

STREET SCENE

Clutch shakes things up with support from Dan K

By CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Based in West Virginia, the rock band Clutch considers Detroit its second home. Sweet drips off the walls at St. Andrew's Hall and Harpo's, both in Detroit, because Clutch shows up so packed. The antagonistic rock band's merchandise goes for the counter like a waterfall.

Singer Neil Fallon has two words for his band's success - Dan K. The crazy bartender at The Shelter swings from the rafters, pontificates from the bar top, publishes the local fanzine "Big Hard News," and plays Clutch's music so loud it drowns out the music upstairs from St. Andrew's Hall.

"I don't think I need to tell Detroit who he is. He's a local hero," Fallon said with a laugh during a recent phone conversation from Columbia Records' office in New York.

"We also got played on the radio there. Once you get played on the radio it spreads the music across the atmosphere. Plus, Detroit's a rock town and being a

rock band, that's good for us."

On Thursday, March 5, Detroiters will get a taste of Clutch's upcoming album "The Elephant Riders" when the band performs with Limp Bizkit and Sevendust at the "Ladies Night in Cambo" '98 Tour" comes to the State Theatre in Detroit.

"The Elephant Riders," due in stores Tuesday, April 14, is a departure from its previous efforts, 1993's "Transnational Speedway League" (EastWest) and 1995's "Clutch" (Elektra).

"It's the kind of record you have to listen to a few times before you understand what's going on. Once you do that you continue to find things," said drummer Jean Paul Gaster via telephone from the band's home in West Virginia during the recording of the album.

"Just as the music itself is a lot more rich, there's a lot more things happening. Not only with the lyrics but the vocal delivery is much more rich as well. There's a lot of tones and colors."

Clutch's heavy, melodic sound is peppered with horns and bluesy guitars on "The Elephant Riders." What's missing, howev-

er, is Fallon's acute sense of humor. Lyrics like "Deebopaloobopwopshambo/ domo arigato if I got to" and "little bunny foo foo" remain buried in Clutch's previous two albums.

"There are some songs that I think are humorous. It's a little more, I hesitate to call it dark, heavy. That's a great word. That's what entertains us. I hope it entertains other people as well," Fallon explained.

He added that the poor relationship Clutch had with its previous record label caused the attitude change.

"It kind of took away the energy. It has been very difficult to get that back. Going on tour helped out immensely... It's been difficult. I think we were getting very tired of everything being an uphill battle to do the simplest things. Columbia's definitely got their act together. Now all of a sudden I feel as if there's an opportunity now that wasn't there before."

To promote the album, Columbia Records has set up a website for Clutch. <http://www.elephantriders.com>, and brought Fallon in to New York to approve

the artwork.

"I saw it last night," Fallon said of the website. "I brought a bunch of pictures taken over the years and I'm going to be putting these pictures up on the website. I'll be changing it every couple weeks or so."

Now that Clutch finally feels at home with Columbia, the band expects to release an album a year.

"There was way too much time between this album and the last one. We're talking three years. That's unacceptable."

"Columbia is doing good by us so far. But we always have ourselves to fall back on in our music. They can't take that away from us."

Clutch, Sevendust and headliners Limp Bizkit perform Thursday, March 5, at the State Theatre, 2115 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Showtime is 7:30 p.m. for the all-ages show. Tickets are \$14.50 in advance, but the first 400 users through the doors March 5 will be admitted free. For more information, call (313) 961-5451 or visit <http://www.961melt.com>



It's a war out there: Clutch - from left, drummer Jean Paul Gaster, vocalist Neil Fallon (sitting), guitarist Tim Sult and bassist Dan Maines - hopes to bring the troops into the State Theatre in Detroit Thursday.

Venerable music traditions get spotlight

BACKSTAGE PASS

DELISH!

I have a morning coffee habit. In its own small way my coffee consumption strengthens the American tradition of scarfing down seeds of coffee at the beginning of every day. And when I ride Junn Valdez's donkey to that Big Cafe in the Sky, the participants of my coffee habit (I hate styrene cups) may go with me, but I'll hang him on the show in a big deal.

"Old habits may die hard, but they die with a person. Traditions live on in a people. Tonight's Backstage Pass on Detroit Public Television includes performances from top practitioners in two venerable traditions: Celtic music and American blues.

Kim Hunter will host Solas, a quintet of contemporary Irish music all-stars that's riding the wave of Celtic music's widespread acceptance. I asked Kim why this traditional music is garnering such popular appeal. "The Celtic music thing

started in the late '80s and it's coming to a slow climax. Irish music is probably the most influential folk music - it's the grandmother of bluegrass. So people might be making those connections, which are evident if you listen with open ears.

What about Solas in particular? "They have Seamus Egan playing with them. He's the youngest-ever winner of a big prize in Ireland called the 'Irish Echo Traditionalist of the Year' at age 27. He's a really outstanding player and multi-instrumentalist - flute, banjo, mandolin, guitar, percussion and more. Just having him on the show in a big deal.

"There are a lot of young players with a great deal of enthusiasm and have a lot of chops. But he plays slow tunes with a lot of soul. It sounds like he's done a lot of living beyond his years."

No American music has a stronger tradition than the blues. And Monroe is building a quintet of contemporary Irish music all-stars that's riding the wave of Celtic music's widespread acceptance. I asked Kim why this traditional music is garnering such popular appeal. "The Celtic music thing

the concert every year since.

Widely known for his WDET program, "Blues from the Lowlands," Robert also works with kids with his "Blues in the Schools" program and makes frequent concert appearances both playing and preaching "the true facts" about the history of the blues. He's a top player and historian and Lex Kulline will host a performance.

Also on the Big Show, Plowshares Theatre's Gary Anderson will host a performance from "Taking Sides," the new show at

the Jewish Ensemble Theatre. Gary described an intense work. "The play focuses on an artist's culpability in continuing to perform in the Berlin Symphony during World War II while Hitler is killing Jews and wrecking havoc."

Finally, Gerry Craig from the Detroit Zoo's Wildlife Interpretive Gallery will host local graffiti artist Donovan in our studio to create an original work for us.

That's on Backstage Pass, tonight at midnight, repeated Friday at 7:30 p.m. on Detroit Public Television.

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