

Gangsters: They want to have fun

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

The fun is still in Gangster Fun. Singer John Bunkley was reminded of a burning ska show in the band's infancy four years ago at the Hamtramck Pub, which included an encore and the audience singing "Happy Birthday" to drummer Brian Bowie.

"It's funny, you would think because we are older things would have calmed down by now," said Bunkley, whose band performs Sunday at the Majestic Theatre. "Actually, things have become wilder."

Gangster Fun, with their ska-inspired zaniness, have always brought a certain electricity to live performances. In the beginning, that could easily be attributed to the enthusiasm of neophytes.

But after four years of gigs, a cross-country tour and an album, one would expect the cynical side of Gangster Fun to emerge. Or at least a little burnout. Not so on both counts.

The band has grown in size to nine players. Current members include guitarist Dave Minnick of Centerline, trombonist Peter Zura, percussionist Josh Silverstein of Southfield, bassist Ron Hill of Detroit, trombonist Robert Cogswell of Ann Arbor, saxophonist Chris Minnick of Centerline and keyboard player Andy Birko of Livonia. They join chief songwriters Bunkley and Bowie.

"Is that nine?", asked Bunkley after listing his bandmates.

ALSO, GANGSTER FUN will release their second LP, "Time Flies When You're Gangster Fun," on Moon Records in New York. Tentative release is scheduled at the end of the summer.

The effort is the long-awaited follow-up to "Come See, Come Ska," the band's debut LP released two years ago. All 4,000 copies of that release sold out.

Band members have received letters from as far away as England, Germany and even the Philippines from those who have listened to the group's first record.

The new 11-song effort was recorded at the Disc with Mike E. Clark as producer. The band is counting on even better distribution from Moon Records, a ska label started by Toasters member Bucket Hineley in the mid-1980s.

And like "Come See, Come Ska," the new release will feature the usual somewhat obscure, somewhat skewed life-as-seen-through-John-Bunkley's-eyes lyrics.

One number, "Bank of Love," is a tale about a guy who breaks into a sperm bank and mixes up all the deposits in order to create one "gray" race. The song makes a statement about racial unity.

"I'm a sociology major. I have to read this stuff," said Bunkley laughing.

Also, if anything, the song reveals the bubbling cauldron of creativity that sets Gangster Fun apart from other purveyors of the blue beat sound. Bunkley wrote all the lyrics for the songs while David Minnick and Bowie collaborate on the the skittering dance music.

GANGSTER FUN has never been about fashion. Whereas other ska bands adhere to the rude boy uniform of black suits, white socks or Doc Marten shoes, the group instead has chosen to rely on individuality and talent.

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Four years after getting started singing ska-inspired music at places like the Hamtramck Pub, John Bunkley and his bandmates in Gangster Fun are riding high on a wave of success.

IN CONCERT

- **SOUTHGOING ZAK**
Southgoing Zak will perform Monday, June 10, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **VIBRAPHONIST BOB PIPHO & THE PARADISE VALLEY JAZZ JAM BAND**
Vibraphonist Bob Phipho & the Paradise Valley Jazz Jam Band will perform Monday, June 10, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. For information, call 835-2355.
- **WILD KINGDOM**
Wild Kingdom will perform Tuesday, June 11, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **DON HENLEY**
Don Henley will perform with guests, Susanna Hoffs, Tuesday, June 11, at The New Pine Knob Music Theatre, 1775 and Sashabaw Road, Clarkston. Tickets are \$18 pavilion and \$21 lawn. For information, call 277-8200.
- **REPUTATIONS**
Reputations will perform Wednesday, June 12, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 961-MELT.
- **LUNA PARK**
Luna Park will perform Wednesday, June 12, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **BOURGEOISE**
Bourgeoisie will perform Wednesday, June 12, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **MOLTRIFID**
Mol Trifid will perform with guests, Control, Thursday, June 13, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **JUNK MONKEYS**
Junk Monkeys will perform Thursday, June 13, at Lili's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. For information, call 875-6555.
- **IMITATION OF LIFE**
Imitation of Life will perform with guests Jimmy Bones & the Graverobbers, Thursday, June 13, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. For information, call 835-2355.
- **NEW RIDDIM**
New Riddim will perform Thursday, June 13, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **WILD KINGDOM**
Wild Kingdom will perform Thursday, June 13, at Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti. For information, call 485-5050.
- **SPEAKER'S CORNER**
Speaker's Corner will perform Friday, June 14, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75, Hamtramck. For information, call 365-3829.
- **EARTH COMMUNITY CONCERT**
Earth Community Concert will take place 7:30 Friday, June 14, at the North-Western Universalist Church, 2325 Northwestern Highway, between Nine Mile and 10 Mile roads, Southfield. Performers include: Bonnie Shanburn, folk; Jason Kobser, poetry; Leah Smith, performance art; Harvest Moon, folk rock; Strange Bedfellows with Missy Gibson, original rock; Roberto Warren and Sings of Life, electronic world music; and Magikal illuminations by Circle of Light. Admission is \$5. Proceeds benefit The Rainbow Gathering, a national alternative camp-out and festival of life. For information, call 548-7235 or 541-8853.
- **BIG DAVE & THE ULTRASONICS**
Big Dave & the Ultrasonics will perform Friday, June 14, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. For information, call 835-2355.
- **CIVILIANS**
Civilians will perform Friday, June 14, on the Bobo Moonlight Cruise. The cruise departs the Detroit dock 11 p.m. and returns 1 a.m. For information, call 843-0700 or 843-8800.
- **CHISEL BROS.**
Chisel Bros. will perform Friday-Saturday, June 14-15, at Moby Dick, 5438 Schaefer, Detroit. For information, call 581-3630.
- **SOUTHGOING ZAK**
Southgoing Zak will perform Friday, June 14, at Majestic Music Theatre, 6140 Woodward, Detroit. Cover is \$4. For information, call 835-9700.
- **ASSEMBLY REQUIRED**
Assembly Required will perform Friday, June 14, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **JOANNA CONNOR**
Joanna Connor will perform Friday, June 14, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **JAX MYTH**
Jax Myth will perform Friday, June 14, at Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti. For information, call 485-5050.
- **BUGS BEDDOW**
Bugs Beddow will perform Friday, June 14, at the Other End Lounge, 5855 Monroe, Taylor. For information, call 278-3550.
- **GRADY HAZY**
Grady Hazy will perform Friday, June 14, at Paycheck's Lounge, 2932 Caniff, Hamtramck. For information, call 874-0254.
- **SPEAKER'S CORNER**
Speaker's Corner will perform with guest, Chris Richards, Friday, June 14, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. For information, call 365-3829.
- **NEW BARBUTIATES**
New Barbutiates will perform Friday, June 14, at Lili's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. For information, call 875-6555.
- **MAJESTY CRUSH**
Majesty Crush will perform with guests, Sleepyhead and Slot, Friday, June 14, at Finney's Pub, 3945 Woodward, Detroit. For information, call 831-8070.
- **JOHNNY 'YARD DOG' JONES**
Johnny 'Yard Dog' Jones will perform Friday, June 14, at the Attic Bar, 11667 Jos Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 365-4194.
- **MIRROR MIRROR**
Mirror Mirror will perform with guests, Standing Shadows, Saturday, June 15, at East Club, 15 Mile and John R. Madison Heights. For information, call 544-1293.
- **ANNE DE DAVIS**
Anne De Davis will perform Saturday, June 15, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **SAXOPHONIST STEVE LACY & HIS SECTET**
Saxophonist Steve Lacy & His Sextet will perform Saturday, June 15, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. For information, call 835-2355.
- **DOG SWING**
Dog Swing will perform with guests, The Dopes, Saturday, June 15, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. For information, call 365-3829.
- **DIFFERENCE**
Difference will have a record release party with guests, Teddy White, Saturday, June 15, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 961-MELT.
- **GEORGE BEDARD AND THE KINGPINS**
George Bedard and the Kingpins will perform Saturday, June 15, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **THE GENERALS**
The Generals will perform with guests, Wa-Ter-Shed, Saturday, June 15, at Finney's Pub, 3945 Woodward, Detroit. For information, call 831-8070.
- **INDIGO GIRLS**
Indigo Girls will perform with guests, The Ellen Jones Society, Saturday, June 15, at Meadow Brook Music Festival at Oakland University in Rochester. Tickets are \$22.50, \$25 and \$12.50. For information, call 370-3310.
- **SOUTHGOING ZAK**
Southgoing Zak will perform Friday, June 14, at the Majestic Theatre, 6140 Woodward, Detroit. For information, call 835-9700. The band will also perform Saturday, June 15, at Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti. For information, call 485-5050.
- **BIG DAVE AND THE ULTRASONICS**
Big Dave and the Ultrasonics will perform Saturday, June 15, at the Other End Lounge, 5855 Monroe, Taylor. For information, call 278-3550.
- **STEVE LACY SECTET**
Steve Lacy Sextet will perform Saturday, June 15, at Alvin's 5756 Cass, Detroit. Tickets are \$12.50 in advance. For information, call 99-MUSIC.
- **UNCLE JESSIE**
Uncle Jessie & 29th Street Blues Band will perform Saturday, June 15, at the Attic Bar, 11667 Jos Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 365-4194.
- **TRASH BRATS**
Trash Brats will perform Saturday, June 15, at Lili's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. For information, call 875-6555.
- **BROKEN YOYO**
Broken Yoyo will perform Saturday, June 15, on the Bobo Moonlight Cruise. The cruise departs the Detroit dock 11 p.m. and returns 1 a.m. For information, call 843-0700 or 843-8800.
- **CONQUERORROOTS**
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REVIEWS

MIGHTY LIKE A ROSE — Elvis Costello

It's hard to believe this guy once made an album called "Get Happy!" "Mighty Like a Rose" is about as far from happy as it gets. The happiest lyrics contained within are "You're still so young/You haven't earned the weariness/That sounds so jaded on your tongue."

But Elvis Costello, rock's reigning lyrical genius, knows that pain is the writer's greatest weapon. As usual, the complex imagery and various verbal concoctions on his latest release are unparalleled.

The record begins with the single, "The Other Side of Summer," an infectious, summery pop song replete with Beach Boys-like falsetto harmonies. But the lyrics are a menagerie of disturbing images, right from the opening, "The sun struggles up another beautiful day/And I feel glad in my own auspicious way." No taste of little old ladies or California girls in this tune.

Other songs smack of bitterness and frustration, and biting sarcasm, a Costello trademark. His sights are trained on his world of nine-to-five in "How to be Dumb." The dramatic chorus with its majestic keyboards harkens back to "Like a Rolling Stone," only the crucial question has changed from "How does it feel to be on your own?" to "Don't you know how to be dumb?"

Especially emotional is the brilliant "So Like Candy," co-written



with Paul McCartney and stamped with that same "For NoOne" brand of helplessness. The stark arrangement of this song, as well as the Spanish-influenced "After the Fall" and the haunting "Broken," emphasizes the bleak themes presented.

The album has its up moments musically. "Playboy to a Man," another McCartney collaboration, is a rocker in true Attractions tradition.

The closing song, "Couldn't Call It Unexpected No. 4," plods along with a semi-polka beat that belies the terrifying images portrayed. It acts as a lyrical apocalypse in the context of the album, ending with the chilling couplet, "Please don't let me fear anything I cannot explain/I can't believe I'll never believe in anything again."

— John Cortez

CEREAL KILLERS — Too Much Joy

No sophomore jinx here. "Cereal Killers," the newest album from those traseable lads from Scarsdale, N.Y., is every bit as sarcastic, intelligent, and fresh as their debut from last year, "Son of Sam I Am."

If anything, Cereal Killers is more balanced than the group's last effort, building on all the groups strengths — catchy lyrics and music, wit and a cavalier approach to life — while retaining the trademark wry insight.

"King of Beers" about being young, getting drunk and hoping tomorrow morning and its accompanying hangover doesn't come is a good example of Too Much Joy's bold mix of wry humor and social observation.

At one point, the group reminds us what being 18 (21 in Michigan), hanging out in bars and living for the moment is all about: "Gonna feel like hell tomorrow/so I won't go to sleep tonight/Na nana na na na sorrow/everything's gonna be alright/I am invincible/I have no fear/I am benevolent/I am the king of beers."

But then, with the insight that comes with experience, Too Much Joy relates: "I love all my friends/I wish they would go away/I say stupid things/Forgotten them all by Monday/Please don't remind me/A man's bar is his castle/And this stool is my throne/Why am I such an a—/e/why am I here alone?" There's ob-



viously more to all this than getting drunk and falling down.

"Good Kill," "Pirates," "Gramatam" and "Thanksgiving in Reno," which present ideas ranging from being bored with everyday existence to the screwing over of Native Americans, are just some noteworthy cuts.

It would be a critique faux pas to not mention "Long Haired Guys From England," about guys who can't get girls cuz they aren't all in foreign rock bands so let's go over there and get some English babes, and the simply titled "Theme Song," perhaps the best theme song since "The Monkees Theme" (this reviewer is probably risking life and limb for mentioning the Monkees and Too Much Joy in the same sentence and hopes this never gets back to the band).

Run, don't walk, to your nearest record store.

— Gerald Frutkay

LOCAL

Here are the top-10 songs on "Detroit Music Scene," which is heard 4-5 p.m. Sundays on WDR-FM 90.9.

1. "Unaffected," Chain Reaction
2. "Nation of Strangers," Cull Heroes
3. "God Fearing Man," Country Bob
4. "Desperation," The Gear
5. "Bored to Tears," Fook
6. "Dumber in Masses," The Grins
7. "Rushing the River," Bruce Ni-
8. "Buy Me a Goose," Grady Hazy
9. "The Road," Generals
10. "All Fall Down," Park the Karma

TOP HITS

Best-selling records of the week.

1. "I Don't Wanna Cry," Mariah Carey
2. "More Than Words," Extreme
3. "Rhythm of My Heart," Rod Stewart
4. "Here We Go," C&C Music Factory
5. "Love Is a Wonderful Thing," Michael Bolton
6. "Rock Me (All Night Long)," Cathy Dennis
7. "I Touch Myself," The Playboys
8. "I Like the Way (The Kissing Game)," Hi-Five
9. "Losing My Religion," R.E.M.
10. "Rush Rush," Paula Abdul

(Source: Cashbox magazine)