

STREET BEATS

Cat's
on the
prowlBy Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Forget disoriented felines. Confuse a Cat can leave the human head in perpetual vertigo as well.

The band, aptly named after a skit from "Monty Python's Flying Circus," plays a skittering blend of folk rock, tempered in new music sensibilities.

Lush harmonies waft above plaintive guitar strumming serve to make Confuse a Cat's music somewhat spasmic yet quality seductive. Each number on the band's five-song demo tape is a sealed consciousness.

Quite clear in this, though, is the anti-pretentious, anti-entertainment platform from which they work. For this, Confuse a Cat will gladly display their flaws if it bears the fruit of a good, original song.

There's more than a ring of authenticity when bassist Jenny Gabel says, "We don't write songs to impress people. We don't try to please them. We just come up with what we come up with and hopefully they'll like it."

Gabel sums up things, puts the lug nuts on the wheel of moving thought whereas singer-guitarist Jim Miller's mind is constantly spinning.

The 1987 Livonia Franklin graduate sits with his legs propped up, carefully sipping his coffee and cautiously gauging his responses in the Looney Baker doughnut shop. He's P.C. (perpetually courteous).

"I like cats," Miller said. "I'm allergic to them. They're attracted to me, though, for some reason."

FOR THE record, none of the four members of Confuse a Cat has a feline. Here's the rest of the story.

Confuse a Cat can be traced back to an ad in the Metro Times through which Cathy Connell met Miller in 1988. Together, they wrote songs and added Jenny Gabel. The band worked under the original name of Magpie. The name only lasted for a couple of weeks.

Miller, Connell and Gabel, another



Confuse a Cat, named after a skit from "Monty Python's Flying Circus," includes Jenny Gabel, Jim Miller, Cathy Connell and David Byrd.

'We don't write songs to impress people. We don't try to please them. We just come up with what we come up with and hopefully they'll like it.'

— Jenny Gabel

1987 graduate of Livonia Franklin, continued to write songs and performed acoustically on the streets of Ann Arbor before they found a drummer. David Byrd of Rochester Hills joined on and Confuse a Cat went on the prowl.

So far, the band has primarily gigged as an opening act at such clubs as 3-D, Hamtramck Pub and Cross Street Station.

The neophyte outfit even put in an appearance at the vaunted Old Miami, known as a meeting place of Vietnam veterans where one refrains from mentioning Jane Fonda's name.

In all, Confuse a Cat approaches everything as a learning experience. "Right now, we're just stumbling around," said Miller, who attends Wayne State University. "We're a

young band, trying to find our identity."

EVER SO careful not to betray their influences, Confuse a Cat doesn't leave an accessible trail. Miller mentions he likes the words of Bob Dylan, Elvis Costello, Bono of U2 along with the kinetic distortion of Sonic Youth.

Gabel also teams with Connell occasionally to write the lyrics such as on the rather mesmerizing guitar fractured number, "Ten Green Signs." Miller comes up with a majority of the words, some of which might be described as searching the outer limits of the soul.

On "Shake," one of five songs on the band's demo tape, Miller screeches "shake, shake your pretty thing" while Connell counters with "Fill my mouth up with sand/Suck a pin up my spine/Bring me down one more time."

"I don't try to analyze his writing too much," said Connell, a 1987 graduate of Troy High School.

Miller illustrates the typical new music connoisseur. Wearing an AOR radio fare, he was converted on a camping trip. A friend brought along a batch of tapes of non-WRIF or WLWZ bands, such as the Ramones, and they echoed through the woods. Gabel comes from a classical music background, proficient in the violin, cello and accordion. "She's Our Brian Jones," Miller said.

BUT IT WAS Gabel's brother who handed her bass and an amp with the firm instructions to join a rock'n'roll band. From a creative aspect, she couldn't have made a better choice.

Confuse a Cat spends as much time crafting songs as playing them live. One of the better forums for their disjointed folk-inspired musings turned out to be on the streets of Ann Arbor.

"As far as honing us, it forced us to listen to one another and it pointed out one thing: We needed a drummer," Miller said. "We were all over the place musically."

And now? "You can really see a change in the music since we first started," Gabel said. "It's more polished."

IN CONCERT

● FUGAZI

Monday, Aug. 5 — Fugazi will perform with guests, Gangster Fun, at the Majestic Theatre, 4140 Woodward, Detroit. Doors open at 9 p.m. Cover charge is \$5. For information, call 833-9700.

● JOHNNY WITH AN EYE

Monday, Aug. 5 — Johnny with an Eye will perform at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● CHRIS AND COSEY

Monday, Aug. 5 — Chris and Cosey, who were original members of Throbbing Grisel, will perform at Industry, 15 S. Saginaw, Pontiac. Doors open at 9 p.m. Advance tickets are \$7.50; \$10 at the door. For information, call 334-1988.

● JAM RAG NITE

Monday, Aug. 5 — Hope Orchestra will perform with Cuppa Joe at Net-Work, Groesbeck Road, north of 16 Mile Road. For information, call 465-6833.

● BONNIE RAITT

Tuesday, Aug. 6 — Bonnie Raitt will perform with Chris Isaak at Pine Knob Music Theatre, 1-75 and Sashabaw Road, Clarkston. For information, call 377-8200.

● MOL TRIFFID

Wednesday, Aug. 7 — Mol Triffid will perform with guests, Lunacy, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● URBATIONS

Wednesday, Aug. 7 — Urbations will perform at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● HOPE ORCHESTRA

Thursday, Aug. 8 — Hope Orchestra will perform at 3-D, 1815 N. Main, Royal Oak. For information, call 589-3344.

● ORIENTAL SPAS

Friday, Aug. 9 — Oriental Spas will perform at Todd's in Detroit. For information, call 368-8633.

● ANNE BE DAVIS

Friday, Aug. 9 — Anne Be Davis will perform at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● JOHNNY POWERS

Friday, Aug. 9 — Johnny Powers will perform with the Rhythm Kings at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn. For information, call 846-1920.

● BORN NAKED

Friday, Aug. 9 — Born Naked will perform at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call

996-2747.

● LOUISIANA HEAT

Friday, Aug. 9 — Louisiana Heat will perform at Moby Dicks, 5452 Schaefer, north of Michigan Avenue, Dearborn. For information, call 987-3650.

● DETROIT ALL STAR REUNION

Friday and Saturday, Aug. 9-10 — Detroit All Star Reunion Jazz Band, featuring Jack Brokensha-vibes, Matt Michaels-piano, Dan Jordan-bass and Jerry McKenzie-drums, will perform at Bird of Paradise, 207 S. Ashley, Ann Arbor. Cover is \$5. For information, call 682-8310.

● J.D. LAMB

Friday, Aug. 9 — J.D. Lamb will perform on the Bobo Moonlight Cruise. The boat departs 11 p.m. and returns 1 a.m. For information, call 843-0700 or 843-8800.

● FELA

Friday, Aug. 9 — Fela will perform with his 25-member Egypt 80 ensemble at the Majestic Theatre, 4140 Woodward, Detroit. Doors open at 7 p.m. Tickets at \$15.50 at Ticketmaster, \$18 at the door. For information, call 833-9700.

● BIG DAVE AND THE ULTRASONICS

Saturday, Aug. 10 — Big Dave and the Ultrasonics will perform at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● DETROIT BLUES BAND

Saturday, Aug. 10 — Detroit Blues Band will perform on the Bobo Moonlight Cruise. The boat departs 11 p.m. and returns 1 a.m. For information, call 843-0700 or 843-8800.

● BLUESMATIC

Saturday, Aug. 10 — Bluesmatics will perform at the Station Lounge, 32115 Michigan, west of Merriman Road, Wayne. For information, call 721-3560.

● MISSED IN DIARY

Saturday, Aug. 10 — Missed in Diary will perform with guests, Dusk, at Exit Club, 29461 John R, Madison Heights. For information, call 544-1298.

● GRANFALLOON

Saturday, Aug. 10 — Hope Orchestra and Granfalloon will perform at Lili's, Jacob Street, east of Jos. Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 875-6555.

● DAVE MASON

Sunday, Aug. 11 — Dave Mason will perform an acoustic set at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn. For information, call 846-1920.

'Angel' captures Frame's inspiration

By John Monaghan
special writer

Classmates affectionately call her "Fuzzy." They persuade her to do something, anything with the mop of red hair that crowns her head like a frizzy halo.

But they have no luck. Nor can they force her to "mix" with the rest of the world. Her terminal shyness causes people to label her not just anti-social but schizophrenic.

"An Angel at My Table," the story of New Zealand author Janet Frame, didn't easily translate to the screen. Jane Campion, who directed the critically acclaimed "Sweetie" in 1988, cleverly weaves her way into the mental workings of a creative and intelligent introvert.

Frame, still alive and working today, is played by three different actresses in three separate sections. In "To the Island," we meet her as a child — one of five children of a working class family during the Depression.

tickets please
John Monaghan

She sleeps huddled together in a big bed with three older sisters. Though she spends a fair amount of time standing in the corner at school, she picks up the writing bug early.

We meet the various influences in her life, from her hard-working parents to her teachers, who range from empty authorities to truly inspired educators.

WHEN IT comes time for Frame to enter the world of teaching, she freezes. "Just pretend I'm not here," says the gruff inspector who arrives to sit in on her class. She stares at the blackboard and chalk in her me-

ticularly prepared classroom and can't utter a sound.

A handsome professor, who Frame has a crush on, advises her to enter a hospital for observation. Over the next eight years, Frame undergoes more than 200 jolts of shock therapy. She would have died there if not for her writing, which actually gets published while she suffers in the hospital.

The final section, "The Envoy From Mirror City," finds Frame still shy, still nervous, embarking on a writing trip to England and Spain, sponsored by a literary grant. She reluctantly enters the Bohemian world of affected English-speaking

writers who reside there.

Kerry Fox, in her feature film debut, plays the adult Frame with quiet power and intensity. Though the film does employ voice-over narration, the filmmakers rely on the woman's pained and expressive face. Director Campion opens the film with a shot from high above, craning down into the lives of the Frame family. She bathes these early sequences in darkened, slightly off-key colors, like a faded family photograph.

YET, THIS is not showy filmmaking. Where the bizarre "Sweetie" was favorably compared to the works of David Lynch, "An Angel at My Table" resembles "My Left Foot" for the earthy quality of its storytelling. Campion says she wanted to capture the calculated simplicity of her subject's writing and succeeds brilliantly. Subtle moments stick with you. When the rest of the girls are ecstatic over the atomic bomb blast and the end of World War II, Frame looks on in horror and pain. You catch her gazing longingly at the happy classmates and family members who so easily socialize and find love.

"My only romance is in poetry and literature," she confesses.

Playing for a second weekend at the Detroit Film Theatre, "An Angel at My Table" is the story of one talented, insecure person who doesn't readily fit into society. The story of her inspiration, suffering, and eventual triumph result in the year's most stirring film.

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SCREEN SCENE

GRANDROCK ACADEMY OF ART MUSEUM, DeSalle Auditorium, 500 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills. Call 645-3333 for information. (\$250 museum admission; for adults, \$150 students and senior citizens)

"David Smith: Steel Into Sculpture" (USA — 1983), 2 p.m. Aug. 9 and 11. This hour-long profile of the artist is part of a summer-long video series.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, 5300 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 535-2333 for information. (\$5)

"An Angel at My Table" (USA — 1990), 7 p.m. Aug. 9-10 and 4 and 7 p.m. Aug. 11. From Jane Campion, the director of "Sweetie," comes this moving biography of New Zealand writer Janet Frame, whose terminal shyness was diagnosed as schizophrenia. Despite eight years of hospitalization and shock treatment, she emerged as one of the country's premier authors. Brilliantly done.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 13471 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 843-3330 for information. (free)

"My Favorite Brunette" (USA — 1947), 7 p.m. Aug. 5. When private detective Alan Ladd goes on vacation, baby photographer Bob Hope decides to pick up his case load. Hope's funniest comedy also stars Peter Lorre, Lon Chaney Jr., Dorothy Lamour, and even a surprise appear-

ance by Bing Crosby. As part of a summer series of movie comedies.

LIVONIA MALL, Seven Mile and Middlebelt roads, Livonia. Call 476-1166 for information. (free)

"The Unforgotten" (USA — 1960), 10 a.m. July 22. John Huston directed this says the gruff inspector who arrives to sit in on her class. She stares at the blackboard and chalk in her me-

MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE, 22918 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Call 540-0660 for more information. (\$4)

"The King of Comedy" (USA — 1983), 8 p.m. Aug. 8. Martin Scorsese returns to themes explored in "Taxi Driver" with this study of would-be comic Rupert Pupkin (Robert DeNiro), who longs to guest host on a late night talk show. Amazing performances by Jerry Lewis (basically playing Johnny Carson) and Sandra Bernhard as a disturbed fan. As part of a series called "Personal Favorites," hosted by WDET disc jockey Dave Dixon.

REDFORD THEATRE, 17360 Laker, Detroit. Call 537-2340 for information. (\$2.50)

"Words and Music" (USA — 1948), 8 p.m. Aug. 9-10 (organ overture), 7:30 p.m. The lives of Rodgers and Hart are



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