

Etch 'A' Sketch draws with ska IN CONCERT

By Larry O'Connor staff writer

Ska was the "blue beat" period of Desmond Dekker and Prince Buster of the 1960s.

Ska was the "Tu-tone" era of English Beat and the Specials in the early 1980s.

Ska is the third generation of players such as Gangster Fun and Exceptions energized by punk and defining a sound for the 1990s.

Ska is here. Ska is here. Ska is everywhere.

So say members of Etch 'A' Sketch, a new group of purveyors of the traditionally upbeat dance music. Contrary to Santayana's grim

prediction about the unknown repeating the past, this Ann Arbor-based outfit revels in ska history.

"(Ska) is like a lifestyle," said lead singer Pat Avsharian. Archivists, though, are usually not the fresh-carrot variety barely 18. They weren't even born when Dekker was cranking out '60s chestnuts like "Israelites," mere children when the Specials and English Beat were redefining the ska sound for the '80s.

A love of ska led keyboardist Rachel Williams, guitarist Ben Manceff and Avsharian to form Etch 'A' Sketch this past summer.

IN A SHORT time, Etch 'A' Sketch has become a regular on the Detroit Ann Arbor club circuit while venturing out to such metropolises as Toronto and Chicago. An abandoned porno book store, a biker farm and frat houses have also served as some unlikely venues for their shows.

Yet Etch 'A' Sketch are mere babes. Impressionistic while others are hardened by the futility of the music scene. Enthusiasm spills over into members interrupting one another when discussing the music they perform.

Giddiness aside, Etch 'A' Sketch are true to their craft. Their vision is unquestioned.

"I think a lot of the bands now are

trying to sound like the "Tu-tone" bands," Avsharian said. "We try to get back more to the roots."

History lessons are "taught" on stage. Amid a pool of flying limbs on the dance floor, Etch 'A' Sketch performed a short but energized set recently at the Blind Pig.

Ben Manceff gyrates while paying tribute to the forerunners of ska, including a stinging cover of Dekker's "Israelites." Avsharian moves smoothly, succinctly to the beat while singing.

Other members apparently are interchangeable. On this night, the horn section includes Joe Cislo on trom-

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The Big Picture is Jeff Scott, lead vocals, Duane Harlick, guitar and vocals, Mike Hynes, bass, Andy Combs, Skip Pruitt, saxophone, Todd Ague, keyboards and backing vocals, Royal Oak.

Big Picture wins in Marlboro Country

By Joseph S. Hoffmann special writer

A local band called The Big Picture recently won the Marlboro National Talent Roundup. Bands from around the country submitted demo tapes in order to be considered for the regional finals in their area. Eight finalists were then selected nationwide. Their last round was in Nashville, Tenn. last month.

The Big Picture took the win — 40 hours studio time and a \$30,000 cash prize. The Big Picture is Jeff Scott, lead vocals, Huntington Woods; Duane Harlick, guitar and vocals, Royal Oak; Mike Hynes, bass, Royal Oak; Andy Combs, drums, Pontiac; Skip Pruitt, saxophone, Detroit; Todd Ague, keyboards and backing vocals, Royal Oak.

great sounding music, but we took that music and turned it into a show atmosphere... "We had been raised to a certain status as first of all the backs in the world," explains backup vocalist Kurt Valaque, on where they got the name.

In this computer age, this band delivers a computer age sound. Information Society is a band out of Minneapolis, Minn. Their sound is a high-tech mish-mash, that for the most part, sounds pleasing and upbeat. They call their style of music "Kraftwerk and Funk."

pletely and to jazzy perfection. Top this all off with some smooth, sultry vocals and what have you got? Well, I think you get the picture... "We're one of the only bands in town that is pretty obsessive in its focus," Ague said. "We do a good variety of music and we always put our own signature to each arrangement."

REVIEWS

HELL'S DITCH — The Pogues

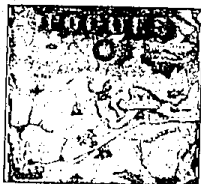
Shane MacGowan may or may not be in bad shape, but he continues to write terrific songs and the band continues to make good music.

In "Hell's Ditch," the band's latest release is very good indeed. In it, MacGowan shows again that he can write a lyric as well as anybody. He is probably better known, unfortunately, for his propensity for drink, and speculation continues about his physical health.

In "Hell's Ditch," we are led on a musical tour of the seedy side, where booze and betrayal abound. It's a tough and dirty place, familiar territory to Pogues fans.

The music is catchy, slightly exotic, and surprisingly upbeat, especially by when led by the bass lines of Darryl Hunt. "Hain Street" is positively joyful in melody. So too is the opening cut, in which a well-traveled narrator seeks to spend eternity on the sunbaked side of the street.

This LP, the band's fifth by my count, was produced by Joe Strummer, who toured with the Po-



HACK — Information Society

A sound for the '90s. This is a good way to describe the Information Society's latest release, a slick, snappy "Hack" (Tommy Boy Records).

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Information Society is not comprised of the traditional guitar, bass, drums combination. It consists of three primary members: Paul Roth, James Cassidy and Kurt Valaque. They rely on their multi-analog and synthesizer effects to create the core of their sound.

Their cassette lists 22, that's right



22, cuts on it. But, only 10 of those songs have a lyrical content to them. Much of the album is a collage of sound effects and audio wizardry. In fact, there may be a bit too much of that here.

Another song called "Can't Slow Down" is a lively dance number. I like the saxophone solo.

On the lighter side, "Now That I Have You" is one of their more delicate contributions. It also sounds good.

Where a lot of bands have come across sounding empty and incomplete under such circumstances, Information Society seems to pull this off quite well.

James S. Hoffmann

LOCAL

Here are the top-10 songs on "Detroit Music Scene," which is aired 4-5 p.m. Sundays (repeated 5:30-6:30 p.m. Tuesdays on WDRB-FM 90.9)

- 1 "Better Days," The Gear
2 "Only a Picture," Knaves
3 "Sway Like a Tree," Hannabals
4 "Stay Here," Missionary Sew
5 "Teacher, Teacher," Dawa
6 "Back on My Feet," Detroit Blues Band
7 "Undead," Dark Theater
8 "Seen and Not Heard," Inside Out
9 "Pain of It All," Blue Nimbus
10 "Serenity," Thirty Forest Animals

CUTTING EDGE

Here are 10 LPs in heavy rotation on "The Cutting Edge," which is heard 8 p.m. to 3 a.m. nightly on CIMX-FM 88.7.

- 1 "Ritual de lo Habitual," Jane's Addiction
2 "Gala," Lamb
3 "Brick by Brick," Iggy Pop
4 "N.Y. INXS
5 "Mead Up," The Cure
6 "Heart-Shaped World," Chris Isaak
7 "Cake," Trash Can Sinatras
8 "Bona Drag," Morrissey
9 "Hell's Ditch," The Pogues
10 "One Simple Word," The Connells

THE IMMACULATE COLLECTION — Madonna

OK, I give up. No more criticism of Madonna out of this corner. Period.

By now, this Rochester Hills lass is well beyond any meaningful criticism anyway. She's a force of nature, like Yellowstone, Niagara Falls, or Elvis. She's a growth industry, like GM, Michael Jordan or Mickey Mouse.

You know all these songs, too. From the bouancy "Like a Virgin" to the slinky "Vogue," almost all were No. 1, top-of-the-pops, Casey Kasem-approved chartbusters.



especially hot. Several — including "Virgin" and "Into the Groove" — appear to have been ever-so-slightly remixed.

Anyway, it's a nice look back. The difference between Madonna's almost-innocent early hits, such as "Holiday" and her later, bolder, work such as "Express Yourself" is clearly apparent. Despite the higher-than-normal list price, there's also a generous sampling. There's even a pricey boxed edition that includes a video greatest hits.

Madonna is pulling down a certain of sorts, but unlike recent hits packages by some contemporaries, it's only on Act 1.

Wayne Peal