

StreetSCENE

Nation changes its tune

The loss of the percussionist and the addition of a bassist, drummer and backup singers has ushered in a major format change for the once techno-driven Blue Nation which now fronts a harder edged, somewhat bluesy sound.

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER



Transition is a buzz word prevalent in the Blue Nation vocabulary. That doesn't mean chaos and confusion are backup singers in the band, though.

Which is perhaps the most remarkable attribute of this engaging seven-member outfit, which throws everything from dreamy space-age keyboards, primal hard rock guitar, pulsating techno beats, funky bass rhythms to soothing acoustic folk into their musical equivalent of stone soup.

Members have filtered in and out, musical directions have been altered. Yet, in this seemingly constant state of flux, Blue Nation is a wholly sound and focused outfit. Why?

The answer is found lurking around the analytical tones of lead singer, John Sousanis, who ponders questions like thesis statements. Understandable, he majored in history at Harvard University.

"It's not so much dates or anything," says Sousanis, who specialized in 20th century U.S. history at Harvard. "History, as a college concentration, teaches you how to argue. It doesn't even matter what you think so much. You



Sound check: Blue Nation features lead singer John Sousanis, guitarist Dion Sullivan, keyboardist Nels Highberg, bassist Frederick David, drummer Ben Ridley along with backup singers Alicia Gbur and Marnni Fielder.

just pick a side and argue it to death.

"A lot of these songs do that," Sousanis jabs the consciousness, not by championing politically correct causes or admonishing injustices of the past, but rather through raising probing questions about our state of being.

In the number "Lay Your Machine Down," Sousanis asks whether one's blind devotion to his job 40 hours a week is really worth it. The river "No Lay" is not a call to anarchy but debates the expressed purpose of laws, good or bad.

In the final analysis Sousanis hastens to add, "You've got to write good songs, good melodies. If you don't do that well, it doesn't matter what you say."

"We're in the entertainment business."

In that department, Sousanis has plenty of help.

Blue Nation features original members guitarist Dion Sullivan of Almont and keyboardist Nels Highberg of Ferndale, who've been with the band since its inception two years ago.

Bassist Frederick David, drummer Ben Ridley of Warren along with backup singers Alicia Gbur of Grosse Pointe Woods and Marnni Fielder of Livonia have added this year. Their arrival ushered in a major format change for Blue Nation, which was a techno-driven outfit until the band's percussionist left abruptly.

Since then, the group has gone for more of a harder edged, somewhat bluesy sound. "I wouldn't say we've gotten any less danceable," Sousanis adds.

On stage, Blue Nation is quite compelling. The band bombards the listener with many musical elements, all corralled by Sousanis commanding presence

as a lead vocalist.

Alicia Gbur's acoustic strumming and glowing harmonies provide an "earthy" texture while Marnni Fielder raps on sequenced drum pads. The band's bassist and guitarist ramble about the stage while Ridley, who played in Beer on the Penguin for seven years nails the proceedings to floor with an unrelenting drum beat.

The band's has been buoyed by successful gigs at Club X and are encouraged by a recent new music showcase in Atlanta, Ga. Getting signed to a major label is a priority and has become more of a reality in the last 11 months.

"I think the transition was because of the focus," Sousanis says. "One thing we've been good at . . . is knowing how good we were or weren't. You tend to keep a lot of that stuff to yourself."

"I think this year we've addressed our shortcomings."

Frank Allison gets himself some Sox

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Are the Odd Sox in the musical hamper for good? Frank Allison isn't ready to wad them up just yet.

After the reported demise of his previous outfit, brought on by the defections of guitarist Dan Beckett and bassist John Boyle, the wily singer/songwriter has decided to keep the name Odd Sox for his new outfit after all.

His band's debut this month was under the name Woolly Mammoth. Then, suddenly, he changed his mind.

"We were talking about it last night," says Allison. "The guys said, 'Woolly Mammoth' sounds like it's just you . . . but we're more like Odd Sox."

The reincarnation features guitarist Kevin Allison (no relation to Frank) along with drummer Rob Hejna and bassist Chris Noteboom. Frank Allison is awash with glowing praise about his new crew of Odd Sox.

"I'm looking forward to the change," says Allison, whose new outfit performs at Lili's and Blind Pig this week. "When we all get together we all click."

Still, there's lingering bereavement for the old Odd Sox, which justly earned the reputation as one of this area's top dance/rock bands.

"I know people would come up to me and say, 'Oh Frank, this is so sad and horrible,'" says Allison. "I was right there with them. I didn't want it to end, either."

Frank Allison & the Odd Sox have done well in their five-year span. They packed clubs, released two acclaimed albums "Monkey Business" and "Hokey Smoke" and received sterling reviews from critics, including one in the New York Times.

Such momentum, though, didn't bring the band any closer to being signed. The strain of personal commitments took their toll earlier this year.

"We did everything right from an artistic standpoint," Allison says. "We had the songs. We had the act. We didn't have the business. Usually, a band has some business go-getters. We didn't really have any of that."

Rather than ruminate on the loss, Allison put together an interim group of musicians and performed a couple of gigs under his own name. His first chore was tracking down a permanent guitarist, imperative to the guitar-rooted sound.

Kevin Allison, who is originally from Colorado, made the process easy. He asked Frank about playing with the band; he had performed with the Rocky Mountain rock outfit Midnight Kitchen.

His tight guitar style should augur well with Frank Allison's hell bent failling. The change in membership also means new interpretations of many Frank Allison & the Odd Sox tunes, which will still be a major part of the playlist.

"With some of the songs, I told the guys to listen to all the tapes and take out what you like and if



New Sox: Frank Allison changed his band's name, but then he changed his mind and kept the recognized moniker of Odd Sox.

you can improve it then go ahead," Allison says.

As a result, some numbers like "Remus Road" have been sped up while others have been streamlined. Frank Allison says his songwriting has also evolved during the transition, whittling out the "deadwood while adding some more interesting branches."

Audience reception has been quite good to the new line-up, Allison says. But it begged the question why he didn't initially retain the Odd Sox moniker in spite of the loss of two members.

"I thought of Woolly Mammoth and I liked it," he said Wednesday.

By Thursday, he apparently changed his mind like he changes his socks.

Frank Allison & the Odd Sox will perform Saturday, Dec. 26, at Lili's, 2930 Caniff, Hamtramck. For information, call 875-6555. The band also performs Thursday, Dec. 31, at Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 956-8555.

IN CONCERT

Monday, Dec. 21

PIAFCE
Industry, 15 S. Saginaw, Pontiac. (All star industrial featuring Martin Atkins, William Tucker, Ogie Altsch, Hope Nichols, Barbara Hunter, Scott Schultz and Floor.)
334-1999

PARADISE VALLEY JAZZ JAM
Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit.
832-2355

Tuesday, Dec. 22

CHISEL BROTHERS WITH THORNTITA DAVIS
Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit.
832-2355

BLACK MARKET
Metropolitan Metroclub, 326 W. Fourth St., Royal Oak. (reggae)
542-1890

Wednesday, Dec. 23

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

CHEAP THRILLS
With Last Minute at Griff's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. (hard rock)
334-9292

ACOUSTIC FESTIVAL
With Wally Pleasant, Moshka, Jake Angel and Joe Lawless at Lili's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck.
875-6555

WEATHERVAVES
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2742

CHRISTMAS PARTY
With Drophy Dale and Al Hill at Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor.
896-6555

CHRISTMAS PARTY BENEFIT FOR C.O.T.S.
With the Chisel Brothers at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit. (blues)
832-2355

MARY MCGUIRE & MYK RISE
Harp's in Auburn Hills.
373-4744

THE HOPE ORCHESTRA
With Phunhogg, The Ritz, Gratiot and IO 1 1/2 Mile, Roseville.
778-8150

Thursday, Dec. 24

Friday, Dec. 25

Saturday, Dec. 26

CHEAP TRICK
With American Jam at Harpo's, 14238 Harper, Detroit.
824-1700

FRANK ALLISON AND THE ODD SOX
Lili's, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. (Danceable rock)
875-6555

PAUL VOORNHAGEN QUARTET
Bird of Paradise, 207 S. Ashley, Ann Arbor. (jazz)
666-6310

HAVE NOTS
Psychicks, 2930 Caniff, Hamtramck.
874-0254

SKYLES
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.
996-2742

BIG DAVE AND THE ULTRASONICS
Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor.
896-6555

CROSSED WIRE
With the Hornbells at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit.
961-MELT

MARY MCGUIRE & MYK RISE
Backseat Saloon in Keego Harbor.
682-1119

THE COLORS
With Torchwood Stew at Psychicks Lounge, 2932 Caniff, Hamtramck.
874-0254

CHAOS JAM NITE
With The Generals, Culture Bandits, Blue Nimbus, Grady Hazy, Skinhorse, Hood-

poopers, Mental Landscape, Vavoom, Brothers From Another Planet, Sluggbug, Inside Out and Red September at Fin-50's Pub, 3955 Woodward, Detroit.
331-8070

Sunday, Dec. 27

THE CHARM FARM
With Brotherhood Recipies at Industry, 15 S. Saginaw, Pontiac.
334-1999

THE HORNBELLS
Acoustic show in Sackel Room at Industry, 15 S. Saginaw, Pontiac.
334-1999

Monday, Dec. 28

RAIN
Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor.
896-6555

PARADISE VALLEY JAZZ JAM
Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit.
832-2355

MUTANT PRESS
The Gallery, 22759 Van Dyke, Warren.
757-6060

Tuesday, Dec. 29

See IN CONCERT, 7B

STREET SENSE

Trust your gut reaction and limit daughter's excitement



BARBARA SCHIFF

Dear Barbara,
I am the divorced mother of a two-year-old daughter. We live by ourselves and my father, her grandfather, babysits with her often. My mother died five years ago and he was depressed until my daughter was born. Since then, he has dated on her; she is the main focus of his life.

This is great for both my daughter and me, because I want so much for her to benefit from the goodness of a grandparent relationship. This will give her depth and continuity about the importance of family ties.

Obviously, this isn't the whole story or I wouldn't need to write this letter. The problem is that I worry because my father is such a physical man. He throws her in the air, tickles her, holds her until she screams and generally arouses her.

He was and is a wonderful father to me but when I was little my mother was around to keep him more subdued. I remember her saying to him, "Bill, stop getting Mary excited," and sometimes she would take me away from him.

When I was little I never really understood why my mother died, and sometimes I was angry with her for ruining my fun, but now I worry about my daughter getting over-excited when she is

with him like my mother worried about me.

Also, my daughter sleeps at his house and although I have asked him not to, he will let her sleep in his bed when she has a bad dream or is upset in some way. Again, I do not want you to think that I think anything funny is going on because I don't. But for a reason I don't understand — it is just a gut reaction — I am uneasy about this. I would appreciate any comments you could make on this subject.

A worried Mom

Dear Mom,

Trust your gut reaction. This is an issue that is generally not well understood, but very important.

Some time ago, a friend said to me that she had taken her daughter

to a psychoanalyst (a psychiatrist with further specialized training) who told her that it is essential to her daughter's mental health that she should never see her parents naked, never be taken into their bed and never be physically over-aroused by either of them. This advice seemed so extreme to the friend that she did not return for further appointments. It seemed to her that to stop these activities would be artificial and make it impossible for the family to relate spontaneously to one another. Subsequently, she took her daughter to a different therapist, one with fewer stringent rules.

She asked me why the psychoanalyst had made those recommendations. "It is clear," the friend said, "that most families

do not follow such practice and they don't all raise sick kids."

She is right, but the psychoanalyst sees the ones that are affected and wants to protect others, if she (the analyst is a woman) can. Many adults have difficulty relating sexually because they are physically over-stimulated in childhood. This is true even when the stimulation is a sincerely affectionate and loving.

The person each of us becomes in adulthood is a product of both nature and nurture. The equation is a complicated one that no one has ever defined. Some children's natures can withstand any environmental stress. At the other end of the spectrum are the children who will have problems despite the best possible conditions.

There are many variations in

between. Thus, the amount of stimulation a child requires and can successfully manage is individual to each child.

Learning about our own children, their individual traits and idiosyncrasies, is the best way to establish child-raising guidelines. But, in general, childhood needs to be a quiet time, in a "good enough" environment that will allow for the development of a strong and independent self.

Barbara

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