

STREET SCENE



Above all others: At 6'8" tall, R&B artist Montell Jordan is towering over his peers both in height at success.

Listener-friendly Montell Jordan mixes rap, R&B

BY CHRISTINA PUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Part of the duties of being an older brother include letting your younger sisters live off your popularity. Fifteen-year-old Tracy and 12-year-old Jennifer Jordan aren't any different.

Ever since their twenty-something older brother, rhythm and blues singer Montell Jordan hit the top of the charts with the song "This Is How We Do It," everyone at school wants to be their friend.

"They're very popular in school now. They're very popular kids," Jordan said with a laugh.

Jordan is pretty popular himself. "This Is How We Do It," from his debut album of the same name, stayed at No. 1 for seven weeks and went platinum. (The album is gold.) On July 4, Jordan set off his own fireworks by releasing the second single and video "Somethin' 4 De Hooney," a tune he calls the quintessential summer song.

"It's gonna be a cool song. It's got a real summer vibe to it," he said.

Three days later, he hits Pine Knob Music Theatre as part of the Budweiser Superfest with Mary J. Blige and Boyz II Men.

The road to stardom was a long one for Jordan. He began playing piano at age 10 and by 14 was a director of the Carver Missionary Baptist Church choir. Music took a sideline until he earned a communications degree from Michigan's Pepperdine University in 1991.

For a while he split his time between his 9-5 advertising job and singing in nightclubs — until pioneering rap producer Russell Simmons got his hands on Jordan's demo tape. The aspect of Jordan's music that impressed him the most was Jordan's ability to combine rhythm and blues, jazz, bounce and hip-hop, Jordan recalled.

"I think I've tried to make the music user-friendly. I want to be the Macintosh of the industry. I would like it to be when hip-hop fans heard the song and say 'I like this. This is hip-hop,' and where R&B fans heard the song and say 'I like this. This is R&B,'" he said.

"I tried to create something

that's different. I'm not saying I'm an innovator or a creator. I took elements that already existed and did it my way. The result was something that pleased a lot of hip-hop fans and R&B fans — and maybe confused a couple people in the process," he added with a laugh.

A former member of his hometown church choir, Jordan "always" takes the feelings of his congregation and family in consideration when he writes his songs.

"There's a responsibility that comes along with doing songs like I do. I'm not a perfect individual, but I take full responsibility for the stuff that I've said or sung. What I've tried to do is I've tried to create for people who are listening to me (the chance) to see that I'm a kid from the street."

When he sings about drinking, he said, he hopes listeners are smart enough to realize that they're not old enough and if they're gonna drink, get a designated driver.

But, he admits, there's songs on "This Is How We Do It," that he doesn't want his sisters to hear, like the frank "I Wanna Be the Very Midnight Intertide."

"At their ages, right now, they know the stuff that they don't need to be listening to. If they happen to hear it on the radio, my parents are the type of parents that would rather talk about it and let them know that you don't need to be listening to that until you get older. It's part of that whole respect thing."

However, Jordan feels those songs were necessary for the album in order to show the "complete" Montell.

"I'm trying to let them see all the sides of Montell." There are different sides of Montell. There's an emotional and social side, a party side, lazy side, and a romantic side. There's a lustful side of Montell. There's a funky side of Montell. All these things come across on this album. "There's *Men and Mary J. Blige* at 7 p.m. Friday, July 7, at Pine Knob Music Theatre, 1-75 and Sashabow Road, Clarkston. Tickets are \$45 per person and \$28.50 less. For more information, call (810) 377-0100 or (810) 645-8668.

Have a listen

To hear music by Speedball (message 15), Pansy Division (message 14), Executive of Blues (message 15), Sonia Dada (message 16), Jennifer Trynny (message 17), General Public (message 18), Waka Jawska (message 19) and L.C.P. (message 20) you can call the Street Scene Music Line at (313) 953-3025 on a touch-tone phone. Fast-forward to the corresponding message by pressing 31. To repeat a message, press 4.

Speedball puts pedal to metal

BY CHRISTINA PUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Speedball singer/guitarist Chuck Burns took a lot of stock in the old joke "You can't chew gum and walk at the same time" when he formed his rock band three years ago in Los Angeles. The first time the former Westland and Garden City resident jammed with his quartet proved to be a true test of his coordination.

"This is the first band I've ever played guitar and sing in," said Burns who previously had been a drummer. "I put Mike (Alonso, drummer) and Bill (Kozy, guitarist) and Jeff (King, bassist/backing vocalist) together one day just to get together and jam. It was actually to see if I could stand up and sing and play."

"It was cool. We just kind of evolved from that."

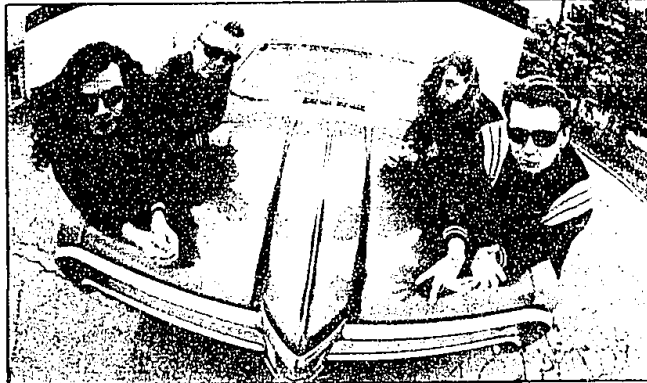
Speedball, all of whom now live in the Detroit area, evolved into a rock band on the independent hard rock label Energy Records which released the band's debut "Do Unto Others, Then Split" on Tuesday, June 27. It was produced by Steve Thompson whose credits include Guns N' Roses, Metallica, Soundgarden, Madonna, Yoko Ono, Blues Traveler, and Public Enemy.

The band, which has a one-album, four-album option deal with Energy, celebrates the release of the CD with a party and performance Saturday, July 8, at St. Andrew's Hall in Detroit.

"Do Unto Others, Then Split" has a lot in common with Burns' love of drag racing. The 35-minute, 10-song CD speeds along with its relentlessly addictive guitar riffs and hook-laden lyrics until it crashes head first into the end of the CD before you realize what hit you.

The first single, "Hog," is a hard-rocking testament to motorcycle riding: "Live fast, die young. Get on your hog and ride," Burns sings rolling his r's. "God of Slumber" is another highlight of "Do Unto Others, Then Split" with its Clutch-like monotone vocals that build tension until they explode into the chorus "Refuse to feel the pain. Some things just never change. Refuse to play the game."

"Do Unto Others, Then Split," Speedball weaves in and out of the rock, heavy metal and alternative rock lanes. The band's ability to diversify is one of



Speeding along: Detroit rockers Speedball — from left, drummer Mike Alonso, bassist/backing vocalist Jeff King, guitarist Bill Kozy, and vocalist/guitarist Chuck Burns — released their debut CD "Do Unto Others, Then Split" (Energy Records) on Tuesday, June 27, but the single "Hog" has already been added to a number of area radio stations.

Speedball's selling points, Burns said.

"One of our strong points is we like to hint at things. We like to hint at heavy metal. We like to hint at grunge. We like to hint at alternative. But we're none of those. We're just a rock band that kind of likes to dip into different valleys."

Although the band was formed in Los Angeles, three quarters of Speedball's members are originally from suburban Detroit. (Bassist/vocalist Jeff King was a military brat who lived all over the United States.) Alonso moved out west first in 1988 with his band Katmandu, which recorded an album for Epic Records. Burns and Kozy, who are longtime friends of Alonso, moved the following year.

The three remained friends in California — King was Alonso's roommate — and got together to jam after Katmandu fell apart. Burns at the time was playing in a side project of Tracy Guns of L.A. Guns called Killing Machine, and another band called Detroit. (If you called rock close on Alice in Chains' "Dirt" album, one of the guys is wearing a Mother T-shirt.)

As the band practiced, Alonso said, it was apparent that Speedball was their calling.

"Every song we wrote just got cooler and cooler. (We thought) 'Let's do it,'" Alonso explained.

Eventually, Burns put the pedal to the metal, spun his tires and left Killing Machine, which released an album on Polygram Records, and the drums in the dust.

"It wasn't until we started playing out that I thought, 'This is it.' So I finally quit Killing Machine and quit playing drums all together," Burns said.

The fledgling band gigged around the L.A. club circuit until the pressures of being under the record industry microscope got to them.

"This was the first band I ever played guitar and sang in, and here we are and I'm playing in Hollywood. We immediately started getting interest from record labels. I didn't feel that I was up to par with the rest of the band. I needed time to grow as a singer/guitar player. It was easier to come back here and do it because there's less pressure here."

Burns said during an interview at his Oak Park home.

"In L.A., as soon as you get any kind of a buzz, everybody comes out and you're under a microscope. If you don't get signed within the first couple of months, you might as well forget it."

The band, including King who had never been anywhere close to Michigan, packed its bags and headed back for Detroit. "The move was a valuable one, Alonso said.

"Detroit gave us a little chance to discover our niche (and discover) exactly which direction we wanted to go in. We were fighting with it a little bit. Now we're focused on exactly what we want to sound like."

Touring is the next race that Speedball is up against. Although their schedule's still tentative, Burns isn't taking any chances. He's getting in all the drag racing that he can.

Speedball, Hoarse and Chicken-hack perform on Saturday, July 8, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Doors open at 9 p.m. for the 18 and older show. For more information, call (313) 961-3617.

Gay band emphasizes the positive

BY CHRISTINA PUOCO
STAFF WRITER

In the three years that Pansy Division has been singing pop songs about the homosexual lifestyle, they've never encountered a homophobic crowd — until they visited Detroit with Green Day.

"It was one of the worst responses we've ever gotten in the entire country," singer/guitarist Jon Ginoli said via telephone from his San Francisco home. "It was the most loud and obnoxious and antagonistic crowd that we had to face."

"We always wondered when we would run into a really homophobic audience. It took about 200 shows before we saw one."

Ironically, Pansy Division merchandise sold well, which is why the trio is looking forward to playing two shows, sponsored by Homocore Detroit, on Tuesday, July 11, at Alvin's in Detroit.

The band is touring in support of "Pile Up" (lookout!), a compilation of singles, rare tracks and covers of songs by Prince, Lis Pharis ("Plover"), Lou Reed ("Femme Fatale"), and Spinal Tap ("Big Bottom") among others. On the 20-track CD, Pansy Division doesn't mince words about their lifestyle.

"I feel like the best thing that we can do is just present ourselves the way that we're comfortable doing. If we were really worried (about people's reactions) we couldn't have started in the first place," he said.

The album closes with "Smells Like Queer Spirit," based on Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" rewritten with pro-gay lyrics: "Irreverent and in your face. Attaching preachers spewing hate. I'd love to puncture their balloons. Spray silly smog around their rooms. Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello."

Even though there's a statement inside the CD booklet that Nirvana didn't mind "Smells Like Queer Spirit," Pansy Division had to stop playing the song



Gay and proud: Members of the San Francisco alternative rock band Pansy Division — from left, vocalist/guitarist Jon Ginoli, bassist/vocalist Chris Freeman, and drummer Dustin Donaldson, former Kalamazoo resident and member of Thought Industry — aren't afraid to write songs about their lifestyle.

because Nirvana fans took offense to it. The band's lead singer Kurt Cobain committed suicide a year ago.

"People are really sensitive about Kurt Cobain. It's not a parody of the original. It's not a put down. (But) People think we're making fun of the song and we got some bad reactions. The meaning of the song changed after he died. This sort of light fun song that became sort of heavy," Ginoli explained.

"Pile Up" isn't a diatribe lambasting people who disapprove of the gay lifestyle. Most of it is fun, upbeat songs. For example, in the opening track "I Can't Sleep" Ginoli makes fun of a boyfriend that he had: "Wish I could turn on my light/And read my Village Voice/But 'twas' next to this lecherous whelk/I haven't got the choice/He looked good at the time/I sweet have been out of my mind."

With their music, Pansy Divi-

sion hopes to give listeners a positive look at the gay lifestyle, Ginoli said.

"Part of the idea was to document something that really was sexually positive and reflect our own experiences which are good experiences in terms of we're happy that we're gay. It hasn't been all roses all the time. The songs in general try to reflect what we're upbeat about. Sometimes we get kind of cynical or sarcastic, but for the most part we're dedicated to doing something that we enjoy doing. We don't really get on stage and try to be morose. We're trying to do something positive with our experiences," Ginoli said.

Two of Pansy Division's members are gay — Ginoli and bassist/vocalist Chris Freeman. New drummer Dustin Donaldson, a former Kalamazoo resident who played with the industrial rock band Thought Industry, is straight and doesn't mind the explicit lyrics.

"When we met him, one of the things that he said was he has never understood why people get so upset about gay issues. It's never been an issue for him. ... It's very into the idea of supporting a gay band even though he's not gay," Ginoli said.

"It says something about us too. We're in the rock scene. We've been gay since we were grown up. We've always had straight friends who were in the music scene with us. We're pro-gay and really in your face about it, but we really value our straight fans. It's not a separatist kind of thing."

Pansy Division performs an all-gays show at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, July 11, at Alvin's, 3708 Cass Ave., Detroit. A portion of the proceeds will benefit Oakland University's Gay and Lesbian Alliance (GALA). For more information about the show, call (313) 832-3254.