

STREET BEATS

Elvis Hitler: Not quite Elvis, definitely not Hitler

By John Logie
special writer

The man who now calls himself Elvis Hitler and leads the group of the same name, was not entirely responsible for his becoming a musician.

At least part of the credit (or blame) belongs to Snake-Out leader and Wangehead Records impresario Len Puch, who "suggested that after years of hanging around with musicians and being a wise guy, that maybe I should try it."

Elvis remembers his terror after returning from a vacation and being told not to make plans for a specific evening in January 1986 by Puch and his bandmates. When Elvis asked why, he was told that he was scheduled to perform at Paycheck's in Hamtramck.

"I made every excuse I could think of," Elvis recalled. "I said, 'Well, I don't know... I've never played live before. I don't know any songs and I don't have a band.' And they said, 'Don't worry, it's all taken care of.'"

The promised band, as it turns out, was Snake-Out's rhythm section and, despite Elvis' protestations, he did perform at Paycheck's, playing only the three songs he and the band had rehearsed and leaving the stage after an exhilarating 10 minutes. The show was part of what Elvis describes as Puch's grandiose scheme to produce "It Came from the Garage," a compilation of Detroit-area bands. Elvis and his ad-hoc band performed well enough to earn a slot on that record.

In 1987, Elvis Hitler recorded a full-length album, "Disgraceland," at Puch's Garageland Studios in New Boston. The album came to the attention of Enigma Records, a California-based major independent record label, which quickly signed the band to its sub-label Homestead.

"DISGRACELAND" was remixed, remastered and repackaged and given an international release. The Homestead version of the record received encouraging reviews.

In the wake of that record, the band arrived at its current line-up — Damian Lang on drums (formerly drummer of Snake-Out), Warren Delever on bass (formerly interim bass player for Snake-Out), Elvis Hitler on lead vocals and rhythm guitar (a confounding mix of Snake-Out who never learned how to play stand-up bass well enough to perform publicly with the band) and John Delever on lead guitar (who refreshingly has never been a member of Snake-Out).

The borderline incestuous relationship between the two bands is further compounded by the fact that Snake-Out's current bass player, Jim Auge preceded Lang as Elvis Hitler's drummer.

The band toured extensively before returning to Garageland last year to record for Restless Records, another Enigma sub-label. The new record, "Hellbilly," picks up where "Disgraceland" left off, scrawling portraits of surf slaves, ghouls and various misanthropes against an



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apocalyptic landscape strewn with broken beer bottles and pick-up truck shrapnel.

Elvis Hitler routinely receives great reviews from the British press, but "Hellbilly" has not gone over well with some American critics.

"A FEW PEOPLE called and told me about a review in the most recent *Guitar World* magazine where the guy totally cuts us down," Elvis

said, "and the East Coast Rocker just totally destroyed us."

"They warned people not to buy it, saying that it stinks, and we're a crummy band, and I'm a second rate guitar player, and John Delever stole all his licks. Anything bad you could say, they said."

In addition to occasional critical slugging, Elvis feels increasing pressure to defend the band's name, which has already cost it some valuable opportunities.

"I'm sure it's bad taste to a lot of people," Elvis conceded. "It's supposed to be black humor, or it could be kind of sick, but when I thought of it I felt... that maybe people would be able to laugh at it."

It's two names that are known by everybody, and they go together in a catchy way. I thought it would be amusing and that people would not forget it, which they don't, but probably for the wrong reasons."

Elvis takes pains to distance the

band from neo-fascist and racist groups, but that message hasn't always gotten through.

At their record label's behest, the band filmed a video for "Showdown," the first song on the new album. The video is, as Elvis terms it, "perfect fodder for MTV," with the quick editing, sleaze and violence that are common place on the station.

MTV WAS planning to air it as part of the weekly alternative music program "120 Minutes" until some of the powers that be began voicing objections, not to the video itself, but to the band's name. The band and Restless have started a postcard-writing campaign in hopes of swaying the programmers, but at this point it seems likely that the video will never reach its intended audience.

The band's name is also preventing it from touring Europe, where it has received its most favorable reviews.

"We can't go to Europe because no promoter will book us," he said. "They're afraid that because of the name, it's going to attract trouble, and they don't want to risk it."

Elvis admits flirting with the idea of dumping the name, but he now feels that he will probably stay with it, and try to overcome the misapprehensions it creates.

"I have all these people who are eager to accuse me of racism or white supremacy or anti-Semitism, and it's none of that," he said. "It's just that I'm not pleased with mankind as a whole. If I'm racist, I'm a racist across the board."

While the name, in hindsight, seems obviously ill-advised, it's also true that Elvis Hitler is probably being too subtle and clever for a medium which routinely defies the obvious. Despite the band's nitro-burning pedal-to-the-metal sound, they are eminently capable of operating on several levels at once, as evidenced by their recent cover of Sgt. Barry Sadler's "Ballad of the Green Berets."

"I thought, 'what if we did a super reved-up thrashably version of this song,' and so I did it," he said. "... it's kind of a way to mock and poke fun at people, but at the same time give the illusion that I might be glorifying and praising."

"It's kind of a slap in the face doing that song, which is probably like a hymn for the Green Berets, but the way we do it is kind of like the way Hendrix did 'The Star Spangled Banner.' Most of what I do depends on your perception."

IN CONCERT

● Noise That Hurts

Noise That Hurts will perform on Monday, Jan. 23, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● Suite Life

Suite Life will perform on Tuesday, Jan. 30, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● Meat Puppets

Meat Puppets will perform on Tuesday, Jan. 30, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● Mr. Largeheart Existence

Mr. Largeheart Existence will perform with guests, Bottom Feeder, on Wednesday, Jan. 31, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

day, Jan. 31, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.

● Idyll Roomers

Idyll Roomers will perform on Wednesday, Jan. 31, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● Difference

The Difference will perform on Wednesday, Jan. 31, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● Borax

Borax will perform on Thursday, Feb. 1, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● Bastards

Bastards will perform on Friday, Feb. 2, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.

● Ron Brooks Trio

Ron Brooks Trio will perform with Edie Russ Friday and Saturday, Feb. 2-3, at Bird of Paradise, 207 S. Ashley, Ann Arbor. For information, call 662-8310.

● Mol Trifid

Mol Trifid will perform on Saturday, Feb. 2, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.

● Red C

Red C will perform Friday and Saturday, Feb. 2-3, at Jameson's, 1812 N. Main, near 12 Mile, Royal Oak. For information, call 545-6470.

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● Sensitive Big Guys

Sensitive Big Guys and Voodoo Hipsters will perform Friday, Feb. 2, at Paycheck's Lounge, 2932 Canfield, Hamtramck. For information, call 872-8934.

● Missionary Slow

Missionary Slow will perform with guests, Colorful Trauma, Friday, Feb. 2, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Canfield, off I-75.

● Orange Roughies

Orange Roughies will perform Saturday, Feb. 3, at Paycheck's Lounge, 2932 Canfield, Hamtramck. For information, call 872-8934.

COLLEGE

Here are the top 10 albums receiving air play on WDRB-FM, campus station of Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge campus.

1. "Helter Skelter," Negative Land.
2. "King and Eye," Residents.
3. "Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Taste," Ministry.
4. "Intolerance," Grant Hart.
5. "Rabies," Skinny Puppy.
6. "Touch Me and Die," Shock Therapy.
7. "Blood and Thunder," Neon Judgment.
8. "Deep," Peter Murphy.
9. "Suicide Kings (EP)," Mary My Hope.
10. "Window Maker," Butthole Surfers.

LOCAL

Here are the top 10 songs (no particular order) receiving air play on "Detroit Music Scene," which is hosted by Scott Campbell and heard 4-5 p.m. Sundays (repeated 5:30-6:30 p.m. Tuesdays) on WDRB-FM.

1. "Make Up Your Mind," See Dick Run.
2. "Everything She Calls Love," The Grays.
3. "I'm Not the One," Lost Patrol.
4. "The Narrow Line," Walk the Dogma.
5. "Star Is Mine," Strange Bedfellows.
6. "Take My Heart Away," EFX.
7. "17th of May," Christopher Gorey.
8. "Wishing for a Hat," Hay.
9. "Randy Day Picture Show," Hypnotics.
10. "The Antithesis," Sys Synd.

REVIEWS

DEEP

— Peter Murphy

Usually, when a band breaks up, the singer carries the legacy of the group's sound. In the case of the band Bauhaus, this doesn't hold true. You can hear a few traces of the old band on Peter Murphy's new solo album, "Deep," but gone is the deep, throbbing bass of Bauhaus tunes like "Bela Lugosi's Dead." The other Bauhaus members went on to form Love and Rockets, a band that has now veered far from their original sound and dangerously close to Top 40.

Murphy sings with his trademark deep, resonant voice of the Iggy Pop-David Bowie genre. The Bowie influence is especially noticeable on "Deep Ocean Vast Sea" and "Marlene Dietrich's Favorite Poem." Bowie once said that Bauhaus was his favorite band and even got one of their songs into his movie, "The Hunger."

On "Deep," Murphy is equally adept at somberly belting out ominous rockers as he is at singing gentle ballads. In other words, the slow songs aren't sappy and the fast songs are angry and powerful. The ballad, "A Strange Kind of Love (Version One)," has heart-felt, hopeful lyrics like, "There is no terror/dread/or place for rage/no broken hearts/White wash lies/Just a taste for truth/perfect taste choice and



meaning/A look into your eyes." Murphy's plaintive singing and the simple instrumentation made the song sound almost like it came from a 1970's rock opera. The lyrics on "Deep" tend to be rather cryptic, but, if you feel like taking the time to understand what the songs are about, you'll find some pretty poetic stuff. In the song "Deep Ocean Vast Sea," Murphy mixes his religious metaphors with apocalyptic, religious imagery like "Dense lyrics said, this album is a great listen, Murphy is at his best on his complex, yet ultimately rewarding latest offering. Just keep in mind that 'Deep' is a Peter Murphy album, not a Bauhaus one. Murphy's solo stuff isn't better or worse, just different. If you're looking for that good old Bauhaus sound, buy an old Bauhaus album.

— Jill Hamilton

RHYME

— Marty Willson-Piper

Have you ever noticed that if you buy someone's first album and really love it, the second one you buy by that artist never seems quite as good?

This rule holds true in the case of Marty Willson-Piper's second solo album, "Rhyme."

In 1988, Willson-Piper, a member of the band The Church, put out the vastly underrated album "Art Attack." Although it never attained commercial success, it was a favorite among those who presumably know music — like record store owners and certain female music critics.

Like Pink Floyd and Roxy Music, Willson-Piper writes music that you will find in the rock "rock" section of the record store, but it isn't really rock'n'roll music.

Willson-Piper creates his own genre by combining gentle, floating vocals, mesmerizing "fourth" background sounds like a ticking watch or muted conversation and beautiful, atmospheric melodies.

"Rhyme" is music for dreaming. It's not an instant favorite like "Art Attack," but it does sort of grow on you after a few listenings. In other words, highly recommended.

Willson-Piper has a knack for



writing songs that sound both modern and indescribably ancient. He hangs out in places like Stockholm, Paris and Sydney and the European influence is obvious in his music. With "Rhyme," Willson-Piper doesn't give us a rehash of the same stuff on "Art Attack" although it would have been great if he had. It seems as though some record-company type told Willson-Piper something along the lines of "Write me a hit, Marty baby! Give me some pop hooks!"

This is especially apparent on the insufferably peppy tunes "Cascade" and "Melancholy Girl."

Fortunately, these two (or three, depending on your verdict of "Idiot") songs are isolated flaws which can be easily overcome. The rest of the album is classic Willson-Piper.

— Jill Hamilton

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF GOOBER & THE PEAS

— Goober & the Peas

Let's hope Goober & the Peas never take themselves seriously. If they do, contemporary music as we know it might be in serious trouble.

Right now, we'll gladly settle for the Goober & the Peas that's irreverent, mocking and more fun than a barrelful of moonshine. For those of you who may not be familiar with Goober & Co., the band has been performing a little more than a year now in the Detroit area. The group earned its spurs, opening up for the Red Hot Chili Peppers at Saint Andrew's Hall.

Goober's roots go back even further to Michigan State University, where as students the band would perform at barbecues and parties. The band's appeal to this point has been visual, mainly due to the classic cowboy get-ups and the gangly stage presence of 7-foot tall Goober.

Don't let the cowboy hats or the Wyoming driver's licenses fool you, these guys can sound about as country as the Kennedys on "The Com-



plete Works of Goober & the Peas." Perhaps that's why "Funky Cowboy" is as much an anthem as it is a mutated piece of country jerky. Against the backdrop of the spiky guitar lines, lead singer Goober howls on about he is not the average drugstore cowboy. (The video for this tune, incidentally, is hilarious.)

But if that ditty doesn't lasso you by the ear, check out "Hot Women (Cold Beer)" or "Dear Grandpa" (we get two "Dear Grandpa" here). Like all Goober & the Peas compositions, the tunes are marked by Goober's Hank-Williams-using-hellum vocal stylings and gut-busting lyrics.

The sound is as raw as two rocks grinding against one another, and as original and enjoyable as any new music band to roll down this path in awhile. Goober & the Peas are hot.

Even Aunt Bea and Andy could tell you that.

— Larry O'Connor