



Johnny Allen isn't trying to rip off Bruce Springsteen or John Cougar Mellencamp with photos like this. It's just "the way I look," he says.

## Allen puts in 'hard labor' for his 'Desperate' album

By Larry O'Connor  
Staff writer

Johnny Allen went into labor to deliver his first LP.

The hard-driving rocker from Westland took jobs as a construction worker, an office clerk and a painter in order to foot the \$12,000 bill for the release of "Desperate Years," a stunning LP.

Bluesmen talk about hard times. But Allen's trek to becoming a promising rock and roll performer wasn't exactly a cakewalk.

For awhile, Allen slept in a vacant office floor of a condemned theater building in the Grand Circus Park area of downtown Detroit. He rented the office floor for \$90 for eight months. His stay lasted only four months.

"It was terrible," said Allen, 24, who moved out after his equipment was stolen. "I got jumped and had a knife pulled on me. It made for some good songs, though."

The vacant floor also served as the launching pad for Johnny Allen and his band, The Appeal. Somehow, Allen managed to get the electricity turned on so he could rehearse with his band members.

Allen and The Appeal released "Attitude," a five-song EP, in 1984. "Attitude" sold 600 copies.

Allen, obviously, expects better this time around. He has good reason. "Desperate Years" is full of well-penned, punchy hard-rock tunes.

All of which was Allen's goal. A lot of time and money went into producing the album. Allen wanted to do it right.

BUT THERE were times of doubt, he admits. "I was getting a lot of feedback from working all those crappy jobs," Allen said. "In the end, I had to keep remembering, 'Hey I'm doing this for a reason. I have a goal.'"

"A lot of times I would say, 'Hey this is too much. I can't handle it.' That feeling would be gone in a half hour. I would fight it by picking up my guitar and writing."

Allen is also bucking another trend. He's playing hard rock smack dab in new musicville — Hamtramck.

He's having relative success. Crowd response, for the most part, has been favorable. Although some might tend to turn their nose up at it, a majority of patrons like his straight-ahead approach to rock and roll. The music fits his no-holds-barred, tell-it-like-it-is personality.

To Allen, there's no other way.

A glance at the album cover might give the impression Allen is trying to cop a Bruce Springsteen or John Cougar Mellencamp image. One album photo has him walking down a railroad track with a guitar slung over his back. "It's not like I'm ripping off Bruce Springsteen or John Cougar," he said. "I just happen to look the way I look. The sound is a lot harder rock. It's not a problem. I don't worry about it."

THE BIG concern is getting the album properly distributed. Allen said there's already some interest from a few record labels.

Allen is busy working with the new lineup for the Appeal, his backup band. With the exception of Stu Simon on guitar and David Jasmund on bass, the lineup is different from the one that played on the album.

As the frontman, Allen knows there's more at stake. He said it's a team effort. "It's funny," he said. "I don't look at myself as an individual or a solo performer. I see a leader of a band. I don't put myself above the band. . . I'm lucky I landed with these guys."

Johnny Allen will perform along with the Junk Monkeys Saturday, April 9, at Harpos in Detroit. For more information, call 823-6400.

## MUSIC NOTES

It's here. Finally, the long-awaited "Digital Detroit" compact disc is available at area record outlets.

Bob Crane of the Creative Audio Group in Troy has managed to gather some of this area's best metal, hard rock, new music and country rock acts on CD.

Some nuggets here include songs by Funhouse ("Industrial Noise"), Figure 4 ("Man in the Mirror") and See Dick Run ("Good Thing").

Fans of heavy metal will take to the offerings from Vikon ("Shape I'm In") and Weapons ("The Rock Starts Here") as well. The hard rock crowd is represented by The Hose Band, Room Service and Trinity.

The Hose Band's "Don't Stand in My Way" has been receiving airplay on WLLZ-FM, which helped sponsor the disc. The rock station has been playing cuts from "Digital Detroit" regularly.

Crane's goal was to have something for everyone.

Like the four major food groups, we have the four major rock groups," said Crane, executive producer of "Digital Detroit."

Plans include distributing the disc Europe and throughout the United States. Around here, "Digital Detroit" can be found at Harmony House record outlets, Rock of Ages in Garden City, Dearborn Music and Sam's Jams.

The last in a series of Rag Jams



Bob Crane has managed a coup, of sorts, with his "Digital Detroit" compact disc release.

will take place Friday, April 8, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. In A Sense will perform at 10 p.m. followed by Shouting Club at 11 p.m. and The Wires at midnight. Funhouse will round out the evening festivities, taking the stage at 1 a.m.

Money raised will go toward a new printing press for The Jam Rag, a locally produced magazine focusing on the Detroit music scene. Subscriptions are \$6 for 15 issues. For

more information, write to: Jam Rag, Box 20076, Ferndale.

Speaking of live gigs, WRIF-FM is offering free concerts at the Ritz, Grand north of Nine Mile Road, Roseville. On Wednesday, April 6, Tonic K will perform. On Friday, April 8, Mitch Ryder will perform. Free tickets for the Mitch Ryder show are available at Car Tunes outlets. Ticket information on the Tonic K show can be obtained by calling WRIF at 827-1111. The shows are open to people 18 and older.

See Dick Run is on the run of late. These fellas have been keeping a busy schedule. In addition to a slew of dates (Hamtramck Pub, April 9; Psychecks, April 23; LH's 21, May 7; and Third Avenue, May 21), the band is busy recording a new album. Original plans for a six-song EP have been discarded for a full-length album, which is scheduled to be released during the summer.

Also, the group recently won the monthly portion of WRIF's "Local Riffs" program and will be on the station's compilation album at the end of the year. Also, the group is on the "Digital Detroit" compact disc.

Let us know what's happening with your band, drop us a line at: Street Beats, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

## IN CONCERT

● **SINEAD O'CONNOR**  
Sinead O'Connor will perform Wednesday, April 6, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 Congress, Detroit. For more information, call 961-6358.

● **HIPPODROME**  
Hippodrome will perform Wednesday, April 6, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75, Hamtramck. For more information, call 365-9760.

● **A.K.A.**  
A.K.A. will perform Wednesday through Saturday, April 6-9, at Jagers, 2481 Elizabeth Lake Road, Waterford Township. For more information, call 681-1700.

● **ROCK**  
Rock will perform Wednesday through Sunday, April 6-10, at Studio Lounge, Wayne Road south of Warren, Westland.

● **ROBYN HITCHCOCK**  
Robyn Hitchcock and The Egyptians will perform Thursday, April 7, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 Congress, Detroit. For more information, call



961-6358.

● **ARTIE WOLFF AND THE PACK**  
Artie Wolff and The Pack will perform Friday and Saturday, April 8-9, at Griff's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. For more information, call 334-9292.

● **GEORGE BEDARD AND THE KINGPINS**  
George Bedard and the Kingpins will perform Friday, April 8, at the

Blind Pig, 208 First, Ann Arbor. For more information, call 996-8555.

● **SEE DICK RUN**  
See Dick Run will perform Saturday, April 9, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. For more information, call 365-9760.

● **MEN WITHOUT HATS**  
Men Without Hats will perform Saturday, April 9, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 Congress, Detroit. For more information, call 961-6358.

● **JUGGLERS AND THIEVES**  
Jugglers and Thieves will perform Saturday, April 9, Third Avenue Cafe, Third and Main, Royal Oak.

● **JONATHAN RICHMAN**  
Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers will perform two shows at 7:30 p.m. and 10 p.m. Thursday, April 14, at The Ark in Ann Arbor. For more information, call 99-MUSIC.

## CD

Here are the top 10 selling compact discs at Musicland in the Livonia Mall.

1. "Dark Side of the Moon," Pink Floyd.
2. "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," Beatles.
3. "Eagles Greatest Hits 1971-75," Eagles.
4. "Listen Like Thieves," INXS.
5. "Live Bullet," Bob Seger.
6. "Momentary Lapse of Reason," Pink Floyd.
7. ". . . Nothing Like the Sun," Sting.
8. "Mad Man Across the Water," Elton John.
9. "Every Breath You Take," Police.
10. "Once Bitten," Great White.

## COLLEGE

Here are the top 10 songs being played on WORB-FM 90.3, the campus radio station at Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills.

1. "Yashar," Cabaret Voltaire.
2. "Globe of Frogs," Robyn Hitchcock.
3. "Dead Heart," Midnight Oil.
4. "Interstate," Jet Black Factory.
5. "Inside Out," Mighty Lemon Drops.
6. "Victoria," The Fall.
7. "Looking for Lot 49," Jazz Butcher.
8. "Kidney Bingo," Wire.
9. "Every Breath You Take," Mission UK.
10. "Destruction," The Church.

## CHRISTIAN

Here are the top 10 songs receiving airplay on WMUZ-FM 103.5, a Christian radio station in Detroit.

1. "Easter Song," Glad.
2. "Precious Lord," Crystal Lewis.
3. "For Always," CeCe Winans.
4. "Gettin' Ready," Terry Gibbs.
5. "Sing Over Me," 2nd Chapter of Acts.
6. "Heart and Soul," Geoff Moore.
7. "Make This Praise Glorious," Sandi Patti.
8. "I See Love," Renee Garcia.
9. "A Little Broken Bread," Debby Boone.
10. "How Much Love," Allies.

## REVIEWS

### DIESEL AND DUST

— Midnight Oil



Not often do politics and music mix. Midnight Oil manages to pull it off, and pull it off well they do.

Even a person to the right of Reagan can appreciate the massive anti-nuclear beat of Midnight Oil on "Diesel and Dust" (Columbia). There are anthems there, are anthems. But more than anything, there's plenty of good music here.

From "Beds Are Burning" to "Arctic World," the political overtones are obvious.

"Beds Are Burning" is a catchy, yet quirky number, which features the rather grinding vocals of Peter Garrett. The number has received a considerable amount of commercial airplay, making a name for Midnight Oil in these parts.

In Australia, they're as "Aussified" as, well, locals bears drinking Foster's Lager. Garrett, the bald-

headed leader of Midnight Oil, even ran for political office in Australia.

Garrett rocks here. But the main thrust on "Diesel and Dust" is the music. This band has played together for awhile and it shows.

The tightness can be heard in every song, especially in the rather pop-sounding "Put Down That Weapon" and "Dreamworld."

"Dreamworld" features enough hooks to make it a follow-up hit to "Beds Are Burning" on commercial radio. Although the message is bleak — "Your dream world is about to end" — the song has an upbeat melody.

By contrast, selections like "Arctic World" are stark, featuring Garrett singing to a lone piano. There's a nice mixture here of material. Above all else, it's well-polished.

— Larry O'Connor

### FOXHEADS STALK THIS LAND

— Close Lobsters



The youth unemployment problem in Europe is starting to rear its ugly head over here.

With little to do, these boys without work are picking up guitars to pass the time. As a result, there's an endless line of guitar bands originating from there who bomb us continually with bland pop music. We already have Madonna, thank you.

Add Close Lobsters to the list. On "Foxheads Stalk This Land" (Enigma), the album opens with some uplifting sonic guitar work on "Just Too Bloody Stupid."

Promising, yes. Upbeat melodic pop, you bet. Except Close Lobsters have decided one sonic guitar line is all one needs to make an album. The music is mired in one continual dirge.

The mumbled vocals on this album can best be described as sounding like Herman's Hermits with bad

colts. One rather forgettable number digresses to the point where the boys break out in a chorus of "yeah, yeah, yeah." Another highlight is the grinding guitar feedback provided in "Mother of God," the last song on the album. If anything, this is a public service gesture. If one falls asleep during the album, the snarling guitar will at least wake them up and let them know the album is over.

"Foxheads Stalk This Land," according to the press releas, was recorded in a "mere 15 frenetic days." Geez, could have fooled us. Judging by the depth of material here, it sounds like it was done in 15 minutes.

If anything, Close Lobsters need to develop a little more depth and versatility. Until they do, Close Lobsters will be a novelty at best.

— Larry O'Connor

### DESPERATE YEARS

— Johnny Allen



Johnny Allen is testament to the belief if you're going to do something, do it right.

Johnny Allen does here. And this album shines because of it.

This is a well-produced, well-written and well-performed album from the word go.

One reviewer called it a cross between John Cougar Mellencamp and Bruce Springsteen. Perhaps that's overstating it a bit. This has more of a hard rock feel than compared to those great artists.

Allen goes with straight-ahead rock and roll, accented with guitar licks that are enjoyable without being tedious. Too often, hard rock mavens do guitar riffs just to hear themselves. Not here. The guitar lines serve only to highlight the music, not dominate it.

Allen's strength lies mainly in his

songwriting. There are very few rock and roll cliches here. Sure, he sings about love in "He's Love Again." But it sounds like nothing ever heard before.

Only one demerol point here, though, and that's with the hearty "Come on" Allen shouts before launching into "Years." It sounds a little too much like a jingoistic cry.

"Deal Me In" is a slow acoustic number that is highlighted with some soaring sax and flute work by Paul Johannes.

"Bare Feet in the Snow" adds a twist to what otherwise would be a mindless hard rock love tune.

"Desperate Years," the title track from the album, and "Waiting for a Change" both have hit potential. Both numbers have a catchy melody that will stick in your ear as will the rest of this album.

— Larry O'Connor