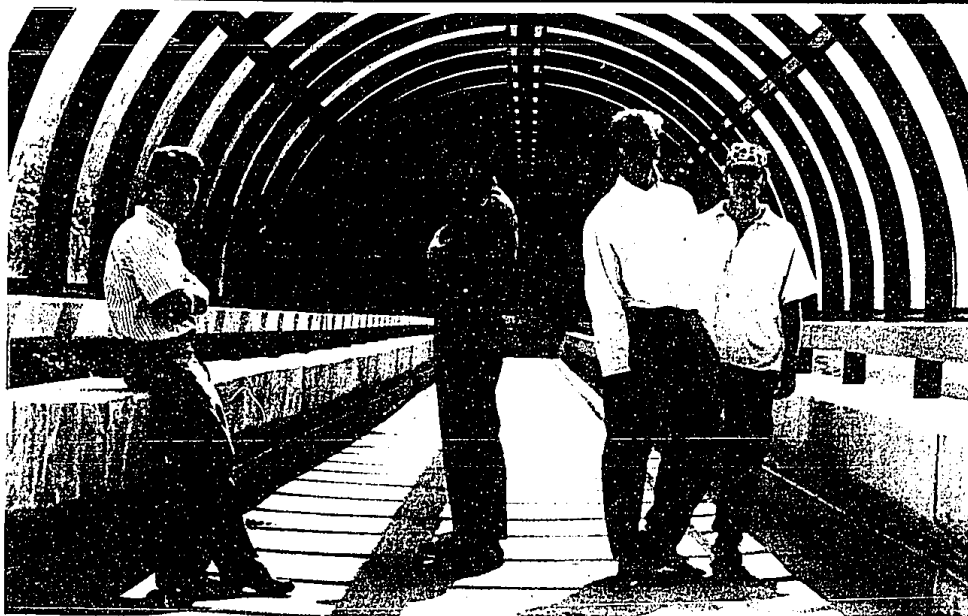


## STREET BEATS



Private Drive members include Craig Catton (left), John Latini, Kurt Wolak and Bill Wynne.

## On a roll

## Private Drive: A smooth road of musical diversity

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

With Private Drive, the pin wavers all over the musical spectrum and never finds a spot.

This band is tough to nail down. Listening to the four-member group invokes a lot of images. One can hear a little Steely Dan, a dash of Elvis Costello, a smattering of blues and a pinch of pop rock ala Little Feat. Private Drive is all of those things, then none of them.

Yet instead of veering off in different directions, on-stage Private Drive is a convoy of trucks heading fast down the same lane.

"Whatever music you're into, the band plays well and we communicate with one another," said Kurt Wolak, who is keyboard player. "People can appreciate that."

First, a little introduction is in order. Private Drive is a toned-down version of a previous outfit called The Phones. A six-member band, The Phones performed together for a number of years in the Ann Arbor area and included four of the present Private Drive players.

Members of Private Drive include a self-taught guitarist turned bassist named Craig Catton, a raspy-voiced lead singer named John Latini (a.k.a. Johnny Jones), a classically trained pianist and keyboardist, Kurt Wolak, and a drummer whose performed before Presidents Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford, Bill Wynne.

CHALKING UP their days with The Phones as a learning experience, Private Drive has recently staked out to claim a name for itself in area music circles. The move is a calculated one.

Before venturing out into the club circuit, Private Drive spent countless hours holed up in the studio and in their basement, honing the songs they play near perfection. The idea is to hit the college radio market with a good recording and then draw on the following that might develop.

Live, there's a certain amount of intrigue. And that's provided by the Queens, N.Y.-raised lead singer, whose gravelled voice is a natural in the haze of a nightclub setting.

PRIVATE  
DRIVE

Latini provides the band's "street-smart" edge. His "New Yorker"-flavored vocals serve as a perfect vehicle for songs about everyday life.

"You have to realize with John's voice, we're not going to be doing Johnny Mathis covers," Wolak said.

If anything, Latini's voice gives Private Drive a sort of blues edge. Latini further enhanced that theory at a recent performance at Sully's in Dearborn with his left-handed guitar style, weaving through bluesy covers like "Route 66."

The guitar licks of The Allman Brothers and Eric Clapton have apparently left their mark.

"THERE WERE these rock bands playing the blues when I was learning the guitar," Latini said. "I stayed down in the basement in Queens and would solo to the album instead of learning the chords. That's not the most disciplined way to learn."

"What I lack in discipline I can cover up with passion, you know."

Another element of Private Drive's music is directed by Wolak. The band is able to add a keyboard sound without sounding like a gaudy version of Happy Kine and the Merh Makers.

Wolak is Dr. Keyboard Knowledge. His experience ranges from classical piano to playing keyboards in a hard rock band.

"More than any other instrumentation, the keyboardist has to be very diverse in what he can put in," said Wolak, sounding very clinical. "Sometimes he just sits in the background and puts very light pads like strings, horns and stuff like that. In our music, I use very natural sounding stuff."

"We kind of live by the adage that one of the best musical things you can have is nothing. Musical space, it makes what you do play stand out more."

Stand out is what Private Drive does in live performances. The music is appealing and quite danceable. In the studio, the band is trying to find the middle ground between the energy they generate onstage and well-produced recordings.

IF ANYONE can pull it off, it's Private Drive. Band members appear quite committed to what they're doing. Even the circumstances surrounding their formation shows a group of people willing to work together.

Latini recalls hearing music through an open window across the street.

"As I was leaving the house, I heard those guys. I remember standing by the car saying, 'Wow those guys are hot,'" Latini said. "I was standing out there shuffling my feet thinking, 'How can I make an introduction?' So I went up to the window and said, 'You guys sound great.' You can't get any more forward than that."

Catton and Wolak were providing the music. They also provided a hand of friendship and invited Latini in to join the fray.

Together, they have moved forward without consciously jumping on one musical style.

"The only thing we've consciously done is have passion for what we do," Latini said. "We love the music."

Private Drive will perform on Monday, Jan. 9, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For more information, call 996-8555.

## IN CONCERT

## ● TALENT IMAGE

Talent Image will perform on Tuesday, Jan. 3, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For more information, call 996-8555.

## ● YOUNG CAUCASIANS

Young Caucasians will perform on Wednesday, Jan. 4, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For more information, call 996-8555.

## ● JUICE

Juice will perform on Thursday, Jan. 5, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For more information, call 996-8555.

## ● THE GENERALS

The Generals, The Gear and Bothers will appear Friday, Jan. 6, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. For more information, call 365-9760.

## ● BIM SKALA BIM

Bim Skala Bim will perform on Friday, Jan. 6, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For more information, call 996-8555.

## ● NEW LOGIC

New Logic will perform with Y.B. Sky on Saturday, Jan. 7, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75. For more information, call 365-9760.

## ● MITCH RYDER

Mitch Ryder will perform two shows on Saturday, Jan. 7, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. Show times are 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. Tickets are \$10 in advance. For more information, call 996-8555.

## ● ORANGE ROUGHIES

Orange Roughies will perform on Monday, Jan. 9, at Rick's American Cafe, 811 Church, Ann Arbor. For more information, call 996-2747.

## COLLEGE

Here are the top songs receiving airplay on WQRB-FM 90.3, campus radio station of Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills.

1. "Teenage Riot," Soledad Youth.
2. "Silver & Gold," U2.
3. "2541," Grant Hart.
4. "Just Like Arcadia," Psychic TV.
5. "Sigmata," Ministry.
6. "Valentine's Day," Billy Bragg.
7. "Do It," Heavy Rollins.
8. "Don't Know Why," Level 42.
9. "Channel Zero," Public Enemy.
10. "Dreams For Real," City of Love.

## CLASSICAL

Here are Dick Wallace's most requested classical hits on WQRB-FM.

1. "Octet," Mendelssohn.
2. "Symphony No. 1," Beethoven.
3. "Symphony No. 1," Brahms.
4. "Candlelight Carol," Rutter.
5. "Horn Concerto No. 2," Mozart.
6. "Piano Quintet," Dvorak.
7. "Light Cavalry Overture," Suppe.
8. "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 1," Liszt.
9. "American Salute," Gould.
10. "Cadenza in D," Pachelbel.

## COUNTRY

Here are the top 10 songs receiving airplay on WWWW-FM.

1. "Desperately," Don Williams.
2. "Deeper Than the Holler," Randy Travis.
3. "Change of Heart," The Judds.
4. "I've Been Looking," Nitty Gritty Dirt Band.
5. "That Old Wheel," Hank Williams Jr./Johnny Cash.
6. "If You Ain't Lovin' (You Ain't Livin')," George Strait.
7. "A Tender Lie," Restless Heart.
8. "When You Say Nothing at All," Keith Whitley.
9. "Mama Knows," Shenandoah.
10. "All the Reasons Why," Highway 101.

## REVIEWS

I AM A KURIOUS ORANJ  
— The Fall

"The post punk era has provided us a lot in terms of new musical expression. Does anyone care to remember A Flock of Seagulls?"

But when you're talking good bands of post punk times, The Fall says it all. This English band has defined and refined it without being confined. "I Am Kurious Oranj" (Beggars Banquet) is testament to that.

"Those who feel the post punk era has produced nothing but synthe-sized ooze and whacked out haircuts might be inclined to check out The Fall's offering here."

Musical styles vary on this album. She can be heard in the number making light of the Catholic-Protestant struggle in "Kurios Oranj" while "Cab II Up" features the band in the role of upbeat pop rockers. All of the music here is appealing.

"For instance the opening track, 'Big Prins' is sparse musically and lyrically. Yet the seductive guitar work of Craig Scanlon and Brix Smith (wife of lead singer Mark E. Smith) draw you in along with a repetitive and hypnotic back beat provided by drummer Simon Wolstencroft and bassist Steven Hanley."

From there, The Fall takes you on



a musical odyssey and then lets you out at the end with your hearing and stomach intact. You want more.

The sound is basic, really. The overture from "I Am a Curious Orange" (a ballet based on the life of William of Orange (who sent King James II packing in the 16th century) is case and point. The guitar work of Brix Smith on this is stunning while very understated.

Then there is line matter of Mark E. Smith's lyrics and vocals. As a singer (???), many third-string rappers are better. But his self-imposed irony comes through on many tunes with the way he twists and manipulates the lyrics. For example on "Jerusalem," Mark E. Smith opines about ripping the side of his head on a piece of brick. "It was the government's fault/It was the fault... of the government."

There is little fault with this album.

— Larry O'Connor

THE BIG PICTURE  
— Broken Yoyo

There are a lot of things to like about the Royal Oak-based outfit Broken Yoyo. They show an unlimited source of energy, intelligent and well-written lyrics along with some fine musicianship.

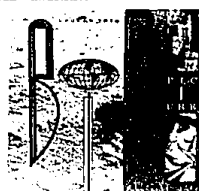
But, ah, capturing that all on vinyl is often a difficult task. Apparently, that appears to be the case for Broken Yoyo whose "The Big Picture" (Fiasco Records) is even too massive for them to capture effectively at times.

The height of the Broken Yoyo musical euphoria is a big, brassy sound featuring a wide variety of instruments (trumpet, flugelhorn, keyboards and saxophone to name a few). Instead of trying to use these elements as textures, there is a tendency to fire all guns at once.

As a result, "The Big Picture" never seems to settle in a particular groove. Once you get comfortable with one number, the next one jumps the tracks and goes in another direction.

The song "Don't Wake Up Alvin," penned about convicted murderer Alvin Ford, gathers momentum as a rather enjoyable pop-rock number. Then suddenly, it breaks into a trumpet solo before landing.

— Larry O'Connor



These progressive rockers do have their moments, however. The impressive dramatic quality of "Daisy" is a highlight as are the searing guitar lines produced by Mike Mercante in the jump "One Inch Left."

"The Big Picture" and "Drive Enough to Think" also carry their weight as dance-oriented numbers with thumping bass lines.

Deservedly so, this band has earned a reputation as one of the more innovative groups on the local scene. Live, this band's forte is combining other artforms (theater and literature) with music.

Creativity is certainly not lacking in Broken Yoyo's camp. The string that ties it all together is what's missing.

GREATEST HITS  
VOLS. 1 & 2  
— Ray Charles

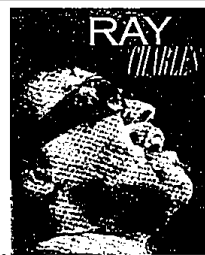
Indeed, the man is a genius. But more than that, Ray Charles is an American treasure.

Rhino Records has done an excellent job of chronicling Charles' career as one of the greatest artists of our time. Volume One documents Charles' musical journey from 1955 to 1967, touching upon everything from blues, jazz, roadhouse rhythm and blues, gospel, country and pop.

Volume Two captures his music between the years of 1960 and 1972. And the hits are all here. The drifter anthem of "Hit the Road Jack," the sad "Born to Lose," the ode to poverty "Busted" and the jazzy "Unchain My Heart" can all be found on Volume One.

Volume Two features Charles at his piano-playing best with classics like "Georgia on My Mind" and "Take These Chains from My Heart" along with some obscure numbers like "Hide Nor Hair." The second collection also lends some evidence of why Charles is the legend that he has become.

His cover versions of Paul McCartney's "Eleanor Rigby" and Hank Williams' "Your Cheating Heart" display Charles' ability to gracefully cross into other genres of



the music, such as pop and country, and leave his trademark with emotionally filled renditions.

Don't believe it? Listen to "Ain't no Mountain High Enough" and if that doesn't leave you patriotic, then you probably have a rod under the bed.

A nice feature to this two-volume collection is the liner notes that tell the story behind each song. For instance, "What'd I Say" (which is a live track on Volume One) originated when Charles had run through his repertoire at a four-hour ballroom show in the Midwest and composed the number in rough form to fill the last few minutes.

This collection will more than just fill a few minutes of your time.

— Larry O'Connor