



Alligators members guitarist Garrett Kazanowski, vocalist Dave Kramer of Redford, harmonica player Wallin' Dale, drummer Pete Berg of Farmington and bassist Robert "RD" Jones give the blues band an uptown boogie bite.

## 'Gators bring swing to the swamp

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

### SEEING THE SHOW

**Who:** The Alligators and the Detroit Blues Band

**When:** Friday, July 19

**Where:** Chono Park Music Theater, Chono and Atwater, Detroit. Call 393-0066

Kramer and Dale witnessed the lean years of playing the blues in Detroit, starting out together 11 years ago in an outfit called Hound's Tooth Jones.

Four years later, the duo were the founding members of The Alligators. Initially, the group was styled in a rock-blues motif to coincide with the emergence of similar rock-blues artists such as Stevie Ray Vaughan and The Thunderbirds.

AFTER 12 MONTHS into the experiment, the Alligators were disillusioned to find everyone else doing the same. Instead, the band

changed gears to incorporate more of a dance sound.

"The blues was a dance music in the '20s and '30s," says Dale, the appointed musical historian of the band. "You sort of lose that when you go into long, drawn-out solos."

Or as Kazanowski waxes philosophically: "I get depressed at work. I don't play my guitar to get depressed."

Citing the likes of Duke Robillard (member of Rumble of Blues) and T-Bone Walker as influences, a slithering up-tempo guitar sound pours out of both Kazanowski's 175 and his vintage dot-neck 335 Gibson guitars.

Kazanowski is one of three former members of the Progressive Blues Band in the Alligators. Drummer Pete Berg of Farmington and bassist Robert "RD" Jones of St. Clair Shores also played in the Detroit area club favorite.

Kazanowski played rhythm guitar in the Progressive Blues Band for eight years, but he convinced Kramer and Dale he could fill the lead role when the vacancy opened up a year ago.

THE ALLIGATORS swing with a repertoire of originals spiked with a series of obscure covers such as an old New Orleans nugget like "Flatfoot Sam" or a raucous rendition of "The Big Maybelle Tune." Those numbers are culled from Dale's extensive archives.

"Wallin' helps us stretch out by bringing that stuff in," says Kramer, whose daughter has the chicken pox, necessitating a meeting in his back yard.

The band travels extensively around Michigan and Ohio to be heard.

Members say traveling to places like Traverse City or Zalesville, Ohio, provides for some fun rides, especially when Kazanowski starts in with some lore from the pro mat war.

"One time, I met (wrestler) Lord Athol Layton outside behind Cobo Arena when I was a kid. I told him, 'Watch out for that nail! Remember, The Sheik has that nail.' But he got in the ring and then, wham, he got bit with that nail. No, he wouldn't listen to me."

But blues audiences are

## IN CONCERT

● **PARADISE VALLEY JAZZ JAM**  
Paradise Valley Jazz Jam will take place Monday, July 15, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.

● **Y.M.I.**  
Y.M.I. will perform Monday, July 15, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● **CHISEL BROS.**  
Chisel Bros. will perform Tuesday, July 16, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.

● **STRANGE BEDFELLOWS**  
Strange Bedfellows will perform Wednesday, July 17, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **TERRY FARMER AND THE DEADHEAD**  
Terry Farmer and the Deadhead will perform Wednesday, July 17, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● **BRUCE HORNSBY AND THE RANGE**  
Bruce Hornsby and the Range will perform Wednesday, July 17, at Meadow Brook Music Festival in Rochester. For information, call 377-2010.

● **GOD BULLIES**  
God Bullies will perform Wednesday, July 17, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.

● **SPIRAL DANCE**  
Spiral Dance will perform with guest Love Kings, Thursday, July 18, at 3D, 1815 N. Main, Royal Oak. For information, call 589-3344.

● **THE GRINS**  
The Grins will perform with Angry Youth and Skeletons Thursday, July 18, at Paycheck's Lounge, 2322 Canfield, at the corner of Jos Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 872-8934.

● **BIG DAVE AND THE ULTRASONICS**  
Big Dave and the Ultrasonics will perform Thursday, July 18, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● **ASSEMBLY REQUIRED**  
Assembly Required will perform along with Terry Farmer and the Deadhead on Thursday, July 18, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.

● **JONATHAN RICHMAN**  
Jonathan Richman will perform two shows 9 p.m. and midnight Friday, July 19, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit. Tickets are \$11.50. For information, call 832-2355.

● **FRANK ALLISON & THE ODD BOX**  
Frank Allison & the Odd Box will perform Friday, July 19, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **PIT VIPERS**  
Pit Vipers will perform two shows Friday, July 19, at Rick's Keyboard Lounge, 1870 S. Wayne Road, south of Palmer Road, Westland. For information, call 739-9330.

● **BIG TOWN**  
Big Town will perform Friday, July 19, at Moby Dick's, 5452 Schaefer, north of Michigan Avenue, Dearborn. For information, call 581-3650.

● **THE HANNIBALS**  
The Hannibals will perform Friday, July 19, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● **THE ALLIGATORS/DETROIT BLUES BAND**  
The Alligators and the Detroit Blues Band will perform Friday, July 19, at Chono Park Music Theater, Chono and Atwater, Detroit. For information, call 393-0066.

● **POLISH MUSLIMS**  
Polish Muslims will perform with guests, 17 Reasons Why, Friday, July 19, at Paycheck's Lounge, 2322 Canfield, Hamtramck. For information, call 874-0254.

● **3-D INVISIBLES**  
3-D Invisibles will perform Friday, July 19, at Lulu's 21, 2939 Jacob, off Jos Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 875-6555.

● **PAUL VORNHAGEN QUARTET**  
Paul Vornhagen Quartet will perform Friday and Saturday, July 19-20, at Blind of Paradise, 207 E. Ashley, Ann Arbor. For information, call 662-9510.

● **THE FANTASTICS**  
The Fantastics will perform Friday, July 19, on the Bobo Moonlight Cruise. The boat departs 11 p.m. and returns 1 a.m. For information, call 845-0700 or 843-8800.

● **VUDU CHILI**  
Vudu Chili will perform with guests, Splinters, Friday, July 19, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2045 Canfield, off of I-75.

● **SUN MESSENGERS**  
Sun Messengers will perform Friday, July 19, at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn. For information, call 846-1920.

● **REDFORD STEVE & THE DETROIT SPECIAL**  
Redford Steve & the Detroit Special will perform Friday, July 19, at the Attic Bar, 11687 Jos Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 355-4194.

● **NEW FLUSH**  
New Flush will perform with guests, Skin Horse and Plasma Bat, Saturday, July 20, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 874-0254.

● **LEGENDARY PINK DOTS**  
Legendary Pink Dots will perform Saturday, July 20, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 981-MELT.

## Songwriter bags gems with new release

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

### SEEING THE SHOW

**Who:** La Casa Folk Music Series

**When:** Saturday, July 20, 8:30 p.m.

**Where:** Birmingham Unitarian Church, 1651 N. Woodward. Call 540-9031

at night, Michelle Shocked did it, as have a lot of singer-songwriters. The idea is to get in free and enjoy the music. Elwood found himself on

main stage at the festival the next year.

THIS IS perhaps attributable to many things, but most notably a hefty batch of well-crafted songs that had been fermenting for 12 years. Only Elwood didn't choose to reveal them until two years ago.

"I couldn't sit on them anymore," Elwood said in a telephone interview from Dallas with his musical partner, Beth Galiger. Both perform Saturday, July 20, at Birmingham Unitarian Church.

"I went through a lot of personal changes. I went through a divorce. I was definitely drawn into it by the response."

ELWOOD'S WRITING style embraces simplicity, yet is ornate with piercing reflections and syncopated with scrupulous detail. He's not one to wrap songs in vague metaphors, rather letting stories tell themselves.

Each number's authenticity is relayed in Elwood's vocals. He sings in a direct, whispering narrative of a storyteller. The Sheik has that nail. But he got in the ring and then, wham, he got bit with that nail. No, he wouldn't listen to me."

While those trademarks might be synonymous with many songwriters from Austin, Texas, Elwood's work explores divergent styles of music.

His debut release, "Scarcrow's"

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## REVIEWS

### NEVER LOVED ELVIS

#### — The Wonder Stuff

The Wonder Stuff are an English band whose members take pride in not taking themselves too seriously. Don't worry, fellas, we won't either after listening to this wayward effort.

Oh, The Wonder Stuff try to pull the wool over our eyes (or ears in this case). They blast through their pop bubble at breakneck speed in an attempt to insert some sort of immediacy to make their musical statements seem profound. "Never Loved Elvis?" Why not just name this "I Hate Peanut Butter?"

Certainly, The Wonder Stuff must be admired for their humor. They even go to such wisecracking lengths of inviting Mick Glossop, whose previous production credits include Van Morrison and the Waterboys, to mix this bland stew.

Also, former sideman Martin Bell is made into a full-fledged member so he can play fiddle, banjo, mandolin and accordion.



### THE WHEELER TRACKS

#### — The Grins

Remarkably, The Grins recorded 17 songs during a period of 11 months with only Guy Clark and Paul Koppel manning drums, guitars, bass and keyboards. The process included initially recording on eight-tracks and mixing the project to a digital two-track in their home studio.

This is the basis of "The Wheeler Tracks," a rather fanciful collection of pop songs that are delectable in their most rudimentary form. Yet, The Grins reveal far more in an endless stream of pop songs. Despite the self-imposed limitations, (there's only so much two guys can do, you know), The Grins prove one can go above and beyond with the smallest of resources if the idea is right.

The Grins know how to make pop songs bore out in the fact that "The Wheeler Tracks" (Mek Mok Records, Box 610002, Port Huron 48061-0002) is neither derivative or tedious despite numerous offerings. Each number is simple, book-learned and expansive.

Guy Clark sounds a little like a junior Elvis Costello, sometimes muffled. But he's more than able to invoke a plea or a moan when the emotive edge is called for like in the brilliant song like "Old & Rotten."

Yet the guitar-playing is one of the



more endearing qualities of this project. While strident, Clark's strumming is certainly not one-dimensional as he handles a yeoman's load of the guitar playing. On three cuts, "If You Go On," "Wheeler II," and "Wheeler III," he plays all the instruments. When Koppel joins the fray on some of the numbers (he's co-written six songs here), the guitar interplay enhances the effort without being self-indulgent.

Instrumental and vocal economy are the focal points. So, too, is the lyrical content of "The Wheeler Tracks." Not one to mix metaphors, Clark and Koppel usher this project through with an endless batch of rhymes.

And, of course, no pop offering is complete without a few numbers about girls. Only in the doo-wop of "Mary Lou," do The Grins steer dangerously close to throw-away Beach Boy territory. Otherwise, heck, the band scores points there.

After listening to "The Wheeler Tracks," one only wonders what The Grins could do with a full complement of musicians and a big studio.

— Larry O'Connor



### Palace rhythms

Rhythm Corps will perform 7 p.m. Friday, July 19, as part of The Palace of Auburn Hills Summerfest, which takes place Tuesday, July 16, through Sunday, July 21. Other musical acts include 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, July 16, Commodores; 8 p.m. Wednesday, July 17, REO Speedwagon; 8 p.m. Thursday, July 18, Mitch Ryder; 4:30 p.m. Friday, July 19, Archies Anniversary Tour, 3 p.m. Edgar Winter, 9 p.m. Legal Tender and 10 p.m. Winger; 10:30 and 12:30 p.m. Saturday, July 20, Archies Anniversary Tour, 2:30 p.m. Gene Watson, 4 p.m. Ronnie McDowell, 6:30 p.m. Mary McCormack, 8 p.m. Jerry Reed and 9:30 p.m. Vince Gill; and 2 p.m. Sunday, July 21, Bellamy Brothers, 3 p.m. Kim Boyce, 4 p.m. Petra and 6 p.m. Air Supply. For information, call The Palace at 377-0100.

## CUTTING EDGE

Here are 10 releases in "power" rotation on "The Cutting Edge," which is heard daily on CINX-FM 88.7.

1. "Electronic," Electronic
2. "Peggy Sue," Julian Cape
3. "Supernatural," Sleazie & Banbees
4. "Out Time," R.E.M.
5. "Biscuits," Living Colour
6. "Mighty Like a Rose," Elvis Costello
7. "The La," La's
8. "Real Life," Simple Minds
9. "Laughter and Lust," Joe Jackson
10. "Life's Too Short," Marshall Crenshaw

## LOCAL

Here are the top-10 releases on the "Detroit Music Scene," which is heard 4-5 p.m. Sundays on WDET-FM 90.7.

1. "Armageddon," Imitation of Life
2. "Radio Existence," GROY
3. "Wolves at My Doors," Colt Heroes
4. "Live at the Hamtramck Pub," Various artists
5. "Innocent Love," Chris Egan and the Farmers
6. "Dang Me," Country Club at the Blind
7. "Old and Rotten," The Grins
8. "Serenity," Thru's Papa Thru's
9. "Welcome to the Night," Dave Rave
10. "Work Poisons the Mind," The Grays