

STREET BEATS



Frank Allison has found his niche with the Odd Sox — John Seldin, Dan Beckett and John Boyle.

Allison, Odd Sox: Best band in '88

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Frank Allison is a music man with a mission.

His main concern on this night is not the impact his band, Frank Allison and the Odd Sox, could have in the grand mystical sense. Nor is it how their latest album, "Monkey Business," will rank in terms of musical statements made of this generation.

Naw. With his baseball cap on backwards, covering all but a few strands of his long hair, Allison's main concern is to get the show started.

COLLEGE

Here are the top 10 alternative albums of the year as selected by Lew Perritt, who is music director of WDRB-FM at Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills.

1. "Life's Too Good," Sagarikos.
2. "I Am Kostas Ouzis," The Fall.
3. "Loveless," Prince.
4. "Dream of Life," Patti Smith.
5. "Startish," The Church.
6. "Daydream Nation," Sonic Youth.
7. "Pop Art," Transvision Vamp.
8. "Nothing Wrong," Red Lorry/Yellow Lorry.
9. "Allegory and Sell," Psychic TV.
10. "The Real Dirt," King Blank.

REVIEWS

BEST ALTERNATIVE

• "The Tenement Years," Pere Ubu: Without a doubt this is one of the must listens of the decade, not just of this year. Yes, it is strange and quirky and may take some getting used to, but just like falling in love, the more you give to it, the more you want to give to it. From one of the innovators, this is music that lives on the edge.

• "Only Life," The Feelies: Simple song, great vocal melodies, great guitar melodies from New Jersey's finest. On this LP, their frantic live action gives way to a clearer presentation of the songs without losing the excitement. Singer and master guitarist Glenn Mercer gives their songs a feel reminiscent of other New Jersey favorites like Velvet Underground.

• "Workers Playtime," Billy Bragg: Everybody's favorite socialist focuses his passion more in the direction of personal politics and troubled relationships than previously. He expands his sound from his solo angry electric guitar to include such diverse instruments as piano, cello and female vocals and in the process comes up with classic failed love songs as "Must I Paint You a Picture" and "Valentine Day Is Over."

is in front of him at the moment — a tuna fish sandwich neatly sliced in half. Nearby, a half-filled pitcher of water is the dinner wine.

"Want some?" asked Allison, 27, offering one-half before tearing into the main course of this night's dinner.

Allison chews then talks. He swallows and talks some more. In the feeding fury, he manages to breathe too. Otherwise, he'd turn blue.

Frank Allison and the Odd Sox also pack quite a bite musically. Simply put, they're the best local unsigned band of 1988. And the reasons why are many, a first-rate LP and moving live performances are starters.

The zest with which Allison attacks the sandwich might offer the best hint.

On stage, the energy Allison exudes as lead singer is multiplied tenfold. He doesn't strum his acoustic guitar, he strikes it. He doesn't sing a lyric, he hurls it vocally into your ear.

WHEN HE gets going, his face contorts like a jellyfish having an seizure. But it's as genuine as the construction boots on his feet. For Frank Allison simply loves the music he plays, and it shows.

"His energy is what is remarkable," said Odd Sox guitarist Dan Beckett.

• "Been There, Seen That, Done That," Something Happen: The debut album from Ireland's best export of the year, this LP of solid guitar based songs is well worth picking up from the import bins while the band is also featured on a domestically released movie soundtrack "The Courier." Get it ahead of the rush. "Shadowland," k.d. lang/"Trinity Sessions," Cowboy Junkies: Keep these albums around for the next time you feel like crawling into a corner with your favorite bottle of whiskey and wallowing in self-pity. The finest country songs from the beautiful voice of the woman who claims to be the reincarnation of Patsy Cline. I believe her. Sad, sad songs on the Cowboy Junkies' quiet, moody and beautiful album, featuring the ethereal vocals of Margo Timmins. — Cormac Wright

Allison's zeal for playing music is only matched by his mind for detail. "Monkey Business" is chock full of stories about life's little peculiarities as seen through the eyes of Allison.

For example, "a little ditty, 'Bart's Reunion Party,'" was penned after seeing his father get together with some old friends.

"One thing I've noticed is that Frank has an amazing memory for his past," said bassist John Boyle. "When he was 12 years old, he remembers everyone in his class by name and he has a story for everybody. I mean I would be lucky to remember two or three guys from my class. He'll say, 'That reminds me of a guy named Bob Dinkelheimer...'"

Allison grew up on an "unfarmed farm" in the outer Washtenaw County area.

Allison wrote comedy scripts in high school and dabbled in some poetry. Then he began to click as a storyteller with his guitar. He spent 2 1/2 years at Eastern Michigan University before dropping out. He was a humanities major.

"I used to cut my classes and go to humanities classes because they had such great movies," Allison said. "I had really bad studying ethics you could say."

STUDYING BOOKS was quickly replaced by studying lyrics and chords. His first musical venture

was with a group of high schoolers three years ago. They parted ways.

Then Allison decided to give it a second try with Frank Allison and the Odd Sox, this time with an excellent lineup which includes drummer John Seldin along with Beckett and Boyle.

During that time, the band happened to hook up with their present manager Kevin Knapp of Plymouth. Knapp, a free-lance writer, remembers meeting Allison at a party.

"I heard this guy talking about this pop group called The Left Banke," Knapp said. "I thought, 'Wow, there's not too many people who remember Left Banke. He had a baseball cap on backwards and was wearing a service station shirt. I said to myself, 'Who is this guy?'"

That outlook is what still keeps Allison going. With every critical rave (and there's been plenty of those lately) is a night of performing in a empty nightclub that staps him back to reality.

At a recent performance at Rick's Cafe in Ann Arbor, the band walked off the stage two numbers into the first set. Rick's management wanted to change the cover charge from \$3 to \$1.

SINCE THEIR income depends on the intake at the door, the band balked. For their stance, a few angry

college students pelted band members with maraschino cherries and ice cubes as they packed up their equipment.

"It's always frustrating," said Allison, almost prophetically before the show started. "You play some place and no one shows up and you don't make any money. The guy at the bar tips you off. You drive home. You don't get any sleep. You're miserable."

"Then you play somewhere and there's a mess of people and everybody is throwing down. Ask me on that day and I'll tell you we're going all the way."

If Allison and company does go all the way, they'll do so on their reputation of combining rousing live performances with solid songwriting. They might be one of the few bands locally who can honestly boast of both.

The working folk can especially relate. Song subjects focus on having no money and driving crappy cars. Yet the MBA-seeking crowd is drawn by the band's energy onstage. Whatever income, though, if the crowd is happy Frank Allison is really happy.

THE PERFORMANCES he reminisces about with most fondness are those onstage, where he won over a crowd that's not normally receptive

to them rock'n'roll fellas with long hair.

"I remember this one guy in particular," said Allison, recalling a gig in Big Rapids. "He was a big fat guy with a chaw. He had on a dirty T-shirt. He must've been 55. He was standing there with these big jewels. He looked like he should have been a banjo player in 'Deliverance'."

"He was enjoying the show. He was shaking and stuff and his belly was moving right along."

LOCAL

Here are the top 10 local releases of 1988 (no particular order) selected by Scott Campbell, host of "Detroit Music Scene" on WDRB-FM.

1. "Karen Monster, EP," Karen Monster.
2. "See Dick Run Cassette," See Dick Run.
3. "Novelty," Hippodrome.
4. "Surround," Fastest Image.
5. "Local RI/Is," various artists.
6. "Detroit Music Scene," various artists.
7. "Folk Songs from the Twilight Zone," various artists.
8. "Your Touch," Stingsrays.
9. "Bad Trip on a Paisley Train," Colorful Trauma.
10. "Separate Years," Johnny Allen & The Appeal.

BEST LOCAL

Local acts took refuge in the studio and the end result was a slew of EPs, LPs, cassettes and compact discs in 1988. Some were good, some showed flashes of brilliance. Some fell short of expectations.

Picking five albums was difficult in that many releases featured some outstanding moments but had a few duds in the pile as well. Demo tapes didn't count. These products were ones available to the general public. Here's the individual releases that have a special place in my collection (no particular order).

• "Novelty," Hippodrome: This five-song cassette was a dandy. "Josephine" and "Autumn Colors" rank as immediate favorites while the other material is first-rate as well. Breezy guitar licks and vocals to match.

• "See Dick Run," See Dick Run: Sweet melodic pop is this group's forte and it definitely shows here on this cassette release. "Five O'Clock Bus Stop" certainly ranks as one of the best singles released this year locally while "Incomplete" is another first-rate tune.

• "Karen Monster EP," Karen Monster: Despite the self-help, this hard-rocking release still shined and certainly established Monster as a force to be reckoned with in the Detroit music scene. The metal tone



of this album didn't overshadow some great lyrics sung in Monster's distinctive voice (Christy Hynde comparisons accepted).

• "Monkey Business," Frank Allison & the Odd Sox: This recent release features this Ann Arbor outfit at their quirky best. The kitchen setting for most of the recording allows Allison to showcase his excellent songwriting talents. The live songs show how creatively it met with bountiful energy onstage. Undoubtedly, this disc will lead to bigger things in 1989.

• "Seven Simple Songs," Orange Roughies: Dave Fenry takes seven simple songs and paints them into separate masterpieces with his deft guitar. And John "Rosey" Pignear is much easier to digest on tape than he is at times live with his onstage antics. — Larry O'Connor

BEST OF DETROIT

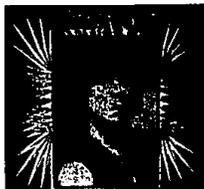
With Emily Gall in mind, we humbly offer this list of Detroit area artists who have made good this year in the field of pop music.

Gall, for those who can't recall, was that tireless runner and promoter, who urged us to "Say nice things about Detroit."

These four artists and many others this year made rich contributions to the Motor City's reputation as a musical city. It is a reputation worth fostering considering the city's other, more lethal claim to fame.

Shall we start a petition drive or something? Where is Emily when we need her? Consider this:

Iggy Pop put out his best album in years. Called "Instinct," this disc has a decidedly Motor City feel to it. "I play tag in an auto graveyard," Iggy croons on the opening number. Iggy is said to be living a more stable life these days, but in a recent local performance, he growled thus: "I'm tough, I'm from Dee-troit!" He then dove into a sea of adoring fans. Was (Not Was) has been collecting well-deserved praise for its latest album, "What's Up, Dog?" And didn't it warm the cold, cold hearts of local rockers to see in a recent issue of Rolling Stone mag a picture of the band leaning against



the wall of Steve's Place, that strange watering hole adjacent St. Andrew's Hall?

This year saw the return of Patti Smith from musical exile with an album called "Dream of Life," featuring her husband/guitarist Fred "Sonic" Smith, whose musical history is notable in its own right.

We believe Patti when she sings, "People have the power..."

In our midst too is the marvelous Anita Baker, whose "Giving You the Best I've Got" is one of the hottest-selling albums around. Emily Gall, we understand, has moved to Maui. We can't think of a single Maui musician... — Brian Lysaght