

STREET SCENE

Forget 'Domestic Problems' when this band's on stage



STEPHANIE A. CASOLA

Some songs evoke feelings, others draw you in and let you glimpse at a person you've never met, a place you've never seen.

Such is the case with me and a man named James Francis. I don't know what he looks like, but I have a good idea. I've never heard his voice, but I know he can sing.

James Francis

He's the subject of a song of the same name by a Grand Rapids band called Domestic Problems. He also happens to be singer Andy Holtgreive's father. When Andy called me on Tuesday, Jan. 18 — just back from an East Coast tour — he related the story behind that song.

About two years ago the family was preparing to celebrate their father's 60th birthday. Andy's oldest sister suggested that each of the five siblings and their mother take a decade of his life and find some special way to represent it. Andy was asked to write a song about the first decade of his father's life. While he maintains that "you can't force the music to do what you want," he went to work, talking to relatives and digging up stories.

"The night before his birthday party in the kitchen of his parent's house with my brother Tom... it came together," said Holtgreive. Those lyrics are not easily forgotten: "Sing, Jimmy, sing, and the world will dance around you/Sing, Jimmy, sing, it makes them glad/Sing, Jimmy, sing, and the world will dance

around you/Sing, Jimmy, sing, that's my dad."

Apparently Jimmy's youngest boy took after his Dad.

But the vocalist, songwriter and guitarist is only one in a group of multi-talented musicians who create the eclectic sound that is Domestic Problems. Job Grotzky plays saxophone, flute, clarinet, and percussion; Earl Tolliver Jr. plays bass; Bill Kenny can be seen delighting audiences with his mastery of trumpet, flugelhorn, and mandolin and R.J. Ness joined the on-stage party with drums and percussion. Jamie Black rounds out the sound on keyboards.

Best of Midwest

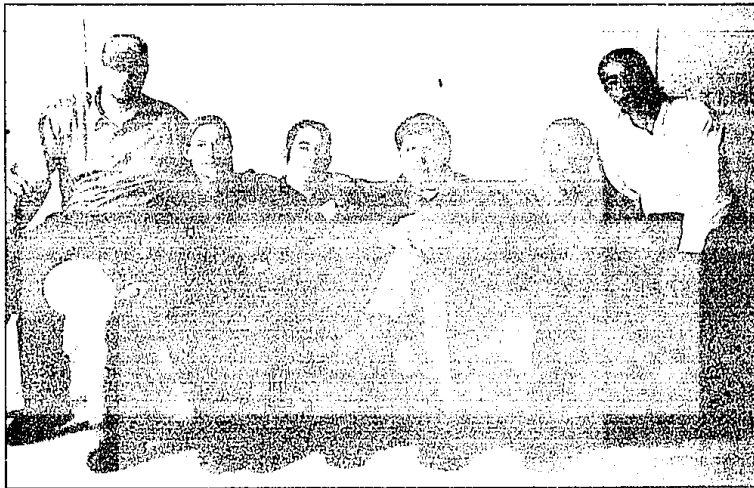
That "Midwestern sound," as Holtgreive likes to call it, reflects something everyone can relate to — family, relationships, friends — in a true and uplifting manner. For a band who snaggled its name from a line in a "Blues Brothers" movie, Domestic Problems is serious about two things — the music and the fans. That's about as Down-to-Earth and Midwestern as it gets.

Those who haven't seen Domestic Problems in all their live performance glory can get a taste of it with the recently released "Domestic Problems-Live" CD.

New CD

"We were going into the studio last summer to lay down some tracks for a studio album," said Holtgreive. "We weren't ready to go to the studio, but at that point we knew we wanted to get something out to our fans."

The band organized a show at the State Theatre in Kalamazoo, chose to forgo an opening band,



No problem: Domestic Problems is Billy Kenny, Jamie Black, Reggie (R.J.) Ness, Andy Holtgreive, Earl Tolliver Jr. and Job Grotzky. Catch them in Ann Arbor this month, or Ferndale in February.

and played an explosive 24 songs. Choosing the best 10 and tossing in a few new-to-CD tunes — namely "El Matador," "Where Have You Gone" and "Free" — for flavor, "Domestic Problems-Live" was completed only two months later.

Where credit's due

"A lot of credit goes to Al McAvoy and Jon Frazer, our producer," said Holtgreive of creating a CD that does justice to the performance. "Al put in a lot of time. I think it's really how it translates on the mixing side of

things, that captures a real live feel."

What started out as just "a fun thing to do" for Holtgreive and Bill Kenny while attending Grand Rapids' Aquinas College has become a burgeoning musical career. With the recent addition of new members Ness and Tolliver and a wide variety of instruments to draw from, the band has never stopped experimenting with new musical styles.

Holtgreive said it's a virtual "cornucopia of music that offers something to everybody."

While any of the band's three CDs are fabulous company in rush hour traffic, it's the energetic live show that makes Domestic Problems a band to behold. So what makes Mr. Holtgreive get out of bed each morning? It's hearing one fan say "you guys just make me smile."

James Francis must be proud.

"Domestic Problems-Live" is available at Ha'mony House locations in the Metro area. See the band crowd the stage 9:30

p.m. Saturday, Jan. 29 at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First Street, Ann Arbor \$5, (734) 966-8555, or 8 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 19 at The Magic Bag, 22920 Woodward Ave., Ferndale, (248) 544-3030. For MP3's and more on the band, check out www.domesticproblems.com.

Stephanie Angelyn Casola writes about popular music for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. She can be reached at (734) 953-2130 or e-mail at scasola@ecnewspapers.com. To send a fax, dial (734) 591-7279.

CD REVIEWS



Send recently-completed CDs for review to Stephanie Angelyn Casola, 36251 Schoolecraft, Livonia, 48150. Call (734) 953-2130 or e-mail scasola@ecnewspapers.com, homecomm.net for more information.

Fez

Milquetoast
It isn't often a band can make a pump organ sound, well, relatively modern.

Fez not only achieves that feat, the Dearborn foursome also uses the not-so-common glockenspiel and the sounds of duct tape to make their album "Milquetoast" an unforgettable hodge-podge of reverberations.

This is one band that truly gives local music a good name. The album has an eerie overtones, mixed with an almost merry-go-round charm. Beginning with "Shot of Poison," Fez draws listeners into their carnival world. Dean Olkowski's vocals show an influence of Brit pop and alternative, while matched with the howling sounds Melinda Clynes on electric organ, Jim Morningstar's solid drumming and Bill Zoyes pumping basslines.

Remember when the B52s sounded fresh? Fez far surpasses the whimsical nature the band had with grittier material and otherworldly style.

The album's title track "Milquetoast" shows off a touch of country while it paints vivid pictures with lines like "My old neighborhood was raised on milquetoast." Every housecat has a silver lining, and "TV on the front porch, news at eleven, heaven finds a cure for hell."

"Heads I win" is reminiscent of childhood with reference to games like "Red Rover." "Third Street Fat with Punch" is good for a giggle. "Half Drunk" is good for a giggle. Fez creates a delightful party for the ears. For a copy of "Milquetoast" e-mail

bredwconcepts@msn.com or write to P.O. Box 7103 Dearborn, Mich. 48121. You won't be disappointed.

See the band 9 p.m. Friday, Jan. 28, The Majestic Theatre, Detroit. (313) 833-9700.

—BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA

Marcy Playground

Shapeshifter
Capitol Records

Though Marcy Playground's first self-titled release spawned a provocative commercial hit and garnered critical success, the Minneapolis band's second release, "Shapeshifter" proves there's far more to life than "Sex and Candy."

Lead singer and songwriter John Wozniak offers a dozen upbeat tunes laced with ominous overtones. And his intelligent lyrics are masked as deceptively simple. But when he throws in his signature fun-filled yodel, everything in the world is as fine as a cup of warm cocoa.

The opening track, "It's Saturday," with its grunge guitar and dance-beat rhythms, is destined to be a hit. Even the slower ballads including "America" and "Never" leave a lasting impression.

On "Our Generation" Wozniak offers a folk-pop anthem for his "Free to Be... You and Me" peers. He also reaches back to his favorite Saturday morning superheroes for inspiration on the deliciously sinister "Secret Squirrel."

"All the Lights Went Out," an apocalyptic love song, seems only too fitting a tune given the twilight of the millennium.

If "Shapeshifter" is any indication, Marcy Playground is only going to get better. And in this day and age of studio produced sound, it's a pleasure to hear innovative and finely layered music being made from three guys who know what it means to play drums, bass and guitar.

—BY ALICE RUZEN

STAY TUNED

It seems Austin Powers and Q95.5 FM have something in common. They've both found their Mojo. The pop music station will add Mojo — a Chicago native — to its morning show team by February. Coming to Detroit from a top-rated morning show in Tucson, Ariz., Mojo's ready to hit the Midwest with his dynamic personality. Welcome to the Motor City, Mr. Mojo.

Listen up. Speaking of radio, 89X and 93.9 The River unveiled the latest in broadcast technology this past week at the 2000 North American International Auto Show. The stations' parent company, Chum Group Ltd., is the first conglomerate to bring digital radio to the U.S. — which translates into a clearer, CD quality sound.

Michigan Radio, public radio station at the University of Michigan, may not be digital yet, but they're progressing, too. Michigan radio's stations: 91.7 FM in Ann Arbor and Detroit, 104.1 FM in Grand Rapids and 91.1 FM in Flint, is now offering a 24-

hour streaming on-air signal to its listeners. It's available at www.michiganradio.org. That means fans of NPR's "All Things Considered" and "Morning Edition" can be accessed on the Web, expanding the station's listener base.

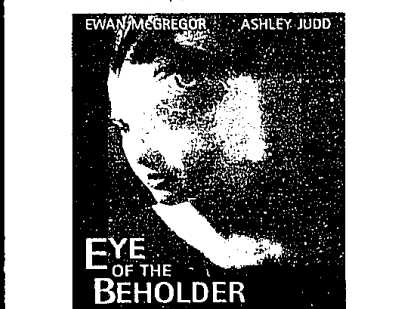
Also at the top of their game, Pine Knob Music Theatre's 1999 season meant record-breaking numbers for attendance, with more than 958,000, and sold-out shows, a total of 29. Fans flocked to the outdoor venue to see performers like the Barenaked Ladies, Alanis Morissette and Tori Amos, and Paul Simon and Bob Dylan last summer.

The Backstreet Boys set a record for the fastest sellout when tickets for three shows at The Palace of Auburn Hills disappeared in just eight minutes. That heat Madonna's "Girlie Show" in 1993, which sold out in 10 minutes. Concert-going in Metro Detroit has never been better.

—BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA

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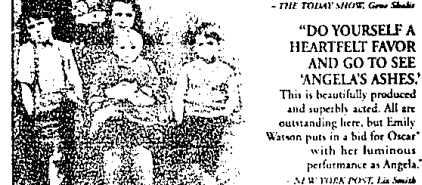
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