

# Street SCENING

Making a debut: The Ann Arbor-based Big Chief has proven it's up to the challenge musically with its debut album, "Face," on Sub Pop.



## Traveling show goes for laughs in karaoke style

By BOB SADLER  
SPECIAL WRITER

Perhaps it was just bound to happen.

The idea of merging karaoke, the entertainment sensation of the '80s, with stand-up comedy, which enjoyed its greatest popularity during the '80s, is actually a highly logical proposition.

Known as "Stand Up to Go," this interactive karaoke-style program is now touring the country to promote Comedy Central, cable television's all-comedy network. And shoppers at Oakland Mall in Troy were among the first to try out the new concept at the inaugural step in a 15-city tour.

"This is Comedy Central's way of showing you what it's like to be a successful stand-up comic," said Lee Michael Buckman, the comic who serves as master of ceremonies for the "Stand Up to Go" tour. It's Buckman's job to grab people's attention as they pass the large high-tech display in the center of the mall.

Those itching to participate could get on a mock stage (in front of a red curtain facade of the trademark comedy club brick wall) and perform their favorite one-liners and comedy bits from a menu featuring the work of the world's funniest comics.

Some of the categories on the "Stand Up to Go" menu included "The best of Henny Youngman," "Knock Knock," "My Mother-in-Law" and "Take My Family Please." The performer simply made a selection from the menu and read the jokes to the audience from a monitor placed directly in front of them.

Others more familiar with the comedy trade could elect to do their own material. To make the proposition more enticing, audience reaction clips, laughter and applause were mixed on a video cassette tape which the performer got to keep.

But wait, there was more. The performer chosen as the Detroit area's best received a chance to host a segment of Comedy Central's daily comedy clip program, "Short Attention Span Theater."

The lure of instant stardom brought 61 brave souls to the

stage. Evan Branch of Royal Oak was the first. He has tried his hand at comedy before — a few open mike nights at local clubs — and he was disappointed in his performance.

"I have a lot of material," Branch said, "but most of it's dirty. They told me it had to be clean."

Many of the performers had never tried their comedic luck in a club setting. They were just too young to get in. Nevertheless, a few of the younger set managed to steal the show by exhibiting grace under pressure.

"My sister was going to do it, but she chickened out," said Lisa Alry of Rochester Hills, a student at West Middle School. She performed jokes from the category of "My Lousy Childhood."

To date, Matthew Nyquist has never had the opportunity to take center stage during productions at Athens High School in Troy, but for a few minutes, he was able to show the poise of a pro — and get some laughs.

When it was all said and done, Bryan Ferguson of Detroit was chosen as the day's winner. An auto mechanic by day, Ferguson has moonlighted as a comic the last four years, appearing at most of the local clubs as an emcee or feature act. But performing in the middle of a mall was definitely a different experience.

"People were walking through wondering what in the world I'm doing," Ferguson said. "It was pretty cool, though."

It got even better when he was selected as the winner. "I couldn't believe it," said Ferguson, whose taped segment aired last week on Comedy Central. "I'm starting to get really serious about comedy now, and that really helps."

Royal Oak's Karl C. Kohl, who also has graced the stages of a few local clubs, just summed up the afternoon's activities.

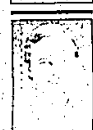
"It's a great idea," he said. "It gives people who aren't familiar with the business a chance to see what it's all about."

Now there are 61 people a bit more familiar with "the business," perhaps, comics may start to get a bit more respect around here.



Laugh, laugh: Matthew Nyquist, 17, a student at Troy Athens High School, goes for the gusto — and a few laughs — at the recent "Stand Up to Go" tour at Oakland Mall.

## Big Chief: No apology necessary



LARRY O'CONNOR

From the debut album of the Ann Arbor-based Big Chief to the latest from the Pale Saints, the record industry has a plethora of new sounds on the market these days. And some are well worth a listen.

From the guttural, tortured metal to the gutters of cosmopolitan funk, can Big Chief sound any bigger? The Ann Arbor quintet's debut on Seattle-based Sub Pop, "Face," would indicate not.

And being on Sub Pop, that fabulous label that has brought us Reverend Horton Heat, Dwarves, Mudhoney and some other band whose name escapes us at the moment, (Did you say... Nirvana?), there's much to be expected of Barry Hensler's thump and grunt outfit.

Big Chief hasn't let this become a creative shackle nor do they sound the least bit like they're riding the Nirvana bandwagon.

Their sound has always been insofar as much as it is primal. A Big Chief number manifests itself through inner exploration of wrought feeling, and dense grungy guitars. The sum total of that becomes intertwined with a texture of styles from metal, funk to some free jazz thrown in for good measure.

Hensler's voice is a growling exhaust pipe worthy of an AETB injection. Angry? Yes. Mindless rage? Never. Big Chief and Hensler are far too clever for that.

Rather, they want to show they're in control. The new metal aesthetic calls for such prescribed venom. A little Spanish guitar to disperse the flaming embers from "Who's Gonna Do All That?" Show them some subtlety. A full-blown discharge of uptown funkship in "Lie There and Be Good?" Show them you're street smart.

All of which could be interpreted as an attempt to distance themselves from every spindly-limbed, blond-haired metalhead who has inhabited earth since 1976. In Big Chief's case, one figures they just want to take the genre to a higher artform.

"The Ballad of Dylan Cobi" initially relies on the dungeon metal guitar but quickly shakes out into a scorching electric crescendo of '70s Hendrix-like proportion. By contrast, "Desert Jam" is brooding — bludgeoned into submission by thick Black Sabbath-style guitars and a thumping bass.

Raw and savage, but Big Chief need not make any apologies.

(Caroline/Sub Pop, 114 W. 26th St., New York, N.Y. 10001)

■ "BEDLAM A-GO-GO," SOMETHING HAPPENS — Oh, and you wonder why. This band seemingly possesses every ingredient it takes to make giant strides in the industry — infectious, melodic songs; powerful, flawless vocals; and a reputation for hot, awe-inspiring gigs.

A listen to the quartet's latest on Chorusima will only make you wonder all the more. Unlike "Stuck Together with God's Glue," where almost-cry-talline production rendered some of the band's otherwise brimming numbers inert, Something Happens are back to their usual, self-assured ways thanks to Ray Horman's blistering, seemingly visceral at times, guitar playing.

Thematically, numbers are a tad more mature — topped off by the big, all-encompassing question posed by lead vocalist Tom Dunne in "Beautiful Country," a soft acoustic tempered song that delves into nationalism and the disintegration of one's homeland.

The penchant for indelible, straightforward dance floor numbers is still there as revealed in songs such as "Dance on the Cross." There's always a tension at the core of a Something Happens song, which in its release is immersed in the fountain of sanctifying rock'n'roll glory.

(Chorusima Records)

■ "HEY BABE," JULIANA HATFIELD — "Ev-

eryone loves me but you," sings the Blake Babies vocalist on the opening cut of her solo debut on Mammoth Records produced by Gary Smith.

Her sweet vocals, cooling ever so childlike on these jaggily constructed pop numbers belie those feelings. Feel sorry for her? She's not asking you to.

Hatfield's trademark with the Blake Babies is to detach herself somewhat from the songs she's singing. On "Hey Babe," Hatfield, apparently wants to reconcile this (and perhaps distance herself from her work with the Blake Babies in general) with some rather personally revealing lyrics.

Yearning and unfulfillment are recurring themes in her songs.

So, too, apparently is some Morrissey self-pity. "I'm ugly with a capital U and I don't need a mirror to see that it's true," sings Hatfield in "Ugly." Hatfield can cut to the heart of matter, vividly describing a dysfunctional relationship as she does in the festering guitar lament "Forever Baby." Mature, and definitely something Hatfield can call her own.

(Mammoth Records, Carr Mill, 2nd Floor, Carboro, N.C. 27510)

■ "IN RIBBONS," PALE SAINTS — A listless state of melancholy might be awoken by a chilling piece of dissonant guitar feedback. Then to be lulled back into a blissful existence by an ethereal vocal track — such is the Pale Saints modus operandi on their latest A4D release.

On "In Ribbons," the Pale Saints turn giddy at the mere insertion of an orchestral element such as a cello or violin into their music. This obsession almost leads them astray from those gorgeous, fractured guitar introspective numbers they're so adept at performing.

When the Pale Saints find the right track, such as in the shimmering "A Thousand Stars Burst Open," the results are breathtaking. But it's a hard fought battle through out, featuring the Pale Saints ever exploring their vocal and instrumental potential. Theirs and the listener's patience are aptly rewarded, though.

(A4D, 3300 Warner Blvd., Burbank, Calif. 91505-4694)

### IN CONCERT

Monday, May 25

**DAN'S BIG EGO**  
Civic Center Station, 611 W. Cross, Ypsilanti, 48197-5050

**PARADISE VALLEY JAZZ JAM**  
With Larry Smith at Allen's, 5756 Cass, Detroit, 482-2355

**WAT**  
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor, 966-2747

Tuesday, May 26

**CHISEL BROTHERS WITH THORNTON**  
TA Davis, Allen's, 5756 Cass, Detroit, 482-2355

**HOLY COWS**  
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor, 966-2747

**GOLDENTONES**  
With Cracker Bowl at Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor, 966-8555

Wednesday, May 27

**CURVE**  
St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit, 991-MCIT

**BIG DAVE AND THE ULTRASOUNDS**

Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor, 966-2747

**RESTROOM POETS**  
Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor, 966-8555

**ESHAM**  
The Ritz, 17580 Frazee, Roseville, 778-6404

**THE HEAT**  
The Ritz, 17580 Frazee, Roseville, 778-6404

**MARTIN AND JESSICA SIMPSON**  
The Art, 6374 Main, Ann Arbor, 761-1451

**SPANKING BOZO**  
With Blue Dogs and Maple Circle at Allen's, 5756 Cass, Detroit, 482-2355

**Y.M.I.**  
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor, 966-2747

**NEW POTATO CARDOSE**  
Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor, 966-8555

**THE HEAT**  
The Ritz, 17580 Frazee, Roseville, 778-6404

**MARTIN AND JESSICA SIMPSON**  
The Art, 6374 Main, Ann Arbor, 761-1451

**JUNK MONKEYS**  
With Holy Cows and Wally Pleasant at Allen's, 5756 Cass, Detroit, 482-2355

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With Holy Cows and Wally Pleasant at Allen's, 5756 Cass, Detroit, 482-2355

**NO MERCY**  
The Ritz, 17580 Frazee, Roseville, 778-6404

**STRANGE BEDFELLOWS**  
Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti, 48197-5050

**THE APPLIERS**  
With 249 at Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Canfield, 481-1755

**TEXAS HEAT**  
Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn, 446-1920

**SIN SKALA BDM**  
Albion Theatre, 4140 Woodward, Detroit, 833-9700

**BLASPHEMOUS**  
With Grady Hays at 3D, 1615 N. Main, Royal Oak, 589-3344

**TRACY CHAPMAN**  
Fox Theatre, 2211 Woodward Ave., Detroit, 567-7000

**FRANKIE KARMA**  
With Grandson and Red C at Allen's, 5756 Cass, Detroit, 482-2355

**GRANDSON**  
With Swinging Richards at Finney's Pub, 3905 Woodward, Detroit, 831-8070

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With Swinging Richards at Finney's Pub, 3905 Woodward, Detroit, 831-8070

**HUNTUNES**  
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor, 966-2747

**FRANK ALLISON AND THE DOD BOX**  
Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor, 966-8555

**RID BOYS**  
The Art, 6374 Main, Ann Arbor, 761-1451

**JUNK MONKEYS**  
With Strange Bedfellows and Mooshka at Allen's, 5756 Cass, Detroit, 482-2355

**PEDESTRIANS**  
Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti, 48197-5050

**MEDICINE WHEEL**  
With Yesterday's News at Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Canfield, 481-1755

**NO MERCY**  
The Ritz, 17580 Frazee, Roseville, 778-6404

**SKINNY PUPPY**  
State Theatre, 2115 Woodward, Detroit, tickets are \$17.50 in advance, 961-5450

**TOM COLLINS AND THE COCKTAIL SHAKERS**  
With Skat Litter at Finney's Pub, 3905 Woodward, Detroit, 831-8070

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