

Rocking with dad



Livonia's Dad and the Boys — bass player John Kirwan (left), drummer Charlie Bishop, lead singer Don (Dad) Isler and lead guitarist Jon Martin — are hoping for the sweet smell of success with their first album, "Red Red Rose."

LAURA CASTLE/staff photographer

This pop packs power punch

By Wayne Paal
staff writer

Deep in the heart of Southfield on a weekday night and all's quiet — except for a basement studio tucked away inside one of the city's shiny steel and glass office buildings.

There, rock singer Don Isler is talking animatedly about his band, Dad and the Boys, and their album.

Not the just-released "Red Red Rose," mind you. Their next album.

"It's going to be great," Isler says. "One of the songs is called 'Adam and Eve.' It should be a soundtrack if someone wants to make a movie about the Adam and Eve story. We'll have poetry on it too."

Despite the name, this isn't a polka band. The members' wardrobe — black leather and T-shirts for this practice session — indicates as much.

Band members specialize in heavy-duty rock: loud, fast and ag-

gressive. But the mix of heavy metal, thrash metal and new wave isn't their whole world, either.

"We're flexible," Isler said. Even down to the personnel.

While the basic unit, Isler, guitarist John Kirwan, bassist Jon Martin and drummer Charlie Bishop, has been together for 2½ years, accompanying musicians have been added or subtracted over time. Sax/key-board player Dan Siemer, prominent on the first album, has taken a study break — he's gone back to college.

Meanwhile, ex-Teaser guitarist Rick Young has become a de facto member.

"He's one of the finest musicians in Detroit," Isler said. "He'll produce the next album." Another new member, Kevin Frey, has also been added.

On stage, the band encourages jam sessions with other Detroit musicians. But with nearly a half centu-

ry's combined experience on the band circuit — the band includes ex-members of Doctor Inclusion, among others — its live appearances are now infrequent.

"Dad and the Boys is more a studio project than a nightclub act," Isler said. "When we play we put all our energy into making it an event. Just playing night after night doesn't make it."

Isler and his mates clearly have their sights set on the future, hoping to emerge with a big national label deal. For now, their efforts are concentrated on album No. 2.

When they aren't in the studio, band members may be easy to spot tooling around Livonia in Martin's white stretch limo.

"I bought it from Johnny Bee (ex-Mitch Ryder, ex-Rockets drummer John Badianek)," Martin said. "It used to belong to Gov. Milliken."

The band's local roots run deep. Isler is a Livonia Franklin High School product; Kirwan attended Livonia Churchill; Martin and Bishop attended Livonia Bentley.

The band stayed close to home when it came time to celebrate release of their self-financed debut. The record release party was held at a Westland club.

Recorded one year ago, "Red Red Rose" was released earlier this month on Wave Records — the band's own label — but distributed through a New York-based company.

Martin's contribution wasn't limited to bass playing or production chores. A sign-maker by trade, he designed the album cover.

It isn't the only area in which band members' daytime and night jobs merge.

But band members are pooling their resources, anticipating the day when they'll have one occupation: music.

"It's like Mitch Ryder said: The recording payments come first, then food," Martin said. "You have to have your priorities."

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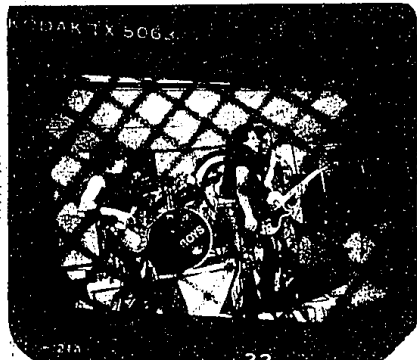
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