



photos by BILL HANSEN

A suited-up Ron Austin signals a greeting while waiting for the next person to do a bungee jump promotion he set up for the Baja Club in Detroit.

Being seen pays off for Ron Austin

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

One chess stick down and four to go. Some 1 1/2 hours later, a few dairy-produced deep fried bits remain on Ron Austin's plate.

The time is filled up talking about himself. There's plenty to talk about.

After all, how many people can say they've been run over by a 3,200-pound Jeep, had a tug-of-war with a 180-horsepower single engine airplane, towed a 30-ton riverboat while swimming and, yes, ran a marathon backwards.

Skydiving and bungee jumping, all of which Austin has done, seem passe by comparison.

Osten, Austin has pulled off such daring feats in the name of charity. He runs off a list of causes he's helped raise money for, such as the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association.

The 1975 graduate of Garden City West High School is part



A jumper dangles above the streets of Detroit after taking Austin up on his bungee jumping offer.

Houdini, P.T. Barnum, Jack LaLaine and even Dr. Spock, dispensing advice for today's disenfranchised youth.

"If you stay in a group," he says, "you lose your identity."

ON THIS day, the stunt man is contemplating putting on a mock disaster drill to drum up publicity for one of his clients in his burgeoning public relations firm of Austin Public Relations.

His diverse roster of clients includes an athletic club, a real estate outfit and a couple of musical groups.

"I can get your attention," said Austin, who lives with his wife, Sheila in Franklin. "I can talk about any subject."

In many ways, Austin is a throwback to the nostalgic days of public relations before the sound bites of TV news.

Then acts of publicity would be designed to elicit a good photo-opportunity in the halcyon days of the newspaper business. Today, there's the immediacy of electronic media.

His stunts have been chronicled in national publications like USA Today and the Wall Street Journal.

Austin's methods make him somewhat a maverick in the often stultified corporate PR world where faces and power lunches are the norm.

But Austin's desire to be the focal point transcends the public relations business.

LISA FISCO, a producer of "Kelly Co.," can usually count on a phone call from Austin. He's been a guest on the morning talk show for such topics as prenuptial agreements and male vanity.

"He calls when he sees a topic that intrigues him," Fisco said. "He says, 'I did that.'"

"I told him we were having a show on male vanity. He said, 'That fits me perfectly. I said, 'No kidding.'"

Fisco hastens to add Austin's non-stop energy and sense of humor is rather refreshing.

"I don't know where he comes up with his ideas," she said. "He's so creative. He comes up with stuff I've never heard before."

Initially, Austin flirted with feats of endurance while at the YMCA in Williamsport, Pa. He remembers swimming a one mile logging river for 15 miles in a benefit for the March of Dimes, including treacherous rapids for the last five.

At the finish, there were 200 people to greet him.

"I started crying," he said.

"There were all these people to welcome me. I thought, 'This feels good.'"

IT WAS so good, Austin refused

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Pacheco: Perfect musical match

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

A restless spirit carries Tom Pacheco, and his songs mirror his journey.

For a songwriter who's claimed Woodstock, Nashville, Austin and, currently, Dublin, Ireland, as his home, Pacheco's work covers a wide variety of themes from desperation to isolation, all rooted in a vivid folk narrative and matched with an uncanny sense of melody.

"I'm kind of happy I've lived in a lot of places," said Pacheco in a telephone interview from Dublin. "By staying in one place too long you tend to get into that whole sound. When you live in Texas, you tend to think of Texas as the whole world, which is a little provincial. It's the same if you stay in New York too long or live in California."

Each place has its own musical influence, something special about it. I've tried to absorb all the various influences into my music."

His last album, "Sunflowers & Scarecrows," (Round Tower) features an array of eloquent postcards from people met on the road as well as anti-war numbers such as "Merchant of Death." Self-admittedly, Pacheco's effort was "overdone" in parts but aptly captures the inspirational story/songwriting style he possesses.

AFTER HIS performance Friday, April 3, at the La Casa Folk Music Series in Birmingham Unitarian Church, Pacheco will fly to Nashville to record "Tales from the Red Lake."

Pacheco feels his third album (to be released in September) will be much like his first, "Eagle in the Rain," a critically acclaimed effort released in 1990 on Round Tower, to do despair with "Robert Kennedy" and featuring his very sense of embellishment with "Jesus in a Black Leather Jacket."

On his new album, there will be a tale of what became of the alleged second gunman in the Kennedy assassination, "Jessica Brown," and one rather unconventional narrative about a woman biker and a New York cop falling in love.



Tom Pacheco has lived in many places and his vivid folk narrative and uncanny sense of songs covers wide variety of themes, rooted in melody.

Pacheco lives in a place where a good tale is still much appreciated, often told by a turf fire over some potoken or like substance. He moved to Ireland in 1987 after an Irishman he met in New York invited him to tour there.

"I moved to Nashville for awhile and I pretty much hated it," Pacheco said. "I was chomping at the bit to get out. Songwriting in Nashville is dull, totally banal. Most of it is verse-chorus-verse-chorus, 'bridge and out. It's usually dull love songs most of the time. I thought, 'Oh, god, I've ended up my life here.' I couldn't imagine sitting in a cubicle somewhere with three or four other songwriters turning out songs like that."

AFTER A THREE-week tour of Eire, Pacheco had no thoughts of returning. He's taken up residence in the southside of Dublin where Eng-

land, Scotland and the rest of Europe are accessible for touring.

Receptive audiences made the transformation to a new country much easier. Pacheco has often found himself performing before younger crowds, seeing as nearly half the population of Ireland is 25 or younger.

"In terms of songwriting, there's so many great writers who've come out of this country," he said. "There's such an emphasis on writing, on poetry and on the arts. Especially coming from Nashville where most people just talk about football and basketball and Baptist stuff. It was great to come to Ireland where the people are interested in the arts."

The art of writing songs, though, is universal. Pacheco uses the process of matching an idea with a melody and then filling in the words later. His craft has evolved through the

years as have his travels. "It's almost like writing a screenplay," he said. "The average screen play is 120 pages or so. Usually, there's a minute of film per page. Every 15 minutes, you have to write something to keep it moving forward. It's sort of the same thing in story songwriting. It's keeping the interest up and keeping the flow going."

"Most stories should have a beginning, middle and an end... and hopefully the melody to match the words."

Tom Pacheco will perform at 8:30 p.m. Friday, April 3, at La Casa Music Series at Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 N. Woodward, northeast corner of Lone Pine and Woodward. Advance tickets are \$10, \$12 at the door. For information, call 646-4950.

Marillion is rocking with a message

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Marillion is an arena rock act sure and true. Songs are simple, written in a strict, hard rock motif that ask few questions.

"A song has to be saying something," said vocalist Steve Hogarth, who leads band performs Friday, April 3, at the Ritz. "It has to be conveying an emotion and painting a picture. It has to paint a picture musically as well as paint one lyrically."

"Above all else it has to be honest."

Such a credo won't land them on the cover of Melody Maker, cause upheaval in the alternative scene or rattle the myopic radio programmer. A cynic might even dismiss such statements of virtue to insincerity.

Somebody must be buying it, though. It's hard to scoff at a European sales figure of 600,000 of their latest album "Holidays in Eden" or write off an outfit that's lasted nearly 10 years and even endured a change in lead singers, from Fish to Hogarth, in that span.

Perhaps there's a vulnerability that leads to

Marillion's durability. Hogarth, who replaced Fish in 1988, has a soft yearning singing style that puts an emotional attachment to his songs.

"MANY NUMBERS" on "Holidays in Eden" speak of voids and personal longing, which Hogarth said were culled from nearly three years of touring after the 1989 "Season's End" album.

"Half of the time, we seemed to be saying goodbye to people for months on end," said Hogarth, who wrote a majority of the numbers on the "Holidays in Eden." "I was trying to put my finger on it. I felt a bit distanced spiritually. It was something nagging me."

Hogarth's vocal ability is somewhat easier to retrace. Although he had no formal vocal training, he did sing in school choirs in his native England. His singing hero was John Lennon, whose honesty as a singer appealed to him more than the former Beatle's vocal range. Likewise, he gets the same "buzz" listening to R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe and solo artist Michael Bolton.

His schooling in the rock arena included stints with English bands How We Live and Europeans before joining Marillion. The group already had

established itself with several albums, including one under the band's original moniker of Silmarillion in 1983 "Script for a Jester's Tear."

Marillion made its American debut in 1985 with "Misplaced Childhood," which was both critically and commercially successful as a concept album featuring the hit single "Koyote."

Hogarth had little trouble accepting as a replacement for Fish, writing half of the songs for "Season's End." Fans seemingly accepted the change in frontmen as well.

Then again, Hogarth is a believable sort. "If you stick a politician in front of a TV camera, you can tell if they're lying," Hogarth said. "Maybe it's something we should remember as people. You should look them in the eye and ask yourself, 'Can I believe this?'"

"I think people can generally tell if people are being honest or not."

Marillion will perform Friday, April 3, at The Ritz, 17380 Frazho, 10 1/2 Mile and Gratiot, Roseville. Tickets are \$5 advance, \$7 at the door. For information, call 778-8150.

IN CONCERT

Monday, March 30

- Bruce Cockburn With Sam Phillips at The Gem Theatre, 58 E. Columbia St., Detroit. Tickets are \$21.50 in advance.
- Sunrise Highway Rick's American Pub, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 996-2747

Tuesday, March 31

- Ugly Stick With Cracker Box at Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. 996-8555
- Jerry Sprague Rick's American Pub, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 996-2747
- Bedou Watanabe The Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main, Ann Arbor. 761-1451

Wednesday, April 1

- Love Battery Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. 996-8555

- Rory Black The Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main St., Ann Arbor. 761-1800
- Tequila Mocking Birds Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 996-2747

Thursday, April 2

- Gangster Fun With Groove Spoon at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. 996-8555
- Jan Krist The Ark, 347 1/2 S. Main St., Ann Arbor. 761-1800
- With the Difference at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 996-2747

Friday, April 3

- Tom Pacheco The Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 N. Woodward, corner of Lone Pine and Woodward. Tickets are \$10 in advance, \$12 at the door. 646-4500
- In Their Own Words With Midge Ure, Darden Smith, Chip Taylor, Rosie Flores and Dee Henry at The Gem Theatre, 58 E. Columbia, Detroit. Tickets are \$18.50 in advance and \$21.50 at the door. 961-5451

- Van Halen With Hardline at The Palace, 3 Champaign Drive, Auburn Hills. Tickets are \$22.50 reserved, \$77-0100
- Teresa Trull & Barbara Higbie Reunion Tour The Ark, 347 1/2 S. Main St., Ann Arbor. Show times 7:30 and 10 p.m. 761-1800
- Nuth'n Personal With Joe Long at Hamtramck Pub, 2018 Caniff, off I-75. 363-3829
- Grady Hazy With Bright Black at Lill's 21, 2330 Jacob, Hamtramck. 875-6555
- Detroit Blues Band Murdoch's, 2688 Crooks Road, north of M-59, Rochester Hills. 832-6550
- Southgoing Zak With Misionary Stew at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. 996-8555
- Lonnie Brooks Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 996-2747

Saturday, April 4

- Van Halen With Hardline at The Palace, 3 Champaign Drive, Auburn Hills. Tickets are \$22.50 reserved, \$77-0100
- Karen Finley Michigan Theatre, 603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Tickets are \$18.50 996-MUSIC
- Robert Earl Keen Jr. The Ark, 347 1/2 S. Main, Ann Arbor. Show times 7:30 and 10 p.m. 761-1800
- Beer on the Penguin With Mirror Mirror at the Hamtramck Pub, 2018 Caniff, off I-75. 363-3929
- A Fist Full of Chaos 7000 E. Seven Mile Road, east of Van Dyke Road, Detroit. Admission is \$5. 366-8633
- Trash Brats With Poltermans at Lill's 21, 2330 Jacob, Hamtramck. 875-6555
- Detroit Blues Band Murdoch's, 2688 Crooks Road, north of M-59, Rochester Hills. 832-6550
- The Samples Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. 996-8555
- The Huntones Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 996-2747