

Street

MONDAY, JUNE 6, 1994

MUSIC NOTES



CHRISTINA FUOCO

Detroit hasn't been very good to the Supersuckers and that frustrates bassist/vocalist Eddie Spaghetti.

"We've never had a good show in Detroit," he said. "We played in Ann Arbor before. It was better. We have had great shows in Grand Rapids. Maybe everyone's sick of rock 'n' roll in Detroit. The Supersuckers are giving the Detroit area another chance when they play the Blind Pig in Ann Arbor Wednesday, June 8, in support of their Sub Pop release 'La Mano Cornuda.' With names like drummer 'Dancing Eagle,' the aforementioned Spaghetti and guitarist 'Don Bolton, age 25,' it should prove to be an interesting evening.

Being on Sub Pop does indeed mean they're from Seattle, but Spaghetti prefers that you don't lump his band in with that crowd.

"Everyone sounds like a cross between Axl Rose and Ethel Merman."

His band has more of a rocking punk sound. "We get together and start playing these songs that I write on an acoustic guitar and they turn into raging punk," he said.

For more information about the show, call (313) 996-8555.

Dig will visit St. Andrew's Hall in Detroit Saturday, June 11, during their post-hype tour. For most of 1994 the band has been riding high, thanks to their MTV/radio hit "Believe." To guitarist Jon Morris, the trip to popularity was a long one.

"We've been touring for almost two years straight," he said. "It's been a slow build. It's not like it happened overnight."

Now he's pretty content, since "it's just like being gradual enough so where it's at a good point."

Later this month Dig—who has toured with the Hollins Band and Bad Brains—is releasing a follow-up EP to their self-titled debut. "Soft Pretzel" features four new songs, including two they do in concert, "On The Inside" and "King of My World."

For more information about their show with Lucy's Fur Coat, call (313) 961-MELT.

Starting a new band with former members of Mary's Danish hasn't been easy in some ways for guitarist Robbie Allen. Himself an ex-guitar technician for the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Allen has been fighting pre-conceived notions that his band Rob Rule sounds like either of those two groups.

"I couldn't do that and be able to look [Red Hot Chili Peppers vocalist] Anthony (Kiedis) and [bassist] Flea in the face," he said. "They always knew I was the hippy kid who would play country western tunes on the guitar."

That's the kind of angle his new band takes on their self-titled debut for Mercury Records.

After living for seven years on the "crew" side of the music industry, Allen doesn't find it much different being a musician.

"It's the same thing; it really is. I just have different things that I have to do," said Allen via telephone from Mesa, Ariz., where he had been laying by the side of his hotel's pool in 100-degree weather. "Touring is not that much work. Even if you're crew, it's not that much work. If I were in the crew, I still would have been sitting by the pool."

Rob Rule—which includes former Mary's Danish drummer James Bradley Jr. and guitarist David King—will play on Belle Isle at 5 p.m. Friday, June 10, as part of WRIF's Grand Prix Free Day celebration. For more information, call (313) 827-1111.

To leave a message for Christina Fuoco, dial (313) 953-2047, mailbox number 2130, on a touch-tone phone, or write her at 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

13 Engines set for new album

By CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Guitar squalls, post-punk energy and sing-along choruses are the trademarks of Toronto's 13 Engines. John Critchley's naturally abrasive voice wings from key to key like a pendulum.

To Critchley, that doesn't necessarily mean that 13 Engines lives up to its reputation as a "dark" or "brooding" band.

"I think in a way it's kind of true," said Critchley from his Toronto home prior to the start of 13 Engines' tour. "I don't see it quite the same as being kind of dark. I guess it is kind of. If I'm in a good mood I'll put on Leonard Cohen 'Songs of Love and Hate' or the Stooges 'Fun House.' I don't think that's dark. I think it's cathartic."

The label of "dark" has followed 13 Engines around since it formed in 1986. It seems only fitting then that the band signed its first record deal

Blues scene thrives in the '90s

■ They may be howlin' in The Windy City, but The Motor City is closing the gap when it comes to singing the blues. Where there once were a few bands and a few venues, there's now plenty of performers and a strong club circuit.

By MARK GALLO
Special Writer

The blues has been in and out of style more times than pin stripe suits. It's always been a musical genre, however, more concerned with style than fashion, which accounts for its enduring presence in Detroit for more than half a century.

Detroit has seen legendary figures like Robert Johnson and Sonny Boy Williamson hang their hats here and has seen the promise of a respectable wage from the auto plants entice the likes of John Lee Hooker, Bobo Jenkins and the pride of the city, the gracious Sippie Wallace, in the 1940s. It was a city with one of the most vital musical centers in the country, the Hastings Street corridor.

The pedigree honed in those heady days and, certainly, the heritage honestly come by, are second to none. This has always been a blues town, just as surely as it's been a baseball town. And during the past few years, it has become an explosively revitalized one.

"There used to be Sully's and the Soup Kitchen," said Blues Factory Records' Mark Foreman. "There were zero full-time bands and only a handful working at all. I mean, literally, there were only four or five bands."

Jimmy Lessnau, proprietor of Sully's, perhaps the most popular blues establishment in the area, has a different recollection.

"There was a strong scene 10 years ago," he recalled, when bands like the Urbanians (since mutated into the Howling Diablos), the Buxtones (most of whom now comprise the



Bill Hansen

Barn raisin': It wasn't a ghost, but a very alive and kicking Mimi Harris, who performed at the Blues Barn behind the Botsford Inn in Farmington Hills.

With Blues Factory responsible for a large percentage of the band and club bookings in the area, it had an enormous impact on the renaissance of interest in blues music locally.

"When [label president] Steve Sanchez, Robert Noll and I formed Blues Factory in 1986, we set it up to put a systematic method into place to develop the club scene," he said. Translation: you need a network of clubs willing to take a chance on their music to encourage the formation of new bands. It's worked like a charm.

"Realistically, there are 30 bands playing in 20-25 clubs that offer blues on a regular, or semi-regular basis now," he said.

If Foreman were to voice a complaint—he prefers calling it a personal disappointment—it's that there isn't more support for what he calls "down home blues," the traditionally rooted music of the '40s and '50s. That Eddie Burns, Mr. Bo, the Butler Twins and other similarly dispositioned bands aren't being exposed to larger audiences is a shame.

These are the hometown vets. Bobo Jenkins and Boogie Woogie Red have passed on and John Lee Hooker has moved on, but many of their contemporaries remain Detroiters. Still here, still more than able and still inspiring.

The triumvirate

For Foreman, the triumvirate of the local blues scene, in terms of guaranteed draws, are Noll (just back from a successful New Zealand tour), the Chisel Brothers and Davis and the James Wallin Band.

There also are a large contingent of equally impressive veterans out there that pack houses that bear a closer look and listen, too. Mimi Harris and the Snakes (just signed to Blues Factory), can rock as hard as Debbie Davies and bring it down to a tender ballad that brings Bonnie Raitt to mind. The Alligators have a swing feel that's often reminiscent of some of the best of the West Coast bands, while retaining that unique Detroit blues edge.

The Reverend Marc Falconberry, Randy Volin, Harmonica Shah, the Curtis Sumpter Project and Cathy Davis, Nikki James and the Flamethrowers, Peter 'Madcat' Ruth and Shari Kane—the list of top-notch blues-based players in town is staggering.

"It's as strong, or stronger, than ever," according to Mike Watts, the producer of the Detroit Blues Festival at Hart Plaza for many years and, until they suspended operations for the summer, the man responsible for the Thursday night jam sessions/concerts at the "blues barn" at the historical Botsford Inn.

Watts has also been at the helm of the Michigan Blues Festival at Pontiac's Phoenix Center for the past few years and has got a solid handle on both the local and international scenes.

"There are a lot of bands working, and there's a real interest in the music," he said.

While he thinks "it's great that Barbara Streisand can command those prices," saying that she's probably earned them over the years, "a lot of

us have families and can't afford that." That's why he produces free concerts, like the Buddy Guy show at the Phoenix Center June 19, as part of the Pontiac World Cup festivities. More importantly, though, the Michigan Blues Festival is set for the Phoenix Center on Aug. 6-7, with Larry McCray, Jeff Healey (tentatively), Johnny Winter, Eddie Money and a slew of local talent.

Next time you get that feeling for the blues, tune in the Famous Coachman's "Blues After Hours" show on WDET, where he's been a weekend fixture for something like 17 years, or young upstart Robert Jones, an outstanding guitarist who hosts "Blues from the Lowlands," also on WDET every Saturday morning.

The free, local Blues Review is chock full of information that nobody else is likely to be able to pass on. Blues Factory has a blues hotline—(313) 280-0363. There are also a pair of great local compilations that are highly recommended: "Detroit Blues Factory, Vol. 1," with Robert Noll, the Butler Twins, Willie D. Warren, Eddie Burns and others, and "Detroit Blues, Live at Lou's," a benefit disc for the Autism Society that features Nikki James, the Alligators, Chisel Brothers, Howling Diablos, Garfield Blues Band, Steve Gornall and others.

Been owing yourself a great time for a while? Try supporting the phenomenal Detroit blues scene this weekend. Like the Butler Brothers sing, "Hello Chicago, Detroit is on your back!"

IN CONCERT

(810) 334-7411

Thursday, June 9

ALAN REYNOLDS AND THE REYNOLDS BROS.
The Ark, 637½ S. Main St., Ann Arbor.
(313) 961-1451

BOSS BENDOW BROS.
The Ark, 637½ S. Main St., Ann Arbor.
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BLUES ACTION COUNCIL
Stan's Dugout, 3350 Auburn Road, Auburn Hills, (blues)
(313) 852-6433

PAUL MARTIN BLUES BAND
Stan's Dugout, 3350 Auburn Road, Auburn Hills, (blues)
(313) 852-6433

THE ALLIGATORS
Mr. Lou's, 1817 Mack Ave., Detroit, (blues)
(313) 862-1700

BLACK WATER STATION
With Dear Abby and Mockingbird at Grif's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac, (blues)
(313) 334-9292

THE LOON
August, 31660 John R., Madison Heights, (rock)
(810) 568-2120

13 ENGINES
Franklin Street Brewing Co., 1560 Franklin, Detroit, (alternative rock)
(313) 568-0390

CARNIVAL COUSINS
With Thought Industry and Type O Negative at Harpo's, 14238 Harper, Detroit, (rock)
(313) 824-1700

PETER WOLF
River Rock, 673 Franklin, Detroit, (rock)
(313) 259-6676

BOULEVARD
With Cossed Wine at the Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor, (alternative rock)
(313) 996-8555

20TH STREET BLUES BAND
Q Club, 29 S. Saginaw St., Pontiac, (blues)
(810) 334-7411

See IN CONCERT, 9A