

STREET BEATS



The Chenille Sisters include Grace Morand, Connie Huber and Cheryl Dawdy.

ART EMANUEL/Staff photographer

Chenille Sisters mix a touch of humor and tight harmony

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

A Barbie doll with suction cups, a kitchen plunger, an acoustic guitar and three lovely voices in perfect harmony.

Only The Chenille Sisters. Obviously, the guitar would seem to be appropriate for a singing trio. But the doll and the plunger, you ask?

Well, standard equipment for a musical group who can make a person listen and laugh when it settles into its "goofy groove."

The clothes are the first hint. The Chenilles' attire resembles the dubious winners of a resale store shopping spree.

Then there are the songs, like the one about the jilted lover whose boyfriend makes off with everything but the silverware. Sings the trio in perfect harmony on "The Break-up." "Was it love, dear? Was it even close? I guess it's the wearing blender I'll miss the most."

When Morand needs a little sound

effects for a swing number, she pulls out the plunger to imitate a jazz horn. The humor is like Wobegone in style.

Comedienne, yes, but the music is what makes it swing. "People like that tight harmony," said Morand, who is a hairdresser by day. "That's the thing that sells it."

SELLS IT to the point The Chenille Sisters are receiving fan mail from as far away as Alaska. Their latest album, "At Home With the Chenille Sisters," is already in its second pressing and the group receives favorable reviews wherever it performs.

One of the reasons for that is people can feel darn right busy at a Chenille Sisters show. It's that missing is the campfire and the marshmallows.

At a recent performance for an open house at Richardson Media Design in Livonia, the trio performed before a diverse audience that included business executives couples

and children.

Once the Chenilles launched into the first song, the audience was all ears and laughs. Delightful, amusing and certainly entertaining — the Chenilles appeal to all ages.

The trio has that effect on most listeners, whether in suits and ties or suited to be tied at a smoky pub. But behind the light-hearted manner of the onstage presentation, this is a group intent on making The Chenille Sisters a national entity.

"It's a lot of methodical thinking and work," Morand said. "A lot of people think that it just falls into our lap, but we work at it. We're always a couple of years ahead in our minds."

When they started out four years ago, The Chenille Sisters' goal was to have their own album. They have two of those now.

TODAY, THEY'RE looking to land a spot on "The Tonight Show" or "Late Night With David Letterman." The formation of the group evolved from a friendship.

Connie Huber and Morand would perform during happy hour at one Ann Arbor club. Cheryl Dawdy made it a point to be there every Thursday.

"We did this Aretha Franklin tune where Grace was Aretha and I was a Pip," said Huber, who is a speech pathologist. "You can't just have one Pip. So we grabbed Cheryl out of the audience and said, 'you have to do this.'"

Eventually, Morand and Huber quit their band and had Dawdy join them. Together, they played at a friend's restaurant. From there, the trio quickly became one of the highly sought after musical acts in the area.

Fun is the essence of their existence. Slowly comedy began to find its way into the act. Members said they didn't set out to be different, things just happened that way.

"People come to the show, they say 'Oh that's funny,' Huber said. "But then they say, 'Oh they're pretty good.'"

IN CONCERT

LAUGHING HYEMAS

Laughing Hyemas will perform on Monday, April 3, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

FRANK ALLISON

Frank Allison and the Odd Sox will perform on Tuesday, April 4, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

THE BANGLES

The Bangles will perform with special guests, House of Freaks, at 8 p.m. Tuesday, April 4, at the Fox Theatre in Detroit. Tickets are \$18.50. For information, call 567-6000.

GRATEFUL DEAD

The Grateful Dead will perform at 7 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, April 5-6, at Crisler Arena in Ann Arbor. Tickets are \$18.50. For information, call 765-7875.

R.E.M.

R.E.M. will perform at 8 p.m. Wednesday, April 5, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 99-MUSIC.

FLASH BACK

Flash Back will perform on Wednesday, April 5, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

3-D INVISIBLES

The 3-D Invisibles will perform on Thursday, April 6, at 3-D Dance Club, Main Street, north of 13 Mile, Royal Oak. For information, call 589-3344. They also will perform with special guests, Kam Kellers, on Saturday, April 8, at Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. For information, call 365-9760.

JAMES GLASS

James Glass Blues Jam Session will take place on Thursday, April 6, at Jamzone's, 1812 N. Main, Royal Oak. For information, call 547-4470.

CUPPA JOE

Cuppa Joe will perform along with special guest, Jowl Baby, on Thursday, April

6, at Paycheck's Lounge, 2931 Caniff, off Jos. Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 872-8334.

GO-BETWEENS

The Go-Betweens will perform with special guests, Ahnora, on Friday, April 7, at Saint Andrews Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 881-MELT.

SUGAR MINOTT

Sugar Minott will perform at 10 p.m. Friday, April 7, at Pulliam's Place, 6001 Woodward, Detroit. Tickets are \$12.50 in advance, \$15 at the door. For information, call 831-4125.

ANTI-FASHION

Anti-Fashion will perform on Friday, April 7, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. Pan the Siren will open. For information, call 365-9133.

PRIVATE DRIVE

Private Drive will perform at 10 p.m. Friday, April 7, at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn. For information, call 846-5377.

THE GEAR

The Gear will perform on Friday, April 7, at Stanley's, 340 Pili St., Windsor. For information, call 833-3413.

1000 CRANES

1000 Cranes will perform on Friday, April 7, at Paycheck's Lounge, 2931 Caniff, off Jos. Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 872-8334.

SEE DICK RUN

See Dick Run will perform on Friday and Saturday, April 7-8, at Lull's 31, 3230 Jacob, off Jos. Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 875-6355.

JOHNNY ALLEN

Johnny Allen will perform Saturday, April 8, at Grif's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. For information, call 334-9272.

JUGGLERS AND THIEVES

Jugglers and Thieves will perform on Saturday, April 8, at Paycheck's Lounge, 2931 Caniff, off Jos. Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 872-8334.



R.E.M. will perform Wednesday at Crisler Arena in Detroit.

MUSIC NOTES

Most Detroit bands are looking for a few good places to play. Well some new bases are open.

Two clubs in Royal Oak have recently started offering new music. Jameson's and 3-D Dance Club. The emergence of the two places helps fill a void left by the loss of Ragsy's in Dearborn and 3rd Avenue Cafe in Royal Oak last year as places to see area bands.

Then there is The Beat in Ann Arbor, which features new music on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

But wait, eh. There's more. Stanley's, a long established alternative music venue in Windsor, has started importing Detroit area bands for Friday nights.

The Gear will perform on Friday,

April 7, at Stanley's, which is at 340 Pitt St. For information, call 833-3445.

And speaking of The Gear, the amiable threesome from Warren way has two record releases scheduled for Saturday, April 15, at Paycheck's Lounge in Hamtramck and on Monday, April 17, at The Blind Pig in Ann Arbor.

"In the New Hittville" is a follow-up to their recent cassette "Don't Let On the Cat." Expect an LP from The Gear in the fall.

THE GEAR'S "Get Twisted" a fine noise indeed, is receiving airplay on alternative waves around the area. One local music booster

giving the tune a spin is Rick Anderson, who hosts "Contamination and Corruption." The show is heard 7-9 p.m. Tuesdays on WORB-FM 90.3, which is the student operated station of Oakland Community College Orchard Lake Campus in Farmington Hills.

And speaking of Rick Anderson (notice how the flow of thought goes here), he's busy working on a compilation tape of Detroit area bands. The tape was remastered at Temperrill Studios in Livonia and should be ready for release later this month, Anderson tells us. A cassette release party is set for May 5 at Paycheck's Lounge in Hamtramck.

Featured on the tape will be the Orange Roughies, The Dancing

Smoothies, Colorful Trauma, Inside Out, The Gear, The Generals, Jugglers and Thieves, Mr. X and Scott Campbell.

While local bands moan and groan (and in many cases, rightly so) about the lack of radio play and media coverage, the Rick Andersons of the world deserve praise. Their behind-the-scenes efforts help keep the Detroit music scene's pulse beating.

This bud's for you, Rick. Compilation disc plug No. 2: "Detroit's Best." The CD and cassette brought to you by WRIF-FM, is still available at record stores. There's some nice cuts off this that definitely make it worth buying. Also, proceeds from the disc will go to Children's Hospital of Michigan.

AND, HEY you folks over at the RIF, why not pull the Lynard Skynard or Jethro Tull tunes once in awhile and throw in a few more songs off this compilation?

By the way, praise where praise is due. WRIF gets a star on its forehead for playing Ash Can Van Gogh's latest songs, "No More Running" and "Just You Coming Down Again." "Because of WRIF playing us, we've been contacted by Atlantic records, Geffen and Columbia," said Mary McGuire of Ash Can Van Gogh. Hey, hey, program directors elsewhere. See how important it is for local bands to play there music once in awhile.

— Larry O'Connor

COLLEGE

Here the top 10 songs receiving airplay on WAYN-AM 640, campus station of Wayne State University.

1. "Live Fast, Die Young," Elvis Butler.
2. "Punk Rock Girl," Dead Milkmen.
3. "High Expectations," Inside Out.
4. "Pat," Violent Femmes.
5. "Chia," Radon Acid.
6. "Sweet Jane," Cowboy Junkies.
7. "Devil Girl," Almighty Lemberjacks of
8. "Into the Groovy," Ciccone Youth.
9. "Today is Summer," Junk Mobsters.
10. "Kissability," Sonic Youth.

REVIEWS

METTLE

— Hugo Largo

Can you say surreal boys and girls?

I think you can. If you like surreal sound emanating from your speakers, then Hugo Largo is for you. A New York band founded in 1984 by bassist Tim Sommer, the original idea for Hugo Largo was to create music with two bass guitars, a voice, and nothing else.

Summer soon joined forces with guitarist/bassist Adam Peacock, violinist Hahn Rowe, and percussion artist/vocalist Mimi Goese to form a unique ensemble.

A demo tape sent to R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe got the band a recording session, which resulted in their first EP "Drum" in 1987 (co-produced by Stipe).

Now, with "Mettle," Hugo Largo continues to explore the more serious, mellowed out and downright dreamy side of pop. This is music not meant for everyone — certainly not a mainstream audience.

Bare acoustic guitar/bass arrangements, a bit of the violin and Goese's droning vocals often make for difficult listening (despite the innate mellowness of it all).

The prime example of this is the very first track, "Turtle Song." The song opens with Goese's gurgling the following qualifier for worst art ly-



rics of all time: "That turtle could be a rock/in disguise/Fooling everyone/Only Indians know how to tell/They're so smart/They touch the dirt and feel it move/That excites me."

Maybe Goese was excited, but the intelligent listener (and native Americans everywhere) will not be impressed.

The rest of the album just meanders along on a path that lacks coherence. Maybe that's the whole spirit. Who knows?

Again, the best word to describe "Mettle" is surreal. This critic has not heard anything quite like it since his first encounter with the Cocteau Twins a few years back. The only difference between the Twins and Hugo Largo is that you can understand the lyrics.

Unfortunately, Largo's lyrics aren't worth understanding, leaving some limp background music.

— Bob Sadler

HUNKPAPA

— Throwing Muses



This is the third major label release from this Boston-based, quirky and curious quartet.

The Throwing Muses first commanded attention when they were signed by a British Independent label, 4AD.

On the strength of local underground following, lots of critical acclaim in the UK and a video, "Fish," which won an American Film Institute grant, they signed to Sire Records in 1987.

The band consists of three women and one man, with the songwriting being Kristin Hersh, who sings, writes and plays guitar on most of their work. These songs are no heads-down-no-nonsense-mindless boogie by any means. They are songs that challenge a listener to work at them.

Despite the assertions that this record was stripped down to "make a record that people could listen to," the songs are musically still densely

meshed and lyrically very obtuse.

Working as they are in the same arena as Pere Ubu. They are a band that is not easily liked. Critically, they generate such accolades as "edgy and serene, exploratory and accessible, dark and incandescent."

Pretty heady stuff, eh?

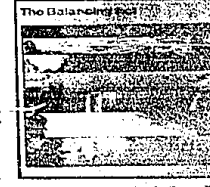
Lyrically, they wander into Joycean, dreamlike territories with lines like "I have two heads/where's the man he's late/one burns one's city, where's the man he's late/Tm the two headed, one free, one sticky."

Not quite sing-along stuff, but it keeps you thinking. Whether you'll like this LP, and I venture to say, this band, will depend on how much you like to be challenged by what you listen to.

— Cormac Wright

BEHIND CURTAINS

— Balancing Act



Quirky is perhaps an overused expression, but the California-based Balancing Act wears the tag quite proudly. Except in this case, quirky often means murky.

Nice harmonies and acoustic melodies are at the forefront of "Curtains" (LRS) as this group tries to manipulate the pop genre to its advantage. The Balancing Act, however, appears to be on a nice merry-go-round ride that doesn't stop to let us on.

Comparisons stink. But if you were to put a finger on the musical experience of the Balancing Act, you might point to the folk-influenced work of perhaps a Sals and Crofts.

There's a sort of easy-breezy, blowing-off-the-ocean California feel to this album. Something here doesn't click. Maybe because this album was done on Pacific Time and lagging three hours behind in rhythm. Anyhow, everything blends together and nothing really stands out.

One notable exception is the well-crafted "Can You Get to That," which is a cover of a Funkadelic tune. There is a nice harmony here that rises above the simple vocals that seem to be the base of this album. Heck, there's even some passion here.

Another feature of this tune is the deft acoustic guitar opening provided by Willie Area. His work throughout this album is certainly impressive as it tends to cover up some flaws in the music.

Songwriting is not a problem in the Balancing Act. There's certainly some well-penned tunes here, including "Valentines Lost in the Street."

The Balancing Act would do better with a few less harmonies and vocal instruments, all of which clutter the approach would serve a hard line this quite well.

— Larry O'Connor