

STREET BEATS

'Sonic' host lets the new tunes roll

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

The time was 1978. Mainstream music had become sterilized and desensitized.

Then came punk. The technical sound gave way to snarling guitars, gnarly haircuts with nasty lyrics to match.

Musicians had taken a turn. Steve Kostan was standing on the corner to see it.

Kostan, fresh out of Western Michigan University, was getting his start in radio when the punk explosion took place. He was working part-time at WABX-FM when records from bands like the Sex Pistols, the Buzzcocks and Patti Smith came rolling in.

"A lot of these bands had shorter hair and shorter tunes," said Kostan, 34, who lives in Farmington Hills, and they wanted to get back to having fun.

Some 10 years later, Kostan seeks to capture the spirit of those times on "Sonic Rendezvous" on WRIF-FM. The show, which is aired 8-10 p.m. Sundays, features the music of many of the up-and-coming bands and Kostan pays homage to the innovators of modern music like David Bowie, Iggy and the Stooges and Talking Heads.

"Sonic Rendezvous" has been an entity on Sunday nights since 1982 on WRIF. Bands like U2, Echo & the Bunnymen, The Cure and The Smiths were receiving airplay on the show when their records were obscure products in import bins.

THOSE GROUPS have obviously gone on to bigger things. Then again, Kostan has had a way of searching out a good thing.

When he was at WWWW-FM, the station was No. 1 in the Detroit market. He then went back to WABX-FM where he served the dual role of program director and disc jockey.

Kostan then jumped ship to WRIF

'You get to play a lot of music that deserves exposure in the proper place on an AOR station.'

— Steve Kostan
host of WRIF's
'Sonic Rendezvous'

In 1982, WWWW turned country and WABX-FM faded into oblivion.

"I've been fortunate," Kostan said. "I've been able to sniff out a terminal patient well in advance."

During his second stint at WABX, Kostan started a new music show called "Dangerous Exposure." He brought the idea with him to WRIF and started "Sonic Rendezvous."

Both shows have provided one of the few outlets for new music on commercial radio. Detroit AOR stations are often criticized for not playing enough of it.

"You get to play a lot of music that deserves exposure in the proper place on an AOR station," he said. "At WRIF, a place like 'Sonic Rendezvous'—not 3 p.m. on a Wednesday afternoon."

Kostan is the quintessential team player. He fully supported the idea of playing four Led Zeppelin songs in a row on his regular 8-10 p.m. shift.

HE ALSO likes the request hour, which has become a regular feature on his show. Both ideas came from program directors.

"If you sit there and undermine the program director, it's really not fair," he said. "You can debate certain things, but you shouldn't carry on a guerrilla war against the program director. It's not good for the station."

What Kostan thinks is good for the station is a good variety of music with some humor and rock'n'roll



BOB ALFORD

Steve Kostan of WRIF meets up with one of the pioneers of new music, Iggy Pop, recently at the Royal Oak Music Theater.

facts thrown in. That's his trademark as a disc jockey.

He fell into the radio business by accident. He started in college radio at WDR-FM.

His interest in music piqued early. He grew up on the westside of Detroit, only a mile from where "Motor City Madman" Ted Nugent lived.

The local scene was healthy. Iggy and the Stooges, MC-5 and Bob Seger were filling the airwaves at the time.

Kostan took his knowledge of Detroit rock'n'roll with him to college radio. He left after two semesters, looking for a job. He landed a weekend job at WABX.

Some 11 years later, he still enjoys the career path he took.

"It's a cool business," he said. "It's a good way to make a living."

AT WRIF, he's firmly entrenched. Disc jockeys at the station have enjoyed longevity, unusual in the tumultuous business of radio. Arthur Pennell, Ken Calvert and Karen Savelli have been at WRIF for a number of years.

During his career, Kostan has seen quite a few changes. The latest fad of classic rock he believes is beginning to burn out. What will replace it remains to be seen.

"I don't think we'll see a full-service new music station in Detroit," he said. "They've tried it a couple of times (WLSB-FM and WDRX-FM). They've had some good ideas, but they haven't presented it as a complete package."

New music fans will have to remain content to be spoonfed from shows like "Sonic Rendezvous."

ing, explosive theatrical rock'n'roll regiment, thundering across the universe."

Slaughterhouse simply responded, "If you need to know what we sound like, you don't need to know."

Anyone close to Ness and his wife, Sue, know there have been plenty of sleepless nights putting the Musician's Directory together.

This is their first major product with the Jam Rag new printing press. Several Jam Rag benefits were held to replace the old table-top printer, which broke down constantly.

"Every 10th sheet would misfold and go flying around the room," Ness said. "It was a toy, really very primitive."

The Jam Rag started out in a primitive way. Ness was booking bands at the Falcon/Mystery Lounge in Detroit. He began printing fliers for upcoming shows as a way for cheap advertisement.

The bar eventually quit hosting new bands, but the Jam Rag fliers were still being printed then in their Ferndale home. Virtually every room in the house was used to get the publication out.

THEY HAVE been able to move

the operation to their garage with the new press. Only 75 people subscribe to the Jam Rag. But 5,000 copies are distributed to more than 85 record stores and local music bars.

Local bands are featured along with concert listings and record reviews.

"We've received a lot of support from people, maybe more than we deserved in the beginning," Ness said. "Some people have complained about our journalistic content, but they don't understand that we're a business first."

"Now maybe we can pick and choose between articles instead of having to run every trashy one we get."

The Jam Rag has increased from a digressive to a magazine-size format. The editorial staff has grown to six people.

Ness said he plans to update the Musician's Directory every three months.

Copies of the Musician's Directory are \$3 and are available at record stores and local music venues. For more information, call the Jam Rag at 342-8090 or 342-8526.

IN CONCERT

● KILLER BEES

Michael Johnson and the Killer Bees, a reggae group from Austin, Texas, will perform at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For more information, call 998-8555.

● JAZZ DUETS

Carla Bley and Steve Swallow will perform from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 4, at the Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main, Ann Arbor. Tickets are \$10.50. For more information, call 783-0046.

● THE LEONARDS

The Leonards will perform with special guests, The Civilians, on Thursday and Friday, Oct. 6-7, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2040 Canfield, off I-75. For more information, call 365-9760.

● HIPPODROME

Hippodrome will perform with special guests, Shouting Club, on Friday, Oct. 7, at the Community Concert Series at the Paradigm Theater in Detroit.

● SECOND SELF

Second Self will perform on Friday, Oct. 7, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For more information, call 998-8555.

● B.B. KING

B.B. King will perform at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 7, at the Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Tickets are \$16.50 and \$12.50. For more information, call 99-MUSIC.

● BLUES BASH

Robert Penn, Butler Twins, Zoom and the Paybacks and Eddie "Guitar" Burns will perform on Saturday, Oct. 8, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For more information, call 998-8555.

● CHURCH, LET'S ACTIVE AND VERLAINE

Church, Let's Active and Tom Verlaine will all perform on Sunday, Oct. 9, at Michigan Theater in Ann Arbor. For more information, call 961-MELT.

● BASIA

Basia will perform at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 12, at the Royal Oak Music Theater. Tickets are \$17.50. For more information, call 546-7610.

● TAXI GANG TOUR

The Taxi Gang Tour, featuring reggae bands Sly and Robbie, Freddie McGregor and Maxie Priest, will take place Thursday, Oct. 13, at Saint Andrew's Hall, Congress, Detroit. For more information, call 961-MELT.

COLLEGE

Here are the top 10 songs receiving airplay on WORF-FM 90.3, the campus station of Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills.

1. "Every Dog . . ." Let's Active.
2. "I Want Your Love," Transvision Vamp.
3. "Dad, I'm in Jail," Was (Not Was).
4. "Fire," Red Hot Chili Peppers.
5. "Headline," Hunters & Collectors.
6. "Skywriting," The Bible.
7. "Warsaw," Joy Division.
8. "Ocean Size," Jane's Addiction.
9. "Just Play Music," B.A.D.
10. "Spacehead," Primitives.

● JOHNNY ALLEN

Johnny Allen and the Appeal will perform on Friday and Saturday, Oct. 14-15, at Griff's Bar & Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. For more information, call 334-9292.

● ANDREW TOSH

Andrew Tosh, tenor of reggae great Peter Tosh, and the Tosh Band will perform at 10 p.m. Friday, Oct. 14, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Tickets are \$12.50. For more information, call 99-MUSIC.

● ADRIAN BELEW AND THE BEARS

Adrian Belew and the Bears will perform Friday and Saturday, Oct. 14-15, at Alvin's, 5765 Cass, Detroit. Tickets are \$12.50. For more information, call 832-2355.

● NEW EDITION

New Edition will perform with special guests, A.B. Sure and Bobby Brown, at 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 15, at the Joe Louis Arena in Detroit. Tickets are \$18.50. For more information, call 567-6000.

● BRAGG, SHOCKED AND COTAL

Billy Bragg will perform with special guests, Michelle Shocked and Man Coats, at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Oct. 17, at the Power Center, 121 Fletcher, Ann Arbor. Tickets are \$14.50. There will be an after-show party at the Blind Pig with musical guests Weddings, Parties, Anything, a band from Australia. For more information, call 99-MUSIC.

LOCAL

Here are the top 10 songs receiving airplay on "Detroit Music Scene," which is aired 4-5 p.m. Sundays (repeated 5:30-6:30 p.m. Tuesdays) on WDRR, 90.9.

1. "Fade Away," Treeshouse Beggars.
2. "Johnny A.," Shane.
3. "Take 495," Funhouse.
4. "Walk on the Horizon," The Strait.
5. "The Lettuce March," Happy Death Men.
6. "No Use Trying," Mock Turtles.
7. "Phone Sex," Twiggy Barbet.
8. "Sally's Hot," J.D. Ruffcut.
9. "Pusherman of Love," Bootsy X.
10. "Springtime," Jeggles & Thieves.

COUNTRY

Here are the top 10 songs receiving airplay on WCXI-AM 1130, country station in Detroit.

1. "The Gift," The McCorters.
2. "I'm Gonna Love Her on the Radio," Charlie Pride.
3. "Honky Tonk Moon," Randy Travis.
4. "You Love Me," Just Say Yes, Highway 101.
5. "Streets of Bakersfield," Dwight Yoakam.
6. "Am I Crazy," The Statler Brothers.
7. "Give a Little Love," The Judds.
8. "Gonna Take a Lot of River," The Oak Ridge Boys.
9. "That's What Your Love Does to Me," Holly Dunn.
10. "Saturday Night Special," Cowboy Tricky.

Directory puts local music at your fingertips

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Want to call a radio station for a request? Or how about getting in touch with a local rock band to play at your next save-the-dandelions benefit?

Well, let your fingers do the walking . . . through the Musician's Directory.

This 24-page publication is chock-full of phone numbers and addresses of local rock bands, radio stations, record stores, music equipment outlets, area music bars and major record labels.

Need the postal code for Lambertville or the telephone exchange for Flat Rock, well those are included also.

The Musician's Directory is the ambitious undertaking of Tom Ness, publisher of the Jam Rag. The Jam Rag is a weekly publication devoted to local rock'n'roll.

The directory is designed to be an easy reference source for those connected with the local rock scene. Band listings are one of the more interesting features.

"We want to cover the whole diversity of rock'n'roll. Whatever that means," said Ness, who spent three



ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Tom Ness holds up his new publication, the 1988 Musician's Directory.

months putting the Musician's Directory together.

NO KIDDING. Bands were asked to provide phone numbers and addresses. Answers were clear, others were left up for interpretation.

For instance the group Shouting Club said their's was "thinking music for sex people." Steel Soldier described their sound as "powerdriv-

ing, explosive theatrical rock'n'roll regiment, thundering across the universe."

Slaughterhouse simply responded, "If you need to know what we sound like, you don't need to know."

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THEY HAVE been able to move

REVIEWS

WHAT UP, DOG? — Was (Not Was)

This is the third and certainly the finest offering from Brother Was Inc. But more than that, "What Up, Dog?" (Chrysalis) is such a good album that radio stations should be climbing over one another to play it.

So far, they haven't. But, geez, let Bon Jovi release songs from the shower and they are all butting heads to play it.

Listen to "What Up, Dog?" and you'll soon realize what is totally lacking on commercial radio.

"What Up, Dog?" abounds with creativity, diversity, irony and a freshness that is certainly amiss in much of today's formulated pabulum music offerings. Was (Not Was) knows the score, dealing with such current topics as pit bulls ("What Up, Dog?"), attorneys named Maggot ("Out Come the Freaks") and women whose virtue is questioned ("Anytime Lisa").

The creative collaboration between former Detroiters Don Was (Fragson) and David Was (Weiss) produces a brand of music not heard this side of Mars.

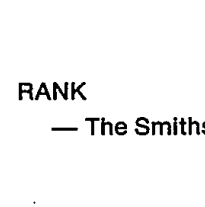
That's not to say this stuff is unaccessible. Quite the contrary with the rough-and-tumble rhythm and blues singing of Sweet Pea Adkins and the sweetly melodic vocals of Sir Harry Bowens (former member of the O'Jays).



One can hear textures of jazz in the slightly optimistic "Somewhere in America There's a Street Named After My Dad." Funk abounds in "Out Come the Freaks" and hard-edged rhythm and blues dominate in "House of Love."

The way Was (Not Was) takes the standard pop form and shapes it into their own somewhat ironic look at life is something to behold. Was (Not Was) is not without humor. All one has to do is listen to Frank Sinatra Jr. croon "Wedding Vow" in Las Vegas. And all one has to do is listen to "What Up, Dog?" to realize these guys are nothing short of pop geniuses.

— Larry O'Connor



RANK — The Smiths

Maybe it was for the best when The Smiths broke up last year. The musical collaboration between singer/writer Morrissey and guitarist Johnny Marr wasn't allowed to grow stale and trite. Or worse, become parodies of themselves.

Indeed, let it be said The Smiths went out on top. They will be one of the few great bands in the 1980s we'll have to look back on.

"Rank" (Sire) captures the British pop group at the pinnacle of their short, but sweet stab at success. Recorded live in October 1988 in London (a month after the band performed at the Fox Theater in Detroit), this generous 50-minute offering shows The Smiths in their full glory.

"The Queen Is Dead" is a raucous opening number, a kind that really comes to life with the buzzing and crackling of Marr's electric guitar. "Rheumatism Ruffians" and "Gusto She Said" follow in the guitar gusto



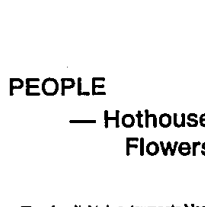
tradition of Marr. People who can't take a joke, can't take The Smiths. The lyrical wit of Morrissey is showcased with the peppy "Vicar in a Tutu" and the rigidly rhythmic "Is It So Strange?"

When he isn't moaning and groaning, Morrissey actually displays some rather fine vocal work. His majesty of self-pity sounds like a member of the Vienna Choir in "A Boy With a Thorn in His Side."

All the songs here burst with energy because, unlike some of the studio versions, Marr's guitar really comes to the forefront. Without a doubt, he is certainly in the company of U2's Mr. Edge as one of the greatest guitarists of this decade.

"Rank" is an excellent testament to The Smiths' ability to manipulate pop music.

— Larry O'Connor



PEOPLE — Hothouse Flowers

Thunder, lightning, trumpets blaring. The Second Coming? No, just Hothouse Flowers.

Hothouse Flowers, if you listen to some people, are the next big thing. On "People," their beachhead LP, Hothouse Flowers blares with a rich combination of soul, rock'n'roll and Celtic rhythms.

Except this Irish band really wants to let you know they are sincere and passionate about the music. In fact, they go to great lengths to pound it into your head that their music is full of feeling, full of life. More than anything, though, the music tends to be just what it is.

Does this mean Hothouse Flowers music is guilty of being a bit overblown? Heck, yes. Look it up and throw away the key.

Any talent—musical, mystical or otherwise—this band possesses is lost in the way it bludgeons songs to death on "People." Certainly adding to the almost chaotic chaos here is the overwrought vocals of Liam O'Maonail, who wails at times as if

he were walking on hot coals.

For example, "Yes, I Was," opens with a sweet acoustic guitar line only to break into a wild, gospel-like frenzy. The end result is disjointed. And, what at first sounds to be enjoyable turns sour.

The idea of a born section in a band is to provide texture to the music. Here, especially in the slow-moving "Ballad of Katie," they only provide noise. The Waterboys, a band that Hothouse Inc. lists as an influence, uses trumpets and other horns in their music quite well.

Perhaps, therein is the problem with Hothouse Flowers. Maybe they're trying to be too many things to too many people. Are they a little bit like Van Halen? Or the Waterboys? Or U2? Or Bruce Springsteen?

As a result, they try to be all of them in one lump sum. And it doesn't add up to much.

— Larry O'Connor