

## STREET BEATS

## Easter stays Active

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

For Mitch Easter, the game isn't "What's My Line?" but rather "Who Have You Talked to Lately?"

After a recent Let's Active performance, the usual backstage well-wishers swarm around the one of the most-lauded new music producers today. The questions start.

"Hey Mitch, great show. Have you talked with Game Theory lately?" "Mitch, the band sounded great. What's R.E.M. up to these days?"

Such is the life of a producer whose musical works include R.E.M., Game Theory (see related story), Marshall Crenshaw, Suzanne Vega and Velvet Elvis. But Easter has an album of his own, "Every Dog Has His Day" (R.S.), the latest from pop-rock outfit Let's Active.

He politely answers the barrage of inquiries. He's quite aware that Mitch the producer casts a bigger shadow than Mitch the performer.

"Apparently, it does," said Easter, almost resigned, "and that's too bad. I've been a musician much longer than I've been a producer. That's why I got into this stuff in the first place so I could play music more than just music on its latest album. If it could be described as an adventuresome pop."

"Every Dog Has His Day" perhaps has more of a sharp bite than other Let's Active works. That stems from having John Leckie (Pink Floyd "Dark Side of the Moon") along as co-producer. Easter said he focused more on the hard-edged side of Let's



The members of Let's Active are Angie Carlson, Mitch Easter, John Heames, Eric Marshall.

Active.

EVEN HAVING a second producer is something new for the group. Easter usually handles things on his own.

"It was politics, really," said Easter, about having Leckie as co-producer. "People in the music industry like more guaranteed formulas for success. They think bringing in big names, going to expensive studios is going to help the album sell."

For the first time, Easter entered the studio with a solid band. He's joined by Angie Carlson on keyboards, guitars and vocals, Eric Marshall on drums and John Heames on bass.

The band is tight. In a recent show at Ann Arbor's Michigan Theater, Let's Active provided nearly an hour of high-powered pop as an opening act for The Church.

At the forefront is Easter, who's quite an adept guitar player in addition to his songwriting capabilities. Carlson, an accomplished vocalist in

her own right, takes center stage for a couple of songs.

The show is varied, but could one expect anything else from Easter? He knows what makes for good pop songs.

"There has to be one outstanding thing to get hold of," he said. "It can be anything. It could be the melody. It can be the clever use of words or it can be the sound."

"The whole thing about pop songs is that you're limited in structure. You have to do it in three minutes. It's sort of a bit-you-over-the-head type thing. It has to grab you. It can't be bland."

IN THEORY, that might hold true, but in reality it doesn't. Easter feels commercial radio is the main culprit.

He points to the 1960s where a band with a new approach and sound was welcomed. Today, he believes the approach is repetitive.

"The way radio has pushed rock music, people don't how to listen to

good songs any more," he said. "I think bands like Game Theory should be bigger than they are. But people hear them now and think, 'What's going on? There's too much going on!'"

"It's ridiculous, but we've actually gone backward in our ability to take in musical information. I blame it on the way radio has continued to have recycled songs from the 1970s."

Easter continues to move forward, especially in the area of producing. He will have 10 new albums to his credit coming out next year. One of his upcoming projects will be working with an Australian band, The Hummingbirds.

Mitch the producer makes it tough on Mitch the performer.

"I don't ever think right," he said, "but I don't lose any sleep over it."

Let's Active will perform Sunday, Oct. 30, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For more information, call 981-MELT.

good to him. There are a whole lot of producers who might not think the same way and there's usually a lot of second guessing.

"PLUS, He's really technically proficient. He's great in the studio. And he knows the guidelines for making good pop music."

But the A.B.C.'s of pop success means knowing to present day (and often mediocre) standards. Game Theory wants success of its own terms.

Few bands are able to do that. R.E.M., for example, is an exception. And like the Athens, Ga., rockers, Game Theory is using a combination of college radio support and extensive touring to try and make it happen.

Some critics of the band say Miller's voice is what keeps Game Theory from being a commercial. He just brushes it off like dandruff from the shoulders.

"Who knows if it's in the cards for us to be the best band around," Miller said. "Maybe my voice is too offensive to people in general. But I always hold out for that dream that we will be. Who knows?"

Game Theory will perform with special guests, Walk the Dogma, on Tuesday at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For more information, call 996-8555.

## IN CONCERT

## ● FLOCK OF SEAGULLS

A Flock of Seagulls will perform tonight at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For more information, call 996-8555.

## ● THE SHY

The Shy will perform on Tuesday, Oct. 25, at Jagers, 3481 Elizabeth Lake Road, Pontiac. For more information, call 681-1700.

## ● GAME THEORY

Game Theory will perform with special guests, Walk the Dogma, on Tuesday, Oct. 25, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For more information, call 996-8555.

## ● WALK THE DOGMA

Walk the Dogma will perform on Wednesday, Oct. 26, at The Beat, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For more information, call 683-7758.

## ● ROMANCE

Romance will perform Wednesday through Saturday, Oct. 26-29, at Jagers, 3481 Elizabeth, Pontiac. For more information, call 681-1700.

## ● GOOBER &amp; THE PEAS

Goober & the Peas will perform on Thursday, Oct. 27, at Paycheck's Lounge, 2932 Caniff, Hamtramck. For more information, call 872-8934.

## ● LITTLE FEAT

Little Feat will perform at 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 28, at Royal Music Theater. Tickets are \$18.50. For more information, call 546-7610.

## ● HIPPODROME

Hippodrome with special guests, Shouting Club and The Gear, will perform on Friday, Oct. 28, at Paycheck's Lounge, 2932 Caniff, Hamtramck. For more information, call 872-8934.

## ● 3-D INVISIBLES

The 3-D Invisibles will perform with special guests, Zombi Surfers, on Friday, Oct. 28, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. For more information, call 365-9769.

## ● ROOK

Rook will perform on Saturday, Oct. 29, at New York, New York in Warren. For more information, call 756-6140.

## ● FUNHOUSE

Funhouse will perform with special guests, Pest, on Saturday, Oct. 29, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. For more information, call 365-9769.

## ● VERTICAL PILLOWS

Vertical Pillows will perform with special guests, Vibratory Synod, at Paycheck's Lounge, 2932 Caniff, Hamtramck. For more information, call 872-8934.

## LOCAL

Here are the top-10 songs receiving airplay on "Detroit Music Scene," which is heard from 4-5 p.m. Sundays (repeated 5:30-6:30 p.m. Tuesdays) on WOTR-FM.

1. "Digging My Own Grave," Kares Monster.
2. "Five O'Clock Bus Stop," See Dick Run.
3. "Under My Leather," Bathory.
4. "Lick the Boot," Grievance Committee.
5. "She's Fine," The Reputations.
6. "Johnny A.," Shane.
7. "Scary, Scary," Jerry Vile.
8. "Doctorin' the Tardis," The Time Lords.
9. "Cat Stop Shaking," Teenage Head.
10. "Mojo Man," Cinecye.

## COUNTRY

Here are the top-10 songs receiving airplay on WWWW-FM 106.7, country and western station in Detroit.

1. "We Believe in Happy Endings," Conley and Harris.
2. "Am I Crazy," Statler Brothers.
3. "Strong Enough To Bend," Tamy Tucker.
4. "Gonna Take A Lot of River," On Ridge Boys.
5. "Joe Knows How to Live," Edie Raven.
6. "Do You Love Me) Just Say Yes," Highway 101.
7. "Blue to the Bone," Swirlin' of the Rodeo.
8. "It Kicks Right on Hurtle," Bill Joe Royal.
9. "Honky Tonk Moon," Rand Travis.
10. "Saturday Night Special," Coy way Twitty.

## Game Theory shoots for the top

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

Scott Miller nearly had a hernia. The record label almost had a heart attack.

Miller wanted to make a good impression of Enigma Records, which had just signed his band Game Theory. So he juggled in the double-album set full of weird titles and even more bizarre noise tracks (including a vacuum cleaner). Talk about first impressions.

"There was horror," said Miller, recalling the looks from the record executives when what became "Lolita Nation" was placed in their laps. "There were chins hitting the floor, people were filling out of the room in disappointment."

Nobody went out the windows, but "Lolita Nation" went through the roof in terms of critical reviews and support from college radio. The project was lauded for its ambitiousness and general overall weirdness.

Along with the off-beat, though, the album carried its fair share of well-honed pop songs including "The Real Sheila."

Game Theory has recently released its second album on the independent label, "Two Steps from the Middle Ages." Miller said the north-



Members of Game Theory are Guillaume Gassuan (left), Shelly LaFreniere, Gil Ray, Donnette Thayer and Scott Miller.

ern California-based band took a more mainstream approach this time.

"We figured we'd better turn in a normal album this time around, or they probably wouldn't release it," Miller said.

ENIGMA HAS, and perhaps for the better. Again, the group has hooked up with notable producer Mitch Easter (R.E.M., Velvet Elvis) and have released perhaps their most accessible album to date.

Included in the single disc release are pop tunes "You Drive," "Wyming," and "In a DeLorean." College radio play is virtually guaranteed.

Yet there's uncharted territory for Game Theory called commercial radio. The eccentric pop band has an underground audience but is not sure how to cross the bridge into the land of mainstream success.

So far, they have stretched the limits of pop like a cheap piece of elastic on William "The Fridge" Perry's B.V.D.s. The band formed in 1982 and produced a few mini-LPs and an LP "Blaze of Glory."

In 1985, Game Theory hooked up with Easter for "Real Nighttime." The collaboration worked.

"On the one hand, he musically thinks like I do," Miller said. "A melody that sounds good to me sounds

## REVIEWS

SEE DICK RUN  
— See Dick Run

Finally, there is a document of what all the fuss has been about.

In the last year, See Dick Run has taken the Detroit area by storm. Already, the group's tunes have received airplay on WLLZ-FM and WRIF-FM. Also, the group won the monthly portion of "Local Riffs" and will be featured on the soon-to-be-released compilation album as a result.

Also, the pop foursome has been featured on other compilation works, such as "Digital Detroit" and "Detroit Music Scene Vol. 1."

On each of those productions, See Dick Run merely offered a sample of what the group is capable of. Good, infectious, melodious pop. It's nothing more, nothing less. Yet these guys somehow have managed to figure out the formula in little time as evidenced in their latest cassette release.

Good pop doesn't just happen. It takes work. Yet See Dick Run makes it sound so effortless here.

There are only four songs, but they are a good representation of what See Dick Run is all about. Included are local bar favorites like "Good Things" and "Everything Is Incomplete."



"Five O'Clock Bus Stop" is a pleasant surprise, simply because lyrically it holds its own. Mark Campbell lays down some acoustic guitar lines here while Jim Edwards shows why he is one of the best male vocalists in Detroit, belting out choruses in even, yet powered fashion.

If See Dick Run is to escape the realm of the Detroit music scene, there will be a need to avoid the banal route that a few lead groups astray. There are a few too many clichés for instance in "I'll Remember You."

Still, this four-song offering will only leave you wanting more.

— Larry O'Connor

## SMALL WORLD

## — Huey Lewis &amp; the News

Chef Huey and his musical partners went back into the kitchen for "Small World" (Chrysalis) — stirring a pinch of jazz, a dash of Cajon spice and a surprising world vision into a shimmering mix that nearly reaches the boiling point.

"It's a small world," Lewis sings, and the sincerity of his affable, ratty voice saves the concept from Disneyland-level allegorizing.

The realities of this small world, its inequalities and the way people survive them, surface not only in "Give Me the Keys (And I'll Drive You Crazy)" and "Walkin' with the Kid" — another sweet-tempered pean to domestic bliss.

But it isn't totally predictable, ei-



ther. Who would have thought the band could have stretched out for the jazz "Small World (Part 2)"? And "Old Antelope," sports a spicy Cajon beat that's satisfying as a steaming pot of gumbo.

Long in the shadows, the News steps out as one of rock's tightest backing bands. Tower of Power horns add their always-welcome assistance.

Despite this potent mixture, there are signs fewer people will be dining at Huey's table this time around. Lewis' statement about making the album he and the band wanted to make is industry shorthand for lowered sales expectations.

No matter. This is a better album, in every way, than "Sports" and "Fore." Its two multipatinum predecessors.

As is now clear, those albums were merely appetizers. With Small World, Huey and the boys serve up their main course.

— Wayne Peel

## WORKER

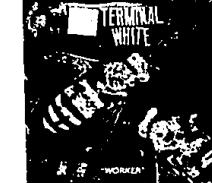
## — Terminal White

Thump, thump. Who's there? Thump, thump, thump . . . Is it Thumper? No, this is the Chicago-Detroit rock outfit Terminal White doing what they do best.

"Worker" (White Records) is a six-song EP that is splitting at the seams with heavy-duty techno drum beats. For an idea of what this band is like, pull out a stethoscope and catch the next jogger running down the street and check his heart. You'll get the idea.

In short, this EP lacks soul. This is computer chip rock, not the kind Chuck Berry and Elvis made famous. Or the kind that is reminiscent of the raw Detroit rock sound of Iggy and the Stooges and the MC-5.

Oh sure you can dance to it, but that's not saying much these days.



"Worker," the title track, opens the EP in a dark, futuristic tone, deep meaning in the song is certainly hidden in a pulsating, repetitive drum beat.

Someone throws in another quarter into drum machine, and then we have "Slaughter Me," another number that seems to go nowhere. The EP seems to have a few of those.

"Hamtramck" is another tune that gets lost in the murk. Any song about your favorite city needs to have lyrics that can be clearly heard.

But somewhere in all this, there is hope. "Fair Novelties" serves the day, mainly because you can actually hear the vocals. This track is worth buying the disc alone, simply because there is evidence that there are actually people performing and not robots.

For any future recordings, the way to be the route for Terminal White to take.

— Larry O'Connor