

STREET SCENE

Bluesman creates unique sound all by himself

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

On his debut CD "Trashy Love Songs," bluesman Pete "Big Dog" Feters warns listeners of the impending trouble.

"This product may cause happy feet. Do not listen while wearing swim fins or other restrictive foot gear," the Livonia resident writes.

There should be a warning of another kind on "Trashy Love Songs" and his recent release "Be a Big Dog." Listeners who haven't seen Feters perform live are in for a surprise.

Feters is a one-man band. The guitar, vocals, harmonica, congas, shakers — Feters does it all. He fills out the bottom end of the music by tapping his foot on a piece of wood that has a microphone mounted to it.

"People get up and dance," Feters said of his live show. "There's more of a beat to it than people would think. I fill up a room with music. I used to be a trio but it sounds just as full to the people who are listening."

He's also a one-man organization. Feters writes and performs the music, and takes care of all of the business.

"I spend a lot of time being my own booking agent," he said with a laugh.

An East Lansing native, Feters graduated from Michigan State University in 1980 with the hopes of becoming a professional musician. Soon afterward he formed a four-piece country band.

"That's when the 'Urban Cowboy' craze was going on."

Three years after graduating from MSU he went to Nashville to record an album and made a logical decision about his immediate future.

"I said, 'Now that we're big time, what do we do? We go out on the road.' We did the travel thing for six months barely making enough money."

Songwriting was where the money was so Feters moved to Nashville to concentrate on his career.

It was there that he was introduced to the blues.

"There was all kinds of stuff going on. There was a blues scene with some great players," said Feters who also worked as a swimming coach for a local university.

In 1984, when his songwriting "was not going anywhere," he decided to "get out of music" and earned his master's degree at Michigan State University. For six years following, Feters worked as the head swimming

coach at Vanderbilt University. In the fall of 1994, he moved back to Michigan to be near his daughters.

Since then, Feters has released two CDs. His latest effort, the 11-song "Be a Big Dog," recorded at the Boneyard Studio in Warren, kicks off with the rollicking "Big Bottom Woman." In the song, which takes place in a Mexican jail, Feters sings "I've got a big-bottomed woman in my mind tonight. She can move that thing and make the whole world bright."

He keeps his sense of humor in check with the Hawaiian-flavored "Hula Dancer" (the way you move can make a man go blind), and his trademark song "Be a Big Dog" where Feters growls in the chorus ("Remember these four little words and they'll take care of you").

Feters moves on to more sentimental topics with "Deeper Into the Stars" which closes with the sounds of windchimes blowing in the mind, and "Casey's Song," an ode to his daughter.

His CDs are only available at his shows.

Ironically, now that Feters is back in the Detroit area, he's able to make a living off of his

music.

"I can make ends meet financially. I spend a lot of time focusing on my writing and teaching myself the slide guitar."

Feters recently played his biggest gig, opening for Leon Russell at the Magic Bag in Ferndale.

"It was a really great audience. The place was packed. They opened the doors at 8 and at 8:25 you couldn't find a place to stand up in there. I did a 45-minute set and about 95 percent of it was stuff on my CD and it went over really well. I sold a bunch of CDs."

The key to his success, Feters said, is being unique.

"It's really important not only to have a unique sound but to do something that's unusual that they'll remember," he said.

Pete Feters performs at 9 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 29, and every Friday and Saturday in December at Bole, 2055 S. Milford Road, Milford. The free shows are open to all ages. Call (248) 685-0505 for more information. He also plays at 9 p.m. Thursdays in December at Telly's, 20795 Mack Ave., Grosse Pointe Woods. The free shows are open to those 21 and older. For more information, call (313) 881-3985.



New release: Pete "Big Dog" Feters of Livonia recently released his second CD "Trashy Love Songs" on Two Sisters Records. Feters was nominated for Best New Acoustic Act for the 1997 Detroit Music Awards.

Hard-working people stage Thanksgiving parade

BACKSTAGE PASS



ANN DELISI

It makes your day to talk with people who love what they do. It shows in their work, too. A certain joy seeps into the finished product, and you're left just feeling good.

I've just spent some time with a group of people who love their work. They put together America's Thanksgiving Day Parade today, an enormous event in its 71st year — 2.2 miles of parade along Woodward Avenue and still Michigan's largest free public event. And, in the words of the Parade Company's executive director Suzie Gross, "We've revved up."

Another thing about the people who love what they do? Follow the baton as it's passed around. Suzie Gross: "We have four full-time artists who are master sculptors and craftsmen, plus hundreds of volunteers to paint, glitter, mache, work with fabric and sculpt. The windows of my office overlook the parade studio, and there must be 300 people in the studio. We have an award-winning art director, Jimmy Thompson, renowned nationally for his designs and his whimsical and creative concepts. It's fun."

To art director Jimmy Thompson: "Ralph Skinner, our assistant art director, is one of the best sculptors I've ever met, and Don Watta, our technical director, who does everything from building chassis to building animation. We're all on the same page. And the veteran volunteers understand the direction we're going, too."

To technical director Don Watta: "It's a pretty big effort between a lot of different people. I keep a pretty low profile. My goal is to make the animation work underneath their art work. If my animation distracts from the art in any way, that's not good. My intent is to make the art work come to life by adding the movement. And I have great people backing me up."

Sense a pattern? Suzie credits Jim. Jim credits Don. They credit the volunteers. No wonder the parade's so fun to watch! Jimmy explained the parade process lasts all year. "In January, I state illustrating for next year." Literally hundreds of artists and volunteers are involved. "We have carpentry, mechanical, people who are engaged in practical matters when putting things together, production line folks, people who work on surfaces and coatings, painters, fabricators, fabrics people with sewing skills — like if we need an oversized bedspread printed in a certain way that had to be weighted to



float just right, they can do it. You get to do as many different types

of art as you can imagine. Painting, sculpting, seeing how things are going to move left to right, and the whole live performance aspect. There are people who discover themselves as artists by pushing themselves a little further."

Talking to Don, it sounds like he may be one of those people. "My previous mechanical background was working on trucks, and I couldn't express myself. I only did repairs. But now Jimmy Thompson and I talk about how to make clearances lower so the artwork doesn't sit on high, or so we can put more on the chassis. Even though nobody really sees that, it enhances the art we've done well."

They all get a thrill out of parade day.

Jimmy says, "The payoff is the teamwork involved. There's nothing like seeing so many people on the same page. And to see it go down Woodward, seeing people enjoy the parade even if they don't know how much work goes into it. And then there are the people who pitched in who are able to point their stuff out to people, 'hey I did this part, that's my piece!' So it really is a parade for everybody."

Suzie says she watches children on parade day. "The best part are the looks that you see on the kids' faces as you walk the route. When you look at the parade, it takes you on a magical journey. It takes so many people to put together, but it touches everyone individually. That's why we work these 18- and 20-hour days. These are not only

floats and balloons, these are enduring memories that will last a lifetime. It's really a moving exhibition, a museum on wheels. It's not only a story book, but it's a history book, too."

Don concurs. "I personally do love it. I get a thrill out of the excitement of doing the parade."

Then he whets our appetite with this: "Wait 'til next year, 'cause we already have ideas!"

Backstage Pass will be pre-empted tonight (and for the Winterfest Pledge Drive — we return Dec. 18), so for Detroit Public Television: Happy Thanksgiving.

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