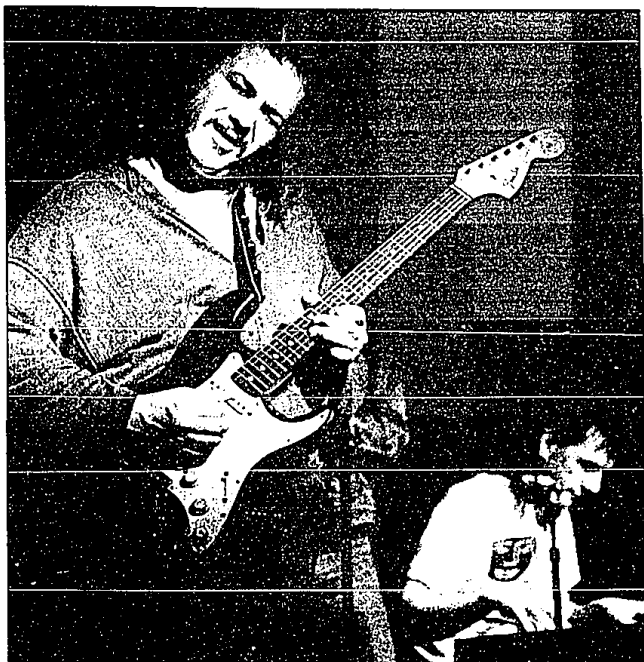


STREET BEATS



Robert Noll, who grew up in Livonia, has played with such noted blues groups Grammy winner Albert Collins' Icebreakers and Big Twist and the Mellow Fellows.

BILL BRESLER/staff photographer

Noll: Blues with wallop

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

The Detroit Pistons are locked in an overtime battle on the saloon's big TV screen. Nearby, Robert Noll plays the blues.

Noll's soaring guitar riffs carry with Vinny Johnson as he drives to the basket. The uptown, boogie-woogie music is in sync with Isiah Thomas as he dribbles the ball upcourt.

Basketball and the blues make for interesting theater... except none of the patrons are paying attention to what's happening on the court. All eyes at the Plymouth Rock Saloon are on the stage, where Noll is entertaining the masses with his own guitar-slinging moves.

His moves pack more of a wallop than a behind-the-back slam dunk. If anything, sports and music is something Noll can relate to. In fact, he uses a little baseball to describe his style.

"I usually bat pretty good," said Noll, a graduate of Livonia Bentley High School. "I can be like Kirk Gibson and get the big grand slam. I try to be more like Alan Trammell and get on base every night."

Consistency is what he strives for. But understand, Robert Noll's definition of good is perhaps better than most.

Through his blues travels, Noll has seen and played with the best. He paid his dues with the likes of Little Rueben, Albert Collins and Big Twist and the Mellow Fellows.

NOLL HAS played everywhere from the "chitlin circuit" in the South to the blues festivals in Europe. And, of course, like all bluesmen, he has stories.

Noll remembers when he first joined Albert Collins' group, The Icebreakers, and the bus broke down in the middle of the western Canadian prairie en route to Winnipeg. With 6 feet of snow on the ground and below-freezing temperatures outside, the group hovered around kerosene heaters on the bus to stay warm until help came.

"There was this black soot everywhere and we were breathing it in," Noll said. "My clothes, everything smelled like kerosene for months."

The bus would break down in warmer places, like in Louisiana where the temperatures were more than 100 degrees. Noll would be the hitchhike into town to get

help or parts to fix it.

Yet, he recalls those times with fondness. He was the only white member of Albert Collins group. Band members went out of their way to make him feel at home and looked out for him when they played in the rougher parts of town.

But, more importantly, he learned some tricks from Albert Collins — a Grammy winner.

"Albert always let me have a spot," Noll said. "He'd let me play a number before he'd come on stage."

"I learned what it was like to be a guitar player. He showed me how to look them right in the eye and play to the audience."

THE HARD times of being on the road can be heard in the music of Robert Noll and the Blues Mission, his own band. Noll said the group is the best he's ever played with.

The Robert Noll Blues Mission, which features former James Cotton band member Eddie Harsch on keyboards, plans to have an album out by the end of year. They're also planning a brief tour to Canada in May. Next year, the group plans to tour Europe and Japan.

The Robert Noll Blues Mission is featured on the compilation album "Detroit Blues Factory, Vol. 1."

Noll's days with Big Twist and the Mellow Fellows can be detected in the group's music. Noll recently added two horn players for a big band sound.

The focal point, however, is Noll's guitar work. He can manipulate his Fender guitar to sing or cry. He can go from the uptown swing to the traditional blues twang.

Noll is a member of the fourth generation of bluesmen. He's influenced by rock blues guitarists like Eric Clapton and Stevie Ray Vaughan, but he pays homage to the traditional artists like B.B. King and Albert Collins.

The first record he bought as a kid was B.B. King's "Live at the Regal." He's been hooked since.

"I USED TO sneak out of my house at night and hitchhike down to the clubs in Detroit," he said. "I think it was the sound of the guitar that influenced me."

Noll had his own band at the time. He soon began incorporating blues numbers in his repertoire.

"The blues had that extra feel," Noll said. "That feeling you get when you're playing live, there's nothing like it."

IN CONCERT

● RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

Red Hot Chili Peppers will perform with special guests Fishbone and Thelonicus Monster at 10 p.m. tonight at the Nectarine Ballroom, 510 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Tickets are \$14.50.

● ROBERT NOLL AND THE BLUES MISSION

Robert Noll and the Blues Mission will perform tonight and Tuesday at the Plymouth Rock, 3825 General Rd., Plymouth. For more information, call 455-9800.

● 7TH HEAVEN

7th Heaven will perform Wednesday through Saturday, April 20-23, at Jagers, 3481 Elizabeth Lake Road, Waterford Township. For more information, call 681-1700.

● DANNY & THE DECIBELS

Danny & The Decibels will perform with Sensitive Big Guys on Friday, April 22, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff. For more information, call 365-9760.

● FUNHOUSE

Funhouse, along with Figure 4, Last Cavalry and Sex Dick Run, will perform Friday, April 22, at St. Andrew's Hall, Congress, Detroit. All four bands are on the recently released "Digital Detroit" compact disc.

● MAP OF THE WORLD

Map of the World will perform Thursday, April 21, at the Blind Pig,



Pianosaurus will perform Friday, April 22, at Paycheck's Lounge on Caniff in Hamtramck.

208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For more information, call 996-8555.

● BUTLER TWINS

The Butler Twins will perform Thursday, April 21, at the Soup Kitchen, 1585 Franklin, Detroit. For more information, call 259-2643.

● PIANOSAURUS

Pianosaurus will perform Friday, April 22, at Paycheck's Lounge, Caniff, Hamtramck. For more information, call 99-MUSIC.

● SCOTT CAMPBELL

Scott Campbell, Bruce Nichols Band, The Happy Death Men and special guests from Tanfoni Image and The Reputations will perform Friday, April 22, at the Third Avenue Cafe, 122 E. Third, Royal Oak. Admission is \$2. For more information, call 547-4473.

● EMERSON, BERRY AND PALMER

Kelth Emerson, Carl Palmer and Robert Berry will perform Saturday, April 23, at Harpos, 14238 Harper, Detroit. For more information, call 823-6400. Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$15 at the door.

● LOVE AND ROCKETS

Love and Rockets will perform at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, April 24, at Royal Oak Music Theatre. Tickets are \$17.50. For more information, call 546-7610.

● ROBIN TROWER

Robin Trower and Doggs will perform Monday, April 25, at Har-

pos, 14238 Harper, Detroit. Tickets are \$12.50 in advance and \$14.50 at the door. For more information, call 823-6400.

● SAVOY BROWN

Savoy Brown will perform Friday, April 29, at Harpos, 14238 Harper, Detroit. Cost is \$5. For more information, call 823-6400.

● JOE SATRIANI

Joe Satriani will perform Friday, May 6, at Harpos, 14238 Harper, Detroit. Cost is \$10 (\$12 at the door). For more information, call 823-6400.

COUNTRY

Here are the top 10 songs receiving airplay on WWWW-FM 106.7, a country and western radio station in Detroit.

1. "Life Turned Her That Way," Ricky Van Shelton.
2. "Shouldn't It Be Easier Than This," Charley Pride.
3. "I Wanna Dance With You," Eddie Rabbit.
4. "Americana," Moe Brandy.
5. "I Didn't (Every Chance I Had)," Johnny Rodriguez.
6. "This Mission You Heart of Mine," Sawyer Brown.
7. "Listen to His Arms," The Forrester Sisters.
8. "Famous Last Words of a Fool," George Strait.
9. "It'll Always Come Back," K.T. Oslin.
10. "Love Will Find Its Way to You," Reba McEntire.

CD

Here are the top 10 selling compact discs at Musicland in the Livonia Mall.

1. "Kick," INXS.
2. "Now and Zen," Robert Plant.
3. "More Dirty Dancing," various artists.
4. "Whenever You Need Me," Rick Astley.
5. "If You Can't Live 'em...," Ted Nugent.
6. "Dark Side of the Moon," Pink Floyd.
7. "Bad," Michael Jackson.
8. "Steve Miller's Greatest Hits 1974-78," Steve Miller.
9. "Backman Turner Overdrive's Greatest Hits," B.T.O.
10. "Dirty Dancing Soundtrack," various artists.

COLLEGE

Here are the top 10 songs receiving airplay on WOUX-AM, the campus radio station at Oakland University in Rochester.

1. "Children," Mission U.K.
2. "Pinet Working," R.E.M.
3. "Foxheads Stalk This Land," Close Lobsters.
4. "Oh No! Not Them Again," Surf Punk.
5. "Pinker and Prouder Than Previous," Nick Lowe.
6. "Ugly American in Australia," Wall of Voodoo.
7. "Strangeways," Smiths.
8. "Kidney Blingoes," Wire.
9. "The Lion and the Cobra," Sleaze O'Connor.
10. "Diesel and Dust," Midnight Oil.

REVIEWS

INTRODUCING THE HARDLINE ACCORDING TO TERENCE TRENT D'ARBY

— Terence Trent D'Arby

Terence Trent D'Arby is a dazzling, talented performer. And he might be the first to tell you so.

After listening to his debut album, "Introducing the Hardline According to Terence Trent D'Arby," it would be hard to argue with him. This is an excellent album.

The tunes range from pop to gospel — all with a very soulful edge. It harks back to the Motown days with Smokey Robinson and it captures it with a new energy reflective of the raw spirit of those times.

D'Arby spares no vocal effort on any of these songs. He goes all out, milking every lyric for what it's worth. Listen to "Let Me Stay" repeatedly and you know he's not just going through the motions.

"Wishing Well" is as infectious as any pop song can be without being redundant. It's very well written,



and with D'Arby at the helm, very well sung.

But the strength of this album lies purely in its diversity and all-around versatility. No two songs sound alike.

"Dance Little Sister" is a funk number, highlighted with trombone, and has D'Arby sounding like a junior James Brown. When you're finished dancing, you can listen to the more somber "Seven More Days" that follows.

"As Yet Untitled" is a moving gospel song about South Africa. D'Arby sings a cappella for most of the number, a gutsy move for any performer let alone on a debut album.

Needless to say, riveting stuff, which could sum up this whole album.

— Larry O'Connor

WHENEVER YOU NEED SOMEBODY

— Rick Astley

The problem with hit singles that come out of nowhere is they always end up leaving you with such impossibly high expectations when you finally get the album in your hot little hands.

Case in point: Rick Astley. While "Never Gonna Give You Up," the infectious, slickly written piece of pop has been making its way up the U.S. charts, the English-born Astley has had a lot of people asking their car radios "Who is this guy?"

But "Whenever You Need Somebody," Astley's debut album for RCA, slides quickly downhill after making it past the hot opening cut. What we have here is just another set of clean, safe, Top 40 tunes meant to offend — and therefore challenge — nobody.

Oh, the quality is there. From Astley's soulful baritone to the keyboard and production work by the triumvirate of Mike Stock, Matt Aitken and Peter Waterman, there isn't a thing about this record that isn't first-rate.

And Astley even manages to show some promise as a writer as well as performer. His three compositions make for some of the album's bright-



est moments, especially "No More Waiting for Love," with its simple, yet heartfelt lyrics.

That's the crux of the problem though. There's precious little in "Whenever You Need Somebody" that comes from the heart.

The post-disco formula tunes seem mostly to blend right into one another. "Together Forever" becomes "Don't Say Goodbye" becomes "The Love Has Gone," all in the blink of an eye.

And the only stark departure from the formula — the 35-year-old pop classic "When I Fall in Love" — suffers from the same lack of feeling. Astley's tribute to Nat King Cole is right on the money from a technical standpoint, down to an almost perfect imitation of the late singer's phrasing.

— Todd Schneider

AMERICAN ENGLISH

— Wax U.K.

With Wax U.K., Graham Gouldman and Andrew Gold are sending a message to other music business mainstays. Hey guys, this (truly) bi-coastal pair is saying, updating your sound doesn't mean you're going to lose your roots.

"American English" is the second collaboration by the veteran hitmakers (10cc, the Hollies, the Yardbirds) in their current band.

Listen to the album and it becomes obvious we have a singer-songwriter team that isn't content to rest on its laurels.

The album offers a solid blend of late '60s musical technology with a feel for the harmonies and beat which made much of the first British invasion so refreshing.

Gouldman, a British native, and the American-born Gold throw in a set of thinking-man's lyrics in this tribute to matters of the heart and come up with one bright, refreshing piece of work.

From the danceable/listenable title track to the more pensive tunes like "Share the Glory" and quiescent feel of "The Promise," Gould-



man and Gold offer up a tasty look at the current state of life, love, lust and longing.

The 1960s history and influence of Wax U.K.'s main counterparts shines through on songs like "Ready or Not," which features a rich, textured blend of vocals and instruments a la the Hollies. It's a sound that's been perpetuated, yet updated, by current groups like ABC — and now Wax U.K.

Musically and lyrically, the pair form a near perfect complement. Gold handles most of the lead vocals and the major keyboards, while Gouldman works some unbelievably clear-as-a-bell sounds out of a whole range of guitars.

A more than competent group of English musicians and backup singers does well with the intricate harmonies on much of the album.

— Todd Schneider