

## STREET SCENE

## Go, cats, go — rockabilly bands rave on

BY TODD WICKS  
Staff Writer

Ready Freddy, Gorgeous George, Valentino, the Professor... these aren't characters from vintage Saturday morning cartoons. The wrestlers your father grew up watching. They're the new breed of Detroit's rockabilly, young and old musicians alike who want to earn their music the respect it deserves.

Still honoring pioneers like Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent, the leaders of the burgeoning rockabilly scene are also working to put a modern spin on their traditional American music.

These bands may disagree on the importance of the pompadour, the tattoo and the upright bass, but all would agree that today, rockabilly has become greatly misunderstood.

Everybody thinks that rockabilly was this one narrow thing that the Stray Cats did in the mid-'80s, and it's a lot broader than that," explained Pistol Pete, singer/bassist from Pontiac and the leader of the Twistin' Tarantulas.

Most of the rockabilly artists across the States are all working hard to shake that stigma of 'Sha Na Na' and the whole nostalgia thing. We're trying to get recognized as an American musical art form like blues, swing or jazz."

For the uninitiated, however, the Stray Cats aren't a bad place to start. Their hit "Rock This Town" features all of rockabilly's vital ingredients: a minimal but swinging drumbeat, a nifty walking bass line, twangy lead guitar and hiccupping vocals heavy on the reverberation. From Elvis Presley's "That's All Right" in the '50s to Morrissey's "The Loop" last year, this peculiar blend of blues and country can be irresistible.

Rockabilly was pushed up big back in the '80s," said Mike "the Professor" Silvio of the Farmington-based Chickenhawk, "but there have always been bands doing it."

"It cuts out a lot of the confusion of hard rock and alternative. It's the basics: it's danceable, it's mean, it's honest, it's a good time. People can dance, they can jump, they can shout, they can scream, they can wiggle, they can walk. It's just a lot of fun."

Besides newer bands, there are also a few rockabilly lifers who still call the Detroit area home. Originally from Utica, Johnny Powers hit it big at the legendary Sun Studios in the '60s, later worked for Motown Records and still tours.

"They now say I'm the only art-

ist on the planet to sign with two such legendary labels," he said.

Despite his early success, Powers quit singing for 20 years but was lured back by his cult of European fans in the '80s.

"It's hard to explain how big (rockabilly) is in Europe," he said. "They're really hip to that stuff... they still have teddy boys and rockers, just like in the '60s."

On Aug. 19 Powers will test the waters at home when he headlines a rockabilly festival at the Magic Bag in Ferndale to promote his new record, "New Spark For An Old Flame" (Schoolkids Records). He hopes for a strong hometown turnout.

"Unfortunately, I don't do that many shows in Michigan," he said. "I would just like to see my home state participate and have fun cruising Woodward like I did in my teenage days. I'd also like to see some of the older people come out and get a little loose along with the younger kids."

One of the younger kids at the Magic Bag that night will be Ryan Racine, except he's not just going to see Powers; his band is opening. Racine and the two other members of the Ann Arbor-based rockabilly group Lucky Haskins are all still in high school.

"Yeah, we have one more year left," Racine said dejectedly. The impending school year will put a sizeable cramp in Lucky Haskins' giggling.

"I guess we'll just do weekend shows, like we have the past couple (school) years," he said. Although the Stray Cats peaked when he was about 5 years old, Racine still observes a pattern to rockabilly's lifeline.

"It seems like every 15 years or so it resurfaces," he said.

Lucky Haskins' clearly admire his musical elders. "I love Johnny Powers," Racine said.

"We played with him before at Sully's. He also had us open with him for Carl Perkins' (Blue Suede Shoes) at Sully's last December. (Perkins) was really great, kind of a grandfather figure. Bill Giorgio of Nobody's Business (also playing the Magic Bag Aug. 19) hopes to create a full-fledged rockabilly scene in Detroit starting with Tuesday night jam sessions at The Office Bar in his hometown of Redford.

"We're trying to build on something we feel is already there, promoting ourselves and any rockabilly band that comes down," he said, stressing the unity such a scene requires.

"We're trying to take something



**Awaiting CD release:** While the Redford-based rockabilly band Nobody's Business awaits the release of their latest CD, produced by ex-Stray Cats bassist Lee Rocker, they play jam sessions at their hometown's The Office Bar.

we feel is happening and make it bigger and better, but for all the rockabilly bands."

Waiting for the final mix of its debut CD (produced by ex-Stray Cats bassist Lee Rocker), Nobody's Business purposely puts the emphasis on the music instead of the look.

"We are into the visual thing, but do we look like every other rockabilly band out there? No," Giorgio said flatly. "We do our homework, but at the same time we try and keep everything as original as we can."

Fashion plays a bigger role for others. Silvio and his bandmates in Chickenhawk gleefully indulge in '60s visuals.

"It's all tattoos, greased-back hair, kids jitterbugging in the audience, it's all that," he said. "It's the look and a big part of the show."

But Silvio will admit that cool

clothes and flashy guitars are subversive to the sound.

"The pompadours and stuff are all a part of it, but it still comes down to the music. Heavy metal without long hair is still heavy metal, you know?"

The Twistin' Tarantulas know rockabilly's visual appeal, but worry that it overshadows the music.

"Sure, when you go to a Mexican restaurant you like to see a few sombreros hanging on the wall, I understand that," said Pistol Pete of Isopurkin shoes and watch chains. "I also understand that the '60s aspect of (rockabilly) is the reason some people like it. But that's not why I like it."

"To me, rockabilly was the first punk rock," he continues with growing intensity. "When it was first being created back in the '60s, this was serious greaser music for hot-rodgers and juvenile

delinquents. All the geeks and jocks were listening to do-wop and the Platters and bands like that. (Rockabilly) was rarer and had more energy."

From the respectful youths in Lucky Haskins to the brash confidence of the Tarantulas, Detroit's

rising rockabilly scene is host to several distinct personalities. All must co-exist to create the scene Giorgio and Nobody's Business hope for, but it shouldn't be too hard, as those pompadoured denizens the Stray Cats sang not long ago, "Everybody knows that rockabilly rules, OK?"

## Cats gather at Magic Cafe

Nobody's Business, along with Lucky Haskins, Astie Wolff and the Pack and Johnny Powers perform during the "Rockabilly Festival" at 8 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 19, at the Magic Bag Theatre Cafe, 22918 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Tickets are \$6 in advance for the 18 and older show. For more information, call (810) 544-3030. Nobody's Business also hosts a

rockabilly jam session every Tuesday night at The Office, 15414 Telegraph, Redford, (313) 533-4477.

The Twistin' Tarantulas play every Sunday night at the Magic Stick in the Majestic Theater complex, 4140 Woodward Ave., Detroit. For more information, call (313) 833-9700.

## SOUND Bites

## Tata's Basement

• Seth Hittsky, singer  
• Mike Flaherty, bassist  
• Jeremy Shiloh, guitarist  
• Jon McRoberts, percussionist

Seth Hittsky of the Southfield-based Tata's Basement doesn't like what he's seeing in clubs these days. Lyrics, he said, are taking a backseat to the ritualistic aspects of shows, such as jumping around and head-banging to loud music.

"I think in a lot of music, lyrics are getting lost. Lyrics are important to me... (Listeners) are listening for just certain things as opposed to the whole. For example, you can read a John Grisham novel and have a really enjoyable read and read something by Henry James and have a hard time with it. You have to work at Henry James but it's a lot more fulfilling (in the end) than John Grisham," said Hittsky who is also a actor who performed in "Henry James" at the Stratford Festival and "The Piano Lesson" at Greenfield Village.

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## Black Crowes happy with the HORDE

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO  
STAFF WRITER

The Black Crowes' success with their album "America" easily could have sent the band on a headlining U.S. tour of its own for the summer. But the band decided to shake a different kind of money maker and head out with the HORDE (Horizons of Rock Developing Everywhere) tour.

"We did a couple of HORDE shows last summer. It was just a good vibe, a real positive thing. They invited us back and we accepted. We thought, 'What a way to spend a lot of the summer,'" bassist Johnny Colt said.

Unlike other all-day festivals like Lollapalooza, the focus is placed strictly on the music — not body piercing, tattooing or shopping. Bands on the main and side stage alternate leaving barely any time for non-musical attractions anyway.

"It's a really diverse musical day. Your attention is focused on music," Colt said.

With this year's lineup ranging from the avant garde funky blues rock sound of Morphine to reggae progenies Ziggy Marley and the Melody Makers, the HORDE festival has adopted the original idea of Lollapalooza — introduce fans of, say, Blues Traveler to pop upstarts like Seminoles. The rest of the day includes performances by Wilco, Red Thunder, and Sheryl Crow.

What sets the HORDE festival apart is fans will be allowed to bring in tape recorders. "Real big microphones" are even permitted, Colt said. The Black Crowes have offered that luxury to fans during their entire "America" tour and make nightly changes for fans who attend more than one show.

"We play a different set every night. We play an open-ended slot. We just go with the flow," Colt said. The Black Crowes, who expect their next album to be released in spring

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Johnny Colt  
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1996, explored different kinds of rhythms on "America" than those on the band's first two albums, 1990's "Shake Your Money Maker" and 1992's "The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion."

"We're a relatively young band. It's still a growing process. Because of how the industry is, sometimes it's easy to forget we're still learning and we're still trying to express ourselves as we find a deeper resource of soul music," singer Chris Robinson was reported as saying.

The band, which includes Detroit/keyboardist Eddie Hirsch, took longer to record the album as well, Colt said. Instead of the seven days it took to record "Southern Harmony," the Black Crowes took six months to wrap up "America."

As the record was released it took on a life of its own — partially due to the controversy that the album cover caused. The cover is a picture of a person wearing American flag briefs with public hair hanging out. To keep the complaints at a minimum, the band's label American Recordings changed the background to black leaving only a triangle flag on the cover.

To the band, the cover of Wren's latest album which pictures a tight outfit wearing woman wearing a tight outfit was much more offensive.

"It was my whole point. When I'm doing interviews in Europe, they don't understand. They're like, 'What's the problem?' The funny



**Helping the development of rock:** The Black Crowes — from left, singer/harmonica player Chris Robinson, drummer Steve Gorman, keyboardist and Detroit Eddie Hirsch, guitarist Marc Ford, guitarist Rich Robinson, and bassist Johnny Colt — headline this year's H.O.R.D.E. festival, which stands for Horizons of Rock Developing Everywhere, on Sunday, Aug. 20 at Pine Knob.

thing is that people were more upset with the public hair than the way the flag is being used," Colt said.

The sold-out HORDE Festival comes to Pine Knob Music Theatre, 1-75 and Sashabaw Road, Clarkston, at 8 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 20. Scheduled to appear on the main stage are the

Black Crowes (9:30-11 p.m.), Blues Traveler (7:50-9 p.m.), Sheryl Crow (8:35-7:55 p.m.), and Ziggy Marley and the Melody Makers (8:25-9:10 p.m.). Morphine (9:30 p.m.), the Rembrandts (7:25-7:50 p.m.), Wilco (8:10-8:35 p.m.) and Red Thunder (8:25 p.m.) are on the side stage.