

Monday, September 18, 1991 O&E

Blake Babies just rock away

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

All John Poole Strohm asks is that you don't judge his band by its cover.

On the Blake Babies' latest EP, "Rosy Jack World," is a backhanded rendition of the Grass Roots' chestnut "Temptation Eyes." The song is slick, non-threatening and by all means radio friendly.

"I guess I'm a little embarrassed," said Strohm, who is the guitarist in the three-member band. "It's so pop, it's so..."

Undoubtedly, the Boston-based trio is indeed a pop band, but not one to express carefree sentiments and teary-eyed laments in a banal fashion.

Using strident guitar-driven melodies backed by irregular bass beats, the Blake Babies are mostly about contradiction.

A voice so sweet, so ethereal as Juliana Hatfield shouldn't be allowed to sing about such sad themes as unfulfilling relationships and uncompromising personal politics. She possesses all the vocal innocence of The Sundays' Harriet Wheeler with the flippancy attitude of Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon.

Guitarist Strohm can seem totally at ease within the confines of a simple pop melody only to turn to a dissonant snarl at the slightest provocation. Drummer Freda Love's loud percussion only punctuates the unharmonious moments.

BY AND large, the Blake Babies and bands of their ilk offer pop's only salvation. In a time when the genre is sadly synonymous with the falseness of Milli Vanilli, the flamboyance of Madonna and the repetitiveness of R.E.M. clones, the Babies disruptive pop musings are rather rapturous.

Strohm said it's all about striking the delicate balance between the scenery pop music offers and the disturbing images of real life. "It comes really natural," said Strohm who shares songwriting duties with Hatfield. "We're all really into pop music, but the pop you hear on the radio but by the concept of making pop songs."

"Earwig" was the band's first release on the North Carolina-based independent Mammoth Records in 1989 and abounds with cutting edge pop. The band put out two EPs previous to "Earwig," including "Slow Learner" released on Billy Bragg's Ullully label in England.

From the group's inception when Strohm and Love met up with Hatfield at Berklee School six years ago, the mission has been to write songs chronicling some of life's bitter experiences. The band's been on a tear since.

"Earwig" was followed 10 months later with "Sunburn," which was produced by Gary Smith (Pixies, Chills and Connells). In that time, the band toured virtually non-stop.

INITIALLY, the Blake Babies had difficulties performing live on a consistent basis. Strohm attributed the problem of transforming the anger that fuels songs such as "I'm Not Your Mother" on stage.

Smith has been able to capture that intensity in the studio, especially during the "Sunburn" sessions at Fort Apache in Cambridge, Mass. The bulk of "Rosy Jack World" was called during that time. Smith has played a large role in helping mold the ideas of a band that was languishing on the club circuit.

"In a sense he (Smith) discovered us," Strohm said. "He sort of took us in and funded it. He gave us free time in his studio at Fort Apache. He basically saved our ass."

Then again, it was Smith's insistence the Blake Babies record "Temptation Eyes." Strohm said none of the band members knew of the number until Smith brought a copy in and played the single for them. The group also covers Dinosaur Jr.'s "Covered Lips" on "Rosy Jack World."

"I wouldn't like to be known for one song," Strohm said. "I would like for people who bought our records to get into them and listen to them."

For those familiar with the Blake Babies' work, the ruse of "Temptation Eyes" will be easily seen. To that Strohm said, "I hope

Under these circumstances, she is compelled to take any man, even if she then becomes a victim. When one is weak and dependent, a bully looks strong. This is an illusion. If bullies were strong, they wouldn't have to oppress others.

I agree with the woman from HAVEN, our social institutions need to change. But that is only part of the story. The other part is that victims must change, too. None of us should accept a complete lack of control for our own welfare.

If you have a question of comment for Barbara Schiff, a trained therapist and experienced counselor, send it to Street Sense, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

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The Boston-based Blake Babies — John Poole Strohm, Juliana Hatfield and Freda Love — offer disruptive musical musings that are rather rapturous at a time when pop is synonymous with the falseness of Milli Vanilli.

Blake Babies will perform Friday, Sept. 20, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.

IN CONCERT

● **VISION**
Monday, Sept. 18 — Vision will perform at Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross St., Ypsilanti. For information, call 485-5050.

● **WILD KINGDOM**
Monday, Sept. 18 — Wild Kingdom will perform at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● **PARADISE VALLEY JAZZ JAM**
Monday, Sept. 18 — Paradise Valley Jazz Jam will take place at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across Wayne State University, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.

● **THE ATTIC**
Tuesday, Sept. 17 — The Attic will perform at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● **CHISEL BROS.**
Tuesday, Sept. 17 — Chisel Bros. will perform at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across Wayne State University, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.

● **DAVID CASSIDY**
Tuesday, Sept. 18 — David Cassidy, formerly of the Partridge Family, will perform at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across Wayne State University, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.

● **HANNIBALS**
Wednesday, Sept. 18 — Hannibals will perform at the Blind Pig, 308 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **TRINIDAD TRIPOLI STEEL BAND**
Thursday and Friday, Sept. 19-20 — Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band will perform at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● **WILD KINGDOM**
Thursday, Sept. 19 — Wild Kingdom will perform at Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross St., Ypsilanti. For information, call 485-5050.

● **DONALD WALDEN**
Thursday-Sunday, Sept. 19-22 — Donald Walden and The Monk Dynasty will perform at Baker's Keyboard, 2010 Livernois, Detroit. For information, call 864-1200 or 864-1201.

● **DETROIT BLUES BAND**
Friday, Sept. 20 — Detroit Blues Band will perform at the Blind Pig, 308 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **LIBERTINES**
Friday and Saturday, Sept. 20-21 — Libertines will perform at 20th Century Bar, 22759 Van Dyke, Warren. For information, call 757-9847.

● **MISSIONARY STEW**
Friday, Sept. 20 — Missionary Stew will perform at Lili's 21, 2930 Jacob, off Jos. Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 875-6555.

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● **DAVID HALLEY, TOM PACIOREK, RICHARD DOBSON AND STATE OF THE HEART**
Friday, Sept. 20 — David Halley, Tom Paciorek, Richard Dobson and State of the Heart will perform 8 p.m. at Birmingham Unitarian Church, 631 N. Woodward. For information, call 540-9931.

● **BLAKE BABIES**
Friday, Sept. 20 — Blake Babies will perform 10 p.m. at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across Wayne State University, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.

● **CROWDED HOUSE**
Friday, Sept. 20 — Crowded House with Richard Thompson will perform in Clubland at the State Theatre, Detroit. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$18.50 in advance at TicketMaster locations or Clutch Cargo in Royal Oak. For information, call 963-7237.

● **BLACK MALL**
Friday, Sept. 20 — Black Mall and Elther Way Party Dies will perform at Flanery's Pub, 3565 Woodward Ave., Detroit. For information, call 831-8070.

● **BILL HEID TRIO**
Friday and Saturday, Sept. 20-21 — Bill Heid Trio will perform at Bird of Paradise, 107 S. Ashley, Ann Arbor. Cover is \$5. For information, call 962-8310.

● **URBATIONS**
Friday, Sept. 20 — Urbations will perform at Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross St., Ypsilanti. For information, call 485-5050.

● **ROBERT PENN**
Friday and Saturday, Sept. 20-21 — Robert Penn will perform at Moby Dick's, 3452 Schaefer, Dearborn. For information, call 581-3650.

● **PATO BANTON**
Saturday, Sept. 21 — Pato Banton will perform at the Blind Pig, 308 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● **THE DIFFERENCE**
Saturday, Sept. 21 — The Difference will perform at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● **SOUTHGONG ZAK**
Saturday, Sept. 21 — Southgong Zak will perform at Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross St., Ypsilanti. For information, call 485-5050.

● **PARK THE KARMA**
Saturday, Sept. 21 — Park the Karma will perform at Lili's 21, 2930 Jacob, off Jos. Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 875-6555.

STREET SENSE

What's luck got to do with abuse?

Dear Readers:

On a recent cable show, I interviewed the public relations director of HAVEN (Help Against Violent Encounters Now). HAVEN is an Oakland County facility which provides protection and guidance to women and children from abusive home environments.

One of the questions I asked the director was what personality characteristics are shared by women who feel trapped in abusive relationships. She was emphatic in her denial that any exist. She said that any woman could find herself in an abusive relationship and that these are social problems, not individual ones and so must be cured through our social institutions, for example, the courts, police.

Coming as I do from a position of self-problem solving, I found the one-sidedness of her statements difficult to accept. When I asked her if it was "just luck" that trapped these women, she didn't answer. I assume she saw, but could not respond to, the confusion in her thinking.

Now I want to tell you about another woman. After dating a man for a month, he became very possessive when she broke up with him. He then became enraged, beat her up and

would not stop calling her. At first she was very frightened; she did not take his calls and avoided any of the places where they might meet. Her parents and I warned her that he was dangerous and that she must avoid him at all costs.

HE WROTE her letters of apology, professing love and devotion. It has been about two months since the blow-up. Last week, she saw him, by chance, at a place they both frequent. He wanted her to "just talk" to him. He seemed nervous and concerned about her.

She mustered a lot of will power and managed to stay away from him, but her sentiments had changed. She told me she doesn't want to hate him; it feels bad to hate him. She wants to forgive him. After all, he didn't really have malicious intent when he hit her, he momentarily lost control.

She is not perfect either. She worries that if he asks her to spend a little time with him, only as friends, she will not be able to give an excuse without hurting his feelings.

If the woman I am describing starts seeing this man again and possibly turns up at HAVEN, will it be called luck? Perhaps, one could call their initial meeting luck. Even their first few dates might be attributed to fate. But after that, the signs of his possessiveness were already present and shouldn't any reasonable person be aware that he is dangerous after he became violent?

This is a woman who holds a job and supports herself. By outward appearances, she is a reasonable person. Why then can she not completely break off the relationship? It is irrational to say it is because of luck.

SHE HAS not been able to separate, unambiguously, the abusive emotionally she needs him. She is a woman of low self-esteem who can't get along on her own. It may look to the casual observer that she can, but that is not her reality. Her reality is fear of separateness or aloneness.

Under these circumstances, she is compelled to take any man, even if she then becomes a victim. When one is weak and dependent, a bully looks strong. This is an illusion. If bullies were strong, they wouldn't have to oppress others.

I agree with the woman from HAVEN, our social institutions need to change. But that is only part of the story. The other part is that victims must change, too. None of us should accept a complete lack of control for our own welfare.

If you have a question of comment for Barbara Schiff, a trained therapist and experienced counselor, send it to Street Sense, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

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