

STREET BEATS

Hitchcock comes into his own



Robyn Hitchcock will perform some numbers from his latest A&M release, "Queen Elvis," on Wednesday at Saint Andrew's Hall in Detroit.

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Robyn Hitchcock wants to know what the weather is like here. He's quite gleeful when he learns that it's rainy and humid.

"Ah, that's good for growth," said Hitchcock, who will perform on Wednesday at Saint Andrew's Hall in Detroit.

Perhaps only Hitchcock would delight at the prospect of the different vegetation — weeds and wildflowers — that would pop up as a result of rainy conditions. If anything, his albums have been something of a bed of rich organic life to romp through.

"Queen Elvis," his latest release on A&M Records, displays the pop artist at his quirky best. The album is the follow-up to the equally eclectic and enjoyable "Globe of Frogs," which had both its dandelions and its roses.

There is the contention that Hitchcock could easily write the commercial pop smasher that would sell millions. One gets the impression he merely toys with the listener, revealing his pop genius like Mike Tyson uses a right hook — only when necessary.

THERE'S NO JOKE in the fact that Hitchcock is perhaps at the top of his craft.

Hitchcock began playing his songwriting skills in folk clubs around England. He performed for a while in a group called the Soft Boys, which featured Kimberly Rew, who went on to join Katrina and the Waves.

The Soft Boys split, leading Hitchcock to release two solo LPs "Black Snake Diamond Hole" and "Groovy Decay" in the early 1980s. Dismayed that the rock world was "in the grip of syncretic, technological unconscious music," Hitchcock dropped out.

He resurfaced in 1984, releasing "I Often Dream of Trains." He formed The Egyptians and began touring again.

His popularity on the college circuit led to his signing with A&M records in 1988. Commercial radio play has been sparse, despite the

good sales of "Globe of Frogs."

One reason is that his songs can be surrealistic at times. He uses the whole canvas when writing.

Interestingly enough, a song-by-song description is included with the press notes on "Queen Elvis," which in Hitchcock's case is like trying to describe World War II on the back of a gum wrapper.

"I'm not really interested in describing songs," Hitchcock said. "I think the listener doesn't need to have things explained to them."

... Though T.S. Eliot had these little poems next to the lines in one of his works, "Waste Land," they were like academic footnotes. It's one of my favorites. Maybe I'll put that on my next album. I'll put in these little reference points as I go along.

HIS ALBUMS, though, are merely blueprints. Onstage is where the music really comes into full bloom.

"I wouldn't say the songs evolve," Hitchcock said. "I'd say the musicianship does. The songs are stretched out more on stage. We're much better live ... We usually record them right after they are written, so they are fresh."

On "Queen Elvis," Hitchcock tried to get more of his emotions out instead of his vision. He believes he's pretty much evolved as a songwriter. "I don't think I could write a song about what's happening in Beijing or the Exxon spill," he said.

He mentions perhaps taking a couple of years off from writing to assess things. Before going into the studio, Hitchcock worked inconspicuously in a San Francisco record store.

People would buy his albums in the store, not realizing the guy at the cash register was Hitchcock himself. That's not what he remembers most from the experience, though.

"The Hoover didn't work very well. One of the speakers in the shop didn't work properly, so everything came out in mono," he said.

Robyn Hitchcock and The Egyptians will perform on Wednesday, June 28, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 961-MELT.

IN CONCERT

● RHODE FREEDOM

The Rhode and the Freedom will perform Monday, June 26, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-4555.

● TAJ BAND

The Taj Band will perform Tuesday, June 27, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-4555.

● ROBYN HITCHCOCK

Robyn Hitchcock will perform Wednesday, June 28, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 961-MELT.

● IDYL ROOMERS

Idyl Roomers will perform Wednesday, June 28, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-4555.

● STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

Strange Bedfellows will perform at "Rock'n'Roll" along with special guests, Shouting Club, Thursday, June 29, at the Garden Bowl, 4150 Woodward, south blocks south of Warren, Detroit. Admission is \$4. For information, call 833-9510.

● TERRANCE SIMIEN

Terrance Simien will perform Thursday, June 29, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-4555.

● TRASH BRATZ

Trash Bratz will perform Friday, June 30, at Bloodie's Concert Hall, Seven Mile Road, east of Telegraph, Detroit. For information, call 535-8108.

● URBATIONS

The Urbations will perform Friday, June 30, at Alvin's, 5758 Cass, Detroit. For information, call 832-3355.

● MALLET PLAYBOYS

Mallet Playboys will perform Friday, June 30, at Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-4555.

● BOOTSEY X

Bootsey X and the Lovemasters will perform along with special guests, Victims of Circumstance, Friday, June 30, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Canfield, off I-75. For information, call 365-9760.

● ROBERT NOLL

Robert Noll and the Blues Mission will perform Friday, June 30, at Mobly Dick's, 3455 Schaefer, Dearborn. For information, call 581-3450.

● BIG TOWN

Big Town will perform Friday and Saturday, June 30-July 1, at Skylights, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. For information, call 334-7651.

● FIREWORKS CONCERT

Spirit, Duke Tumbleton and the Power Trip, The Greg Stryker Band and Ash Can VanGogh will perform noon to 6 p.m. Friday, June 30, at Hart Plaza in Detroit. The concert is free and sponsored by WHIR-FM.

● CLARENCE FOUNTAIN

Clarence Fountain and the Five Blind Boys of Alabama will perform Saturday, July 1, at Alvin's, 5758 Cass, Detroit. For information, call 99-MUSIC.

● HYPER FORMANCE

Hyper Formance will perform with special guests, Threshhold, Saturday, July 1, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Canfield, off I-75. For information, call 365-9760.

● JEANNE AND THE DREAMS

Jeanne and the Dreams will perform Saturday, July 1, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-4555.



L.R.S. recording artist, Spirit, is one of several bands who will perform Friday at Hart Plaza in Detroit.

MUSICAL NOTES

The New York Times recently took the time to review Frank Allison and the Odd Sox's "Monkey Business," a considerable feat in that the album is on an independent label, Relapse, and doesn't have a big public relations machine behind them.

But there's a lesson to all other bands and managers out there. Manager Kevin Kampy, who operates "out of two closets and a file cabinet" in his Plymouth residence, does the work of 20 people at big record labels.

He's first-rate and professional. He doesn't guish with overblown praise about the band. He doesn't ask such tacky questions like "How big are you going to play it up in the paper?"

Of course, the music is what speaks the loudest in the end. And Frank Allison and the Odd Sox will be heard by many more people in the days to come.

Gary Reichel sent a cassette sin-

gle our way recently. The song, "Burn the Crack House Down," is nothing less than what we've come to expect from our political rockers, Clincycide. States the press release that accompanied the tape, "Clincycide doesn't like violence and doesn't admire violent people. Goons and racists have a particularly unappealing vision. 'Burn the Crack House Down' is about regular, peaceful, hard-working people. People whose neighborhoods have been abandoned by city government and the police. People who won't be pushed anymore. People who will take a stand when their government won't. If in only a small way, 'Burn the Crack House Down' can bring more government attention to the problem of crack, crime and devastated neighborhoods, Clincycide will be satisfied."

Funhouse, featuring lead singer Kimba, had a cassette-release b&b at the 3D Dance Club in Royal Oak

recently. "Psychodrama" is the long-awaited eighth-song release from this hard rocking outfit and should be available at the finer record outlets in the area.

Ayn Rand's favorite sons Figure 4, have also released a five-song EP "Blind Justice" (Nebula). Figure 4 has an ad for a new bass guitar, Mike Bisch. His previous experience includes performing with the Scott Campbell Group and most recently Strange Bedfellows. Bisch can also be found thudding some bass lines for Twiggie Barbust and the Lizards to Jars.

And we wait. And we wait some more. The Orange Roughies' album that was due out in March, April, June and July might not be out until September, according to the big Roughie himself, Dave Feeny.

Apparently, "Knuckle Sandwich" was completed 2½ months ago. Nocrurnal Records in Detroit is waiting for the cover artwork.

In the meantime, the Orange Roughies have turned a political film. The band performed at an anti-nukes rally in Las Vegas in April and is scheduled to perform at a Seeds of Peace benefit Oct. 7 in San Francisco. Also appearing at the show will be 10,000 Maniacs, Billy Bragg and Michael Stipe.

The event in Las Vegas wasn't without a few hitches. First, the band endured an uncomfortable 2½-day bus trip to Nevada. Then three songs into the set, a bass string broke. Before the six-song set ended, two snare drums also bit the dust.

Several people were arrested at the sit-in, but not the Orange Roughies.

"We tried to," Feeny said. "The thing was we had a show on Saturday. We heard they got you for 20 hours and we wanted to get back in time for our shows."

— Larry O'Connor

COLLEGE

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

1. "Doolittle," The Pixies.
2. "Welcome to the Jolly Days," Life in the Blender.
3. "Boom, Boom . . .," Tom Tom Club.
4. "Mr. Music Hoed," Adrian Belew.
5. "Nite," P.U.L.
6. "Exercise in Tension," Deasas.
7. "Root, Root or Hog," Nixon and Royer.
8. "I.B.T.A.B.A.," Wire.
9. "Love and Rockets," Love and Rockets.
10. "Brain Drain," Ramones.

LOCAL

Here are the top 10 songs receiving airplay on "Detroit Music Scene," which is heard 4-5 p.m. Sundays (repeated 5-5:30 p.m. Tuesdays) on WDTN-FM 96.9.

1. "Slang Tang," Shaking Voodoo Dolls.
2. "Childhood," Mysterious Brew.
3. "I'm in Love Again," Shane and the Sirens.
4. "Blind Justice," Figure 4.
5. "Pony Down," Bootsey X.
6. "Sour Cream," Sensitive Big Guys.
7. "Two Steps Ahead," World State.
8. "The Real You," The Gear.
9. "Hot Type," Messengers.
10. "Springtime," Jugglers and Thieves.

REVIEWS

HEART SHAPED WORLD

— Chris Isaak



Hailing from San Francisco, Chris Isaak thickly sounds nothing like that city's other musical luminaries, Graham Nash and Jefferson Airplane. Instead, Isaak operates more in the tradition of one man, one guitar, a broken heart and a bunch of great songs.

This is his third LP on Republic Record and as Isaak himself jokes: "If you have my last two records, don't buy this one." He uses the same producer, Erik Jacobson, as his previous record, and his band, Silvertones, is the same line-up as they have had since their inception in 1984.

Isaak, who is fast becoming as hip for his fashionably good looks as his music, resembles an early Elvis Presley both visually and to a lesser extent, musically. This may be no surprise as he claims that his first introduction to the heady world of rock'n'roll was when he heard the original Sun Sessions. Prior to that he listened primarily to country and western music.

If you know Chris Isaak's music

you don't need to be told this, as these two influences are what press themselves to the listener immediately.

The unique, over-riding characteristics in the Isaak's sound is his smooth, evocative voice and his lone, smooth, plaintive guitar wailing at the moon. His haunting melodies are well matched by his sad lyrics of lost loves.

If these songs are in any in any way true to life, boy, has he been screwed around. For example, "I never dreamed I'd meet somebody like you, I never dreamed I'd lose somebody like you" from the song "Wicked Game," which also features a magical guitar melody, or "The one that I loved used to laugh when I cried (the one that I loved wouldn't stay by my side/I love could have lasted forever, I'd be with her today" from the number, "Kings of the Highway."

Truly beautiful, gentle late night listening.

— Cormac Wright

ABSOLUTE TORCH AND TWANG

— k.d. lang and The Recliners



Give Ms. lang some credit. After the success of "Shadowland" (Sire), the Canadian singer could have easily called it a "Green Door" I Sound Like Patsy Cline, Vol. II."

Instead, k.d. lang has gone out of her way on "Absolute Torch and Twang" (Sire) to profess her allegiance to country music. She knows where her true following is, not with the trendy posters but the blue jeans and cowboy hat crowd.

Those people especially will be delighted with the work of k.d. lang on this album. She pulls out all the tools of the country arsenal on this one. The twang of the steel guitar and the ballads of broken hearts are all there.

But the thing that sells the whole package is lang's voice, which is soothing as the wind whispering through the wheat of an Alberta farm. The album's haunting melodies that marked "Shadowland," which was Owen Bradley produced, are replaced by upbeat jangles that have a country dance hall quality to them,

such as "Big Boned Gal" and "Lock in My Eyes."

lang can slow things down as well as she does on "Wallflower Waltz," which offers a nice balance on the album. lang collaborates with Ben Mink on most of the songwriting chores. Mink also handles the string arrangements on "Absolute Torch and Twang."

But it's lang who puts her signature on several numbers, one of those "It's Me" perhaps alludes to her sudden bout with fame.

"What you see on TV/all them sparkles, it ain't me. . . I'm not asking for the world/I just want to be an ordinary girl/might not be all you want but it's all you get, it's me."

Which, on this album, is all anyone could ask for.

— Larry O'Connor

DONNY OSMOND — Donny Osmond

This album is hot. Here comes Donny, a devoted "Soldier of Love." Just when we didn't expect it Donny Osmond fights the battle of the music industry and makes an incredible comeback.

Looking a little like George Michael (which isn't so bad), Osmond proves to the industry that he does have serious musical talent.

Mixing R&B with pop seems to be the answer for Osmond. The album (Capitol Records) is full of tunes produced by Carl Sturken, Evan Rogers and George Acogny along with Osmond himself. Sturken and Rogers perform with Osmond.

Osmond does have rhythm and blues when he sings "Sacred Emotions" and "If It's Love that You Want," both written by Sturken and Rogers, and "Groove" written by Acogny and Osmond.

Unlike the sugary Donny and Marlene, Osmond's new sound has plenty of soul combined with backup singers harmony, melody, synthesizers and drum machine. "Soldier of Love" written by



Sturken and Rogers, the current hit single from the album. It was first released in the European market to Capitol records. Osmond and Capitol had not planned to hit the American market just yet.

But "Soldier of Love" turned out to be a big hit on the American charts, a pleasant surprise for Osmond and the record label. Radio stations first aired the upbeat song without releasing Osmond's name. The music spoke for itself. None of the listeners knew who the artist singing the song was for the first week. But how else could you orchestrate a comeback?

Apparently, Donny Osmond has benefited from his hiatus of a decade. He was able to chart without learning the business.

Come back any way you want, as long as it's as good as this album.

— Gail O'Connor