

STREET BEATS

GS band flirts with notoriety beyond border

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

A little radio airplay can go a long way — even to Toledo, Ohio.

The Greg Stryker Band, whose number "Spellbound," found its way on to both WRIF-FM and WLZZ-FM's play lists, is starting to notice the benefits of its recent flirt with notoriety.

"People have been coming to see us because they have heard the tunes," said Stryker, 23, who grew up in Bloomfield Hills. "When we go to Toledo, people even know us."

Today, Toledo, Tomorrow who knows. Maybe it will be Tallahassee. Granted, reaching the people of northern Ohio is not exactly a national breakout. But, hey, it's a start.

Any day the bus for the national spotlight could be leaving from Detroit. Greg Stryker Band wants the front seat.

The band is ecstatic by the recent radio support, especially from WRIF. The album-oriented rock station has also included the Greg Stryker Band in a few of its promotional "Local Riff" nights at area nightclubs.

BUT ALONG with the encouragement has also come discouragement. Pat Still was recently fired as program director at WRIF.

"Finally we get a break and he gets fired," Stryker said. "From the second we met him, he helped us out immensely."

"You finally accomplish something, then something like this happens. . . . Rock'n'roll is like a roller coaster ride. You take two steps forward and 10 miles backwards. That's what it feels like anyway."

The Greg Stryker Band plans to gain a few miles instead. The group's hard rock product will tell the story.

The sound is high energy rock'n'roll with Stryker leading the way with his distinctive and well-honed vocals. The writing is tight as well. For the most part, the Greg Stryker Band is able to avoid the clichés in its music.

Apparently, people are not avoiding the band. Already, according to Stryker, the band has been scouted by Capitol. And there are six other "major labels" taking a peek as well.

In a short time, the Greg Stryker Band has made a name for itself at hard rock venues such as New York, New York, The Ritz and Harpos. The group possesses a large and rather loyal following.

The Greg Stryker Band's strength lies in the music, according to band members. Stryker said he has anywhere from "500 to 600" songs down on tape.

MOST OF the material is written on the farm where Stryker lives in Marietta, Mich. The rural atmosphere makes for some good tunes, he said.

"I can't say when I sit down I have all these emotions," he said. "I'm a crazy kind of a guy. I just sit down and it happens."

But, as the case for so many bands, the nightclubs seem to outnumber the songs.

"We're in the middle of bar burnout," Stryker said. "It's like every time you walk in to a bar you say to yourself, 'What am I doing here?'"

Stryker and his bandmates know full well the answer to that question. And Billy Craig, guitar, Charlie Grover, drums, Bruce LaFrance, bass, Bruce Fisk, guitar and keyboards, are willing to meet the burned-out bar blues head on.

Some possible opening gigs at Pine Knob are in the works. The group's recent surge has made them optimistic to say the least.

"I know that we can do what the big boys can do," Stryker said. "I've always looked up to B.S.A. (Bittersweet Alley), Toby Redd and Strut. . . . We're finally happening. We know who we are."



Greg Stryker (top) and Billy Craig of the Greg Stryker Band, which also includes Charlie Grover, Bruce LaFrance and Bruce Fisk. The band is starting to notice the benefits of its recent flirt with notoriety.

ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

The Blanks back up words with action

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Today, the only music Bill Boyer might be making is by dragging the metal cup across the bars of a jail cell.

Yes, that's right. If everything goes according to plan, the drummer of the Blanks could be in the can.

This morning, Boyer and a host of other protesters will have gone to the construction site of controversial the trash incinerator in Detroit and had a sit-in. He expects to be arrested.

"We feel like we're too preachy, if we don't back up what we say," said Boyer, who grew up Birmingham.

What the Blanks have to say about the trash incinerator, now under construction, isn't so nice. But the incinerator, which has drawn the protest of many environmental groups, including Greenpeace, is not the only thing burning at the Blanks lately.

The Blanks do benefit gigs for alternative newspapers, fighting censorship and getting the U.S. out of Central America.

On the less volatile side, the group has worked for such causes as the Paradigm Dance Theatre and the Humane Society.

OBVIOUSLY, one can fill in the Blanks as political. Many bands take political stances with their music. Few bands, however, actually take their stances to the street.

The Blanks do. The group's music, though not hardcore punk, carries the electric crunch of protest songs. The band's debut album, "The Blanks," is chock full of po-

litical offerings.

Live performances can be anywhere from high schools to clubs like the Hamtramck Pub and Heron's in Dearborn. During the weekend, the group had a benefit performance at Alvin's to raise money in the fight against the trash incinerator, "Ban the Burn."

The Blanks formed more as a project than a musical group. Two members, Steve Bitto and Chris Israel, were in political bands Heavy Things and Zerammar while in high school at Bloomfield Hills Lahser.

Israel joined forces with Boyer. Bitto, who was "musically hopeless" at the time, later found his way to the Blanks.

The Blanks are a product of their upbringing, they said.

"KIDS IN school used to drive me nuts with their ideas of, 'I can't wait until I turn 16 so I can get a Corvette,'" Bitto said. ". . . They were basically rich, snobbish kids. I was not."

The Blanks haven't totally defined its sound yet. Boyer said it's developing more of a bite as time passes. After all, after the trash incinerator there are other issues like casino gambling to tackle.

While the list of causes to embrace is endless, one wonders if the energy is as plentiful. The Blanks think so.

More than anything, the group doesn't want to be dismissed as a bunch of hippies reliving a '60s nostalgia trip.

"Our hair is shorter," Bitto said.

"Protest in the '90s isn't going to be a rebash of the '60s," Boyer added. "It might be even more exciting because of the quality of the commitment."



The Blanks feature Bill Boyer, Steve Bitto and Chris Israel.

IN CONCERT

● THE FALL

The Fall will perform with special guests, Luxuria, Monday, May 16, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For more information, call 961-6358.

● HYSTERIC NARCOTICS

Hysteric Narcotics will perform Tuesday, May 17, at the Bill Hamtramck Pub, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For more information, call 996-8555.

● JOHNNY ALLEN

Johnny Allen will perform Friday, May 20, at Paycheck's Lounge, Caniff Avenue, Hamtramck.

● TOBY REDD

Toby Redd will perform along with guests, League of Nations, Friday, May 20, at the Hamtramck Pub, 208 S. First St., Detroit. For more information, call 365-9760.

● MISSION U.K.

Mission U.K. will perform Friday, May 20, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For more information, call 961-6358.

● BLUES JUBILEE

The Fabulous Butler Twins, Johnny "Yard Dog" Jones, The Alligators, So and the Blues Band, Barlen James Blues Band will all perform at the Spring Time Blues

Jubilee on Saturday, May 21, at Moby Dick's, 5452 Schafer, Dearborn. Doors open at 6 p.m. for dinner. Music starts at 8 p.m. For ticket information, call 581-3556 or 423-6666.

● FUNHOUSE

Funhouse will perform Saturday, May 21, at the Hamtramck Pub, 208 S. First St., Detroit. For more information, call 365-9760.

● MONSTERS OF ROCK

Van Halen's Monsters of Rock tour, featuring Van Halen, Scorpions, Dokken, Metallica and Kingdom Come, will take place at 1:30 p.m. Friday, June 17, at the Pontiac Silverdome. Tickets are \$25.

LOCAL

Here are the top 10 songs being played on the "Contamination and Corrosion Show" on WOH-FM 90.3, the campus station of Oakland Community College.

1. "Take Your Money Downtown," Colorful Trauma.
2. "Springtime," Jugglers and Thieves.
3. "Terminal City," Shock Therapy.
4. "Blues," Detroit Energy Asylum.
5. "Pure and Simple," Orange Roughies.
6. "You Won't Break," Fugitive Poetry.
7. "Industrial Noise," Funhouse.
8. "Tying Up Daytime," Junk Monkeys.
9. "New Recruits," The Gear.
10. "Cheap Rayon Soul," Granfallon.

COLLEGE

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

1. "I Can't Break Away," Big Pig.
2. "Beds Are Burning," Midnight Oil.
3. "I Want Your Hands on Me," Sliced O'Connor.
4. "Hairspray Soundtrack," various artists.
5. "Only a Memory," Smitherens.
6. "Birth, School, Work, Death," Godfathers.
7. "Tomorrow People," Ziggy Marley and the Melody Makers.
8. "Rev. Jack and Roamin' Cadillac Church," Timbuk 3.
9. "Finest Worksong," R.E.M.
10. "Golden Call," Prefab Sprout.

COUNTRY

The following are this week's top country record hits, according to Billboard Publications Inc. Copyright 1988.

1. "I'm Gonna Get You," Eddy Raven.
2. "Young Country," Hank Williams Jr.
3. "Baby I'm Yours," Steve Wariner.
4. "Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses," Kathy Mattea.
5. "Old Folks," Ronnie Milsap and Mike Reid.
6. "The Factory," Kenny Rogers.
7. "True Heart," Oak Ridge Boys.
8. "What She Is (Is a Woman in Love)," Earl Thomas Conley.
9. "Always Late With Your Kisses," Dwight Yoakam.
10. "One True Love," The O'Kanes.

REVIEWS

ALPHABET STREET/
EVERYTHING
YOUR
HEART DESIRES— Prince/
Hill & Oates

Two years ago, Prince invited us to "try my new funk." But this time, lead-off track from his upcoming *Lovesexy* album, shows the Purple One is still refining his funk, still boiling it down to its essence.

As it stands, "Alphabet Street" is one long, fat, funky groove. Melody and harmony are now almost completely abandoned in favor of rhythm.

House music, specifically Prince's own "housequake," seems to have been the inspiration here. It's a brave move. While "Alphabet Street" bristles with shake-your-head energy, it doesn't appear to have much bit status written all over it — at least not upon first listen.

Prince, however, has long shown a preference to leading his audience to new, uncharted, musical territory, rather than reflecting momentarily on pop chart trends.

Once again, this ever-innovative

artist has thrown down the gauntlet. Now, it remains to be seen whether the record-buying masses are ready to pick up on his new (revised) funk. Prince may push the limits of his talent on his new release but Hill & Oates go more conservative on their new 45, the pair's first for their new label.

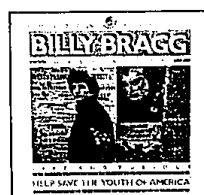
The rock'n'roll crunch displayed on "Big Bam Boom," their last RCA album is, at least, momentarily, abandoned for a sound closer to their mid-'70s hits.

"Everything" would easily fit alongside "She's Gone" or "Sara Smile." So is its easy, laid back groove should make it a solid early summer hit — pleasant enough, but at this late date, not much to jump up and down about either.

— Wayne Peat

HELP SAVE THE
YOUTH OF
AMERICA

— Billy Bragg



Needless to say, with Billy Bragg's fur hat and the hammer and sickle on the album cover, this one won't make William F. Buckley's Top 10 list.

"Help Save the Youth of America" (Elektra) is mostly political oratory that's a little lean on the musical side. Recorded live, Billy Bragg's latest effort still manages to capture the raw energy reminiscent of the protest days of the 1960s.

Featured on the album are six songs that run the gamut from nuclear war to unionism to political apathy. Bragg is certainly no Luciano Pavarotti in the vocal department, but he gets the job done.

Bragg's big project stateside is to encourage Americans to vote. Included in the six-song EP is list of places in each of the 50 states where people can register.

"Remember, when you elect a president, you are electing a president for all of us." Bragg writes on the back of the album. "Please be more careful this time."

— "Help Save the Youth America,"

the title track from the album, begins with Bragg telling his Soviet audience how this number could easily apply to them as well. A guy sounding like Yakoff Smirnoff translates what Bragg is saying.

Bragg launches into his electric folk number with undaunted zest. The Soviet audience claps heartily (then again, judging the state of Soviet rock'n'roll, they'll clap at anything).

"Think Again" deals with consequences of nuclear war, reminding us the Soviets want no more of it than we do. "There Is Power in a Union" has all the makings of a Teamsters' anthem.

"Chile, Your Waters Run Red through Soweto" amazingly manages to grapple with the monumental problems of Chile and South Africa in one song. Apparently, nothing is too mighty for Bragg.

— Larry O'Connor

THE SEA
OF LOVE

— The Adventures



This is a nice album. So nice is this album that you can take it home and play it for mom and dad. And while you're at it, invite Buffy, Jody and Mr. French along, too. Make it a true family affair.

"The Sea of Love" (Elektra) is so syrupy at times you want to look over the album cover for pictures of Aunt Jemima.

For the purely pop ear, there's plenty of sap to keep one happy. But The Adventures is a contradiction in name. This group doesn't take any chances here, playing it safe most of the way.

Sure in "Broken Land," there's political overtones to "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland. But this number makes it sound like the warring factions are out there with pea shooters.

Because of that and a few hooks as well, this number undoubtably will garner a fair amount of airplay.

Let it be said The Adventures have a very clean sound. Nary a scratch

or a vocal out of sync. Worst of all, though, there's no thunder.

And take a listen to some of these song titles: "Drowning in the Sea of Love," "Hold Me Now," "When Your Heart Was Young" and "The Sound of Summer." It's easy to see Pat Gribben, the group's chief songwriter, is not exactly breaking new ground here.

Gribben, who is guitarist for The Adventures, actually provides a bit of an edge with a few well-placed riffs in "When Your Heart Was Young," but the rest of the album would be lucky to cut butter.

The sad, but true, thing in all this is that with one song, "Broken Land," The Adventures will get its video on MTV and its song on the radio. There are so many other bands, pop and rock alike, with more to offer. But they haven't figured out the formula.

— Larry O'Connor