

SPECIAL

'Cheating at Solitaire' offers Ness a dose of sanity



CHRISTINA FUOCO

Social Distortion fans are kind of like mailmen. Rain, snow, sleet or hail won't keep them away. Mike Ness punched away at his guitar, cranking out the granger anthems "Let It Be Me," "Story of My Life" and "Ball and Chain." Mohawk-laden teens crowd aaked, while others slam danced, pushing away fans trying to get a glimpse of the seminal Orange County punk band.

Last month, Ness left that raucous environment to release his debut solo album, "Cheating at Solitaire" on Time Bomb Records.

"I don't have to worry about stage diving and shoes flying up or lights or Nazis," he said with a laugh. "Just the true people who are into it for the music are the

ones who follow. The sad thing is, with punk shows you get a lot of people there for the wrong reasons. They think that they know what punk is and what it's all about. They have no idea whatsoever. It's a sad thing, but it's true."

"Cheating at Solitaire" is a country-based album that showcases Ness' varied tastes. The album includes a twangy cover of Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice" and Hank Williams' "You Win Again." The raw, roots-rocking "Mystery Loves Company" is among Ness' favorite songs to play.

"It's always fun to play, just the raw, raw emotion and energy. It's raw and it's really fun. The whole record is fun to play. I'm gonna tell you this whole thing is just very liberating. It was a little scary at first. To have it so well received, it's nice," Ness said adding that there will be another Social D album.

"Cheating at Solitaire" was conceived in five years and was actually recorded in 1998 at Ocean Studios. For the recording process, he brought along a few

special guests - namely Brian Setzer who plays Gretsch Silver-tone on "Dope Fiend Blues," and Bruce Springsteen who offers vocals and guitars on "Misery Loves Company."

"A couple of songs are five years old, but I'd say I started writing about a year ago. I did about a month of pre-production and then two months in the studio," he explained.

"Don't Feel the Blues" and "I'm in Love With My Car" are among the oldest songs on the CD, but he included them on "Cheating at Solitaire" because he said they were still timely.

"The songs are almost more valid. No one was into cars back then. Now there's a bunch of greaser kids are driving old cars now. It's like a greaser anthem."

Cars are Ness' hobby. The jewel case on the back of the CD jewel case belongs to Ness. He also has a 1953 Harley-Davidson in his collection.

"Yeah, that's what I do when I'm not writing. When I was younger, I could never afford it. Just the last 15 years I've really

gotten into doing it. My other obsession is I go junking - thrift stores, junk stores, antique stores."

That, he said, along with "Cheating at Solitaire" is offering him a dose of sanity.

"I just think I really just did it for sanity purposes," he said with a laugh. "I needed to do something different. If I didn't, I'd go crazy. After doing something for 20 years, naturally you want a promotion. You want recognition for what you've done. I just feel that it was time to venture off and try other things if I ever want to grow."

Beautiful life

To singer Cree Summer, life is just beautiful.

She's riding around the United States on tour with "the fellas" - her good friend Lenny Kravitz, the Black Crowes and Everlast. (The tour comes to Pine Knob on Saturday.) Her debut CD "Street Faerie" is out on The Work Group.

"I'm ridin' with the fellas. Lenny took me out to open for

him in December in Europe. We had an incredible time and he asked me to open for him on this tour. It's just beautiful," Summer said.

Summer is the former star of the television series "A Different World." Although she has acted for most of her life, Summer is now concentrating on music.

"I haven't acted on television in about 3-1/2 years, and I'm not doing it again anytime soon. It's not because I didn't like it, it was because I didn't think I was very good at it. When you go to work every day, you should have a certain amount of confidence and feel at least that you're competent. There are so many incredible actors in this world. I don't think I'll be missed really," she said.

Music is her first love, having moved to Los Angeles to pursue singing. Immediately, however, she fell into acting. Summer made one record with her band, Subject to Change, before Capitol Records dropped the act. The album was never released. "Street Faerie" is her debut solo album, and it's safe to say she's excited about it.

"I'm very geeky that way," she said with a slight giggle. "It makes me want to jump up and down."

Summer's bluesy, mainstream pop effort "Street Faerie" was a "completely spontaneous experience." Produced and arranged by Kravitz, "Street Faerie" was recorded at a studio in Nassau.

"We literally picked the songs that we were going to record on the record the same day. The reason 'Soul Sister' got on the record was because I showed up in the studio that morning wearing a soul sister T-shirt. There's no real rhyme or reason to any of it, which is why I think it's so pure," she said.

Christina Fuoco is the pop music reporter for The Observer & Eccentric Newspaper. If you have a question or comment for her, you can leave her a message at (734) 953-2047, mailbox No. 2130, or write to her at The Observer & Eccentric Newspaper, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, Mich., 48150, or cfuoco@oe.homecomm.net.

Kravitz waves flag on 'American Woman'

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
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Lenny Kravitz picks up the phone, and clears his throat with a deep chesty cough. "Hello!" he said sounding groggy at 1:45 p.m.

He explained that he's calling from his bed on the tour bus, having just woken up minutes before. Contrary to his charismatic, commanding stage presence, Kravitz isn't exploding with energy.

Kravitz, the son of the late Roxie Roker of "The Jeffersons," isn't a man of words. This tour is "fine." He recently covered "American Woman" because someone asked him to, and in his free time he likes to read and watch movies.

Chatting about movies and

'I used to act in theater. I stopped doing it so I could pursue my music. It's not something that I miss. It's another outlet, another medium which takes off the pressure.'

Lenny Kravitz
on acting

reading seems to be appealing to Kravitz.

"Hey, what did we watch last night?" he said to a woman nearby. "Oh yeah, 'Last Tango in Paris.' That was last night's feature. This morning is Woody Allen and right now we're doing 'Brazil,' I think, or something."

Kravitz has a long-term relationship with acting. He explained that he's been acting since he was a child. This fall, he

has the option to film a movie or to make another record. He said he was unable to reveal anything about the movie.

"I used to act when I was younger. My mom was an actress. I used to act in theater. I stopped doing it so I could pursue my music," he said. "It's not something that I miss. It's another outlet, another medium which takes off the pressure."

This summer, Kravitz is bringing one medium to several towns in the United States, thanks to the package tour he created featuring him, the Black Crowes, Everlast and Cree Summer. The show hits Pine Knob on Saturday, May 22.

"The tour's fine. It's going good. I just had a choice of who was available and who I thought would put on a great show. I liked Everlast's record, but I didn't know him before the tour," Kravitz said about forming the tour.

Kravitz's set will include songs from each of his albums and his new song "American Woman," a cover of the 1970 The Guess Who hit. The song will appear on the

soundtrack to "Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me" (Maverick), and beginning June 1, Virgin will make "American Woman" a part of Kravitz's latest album "6."

The concert video for "American Woman" features Kravitz and his band performing in front of a massive, flashing neon American flag. Recently shot in the desert of Southern California, the video features more than 500 extras, a special appearance by Heather Graham, who plays "Felicity Shagwell" in the film, and a grand finale of fireworks illuminating the sky.

"American Woman" is Kravitz's follow-up to his hit "Fly Away." Kravitz, who won the Grammy for Best Rock Performance Male last February, scored a major hit with "Fly Away." It was the first single to hit No. 1 on the Modern, Active and Album Rock Charts in the same week.

The story behind Kravitz's cover of "American Woman" is simple.

"Somebody asked me if I would do it. That was a song they were looking for. I thought it was a song I could do."

Lenny Kravitz and The Black Crowes perform with Everlast and Cree Summer, at 6 p.m. Saturday, May 22, Pine Knob Music Theatre, 1-75 and Sashabaw Road, Independence Township. Tickets are \$45 pavilion, \$20 lawn. Call (248) 377-0100 or visit <http://www.palacenet.com> for more information.



Rock festival: Lenny Kravitz, along with the Black Crowes, Everlast and Cree Summer, performs Saturday, May 22, at Pine Knob.

Artists celebrate life and express outrage



ANN DELISI

After a month of disturbing headlines and images from Littleton, Colo., Kosovo and the nado-torn areas of Oklahoma and Kansas, the hope that many feel with the blossoming of spring may need a bit of nurturing. Fortunately, the arts are in full bloom.

"When it seems that the world has gone horribly awry, nature provides a spiritual experience to all human beings. It is amazing what can be accomplished by simply looking closely at a flower," says Kay Young, an Oakland County-based photographer whose twenty-year career has celebrated her Native American heritage and the natural world. "My work is intended as a celebration of life through the beauty of nature." If you caught her "Wildflower Paintings: A Photographic Exhibition" at the Detroit Institute of Arts or The

Somerset Collection, you already know about the sense of peace her photos can provide.

In describing her exhibit "Feed Me" at the American Indian Community House in New York, Young writes, "My family was humble, not poor, and the teachings were to honor the earth, harvest the food, and give thanks for life - all life around us." There's also a powerful message to guide us through the turmoil of a difficult time, as her work challenges us to, in her words, "to have the perseverance and strength to try and understand all, while living in a place out of balance."

On the next edition of Detroit Public Television's "Backstage Pass," the timeless beauty of Young's work is featured, and traditional songs from Native American cultures are performed by the inter-tribal group the Blue Lake Singers.

The horror at Columbine High has us all asking what can be done to protect young people from violence. For Ann Arbor artist-blacksmiths Scott Lankton

and Jim Roth, the tragedy was a terrifying example of the nature of gun violence and the reason for a two-year old project to transform powerful weapons into powerful art. Lankton and Roth use their skills as blacksmiths and their creative abilities to melt handguns into anti-violent artistic symbols.

"We've got thirty pieces created so far, and the one that gets the strongest reaction is a gun nestled in a stop sign with photos of gunshot victims," says Jim Roth.

"We're not going to change the world, but we're disgusted that anti-gun groups and members of organizations like the National Rifle Association can't get together to work on the major social problem of gun violence," he adds.

Lankton and Roth have received no backlash from hunting groups concerning the project. "I enjoy hunting and I like guns. The only message we send through our work is our outrage over gun violence," says Roth. Consistent with that theme are creations such as a gun molded into a book, while others are wrapped in chains or locked in a cage.

The two hope to have several public showings later this year and a permanent exhibit later this year. "Backstage Pass" viewers get a look in an edition airing 7:30 p.m. Sunday, May 23, at Detroit Public TV.

What's my favorite piece of the blacksmith's art? It's a gun with a gold-colored rose coming out of the barrel. Once again, there's peace through flower power.

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