear this year. It stands up to anything out there for sheer heart and joy in the playing.

Wheeler is still a pretty formidable harmonica blowing vocalist, and the band cuts a tight groove behind him throughout. Outside of Jimmy Reed's "Down in Virginia" and Little Walter's "Everybody Needs Somebody," the program leans on drummer Steve Cusling originals and less familiar cuts from the blues history book.

If "Evil Woman" doesn't blow your hair back, I guess we're doomed to different strokes.

— Mark Gallo

Party Store — Snake and the Charmers



Michael Jackson took the word back to new extremes and had a million or so selling releases. "Party Store" has brought the meaning of bad back into its intended purpose: Bad music, bad sound, bad vocals, bad release.

Snake and the Charmers' "Party Store" sounds as if it wants to break new boundaries, but is hampered by its basic electronic feel. Nevertheless, it is hampered not so much by a lack of effort, but more from disillusioned talent.

The eight-song CD contains two original cuts and three worthwhile re-mixes. "Party Store" kicks off with a fun-sounding techno-based "Love Star" and progresses to a heavy-hearted "Here I Am" then back to a bouncy number entitled "Yum Yum." It all seems to be loosely strung together, flip-flopping from one extreme to another with no neutral ground in between.

Each piece starts off with potential then without notice is destroyed by the abrasive vocals and mindless lyrics — a mix from hell.

"Party Store" is not what you would find at the nearest 7-Eleven, but it is a Quick Pix for a laugh.

— Kyle Green

Call Me — Hans Theessink



Hans Theessink, born in Holland and currently residing in Austria, isn't the first name that comes to mind when the blues is the subject at hand, particularly given his signing to Deluge.

Like Ry Cooder, to whom he's unavoidably bound to be compared, his forte is a generous mixture of gospel, delta and country. He's a first rate slide player, has an amazing hand, anchored by the superb tuba playing of Jon Sasa, and does the coolest version of Chuck Berry's "Mellie" ever recorded.

James Brown's horn players, Fred Wesley, Pee Wee Ellis and the great Maceo Parker, are along for the ride, as are the Band's Garth Hudson and Rick Danko. So are longtime Cooder vocalists Bobby King and Terry Evans.

Oh yeah, this is an amazing disc! What else do you need to know.

— Mark Gallo

LOOKING AHEAD

- Christina Fuoco takes and in-depth look at Kid Rock.
- John Monaghan's look at the latest in alternative movies.



In overdrive: Clutch — Tim Sult (photo above, from left), Dan Maines, Jean Paul Gaster and Neil Fallon — plays St. Andrew's Hall on New Year's Eve while ex-J. Geils frontman Peter Wolf plays The Ritz in Roseville.



Detroit rocks in the New Year



There'll be plenty of will be rockin' n'rollin' in Detroit this New Year's Eve with performances by the likes of Goober & The Peas, Clutch, Karen Monster and Ted Nugent giving metro music fans plenty of choices.

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

One year Ted Nugent opened his annual "Whiplash Bash" by playing guitar while dangling upside down from a rope. Another time, he drove his Ford Bronco onto the stage.

For this New Year's Eve show at Cobo Arena in Detroit (810-645-6666) he's close-mouthed about what kind of hijinks he's going to pull, so let's just say it's going to be a trademark Ted free-for-all.

It's the consummate rock 'n' roll, energized event in the history of the planet," Nugent said via telephone from the office of his magazine, "World Bowhunters." "It's virtually unparalleled. It has this certain atmosphere. You have to see it in order to comprehend the dynamics of it."

New Year's Eve is the beginning of a busy new year for Nugent who will play only solo material at the Cobo show. He's working on a new album and will debut his nationally syndicated radio show in spring. He said his radio show will resemble his guest DJ stints.

"If you've heard me on the radio, you know I just whip out anything — new stuff, old stuff, different stuff," he said.

Cry Wolf
Ex-J. Geils singer Peter Wolf will be kicking out material representing his entire career at The Ritz in Roseville (778-6404) on New Year's Eve. The quintessential rhythm and blues rocker is bringing along his

new band, The Incomparable Houseparty 5. Although he was offered a few other gigs on New Year's Eve, Wolf felt the obvious choice was to play in Detroit — a town he often refers to as his second home. He likes the honesty that Detroit fans emit.

"Well, it's just that they let you know what they like. If they like it, they let you know," Wolf said.

He hopes the Detroit audiences will approve of his new band. Although it has a few of the same traits as J. Geils, it's not a clone, he said.

STREET BEATS

"It's like being in love but with a different boyfriend; it's a different person with different actions and reactions."

His next album, to be released in March, will reflect that.

"It's a collection of primal, intimate songs that are more biographical," he said.

In a Clutch
The Baltimore, Md., alternative rock band Clutch also calls Detroit its second home.

Within the last year, Clutch has gone from attracting 20 fans to selling out the 1,000-person capacity St. Andrew's Hall. Lead singer Neil Fallon attributes that to the band's one-man Detroit publicity team — former St. Andrew's Hall/Shelter bartender Dan Kotwicki.

"Just out of his own personal interest, he started playing our CD at the bar and he bought all of our records and sold them (at the Shelter) — not for profit" just for exposure, Fallon said.

Clutch's album "Transnational Speedway League: Anecdotes and Undeniable Truths" is one that should be exposed to a wider audience. The intense dirgy guitar and Fallon's growling vocals make Henry Rollins look laid back. Clutch, the master of metaphors, often uses humorous lyrics, however, to make their point. For example, in "A Shogun Named Marcus," Fallon sings "I'm like a buzz bomb. So Beelophallohopawopshambo and domo arigato if I got to."

The lyrics that are considered the humorous ones weren't written with the intent that it was going to be a comedy song," he said. "A lot of the lyrics (in other bands' music) are 110 percent anger. That's all well and nice in their own right. (But) you can do other things with loud music."

Because of the lyrics, it makes it easy for Clutch to be mistaken for juvenile, Fallon said.

"The bad ones (reviews) are usually people who don't get it, not to sound pretentious."

New Recipee
The Junk Monkeys, Tyrone's Powerwheel Chicago's Catherine will perform with Clutch. Below St. Andrew's Hall at The Shelter, Brotherhood Recipee will showcase their new sound and lineup. Former backup singer Almee Armstrong moved up front to lead vocalist and guitarist John Kinney replaces Chris Conley. That's not all that's new, however, with the former funk/rap band.

"We're more like traditional '70s

funk music. Everyone cites Parliament-Funkadelic as influences. We're more along the lines of Average White Band . . . Earth, Wind and Fire. That's what we are now — real, clean '70s," said guitarist Perry LaVoisine.

Detroit Music Award winners Charm Farm will play prior to Brotherhood Recipee's set at The Shelter. Admission to The Shelter, St. Andrew's Hall and the Burns Room (techno/house music will be spun there) is \$10. For more information, call 861-MELT.

Earlier in the evening, Brotherhood Recipee will be one of about 14 alternative and country bands playing at the Hyatt Regency Fairlane in Dearborn (810-645-6666). The \$39 ticket price includes food and drink tickets.

Lollipopuza veterans and teen-angst idols Rage Against the Machine will visit Detroit once again, this time at the State Fair Coliseum in Detroit (334-1999). Although the sound in an echo chamber is better than at the coliseum, the energy is electric. Helmet, on break from recording their follow-up to "Meantime," will open the show. The gig will mark the Detroit debut of Helmet's new guitarist Rob Echeverria.

Those who prefer a more intimate setting can see hard-rocking Karen Monster at Lil'it's in Hamtramck (875-6555). She recently released "Necessary Evil" on the Birmingham-based Sitter Records. Loose Stools and Willy Piansant are also on the bill.

Monster's 18-song CD, a retrospective on her career, also includes songs from her former bands Little Monsters ("Buy Me A Pony") and the now-defunct Tranchunks ("Biggest Head in America"). Monster answers matter-of-factly when

See ROCK'N', 6B

Marr, Morrissey, together again in a book

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

The Smiths were undoubtedly one of the most influential, infuriating, enigmatic and glorious of the past punk bands of the 1980s.

Lead vocalist and lyricist Morrissey provided canvases of sardonic, outrageous lyrics while guitarist Johnny Marr's scaring, hook-ridden play emphasized itself onto the subconscious of a generation of music listeners.

The Smiths disbanded in 1988, having produced six studio albums. A

series of best of collections and a live LP have followed in the band's wake.

"They went their separate ways; Morrissey a solo career producing uneven results and Marr as a journeyman with a host of bands from the Pretenders to Electronic.

As events would dictate, there's now a book.

"Morrissey & Marr: The Severed Alliance" by Johnny Rogan attempts to be the definitive tome on the creative collaboration that caused equal amounts of delirium among fans and

critics alike.

The unauthorized biography, released stateside by Omnibus Press, precipitated a ruckus upon its release in England. Morrissey, who had not yet read the book, supposedly lodged death threats against its author.

Rogan, who has charted such disparate musical outcasts as Van Morrison and Wham, hasn't gone into Sal Rushdie-type seclusion.

"It didn't bother me at all," said Rogan in a telephone interview. "When you've written books about

pop management, a pussycat like Morrissey, there's nothing to be disturbed about."

Rogan interviews family and friends. He chronicles Morrissey's and Marr's respective family genealogies going back to Ireland.

The avid Smiths' denizen may appreciate the black and white family photos and factoids, such as the Morrisseys living in Dublin a few blocks from Christy Brown of "My Left

See MORRISSEY, 6B

Monday, Dec. 27
THE JARVIS SHARID QUARTET
Avin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit. (922) 832-2355

THE EXCEPTIONS
Headline the CD release party for "American Skit-This Portrait of Midwestern Skit Past to Present" along with Mustard Plug and the Skolars at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 Congress, Detroit. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. (516) 961-MELT

YUDU HIPPIES
Rick's, 611 Church St., Ann Arbor. (alternative rock) 996-2747

IN CONCERT

THE BLUE FRONT PERSUADERS
Featuring Steve Wetby, Marc Russell, Charlie Tyskind, Karl Dyke, Jake Lewandowski and John Lucie at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. (blues) 996-8555

THE HANNIBALS
With Spank at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. (twelve/jungle rock) 961-MELT

Wednesday, Dec. 29
SECOND COMING
With Missed in Day and Norming May at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. (alternative rock) 996-8555

Thursday, Dec. 30
ONLY A MOTHER
With Immigrant Sons and Twitch at Avin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit. (alternative rock) 832-2355

PETS OR MEAT
Grit's Grit, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. (alternative rock) (810) 334-9292

SOME PEOPLE'S CHILDREN
With Slide Off Saturn at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. (alternative rock) 996-8555

SOUL ROCK OUTLAWS
With Lyman Woodard and George Bedard at Sully's, 4756 Greenfield Road, Dearborn. (blues) 846-1920

MASQUERADE
Avon Bar and Restaurant, 3982 Auburn Road, Rochester Hills. (alternative rock) (810) 852-2707

SOMETIMES WHY
Java, 307 Main St., Rochester. (alternative rock) (810) 650-3344

See IN CONCERT, 6B