

STREET SCENE

Playful R.E.M. builds frenzy

BY TODD WICKS STAFF WRITER

Michael Stipe hates balloons — at least the black ones from a local radio station that floated around Michigan State University's Breslin Center Sept. 27.

Midway through R.E.M.'s set, the Q106 balloons, which had drifted lazily through the air during Radiohead's languid set, invoked the wrath of the bald singer. "I don't know why, but those balloons are really bugging me," Stipe announced between songs. He then accepted one from a security guard, and with a little help from bassist Mike Mills, popped it with a microphone stand to wild applause.

Funny little scenes like this were scattered throughout R.E.M.'s show in East Lansing last week. On the final leg of the grueling tour in support of its latest album "Monster," the band seemed relaxed and playful. Barely 30 minutes after Radiohead's set ended, the lights went down as R.E.M. strolled casually onstage and leaned into the midtempo "I Took Your Name." But something about the scene wasn't quite right. Light flooded in from the ceiling and the bouncers circling the floor seats never let anyone forget that this was, after all, just a mid-sized basketball arena. As the first song ended, both the crowd and the band seemed uncertain about what kind of night this was going to be.

However, several crowd-pleasers in quick succession roused the sedate crowd. A vestal, surgery-free Peter Buck and a Les Paul led the charge through "What's the Frequency, Kenneth?" "Crush With Eyeliner," and the electric hip-hop version of "Drive" with gusto. Mills, in a white Nudie suit and long curls, stomped about the stage with his bass lunging, banishing his former nerdy, shirt-sleeves image to the '80s forever. His perfect background harmonies also saved a few songs from Stipe's purposely erratic pitch. Drummer Billy Berry was typically non-descript, donning a baseball hat for his turn at bass during a disturbing "Country Feedback," which Stipe introduced as "our favorite song."

For all of their scissor kicks and crowd-working, Stipe remained the show's focal point. Under thick black eye makeup and the quickly shifting stage lights, he alternately resembled an angry zombie and a playful, restless child. Unintentionally at the Palace show this past summer, Stipe was exceptionally verbose between songs. "This one is ladies' choice," he announced as a disco ball dropped for roller-rink effect on "Tongue." At one point, harassed by an overzealous fan at stage right, Stipe looked perplexed and said, "Uh, I'm going to go over here now," walking left to enormous laughter.

Like the Palace visit, the show contained a good number of new songs consistent with the gritty, glamorous, guitar bent "Monster." "Departure" and the Beastie Boy-ish "Revolution" were highlights of material slated for an upcoming album. R.E.M.'s road-tested muscle also rejuvenated old favorites like "Losing My Religion" and "Man on the Moon," turning the latter into the most propulsive, rousing song of the evening. Reaching back for 1986's "Begin the Begin," Buck's Spanish riff was hypnotic above Berry's tribal rhythm. At the set's fast song-slow song-new song pattern occasionally disrupted a good groove, it also provided for a wealth of diverse material from the slowest of the slow ("Everybody Hurts") to the slamming ("Star 69").

Stipe seemed especially excited bringing out Detroit legend Patti Smith for their encore. After an under-rehearsed but moving duet on "Let Me In," and a love-dovey chat near the drum riser, Stipe left the spotlight as Smith fronted the band for the night's only cover, her classic "Dancing Queen." However, the night's best treat was yet to come.

The closer, "It's the End of the World as We Know It (and I Feel Fine)" was given a trashier treatment than its album counterpart, with Stipe wanting the stream-of-consciousness lyrics way out of time. As the song built and built, the crowd, who had remained excited but orderly the entire show, finally broke loose, flooding the aisles in a rush to the stage.

After several stressful and injury-prone months on the road, R.E.M.'s performance was full of fire and gristle. Overcoming a slow start, it had professionally worked the crowd into a frenzy. Now it was time to have some fun. So Mills, Buck and Stipe, immediately noticing the crush, moved forward like good old-fashioned rock stars, closer to the broiling masses, posing, jumping and teasing the crowd joyfully as the night spun to a frenzied close.

R.E.M. and special guest Grant Lee Buffalo perform at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 22, at Crider Arena, 2331 Stadium, Ann Arbor. The show is sold out. For more information, call (313) 763-4636.

Roseville's The Ritz becomes Palladium

BY CHRISTINA FUCIO STAFF WRITER

After 11 years as The Ritz, the Roseville club has changed its name, its facade and is in the process of revamping its image.

The Palladium, as it's now called, will turn its focus toward Top 40 and alternative music. "We've always been known as a long-hair heavy metal band club," said manager John Cather. "We're making a change in format to Top 40 dance bands."

"We want to become known as an event-oriented venue. We want to bring in bands, comedians, anything really," he added.

STREET BEAT

Charm Farm shifts musical gears

BY TODD WICKS STAFF WRITER

It's a rare band that can successfully change musical styles over the course of its career. The Rolling Stones have done it a few times, from rock to disco to punk and earth-toned missionaries into black-leathered technobrats a few years ago with "Achtung Baby."

Detroit's Charm Farm doesn't resemble either of those bands, but doesn't need a 10-year career to start genre-hopping, either. On their third album, "Pervert" (PMA Records), they do it within the course of a few songs. The head-turning jump from the straight-ahead rock of "I'm a Man" to straight-faced disco on the first single "Superstar" is an undeniable shock. Likewise, the whipsaw funk of the title track unexpectedly gives way to "Sick" and stereo guitars like something by Queen.

These kinds of surprises delight the members of Charm Farm. After four years, the band has become a staple of the Detroit scene. Singer-songwriter Dennis White and guitarist Steve Zuccaro, both of Grosse Pointe Park, enjoy their ongoing expeditions in musical diversity.

"It's a very, very diverse record," said White of "Pervert," released Sept. 19. "I'm a musician, I don't listen to music a lot. If I do listen to a full CD, it's because it went all over the place. Even if (a CD) is great all the way through, if the instrumentation doesn't change up a lot, I can't be interested in it. And of course, if I'm making it, it's something I want to be interested in."

Zuccaro said despite the musical changes there's an underlying theme to the songs.

"There are a lot of different areas we're going into, but there's still a common denominator in all of the songs. The production value should bring it all together and make for a cool record. When we were recording it, we were thinking about that. We knew that these were all different styles, so we tried to make sure on each song so it would be cohesive."

Particularly for White, "Pervert" marks a distinct change from the styles on 1993's "Flirt," which spawned the radio hit "La La Hey." Those songs on "Flirt" were written when I was between 22 and 24, and that's a pretty happy record," said White, who is 28 now. "I had just finished playing with Inner City (a groundbreaking Detroit techno project with Kevin Saunderson). It had been telling me about the world as someone else's expense, and it was just modula, parties and good times. I came home and wrote a record that sounded exactly like that... which is why no one cares about it now, why it did a pretty quick death artistically."

White, who produced both albums, shared the public's apathy.

"Flirt" was out of sight, out of mind for me four days after I got the CD," he said.

He sees the superior lyrical quality of "Pervert" as a personal triumph.



Celebrating release: Multi-Detroit Music Award winners Charm Farm — from left, bassist Dino Zoyes, background singer Taj Bell, keyboardist Ken Roberts, singer/songwriter Dennis White, drummer Eric Meyer, and guitarist Steve Zuccaro — celebrate the release of their third CD "Pervert" with a party and performance at 10 p.m. Friday, Oct. 6, at the Magic Bag in Ferndale.

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"I have a record now that I really believe in. I'm very proud of this. I can actually listen to this and be interested in what we came up with in the studio. I want as many people to hear it as possible."

Interestingly, "Pervert's" more wounded, emotional approach was completely unplanned.

"I didn't go into this album saying, 'Here's what's on my mind and I'm going to get it down,'" White said.

"Only after I finished everything and put the songs in order did I start to notice that it was the kind of record that a guy who's getting older makes. In a retrospect, thematically, the record is about the range of getting older and getting on, more about coming to terms with the way life really is as opposed to the fantasy of what we hope it will be. There are the fantasies we entertain about it when we're 16 and then there is the way that it really is."

Bestie's "Pervert," a new development that should widen Charm Farm's audience is a band project called "Underground Television" (U.T.V.) on local public access cable channels. The show features interviews with the band, acoustic perfor-

mances, and old Charm Farm footage. Having his own TV show excites White.

"The minute I learned that cable operators had to let you have your own TV show if you wanted one, I was all over that in a second. You can spend a lot of time trying to promote a little concert and hope that 400 or 500 people show up, or you can spend the same amount of time putting a TV show together. Even if it's on these little dinky cable stations, at least 5,000 people are going to see it. We hope to not just get exposure for ourselves, but to get exposure for things that we're into."

Zuccaro said that the TV show is "a big deal to us."

"This could really help spread the word. Plus it's something you don't really see a band do, at least not since the '70s, since the Osmond Family or something."

The members of Charm Farm — which also includes bassist Dino Zoyes, background singer Taj Bell, keyboardist Ken Roberts, and drummer Eric Meyer — are pleased to have become a multi-media experience. The group is one of the few Detroit bands who have its own World Wide Web site.

Wide Web site.

"It does a lot more to empower individuals and give them a lot more access to information and exposure. Like us! A couple of dorks can get their own TV show, exposing themselves to tens of thousands of people. We have a web site, and tens of millions of people have access on the Internet now," White said.

He paused sounding bored by such numbers. "Look for Charm Farm to worry less about playing shows around the area and more about maintaining a really cool television show and having a really good site online. We want to have a lot of ways for people to interact with the group besides the same old, boring, 'We're playing a show at a club' thing."

Technology and advancement aside, Charm Farm members are still old-school rockers enough to throw a good bash the US "Where the Streets Have No Name" or the Beatles' last gig waltz. Without coming right out and saying it, Zuccaro hinted that Charm Farm would be visiting downtown Royal Oak very soon in a very special sort of live show.

Charm Farm, with special guest DJ Kenny Larkin, celebrates the release of "Pervert" with a party and performance at 10 p.m. Friday, Oct. 6, at the Magic Bag Theatre Cafe, 22918 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Tickets are \$6 for the 18 and older show. For more information, call (810) 644-3030. They will also perform Thursday, Oct. 26, at Industry 15 S. Saginaw, Pontiac, (810) 334-1999. Visit the Charm Farm World Wide Web site at http://msn.com/tilda/chrmfm.

Jude Cole drops heartbreak for happiness

BY CHRISTINA FUCIO STAFF WRITER

St. Jude and singer/songwriter Jude Cole have a lot in common. St. Jude is the religious icon to turn to for hopeless causes, and since the late 1980s Cole's fans have looked to him when relationships have crumbled.

Now they'll have to turn elsewhere. The man who specialized in break-up songs like "Get Me Through The Night," "Time for Letting Go," and "Tell The Truth" is much happier, this time.

His latest album "I Don't Know Why I Act This Way" (Island) reflects this sentiment.

"I'm a pretty happy person. I'm very out of step with what else is going on, musically speaking. The thing that ticks me the most about this record is I'm not 'alternative.' It's not an angry record," Cole explained.

On "Believe In You" he sings "There's too much talk about the clouds of gray/when there's a great big sky of blue/I turn off the TV, and look in your eyes and I know that I've found something true/just believe in you and I'll believe in me."

That's a far cry from his heartbreak songs like the 1990 single "This Time It's Us" or "A View From Third Street" (Reprise) where he says, "I know that it could happen to us, we're going 'round, breakin' down/each other's hearts/so go on and blame me/for whatever you want/But we've become just like the ones/We've laughed about/This time, this time it's us."

It's kind of a surprise that "I Don't Know Why I Act This Way" turned

out as optimistic as it did. It's been a rough ride for Cole since the recording of 1992's "Start The Car" (Reprise). Cole kicked a drug and alcohol addiction four years ago, which is chronicled in the song "Heaven's Last Attempt."

"All that came to a head when I was recording the 'Start the Car' record. That first year of being sober is not the most fun place to be. Every time something goes wrong and things always go wrong because you're edgy, you want to run to the closest bar or whatever. That was the hardest year of my life. Now I've settled into it and I'm having a lot of fun."

Around the time he was settling into it, his longtime manager Ed Leflor died of cancer, which is reflected on the moody acoustic "I Don't Know Why I Act This Way."

"That is why the record is more softer and more introspective, post-baby. With a baby on the way and a very close friend and manager dying, I wasn't really in the mood to rock out."

The positive mood of the album is a result of the musical reawakening that Cole went through while preparing to record "I Don't Know Why I Act This Way."

"I'm not too interested in writing about turbulent love anymore. There was a lot of songs that were about that. I know I can do that and a little voice inside my head told me to go onto other things." Cole said. "His songs still touch some sort of conflict but they have a happier ending."

"I find it hard to sing about optimism without some sort of conflict first," Cole said. "Like 'Spread of Life,' it's very optimistic. 'Believe In You,' is very optimistic. 'Take the Reins,' they're all about optimism."

"They all come from maybe a more down-on-your-luck perspective. I've found it more interesting to be down on your luck and to fight twice as hard. That's been my life and my career anyway. It's not something I'm fabricating from my million dollar home."

Cole has definitely had to "fight twice as hard" in his career. The singer, who released "Start The Car" and "A View From 3rd Street" on Reprise Records, never reached the star status that he deserved. Those two albums along with his self-titled debut are burning at the seams with pop gems.

Granted "House Full of Reasons," "Baby, It's Tonight" and "Words Apart" achieved some airplay on contemporary hit radio, but had the records been pushed to his standards by his former label, he would have been all over the radio.

"I will love listening to those records. They withstood the test of time for me. I don't have any animosity (for the label) but I don't think they did a great service."

Jude Cole, and special guest Chris Bennett, perform Tuesday, Oct. 10, at 7th House, 7 N. Saginaw St., Pontiac. Doors open at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for the 18 and older show. For more information, call (810) 836-8100.



Happier times: Jude Cole's latest CD "I Don't Know Why I Act This Way" is more uplifting and positive than his past efforts. Cole plays an acoustic show on Tuesday, Oct. 10, at the 7th House in Pontiac.