

# STREET SCENE

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## MUSIC NOTES



CHRISTINA FUOCO

## Rappers I.C.P. sign to Jive

The world apparently won't end after Southfield-based rappers I.C.P. release their sixth album. The rappers, who dress in clown outfits, have signed a "long-term deal" with Jive Records, according to I.C.P. spokesman Bruce Loriel.

In an October interview with Street Scene, I.C.P. said, "Every album is a joker card. By the time the sixth joker card is released... the world's gonna be over with." Loriel couldn't reveal if a "long-term deal" meant more than three albums, but we assume so.

Jive — which boasts a line-up that includes R. Kelly and his alleged teenage bride Aaliyah of Detroit, Shaquille O'Neal and Too Short — is one of the top rap and R&B labels in the United States. Loriel speculates that I.C.P.'s third album (the first with Jive) will be out in early summer as a joint venture between Jive and I.C.P.'s label, Psychopathic Records.

The first video will be filmed during an April 7 performance at The Ritz in Roseville. Loriel isn't sure which song it's going to be, but "We're encouraging kids to show up in clown outfits. A lot of them do anyway... because we're going to shoot (film) these kids as part of the video," Loriel said. For information about the show, call (810) 778-8150.

A handful of local bands have been accepted to play the prestigious South by Southwest music conference in Austin, Texas. The wide array of bands include skaters Mustard Plug, Ann Arbor alternapoppers WhirlingRoad, the instrumental surf band The GoldenTones, alternative rock/blues group Laughing Hyenas and folk singer Dick Siegal. The conference will be held in mid-March.

As for WhirlingRoad, they will release their first album, "Twelve Steps Below Walnut," in early April on the band-run Skillet Records.

Steve Wood, former member of the roots rock band Red C, and his new band The Coyotes have settled in at the New Way Bar, 23130 Woodward Ave., Ferndale, where they will play every Tuesday. For more information, call (810) 541-9870.

Sponge's major label debut "Rotting Plintha" reached No. 7 on Harmony House's Top 20 report.

If you have a question or comment for Christina Fuoco, you can call her at (313) 953-2047, mailbox number 2130 on a Touch-Tone phone, or write her at The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. She can be reached through e-mail at CFuoco@aol.com.

## SOUND BITES

### Red Square Black

**Members:**  
• Mark Binden lead singer  
• John Lowery guitarist  
• Angelo Barbera bass  
• Randy Castillon drummer

Release the CD "Square" on Zoo

John Lowery had a harsh lesson in humanity when he moved out to Los Angeles from Grosse Pointe.

"I lived in this homeless place for all these kids and all these bands and stuff. It was the worst. There were dead bums there all the time. People were getting killed there all the time," said Lowery whose photograph is blurry because all he does is shake his head on stage.

His life turned around when he hooked up with the industrial rock band Red Square Black, which includes former Ozzy Osbourne band member Randy Castillon. When Ozzy heard their debut EP "Square" (Zoo Entertainment), he called it "a cracker."

Red Square Black's music and Lowery's look are a far cry from his days in the high school band Dirty Tricks. "We won all those battles of the bands, the high school talent show when I was not even in high school yet. I had all these newspaper clippings of Dirty Tricks. I'm wearing this Ralph Lauren huge Polo sweater in one picture. Now I'm covered in tattoos and things like that."

He also uses "weird things" like drills, hairbrushes and batteries on his guitars to make Red Square Black "as different as possible."

Write the band care of Zoo Entertainment, 6363 Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood, Calif. 90028.

—Christina Fuoco

# Musical fortune rises for Droge



He worked at a pizza joint with Pearl Jam's Mike McCready, moved on to a spot on the soundtrack of "Dumb and Dumber." How he's opening for Tom Petty. Pete Droge's musical fortunes are on the rise.

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO  
STAFF WRITER

The scenario sounds almost like another twentysomething film: two guys working at a pizza joint, talking music, occasionally going to a party and jamming.

They were a little more serious about their dreams than two long-haired in a movie, though. One half of the duo was Mike McCready, then-future guitarist of Pearl Jam. The other was Pete Droge, who scored a hit with "If You Don't Love Me (I'll Kill Myself)" thanks to, ironically, a movie — "Dumb and Dumber."

"When we met at the pizza joint, we realized we had quite a bit in common musically, as far as the philosophy of music and taste in music," said Droge who, like McCready, always wears wide-brimmed hats. "He turned me on to music that I hadn't been exposed to before."

New Droge's working his way up to being as popular as McCready. The 25-year-old Droge is surprised he's gotten this far, but it's something he always imagined.

"I thought positive thoughts about it for a long time. I visualized it," he said.

The road to the spot opening for Tom Petty on his arena tour, was rough — literally. Shortly after his debut "Necktie Second" (American Recordings) was released, he did a "residency tour" where he played in the same city, one night a week for a month. That amounted to a different city each night.

"It was really grueling. We had a lot of driving. Some of us started to get really sick at that time. We had problems with our van, too. We had broken problems, alignment problems. It was a real tough leg," he said.

His Detroit shows were at A.P.B., a popular watering hole on Woodward Avenue in Detroit. The first night was packed, the second was less-than-stellar, but by the third, listeners had become hip to the music.

His most vivid memories of Detroit relate to the city's nickname of "Motor City."

"My memories of Detroit, immediately, are of the certain Ford garage and the large sums of money being shoved into our van. Detroit was the place where we had a lot of our repairs done. What better place to get the car fixed," Droge said.

### The big break

The residency tour helped him establish a name for himself, but his big break came when "If You Don't Love Me" was added to the "Dumb and Dumber" soundtrack. The release of that single, he said, is a good segue for people to explore the rest of "Necktie Second."

"Things are going very well for me right now, everything's on the upslide right now," said Droge who now lives in Oregon. "We're getting more press attention, more radio play and that ("Dumb and Dumber") definitely helped that."

Parts of the album were recorded in very unlikely places, including the bathroom of Room 306 at the Hampton Inn in Atlanta, Ga.

"I just see it up in the bathroom in the motel room where there's tile and a natural reverberation," he said explaining the technicalities. "The bathroom's a little bit more reflective (of the sound)."

From playing in the bathroom to pigging in clubs to opening for Tom Petty in arenas wasn't a hard jump for Droge.

"I found it surprisingly easy to make the adjustment it takes to do that (play arenas)," he said. "I was really flattered. A lot of the promoters and a lot of the people around had a lot of nice compliments."

"Your timing has to be a lot more precise between songs. Playing club you can tweak your tuning, lean back and tell a little story. In arenas, you gotta be ready to end one song and go into another directly."

### Tales to tell

One of the stories he likes to tell at shows is that "If You Don't Love Me" doesn't reflect his current state of mind.

"If You Don't Love Me"... definitely not. It's more of a glimpse into the past," he said. "It was what I was thinking about when I was 12 or 13 when, you know, you meet a girl, you pass notes back and forth. You're an item, you're dating and she dumps you. You get all bummed then you realize it's not life or death."

His new material is more reminiscent of "If You Don't Love Me." It possesses more of an edge and is more band-oriented.

"A good portion of the songs that I've been writing lately are more band-oriented rock songs... a little



Not suicidal: Pete Droge, who scored the pop hit "If You Don't Love Me (I'll Kill Myself)," opens for Tom Petty at The Palace at Auburn Hills March 9 and does a more intimate show at the Blind Pig in Ann Arbor March 10.

more up tempo, a little more driving and little more harder hitting," Droge said. "That's a natural result of the fact that I now have a rock band."

For "Necktie Second" he threw a band together at the last minute.

Still, Droge said, the album is a good reflection of him.

"The record that's out now is the culmination of a long process of musical growth for me. It's just like one row in my field, you know, in my music."

Pete Droge opens for Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 9, at The Palace of Auburn Hills, 2 Championship Drive, Auburn Hills. The show is sold out. Droge does a solo performance at the Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor, Friday, March 10. For more information, call (313) 996-8555. Catch him, along with labelmates The Joyhawks, on "Live From the House of Blues" at midnight Friday and Saturday, March 24-25, on TBS.

# Francke extracts reality from reality

BY KYLE GREEN  
SPECIAL WRITER

Many musicians live in a self-induced fantasy world filled with musical icons and self-love.

What the living in the real world of dry-to-day living. Stewart Francke has created an imaginary world where his own musical characters can survive with their trials and tribulations on his debut release "Where the River Meets the Bay" (Schoolkids Records).

This musical world is a long stretch from his middle class upbringing in Saginaw, but well worth the ticket, he said.

"Saginaw is geography where the river meets the bay, so it has set up some sort of mystical place," Francke said. "I am trying to create a fictional landscape so that the characters can live and breathe and take shape. Every artist's job is to extract reality from reality."

The easy-flowing 11-track release took a year to plan, record and market with material which touches on daily trials and tribulations, all within the realm of reality.

(The songs) were written over the last five years about a certain sense of place and the people that move around the place," Francke said.

That is an idea that many of the top 40 superstars tend to shy away from, with the exception of Sheryl Crow, Edie Brickell and Lisa Loeb.

## Have a listen

To hear music by Stewart Francke (message 3), Pete Droge (message 2), Syrens (message 3), Weapon of Choice (message 4), Soul Catching (message 5), Twarjics (message 6), Hentchmen (message 7) and Candy Machine (message 8) you can call the Street Scene Music Line at (313) 953-2025 on a touch-tone phone. Fast-forward to the corresponding message by pressing 33. To repeat a message, press 4.

"I cannot write a 'starry' pop tune," Francke said. "This contains the rhythm and the details of life and that is important to me and that is what I wanted to do. I think I succeeded with what I wanted to do."

"The most important thing is to try to get the specifics and the details right so that the songs reflect the day-to-day as much as possible. I try to write songs that are short stories."

Francke credits his 11-month-old daughter Tess and his wife of seven years, Julia, with keeping him centered and focused. Julia inspired Francke to name his publishing company after her, Alluj Publishing.

"Where the River Meets the Bay" is Francke's first formal entry into the music business, but the 36-year-old has been performing since he picked up a guitar in his early 20s.

Along with a number of headlining gigs, he has opened for the Cowboy Junkies, Sam Phillips, The BoDeans, Warren Zevon and Grammy Award-winner Sheryl Crow. Francke has seen some national spotlight attention as well. He has twice showcased his music at the Songwriter's Hall of Fame Series in New York.

Right now he is more concerned with the quality of his music than the amount of attention he receives nationally.

"Some people have found great success with the Hall of Fame Series," he said. "I just want to gather a relatively loyal and attentive audience. I just want to write creative pieces."

Writing is nothing strange to the quality-based musician who is also a music reporter for national and local publications. Talking to recording artists is just part of the job and not an invitation to ask advice, Francke said.

"I've interviewed Yo-Yo Ono, Bruce Springsteen, John Mellencamp, Mitch Ryder, Bob Seger... I have spoken to all my idols," he said. "I don't even tell them I am a writer. As soon as people think that I want something out of them, they shut off. I want to do something for myself."

As for his own career, Francke is proud of his first effort with the recording industry. What will the future hold for him in 10 years?

"I hope I am still alive," he said followed by a



Celebrating: Stewart Francke performs songs off his debut disc at the Magic Bag Theatre Cafe in Ferndale March 10.

quick laugh. "The rules of this game are redefined constantly. Being a rock'n'roll musician and an artist, you can redefine creatively. I hope to be writing when I am 46. I am happy I cannot answer this question."

Stewart Francke celebrates the release of his CD with a party and performance Friday, March 10, at the Magic Bag Theatre Cafe, 22918 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. For more information, call (810) 544-3030.