

## STREET SCENE

## Train taking success slowly, rolling back this way



There's something to be said for word-of-mouth.

I first heard about the San Francisco-based quintet Train from a friend, who happens to be a strawberry farmer living somewhere in Florida. "If a band called Train ever comes here, you gotta see 'em," he said to me in a smoky Ferndale club more than a year ago. For some reason, the conversation stuck in my mind.

That's basically how the Southern folk-rock band has risen from status as San Francisco Bay-area darlings to regular rock radio rotation. Together since 1994, vocalist Patrick Monahan, guitarists Jimmy Stafford and Rob Hotchkiss, bassist Charlie Colin and drummer Scott Underwood have done it grass roots style, touring incessantly. Train didn't want to be a one-hit wonder. Though the second single off their self-titled 1998 debut, "Meet Virginia," has since catapulted the band to platinum status, the musicians never intended to be the "Meet Virginia" band.

But hey, I'm just going by what Jimmy Stafford told me when he called April 11, over a week into the headlining tour set to stop in Detroit Thursday, April 27. "We just pulled up to the venue in a van," said Stafford, calling from what sounded like a temperamental cell phone somewhere in Sacramento, Calif. He was far from the starting point of the tour—Marquette, Mich.

"The Marquette show was at a college, in an area we hadn't played before. We flew up there. A show like that is kind of out of the way; it's a really good place to start, to get over the first day jitters. Actually, it was one of the best shows. The crowd was outstanding."

It wasn't always this way. While Train won over a strong following in its birthplace, the

**'They are really dedicated. I have a lot of respect for them.'**

Chris Johnston  
19 Wheels

Bay area, it took constant work to spread the word. High profile tours with the likes of Counting Crows, Dave Matthews Band, Hootie and The Blowfish and Ben Folds Five helped. But Ferndale resident and 19 Wheels frontman Chris Johnston remembers the very first time Train went on the road. "We went on the road with them," said Johnston, calling from Boston, while 19 Wheels was on tour. "We had a record on Aware the same time they did. They had a deal that took them to Columbia [Records]. Johnston said not only is he a fan of Train's music, "they're a good bunch of guys." The last time Train made it to the metro area, they performed at Ferndale's Magic Bag and had a chance to stop in at the Woodward Avenue Brewery, which Johnston owns just a few doors down from the club. "They have really good food and stuff there," recalled Stafford of the brewery. He said he was looking forward to seeing his 19 Wheels friends.

Now headed back to Michigan as the final act to take the stage, Stafford could hardly contain his enthusiasm: "We're really excited about this tour," said Stafford. "It's the best-looking tour and the best-sounding tour."

Stafford admitted that it still took time for radio and MTV audiences to catch on to songs like "Free" and the latest single, "I Am."

"That was partly intentional and partly the way our single was released. Our plan with Columbia Records was to develop the band slowly. We didn't want to be an overnight smash hit. Those fans buy your records up fast and forget about you."

So Train took the long track, building a core fan base one city

at a time. "I think it's working," said Stafford. "Our fans are the greatest. We get hundreds of fan letters a day. We're not a band that's going to go away tomorrow."

Johnston said he's happy to see Train succeed. "I know they've done it the hard way," he said, predicting the band will have a long career. "The songs have done well. It's really the amount of touring. If you watch the charts, they've never really been in top 10 record sales. They've just had steady, steady sales."

"They are really dedicated. I have a lot of respect for them."

Chugging along non-stop since January 1998 in support of the album hasn't been easy. "In the beginning it was frustrating, in a van playing in front of 30 people every night. But it grew and we felt it grow."

The strength of Train's music lies in the way it reaches people. Stafford said one of his favorites, the sentimental ballad "Blind," "somehow hits a spot." "I Am" is another song that really touches a nerve," he added. "It's a goosebumps song." Train is currently working on a video for "I Am."

The focus now turns to a follow-up album. "We recorded a new record on our time off," said Stafford. "It's exciting to have new songs. Every night there's more energy for the show. It's a really diverse record, a little bit of something for everybody. We're pretty much playing the uptempo, exciting stuff off the new record. It's a hint of what's to come."

Train worked with producer Brendan O'Brien (Korn, Pearl Jam, Rage Against the Machine) on the CD, which should hit stores by this fall. The working



Tracking down Train: From left, Scott Underwood, Charlie Colin, Rob Hotchkiss, Jimmy Stafford and Pat Monahan are Train, a sublime San Francisco quintet headed to a station near you. Train performs Thursday, April 27, at St. Andrews Hall in Detroit.

title is "Something More," reflecting what Train fans have been thinking for about two years.

"[Brendan] is a dream come true," said Stafford. "He is the rock producer of the day. Everyone wants to work with him, including the Stones. He was our first choice. We weren't seriously going to ask him. Then we found out, he's a Train fan! The timing was right. He's got great ideas. A month and a half after going in, the album was recorded."

Long before its scheduled release, the only way to hear new Train material is to catch the band when the bus rolls into town next week.

And Train's looking forward to this stop. "Detroit is actually going to be a lot of fun for us," said Stafford.

My advice? I'm certainly not a strawberry farmer, but I know this—a band called Train is coming soon. You won't want to miss the show. Pass it on.

Catch Train with guests Gas Giant, 8 p.m. Thursday, April 27, at St. Andrews Hall, Detroit. All ages. \$15 in advance, call (248) 645-6666.

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## STAY TUNED



Women aloud: Aretha Franklin is among a host of female artists on the newly released CD, "A Woman's Voice," from Universal Music Group.

More Mitch Ryder you asked? Well J-Bird Records has answered with the scheduled release of seven solo CDs by the former frontman of the Detroit Wheels. Fans can get online May 30 and order "How I Spent My Summer Vacation" (1978), "Naked But Not Dead" (1979), "Live Talkies" (1981), "Got Change For A Million" (1981), "Smart Ass" (1982), "In The China Shop" (1988) and "Red Blood and White Milk" (1988). All previously unavailable in North America, Ryder's solo CDs were the result of an alliance between his Seeds and Stems label and German record label, Line. Check it out at www.j-birdrecords.com.

What would you say is the definitive women's anthem? "Respect," by Aretha Franklin, or maybe Gloria Gaynor's disco classic "I Will Survive." How

about Dolly Parton's "I Will Always Love You," brought back to life by Whitney Houston, or possibly Patti Smith's "Because The Night." Don't forget that shoulder-shaking '80s hit "We Belong," by Ms. Pat Benatar. They've all made it to CD, with a host of other evocative hits by Etta James, Gladys Knight,

Patsy Cline, k.d. Lang and more. Universal Music Group has released "A Woman's Voice," to celebrate some of the greatest songbirds of the last four decades. Forget the Spice Girls, get your girl power from the divas who truly count.

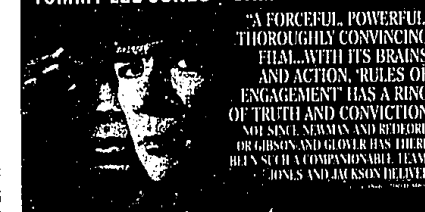
—Stephanie Angelyn Casola

## Listenup

Are you hip to the local scene, into supporting Metro area music? Send us a photo of yourself and a list of your top five CDs from local bands, complete with band names. Then, include your list of the top five local bands to see live in the Metro area. The Observer & Eccentric will publish entries in our Entertainment section on Thursday, as space provides.

SEND entries with your full name and city of residence to: C&E Entertainment, 38255 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. Or FAX to: (734) 593-7279. Or EMAIL to: scasola@ec.homecomm.net

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