

SCREEN SCENE

The Snake
— Shane MacGowan
and the Popes

With his whiskey-soaked demeanor and a mouthful of blackened, twisted teeth, Shane MacGowan's reputation precedes him. Back in the '80s, the ex-husband of the Popes' cartoon persona became more famous than his now-revered band, one of the first to marry traditional Irish music with modern rock.

The idea of the Popes was always better than the real thing (the uninspired trashing of "Honky-tonk Women" found on "Popes Essential" borders on sacrilege) and the same goes for "The Snake." Blending penny whistles and furred-up guitars is an intriguing idea, but thanks to MacGowan and Dave Jordan's flat production, intended ravers like "That's Woman's Got Me Drinking" and "A Mexican Funeral in Paris" merely sound cluttered. Only the opening "The Church of the Holy Spook," a rollicking tale of religious family tradition, succeeds with this formula. Traditional jigs like "Nancy Whiskey" and "The Rising of the Moon" may be instantly memorable, but only because MacGowan's vocal melody and the whistle melody are exactly the same on every such song. During the course of 15 tracks, this effect gets annoying quickly.

The real tragedy here is "Haunted," a duet with Sinéad O'Connor. Duet near the album's end and coming after nearly an hour of MacGowan's passionless grunting, O'Connor's vocals are startling and breathtaking. Then the grim reality seeps in: a duet means two singers. Soon O'Connor's spell is rudely broken by her host's attempt at crooning along. Sung alone by O'Connor, "Haunted" could have been a classic, which attests to MacGowan's songwriting skills but also makes his vocal shortcomings embarrassingly obvious.

As bad as his reputation may be, MacGowan is capable of producing some of his own magic, as evidenced on his remake of "What A Wonderful World" with Nick Cave a few years ago. While his sense of humor and lyrical gifts sometimes shine here, particularly on "Victoria," the album just doesn't add up musically. In the end, the album's lyric sheet is better reading than "The Snake" is listening.

(Shane MacGowan and the Popes, with The Waltons perform Wednesday, Aug. 16, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For more information, call (313) 961-MELT.)

—Todd Wicks
A Rochester Hills resident, Todd Wicks is a journalism student at Michigan State University.

I Love Everybody
— Lyle Lovett

An acquired musical taste, Lyle Lovett is the epitome of "either you love him or you walk away scratching your head." For this fifth best-selling disc, Lovett has attained something akin to popularity in the music biz (not to mention a growing appeal as a cinema star), it appears that he's concluded that this latest batch of tunes, many of which were written close to a decade ago, are finally ripe for an audience just coming to grips with his quirky (at least) sense of lyricism.

"Penguins" ("I don't go for fancy cars/for diamond rings/for movie stars/I go for penguins"), clearly written prior to his marriage to movie star Julia Roberts, benefitted from some airplay, mostly on college and public radio, and serves as a perfect tone-setter for the rest of the package. If it's a song that catches your ear, it's a safe bet that this delightful compilation will be a welcome addition to your collection. His ability to wed catchy melodies to downright strange lyrics has always been Lovett's forte, and this is most definitely more of the same.

Songs like "Hello Grandma" and the dark-hood "Creeps Like Me" ("I keep my uncle Leon in my closet because he's nobody knows him and Uncle Leon"), set to lush and lilting melodies, may be the best examples of that unlikely alliance here, and his "Yes He Does" ("I don't like hippies and I don't like comedians and I don't like much but that's OK"), and "They Don't Like Me" ("I can feel it and I don't like them") are their equals for classic Lyle-isms. Did I mention that he's an acquired taste?

There are, though, as always, beautiful and straight-forward songs here, as well. "Moon On My Shoulder," with its theme of coming to grips with a love affair and the bar house arrangement of "Just the Morning" are two of the most touching. The excitement that lies at the heart of the best of Lovett's album will forever be the joy of searching through the treasure. This one is loaded with them.

(Lyle Lovett performs Friday, Aug. 4, at the Fox Theatre, 2211 Woodward Ave., Detroit. For more information, call (313) 295-7800.)

—Mark E. Goffo
Mark E. Goffo is a freelance critic from Farmington Hills.

Have a listen

To hear music by Don Dixon (message 15), Peter Murphy (message 16), Thomas Madder (message 17), Bright Blunt (message 18), Hootie and the Blowfish (message 19), Solid Frog (message 20), and Trash Taste (message 21) you can call the Street Scene Music Line at (313) 953-2275 on a touch-tone phone. Fast-forward to the corresponding messages by pressing 53. To repeat a message, press 4.

STREET BEATS

Singer returns from self exile

BY CHRISTINA PUOCO

STAFF WRITER

When Peter Murphy completed his 1992 "Holy Smokes" world tour, he needed to make a clean break. He dissolved his longtime backing band, The Hundred Men, and moved his family from London to Turkey hoping to recharge his musical career. "I set out to burn bridges, to give myself a feeling of freshness and vitality," Murphy said. "That burning of bridges went as far as potentially accepting that I'd finished in the music business. It was a purging period — making a clean break. The splitting up of the band, although as much for economic reasons as any, seemed to be an appropriate part of that."

As he rose to the surface of his self-imposed hiatus, he realized that his music career wasn't over with. The result is "Cascade" (Bizarre Banquet/Atlantic), a release that leaves the dance club vibe behind and goes full force into the adult alternative market. The first single "The Scarlet Thing in You" is his lyrical sequel to his 1990 hit single "Cuts You Up" from the album "Days." Lush, introspective songs like the book-laden "Gliding Like The Whale" and "Subway" carry most of the album.

Literally, the album has a stamp of Turk culture on it. "Wild Birds Flock To Me" takes its cue from the aspirant poetry of the 13th century mystic, Jalaluddin Rumi. Musically, there would seem to be a distinctly Turkish influence on "Cascade," but Murphy said it was quite the opposite.

"This is the first album which doesn't have a Turkish instrument on it," he said via telephone from his Oran, Fla., hotel room. Murphy could have been on Mars and not be affected.

"I've always written in private space. I've never been one to branch out and socialize music. My music's always been quite introspective. Yet, there's obvious social influence there. (Moving to Turkey) has probably clarified a few things for me."

"Cascade" is Murphy's first album since 1991's "Holy Smokes." Although he took a break from the industry, most of the last four years have been spent perfecting lyrics and influences. "My financial situation doesn't allow him to home his skills in the studio during the recording of the album."

"I'm not like a U2 who has the money to hire the studio for two years solid and play around with the ideal until it's right. I have to get it right from the word go. . . I don't have the luxury to really think about different ideas. It's pretty much a one-shot thing."

Murphy is now in the midst of a



No thanks: Former Bauhaus singer Peter Murphy, who plays *Industry* on Monday, Aug. 14, said none of the current music he hears impresses him except for maybe Seal.

U.S. tour in support of the new album with his new band. For his live shows, which comes to *Industry* in Pontiac on Monday, Aug. 14, Murphy said he's concentrating less on the visual aspect and more on the musical presentation.

"I've taken it down a notch in terms of The Hundred Men. We pretty much take it where we left off and start to reshape it. I had to get a totally new band together. Because of that, it brought us all into that sort of area where we were starting from scratch. It has a sense of danger to it really. I let myself be taken by that sort of very basic need activity of getting the songs happening and played well."

"It's taken me back to the early days where you are on the edge and you're on the line."

Murphy is the former lead singer

for the ground-breaking goth band Bauhaus, which broke up in 1983. He's seen the "alternative" scene come and go and frankly he's not impressed with what he sees now, except for Seal.

"A lot of the instrumental music keeps me interested. I like a lot of classical music. I like a lot of the jazz music. I'm totally disconnected from all that. I don't know whether that's good or bad. On MTV I see a Nine Inch Nails there; Nirvana constantly. . . MTV seems like repetitions of the same sort of theme of that very vibrant but yet unfortunately senseless youthful rage, but it does spark up a lot of energy which kind of justifies it in a way."

Murphy admits that he doesn't have the same sort of drive that he had when he first entered the music

business as a teen.

"That's due to a lot of innocence, a lot of the fantasies about being inexperienced. As with a lot of fantasies about certain lifestyles, once you come through a lot of those fantasies they become necessarily broken down. Those illusions lead you into maybe trying to retake that illusion back, supporting it with drugs or whatever just to keep the feeling."

"I welcome that sort of breakdown of illusions. I've grounded down. I'm at a point where it's entirely practical, yet it's still very inspiring in the appropriate area. That's the hour and a half I'm on stage."

Peter Murphy and Jewel perform at *Industry*, 15 S. Saginaw, Pontiac, on Monday, Aug. 14. Tickets are \$15.50 in advance for the 18 and older show. For more information, call (810) 334-1999.

Producer enjoys helping young bands

BY CHRISTINA PUOCO

STAFF WRITER

For Don Dixon, producing records by acts like R.E.M., the Smithereens, and Marshall Crenshaw is a two-fold therapeutic process. First it does the obvious — eases financial burdens. But it allows him to return payment for the emotional fulfillment that he received as a struggling musician.

"I started producing years ago for the same reason guys coach little league baseball — to help out the younger kids that hadn't made records. It was back in the '70s and I had already been making records (with the band Arrogance). I started helping people in that same sort of almost egalitarian kind of fashion," Dixon said.

He started his career helping the struggling Athens, Ga., band R.E.M. produce their records "Murmur" and "Reckoning."

"They are a very smart, intelligent bunch of guys with very realistic expectations all along. They weren't trying to go out and have a hit record. They had this sort of Grateful Dead like early on with these really loyal and pretty fans even in the very beginning. They just continued to build on their grass roots following," he said.

He lent a hand to the Smithereens' ground-breaking album "Lately." Especially for "Yes," "Green Thoughts," and the most recent "A Date With The Smithereens."

"They are the best American band. They are totally kick (butt). They're just great. They play with a tremendous amount of energy."

Although Dixon has received the most notoriety as a producer, Dixon calls himself a songwriter first.

"It's (songwriting) been a job of mine. They seem a lot of my money, even though songwriting is probably the biggest wage-earner for my house."

I don't think of myself as a producer. My career's very much handled more like an artist or writer despite the fact that I produce records," he said.

For most of August, Dixon is getting the chance to put his own music in the spotlight opening for Hootie and the Blowfish during a chunk of their summer tour. The show comes to Pine Knob Music Theatre in Clarkston on Wednesday, Aug. 9. The Chapel Hill, N.C., adult alternative singer is out promoting his latest album "Romantic Depressive" (Sugar Hill). His first in a little over five years, "Romantic Depressive" is a collection of top-topping pop songs that delve into blues, gospel and rock influences. Producing his own material, Dixon said, is much different than helping others. He has to turn the focus toward himself.

Obviously — when I'm producing somebody I mirror them. I help them concentrate on their strengths. It requires a different approach. I have to sort of subsume myself into their persona a little bit."

The twenty-something Hootie fans at Pine Knob will probably remember Dixon as the man who recorded "Teenage Suicide (Don't Do It)" the featured song in the Winona Ryder/Christian Slater cult film "Heathers." Dixon was surprised that anyone remembers that song. Now that it's been brought up, he's considering releasing the song for the Pine Knob



Successful yet modest: Although Don Dixon has sat behind the knobs during the recording of albums by R.E.M. and Marshall Crenshaw, he doesn't consider himself a "producer."

real generic look to the movie. It's hard to tell when the movie is. It could be in the '50s or '60s."

Besides his sole record, Dixon's current project is with Murray Attaway, formerly of Guadalquivir Diary. His previous project was with James Murphy, whose latest album "Where D'ya Hide the Body" (Columbia/Sony) is receiving a fair amount of airplay on adult alternative stations like CDRW-FM (92.5) "The River." Dixon is proud of his effort, hoping that McMurtry's time will come.

"I realized that his records weren't doing himself justice. We took this, his third album, and made it more like what I was hearing every night on the stage like the grooves that he sort of created with his guitar. He's very talented."

Hootie and the Blowfish and Don Dixon perform a sold-out show at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 9, at Pine Knob Music Theatre, 1-75 and Southland Road, Clarkston. For more information, call (810) 377-0100.