Len is bringing its 'sunshine' our way, finally

STEPHANIE A. CASOLA

If you ask Sharon Costanzo about the recent success of "Steal My Sunshine," a summer smash for the Toronto-based Len, she'll tell you she had no idea it was going to be a hit.

The only female member of the Len, which blends old school hip hop with touches of electronica and rock, spoke openly while hanging out on the band's bus, just before heading out on tour.

During the Oct. 6 telephone interview, she spoke about the song, the new album and working alongside her little brother, Marc — known within the Len crew as The Burger Pimp.

"It was anybody's guess," she said of the song's success. "We had to find that song. We lost it."

"Sunshine" was a song The Burger Pimp wrote on his leg at a party. He came home, woke Sharon, and recorded it the same night. The tape was lost, and eventually found under a bed. It wasn't made to be a hit.

"We'd never performed it," she said. "The song was rolling before we were. I felt like I was doing a cover."

Despite the warm reception given to "You Can't Stop the Bum Rush," Sharon's quick to say that the band didn't exactly set out to be a success. In fact, they didn't think about much more than making music and having fun.

"We didn't set out to do anything," she said of Len, which formed in 1991. "We just got together to have a good time."

So far, that idea has worked pretty well. Sharon, Marc, DJ Moves, Drunkness Monster and D-Rock make up Len, a band simply named after a friend.

"Everyone's amazingly talented," said Sharon. "Everyone's got their own project." There's an independence within the band, she added. No one tells the other members what to do.

"Everyone's got their own energy. That makes it easy to party together. We've been friends for a decade. It's like a family."

For siblings Sharon and Marc, it is a family. "I wouldn't do it without him," she said. "There's no good reason I would be in this business without him — I would still sing in the shower — but it wouldn't be any fun for me if he wasn't in the band.

"The only problem it does pose, if one of us in a bad mood, the other goes down too. We're superclose. We can really upset each other. We try to keep everything up...With family, the best thing is that you always know they'll be around."

Len's sound is somewhat difficult to describe, Sharon said. But she tried: "It's pretty up, kind of a party vibe. You ain't gonna sleep through a set."

While Len's been together as a band for eight years, the current line-up has only solidified over the past three. Success came almost too quickly.

Len's canceled two concert *dates in the Detroit area over* the past year, one as the proposed opening act for Bare Naked Ladies. But Sharon Costanzo promised, this time, Len is on its way into the Motor City.

Last-minute scheduling of shows and a European press tour prevented the band from performing. And at the time, Costanzo said, Len wasn't ready to go from playing 30 minute sets on festival tours to a 50 minute headlining set.

"People were waiting for us," she said. "It was pretty upsetting for us, as much as it was someone else. We had to go to Europe. There were too many things going on at the same time."

In the midst of moving their home studio from Toronto to Vancouver, and heading out on tour, Len is ready to commence its first major U.S. tour. No more conflicts, no more teasing.

"I don't even know what day it is," said Sharon Costanzo, still reeling from all the wonderful chaos.

"You Can't Stop the Bum Rush" is the band's third album. *Len independently released* "Superstar" and "Get Your Legs Broke." In every case, the band invited guest musicians to perform, but with their latest work, they sought out the sounds of old-school hip hop performers Biz Markie and Kurtis Blow.

"We've always had guests," said Costanzo. "We've always had people come in and do what they want to do. This time we could reach out to the people we couldn't reach out to before. We might not be able to do this again."

So the Len crew sat around thinking about who they would like to join them. A few phone calls and two weeks later Biz Markie showed up at their home studio. The result was "Man of the Year" and "Beautiful Day," two strong tracks on the album, either of which could become a single. Kurtis Blow contributed to "Cold Chillin." Perhaps the most unlikely contributor to the album was none other than former Poison guitarist C.C. DeVille.

While in Los Angeles, the band sought a guitarist to fill an *empty stretch in the song* "Feelin' Alright."

"We didn't want vocals," said Costanzo. "We decided we should pay some kind of respect to 80's hair bands."

While other candidates included Eddie Van Halen and Guns-n-Roses axe-slinger, Slash, C.C. DeVille was available, and a friend of the studio's receptionist.

"He shows up at the studio," said Costanzo. "He's actually a really normal guy. He didn't show up in zebra-stripped lycra pants."

Not only did DeVille provide the guitar work, he traveled to Canada to appear in the video for "Feelin Alright," Len's latest single. It was shot at the Costanzo's high school and should be taking over MTV's airwaves this week.

Listen for the tune when Len performs at Saint Andrews Hall on Oct. 15. And bring your friends. Sharon's going to. "It's going to be a great show. We're heading your way."

Check out Len, 6 p.m. Friday, Oct. 15 at St. Andrews Hall, 431 E. Congress in Detroit. Tickets are $10 advance, $13 day of the show. All ages are welcome. Call (248) 961-MELT. or www.961melt.com.

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such as the Beatles "Hide Your Love Away." His national tour in support of the program hits major U.S. cities including Chicago, Seattle, New Orleans, Boston and Minneapolis.

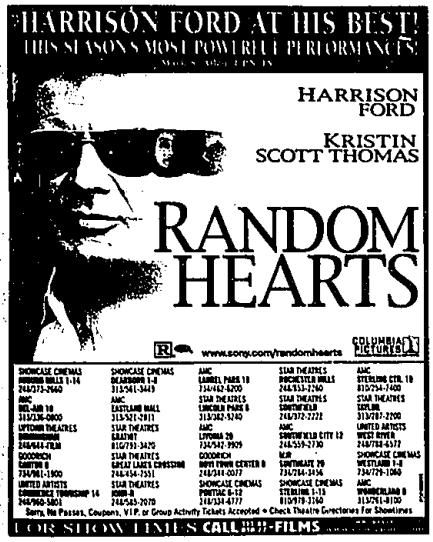
Fans that filled the small pub commented on the opportunity to see DiNizio perform in such an intimate environment. "I missed him at Pine Knob, so I wanted to see him here," said George Bowman, a Troy resident. "I like his music. He's a good singer. 'Blood and Roses' and 'Wall of Sleep' are rock classics."

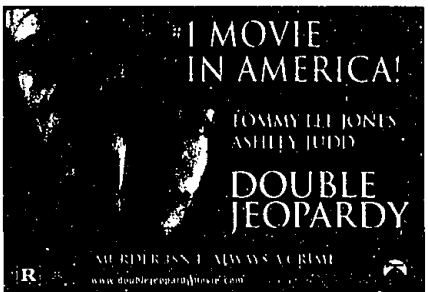
Ken Abraham, a Rochester resident, caught The Smithereens show at PlanetFest this summer, so he came down to see DiNizio play a smaller venue. "He came and asked if he could sit down with us," he said of the musician he called "down-to-earth."

Grants were distributed in May and August and another round will be awarded in November.

"I know for a fact that its real," said DiNizio, strong believer and chairman of the BEAM program. "I would encourage all local musicians to go to the BEAM Web site," said DiNizio, before taking the stage. "You'll be foolhardy to do otherwise."

Applicants must be at least 21, not be signed to a label, and demonstrate dedication to their work in the music industry. For an official application and rules see www. jimbeam.com or write to B.E.A.M. at P.O. Box 4723, New York, NY 10163-4723.





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SHOWCASE PONTIAC	SHOWCASE STERLING HEIGHTS	STAR GRATIOT AT 15 MILE
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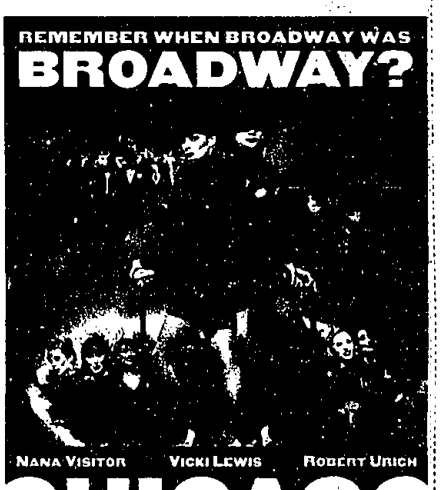

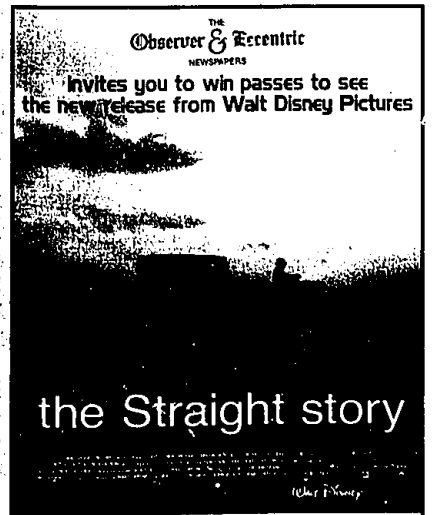

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