## STREET SCENE

## Judah Johnson strikes a new sound



Rings of smoke swirl around and the around and the setting sun shinos at eye-level through the window of the bar where I've agreed to meet Judah Johnson.

Despite its Despit

Togother since last spring, Judah Johnson has gotten off to a strong start – performing at some enviable venues like the Magic Bag in Ferndale and Detroit's Magic Stick, with some local darlings, The Atomic Numbers, and national up-starts, The Push Stars.

Push Stars.

Don't deem Judah a pop band, though its distinctive sound the star as setting. Vocalist Daniel Johnson, keyboardist Nate Cavalieri, drummer Charlie Koltak, guitarist Brian Pierson and bassist Zach Roberts defy classification.

Boundaries.

But it sounds like someone you
might know.

If you haven't heard Judah
Johnson, you haven't heard anything like this.

**Moving Midwest** 

Moving Midwest

The band's Midwest roots stretch rather far. Roberts and Koltak grew up together in Midland, Mich. They met Cavalieri while attending Central Michigan University. Pierson grew up in Missouri and met Johnson while attending college there. The first spark of this line up, though, came when Koltak and Johnson met during an open mic night at Hamtramck's Helbrook Cafe. They began working on songs together with Roberts, which soon led to recording a demo with producer Don Dixon (REM, The Smitherens, Slowly linking these associations, Judah Johnson grew from a trio to a

DOWN TO LASTIN (PC 13)
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"In some ways its easier," said Daniel Johnson. "When you're a three-picce, it's kind of spare. When you have more musicians, you can do a lot more."

you can do a lot more."

While songs often originate with him, each member puts his own mark on them, a certain spin or style. There exists an equality in the band. Pierson said it's one reason he's happy to be part of Judah Johnson. 'I don't think anyone is afraid to bring up a new idea,' he said.

bring up a new idea, "he said.

From Tom Waits to the superspeed boats of Autechre, the
bands influences vary greatly.
There's no telling what this
group might be into next—or
what direction their own music
might take. "This is like the
ideal band for me," said Pierson.
"When you see what your friends
are passionate about, what they
get excited about, thu's the best
part about music."

What it was the part about music."

part about music.

When it comes to music, Judah
Johnson doesn't stick to rules,
time signatures or any tried-andtrue pop formula. They won't
win many comparisons to bands
hovering a top the Billboard Hot
100s chart. And that's the point.

"We try to be aware of what's
going to make the song effective," said Roberts.

board and we were in high gear.

Judah Johnson is good music
for music's sake. It delves into a
dark, dreamy place, one that
feels at once familiar and brandnew. At a time when pop music
is barraged by well-designed boy
bands you can barely tell apart,
here is a glimmer of hope and
originality on our side.

Judah Johnson celebrates the release of their self-titled E.P. on Flameshovel Records, along with performances by The Climax Divine, Document, Sunday, June 17, Magic Stick, Detroit. Call (313) 833-9700.



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## Have you heard

"We're trying to do something, you haven't heard anybody do," said Johnson. In Judah Johnson that often translates into unsual arrangements and song structures. "I write as I go through the day," he said, "I kind of have to live with the stuff. I let it percolate, write over weeks." Lyrics,



Loud and clean: (Left to right) Charlie Koltak, Brian Pierson, Zach Roberts, Nate Cavalieri and Daniel Johnson are Judah Johnson. Celebrate the release of their self-titled debut (and Nate Cavalieri's birthday) this Sunday, June 17, at the Magic Stick in Detroit.

the going through."

The EP was recorded digitally from August to January. "We just did it as naturally as we could," said Pierson, It was mastered at Rustbelt Studio, where producers Al Sutton and Bob Ebeling praised the outcome, "It was really flattering," said Cavalieri.

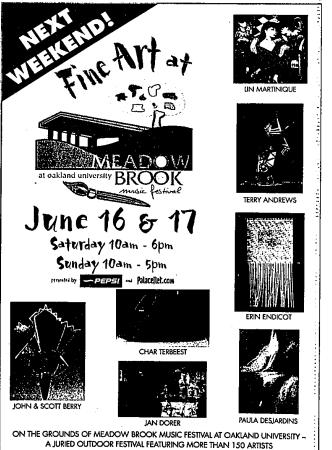
The record is one of the first to be released on Chicage's Flameshovel Records label. Jesse Woghin has been a lengtime friend of the band and also completed the records artwork. "He had some idea of what we were trying to do," said Cavalieri. "We're not talking about getting rich."

rich."
Woghin said he and Flameshovel cohort Nash Static are proud to work with the band. "In a lot of ways you could say that Judah Johnson is the reason that Flameshovel exists right now," he said in an e-mail interview. "I had been thinking idly of starting a label for a while, mostly as a pastime, something to break up the

he said, reflect "things we've all been going through."

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Stephanie Angelyn Casola writes about popular music for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. E-mail her at scasola@oc.homecomm.net.



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