

## STREET SCENE

## Fastball takes the fast track on release of new album



CHRISTINA FUOCO

"I actually immediately booked a plane. We played in Phoenix yesterday and we were going to drive to Austin right after," Zuniga explained during a phone conversation March 19.

"We have a full day of radio and promotion tomorrow and if we drove we'd be getting in at 11 or 12 tonight and just have to go to bed and give up on sleep. But when I saw we were at No. 111, I said 'I'm flying.' We were going to

pay for it but Hollywood offered." Sales of the album have been bolstered by the hit single "The Way," a snappy low-fi number that opens with the cracking and snapping of an old 45.

The song, Zuniga explains, speculates on what happened to an elderly couple from Texas who were reported missing when they didn't show up for a family reunion. The woman had Alzheimer's and the husband was partially paralyzed from a stroke.

"It's just Tony's (bassist/vocalist) idea of what might have happened. They may have just gotten tired of their jobs and decided to go in an RV and drove away. Maybe they went to renew their romance," Zuniga said of his songwriting partner's idea.

After Fastball finished recording the song, the Texas-based band found out that the couple's

car had been found at the bottom of a canyon near an old family vacation spot.

Dark lyrics are commonplace on "All the Pain Money Can Buy." "Fire Escape" explores the desire to have a casual relationship. "I don't wanna make you mad/I don't wanna meet your dad/I don't wanna be your dream come true," Zuniga sings.

An more upbeat note, the Scatzo-penned "Warm Fuzzy Feeling" is an ode to Ben Kweiler, the teenage lead singer of the fellow Texas band Radish who wore a Fastball T-shirt in his band's latest video.

The pop noir of "All the Pain Money Can Buy," however, offers undeniable hooks with the help of vintage-sounding keyboardist, odd time changes, horns and cellos.

It's all about taking risks. This time out we were going for

something a little more expansive and a bit more mysterious. We didn't worry about what other people were going to think, we just wanted to make a personal statement with our music," Zuniga said.

That recording process was completely different than the one for "Make Your Mama Proud," its 1996 debut on Hollywood.

"We just tried to mess around with things and really use the studio and experiment. The first record we pretty much just went in and recorded it the way they were."

"This time we let the songs organically grow in the studio. That helped a lot. A song could go in any direction."

Zuniga cites that experimentation and his band's influences as reasons for the success of "All the Pain Money Can Buy."

"We try to write from our heart

and sometimes people can really relate. We're pretty old school. We like rock 'n' roll. I don't mean alternative rock. I mean rock 'n' roll, like Elvis and Chuck Berry," he said.

"I love Chuck Berry. I try to emulate Chuck Berry and people influenced by him like Angus Young from AC/DC. I have a lot of respect for rock 'n' roll and where it comes from. We also listen to blues and country music and that really filters into the music."

Fastball is Zuniga and drummer Joey Shuffield's second foray into the major leagues. The duo formerly played in Big Car and Zuniga calls their experience with record companies "a nightmare."

"Everything that could go wrong did go wrong. I thought about maybe not playing music professionally anymore and just playing for fun."

All that changed when Zuniga traveled to Europe and played in the subway in Paris and at a bridge in Italy.

"That probably factored me into continuing to play music. I went to Europe and played on the street there, played in bars, anywhere I could play. I just realized that I really loved playing music so much that I should

keep doing it and not worry about it if it was going anywhere."

Fastball is going somewhere. "The Way" went to No. 7 on Billboard's Modern Rock charts last week and the band is planning on touring through Christmas. After opening for Whiskeytown at the 7th House in Pontiac on Friday, March 27, Fastball will return to the area in June with Everclear and Marcy Playground.

Fastball opens for Whiskeytown at 8 p.m. Friday, March 27, at the 7th House, 7 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. Tickets are \$10 in advance for the 18 and older show. For more information, call (248) 335-8100 or visit <http://www.961melt.com>.

Fastball's website is <http://www.hollywood.com/fastball>. Just a reminder that tickets for Janet Jackson and Usher, Friday, July 17, at Joe Louis Arena in Detroit go on sale Saturday, April 4, at all Ticketmaster outlets. Tickets are \$45, \$62.50 and \$75. For more information, call (313) 596-3200 or (248) 645-6666.

If you have a question or comment for Christina Fuoco write her at The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia, Mich. 48150, or via e-mail at [cfuoco@aol.com](mailto:cfuoco@aol.com).

## Backstage Pass returns with the Friars



ANN DELISI

Whew! Pledge is over, and viewers of and employees at Detroit Public Television can breathe a sigh of relief. The nasty business of the bottom line is done, and now we can go back to enjoying the fruits of our labor — and your generosity. Thanks to everyone who donated — with dollars, time and feedback. Detroit Public Television is truly a partnership. We can't do anything without you, the viewer.

And who would want to? Without viewers, broadcasters are the proverbial trees falling in the woods. It's the audience, stupid! So after a Backstage Pass pledge special that broke format and a week off the air to make way for special pledge programming, we're returning to regular airings with renewed vigor. That's right, no vim, just vigor. Nobody really knows what "vim" is, anyway.

Typical of our return to regularity (if not normalcy) our own Gerry Craig will take a Backstage Pass camera crew to Robert Kidd Gallery in Birmingham to see "The Master's Eye," an exhibition of work by contemporary artist Larry Rivers. Rivers' art often speaks to the absurdity of the very concept of art. Assessing his vocation, Rivers says, "I continually picture the artist as a minister without a parish or as some ludicrous opera singer, serious, with hand on breast, bellowing to an empty theater."

He may attempt to diminish the grandiosity that is too often part and parcel of the art world, but he's the real deal. As Princeton University Professor Sam Hunter writes, "In his career, Rivers has had, on occasion, to play many roles — realist, traditionalist, rebel, iconoclast and even buffoon. His art grew out of his life, to a degree unusual in contemporary art, and his own

immense personal vitality has sustained it." "The Master's Eye" runs through April 18 at the Robert Kidd Gallery.

Back home in the Detroit Public Television studio, we're hosting the unbridled fun of The Friars. The Friars is a vocal octet made up of members of the University of Michigan Men's Glee Club. The group is currently comprised of students Dante Mastrri, Todd Claybaugh, Ryan Claesoon, Patrick Evox, Jeff Hogg, Nate Pierantoni, Andrew Watchorn and Chris Jardis.

The boys sent us some interesting advance press. Listen to this: "The group took its name from a prestigious drinking society that flourished at the U of M in the early 1900s. The frothy beermark, the Friar trademark, pays tribute to the light-hearted spontaneity of each Friar performance." Exactly what is a "drinking society" and how do they become "prestigious"? And they have the audacity to call MSU a party school!

As anyone who has seen them perform can attest, the Friars create a party atmosphere at their shows. And they've brought the party all over. The past 40 years have seen the group at the White House, the Rose Bowl, the Miss Hawaii USA contest, the islands of the Caribbean, the Pirates of the Caribbean, Igusua Falls, the beaches of Rio and the handicrafts fair in Santiago.

Closer to home, they also stay busy planning activities and singing for various campus organizations. Weekends are often spent performing for alumni or campus groups, with an occasional local business or social gathering thrown in. And, of course, they perform at Michigan football games. Over Martin Luther King Jr. Weekend, the Friars traveled to New York City to perform for an alumni club there, which marked the first off-campus alumni performance engage independently of the Men's Glee Club.

The Friars sing all types of music including barbershop, rock, pop, soul and country. Members of the group write and

arrange all of the music that the group performs. Many academic interests are reflected in this year's group, including engineering, archeology, communications and political science. The group rehearses twice a week for two hours. I guess that's whenever they're not busy maintaining their status as a venerable drinking society! The Friars

have a concert 8 p.m. Saturday, March 28 at Rackham Auditorium on the UM campus. They also have a CD available for sale called, "Nice."

All that and more on the Backstage Pass, airing tonight at midnight, repeated Friday night at 7:30 p.m. on Detroit Public Television.

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