

STREET SCENE



Movie fanatics: Ruth Ruth, who plays St. Andrew's Hall on Feb. 8 with Everclear and No Doubt named itself after a character in Lily Tomlin's "The Incredible Shrinking Woman." The band — from left, singer/bassist Chris Kennedy, guitarist Mike Lustig, and drummer Dave Snyder — are touring in support of its debut "Laughing Gallery."

New York punkers Ruth Ruth turn free gig at club into record deal

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

It's hard to get any gig in New York, let alone a weekly one. Usually, the band plays a gig one month, takes the next off, and returns the following month.

The three members of the New York pop punk band Ruth Ruth didn't let that dissuade them from devising a plan to build following in the city. After toasting around a handful of plans, singer/bassist Chris Kennedy came up with an idea that would allow Ruth Ruth to generate a fanbase without monopolizing any club's time.

"We talked to the club owner at this club called The Continental in New York and told him we were trying to build a following," explained singer/bassist Chris Kennedy.

"We asked him if we could play early when he didn't have a band playing and we'd play for free. He let us and we did it for about a year and a half. At first we played to nobody, but then after a year and a half we had a pretty good following."

Ruth Ruth's perseverance paid off. The trio met its manager at the club and subsequently signed a deal with American Recordings. Kennedy said he never expected his weekly gigs would result in a contract.

"No way. We had no plan of attack, but we were attacking. I guess... We never thought that far. We just thought it would be great to keep playing."

Ruth Ruth, which also includes guitarist Mike Lustig and drummer Dave Snyder, have kept on playing and will continue during most of 1996 which includes a Feb. 8 St. Andrew's date with Everclear and No Doubt.

A few weeks back, Kennedy had other things on his mind. He's just come in his New Jersey home which has been buried in snow thanks to the "Blizzard of 1996." With shoveling behind him, Kennedy warmly spoke of Ruth Ruth's debut album "Laughing Gallery" and his single "Uninvited."

"I feel really happy and really fortunate that we're getting the insight that we're getting. I love the whole idea of people knowing our single and that they're beginning to check out the record," he explained.

"I feel like I might have a career that I love to do. Right now, we're kind of like, 'Do we go back to work on our day job or do we keep going?'" added Kennedy who "did everything from driving a truck to paralegal work."

The album explores Kennedy's inner-most insecurities and securities, like in "Uninvited."

"With that tune I wanted to try to write a tune that showed what I went through growing up. I hung out on my own a lot and I didn't care. I'd rather be alone than hang out with a bunch of dumb people," said Kennedy, 28.

"I kind of wrote that tune in an affirming light. You can be uninvited on your own and that can be a really good thing."

Kennedy relates the musically choppy "Mission Idiot" to a screwed up relationship song.

"You can't get out of it. You know you're a chump. No matter what you do, you're always in a bad spot," said Kennedy who's happily married.

In this case, the title came before the song.

"I'm really happy with 'Mission Idiot.' I had that title for a long time and I couldn't come up with a tune. I had about five of them that didn't work. Then I turned around and it showed up."

"I Killed Meg the Prom Queen" is a response to Julie Brown's "The Homecoming Queen's Got a Gun?"

"It's pretty much a venting tune. It was written about my graduation period, but I wrote that tune right about a year before we wanted to do the record. It's about what I've gone through, the people I grew up with, and the memory I have from growing up."

"I'm kind of going back to all that (stuff) now."

"When I'm 40 I'll be writing about everything I'm going through now."

Right now his band's focus is its upcoming tour. After rejoining Everclear for a couple weeks, Ruth Ruth will head over to England in mid-February.

Kennedy has no problem with promising fans who have seen Ruth Ruth open for Everclear before that they'll see a much tighter show on Feb. 8.

"When we began the Everclear tour we didn't know what the hell we were doing from putting a show together and playing well. We were all right but it was really kind of a different thing going from playing to 125 people to 600-800. You have to be together to keep up with Everclear. I think we became a better band under the competition."

Ruth Ruth and No Doubt open for Everclear at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 8, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Tickets are \$9 in advance for the all-ages show. For more information, call (313) 961-MELT or (313) 645-6666.

Grueling tour inspires fine album

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Like the Dave Matthews Band, Hootie and the Blowfish and Blues Traveler, the Chicago band The Freddy Jones Band built its following through relentless touring.

Ironically the painstaking 24-year tour almost brought them down.

"There was a lot of stuff that happened on that tour," explained drummer Simon Horrocks.

"We almost ran out of money. Vehicles were breaking down. People were getting sick. Family members died. It was like a ton of bricks came down on the band. It was a make it or break it tour. We figured that if we could survive through that tour, we could survive anything."

The tour was so grueling that The Freddy Jones Band's manager and road manager suggested the band "throw in the towel." Horrocks, whose father died during the tour, and the rest of the band insisted that they finish. Unbelievably, he said, they mustered the energy and the motivation to do that.

"Honestly I don't know where it comes from. You just do it. You don't even think about it. I guess it comes back from when my mom used to make me go to school if I was sick," Horrocks said.

From the bad, however, came the good. The quintet turned its experiences into its third, and most critically acclaimed album to date, "North Avenue Wake Up Call" (Capricorn).

"All the experiences over the course of the year — like the time we were stranded for a day when our bus broke down in 115-degree heat outside of Clovis, N.M., or the death of my father during our tour — got bottled deep inside us. And when we finally got off the road and into the studio, these memories came pouring out."

(Incidentally, on its "North Avenue Wake Up Call" tour, the band has gone through seven opening bands, three tour managers, and three different buses.)

From the slide-powered "Hold on to Midnight" to the haunting "Waitress," "North Avenue Wake Up Call" offers a melodic, lyrical series of road-inspired snapshots.

Every song is framed by The Freddy Jones Band's rich blend of multi-layered three-part harmonies and electric guitars with sprinklings of mandolin, banjo, Hammond organ, and accordion for flavor.

Besides the songs, the name of



No Freddie here: The Freddy Jones Band — from left, guitarist/vocalist Wayne Healy, vocalist/acoustic guitarist Marty Lloyd, guitarist/vocalist Rob Bonaccorsi, ex-Dearborn resident and drummer Simon Horrocks, and bassist Jim Bonaccorsi — brings its never-ending tour to the Blind Pig in Ann Arbor on Saturday, Jan. 27.

the album has connections to the road.

"After a Saturday night gig in the Midwest, we're usually so pumped by the energy from playing for an appreciative audience that we just drive all night, trying to make it home to Chicago by dawn," Horrocks said.

"As soon as we hit the bumps and potholes of beat-up North Avenue on the north side of town right about sunrise, one of us just yells out, 'North Avenue Wake Up Call.' And we're home."

The Freddy Jones Band was formed in South Bend, Ind., by vocalists/guitarists Marty Lloyd and Wayne Healy. The pair moved the group to Chicago in the early 1990s, recruiting drummer Will Leonard, bassist Jim Bonaccorsi and guitarist Rob Bonaccorsi.

Horrocks, who moved to Chicago 10 years ago from Dearborn, came into the fold upon the recommendation of his hometown

friend Leonard who was leaving the band.

Through an intense grass roots campaign that included mailing lists and word-of-mouth referrals, The Freddy Jones Band was able to build up such a dedicated following that more than 120,000 people bought copies of its 1993 album "Waiting For The Night."

The band's label, Capricorn Records, then re-issued The Freddy Jones Band's 1992 independent self-titled album.

In the days when grunge bands were getting the nod from record companies, Horrocks said, it was incredible that bands like his generated that kind of response.

"At the time when all these (college rock) bands were getting started, the musical trend trend was nothing like what we are. They weren't even looking toward the future of music like The Freddy Jones Band. All the record labels were trying to find the next Nirvana," he said.

Times have changed, however.

The Freddy Jones Band continues to pique the interest of radio programmers and listeners, fellow acts Dave Matthews Band, Hootie and the Blowfish and Sheryl Crow are striking it big.

Gigging with those bands helped boost The Freddy Jones Band from its touring-in-a-"little-stupid-Ford van" stage to its current, big-time-touring-with-a-tour bus set up.

"We're happy with what's happened. Now we can afford to do bigger shows and live a little bit more of a comfortable lifestyle on the road."

The Freddy Jones Band performs Saturday, Jan. 27, at the Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. Doors open at 9:30 p.m. for the 19 and older show. Tickets are available at Ticketmaster. For more information, call (313) 645-6666 or (313) 996-8555.

Band lugs piano for different reasons

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Ben Folds didn't want to start a band that would get lost in the sea of "alternative rock" bands.

So he, Robert Sledge, and Darren Jessee purposely set out to do something different. They took a piano, fuzzy bass and punk-rock drums and created Ben Folds Five.

"We didn't want to do the same old thing at all. We figured having a piano trio was a good way to mix it up... It took a full, big, commitment to make it what it is."

And what a commitment it turned out to be. Set against using an electric piano, the band took on the difficult task of moving a piano around the United States during its tour. As a matter of fact, the first time Ben Folds Five was able to talk a promoter into hiring piano movers to carry the instrument from the truck to the stage was for its show with Heather Nova at The Shelter below St. Andrew's Hall in Detroit last September.

It proved to be a pretty mottley experience at best.

"We saw these skinny punked-out kids and I said, 'Has anyone seen anybody looking like piano movers?' They said, 'We're piano movers.' So they got the piano out and I realized that these guys didn't know anything about moving a piano. I told them 'you gotta watch that. Pianos are heavy (and awkward).'"

They got the piano to the stage safely, but Folds learned a valuable lesson.

"It turned out they weren't the piano movers. They were all these tall, skinny, punk kids there for the Pennywise show at St. Andrew's. The real piano movers showed up later."

Ben Folds Five has hit the road

again and will probably need help moving their piano up to the second floor 7th House at 7 N. Saginaw in Pontiac on Friday, Jan. 26. The band is touring in support of its self-titled debut for Caroline/Passenger records.

Folds describes his 12-song CD as "punk rock for sissies" but critics have called it "phenomenal music." He sneaks humor into almost every song.

In the loungey beginning to "Underground" Folds, at times singing like Joe Jackson, takes jabs at alternative rock kids looking for mosh pits. The fuzzy-rock "Uncle Walter" tells the story of that ever-so-annoying relative who talks on and on about pointless things. The full-force rocker "Julianne" is about a girl who looks like Axl Rose while "Boxing," an imagined conversation between Muhammad Ali and Howard Cosell, has waltz-like timing to it.

"All the songs on the CD span from ones I wrote in high school to something I wrote in the studio while we were working on the record... It's the best of my songwriting."

Folds has played the piano since he was 9 when his father took the instrument as payment for some remodeling work he did. Folds' parents didn't have to pressure him to practice like some do — it was actually the opposite.

"I'd get up at 6 or 7 in the morning playing piano and waking up my parents. I think they were sorry they got that piano."

Taking lessons wasn't his thing, so he learned on his own.

"I just knew that that was something I could do, given the chance to mess with it. I'd be playing in bed until 8 or 9 (at night) listening to an Elton John record with a little tape recorder. I'd say, 'When I wake up I'm going to go in there and play this



'90s piano men: The guitarless Chapel Hill, N.C., band Ben Folds Five — from left, drummer Darren Jessee, pianist/singer Ben Folds, and bassist Robert Sledge.

song.' I went to the piano and of course I didn't do it but I had the dumb confidence to play it no matter what."

Years after the temper tantrums ended, Folds is now making his living behind a piano. Folds isn't a big on musicians' stage antics, so being shackled to a piano at shows is fine with him.

"I'm not a big fan of jumping around as a musician anyway. It just looks like a little tape record up toy jumping around on stage. I'm glad I don't have to worry about that."

If you're playing piano and just sitting there, that's probably better. Don't get me wrong, though. We have a really good time."

Take a good look at his piano, he said. The score from his gigs show.

Ben Folds Five and 3 lb. Thrill play the 7th House, 7 N. Saginaw, Pontiac, on Friday, Jan. 26. Doors open at 8 p.m. for the all-ages show. Tickets are \$6.50 in advance. For more information, call (313) 335-8100 or (313) 645-6666.