

STREET BEATS

Hannibals chart a musical course IN CONCERT

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

College is a wonderful place. The perfect setting where there is always someone different, someone you've never quite met before or will ever again.

Be it that roommate who plays the oboe and reads Dostoevski, yet thinks Madonna is a musical genius. Or be it the classmate who wears Army fatigues, drinks beer out of a flower vase and can speak four languages fluently.

At college, from the ivy-infested walls also comes some great music from people of different backgrounds. Such is the case with the Hannibals, a four-man outfit by way of East Lansing.

In this case, the cauldron of creativity was stirred by a chance meeting. Matt Alljan, Dave Christie and Chris Johnston — all originally from Birmingham — ran into Chris Geherin, a guitarist of exceptional skill from Ypsilanti.

At the time, the Birmingham trio were in a non-descript cover band Kool-Aid Smile. They played songs from the psychedelic '70s for appreciative Michigan State students, but soon grew tired of it.

Geherin turned the crew onto a new perspective, the alternative sounds of the '80s. He had the key. "It was a real change for the three of us," said drummer Alljan, 22, who is a Birmingham Seaholm graduate. "We were doing something that was totally new to us. We had our doubts at first."

"We had gotten into the safe trap of being a cover band."



The Hannibals, a four-man outfit out of East Lansing, includes Matt Alljan, Dave Christie and Chris Johnston — all originally from Birmingham — and Chris Geherin of Ypsilanti.

UNLIKE SOME cover bands, the Hannibals had talent to write their own songs — and very fine songs at that. All it took was some prodding from Geherin.

The Hannibals' sound is a matrix of flowing progressive pop consciousness. R.E.M. might be used as a reference point only because the numbers are guitar-oriented. Without a doubt, the Hannibals are charting their own course musically.

Emphasis is placed on songs. The group once took three months off to write a batch.

Although creative, band members keep attitudes quite simple:

Johnston on singing — "I don't try to sound like anybody. I just sing

what comes out."

Geherin on playing guitar — "My style is stripped down... I like to keep it to the basics."

People around East Lansing simply like the Hannibals. The band has become a hot commodity in 1½ years at clubs there, buoyed by radio support on MSU station WDMB-FM.

The Hannibals already have two tapes out, the first quickly sold out all 175 copies. Nearly 275 of 500 copies of the second tape, "Hammer of Rain," are already gone. A full-length compact disc or cassette is in the works for a fall release.

Of course, the next step is to go beyond East Lansing circles. But it's not easy.

"WE'RE HAVING a hard time getting booked because we're an East Lansing band," said Alljan, whose band does its own promotion and bookings. "They say, 'You have a following up there. What about down here?' It's a Catch 22."

Things are going well for the Hannibals. One might wonder how something as tenuous as three friends and an outsider could last without exchanging gunfire. There are no doubts in Hannibal territory.

The Hannibals will perform on Wednesday, March 28, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.



Phineas Gage consists of Sean Hickey on guitar, Dave Walliso on drums, Alex Lumsley on guitar, Reed Schwallie on bass, Chris Farnum on vocals.

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That gets the audience more excited — they all hate Paulie Abdul. After a few minutes spent making fun of this MTV diva and silly pop music in general, Phineas Gage goes on to say that they've developed a taste for local music.

"As we get busier," Farnum said, "I find myself more interested in local bands."

"Crossed Wire... they're our heroes," Lumsley said.

They also like other alternative local acts like Ann B. Davis and Granafalton, but add that local music is suffering because of 21 and over clubs and lack of radio support.

"I have to go to MTV to hear new music," Walliso said. "That's really sad."

The way Phineas Gage's career is going, they may one day find themselves making one of those "sad" videos for MTV.

One musical point they do agree on — they all hate Paulie Abdul. After a few minutes spent making fun of this MTV diva and silly pop music in general, Phineas Gage goes on to say that they've developed a taste for local music.

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Phineas Gage has a chemistry with the crowd

By Jill Hamilton
special writer

There are two Phineas Gages that have become well-known.

The first Phineas Gage will be remembered in psychology textbooks for years to come. He was a young foreman on a work crew who had an accident in which a steel rod was embedded into his brain. Amazingly, he survived the accident but had a marked personality change. It was the first case of a well-documented frontal lobotomy.

The second Phineas Gage, less infamous than the first, is a band consisting of Sean Hickey on guitar, Dave Walliso on drums, Alex Lumsley on guitar, Reed Schwallie on bass, Chris Farnum on vocals. They are, perhaps, one of the best bands playing around Detroit.

When Phineas Gage has a bad night, it's still a good night for the audience.

On this night at 3-D in Royal Oak, as the band waits to go on stage, they are a little nervous because there hasn't been a sound check. Their worry turns out to be prophetic.

Throughout their short set, the band is plagued with sound problems. Although the audience seems not to notice, the band is frustrated by the problems and ends their set

after about six songs.

"THEY'RE USUALLY a lot more energetic and 'into it,'" whispers a girl in the audience when asked what she thought of the set.

"I come and see these guys all the time," a guy remarks. "They sound good to me."

The songs are tight and catchy, the playing style is impeccable and Chris Farnum's vocals are biting and expressive. These guys are talented — pretty amazing, considering that the band has only been together for little more than a year. Well, little more than a year as Phineas Gage, that is. Before that, three of the members played in the band Pray for Rain. The other two were in Common Chapter. In other words, these guys have more than 20 years of band experience between them.

Since their first gig at the Waiting Room Lounge in Hamtramck, Phineas has enjoyed a steady stream of local gigs. They count a performance at Saint Andrew's Hall as their favorite because, as Farnum puts it, "it's easier to play well when there's a lot of people. We got really into it."

It's true, a strange sort of chemistry exists between the band members and the audience during a Phineas performance. Each band member goads the other on to dance

faster, play better and sing louder. That gets the audience more excited — they all hate Paulie Abdul. After a few minutes spent making fun of this MTV diva and silly pop music in general, Phineas Gage goes on to say that they've developed a taste for local music.

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REVIEWS

CAUTION HORSES
— Cowboy Junkies

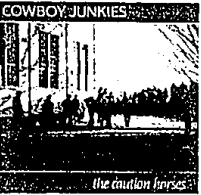
It's one of those days where you're so sure the whole world is out to stomp on your soul that you can't even get out of bed.

The phone rings, and you just let it, "cause everybody knows that good news always sleeps till noon," as the Cowboy Junkies declare on their latest release, "The Caution Horses" (RCA) the follow-up to last year's critically canonized "The Trinity Session."

You follow the advice the band offered on the LP's opener, "Sun Comes Up, It's Tuesday Morning." "There's something about an afternoon spent doing nothing/ Just listening to records and watch the sun falling." So you listen to "The Caution Horses" with the shades drawn, reclining like the lifeless, lonesome shell you are.

The somber songs hold you motionless, a 16-ton anchor on your heart. The "Trinity Session" sugary vocals hauntingly (stop) a mix of accordions, mandolins and steel guitars that mesh in a musical Venetian gondola ride down the Mississippi.

You're transfixed as the Junkies affix their unique stamp to Neil Young's "Powerfinger." But what really gets to you is the emergence of Michael Timmins as a mystical and mystical lyricist.



Timmins penned seven of the album's 10 songs and co-wrote another with sister Margo, in whom he has the perfect mouthpiece for his tales of betrayal, break-up and gut-wrenching loneliness: "Never thought a man could become so desperate/ Never thought a life could lose so much hope," Margo moans in "Thirty Summers."

It's only a record, you tell yourself as your eyes well with mist during "Escape Is So Simple," a story of abandoned love. "Yeah, I remember when we said 'forever' was the cruelest word of them all/ But I think that I like it much better than I do 'goodbye.'"

The album closes with "You'll Be Loved Again," ending a desolate record with a trace of optimism, but it's no use. You can't get up. You hit the repeat button on the remote and prepare for another round of catharsis. Alone.

— John Cortez

PORTENT HUE
— Caterwaul

Probably one of the lamest, clichéd, and most overused method of opening a record review is with a definition from Webster's dictionary. And, although some of us have sworn off using this particular opening, in this case, using a dictionary definition seems unavoidable.

You may have noticed that the name of this band is Caterwaul. Not very catchy, right? Some sort of reporter's sixth sense told us to look in the dictionary for some insight on why the group chose this particular name. Violet Caterwaul is an actual word. It means "to make a discordant sound or shriek." Ah, it's all becoming clearer.

As it turns out, Caterwaul is a very appropriate name for the group. Lead singer and general focal point of the band, Betsy Martin, has an unusual voice/wall that could be most easily described as being similar to that of Siouxsie of Siouxsie and the Banshees.

Her appearance is a cross between the bland earth mother look and a heavy metal groupie who abuses black eyeliner. Her voice ranges from banshee-like screeching in "Alex's Aphrodisiac" to a sublime soprano in "Small Things in Heaven."

When Caterwaul wants to be



discordant, as they are on approximately 80 percent of "Portent Hue," they succeed admirably. "Alex's Aphrodisiac" is filled to the brim with Mark Schaffer's chaotic guitar in a "wall of sound" effect, while Martin experiments with her upper vocal range.

However, all is not chaos on "Portent Hue." Two songs on the album, "Small Things in Heaven" is a sparse acoustic number with Martin's gentle, ethereal vocals accompanied solely by a mandolin.

I.R.S. seems to be giving this band time to make its mark, as "Portent Hue" is their third release on the major label. "Portent Hue" is Caterwaul's follow-up album to their mildly successful 1988 offering, "Pin & Web." For this release, they enlisted the help of producers David Ogilvie (Skinsy Puppy) and Greg Reely (Sarah McLachlan). I.R.S. seems to believe in the band.

We'll see what happens.

— Jill Hamilton

VIOLET AND BLACK
— Scott Merritt

"Violet and Black" is Scott Merritt's third album but is his first to be released in the U.S. Merritt's first two records — "Serious Interference" and "Gravity Is Mutual" — were only distributed inside the boundaries of his native Canada, but allowed him, as a virtual unknown, to work with some influential artists.

He recorded "Serious Interference" at a studio close in Hamilton, Ontario, run by two brothers — Bob and Daniel Lanois. On "Gravity Is Mutual," guest artists included Andrew Beld and avant-garde percussionist David Van Tieghem.

Merritt is a songwriter in the tradition of Bruce Springsteen, Robbie Robertson, and John Cougar, whose make that John Mellencamp. In other words, he writes good old American music. Strange, since Merritt is Canadian. He writes about the simple things in day-to-day life — his hometown of Brantford and the people who live there. Merritt lived in Brantford for his whole life and "Violet and Black" seems almost a tribute to the town. In a larger sense, Merritt's Brantford serves as a microcosm for the universal stories that we all know.

"Are You Sending," for example, is about the floods that plague Brantford in the spring. The song begins by describing how the flood af-

fects one specific Brantford citizen with the words, "Oh, look a Francis standing in the rain/with that bird held in his hand."

The best songs on the album are the ones that kick off each side — "Burning Train" and "Radio Home." The poignant "Burning Train" is a Springsteen-esque tale, even to the point of being sung to a girl named Mary.

"Radio Home" sounds a bit like XTC in that it is heavy on acoustic guitar and quirky rhythm. In a plea for a departed friend to return, Merritt sings, "nicotine, caffeine, Norvalone/sometimes I love that chemical haze/And I'm waiting on you/why am I waiting at all?"

"Violet and Black" is a fine debut. It's honest music — straight from the heartland. So what if this particular heartland is Canadian. Truth doesn't recognize national borders.

— Jill Hamilton

Griff's Grill, 40 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. For information, call 334-9292.

● **Walk the Dogma**
Walk the Dogma will perform on Friday, March 30, at Lili's 21, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. For information, call 878-6555.

● **Strange Bedfellows**
Strange Bedfellows will perform on Friday, March 30, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2548 Caniff, near I-75. For information, call 265-9760.

● **Regular Boys**
Regular Boys will perform on Friday, March 30, at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, north of Michigan Avenue, Dearborn. For information, call 846-5377.

● **Will & the Bushmen**
Will & the Bushmen will perform on Friday, March 30, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● **Inside Out**
Inside Out will perform on Friday, March 30, at Finney's Pub, 3963 Woodward, Detroit. For information, call 831-8070.

● **Oroburos**
Oroburos will perform on Friday, March 30, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **Ron Brooks Trio**
Ron Brooks Trio will perform on Friday and Saturday, March 30-31, at the Bird of Paradise, 207 S. Ashley, Ann Arbor. For information, call 662-8310.

● **Holy Cows**
Holy Cows will perform with guests. The Gear, on Friday, March 30, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.

● **Viv Akaludren**
Viv Akaludren will perform with guests, Mesalene Ritual, on Friday, March 30, at Stanley's, 340 Pitt St., Windsor. For information, call (519) 252-3118.

● **Joanne Connor**
Joanne Connor and Her Blues Masters will perform on Saturday, March 31, at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn. For information, call 846-5377.

● **Ian McCulloch**
Ian McCulloch, former lead singer of Echo & the Bunnymen, will perform on Saturday, March 31, at The Latin Quarter, 3047 E. Grand Blvd., Detroit. The show is open to all ages. Tickets are \$14.50 in advance. For information, call 99-MUSIC.

● **Robb Roy**
Robb Roy will perform on Saturday, March 31, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. For information, call 365-9760.

● **Trash Brats**
Trash Brats will perform on Saturday, March 31, at Finney's Pub, 3963 Woodward, Detroit. For information, call 831-8070.

COLLEGE

Here are the top 10 albums receiving airplay on WDR-FM 99.3, campus station of Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn.

1. "Pretty Hate Machine," Nine-inch Nails
2. "Deep," Peter Murphy.
3. "Rip," Woodentuff.
4. "Blind," The Cure.
5. "Showerhead," Nitzer Ebb.
6. "Flood," They Might Be Giants.
7. "Automatic," Jesus & Mary Chain.
8. "Rabies," Skinny Puppy.
9. "Whack, Ding," See Dick Run.
10. "Deliverance," Misia UK.

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 99.3.

1. "Rise and Fall," The Gear.
2. "Funky Cowboy," Goober & the Peas.
3. "Rollercoaster," See Dick Run.
4. "This Train Is Running Out of Track," Ichabod Stew.
5. "Running Hiding," Bang Revival.
6. "Very West," Cepha Joe.
7. "Out No More," Jimmy Bones & the Gravelers.
8. "Fishing God," Sensitive Big Guys.
9. "Here's Looking At You," Michael Sklad.
10. "Who's the Friend," The Elementals.



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