

Street SCENE

IN CONCERT

Monday, Nov. 2

PARADISE VALLEY JAZZ JAM

Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit.
832-2355

MIDWEST SHOWCASE

Featuring Higher, Hope Orchestra, Mirror, Night and Nu Hippies as part of the Third Annual Detroit/Midwest A&R Showcase at The Hayloft Liqueur Stand, 140 N. Grand, Mount Clemens. Performances start at 8:30 p.m.
468-1010

Tuesday, Nov. 3

SAMIAM

With Bent, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit.
961-MELT

CHISEL BROTHERS WITH THORNETTA DAVIS

Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit.
832-2355

DIG

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

MIDWEST SHOWCASE

Featuring Duce, Kerry Clark, RH Factors, Ten Lost Tribes and The Geek MC as part of the Third Annual Detroit/Midwest A&R Showcase at The Hayloft Liqueur Stand, 140 N. Grand, Mount Clemens. Performances start at 8:30 p.m.
468-1010

Wednesday, Nov. 4

MAGNAPOP

With Wax, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit.
961-MELT

CAFE ZERO

Griff's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac.
334-9292

VUDD HIPPIES

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

GARY LUCAS' GODS & MONSTERS

Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit.
832-2355

DOUGIE MACLEAN

The Ark, 637 1/2 Main, Ann Arbor.
761-1451

SCOTT STERN AND THE TRUST

Doug's Body Shop, Woodward Avenue, south of Nine Mile Road, Ferndale.
398-1940

FULL MOON RISING

Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2748

Thursday, Nov. 5

PATO BANTON

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

Friday, Nov. 6

SLOT

With Don Caballero, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit.
832-2355

THE DEAD BAND

Griff's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac.
334-9292

KISS ME SCREAMING

With Thunderharp Choir, at Lil's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck.
874-0254

FIRST LIGHT

Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2748

SWEET TEZZE

The Ritz, 17580 Frazer, Roseville.
778-8150

IPSO FACTO

With Chuckhead, at The Majestic, 4140 Woodward, Detroit.
833-9700

MOTHER'S ARMY

The Marquee, 8139 E. Seven Mile, Detroit.
366-8533

DEADBEAT SOCIETY

The Ark, 637 1/2 Main, Ann Arbor.
761-1451

BILL NEID TRIO

Bird of Paradise, 207 S. Ashley, Ann Arbor.
662-8310

BUTLER TWINS

Q Club, 29 S. Saginaw, Pontiac.
334-7411

JACOB WILLIAMS

Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn.
846-1920

SUN MESSENGERS

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

PRAXIS

With Crabby Jacks, at Finney's Pub, 3965 Woodward, Detroit.
831-8070

WIG

Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti.
485-5050

ELAN BANK

With Machine Gun Kelly and The Pains, at Paychicks, 2932 Canfield, Hamtramck.
874-0254

Saturday, Nov. 7

MUDHONEY

With Cinnamonhoney and Eugenius, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit.
961-MELT

VIC CHENET

Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit.
832-2355

THE HYPNOTICS

With Rockadaddy, at Griff's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac.
334-9292

VUDD HIPPIES

With Have Nets, at Lil's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck.
874-0254

DC DRIVE

The Ritz, 17580 Frazer, Roseville.
778-8150

JASON MACCAULEY BERRY

With Java Dog, at Griff's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac.
334-9292

MISSIONARY STEW

3D Club, 1815 N. Main, Royal Oak.
589-3344

FIRST LIGHT

Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2748

DROP HAMMER

The Marquee, 8139 E. Seven Mile, Detroit.
366-8533

KING BROTHERS

The Ark, 637 1/2 Main, Ann Arbor.
761-1451

ROLAND B

With Restroom Poets, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit.
832-2355

DROP HAMMER

The Marquee, 8139 E. Seven Mile, Detroit.
366-8533

LA TRINITY

Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti.
485-5050

DEAD PROFESSOR

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BILL SCHWAB

Thunder boomers: Graham Strachan (top left), Christine McCall, Don Didonato, Ron Vensko (lower left) and Jason Kuehn are intent on making Thunderharp Choir compelling creatively as well as entertaining.

Choir captures creative harmony



The core of Thunderharp Choir features an amalgamation of two defunct local outfits Robb Roy and Jugglers and Thieves. After several years chasing major record deals with those bands, they've settled down to focus more on the creative aspects of their music.

BY LARRY O'CONNOR

In the Thunderharp Choir circle, there is musical savvy, an artistic vision and a whole lot of history.

The latter, though, is what initially intrigues one.

"Thunderharp Choir members Jason Kuehn and Graham Strachan were the creative tandem of the highly acclaimed local outfit Robb Roy, which spent a considerable amount of resources and energy in pursuit of a record deal. When that fell apart, so did the band.

Likewise, Christine McCall fronted the equally ambitious, though a little more crunchy sounding Jugglers and Thieves. They, too, were felled by the disillusionment of high expectations and low returns.

One looks for the scars, but they're not there.

Freed from the treadmill of

commercial expectations, the triumvirate is immersed in writing and developing a new sound that is self-described as "between alternative and pop, between grunge and grace, heavy melody, harmony and guitar."

Thunderharp Choir has a four-song cassette, "That Sinking Feeling," planned for release this month followed by a CD release in January "Hope and Gloria."

"It's a fresh start, yes," said McCall, whose hair is shorter and is barely recognizable in jeans and a sweater from her mystic days when she sang in Jugglers and Thieves.

Thunderharp Choir was borne more out of concept than description. The band was initially a loose collection of guest musicians from Robb Roy, Jugglers and Thieves and other bands performing one off gigs.

When Robb Roy broke up a

year ago, Kuehn and Strachan decided to take the notion further. They included regular session member drummer Ron Vensko (formerly of EFX) and bassist Don Didonato.

Initially, McCall provided occasional background vocals but has since moved to the front to share lead singing duties with Strachan.

There is sentiment this is what they should have been doing all along.

Strachan and Kuehn say Robb Roy became one-dimensional, blinded by the lure of the ever-elusive record deal. As a result, their creativity waned.

"You kind of ponder," Strachan said. "We spent \$1,000 just sending people to New York and LA to shop us to the record companies. All said and done, Jay and I have nothing to show for it."

"A lot of Robb Roy was shake your butt and party," Kuehn added. "We weren't as bad as some bands, and not that it wasn't fun."

McCall expresses similar feelings about Jugglers and Thieves.

"I learned a lot of what these guys did, going for the big record deal," said McCall, who recently

married Kuehn. "It was hard for me to do it without the expectation of this big prize. That squashed my creativity."

Originality is the focal point now. Thunderharp Choir blends in divergent instruments such as dulcimer, violins and brushes on a tom tom drum for textural effects on songs such as the Celtic sounding "Home." But the band can call on its acute rock'n'roll instincts when needed.

Kuehn and Strachan are prolific songwriters, but their lyrics are from different perspectives.

Strachan, who admits there's been a great deal of turmoil in his personal life in the past year, carves out more introspective brooding numbers. Kuehn, who's still blurring in the newlywed glow, tends to churn out, spiritually uplifting songs.

"Once we changed over, I had a rough couple of years," Strachan said. "I slowed down a bit. We'll have times we're nothing is clicking."

"Right now, we have a lot of things happening."

Thunderharp Choir will perform with Kiss Me Screaming

Friday, Nov. 6, at Lil's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. For information, call 878-8555.

Sundays: A month's worth of indelible pop



LARRY O'CONNOR

The Sundays 1990 debut, "Reading, Writing and Arithmetic," was splendid, arresting and cherished.

One wondered, though, if the British pop band's light, Nutcracker musical

tact actually carried enough emotional weight to see it through a second album or would a good wind scatter it into oblivion?

The doubts are hurriedly quashed with their gloriously rapacious follow-up, "Blind," on David Geffen Company records.

To their credit, the creative tandem of vocalist Harriet Wheeler and guitarist Dave Gavurin haven't bowed to naysayers. Instead, they've honed in and refined their well-documented strengths.

Lyrical, this is still largely the stuff from which fluffy clouds are

made. But Wheeler's angelic, heavenly (pull out all the celestial references) vocals are captivating and reveal yearning, angst and resolution in a single emotive breath.

She can single-handedly take a simple and seemingly lyrically inert number like "Love" to the precipice of emotional longing.

Gavurin still has the tendency to lapse into Cocteau Twins-style spacey straining — obviously to coincide with Wheeler's sanctified vocals. His better moments, though, come when he's grounded in stark, pensive acoustic strumming such as in the penetrating "Life and Soul" and "Blood on My Hands."

He even takes an acoustic stab at one of the Rolling Stones' better written pieces, "Wild Horses," which Wheeler can seem to propel out of the morass of dormant nostalgia.

The Sundays frailties, though, makes them all the more endear-

ing. (David Geffen Company)

"Automatic for the People," R.E.M.'s Rumor has it the initial inspiration for forming this mega-successful group was to make an album merely approaching the subtle brilliance of Van Morrison's 1968 epic "Astral Weeks."

This is possibly as close as anyone could hope.

Nowhere in their vast catalogue of alternative fare has the Athens, Ga., foursome produced an album this cohesive in tone, yet so overbearing in emotional turmoil your chest feels like caving at times.

"Automatic for the People" (Warner Bros.) is the antithesis of the jangly guitar pop synthesis R.E.M. defined for a generation of imitators.

At times, Peter Buck's acoustic strumming and electric jabs become a heart race for sanity in a maze of pain and bitter introspection. Stipe's vocals are restrained,

almost dead panned.

The result is often a hard thud which penetrates the most vulnerable part of psyche as evidenced in the mournful "Try Not to Breathe." By contrast, "Ignorance" is a searing reaction to the politically myopic proceedings of the past 12 years.

But it's the wistful melancholy weaving its way through "Automatic" that offers refuge. Numbers such as the lighthearted salute to the comedic genius of Andy Kaufman in "Man on the Moon" puts things into perspective and is a welcomed respite from an otherwise heavy album. (Warner Bros.)

(Untitled 4-Song EP), Cop Shoot Cop: New York industrial noisemakers return spewing grim, apocalyptic images designed to make the listless masses shudder in tracks such as "Nowhere" and "We Shall Be Changed."

that, I am doing my very best to take the situation and make it work for me.

Warm regards from Me again

Dear "Me Again,"

Congratulations! Every now and then I think letter writers for deepening my respect and appreciation of people. Such letters help me to feel good about this job.

Barbara

If you have a question or a comment for Barbara Schiff, a trained therapist and experienced counselor, send it to Street Sense, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. You can also leave a message by dialing 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone than mailbox number 1877.

Athens revisited: Uh oh.

Address of Athens, Ga.,

Michael Stipe invited them

to play on a showcase. . .

Could we be talking about

another R.E.M. clone? No

way. Magnapop embrace a

classic pop sensibility but

have a grungy side to them.

See for yourself Wednesday,

Nov. 4, at St. Andrew's Hall,

431 E. Congress, Detroit. For infor-

mation, call 961-MELT.

Dear Barbara,

Remember

me? Well, here I

am again, this