

STREET BEATS



The Connells is a guitar pop band whose fourth album, "One Simple Word (TVT)," is streamlined and refined pop with crashing guitars and laid-back vocals.

Connells: Moody musicmakers

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Pull down the shades, cuddle up in the corner. The Connells' music is so dark Barnabas Collins should be the lead singer.

"Oh, I'm so depressed right now," said the band's lead singer, Doug MacMillan.

He's kidding. Really. The Connells hardly represent the brooding cauldron of manic music some concert pre-hype has painted. The Connells are a guitar pop band, a darn fine guitar pop band.

The group's fourth album, "One Simple Word (TVT)," is streamlined and refined pop with a canopy of crashing guitars and laid-back vocals. To their credit, the Connells don't go full throttle with the happy-as-sunshine leitmotif.

Mike Connell's guitar can scratch the underbelly of pop's far-reaching corners while still retaining an enjoyable melody. For example, the exploratory verve of "Link," a cut off the latest album, is something to behold and delves into Sonic Youth wall-of-sound territory.

That may be construed as being murky and obscure. Also, the band's first LP was titled, "Darker Days."

But dark is relative term, isn't it? After all, there is the refusing-to-look-at-life-through-rose-colored-glasses meaning of the word. Then there is the Bob Mould definition, which blots out the sky and kills vegetation.

"I DIDN'T notice it (the tone of the LP) until we went into the studio and Hugh (Jones, pro-

Seeing the show

Who:
The Connells

Where:
The Blind Pig
208 S. First Street, Ann Arbor.

When:
Friday, Dec. 7. Doors open at 9:30 p.m.

ducer) brought it up," MacMillan said. "To me, it's just the collective mood of a few songs. I don't think it's a growing trend."

The Connells perform Friday, Dec. 7, at the Blind Pig in Ann Arbor.

Labels are not new to the Connells. This is a band just asking for them.

The Connells embody the complete non-image, being neither fashion plates nor followers of hip trends. Band members are like cut-out dolls, ripe for some big record exec to dress them up in his own way.

Some music critics had a jump, painting the band into several corners.

First, there were the R.E.M. comparisons, undoubtedly due to the group's Raleigh, N.C., roots and the prevalence of guitars in the music. Then came the Morrissey/Smiths associations, perhaps brought about by MacMillan's vocals.

MacMillan shrugs these off as "lazy journalism." Comparisons would be difficult for "One

Simple Word," which finds MacMillan in his most relaxed, confident state as a vocalist.

"I WAS just bad," said MacMillan, referring to the Connells' first LP. "Our first album — those were supposed to be demos, and they ended up being an album."

MacMillan is more self-assured. He wrote "One Simple Word" on "One Simple Word," playing guitar in the studio for the first time. The band also spent a good deal of time preparing for the LP.

After working with an all-star line-up of producers such as Don Dixon, Mitch Easter and Gary Smith, the band hired Hugh Jones for this effort. His past credits include slick pop outfits such as Modern English and Del Amitri, hardly groups considered on the cutting edge.

But Jones has also worked with more-obscure bands, such as Dump Truck and Tear Drop Explodes. He was also scheduled to produce what would have been Husker Du's last LP before the band broke up.

The Connells were more impressed with Jones' Dump Truck production work. So much, in fact, that band members asked him to produce their album without meeting him.

"I think his angle was to retain the power of the guitars and the performance," MacMillan said. "I think we really performed well on this album. The atmosphere was great."

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IN CONCERT

● ELECTRIC HOT TUNA

Electric Hot Tuna will perform two shows 8 and 11 p.m. Monday, Dec. 3, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● JUDAS PRIEST

Judas Priest will perform with guests, Testament and Megadeth, 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 5, at The Palace of Auburn Hills. Tickets are \$20. For information, call 377-8600.

● VODOO CHILI

Voodoo Chili will perform with guests, Typhoid Mary and Infectious Disease, Wednesday, Dec. 5, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 994-3562.

● NEW POTATO CABOOSE

New Potato Caboose will perform Wednesday, Dec. 5, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● FRANK ALLISON AND THE ODD SOX

Frank Allison and the Odd Sox will perform Thursday, Dec. 6, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● TRUNCHEONS

Truncheons will perform with guests, Jones Boys, Thursday, Dec. 6, at 3-D Club, 1815 N. Main, north of 12 Mile, Royal Oak. For information, call 589-3344.

● MONTY ALEXANDER & HIS TRIO

Monty Alexander & His Trio will perform 9 and 11 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, Dec. 6-8, at the Bird of Paradise, 207 S. Ashley, Ann Arbor. For information, call 662-8310.

● ETCH-A-SKETCH

Etch-a-Sketch will perform with guests, Exceptionz, Thursday, Dec. 6, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 994-3562.

● PINETOP PERKINS/BOB MORGOLIN

Pinetop Perkins and Bob Morgolin, both veterans of the Muddy Waters Band, will perform Friday and Saturday, Dec. 7-8, at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn. For information, call 846-1920.

● OCTOBER

October will perform with guests, In Autumn, Friday, Dec. 7, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. For information, call 365-9760.

LOCAL

Here are the top 10 songs receiving air play on "Detroit Music Scene," which is heard 4-5 p.m. Sundays (repeated 5-6 p.m. Tuesdays) on WDRB-FM 90.9.

1. "One Grateful Thing," Hainfalls
2. "Just a Little More Love," Walker Stick
3. "Dispair," Andy Breckman
4. "Don't You Cry," Imitation of Life
5. "Siding," Thirty Forest Animals
6. "Jennifer," Paul Kasrils
7. "You Turn Me," Blue Nimbus
8. "The River Dies," Palaces Gage
9. "The Real Thing," Faith No More
10. "Burns Like the Sun," Standing Shadows

● THE CONNELLS

The Connells will perform Friday, Dec. 7, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● VOLUME WHORES

Volume Whores will perform with guests, Gories, Friday, Dec. 7, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 994-3562.

● BLUE FRONT PERSUADERS

Blue Front Persuaders will perform Saturday, Dec. 8, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● HUNGRY SO ANGRY

Hungry So Angry will perform with guests, Joe & Out, Saturday, Dec. 8, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. For information, call 365-9760.

● JOHN D. LAMB

John D. Lamb will perform Saturday, Dec. 8, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● PEDESTRIANS

The Pedestrians will perform Saturday, Dec. 8, at Paycheck's, 2932 Caniff, at Joseph Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 872-8934.

● JESUS LIZARD

Jesus Lizard will perform with guests, Destruction Ride, Saturday, Dec. 8, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 994-3562.

● GENERALS

Generals will perform Saturday, Dec. 8, at Club Exit, 2945 John R., at the corner of 12 Mile Road, Madison Heights.



Electric Hot Tuna will perform two shows today at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor.

CUTTING EDGE

Here are 10 albums in heavy rotation on "The Cutting Edge," which is heard nightly 9 p.m. to 3 a.m. on CIMX-FM 88.7.

1. "Time's Up," Living Colour
2. "Ritual de la Habitacion," Jane's Addiction
3. "Brick by Brick," IZZ Pop
4. "X," INXS
5. "Bossa Nova," Pistas
6. "Mixed Up," The Cure
7. "All Shook Down," Replacements
8. "The Real Thing," Faith No More
9. "The Road," The Alarm
10. "Room to Room," Waterboys

REVIEWS

JUST IN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS — various artists

'Tis the season to be greedy. Or at least it would seem so, judging by the number of compilations, greatest hit packages and Christmas albums that have been arriving daily from the record companies.

So far, the worst of these is Barry Manilow's collection of seasonal faves on the wretched "Because It's Christmas." Luckily, we aren't dealing with that album, we're reviewing "Just in Time for Christmas," which is an entirely different matter.

This album of traditional Christmas ditties (and some not-so-traditional ones) is so good that you may find yourself still listening to it — or parts of it, at least — next July. The various artists on it range from the not very well-known (like Molly Johnson) to the sort of well-known (Jules Shear) to the pretty darn well-known (Squeeze).

All of them — surprise, surprise — are artists on I.R.S.'s roster of talent. We told you greed was involved.

Anyway, Squeeze's "Christmas Day" kicks off the CD and finds the band at their usual level of excellence. The song features trademark Squeeze harmonies and a typically catchy melody.

"All I Want For Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth" by reggae-style



Elvis/Led Zeppelin impersonators Dread Zeppelin is another standout. Of course, the album's interpretation of the traditional song is interwoven with bits of the Elvis song, "Viva Las Vegas."

Other stand-outs include Timbuk 3's typically dead-pan version of their song "All I Want for Christmas (It's not the 'All I Want for Christmas')," the dB's excellent "Home for the Holidays," and Wall of Voodoo's bizarre "Shouldn't Have Given Him a Gun for Christmas."

Unlike on some of the other Christmas compilations, the proceeds from this release aren't headed for any charitable cause — unless you consider the I.R.S. record company to be a charity. Anyway, charity begins at home, doesn't it? So buying this album for yourself is a charitable act, right?

— Jill Hamilton

RECYCLER — ZZ Top

You might think, with ZZ Top's last two platinum album releases ("Afterburner" and "Eliminator") that this band has done everything from A to Z. Well, you're probably right.

The latest album from these good ole' boys from the Lone Star state is called "Recycler," and for the most part, it is just an extension of their last two albums.

So... if you've got a good thing why change it, right? Wrong. ZZ Top has a proven track record of non-sense, hard hitting blues/rock talent. But, variety is not a strong point with this tenacious time-tested trio.

"Recycler" does emphasize the bluesier side of the band. They're calling the album "Polyrhythmic Perversity." That is to say that it has a broad diversity of styles, in a perverse sort of way.

I WOULD have to disagree with the diversity part of that claim. Set the needle down in almost any groove of this album and you might



think you're listening to one long song.

There are some catchy tunes in this compilation of down home rock, done up southern style. It's just not something new or innovative.

"Recycler" has 10 new tracks, at least the titles are new. Some of the best rockers on the album, "Concrete and Steel" and "Decision or Collision," are classic tunes delivered ZZ Top style. But, as I've warned, they're nothing new.

This one, might best be left to the die-hard faithful.

— Joseph S. Hoffmann

HEART STILL BEATING — Roxy Music

At first glance, "Heart Still Beating" looks like another attempt to cash in again on the same old songs with a Christmas theme. "Greatest Hits" package. But look a little closer at the cover and, in infinitely tiny letters, you'll see the important words "Recorded Live 1982 in Frejus, France." A live release! Roxy is not a gratuitous re-issue. Roxy Music hasn't put out a live album since "Viva" more than 10 years ago.

Back in 1982, Roxy Music teamed with Bryan Ferry, Phil Manzanera and Andy Mackay. It was a period when they had moved away from the harder sound of their early years and had just finished making the smoother-sounding album "Avalon."

Of course, this "smooth," studio-created sound is the reason many people are attracted to Roxy Music and a live album is not the best way to capture that made-in-a-vacuum Roxy sound. My brother describes that particular sound as "the sort of music you listen to while putting on a tuxedo before a date," which explains it as well as anything.

Anyway, if that's why you like Roxy Music, you'd be better off buying one of their fine old albums like "Siren" or "Avalon" or a Bryan Fer-



ry solo album like "Boys and Girls," because this live album lacks the seamless quality of their studio efforts. Nonetheless, certain songs like "Jealous Guy" come across well and lack the usual rough sound of live songs.

"Heart Still Beating" is a strong mix of Roxy Music at various points in their career, showing the band both at their "rockers" stage and their later, more mournful, love-gone-wrong stage. There are songs from "Siren" like "Editions of You" and songs from "Avalon" like "India" and "While My Heart is Still Beating." So, if your unsure of which era of Roxy Music you enjoy best, this live album is a good way to sample all of them.

— Jill Hamilton