

## STREET SCENE

## James Wailin draws inspiration from secret journal



CHRISTINA FUOCO

A Kangol-topped, corduroy-wearing bluesman James Wailin opens his journal. In it he reveals his innermost thoughts.

However, we're going to have to take his word for it. While in his 20s, he created his own, Oriental-style alphabet after getting into trouble with a girlfriend who read through his journal.

These books, which Wailin has kept since he was 17, had a profound effect on her and his fans as well. From these journals, the singer/harmonica player culls lyrics for his band Wailin.

Listeners can tap into Wailin's thoughts on "Wailin Live," a rollicking romp through blues and funk, recorded at the now-closed Memphis Smoke in West Bloomfield last fall. He and his band—guitarist Anthony Musto, bassist Kevin Floyd, drummer Dylan McCarty and guitarist Brett Lucas—will celebrate its release Saturday, March 14, at the Magic Bag in Ferndale.

Wailin recorded the album with New York-based producer George Racile, whose credits include The Neville Brothers, Keith Richards and Jamey Brown.



**Celebrating release:** Wailin—*from left, bassist Kevin Floyd, guitarist Brett Lucas, drummer Skeeto, singer James Wailin, and guitarist Anthony Musto—recorded its live CD at Memphis Smoke in West Bloomfield.*

"We really got a lot of good energy working with George. We come from the same kind of background—real roots-based music. He was the perfect guy for us to work with."

Racile "simplified a lot of things" for Wailin.

"He made us look within ourselves and the songs. He made us look at the cores and the foundations of the songs. He said it's like building a house. You have to have a good foundation for a song."

It was during these sessions that Wailin wrote "Monday Morning," which he calls one of

his best songs. It will appear on Wailin's next studio album. The recording dates for that album are contingent upon several issues.

"George is making some contacts for us in New York. We're gonna approach some people and see what they think and see if we can get some kind of a budget from a record company," Wailin said.

The live album is the band's first since 1994's award-winning release "Rhythm of Life."

"Our first CD is out of print. It's been frustrating playing big shows and being on the road and

not having product to leave with them."

Since "Rhythm of Life" Wailin has made several lineup changes. Most notably the addition of drummer McCarty, the son of Jim McCarty of Mystery Train and 21-year-old guitarist Lucas.

"When I met Brett he was very well versed in the blues. When other kids were listening to rock, he was listening to B.B. King or Albert King," said Wailin of Lucas, who is studying jazz at Wayne State University.

"When I first heard him play I was impressed. He still listens to new music though. He's really diligent about furthering himself musically."

Each band member brings in a different musical style. Basses Floyd listens to the Weather Report and Tower of Power. Musto, Wailin's guitarist, "is the blues aficionado of the group. He kept us on the blues path when we wanted to stray."

Wailin's aunt and uncle, whom he listened to in his hippies, played a large part in creating his musical style.

"They were hippies, but they listened to a lot of hard-driving R&B like War or the Spencer Davis Group. I am also influenced by Motown and Stevie Wonder. Stevie Wonder is my No. 1 influence. It's not like I try to sound like him. He's just an influence," Wailin explained.

Wonder is still a presence in Wailin's life. The soul singer's

music frequently fills his carriage-style Royal Oak home. A deacon's bench inside the doorway holds a book about Wonder.

One of Wailin's first gigs was with a jazz band in Ann Arbor. From there he went on to a rock band. It was during the making of that industrial film he was introduced to the blues through Floyd, one of his co-workers.

"I was singing jazz and R&B, and I thought I had to have a huskier, rougher voice (to sing the blues). But it actually does work because I've always been fond of being expressive and emotional."

Besides his influences, Wailin doesn't reveal much about his childhood. He keeps his age and the year of the high school he graduated from to himself.

"I've lived all around—Macomb County, Ann Arbor," he said coyly.

The Royal Oak resident will, however, tell of living in Mexico.

"It's part of my heritage. I'm his Mexican. I have a connection with my heritage."

The rest is buried in his journals.

Wailin celebrates the release of its live CD with a party and performance, with special guest Susan Caloway, at 8 p.m. Saturday, March 14, at the Magic Bag, 2222 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Tickets are \$6 for the 18 and older show. For more information, call (248) 544-3030 or visit <http://www.themagicbag.com>

The founding members of Redford-based pop band St. Ashley have decided that 1998 is the year to take its music seriously.

"We released a cassette and an EP but we didn't do much with it," said bassist Jared Styles of St. Ashley. "This one we're putting together packages for clubs and contacting the press."

He is speaking of "Driving Music For One," a collection of eight upbeat pop songs, recorded at The White Room studios in Detroit with Al Sutton and Robert East, and The Hardman House in Highland with Kirk and Eric Bleu.

Styles described it as an album that St. Ashley can be proud of thanks to the addition of drummer Brian Ferrone, formerly of the bands Downer's Grove and Vietnam Prom, and guitarist and Rochester resident, Eric Ciojocari.

Since solidifying the lineup last year, the band has improved even more, he added.

St. Ashley celebrates the release of "Driving Music For One" with a party and performance, 10 p.m. Saturday, March 14, in the Burns Room at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Tickets are \$5 for the 18 and older show. Call (313) 961-4222 or visit <http://www.961melt.com> for more information. The band also performs on 18 and older show with The Krinkles at 10 p.m. Friday, March 27, at The Sardine Bar, 1548 Franklin St., Detroit.

## Backstage Pass seeks viewer support



ANN DELISI

Dry out any food? Glide your way to a thinner, trimmer body? Make millions with no capital investment? Who doesn't love a good infomercial? The word "infomercial" didn't even exist a few short years ago, and they're some of the best viewing options an insomniac has. Infomercials are solution-oriented. What's mesmerizing is how the denizens of infomercial-land unabashedly sell themselves and their wares. We don't often enough show the same gusto, even when what we have to offer is great—way better than any ear sealer.

Such is the case this week on Backstage Pass. We're smack in the middle of the Spring Festival '98 pledge drive at Detroit Public Television. Of course, they keep

track of the funds that are raised during a program—experience shows that audiences support the shows they value. During last spring's pledge drive, not many people called to support Backstage Pass. Maybe it was because we had only been on for three weeks, but the phones weren't ringing.

So this year, we're going to pull out the stops and do some serious testifying. Starting with a very special show: we're breaking format with three music-related segments. First, Kim Hunter talks with a quartet of Detroit jazz greats about our city's unique reputation for mentoring in jazz. Young sax man James Carter fronts the quartet, which is rounded out by Harold McKinney on piano, Don Mayberry on bass and "Pistol" Allen on drums. Each of these men gives us some indelible impressions on James, who is now one of the jazz world's top young stars. They'll talk about the importance of handing down hard-won

knowledge.

Have you noticed that in all the hoopla over Motown Record's 40th Anniversary, people have forgotten about Motown itself? The Super Bowl halftime show in San Diego trotted out a bunch of stars with no mention of the city where it all started. Ditto ABC's two-part special. Think about it: the music that was the soundtrack for an entire generation's coming of age was created right here in Detroit! We sent our cameras to the Motown museum, to see the humble beginnings of one of the biggest musical phenomena of the century.

And two of the metro area's hottest acts—Jill Jack and Stewart Francke—prepared two special duets just for our pledge program. How's that for a show?

But wait... there's more! We have CDs to give to callers who pledge from Jill, Stewart and James. And Backstage Pass alumnus Devin Scillian, the talented news anchor at WDIV-

Channel 4, will be live in the studio with me during the pledge break right after our special program airs.

Backstage Pass was created to increase support, patronage and attendance of the visual and performing arts in Southeast Michigan, and according to the acts and organizations we've covered, it's working. We have a stack of letters from organizations like the Detroit Institute of Arts, Meadow Brook Theatre, Wayne State's Hilberly and Bonstelle Theatres, Ann Arbor's Walk & Squawk Performance Project, the Rackham Symphony Choir—the list is too long to recount here—all saying how the show worked for them, increased interest in and attendance of events.

We're not on tonight at midnight. Our pledge special airs tomorrow at 7:30 p.m. Give it a look. Perhaps give a call. We truly feel supporting our show supports all the arts in our city.

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