

STREET BEATS



The Gear relies on a stripped down approach on its new four-song EP, "Return to Hillville."

The Gear gets in gear

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

A pack of Camels, a bottle of Gabel, a dog named Ginger and The Gear. If it were a black and white film, David Lynch would be the director. But the setting serves the dual purpose of being the headquarters for The Gear International Inc. and home to all three band members. The living room is filled with interesting pieces of art along with posters of The Who and The Clash, the latter having had an influence on the band's music. The couch is slightly worn and soft. But, much like The Gear's music, a person can sink into it rather cozily. Bass player Tom Lynch tells the visitor about the band's photo, which was taken at Lafayette Coney Island in downtown Detroit. "We decided to cash the bottles in and get something to eat," said Lynch, who is formerly of Rochester. The Gear is not only cashing in

with returnables, the band is seeking pay-backs on its soon-to-be released four-song EP, "In the New Hillville." After 1 1/2 years of playing the local circuit, The Gear has something to show for its efforts. The vinyl offering is sparse in terms of sound. The Gear rely on a stripped down approach. The vocals nor the instrumentation will overwhelm at first; but after awhile the simplicity of it has an endearing quality. WHILE THE sound is definitely their own, The Gear's status in the area music scene could be lumped together with a handful of other bands, such as the Volebeats, the Gories and Gangster Fun. The Gear doesn't have a fast-talking manager, nor do they possess a high-powered marketing strategy. Nonetheless, they're there. The Gear can be found playing earnestly in clubs like the Hamtramck Pub and Psychek's Lounge, but they also perform in places of non-high visibility, such as benefits. In the final analysis, the music is

what sells it in the long run — not the numerous clubs a band plays in. Bob Zabor writes the songs and sings them on stage. He usually churns out one to two new songs a month, which he reluctantly agrees is the group's trump card. "I'd say probably — geez it's hard for me to say this but I'll say it anyway — our material," said Zabor, who is the founding member of The Gear. "We have a higher output than many other bands. As bandmates, being roommates certainly helps in terms of focus. Lynch and Zabor don't necessarily agree with the theory about the band that plays and lives together plays better together, but it helps get things done. The other band member's vote is on proxy. Jeff Hunt was in the hospital, suffering from dehydration due to complications from a cold. "WE WOULDN'T be able to get anything done if we didn't live together, fight together and drink together," Lynch said. "When we get

home from work, we flop around and have dinner. Then somebody will say, 'what about those flyers.' It's pretty much a 24-hour thing." Lynch was the last piece of the puzzle. The Gear started out with four members, but was trimmed to three. Lynch is a 1983 graduate of Rochester Adams High School and played on a rather obscure band called The Mangos before answering an ad in the Metro Times for a bass player. Together, The Gear provides a highly energized show that Lynch describes as "sheer anarchy" at times. The live portion of the band is as important, if not more important than the recorded one. "I think the important thing on the record is that it captures the emotion," Zabor said. "We can't afford to experiment in the studio."

The Gear will perform along with Anti-Fashion and Modest Citizens on Friday, March 31, in Oakland University's Abstinence Room in Rochester. Tickets are \$3.50. The show proceeds will benefit WOLX-AM, the campus radio station of Oakland University. For information, call 370-4272.

IN CONCERT

- **BANANARAMA**
Banarama will perform on Monday, March 27, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First. Tickets are \$17.50. For information, call 546-7610.
- **BOX OF 9'S**
Big Box of 9's will perform on Monday, March 27, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- Also the group will perform on Tuesday, March 28, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **CROSSFIRE**
Crossfire, a contemporary Christian music band from Colorado College, will perform at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 28, at Dunning Park Chapel, 24800 W. Chicago, west of Telegraph, Redford. Tickets are \$2. For information, call 532-8540.
- **SECOND SELF**
Second Self will perform on Tuesday, March 28, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **ROMANCE**
Romance will perform Wednesday through Saturday, until April 1, at Dayton's, Rochester Road, near 14 Mile Road. For information, call 528-1550.
- **SUSPECTS**
Suspects will perform on Wednesday, March 29, at Rick's American Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **PRIVATE DRIVE**
Private Drive will perform on Thursday, March 30, at Sully's, 4138 Greenfield, Dearborn. For information, call 846-5377.
- **BEE DICK RUN**
See Dick Run will perform on Thursday, March 30, at the Coburn Club, 1815 N. Main, near 12 Mile, Royal Oak. For information, call 589-3344.
- **DINOSAUR**
Dinosaur will perform on Thursday, March 30, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **KENNY NEAL**
Kenny Neal will perform on Thursday, March 30, at Rick's American Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **VAN GOGH**
Ash Can Van Gogh will perform on Friday, March 31, at Jameson's, 1812 N. Main, Royal Oak. For information, call 547-6470.
- **DION PAYTON**
Dion Payton will perform on Friday and Saturday, March 31 and April 1, at Sully's, 4138 Greenfield, between Michigan and Ford, Dearborn. For information, call 846-5377.
- **WILD WOODYS**
The Wild Woodys will perform on Friday and Saturday, March 31 and April 1, at Griffin Grill, 40 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. For information, call 334-9292.
- **CIVILIANS**
Civilians will perform with special guests, Faded Films, on Friday, March 31, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2046 Caniff, off I-75, Hamtramck. For information, call 365-9760.
- **FUNHOUSE**
Funhouse will perform on Saturday, April 1, at Jameson's, 1812 N. Main, Royal Oak. For information, call 547-6470.
- **SWEET TEAZE**
Sweet Teaze will perform on Saturday, April 1, at Blondie's, 21139 W. Seven Mile, east of Telegraph, Detroit. For information, call 535-8108.
- **R.E.M.**
R.E.M. will perform at 8 p.m. Wednesday, April 5, at Coburn Club in Detroit. Reserved seats are \$18.50. For information, call 99-MUSIC.



Private Drive will perform on Thursday at Sully's in Dearborn.

Freaks: Just 'geeks' who play music?

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

No worry of tripping over any big egos when visiting the House of Freaks. "We're just normal geeks who like to play music," said Johnny Hott, drummer of the critically acclaimed duo. Most bands after receiving rave reviews as the House of Freaks did with their first album "Monkey on a Chain Gang," which was called "extraordinary" in *Musicians*, "terrific" in *EQ* and "inspired" in *Billboard*, would need to order new extra-large hats. Bryan Harvey and Hott appear to shrug off such accolades like dandruff. The bottom line is the music. And the House of Freaks have another batch on the market with their latest LP "Tanilla." Those who liked "Monkey on a Chain Gang" will probably take to the new offering. Aside from the added element of keyboards, the House of Freaks' sound is basically just Harvey on guitar and Hott on drums.



Aside from the added element of keyboards, the House of Freaks' sound is basically just Harvey on guitar and Hott on drums on their new LP.

Nail biting and fractured nerves were at a minimum making the follow-up LP, according to Hott. "We didn't give a damn," said Hott, whose group will perform with the Bangles Tuesday, both at the Fox Theatre in Detroit. "We really didn't make any money off the first album. We figured what do we have to lose?" AS FAR as the critical expectations, Hott doesn't give a hoot about that either.

"Usually, it's just one guy's opinion," he said. "One well-known guy writes something and everyone else writes the same damn thing. We like it when people are a little more critical." OK. So these guys apparently are not picking out what they want to wear to next year's Grammy's. Instead, the House of Freaks is busily cultivating a following. The two-man outfit is on tour with The Bangles at what has been a non-stop pace since the release of the first al-

bum, playing 118 dates with Midnight Oil. All of this started with one trip to Los Angeles in a stolen season 800 hand members' hall from Richmond, Va., but decided to try their musical luck out west. While most groups get swallowed up in the mass vortex of the L.A. music scene, the House of Freaks struck gold instantly. They worked as house painters during the day, but latched on to a promoter who put them in the top clubs. "He liked the band," Hott said. "Either that or he figured with two guys, he didn't have to pay us as much." NONETHELESS, the House of Freaks made waves. Several record labels were interested, but the group signed with the aggressive independent Rhino. The creative spark between Hott and Harvey works, for whatever reason. Hott is not offering any theories. "There's no creativity between us," he said. "When we're not having fistfights, there's just a lot of dead air."

COLLEGE

Here are the top 10 songs receiving air play on WHFR-FM, campus station of Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn.

1. "Orange and Lemons," XTC.
2. "Raw and the Cooked," Fuse Young Canabals.
3. "Violent Femmes."
4. "New York," Lou Reed.
5. "Technique," New Order.
6. "Don't Tell a Soul," Replacements.
7. "Spike," Elvis Costello.
8. "Love/After Dark," Tone Loc.
9. "Figures on a Beach," Figures on a Beach.
10. "Pellgro," Dealin TV.

COUNTRY

Here are the top 10 songs receiving air play on WCXI-AM.

1. "I'm a One Woman Man," George Jones.
2. "Baby's Gotten Good at Goodbye," George Strait.
3. "There's a Tear in My Beer," Hank Williams, Jr.
4. "Who You Gonna Blame It on This Time," Vera Gosdin.
5. "Ballad of a Teenage Queen," Johnny Cash/Ronnie Cash/Everly Brothers.
6. "Bridges and Walks," The Oak Ridge Boys.
7. "I'm No Stranger to the Rain," Keith Whitley.
8. "I'll Still Over," Randy Travis.
9. "New Fool at an Old Game," Reba McEntire.
10. "Doesn't You Ever Get Tired (of Hurtin' Me)," Ronnie Milap.

REVIEWS

THE RAW AND THE COOKED — Fine Young Cannibals

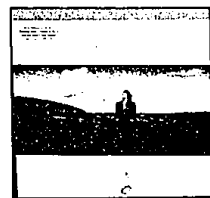
Fine Young Cannibals are beginning to come into their own. They have been somewhat neglected for a while. But as a combination of movie soundtracks (they had a track on Jonathan Demme's "Something Wild"), acting (singer Roland Gift is featured in the film "Sammy and Rosie Get Laid") and videos (Prince produced their last video), they are now garnering some attention. This, of course, is mentioning nothing about the high quality of this particular LP. The band was formed as an after-effect of the breakup of the English Beat with rubber-legged guitarist Andy Cox and bassist David Steele teaming up with singer Roland Gift. For those of you unfamiliar with FYC, it's Gift's unique vocals that gives them their easily identifiable sound. Like Morrissey, it's one of those vocal styles that you either love or hate. On this album, the strength of the songs should transcend anyone's dislike of his vocals.



The predominant mood and feel throughout the LP is that of Motown Records. It's a modern day Motown sound better than any that the modern day Motown groups are producing. It starts off with the current single, the danceable "She Drives Me Crazy" and quickly launches into the wonderful "Thing" which features excellent piano playing from David Steele and great Motown backing vocals. There are only three tracks which don't impress, one of which is a terribly light cover version of the wonderful Buzzcocks' "Ever Fall in Love." The other seven tracks more than make up for those three and special attention should be paid to "I'm Not the Man I Used to Be." ("As Hard as It Is," "Tell Me What (It may well be Smokey Robinson)" and the bouncy, Marshall Crenshaw styled "Don't Look Back." —Cormac Wright

ANCIENT HEART — Tanita Tikaram

On the heels of the folkies success of Suzanne Vega in 1987 and Tracy Chapman in 1988, here comes Tanita Tikaram. No, she's hardly in the league with either of these two, but she has put together a debut release with a lot of potential. The English-raised product of a mother from Borneo and Fiji native father, Tikaram has an unusual background that reveals itself in her music. Her husky voice combines the jazzy smoothness of Sade and the biting introspection of the recent work of Chrissy Hynde. The music is refreshingly acoustic and far from overbearing, with Tikaram on guitar, and album producers Rod Argent and Peter (son of Mike and The Mechanics fame) Van Hoke on keyboards and drums, respectively. The stark but well-layered arrangements feature Tikaram's vocals, often with a dash of strings, brass and woodwinds added to create a highly listenable sound. "Ancient Heart" is an album that grows on you with each successive play. The opening track, "Good



Tradition," is upbeat with a nice horn arrangement. The mention of the words "love and hate," however, conjures up memories of a certain single from the Pretenders' "Learning to Crawl" LP. "Cathedral Song" has a more refined Vega-esque flavor to it, as does "Poor Cow." "Cow" could be the macabre sequel to Vega's "Fancy Poultry" off "Solitude Standing." The album's highlights also include "Sighing Innocents," an international single/wides called "Twist and Shout" and a gorgeous ballad entitled "Valentine Heart." This is a solid first release for Tikaram, who very well could find her niche on American college radio. However, her inconsistency as a songwriter will probably keep her from getting any further than that at this time. Meanwhile this critic will anxiously await Tikaram's second album. —Bob Sadler

CHICKEN GRavy & BISCUITS — Lil' Ed and the Blues Imperials

For those misguided souls who think the blues is nothing but crying-in-your-beer music, meet Lil' Ed and the Blues Imperials. "Chicken Gravy & Biscuits" (Alligator) is house-rocking blues that will shake the cobwebs of depression from the most sulken of individuals. Rolling, hot-fingered guitar licks highlight this second offering by the Chicago-based blues outfit. And to think two years ago, Lil' Ed Williams was virtually unknown. He played guitar on the weekends in blues venues around Chicago. He supported his hobby by working during the day as a senior buffer at a car wash. The band's debut album "Roughhousing" on Alligator was released in September 1986 and Lil' Ed took his show on the road, gaining a large following nationwide. Of course, there's the ever-dreaded second album curse. But with the genuine raw power of



the music, Lil' Ed and the Blues Imperials couldn't go wrong on "Chicken Gravy & Biscuits." With the opening riff on "Chicken Gravy & Biscuits," this album cooks. Wisely, the band chose to record this album live in the studio, meaning few overdubs and outtakes. The dance tracks benefit from the live feel. Too often groups who have great live shows cannot transfer that magic to vinyl. Lil' Ed does. But there are some breaks from the dance floor boogie, especially on the track "Blues for Jeanette." Here we get a fuller appreciation of Lil' Ed's slide guitar style, which he plays only with his finger tips. Most of the songs run along the five- to six-minute range, allowing for Lil' Ed to truly showcase his guitar ability. Most dance tracks lose their zest or become repetitive. Lil' Ed not only keeps up, he sets the pace. —Larry O'Connor