

Frank Allison and the Odd Sox offer rough, punchy and certainly listenable music.



Allison taps experiences for songs

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Frank Allison was alarmed.

Not because his group, Frank Allison and the Odd Sox, had just given a lackluster performance in front of an unimpressed audience. No, quite the contrary.

The group burned through a 45-minute set, providing a solid round of songs at a recent opening for Adrian Belew and the Bears at the Nectarine Ballroom in Ann Arbor. Hearty applause greeted the four-man outfit as they left, a remarkable feat for any opening band.

The sirens that wail in Allison's mind are from a night job he once had while attending Eastern Michigan.

"I'd sit in this room and all these alarms would go off and I'd have to call the police," said Allison, 27, the lead singer of the group. "It was a real drag. It was hard to sleep."

So did Allison merely chalk it up as a lousy work experience? Like all good songwriters, he wrote a song about it. "You Think It's Secure" is the result.

AS A songwriter, Allison is seldom caught napping. A self-professed

people watcher, Allison is always on the lookout for subjects that might make for quirky, catchy numbers.

The results are usually interesting. Take, for instance, this little ditty, penned by Allison — "The Rodent of Love."

"My head is light and the orange sky's bright above/One of them's a rat a matter of fact/He thinks that he's the rodent of love."

And there's plenty more where that came from. While many bands have their own unique bag of songs, few could match the depth that Frank Allison and the Odd Sox have.

The Odd Sox sound is a mix of raw guitar with crystalline vocals. It's rough, punchy and certainly listenable.

According to Allison, there's nothing to it.

"What I consider a song is chord structure, melody and lyrics," said Allison, his long hair tucked under a baseball cap. "I'll just stand there and play it for them (the rest of the band). Then we mull over whether it should be heavy or light."

Usually, these guys just start playing right with me. Then we send Dan (Beckett, the lead guitarist)

home to figure out his part."

Beckett's part usually gives the numbers their edge. His skillful guitar work borders on the sonic at times.

NOT BAD bad for a guy who didn't start playing seriously until he joined the Odd Sox.

Frank Allison and the Odd Sox are relatively new mates. Allison started the band three years ago with a group of high school-age fellows. Things didn't work out. The resurrected Sox include Beckett, John Boyle, bass, and John Soldin, drums, all possessing a wealth of musical experience.

Boyle, 27, for example, was known as John Dull in England. He was a member of the short-lived punk era, arriving right at the time of the Sex Pistols and the Stranglers.

"The lead singer was double-jointed," said Boyle, who is from Toronto. "He would go on stage and tie himself up in knots. People in the audience would come up and pick him up and throw him around."

"The band only lasted four gigs," Frank Allison and the Odd Sox appear to have more durability. The band has an album in the works on Relapse Records in Plymouth, which

they plan to have out by the fall.

Currently, the band's 45 "Rodent of Love"/"Some Odd Girl" is available at local record stores. The single was recorded at Dave Feeny's Tempermill Studios in Livonia.

Immediate plans for the band include opening for Joan Jett in Virginia as well as some local dates in Detroit and Ann Arbor. In the past, the band has opened for Alex Chilton and Skid Roper and Mojo Nixon to name a few.

"YOU DON'T make any money, but you get a really good crowd," said Allison on being an opening act. "Anytime you get a good response, it's not only good in the long run, it's better for you that night."

Crowds, like the one at the Nectarine, can't help but notice the drive of the band. Allison, complete with an ax murder look, spares no effort.

His guitar suffers the most abuse, which often includes a litany of broken strings. He broke nine during one high-energy show.

"We get a good deal on guitar strings," Allison said. "We got them for \$4 a pack. I'm usually down to the store once a week to buy them."

MUSIC NOTES

Is there no honor among thieves?

Apparently not. Jugglers and Thieves recently had \$3,000 worth of equipment stolen. Someone apparently broke into lead guitarist Paul Cortie's car in Detroit and made off with a host of gear, including a Gibson electric guitar, a Fender electric guitar and two acoustic guitars. Also stolen was a 50-watt amp and a black carrying box.

The band has been able to borrow some equipment for the time being. In fact, Jugglers and Thieves will perform along with Sensitive Big Guys and Of All Things Saturday, April 30, at Paycheck's Lounge in Hamtramck.

A reward is being offered for any information leading to the recovery of the equipment. Anyone with any info should call 421-3166.

Tanjent Image, a regular on the new music scene in Detroit, is gearing up for its record release party Sunday, May 1, at St. Andrew's Hall in Detroit. "Suranland" is a four-song EP on Nebula Records, featuring tunes "One Nation," "Anytime (Dream Time)," "Suranland" and "Faith." Also on the bill for the evening's festivities will be Hippodrome.

"A couple of the songs we're rock and roll ('Suranland' or 'Faith') and the other two were dance mixes," said Reed Richard, lead singer for the band.

The disc was recorded at White Room Studios in Grosse Pointe. Plans include putting out 45s on all jukeboxes throughout the area.

"Unless you have something on vinyl, you're not really making it," Richard said. "We would like to play the college circuit."

Tanjent Image is certainly no stranger to St. Andrew's Hall. The group has opened for headline acts as well as setting an attendance record for one of the Sunday concert series shows at the venerable concert hall.

The group, which features James Anders (bass guitar, vocals), Andrew Howell (drums), Gary Watts (keyboards, guitar and vocals) and Joel Wilson (lead guitar) along with Richard, will also be featured on the "Detroit Music Scene" album, due out in June.

COLLEGE

Here are the top 10 songs receiving airplay on WAYN-AM, a campus radio station at Wayne State University in Detroit.

1. "One More Try," George Michael.
2. "Devil Inside," INXS.
3. "Birth, School, Work, Death," The Godfathers.
4. "20 Killerburts," Gene Loves Jezebel.
5. "Give Your Hands," The Sky.
6. "Sitting on the Dock of the Bay," Michael Bolton.
7. "Techno-Dance," New Order.
8. "Play That Funky Music," Roxanne.
9. "Behind the Wheel," Depeche Mode.
10. "See What Must Have," Blue Mercedes.

The three-member band Hippodrome is no longer — that's only because they've had a fourth member.

Keith Kingesmith is the new acoustic guitarist with the Livonia-based band. He joins Chris Richards, Kyle Richards and Doyle Dean.

"We're not changing our sound at all," said Chris Richards, lead singer and guitarist of Hippodrome. "We're just filling it up."

The Orange Roughies and J.D. Lamb recently were monthly "Local Riffs" winners. Along with a year's supply of Rice-A-Roni (just kidding), both will be featured on the WRIF-FM "Local Riffs" compilation disc, scheduled at the end of the year. Already on the disc will be See Dick Rea and Civilian.

Dave Feeny, lead guitarist of Orange Roughies, said there's still some interest in the band from record labels. However, if nothing comes about, they'll put together their own album this summer.

The Roughies recently put in a rousing performance at Paycheck's Lounge in Hamtramck. Along with a solid set of original material, the band tossed in a few obscure covers like Argent's "Hold Your Head Up."

What's new with your group? Drop us a line at Street Beats, Observer & Eccentric, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

JAZZ

Here are the top 10 albums receiving airplay on WJZZ, a jazz station in Detroit.

1. "Acoustic Alchemy," Natural Elements.
2. "Loud Jazz," John Scofield.
3. "Tina Special Part of Me," Onaje Alan Gumbs.
4. "Behind the Sun," Clyde Criner.
5. "Brasil," Manhattan Transfer.
6. "Love Will Conquer All," George Howard.
7. "Yutaka," Yutaka.
8. "Short Stories," Bob Berg.
9. "... Nothing Like the Sun," Sting.
10. "The Immigrants," The Zawinul Syndicate.

COUNTRY

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

1. "Americana," Moe Brandy.
2. "I Didn't (Every Chance I Had)," Johnny Rodriguez.
3. "I Wanna Dance With You," Eddie Rabbit.
4. "Life Turned Her That Way," Ricky Van Shelton.
5. "I'll Always Come Back," K.T. Oslin.
6. "Famous Last Words of a Fool," George Strait.
7. "Should Be Easier Than This," Charley Pride.
8. "Love Will Find Its Way to You," Reba McEntire.
9. "Santa Fe," The Bellamy Brothers.
10. "Cry, Cry, Cry," Highway 101.

IN CONCERT

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.

AC/DC

AC/DC will perform, with special guests L.A. Guns, at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 14, at Joe Louis Arena in Detroit. Tickets are \$17.50. For more information, call 567-6000.

ROBERT NOLL AND THE BLUES MISSION

Robert Noll and the Blues Mission

will perform tonight and Tuesday at the Plymouth Rock, 8825 General Dr., Plymouth. For more information, call 455-8900.

ROBIN TROWER

Robin Trower and Droogs will perform Monday, April 25, at Harpos, 14238 Harper, Detroit. Tickets are \$12.50 in advance and \$14.50 at the door. For more information, call 823-6400.

GREG STRYKER BAND

The Greg Stryker Band will per-

form Wednesday through Saturday, April 27-30, at Jaggers, 3481 Elizabeth Road, Waterford. For more information, call 691-1700.

OF ALL THINGS

Of All Things, along with The Layabouts, will perform Friday, April 29, at Alvin's, 5758 Cass, Detroit. For more information, call 832-2355.

SAVOY BROWN

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

MEGADETH

Megadeth will perform with special guests Warlock and Sanctuary at 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 29, at the Royal Oak Music Theatre. Tickets are \$17.50. For more information, call 546-7610.

ANTON JAMES

Anton James will appear with Vex Saturday, April 30, at Third Avenue, Third Street, half block east of Main Street, Royal Oak. For more information, call 547-4473.

REVIEWS

THIS SONG'S FOR YOU

— Neil Young and the Bluenotes



Ain't singin' for Spuds. . . . Such is a radical notion in these days of expense account rock.

One of the strongest of "This Song's" songs is a screacher called "Life in the City." Shades of electric "Just Never Sleeps" the song talks of people sleeping on sidewalks in the rain, living under freeways ("It's the American Way").

There's another funny one about temptation to a married man and talk of infidelity. He's one of the better composers of rock lyric, but on a number or two here, it doesn't show.

It's nice to hear Young sing in front of a blue all saxophone. He has never been afraid to move around the musical spectrum. His first hit it big with Buffalo Springfield in the mid-1960s and has remained current — if that matters — seemingly without trying.

— Brian Lyneight

TURN BACK THE CLOCK

— Johnny Hates Jazz



How do they keep coming up with these guys? Is there some kind of Euro-pop finishing school we Americans don't know about?

What we have on the cover is a group of young, well-groomed, slightly bored-looking Brits. And inside — slick, danceable pop. Well, surprise, surprise.

This doesn't mean to imply that Johnny Hates Jazz won't be big. "Shattered Dreams," the first single, is already getting heavy airplay and inching its way up Casey Kasem's precious pop chart. Hit status seems all but assured.

Here's another prediction — the title track, a languid tale of romantic loss, will be big news on pop radio this summer.

There's no Johnny here; no jazz, either. Nonetheless, JHJ seems to have its moves down and bases covered. Why, there's even "I Don't Want to

Be a Hero," an anti-war track wedged in among the cool, stylish disco to let listeners know these guys care about more than their hair styles.

But despite its inevitable hit status, perhaps because of it, there's something a tad too familiar about this debut.

It's all competent, all listenable, but there's little, at this point, to distinguish JHJ from the host of similar British acts that have washed up on our shores since the Duran Duran beachhead a few years ago.

Even anti-war sentiments are pro forma among young British musicians these days. Their sentiments may run deep, yet they come across as superficial. In fact, Johnny Hates Jazz may need a new name — Johnny Needs Soul.

— Wayne Peal

SURANLAND

— Tanjent Image



"Suranland" is not only the first piece of vinyl from Tanjent Image, it's more like a declaration.

The Detroit-based group uses everything in its musical arsenal to make this first effort work. "Suranland," a four-song EP on Nebula Records, will make people listen.

There's a blend of synthesized rock numbers and dance mixes here. "Suranland" and "Faith" take the rock route while "One Nation" and "Anytime (Dream Time)" take more of a dance course.

In all four numbers, the synthesizer and guitar lines are woven together to produce a nice dreamscape sound. There are some touches of tamborine and xylophone here and there as well. Does anyone remember Flock of Seagulls?

The natural reaction for some would be to write Tanjent Image's

music off as a bunch of techno-synth pop pablum. That's not the case here.

The guitar adds enough of a heart-felt edge to give the numbers an honest feel. There's also the hard driving rhythm provided by the drumming of Andrew Howell that gives this stuff some life.

If there is a problem here, it's that some of the numbers lack direction. OK, some are dance mixes which are not supposed to have direction anyway. Granted.

But a finely orchestrated number like "Suranland" could do better without the sudden change in rhythm in the middle. And it would be nice to have some type warning in "Faith" that the number is going to end.

This EP could use some tightening up in spots. But it's a good first effort nonetheless.

— Larry O'Connor