

STREET SCENE

STREET BEATS

Soup
— Blind Melon

The lazy New Orleans-style intro to Blind Melon's first single "Galaxie" from "Soup" (Capitol) is a big enough clue that there isn't going to be very many specials on this menu. However, wade through the introductory mess, and "Galaxie," the house special, is revealed. The song, written about Hoon's 1964 Ford Galaxie, has the same sing-along appeal that their break-through hit "No Rain" possessed.

Most of the other tracks have potential but fizzle out quickly. The song "2 x 4" starts out with a "Hand Jive" kind of groove but dissolves into a blasé vehicle for singer Shannon Hoon to show off his rhyming abilities.

Having a baby with his longtime girlfriend brought out the sentimental side of Hoon. An ultrasound photo of his baby lies behind the words to "New Life" in the CD booklet patterned after a menu. He pays homage to his late grandmother in the musically gloomy "Vernie": "Roaming through the cupboard jar of pickles never opened since 1983/Peanuts in a pile and Elvis down the aisle singing gallantly/I wish I could be a little more like Vernie."

The bluegrass-tinged "Skinned," on the other hand, is upbeat despite the fact that it's an attempt to dissect the mentality of serial killer Ed Gein: "I'll make a shoehorn outta your shin/I'll make a lampshade of durable skin/And oh, don't you know that I'm always feelin' able/When I'm sittin' home and I'm carvin' out your navel."

Since the release of "Blind Melon" Hoon has definitely been affected by goodness like in the song "Skinned." "St. Andrew's Fall" is another one. The song was written after Blind Melon, while in town to play St. Andrew's Hall, saw a woman jump to her death from an Omni Hotel room window. "Car Seat (God's Present)" was sparked by the murders of Susan Smith's children in South Carolina. With its lounge-act feel, "Car Seat" has the right ingredients for a second single.

All I can say is that this album's pretty lame. It's time to call "The Bee Girl" back in to rescue Blind Melon from the sophomore jinx.

—Christina Fuoco

Dance On The Stones
— World in a Room

Subtlety is a musical tool few young bands today know how to use. It seems like 90 percent of alternative bands out there are openly loud and pounding, which isn't a bad quality but can sometimes help cover a multitude of sins, chief among them weak, unoriginal material.

The rest, bands with no aspirations to rock out, often seem to be musically drifting, making quiet music that is pretty but shallow.

On their latest release, "Dance On The Stones," Ohio's World in a Room proves itself one of the few groups capable of keeping a song interesting without any overt hooks or blasting, repetitive riffs.

Vocalist and acoustic guitarist Jason Kilbey Smith sings in a deep, dramatic voice without lapsing into generic Vedderisms. His vocals are instead somewhere between Hunters and Collectors' Mark Seymour and Depeche Mode's David Gahan.

But the mellow, jangly instrumentation here is thankfully drum machine- and keyboard-free. "Train" showcases a brooding bass line and "Why," despite its regrettable similarity to the Eagles' "Best of My Love" is a nice, acoustic-strummed ballad. "She'll Be Fine" is the only misfire, spoiled by an uneven, soul-throated chorus.

The other eight originals are to be admired for their ability to entertain and hold interest without being instantly memorable after two or three listens. Such subtlety is rare in so young a band.

"World in a Room's" "Dance On The Stones" is not a spectacular album, but will prove rewarding to fans of easygoing, earnest pop who don't need to be hit over the head with distortion to pay attention.

—Todd Wicks

World in a Room's "Dance On The Stones" is not a spectacular album, but will prove rewarding to fans of easygoing, earnest pop who don't need to be hit over the head with distortion to pay attention.

Have a listen

To hear music by Buffalo Tom (message 9), Blind Melon (message 10), Electrification (message 11), Speedball (message 13) Ted's Basement (message 13), and Southern Culture on the Skids (message 14), 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.

Buffalo Tom wary of too much success

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

The members of the Boston rock band Buffalo Tom are a little weary of performing on television again. You can't really blame them for feeling like they're bad luck after reviewing three of their recent appearances. In support of their fifth album "Sleepy Eyed" (East West) they performed on the "Jon Stewart Show" (it turned out to be Stewart's last show), and guest starred on the now-cancelled "My So-Called Life."

A previous appearance included a stint on the short-lived, Jamie Walters' launching pad "The Heights."

People are reluctant to have us on their TV shows," guitarist/vocalist Bill Janovitz said with a laugh.

Those TV appearances, however, pushed them beyond the cult status that they held since forming in 1988 — just in time for the June release of their fifth album "Sleepy Eyed."

Buffalo Tom, who plays Pine Knob on Sunday, Sept. 3, doesn't waste any time kicking off the album with the juicy, ripe "Tangerine." The one-two punch of the aggressive guitar and hook-laden lyrics make it the hit apparent — but not without a fight.

The woozy ballad "Kitchen Door," during which Janovitz sings "I'm the number on your kitchen door/I'm the baseball team from Baltimore/I'm the number on your kitchen door/Like Cinderella she just sweeps the floor," is right up there. The toe-tapping groove of "Your Stripes" is another runner-up.

Where their last album "Big Red Letter Day" buffed the rough edges, "Sleepy Eyed" sharpens them up again sharing Buffalo Tom's forte of playing live.

"Sleepy Eyed" was recorded predominantly live, which is something we realized we were — a live band, a garage kind of rock band. These songs are a little more urgent live. . . . We set up like it was a gig with little speakers on the floor, no headphones and we just let everything bleed into each other," Janovitz said.

Janovitz doesn't expect "Sleepy Eyed" to be a million-selling hit but he's already made plans in case that happens.

"I'd retire. I'd go down to the islands. It would be frightening," he



Resting on their laurels: Buffalo Tom are from left, bassist Chris Colbourn, singer/guitarist Bill Janovitz, and drummer Tom Maginnis.

said. . . . If Buffalo Tom in some weird world was to sell millions, I would raise a few flags. I know it did for people like Kurt Cobain. Once they started selling millions, they wondered, 'What's wrong.'

Opening for the band Live has given them a taste of what it's like to be million-sellers.

"I have a hard time thinking of us as a blockbuster band. When we play with Live, we get a feeling of what sells millions of records. They play big music. Everything about it is big

— the issues they take on, the way they project it. Like U2 or Pearl Jam, these are bands that are made for that kind of thing. Our concerns are smaller concerns, and more important maybe. It's hard to convey that to millions of people at one time."

He hopes that they don't get notoriety based on their appearances on TV as the "token alternative band."

"That's kind of what I'm afraid of. It's this weird dichotomy of trying to expose ourselves to more people and get on soundtracks, and at the same

time they just need an alternative rock band here and you're just kind of filling it in. I don't want to become this generic kind of thing."

"It's inevitable, though. Once you're mass marketed, it's like there's soap, Aunt Jemima waffles and then they show you."

Buffalo Tom opens for Live and PJ Harvey at 8:30 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 3, at Pine Knob Music Theatre, 1-76 and Sashabaw Road, Clarkston. The all-ages show is sold out. For more information, call (810) 377-0100.

Pavement percussionist critiques the critics

BY TODD WICKS
STAFF WRITER

"Rock critics are usually frustrated grad school writers trying to prove that they're entertaining," said Pavement's Bob Nastanovich, sitting hunched over his dinner on a hot Lollapalooza Wednesday at Pine Knob.

"Unfortunately, they don't write enough about how the music makes them feel, they just try to be as pretentious as possible and force their readers to get a dictionary and a thesaurus to read their reviews."

Coming from the genuinely pleasant Nastanovich, this blow to the ego actually sounded a lot less evil than it reads now. Digging through some kind of breaded fish or chicken with his bare hands in the VIP area, Nastanovich, whose responsibilities with Pavement include playing percussion and screaming background vocals, expounded more on jaded music journalists whose reviews have turned ugly now that their "little secret band" has gone big-time.

"I think we've definitely reached a point where we're not sneaking up on anybody," he said. "We like to think of ourselves as a band who makes people feel things and isn't as cold and icy as graduate school is. None of us have ever been to graduate school."

This punchline is delivered with a totally straight face, just as one would expect from the sardonic Pavement boys including singer/guitarist Steven Malkmus, drummer Steve West, bassist Mark Bold, and guitarist Spiral Stairs. Earlier in the day, clad in long pants and work shirts under a broiling July sun, the band's jangly, obtuse act received a warm response. Its latest album "Wowee Zowee" (Geffen) has continued the roll that began with last year's "Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain" and its breakthrough single "Cut Your Hair" and the oft-quoted "Range Life."

Despite his earlier rant, Nastanovich and his bandmates shouldn't really complain; since their first release in 1989 they have generally received one big, wet kiss from the media. And although Pavement has long since garnered the requisite number of raves from Spin magazine to become incredibly successful, another thing that's gone in the band seem, well, really nice.

"We can be pretty snotty, but I see no point in doing it on stage in front of all these people today, three-fourths of which have never seen us before," Nastanovich said. "Shows

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Bob Nastanovich

like this, we're just going to get up there and introduce our songs to people. Not that anything we say would be over their heads, it's just that most of the people out there don't understand specifics about the band, and a certain amount of them probably couldn't give a crap."

He sounds almost saddened by Pavement's inability to connect with more people. "Really, this is one of the best crowds we've had. I think today, a lot of people were trying to like us. There have been a couple of (Lollapalooza) shows where seemingly, about 100 people have been paying attention. . . . We feel much more confident in front of a crowd of 700 Pavement fans who know us a lot better than this."

Sandwiched between Beck and Cypress Hill, Pavement did seem a little overwhelmed by it all. Malkmus kept his body twisted away from the crowd, focusing more on his bandmates. They were working hard but seemed to be playing more for themselves than that lone kid standing up and dancing wildly out in the 47th row. As Pavement's acknowledged mastermind, Malkmus calls all of the shots onstage, which can sometimes lead to minor musical mishaps.

"Did you notice some confusion out there today?" Nastanovich asked. "We don't write a set list anymore. It makes for a better show. Here at Lollapalooza, he's (Malkmus) just calling them out as they come."

He attempted to explain further. "It's all to make him feel like he can play what he wants when he wants to play it and when he plays it, we'll play it."

Even if they can't always express themselves verbally, you've got to love a workaholic band on the rise who takes a break from the music scene just to give its fans a rest.

"We need time off to give people who care about the band a break," Nastanovich said. After six years of



Pounding the Pavement: Percussionist Bob Nastanovich says that "rock critics are usually frustrated grad school writers trying to prove that they're entertaining." His band was recently in town to play the Lollapalooza Festival.

constant recording and touring, the band is due for a long vacation at the end of the Lollapalooza shows. True to workhorse form, he also cites their lack of new material.

"We only have eight new songs, and until we get that number up to 20, we aren't going to record."

According to Nastanovich, the recording studio is a funny place. "There are so many bands that are so great live and have worked so hard on their live show that they don't have enough energy to record," he said. "Their records are an afterthought." Then possibly spurred on by the sound of Hole screaming in the background, he added, "There are also bands who make great records but were obviously in the magical recording studio for their sound and just stink live."

"We fall into that category on occasion," he said, straight face succumbing to a rare smile.

Bosidon, Nastanovich sees no rush to create more product for an already-crowded marketplace. "There's no lack of new bands today," he noted. "There's almost as many kids playing

in bands now as who play high school football."

Having moved the conversation into sports, Nastanovich finally relaxed a bit. "Pavement are all big sports fans," he said, adding that horse racing rules his life. "According to Nastanovich, who lives across the street from Kentucky's Churchill Downs, Pavement's slightly uncomfortable Lollapalooza campaign was arranged only to raise funds for the hobby closest to his heart. "All this is just to get ready for the fall race," he said, and like before, it was impossible to tell if he was joking or not. "I'm only focusing on raising money to buy a couple of cheap racehorses. That's my plan. I'm going to follow the dream I started when I was 16 years old, to find a decent racehorse and campaign it."

Nastanovich looked around for a minute, lost in thought and far away from the sweaty masses swarming close by, the same masses he had entertained only hours before. "I like Detroit," he announced out of nowhere. "There's a good racetrack up here."