

STREET BEATS

Susans strum way to success

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Susans might be increasingly difficult to come by, but Band of Susans has never been short on guitars.

The New York-based coed group undared personnel changes that included two of the three Susans leaving and has released what some say is its best album to date, "Love Agenda" (Blatt First/Restless).

The LP is a brick wall of guitar noise with no less than three axe masters at the helm.

Now before the comparisons start, let's get a few things straight. Yes, Band of Susans are from New York and, indeed, the group is on the same label.

But Sonic Youth they're not. Band members will be the first to say so. Nonetheless, it doesn't prevent people from putting two and two together and coming up with 17.

"I think people are just trying to find a reference point," said Susan Stenger, who is the last remaining Susan in the band. "It's not justified, really."

"The guitar on Sonic Youth records are more far back," added Robert Poss, who performs in the dual role of guitarist and producer for the band. "There seems to be more of an emphasis on vocals and almost an ethereal kind of murky guitar sound where it's almost acoustic sounding."

"OUR STUFF has the guitars right up in your face."

Poss joins two new guitarists: Libby Flynn and Mark Longman, on this current tour that stops Tuesday at the Blind Pig in Ann Arbor. Susan



Don't look for everyone to be named Susan in the band of Susans. The New York-based group includes Susan Stenger, Robert Poss, Libby Flynn and Mark Longman.

Tallman and Susan Lyall left the band in January 1988 to pursue other interests.

All the founding members had performed with such avant-garde guitar composers as Glenn Branca and Rhys Chatham. Thus their love of Fenders is exposed.

Although Band of Susans places a heavy emphasis on guitar sound, there is a bonding agent that draws the shrills into one stream of consciousness. The glue that holds it together is "the stuff we sniff before we go on stage," Poss said jokingly.

On a serious note, Poss believes the homogeneity of the music is due to the fact the Susans are less random than other bands of its ilk.

"We're not a jammy band," Stenger said. "We do deliberately limit ourselves in certain ways to

the kind of songs we play to even the way we tune our guitars."

People here are just tuning into the Band of Susans. The group formed in 1986 in New York City, but has toured primarily in the East Coast.

In the United Kingdom, it's a different story. The British music press has been fawning over American guitar bands, such as Sonic Youth and Lollapalooza. With one journalistic vigor usually left for Lady Di and Prince Chuek.

BAND OF SUSANS has enjoyed the exposure "Love Agenda" debuted No. 4 on New Musical Express' Independent chart and received thumbs-up reviews on a recent UK tour as a support act for Throwing Muses.

Any premature inflated egos don't seem present, however. Band members are not about to quit their day jobs to support their guitar habit, which for Spenger and Poss included working as clerks in a New York law firm (Spenger worked on an investigation looking into the financial dealings of deposed Haiti leader "Baby Doc" Duvalier).

Such work keeps them grounded in reality. Any success stateide will definitely have to be earned the hard way. Touring is a major component of that.

"We don't plan to change what we are doing," Stenger said. "So whether or not we appeal to mainstream tastes is not our worry."

Band of Susans will perform Tuesday, Sept. 19, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

LIVE

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

— U-Club, Ann Arbor

Ah, it all comes back — red brick institutions of learning, the kiosk announcing the next frat party, a bit of nip in the air. Yes, returning to a life of academe in the fall, there's a certain amount of excitement.

Especially when a band like Strange Bedfellows help bring in the new school year. The five-member group performed a 22-song set Tuesday to a small but enthusiastic crowd at the University of Michigan U-Club.

Up front, let's level a nebulous criticism. At times, lead singer Missy Gibson looks like her body's possessed by R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe. Too much straddling the microphone stand and endless gesturing (including kneeling), especially at the start. OK. Feel much better now that that's out of the way.

Such distractions didn't overshadow an enjoyable show where one could help but become a bit carried away. The Strange Bedfellows have come a long way from the last time we watched them perform 10 months ago (and we thought they were better than the average band then). Since that time, there have been lineup changes and both Yates of Birmingham has added keyboards to her duties as backup vocalist.

In that time, Gibson has gone from a whimsical frontwoman, singing about such things as sugar doughnuts, to a self-assured performer who dominates the stage with her vocals and presence. Her voice has grown even more forceful. So, too, has Yates'. Her role is not limited to the shadows. She picked up the harmonica on one number and was able to display her vocal ability with a poignant solo version of "Baby McGeece."

Though, it was the two-part harmonies Yates and Gibson mastered on many of the Strange Bedfellows songs that provided some of the better moments.

The band itself is tight. Credit goes to bassist George Stasiw, drummer Jim Faulkner and guitarists Kenny Tudrick and Bill Tudrick for that.

The musicianship allows Strange Bedfellows to switch gears from ya-

ya rock numbers to bluesy tunes like "Green Eyed Kitty" without a glitch. Strange Bedfellows gained momentum as they proceeded to burn through the set. Just when it looked like the band was ready to call it a night, it did one better. Things ended on a bang with the rousing guitar-infused "Prayers." Gibson solo performances didn't hinder the flow of the show.

The original purpose of the trip was to see the opening band, Shouting Club, with new lead singer Walter Hanks. Plans were to be back home before midnight (you know, having to go to work in the morning), but midnight became 12:30 a.m. and then 1 a.m. and then 1:30 a.m.

Strange Bedfellows' music wouldn't let us go home.

— Larry O'Connor

MUSIC NOTES

LETTERS FROM HOME: A rather disturbing note passed by our desk recently. Sensitive Big Guys say they will be calling it quits after a pair of "farewell shows" Friday, Sept. 29, at Psyche's Lounge in Hamtramck and Saturday, Sept. 30, at Club Heidelberg in Ann Arbor. The Big Guys will open for the Junk Monkeys for both shows.

According to the Sensitive Big Guy newsletter, issue No. 5, the four members are leaving to pursue outside interests.

Guitarist and vocalist Brian Russell will become the "oldest and first non-hispanic member of Mendo." Ban player Steve Bauer will resume his teaching career at the Dale Carnegie School. Rob Paul has been asked to play keyboards on an upcoming Bon Jovi tour.

That didn't arouse our suspicions so much as the line about guitarist and vocalist Rob Varney devoting his time to knitting and pottery. C'mon, Varney probably doesn't know the difference between a pair of knitting needles and a pair of chopsticks.

"Let's just say it's true, for now," said Varney, trying to keep his tongue in his cheek without choking. "Let's just say there will probably be a reunion tour in a couple of months."

During the layoff, the band plans to write some new material. So not to worry. The Sensitive Big Guys will ride again.

Another band on hiatus for awhile is World State, which is looking for a

new drummer after Todd Kulman left recently. The band is also busy writing some new songs, according to singer Rachel Slinott. Incidentally, World State and Sensitive Big Guys are both featured on the compilation CD release "Detroit Underground, Vol. 1," which is available at finer record stores in the area.

RELEASES AND OTHER PIECES: The "Underground Detroit" CD is one of several releases from bands in the area. The Civilians, Opossums, Figure 4, No Right No Wrong and Gangster Fun all have products in record stores.

All of them avoid the R.E.M./U2/leggy of the Stooges/Cure rehash some bands are particularly fond of playing.

Glyn Scanlan of the Idiots sent along his band's recently released tape. The raucous brand of Livonia punk has been getting regular air play on Scott Campbell's "Detroit Music Scene" radio show that is heard on WDR-FM.

CLUBBED: The club scene picking up again after the August doldrums. Roland Diazis booked several acts from this area Wednesday through Saturday at Club Heidelberg in Ann Arbor and Todd's has started Monday music series featuring local bands.

Gone 24, a national act, will perform a special show tonight at Todd's. No cover until 10 p.m. After that, it costs \$3.

— Larry O'Connor

IN CONCERT

● **24 GONE**
24 Gone will perform Monday, Sept. 18, at Todd's, 8129 E. Seven Mile, two blocks east of Van Dyke, Detroit. No cover before 10 p.m. (\$3 after). For information, call 366-8533.

● **YELLOWMAN**
Yellowman and the Sagittarius Band will perform Monday, Sept. 18, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **BOP HARVEY**
Bop Harvey will perform Monday, Sept. 18, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● **JOE JACKSON**
Joe Jackson will perform at 8 p.m. Monday, Sept. 18, at the 100 auditorium in Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **BAND OF SUSANS**
Band of Susans will perform Tuesday, Sept. 19, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE**
Grievance Committee will perform, along with guests, Skin Horse, Wednesday, Sept. 20, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-7758.

● **ATOMIC CAFE**
Atomic Cafe will perform Wednesday, Sept. 20, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● **OPOSSUMS**
Opossums will perform Wednesday, Sept. 20, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **GOO GOO DOLLS**
Goo Goo Dolls will perform Wednesday, Sept. 20, at Blondies, West Seven Mile Road, east of Telegraph, Detroit. For information, call 535-8168.

● **FLASH**
Flash will perform Wednesday through Saturday, Sept. 20-23, at Jagers, 3481 Elizabeth Lake Road, Pontiac. For information, call 881-1700.

● **HIPPODROME**
Hippodrome will perform with guests, Thursday, Sept. 21, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.

● **JOHNNY ALLEN**
Johnny Allen will perform Saturday, Sept. 23, at Skylights, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. For information, call 334-8292.

● **URBATIONS**
The Urbations will perform Saturday, Sept. 23, at Rick's American Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● **TRACEY LEE**
Tracey Lee and the Leonards will perform Friday and Saturday, Sept. 22-23, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

COLLEGE

Here are Andy Gould's top 10 LPs. Gould's radio show can be heard 3-7 p.m. Mondays on WDR-FM 90.3.

1. "Stone Roses." Stone Roses (Silvertone).
2. "Mother's Milk." Red Hot Chili Peppers (EMI).
3. "Nirvana." Nirvana (Gep). Pop.
4. "Super Fuzz . . ." Mad Honey (Sub Pop).
5. "Real Thing." Faith No More (Slash).
6. "Museum." Mary My Hope (Silvertone).
7. "Faded Out." Loop (Chapter 22).
8. "Pop Out." Darling Buds (Columbia).
9. "Chemistry Set." Chemistry Set (Road Records).
10. "Window to the World." Questionaires (EMI).

LOCAL

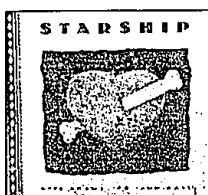
Here are the top 10 songs receiving airplay on "Detroit Music Scene," which is heard 4-5 p.m. Sundays (repeated 5:30-6:30 p.m. Tuesdays) on WDR-FM 90.3.

1. "In Her Heart." 4 Gone.
2. "Only You." The Idiots.
3. "Tomorrow Just Another Day." Son of Sam.
4. "It's So Hard." Peter G.
5. "Talking to the Animals." Doe Boys.
6. "Deliverance." Naming Mary.
7. "Charlie." Capra Joe.
8. "Tape You Down." Allison's Ghost.
9. "Object." Nemesia.
10. "Steroids." No Right No Wrong.

REVIEWS

LOVE AMONG THE CANNIBALS

— Starship



There are times when it's just not worth it writing these reviews I mean, OK, so I get to hear a lot of the latest releases, and usually that's not too bad. It can be enjoyable.

But then along comes that one day when it's time to pay the ferryman. That one day the editor has been reading. He's a gentle soul beneath it all, but it's the evil malicious side that comes out after a late Sunday night's indulgences. Monday morning has arrived a bit too quickly. Everything is colored bloodshot.

The Monday morning Mr. Hyde glares in my direction and sees the innocent, blameless child who slaves so selflessly to make him happy. A cracked Freddy Krueger grin breaks across his face. He kicks a passing messenger boy and launches an LP, Frisbee-style, toward me. Upon extracting the sharpened corner from my eye, and in an immense philosophical moment, I comprehend the

heavy toll to be paid for the decadent life led by all record reviewers.

But my sadness runs deeper than that. It is a heartfelt devastation for the whole of humanity. It is a slap in the face of Glasgow. It is an aberration that strikes against East, West, black, white, Arab, Jew, Catholic and Protestant. It is a crime to be treated with the same contempt reserved for the evil of the Holocaust. Ignore their despicable attempt to fool you with the name change.

Jefferson Starship has released a new album.

Burn as many copies as you can. We have got to work together to save the world. Greenpeace will forgive you for damaging the ozone layer for this one cause.

Please God, be merciful in our hour of need.

— Cormac Wright

MARSUPIAL ERUPTIS

— Opossums



The Opossums don't put a headlock on the music listener and whip them into submission. Instead, this Ann Arbor-based foursome plays an endearing brand of a rock 'n' roll that invites you to sit down and enjoy a tall cool one.

The Opossums make it sound so simple on their 11-song debut LP on the independent label Picnic Home Records.

An easy backwoods beat, snappy lyrics and effortless vocals are the hallmarks of "Marsupial Eruptis." What's remarkable is that this disc was knocked off in two days' time in the studio, providing not only a live feel but a cohesiveness as well.

Whether it's the Byrds-like guitar lines provided by Mark Neff and Marty Fletcher on numbers such as "Hearts Run Wild" and "Roll River" to the rock 'n' roll free-for-all "Alpha-

bet Roadway," a tightness prevails. The Opossums are definitely charting their own course.

Fletcher does a good portion of the songwriting. His country/bluegrass influences can be heard in bits and pieces of each song without sounding like somebody on some revivalist trip.

Neff is the other half of Opossums songwriting tandem. He's no slouch either, contributing two excellent numbers in "In and Out" and "Something Here." The latter pulls you by a lasso of some great guitar hooks.

Also, aside from the music, the Opossums have a first-rate package. The cover is sharp and the liner notes are easy to read.

If you've never bought an album by a local band, there's no better place to start than here.

— Larry O'Connor

PEACE AND LOVE

— The Pogues

Oliver Cromwell's name is not often mentioned in rock and roll lyrics. But the English lord protector is cursed on The Pogues fifth recording. In a song that sent listeners scurrying to their World Books, Cromwell banishes ravaged Ireland in 1649, and on "Young Ned of the Hill" he is damned "to burn in hell tonight."

Title notwithstanding, "Peace and Love" is as spirited (is that the word?) as past recordings. The band that made its name setting Celtic scenes to a thump-thump-thump beat continues to expand. Songwriting credits are spread more evenly. Strains of pop music appear via catchy electric guitar riffs and melodies in 14 big songs in all.

Phillip Chevron has written two of the best, "Lorelei," a love song with a mythical feel, and "Blue Heaven," a raucous ride through fantasy land.

Singer Shane McGowan brings us back to reality, of course. He sports a beard on the album cover, but has not mellowed. His "Boat Train" takes us on an entirely different ride and he spews words like venom.

"Down All the Day" tells the story of "Christy Brown, a clown around

POGOES



town/ now a man of renown from Dingle to Down."

Tribute is paid to London, the band's collective hometown, with two songs. One is an embarrassing McGowan serenade. The other, Jim Finner lone song set on Albert Bridge, is more evocative: "I dreamt we were standing/ By the banks of the Thames/ Where the cold gray waters ripple/ In the misty morning light . . ."

The mix on "Peace and Love" seems a bit heavy-handed at times. The sound is sometimes too layered for a band that sounds best rollicking on a live stage.

Two final notes: The album is dedicated to the 93 victims of an English football stadium disaster, and the fellow on the cover has six fingers. Peace and Love.

— Brian Lyons