

STREET SCENE

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left of center

Jill Hamilton

Forget tube time, go for the games

(This column is dedicated to the memory of William Fleckwith, my uncle, who died in a plane crash. He was 48 years old and one heck dude.)

Well, it's April so it's probably raining or snowing outside and, for some reason, watching the sit-coms on Channel 50 doesn't sound as interesting as it usually does. So what are you going to do with yourself?

Have some fun, of course. And, being the vigilant amusement purchaser that I am, I've gone to great trouble of previewing some diversions for all you music-loving modern children out there. Here are three vaguely music-related pursuits that you might want to check out:

Play It by Ear — The First CD Game. This game is the "Trivial Pursuit" of the 1990s and for good reason. It's a heck of a lot like "Trivial Pursuit."

As the name implies, the game has something to do with CDs. Instead of reading clues from a card, you hear the clues on a CD filled with sound clips from movies, news broadcasts, animal noises, musical instruments and the like. You answer questions that range from the obvious to ridiculously obscure.

If trivia's not your bag, there's also tongue twisters, short-term memory tests and maddeningly detailed short stories for listen comprehension. If it sounds a bit SAT-like to you, fear not. It really isn't and it's a lot of fun.

Next time out they should make a game with video clues.

"Hit Men" (Freddie Dannen, Vintage Books, 1990). If you've ever wondered how in the heck a song like "I Wanna Be a Cowboy" (by Boys Don't Cry, if you're a trivia buff) ever became a big hit, let alone even made it to the airwaves, you'll find all the answers in this revealing little book. The answer in a word — payola.

"Hit Men" is a behind-the-scenes look at the sordid inner workings of the music business. Dannen explains how record companies have huge budgets set up to pay the folks who can make sure certain songs get played on the radio.

In the past, it was as simple as that — pay for play. But since the publication of the book, things are looking up. Radio is no longer the only force to be reckoned with and the payola tradition may die a natural death.

Hits by radio-shunned artists like Enya, Metallica and Nirvana may shake things up enough so the people

will finally get to choose what makes it and what doesn't.

"All You Need to Know About the Music Business" (Donald S. Passman, Prentice Hall Press, 1991). This book is a must for fledgling musicians and a good read for people who are interested in the music biz.

Passman, an entertainment attorney, focuses on the legal side of the business and talk about the various ways that record companies can weasel money out of their artists.

For example, guess who pays for those gilly record company record release parties? The artist. The expensive catered food backstage? The artist.

You get the idea. Armed with this primer, you'll be ready to negotiate with style in no time.

These Are a Few of My Favorite Things. Last month we inadvertently omitted an invitation for you to submit a list of your most hated bothersome practices, so this month you get another chance. This time, we'll be a bit cheerier and offer you another topic to ponder — favorite things.

So, you have two choices — to send a list of (1) things that float your boat and make life worth living or (2) things that make you steaming mad to Left of Center, 35251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

If your list is somewhat coherent, I'll print it. If it's really splendid, I'll send you an as-of-yet undetermined CD. Here's my own list to give you an idea.

Jerry Brown ... free videos at the library ... **Matt Groening** ... Ren and Stimpy ... **comedian Jake Johansen** ... surrealism ... **Woody Allen** ... MTV News ... **Utne Reader** ... parks ... **Albert Brooks** ... street musicians ... **Sinead O'Connor** ... old couples who still hold hands

Getting mail ... kids who make their parents recycle ... **Orbit magazine** ... "Why Things Are" in the Free Press ... **crossword puzzle makers Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon** ... **Michael Stipe** ... **Cynthia Heinel** ... **Gandhi** ... **Edward Munch's "The Scream"** ... **Gaines magazine** ... **Carrie Fisher**

Dave Barry ... **Aldous Huxley** ... **Mike Duffy** ... "Entertainment Tonight" ... **Sassy magazine** ... **Greenpeace** ... **Java lights** ... **Constance Ni-top** ... **Crabcrust** ... **the Majestic Theatre** ... singing loudly in the car ... **Pink Floyd's "The Wall"** ... **Jimmi Hendrix** ... **Bill Shapiro's "Cypress Avenue"** ... and high school radio stations.



Creating the sounds that are solely Machines of Loving Grace are lead vocalist Scott Benzol, keyboardist Mike Fisher and guitarist Stuart Kupers.

Machines mix techno, emotion

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

On their self-titled debut album, Machines of Loving Grace cut a swath through the genres of hard-core techno, thumping funk and pastoral acoustic guitar pieces.

In their wake, lead vocalist Scott Benzol wants to mold a sound from debris left behind. "This record was an experimental process from the beginning," Benzol said. "Essentially, it was Mike (Fisher, keyboardist), Stuart (Kupers, guitarist) myself in the studio trying to define our sound."

They're bored, quite frankly. At least with the direction industrial music has taken in the last few years. Electronically driven bands such as Skinny Puppy and Nine-Inch Nails are veering off into their own domain while those left behind are implacably mass-producing repetitive, multi-beat dirges.

Machines of Loving Grace obviously refuse to get caught in the vortex. Their direction continually spins like a weather vane during a dust storm.

If a common thread does pierce the band's nine-song course on Mammoth Records' *Machines of Loving Grace* is the way of turning cold, hard rhythms into sensual, glowing numbers.

This reveals itself in overt fashion on the shimmering acoustic guitar piece "Circellina" or the amorously driven funk of "Rite of Shiva."

YET THE sampling in number "Content" and the drum machine beats in "Terminal City" don't

'There's always a tension occurring between the two. We like electronics a lot obviously and we want to incorporate them into the songs.'

— Scott Benzol

construct electronic impenetrable walls of sound. Instead, technofunk offers an uneasy bridge between machine precision and human fallibility.

"There's always a tension occurring between the two," Benzol said. "We like electronics a lot obviously and we want to incorporate them into the songs. On the other hand, a lot of hard techno stuff is pretty devoid of human intellect and emotion."

"What we try to do is add those things."

On this tour, Machines of Loving Grace has added drummer Brad Kemp and bassist Andrew Stewart to accentuate the human element of their music. The band's sound has always contained an amiable personality, though.

Kupers' guitar playing can be psychedelic to plaintive while Fisher's keyboards circulate

through the whole body of music rather than bludgeoning it through the ground.

Then there's Benzol's vocals, which can reveal fascination and vulnerability, as opposed to uttering chants to march in cadence to.

Lyrical, Benzol said he's inspired by lines from a novel or a movie: "Rite of Shiva," for example, was derived from a passage in a Robert Anton Wilson novel about a cult ritual.

THE SONG caught the attention of Nine-Inch Nails creator Trent Reznor, who might produce the band's next album. In the interim, Reznor remixed Machines' of Loving Grace's "Burn Like Brilliant Trash (At Jackie's Funeral)," a rather ornery lament about the death of the American dream inspired by John F. Kennedy's Camelot.

Reznor's four versions of the same number radiate the anger, creating a visceral tombstone for the vision held in the '60s.

"You'll notice the chorus is really stripped down compared to our version," Benzol said. "He just stripped it down and strengthened it a lot. He got some harder sounds in theirs, they've got some drum riffs going. He also added a keyboard bit to it that is subtle but adds a nice feel to it. We feel it fits the core of the song."

As for the song, "Rite of Shiva," that initially attracted Reznor to Machines' of Loving Grace? "I don't why he liked it," Benzol said. "Maybe he thought it was demotivated."

Machines of Loving Grace will perform Saturday, May 2, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 961-MELT.

Grazing in tuneless 'pasture'

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

The Holy Cows are very much a Midwestern band. What, you ask, constitutes such a distinction?

Well, a Midwest address helps for starters. From there, it's open to interpretation really.

"We grew up in a rural area and we listened to a variety of music," said vocalist and bassist Michael Feeney, whose band calls Chetsoa, Mich., home. "And we wear flannel shirts."

In the Holy Cows' case, though, there's more to it than just wearing fashions appropriate for the cover of Farm Boy Monthly. Perhaps it's the manner that the band tackles its craft on the album "Get Along" (Picnic Horn) in blistering, yeanlike fashion.

Maybe it's the Holy Cows' sound, which incorporates seminal rock'n'roll plundering with inflections of folk, bluegrass and country.

Then there's the way the band writes songs, taking the seeds of an



Maybe it's a reflection of the rural area they call home, but The Holy Cows has been able to

incorporate rock'n'roll with inflections of folk, bluegrass and country.

idea and cultivating them over an extended period of time in their garage studio and then shucking them back to their exposed richness.

Trust us, this is a Midwestern band.

THEIR SECOND nationwide release, a nine-song offering, is an expedition down a dirt road, creating a timeless and pastoral mood. The title track "Get Along" thumps along languidly and speaks to the heart of a broken relationship.

Feeney, who writes the lyrics for the Holy Cows, said the three-minute number is his favorite on the album. "I wrote it while going through a difficult period of getting over a dif-

ficult relationship," Feeney said. "It was one of those turbulent times where you can't understand why it happened ... (the song) made it easier to understand what I couldn't understand."

Which was? "Really what it boiled down to is we didn't get along. You can't attribute it to anyone particular circumstance. It's just a fact itself."

"I don't think it's going to replace Plato or anything."

The Holy Cows didn't set out nearly five years ago to replace Greek philosophy. Rather, the band simply wanted to play unadorned rock'n'roll passionately and forever.

Initially, drummer Mike Popovich

said the Replacements were an influence — but not anymore.

"They've gotten worse," Popovich said. "We've gotten better."

THE HOLY COWS of late have become somewhat entranced with the '70s Southern rock of the Allman Brothers and Lynyrd Skynyrd as well as roots music, such as bluegrass and country, according to Popovich.

Only in the number "We Never Waltz," a country twang-drenched number, do those influences fully reveal themselves.

The Holy Cows perform Monday, May 4, at The Ritz, 17550 Frusha Road, Livestock. For information, call 778-4150.

IN CONCERT

Monday, April 28

● **Born Naked**
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2747
● **Paradise Valley Jazz Jam**
Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit.
432-2335

Tuesday, April 28

● **Jerry Sprague and the Juveniles**
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2747
● **Elchea-Skelch**
Benefit for Tennent's Union at Blind Pig, 206 S. First, Ann Arbor.
996-8555
● **Chris Proctor**
The Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main, Ann Arbor.
761-1451
● **Chisel Bros. with Thornetta Davis**
Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit.
432-2335

Wednesday, April 29

● **Frank Allison & the Odd Box**
Blind Pig, 206 S. First, Ann Arbor.
996-8555
● **Urbanation**
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2747
● **Flor de Cane**
The Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main, Ann Arbor.
761-1451
● **Cowboy Junkies**
With John Prime, at Royal Oak Music

Theatre, 318 W. Fourth. Reserved seats are \$22.50.
95-MU/STP

Thursday, April 30

● **Mick Vranich & Word Band**
Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit.
432-2335
● **Jerry Sprague and the Juveniles**
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2747
● **The Wishing Field**
Blind Pig, 206 S. First, Ann Arbor.
996-8555
● **Marie-Lynne Hammond**
The Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main, Ann Arbor.
761-1451

Friday, May 1

● **Hannibal**
Blind Pig, 206 S. First, Ann Arbor.
996-8555
● **Blur**
St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit.
961-MELT
● **Strange Bedfellows**
With the Opaque and Legion Hall at Paycheck's, 2920 Canfield, off Jos. Campus.
874-0254
● **Attila**
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2747
● **Ten Lost Tribes**
With Moisture at Hamtramck Pub, 2018 Canfield, off I-75.
363-3529

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