



Perez (left), Beaux Mitchell, Brian Smith and Jim Megerian are members of the band Skanking Voodoo Dolls.

They're ready to rock 'n' reggae

Skanking Voodoo Dolls blend styles of music

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Ya man. Let's kick out the jams. Reggae meets rock 'n' roll. Rock 'n' roll meets reggae. The two make for quite an interesting pair, especially when you have a new four-member band like Skanking Voodoo Dolls taking a crack at mixing the musical styles.

The band recently made its debut, playing before an appreciative throng at the Hamtramck Pub. Members come from other well-known bands in the area. Lead singer and guitarist Beaux Mitchell used to be with reggae outfit Raggamuffin, bass player Jim Megerian played with Black Market, drummer Perez played for Robb Roy and lead guitarist Brian Smith jammed with heavy metal groups Head Hatter, XXAN and TOC.

Together, they make for an interesting, if not unusual combination of musical styles.

Megerian is at the forefront of the Skanking Voodoo sound. He's the reggae aficionado, often traveling to Jamaica to check out the latest groups.

On the other side of the coin is Smith, who supplements the band's heartbeating reggae rhythms with some scorching guitar solos. Then there is Perez, considered by many to be one of the finest drummers in Detroit scene.

MITCHELL FRONTS the band with her ethereal voice, who raises to a cool at times. She takes the role of spokeswoman, making out the alliance to be more of spiritual one than a musical one.

"This band is healing," said Mitchell, sitting at a table before the

band's soundcheck. "The minute we walk into the rehearsal room, we come together. . . . The energy is so positive."

The energy onstage has an edge. Megerian likens the Skanking Voodoo Dolls' music to a cross "between Van Halen and Bob Marley."

"Hardcore reggae lovers are going to either love it or hate it," he said. "Which is what we want. We don't want people to feel indifferent about it."

The music of the Caribbean appears to have some commercial appeal as well. UB40's "Red Red Wine" made it on several rock radio playlists. The difference with Skanking Voodoo Doll is their music takes a much harder approach.

Megerian is quick to point out the group is not on a reggae preservation trip, instead making their own sound.

"We're not trying to jump on a happening bandwagon," he said. "We're not trying to take something that's already acceptable and make it even more acceptable."

THE NEW sound is accepted by band members, but adjustments

were definitely needed. Smith's experience, for example, was strictly in hard rock circles. But he's been a quick study.

"At first, it was different," Smith said. "I didn't know where my place was. In heavy metal, the guitar is more dominant. My role now is keeping rhythm. The solos are more melodic instead of trying to tear people's heads off though we still try to do that once in awhile."

Added Perez about drumming to reggae beats compared to rock 'n' roll: "You have to learn not to play as fast."

Skanking Voodoo is taking it slow in its beginning phase. There are no plans for marketing the band to record labels or making LPs. They are content to play local club dates and see how things develop.

"We love it," Megerian said. "You can make all the big plans you want. As long as we're having fun, that's the main thing."

Skanking Voodoo Dolls will perform tonight at Todd's, Seven Mile Road, Detroit. For information, call 388-8533.

Universal Congress is in (jazzy) session

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

In the Universal Congress Of, there is the house of jazz and a senate of rock 'n' roll. The speaker of the body is guitarist and vocalist Joe Baiza, who espouses a musical philosophy of Mocolodics.

Fear not, music maven. The Universal Congress Of is not as unusual as name and style of music suggest.

"It's pretty accessible, really," said Baiza, whose group performs tonight at the Blind Pig in Ann Arbor. "That's my goal: To create music that's entertaining and yet challenging."

The jazzy nature of the Universal Congress Of would certainly not sound foreign to most ears. There's nightclub beat of the drums, scratchy vocals and blasts of tenor sax.

If anything, it might spark memories of the beatnik sound. Baiza said he's was intrigued with that of 1950s and 1960s style of music, especially after reading Jack Kerouac's "On the Road."

use a set list at shows, instead calling out the songs on stage as they go along. Baiza said the group gauges the crowd and goes from there, sometimes performing obscure jazz covers.

Baiza's interest in bebop music came out of a boredom with rock 'n' roll. His experimental nature can be traced to the punk movement, which gripped the Southern California area in the early 1980s.

Bands such as Black Flag and The Minutemen came out of the scene as did a group called Saccharine Trust, which for whom Baiza played sax. In fact, Baiza's neighbor was the late D. Boon, who was a member of The Minutemen before he died in an automobile accident.

Baiza said he was always on the outside looking in when it came to the hardcore movement.

"You've got to move on to new things," he said. "I'm not disillusioned by it. There's still a number of punk bands out there today. It's not new to me anymore."

UNIVERSAL Congress Of is not new. The band has released two albums "Prosperous and Qualified" and "Universal Congress Of," both on SST Records. Yet, it's still developing. Baiza refers to the songs the band performs as "exercises."

The term Mocolodics sums it up best, even if it has no particular meaning.

"People ask us all the time, 'What kind of music do you?' We tell them Mocolodics to confuse them," he said.

Universal Congress Of will perform tonight at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

BUT THE dips and turns Universal Congress Of takes on its latest EP, "This is Mocolodics" (SST), makes this sound their own. With no radio play, the music is something out of the ordinary for most people.

"In towns like Huntsville, (Ala.), they don't know what to do at first," Baiza said. "This one song, 'Stove Top,' has rite shift that changes into weird intervals that sounds disorienting. People in the club were saying, 'These guys are making mistakes. They aren't playing the songs right.'"

Such are the drawbacks to taking such an improvisational approach. The Universal Congress Of doesn't



Universal Congress Of delivers an interesting mix of jazzy tunes that hark back to the beatnik sound.

IN CONCERT

- UNIVERSAL CONGRESS OF**
Universal Congress Of perform on Monday, June 12, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- ASH CAN VANGUARD**
Ash Can Vanguard will perform on Tuesday, June 13, at Jagers, 3481 Elizabeth Lake Road, near Telegraph and M-39, Pontiac. For information, call 681-1700. The band will also perform on Friday, June 16, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 Congress, Detroit. For information, call 981-MELT.
- MANOU**
Manou will perform on Tuesday, June 13, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- CROSSED WIRE**
Crossed Wire will perform on Wednesday, June 14, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- GEORGE BEDARD**
George Bedard and the Kingpins will perform on Thursday, June 15, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- PAN THE SIRENS**
Pan the Sirens will perform along with Those Who Dream on Friday, June 16, at Hamtramck Pub, 2044 Canfield, off I-75.
- VERTICAL PILLOWS**
Vertical Pillows will perform on Friday, June 16, at Griffs Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. For information, call 334-7651.

- TRACY LEE AND LEONARDS**
Tracy Lee and the Leonards will perform on Friday and Saturday, June 16-17, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- WALK THE DOGMA**
Walk the Dogma will perform on Friday, June 16, at Lili's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. For information, call 878-6355.
- HYPNODROME**
Hypnodrome will perform along with Dancing Smoothies and Shooting Club on Saturday, June 17, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2044 Canfield, off I-75.
- BROKEN YOYO**
Broken Yoyo will perform on Saturday, June 17, at Alvin's, 9754 Cass, Detroit. For information, call 532-2355.
- OPEN BLUE ROOM**
Open Blue Room will perform on Saturday, June 17, at Griffs Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. For more information, call 334-7651.
- ROBYN HITCHCOCK**
Robyn Hitchcock will perform on Wednesday, June 28, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 Congress, Detroit. For information, call 981-MELT.
- CLARENCE FOUNTAIN**
Clarence Fountain and the Five Blind Boys of Alabama will perform on Saturday, July 1, at Alvin's, 9754 Cass, Detroit. For information, call 99-MUSIC.

COLLEGE

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

1. "Doolittle." Pixies.
2. "Love & Rockets." Love & Rockets.
3. "Mister Music Head." Adrian Belew.
4. "Boom, Boom, Chi Boom Boom." Tom Tom Club.
5. "Life in a Blender." Life in a Blender.
6. "Whitcomb." Bob Mould.
7. "Exercise in Tension." Dessau.
8. "Sonic Temple." The Cult.
9. "Root, Hoog or Die." Nixon/Roper.
10. "Nine." P.U.L.

COUNTRY

Here are the top 10 singles on WWWW-FM.

1. "Where Did I Go Wrong." Steve Warler.
2. "Don't Turn Us Away." Patty Loveless.
3. "Better Man." Clint Black.
4. "If I Had You." Alabama.
5. "Down That Road Tonight." Nitty Gritty Dirt Band.
6. "Back in the Fire." Gene Watson.
7. "Lovin' Only Me." Ricky Scaggs.
8. "Come From the Heart." Kathy Mattea.
9. "I'm No Stranger to the Rain." Keith Whitley.
10. "Like Father Like Son." Lonestar Cartwright.

REVIEWS

ELLA MENTAL — Ella Mental



All I know about this band is that their manager, Billy Gaff, used to work with Cream and Rod Stewart and on a night when he was supposed to check out an unknown Irish band called U2, ended up going to a different bar and getting drunk. He signed the Lookalikes instead.

Need I say more?

Ella Mental are his new darling and it seems as though it may have been a similar night when he signed this group.

Apparently, Ella Mental consists of a duo, Tim Parr and Heather Mac, aided by studio musicians. All but one of the songs on this self-titled debut for Warner Records are composed by the aforementioned pair.

Literally they aim toward a "revolutionary" political stance with songs like "Freedom Dive" — "Lay your guns down, too many people crying, young souls, reach out." They need to find a way to reach a new beginning/We don't stand alone against a system we can't condone, we don't stand alone against the

hard hearts in control."

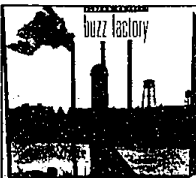
This theme flows throughout with an emphasis on South Africa. Despite this hip "correct" political stance, Ella Mental can't seem to decide who they are musically.

While ignoring their inclusion of a schlock cabaret cover of Bob Marley's "No Woman No Cry" (it may be a decent song, but you've got to suspect the motives of a band doing such an awful version of it), they swing from the dramatic Simple Minds-ish guitar and keyboard sounds on "Seeds of Tomorrow" to a saunter in Jamaican-style Calypso on "Africa" to a second-rate Fleetwood Mac on "Is It Any Wonder." Now there is a scary thought.

Their attempt at credible lyrics is not quite enough to save them. The quality of this album is so low, it's like saying that you are using a step ladder to get out of the Grand Canyon.

— Cormac Wright

BUZZ FACTORY — Screaming Trees



Sorry, but loud and obnoxious guitar bands are beginning to lose their appeal in this camp. Face it, the stuff is getting old. Even the He-palanches have begun to tone it a bit.

At times, the Washington-state based group Screaming Trees sounds like one of many derivative guitar groups on their latest LP "Buzz Factory" (SST). Then there are some numbers that are intriguing. The question is: Who is the real Screaming Trees?

Is it the band that shows a bit of a pop flair on the easy-ear of "Too Far Away"? Or is it the group that digresses to the point that its music is a rebash of '70s acid rock as songs such as "Wish Bringer" seem to indicate? Who knows?

It's easy to understand why some songs work while others don't. Let's start with guitarist Gary Lee Conner, an ax man of considerable skill. He's able to find a groove on such numbers as "Where the Twin Shall Meet" and "Windows." Conner

doesn't dominate here; he carefully sets the pace.

Conner's able to bring some rather unpolished numbers out of their duller with some rather spirited guitar work. "Subtle Poison" benefits from his artful blast of guitar in this slow moving song.

Then things take a turn for the worse. The last three numbers are throwaways — "Revelation Revolution," "The Looking Glass Cracked" and "End of the Universe." This is guitar muck.

One gets the feeling here that the songs weren't much to begin with and Conner took it upon himself to juice them up with his guitar work. Well, it doesn't work.

And if anything, it doesn't leave a good impression of an album that shows a group with promise.

— Larry O'Connor

MARIA MCKEE — Maria McKee



Those who viewed the band Lone Justice with a little less than admiration might be surprised at this first effort by the group's songstress Maria McKee.

McKee's gone solo, and she is better for it.

With Lone Justice, McKee seemed a step out of time with the rest of the band. Her fascination with country and other root forms of music never jibed with the rest of the band.

Without Lone Justice, McKee is less restrained. On this Gelfin release, she appears to revel in her new found artistic freedom. This is her time to sink or swim, and there's no need to yell for a life preserver.

McKee's a little bit rock 'n' roll and a little bit country here. There are elements of gospel and blues to be heard as well.

At the forefront of whatever musical genre McKee tackles is her never-ending voice. It's powerful and piercing and, yes, overwrought with emotion at times.

Her most impressive moments,

though, come when she's not carrying a torch. Instead, she provides slow and almost haunting vocals in the song "Breath." This number has almost a lullaby quality to it. McKee is learning that less can be more.

The songs are hers. There seems to be a recurring theme of uncertainty, perhaps stemming from her less-than-memorable experience with Lone Justice. "I've Forgotten What It Was in You (That Put the Need in Me)" runs along those lines.

Sings McKee: "Well, honey you and I, we had the sweetest thing/And we can try and try and try/I'm not looking in the eye because I'm the one, because I'm the one to blame."

This time, the finger can be pointed at McKee for providing a solid album.

— Larry O'Connor