

STREET SCENE

Creative burst led to creation of Seahorses

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

When guitarist John Squire left the immensely popular etheral Brit pop band The Stone Roses, he had no intention of immediately getting back into music.

Things quickly changed, however, for the 34-year-old guitarist/songwriter. After "living under a cloud" for years with The Stone Roses, Squire felt extremely liberated, inspired and ready for the third coming.

"I was more prolific than I had been for a long time. The songs dictated the fact that I needed to get a band together," Squire said via cell phone from Belgium.

He first called bassist Stuart Fletcher, whom Squire had met after seeing Fletcher's band, The Blueflies, perform the night he left The Stone Roses. Squire's efforts with his first singer were for naught so a friend referred him to vocalist/guitarist Chris Helme who regularly busked



Promoting new record: The Seahorses — from left, drummer/vocalist Andy Watts, vocalist/guitarist Chris Helme (with water bottle), bassist Stuart Fletcher, and guitarist John Squire, formerly of the Stone Roses.

outside Woolworth's in York.

"Chris was a real find. I liked the tape so I went to see Chris

myself a couple of times. It was a very hokey kind of atmosphere. He sat down with his eyes shut.

He was probably drunk as well. We took him out of his natural habitat and brought him to Manchester."

They put him in front of a Mancunian crowd and his whole attitude changed.

"The occasion intimidated him and got the adrenaline flowing. He was completely different. A real bonus is that Chris also writes good songs. The whole experience has a competitive edge and a support that I hadn't been used to. I never worked on someone else's material."

Fletcher's childhood friend, drummer Andy Watts, 27, is the latest addition to the Seahorses which recently released "Do It Yourself" (Geffen Records). The quartet spent 30 days in early 1997 working on the album at North Hollywood's Royalton studios with producer Tony Visconti, who had collaborated with David Bowie, T.Rex, Wings, Badfinger and Thin Lizzy.

Hands down one of the best albums of 1997, "Do It Yourself" is filled with soaring pop songs,

elegant music, and lyrics that stick like fly paper.

"It's very advanced pop music, serious pop music," said the 26-year-old Helme, who picked up a guitar at 19. "Some of the song titles are wacky, like 'Happiness is Egg Shaped' but there's nothing lighthearted about the subject matter. The music lies somewhere on the border of classic pop and alternative rock. It's got that hard edge and strangeness to it, yet once you hear these songs, you'll know them. You'll remember them."

Squire began his career in music with The Stone Roses, one of the most heralded British bands in the late '80s and early '90s. The band's 1989 self-titled debut (Silvertone) yielded the morose dance club hit "Fool's Gold," a funky, nearly 10-minute number, and "I Wanna Be Adored." Squire, whose band never played in Detroit, told the world via British music newspapers that The Stone Roses were the most important band to come along in years.

After success set in, The Stone Roses battled Silvertone Records for years to try to get out of its contract. In the meantime, egos, and creative and personal tensions erupted. Finally, in 1995, The Stone Roses announced its resurrection with "Second Coming" (Geffen). The band quickly went six-feet-under.

The remaining Stone Roses are working on solo projects with the exception of bassist Gary "Mani" Manfield who joined Primal Scream during the recording of its recent release "Vanishing Point" (Reprise).

"Do It Yourself" is like The Stone Roses with a sugar buzz. Squire warned that his care-free attitude won't last for long.

"It reflects the way I felt after leaving," he said of the lyrics on "Do It Yourself." "I don't see myself as writing uplifting, top-tappers for the rest of me life. I still have black moods and cynicism and I won't forget how to

incorporate that into pop music."

He's incorporated it already. Most of the songs begin on a happy note and end grimly.

In the pop-turned-reggae song "Suicide Drive," Helme sings Squire's lyrics "I don't think that I'll be able to swallow your family values again today/Because a giant squid/He stole my wife and kid." It is quickly countered by "Run the exhaust back inside/close the windows and take a ride/I've got a place to go/Nowhere to hide/On Suicide Drive."

The Squire-penned "Round the Universe" expresses the bitterness he felt after leaving The Stone Roses: "I can take you round the universe/In a hot wired police car/We can ram ride Mars and Jupiter/And drive right through a star ... Tell me, tell me, tell me why all good things must come to an end?"

Besides Helme, Squire also collaborated with Oasis singer Liam Gallagher whose previous writing credits were minimal. "Love Me and Leave Me" was written by the two at the home of Gallagher's future wife, actress Patsy Kensit, after Gallagher showed off his new Epiphone Casino guitar.

Unhappy with the muggy weather in Belgium, Squire is, equally upset with the British press for making The Seahorses seem like his solo project. That's not it at all, he said.

"I wanted The Seahorses to sound like a debut, not just appear as one. It was important that it didn't seem as a spin-off of the Stone Roses, or a third Stone Roses album. I wanted to make it as raw, refreshing, and exciting as I could."

The Seahorses and special guests Marsun, perform Sunday, Aug. 10, at the Shelter below St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Doors open at 8 p.m. for the all-ages show. Tickets are \$8 in advance. For more information, call (313) 961-MELT or (248) 645-6666.

'Buzz Bands' get together for a tour



CHRISTINA FUOCO

When the California punk band Smash Mouth recorded the song "Walkin' on the Sun" for its debut "Push Yu Mang" (Interscope) the quartet doubted that it would ever be a hit.

"It was one of those songs that was so different that we didn't know if radio was just going to flip out and say 'There's no way we were going to play this' or 'Wow, this is what we were looking for. It's so fresh,'" vocalist Steve Harwell explained.

Apparently it was the latter. The '60s-ish, Brit pop-sounding "Walkin' on the Sun" is one of the most talked about songs on alternative rock radio.

Songwriter Greg Camp explained that he wrote the song

about the time of the Rodney King beating. "I was riding my bike through this gnarly area to go to a club and I had these cheesy songs in my head. I was trying to be peaceful when all around me there were mothers on crack with kids in their arms. I know it's not gonna change the world, but it's my attempt. It has a '60s sound because everyone was so into togetherness then; underneath that it's all Smash Mouth."

"Walkin' on the Sun" is vastly different from the rest of "Push Yu Mang." Punk, ska, and reggae fill the rest of the album whose songs have silly titles like "Beer Goggles," "Heave-Ho," "Pet Names," and "The Fonz." Harwell explained that the band wanted variety to be the key to "Push Yu Mang."

"There was a lot of different influences. We don't hold anything out. We throw everything into a blender. We don't ever

want to be considered a ska band, a punk band, or a pop/rock band. We want to be Smash Mouth," Harwell said.

Smash Mouth is opening for Sugar Ray who was in town Wednesday, July 23, at Pine Knob as part of the Warped Tour. Hitting the third stage in the early afternoon, singer Mark McGrath knew how to win over fans.

"Detroit — home of the Stanley Cup Champions. Congratulations on the cup for all of you hockey fans," he told the raucous crowd.

During its set fans were standing on their friends' shoulders, and climbing on vendor booths trying to get a glimpse of the band. McGrath invited a teenage boy with a shaved head, and a girl with fuchsia bobbed hair to dance on stage while Sugar Ray played its hip-hop/rock song "Fly" from its sophomore effort "Floored" (Atlantic).

"Floored," which includes a cover of Adam and the Ants' "Stand and Deliver," marks the debut of Craig "DJ Homicide" Bullock, who began infusing samples into Sugar Ray's hard rock sound during the tour for its first album "Lemonade and Brownies."

A former hip-hop DJ who dabbled in production, Bullock said working with Sugar Ray "is the greatest thing."

"It's been inspirational. It made me grow as a musician. The things I do in the future will spring from this."

Sugar Ray, Smash Mouth, and Plexi perform at 6 p.m. Friday, Aug. 8, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Tickets are available at Ticketmaster for the all-ages show. For more information, call (313) 961-MELT.

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