

LET'S GO! STREET SCENE

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Readers prove music matters

BY CHRISTINA PUOCO
STAFF WRITER

The support of local music is strong and Observer & Eccentric readers proved it. They filled our mailbox and hotline with nominees for this year's Band of the Year. Here's a sampling of what they had to say.

- John Swain of Livonia on last year's winner The Verve Pipe: "Me and my buddies, we've been to about 20 (of their) shows over the year. They get better and better every time we see them and they're pretty accessible before and after shows."
- Lisa Hajduk of Westland on rock band Station Neiz: "They do write a lot of their own songs. I just think they're really, really good."
- Kim Wilson of Rochester on industrial mavens HAL: "They're one of the best local bands in Detroit. They put on a great show when you go and see them live."
- Norma Smith of Livonia on Robb Roy: "(Their music) is very personable and hand-written."
- Westland resident Barbara Pohl on the modern country band Waco Band: "It plays great country music and also plays other alternative music."
- Beverly Hills resident Bonnie Davis, a self-proclaimed "middle-aged housewife sort of a person," voted for Discipline: "I was impressed by the talent of the young people writing their own music and the artistic way that they present their music."

- Vicky Kilius of Redford on the East Lansing band rock and reggae band Global Village: "They're really fun to watch. They're always things going on. The horn section is really cool. They're always dancing around."
- Bonnie Sparks of Westland on rockers Blue-Eyed Soul: "I think they're great. They've done a lot of things. They've come a long way. . . I've (only) missed five shows."
- Eleven-year-old Heather White of Southfield on her brother rock musician "Daddy" Richards: "I like his kind of music because he's my brother, but that's not really the reason. I like the beat and the rhythm and the lyrics."
- Thelma Goldstein of West Bloomfield on the rock band Beer Whores: "They're good. They've played a lot of live clubs. They're a good bunch of kids and they deserve a break."
- Other nominees included: Higher, The Exceptions, Steve King and the Ditties, Upper Level, Hooplaopops, The Yeasmen, Walk on Water, Pull House, Emperor's New Clothes, The Sillics, Outraguous Cherry, Rootbox, Immigrant Suns, Punch n' Kitty, Tearjerks and the Vudu Hippies.



Fan favorite: Ann Arbor-based gothic rock band Wig got a lot of family support on the Band of the Year hotline. Grandmother Carol Walitalo of Livonia and sister Katie Jimmerson of Canton gave the band thumbs up.

A look at 1994

Breakups — The Hannibals, BOP (harvey), The Opaque, Asian Love Pimp, Red C, Urban Voodoo Juice, Tickwax, Wounded, Plastic Forest, Jigsaw Jungle, Sweaterfish and Rhythm and Rain.

New bands — Ninesteen Wheels and Tearjerks (both featuring ex-Hannibals), Rootbox (with ex-Urban Voodoo Juice), Daddy Longlegs (with ex-BOP harvey) and Immortal Whines of Soul (from The Generals and Culture Bandits).

Releases — Sprague, Big Chief and Wig all released their major label debuts. The avant-garde jazz band, Hine Dog, released its debut for John Zorn's Knitting Factory label. Higher's second pressing of its eponymous debut EP featured producer Jack Ponsi (S&D Row).

Other bands releasing records: Rocket 455, The Lovemasters, Godsmi, Cashbone, Volensha, Crossed Wire, Skelton Crew, Friedella Ederic, ICP, Tickwax, The Exceptions, General Clust-erfunk, The Have Not, Some People's Children, Immigrant Suns, Big Block, Oriental Spa, Yard Bona, Wally Pleasant, Best Lucy, Downer's a Grov, Jason McCaskey Barry and the All Night Fish Market, Mysterio Crisp, Shw's So High, Princess Dragons Mom, Mental Landscapes, Four Hands, Sister Seed, The Goldstones, The Detemans, Kid Rock, Mary McGuire, Pets or Meat, Outraguous Cherry, Slot, Mike, Michael on Fire, Lollipop Oatid, Scott Fab, Heaven's Wish, General Clusterfunk, Detroit Meatloans Alliance, The Undersharp Club, Edible Food, James Wallis' and "Christmas in Detroit Too."

Now in '95 — Releases by Fiction, Speedball (on New York's Energy Records), Cherrn Funn, Outraguous Cherry, Ed Nelson, Daddy Bitch, Joe Sen, Sideways, The Prudy Green, Gunk, Root Box, Goobar & The Fun, Mysterio Crisp, Underworld Slump, Sherron Wynn, Ninesteen Wheels, ICP, Launching Hyman, Head Injury, Alan Lumsdick, Robb Roy, Freshback Show, Big Block, Tearjerks, Fugz and the "Riot '87" Detroit compilation disc.

— Compiled by Christina Puoco

Band of the Year



Big sound: Big Block will perform with with Goobar & The Peas, Tearjerks and The Verve Pipe on New Year's Eve at St. Andrew's Hall in Detroit.

Big Block supercharges music

Super-charged rock, laced with harmonies and realistic lyrics, has made Big Block the poet laureates of Detroit's rock scene and the choice for The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers' 1994 Band of the Year.

BY CHRISTINA PUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Big Block guitarist/lyricist Kenny Tudrick is a most unlikely rock star. The shy Tudrick and his profound sense of innocence shuffle into a coffeehouse, ski hat pulled tight around his mop-top hair. When asked about his lyrics, he just smiles and shifts around in his seat nervously.

Everything he and vocalist/guitarist Nick Lucasian are able to talk about, Tudrick said, they say through Big Block.

Their musical form of therapy has allowed them to vent their frustrations about living without phones and other luxuries but with rats, getting little respect and broken relationships. They're the poet laureates of Detroit's rock scene.

The band is one of the future voices of the Detroit rock scene and as a result is The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers' 1994 Band of the Year.

Big Block's supercharged rock drags along lyrics like "I'm the least

wanted reaction on a carnival attraction. Feel like a town that no one wants to be. . . I'm sad and disillusioned jumped down all the wrong conclusions. Feel like a town where no one wants to be."

"Under Construction," Tudrick has written eerily prophetic lyrics: "I got my tape in my pocket, goin' to number 1, should be shootin' like a rocket." The kings of the three-minute pop rock songs, they don't waste any time on their debut CD "Guardrail" (Rustbelt). The 11-song CD is 35 minutes long and a record company talent scout's dream.

There's a lot more to Big Block than Tudrick and Lucasian's lyrics. Lucasian has proved with Big Block and through his acoustic shows with Crossed Wire's Chris Moore that he has one of the most versatile voices in Detroit. He flitters between his "smoked too many cigarettes" emotionally raw vocals and his flawless step-brother "Guardrail" explodes from the opening song "Release" and contin-

ues the energy through "Beautiful." The cascading and swirling guitar solos show no mercy. There's no ignoring Big Block. Listeners to 89X apparently feel the same. DJ Vinco Annova played a song from "Guardrail" as the "Catch of the Day" and the response was feverish. Not bad, considering Tudrick didn't even think the station would play it.

"We dropped it off and they put it on three hours later," Tudrick said. "We didn't even get to hand it right to Vinco. We gave it to a secretary and said, 'You're sure you're going to give it to him?'"

"Feverish" can be used to describe Big Block's live shows as well. Lucasian (a future Saaz magazine pin-up if I've ever seen one) commands his guitar like his audience — it's never out of the control and always in his grasp.

Kim Garrett of Westland first saw Big Block a few years ago as part of an acoustic showcase at St. Andrew's Hall and immediately bought their single "Beautiful/Grounded."

"I just thought they were awesome. I bought it and kind of forgot that I didn't have a record player," said Garrett, who plans on spending New Year's Eve at their St. Andrew's Hall gig. "I try to see them as many times as I can."

"I can't really explain why I like

them. There's just something about them. They have catchy lyrics like the Gin Blossoms, but rock like the Offspring."

Big Block has always been one of Detroit's best-kept secrets. Forming only a few years ago, the band — which also includes bassist Joe Proper and drummer Scott MacDonald — quickly made a name for itself with its high-speed yet melodic, two-guitar assault.

Struggling to make ends meet, the foursome lived together in a rat-infested home which later proved to be inspirational. To give fans a sampling of their talents, the band included new songs and some from that time on "Guardrail." (Another new song, "New Day," appears on the "Riot '87" compilation which benefits Angela Hospice in Livonia.)

"Those are good songs. Those are really big part of what we are," Tudrick said. "It represents where we were and where we are."

Big Block plays St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit, with Goobar & The Peas, Tearjerks and The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers' 1993 Band of the Year, The Verve Pipe, on New Year's Eve. Tickets are \$17.50. For more information, call (313) 961-MELT or (313) 645-6666.

Verve Pipe: Unsigned but hopeful in '95

BY CHRISTINA PUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Billboard magazine this week picked up on what The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers readers knew last year: East Lansing's The Verve Pipe is one of the top unsigned acts in the nation.

Pictured on the cover of the international music industry magazine, The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers' 1993 Band of the Year is lauded for its "other dark melodies buffeted by Brian Vander Ark's lush, thick vocal. Add stylized guitar flourishes amid layered harmonies, and you get a song such as 'Honest.'"

With major labels lurking, Verve Pipe drummer Donnie Brown hopes the future will get a record deal. Singer/guitarist Brian Vander Ark added that although they receive a fair amount of attention in their home state, the nod from Billboard offers added credibility.

"It's different attention as far as what you're doing in your home state and how many you're you're sold," said Vander Ark, who was nominated for Best Guitarist at the 1994 Detroit Music Awards. "It doesn't make any difference what kind of following you have (in your home state). To

Increasing awareness of The Verve Pipe outside of Michigan has become the band's main focus.

record labels, it just looks like you have a bunch of friends. We'd like to get some national buzz going."

The "buzz" is definitely on. The Verve Pipe has sold more than 21,000 copies of their two releases "I've Buffered a Head Injury" and "Pop Smeor." Sales jumped after the single "Senator Speak" by the quintet, which also includes guitarist A.J. Dunning, bassist Brad Vander Ark and new percussionist Don Corvella of Walled Lake, was added to radio station WHYY's playlist shortly before it changed its format. "Senator Speak" became a top-requested hit and subsequently listeners chose The Verve Pipe as a participant in its "Dream Lollapalooza."

Brown was just as shocked as WHYY listeners to hear that The Verve Pipe has so much support in Detroit.

"I think it's because of the music and not because we gave it a big push or anything. They heard it and they thought it was very viable," Brown said. "It was beautiful for us, knowing that your stuff is worth it. It's very gratifying."

Aside from playing clubs, The Verve Pipe played the H.O.R.D.E. Tour at Val Du Lakes near Lake Michigan alongside acts like Sheryl Crow, Blues Traveler, Big Head Todd and the Monsters, and the Allman Brothers in mid-July.

Increasing awareness of The Verve Pipe outside of Michigan has become the band's main focus. The group performed during the South By Southwest Music Conference in Austin, Texas, last March. They got a boost from the "Aware II" disc which features two Verve Pipe songs, "Spoonful of Sugar" and "What You Want Good."

So far, touring has been good.

"It's been extremely favorable in St. Louis and really good in Chicago. I think it's because our songs are accessible. It's not hard to figure out the band," Brown said.

In between a few gigs in Milwaukee after Thanksgiving, the band found time to record at "Joe's Studio" run by ex-Violent Femme Victor DeLorenzo. Demos from those sessions, produced by Carnival Strippers' Mike Hoffman, show a more laidback, stripped down (so to speak) sound. On songs like "Drive You Wild" and "Photograph," Vander Ark's grab-you-by-the-throat vocals as well as the Verve Pipe's trademark gaping-mouthed harmonies are more subdued.

Singing the new songs to a receptive audience are the moments that Vander Ark has enjoyed the most this year.

"In light of being on the cover of Billboard and everything, the bigger high — it sounds hokey — is that people dig and listen to the new stuff."

The Verve Pipe will perform Saturday, Jan. 7, at the Blind Pig, 306-308 S. First St., Ann Arbor, at the DT's. Doors open at 8:30 p.m. For more information, call (313) 666-8556.

