

STREET BEATS

Static Alphabet knows its 'ABCs' IN CONCERT

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Static Alphabet is like the kid in the sixth grade who was always in the principal's office. You never expected them to make much of their life.

Then later, they end up being vice president.

Well, anyone who might have caught Static Alphabet's act in the early days — two years ago — wouldn't have deemed the group for the cover of Rolling Stone. Instead, they were more likely to be victims

of a stoning.

"We did get complacent for awhile," said Paul Einhaus of Farmington, guitarist and vocalist with the band. "It was the summer of doom in '87. I remember sitting on the curb thinking, 'We'll never get to play again.'"

Things didn't look good for the group, especially after one nightclub owner told them flat out they stunk. He relegated Static Alphabet to jam nights, when any Joe Simcoe can try his craft.

But, ah, what a difference a few nights of jamming can make. Static

Alphabet has rebounded, all culminated with a rather endearing five-song cassette demo tape.

The band is no longer a four-man. Original member Ken Faulkner left the group due to creative differences.

AS A RESULT, Static Alphabet has a stripped-down sound. There is no clutter, just some guitar-flavored songs in a bare-bones form. Their biography likens the sound to a cross between The Buzzcocks and The Beatles. Einhaus said not to put much stock in such descriptions.

"We had to write a bio in a hurry," he said.

If anything, Static Alphabet has tried to avoid of being caught in a toehold of a particular style of music. They opt for the freestyle approach.

"We don't say, 'we're going in this direction,'" said drummer Bill Long, formerly of Farmington. "We don't do that, because as soon as you do that somebody will say (pointing his finger), 'You're not going in that direction.'"

"If banjo reggae becomes a popular, marketable thing, we'll try that," Einhaus added.

"Banjo reggae? I never even heard of it," Long said.

The band's quest for originality is not fully understood until bass player Mike Fraser's face turns as serious as a heart surgeon discussing a bypass.

"I had a really bad experience," said Fraser, in a voice of horror. "I went to the Holiday Inn to meet some friends at the bar. There was this cover band. They looked like mannequins. They did everything so perfect. I saw my future in music disappearing."

WITH THAT as the alternative, Static Alphabet has gladly taken its lumps on the original circuit. The band formed out of a little-known group called the Acid Puppies. The Puppies decided to call it quits when they went to perform at a birthday party, and everyone went to Burger King instead.

Static Alphabet is one of many westside bands to seek notoriety on the east side. Others include the Orange Roughies, Hippodrome, Sensitive Big Guys and Jugglers and Theves.

Surprisingly, they are able to thrive despite there being no clubs in the area to play. Most earn their reputations in Hamtramck at clubs such as Lil's, Paycheck's and the Pup.

"I don't think west side/east side has anything to do with it," Einhaus said. "It's just that all the clubs are on the east side."

(Hamtramck is Detroit's Green-Wich Village.) Long added, "It's a place where everyone paints their rooms black, smokes clove cigarettes and hangs out together."

But in Hamtramck is where Static Alphabet has had one of several major turning points. It was Rod Cole of the Hamtramck Pub who bluntly assessed the group's talent. They didn't take it too hard.

"We figured there had to be one redeeming quality about us," Long said. "Otherwise, he wouldn't have wasted his breath."

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April 1988 — Static Alphabet enters the studio to record 10 songs at Tempersmill Studio in Livonia. "Dave (Penny) was

great," Long said. "He told us, 'You might want to tune your guitars before you record.'"

August 1988 — Static Alphabet guitarist and vocalist Ken Faulkner leaves the band because of artistic differences. "Ken is the first one we stepped on in the bloody coup in our climb to get to the top," Long said.

It was a major turning point in the band," Einhaus added.

August 1988 — Static Alphabet goes into the studio — this time White Room Studio in Grosse Pointe — to record a four-song demo tape. The band is treated to Greek food. "That's when Bill said (singing), 'We don't need another gyro,'" Einhaus said.

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outside and performs at the Nubest Club in Grand Rapids with True Blue Hearts and Inside Out. "I remember that because that's where I met my girlfriend," Einhaus said.

November 1988 — Static Alphabet members Bill Long and Mike Fraser move from Farmington to Ferndale. "My parents moved to Dayton, Ohio. (Fia,) Long said. "We lost our place to practice."

January 1989 — Static Alphabet sends out demo tapes to clubs and their parents. "My dad hates my voice," Einhaus said. "He's a choir singer. My mom loved it. But your mom loves anything you do."

"My parents said they were genuinely surprised," Fraser added.

Today — "We're older. We're wiser," Einhaus said.

"And hangover," Long added.



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... And its major 'turning points'

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BAD OSKAR

Bad Oskar will perform on Monday, June 19, at the Blind Pig, 203 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

J.D. LAMB

J.D. Lamb will perform Monday through Friday, June 19-24, at The Players Radiation, Inc., 1275 Walkers Road, exit 183 off I-94, Ypsilanti. For information, call 487-3000.

REGULATORS

Regulators will perform on Tuesday, June 20, at the Blind Pig, 203 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

KNAVES

The Knaves will perform on Wednesday, June 21, at Rick's American Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

ISPO FACTO

Ispo Facto will perform on Wednesday, June 21, at the Blind Pig, 203 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

WAY MOVES

The Way Moves will perform on Thursday, June 22, at the Majestic Theatre Centre, 4124 Woodward, Detroit. For information, call 833-9700.

ROBB ROY

Robb Roy will perform along with World State on Thursday, June 22, at Garden Wood, 4120 Woodward, Detroit. For information, call 833-9850.

SKYLES

Skyles will perform on Thursday, June 22, at the Blind Pig, 203 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

MADCAT RUTH

Madcat Ruth's Pressure Cooker will perform on Friday, June 23, at the Blind Pig, 203 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

ORANGE ROUGHIES

Orange Roughies and Missionary Slew will perform on Friday, June 23, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2043 Caniff, off I-75.

HARMONICA SHAH

Harmonica Shah will perform on Friday, June 23, at Moby Dick's, 5412 Schaefer, Dearborn. For information, call 581-3650.

BUTLER TWINS

The Butler Twins will perform on Friday, June 23, at the Attic Bar, 11667 Jos. Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 262-4194.

THE CIVILIANS

The Civilians will perform on Friday and Saturday, June 23-24, at Griffs Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. For information, call 89-1308.

LUXURY CHRIST

Luxury Christ will perform along with Brainhammer on Friday, June 23, at Stanley's, 355 Riverdale Drive, Windsor. Admission is \$3. For information, call (519) 253-3118.

FRIG IDLE

The Frog Island Zydeco, Blues and Jazz Festival will take place Friday and Saturday, June 23-24, in Ypsilanti. The Friday lineup includes: 3 p.m., Krasula, Malia's Success Jazz Quartet; at 7 p.m., Sun Messengers; 8 p.m., Wayne Young A. Zydeco; and at 10 p.m., Queen Ida. The Bon Temps Zydeco Band, Saturday's lineup includes at noon, Straight Ahead; 1 p.m., Mr. B's Blue Turbulence; at 2 p.m., The New York Force; at 4 p.m., The Great Allen/Charles Haden/Paul Motian Trio; at 6 p.m., The Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band; at 8 p.m., Marcia Ball; and at 10 p.m., The Junon Wells Blues Band. Advance tickets are \$9.50 for Friday, \$11.50 for Saturday or \$16.50 for both days. For information, call 487-2229.

ALLIGATORS

The Alligators will perform on Friday, June 23, at Aubree's, 30-41 Cross St., Ypsilanti. For information, call 832-3355.

UNCLE JESSIE

Uncle Jessie and 29th Street Blues Band will perform on Saturday, June 24, at the Attic Bar, 11667 Jos. Campau, Hamtramck. For information, call 362-4194.

ROBB ROY

Robb Roy will perform on Saturday, June 24, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2043 Caniff, off I-75.

CINECYDE

Cinecyde will perform along with Hippodrome and Shooting Club at Paycheck's Lounge, Caniff, east of Jos. Campau, Hamtramck.

BROKEN YOYO

Broken Yoyo will perform on Saturday, June 24, at Sully's, Greenfield Road, north of Michigan Avenue, Dearborn. For information, call 846-1920.

SCOTT MORGAN

Scott Morgan will perform on Saturday, June 24, at the Blind Pig, 203 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

ROBYN MITCHELCOCK

Robyn Mitchelcock will perform on Wednesday, June 28, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 961-MEET.

CLARENCE FOUNTAIN

Clarence Fountain and the Five Blind Boys of Alabama will perform on Saturday, July 1, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit. For information, call 89-MUSIC.

LOCAL

Here are the top 10 songs receiving air play on "Detroit Music Scene," which is played from 4-5 p.m. Sunday (repeated 5:30-6:30 p.m. Tuesdays) on WDTN-FM 90.9.

- "I'm in Love Again," Shane and the Sirs.
- "Loud, Hard and Fast," The Gear.
- "State of Mind," World State.
- "Rock Me Baby," Joey Harlow Project.
- "No More Itturning," Ash Caa Van-Gogh.
- "Too Hot," Skanking Voodoo Dolls.
- "Phuberman of Love," Bootsey X.
- "Who Is John Galt," Figure 4.
- "The Day After Tomorrow," The Day After Tomorrow.
- "Beyond Suburbs," Coppa Joe.

COLLEGE

Here are the top 10 songs receiving air play on CJAM-FM 91.5, campus station of the University of Windsor.

- "Annie," Citrus Park.
- "Sin the Dog," Bars Gobles.
- "Get Tricked," The Great Escape.
- "Woodward," Spawning Blue.
- "Khafe Sho," Sarcastic Mannequins.
- "Pet's Lounge," Ramp Range.
- "Mata's Ray," Frises.
- "Bike," Love and Rockets.
- "Devil Does Drugs," My Life With a Thrill Kill Club.
- "Just Ask Peter," Cerebral Killers.

REVIEWS

FULL MOON FEVER

— Tom Petty



Solo but not alone. This could not be more true with the release of the Gainesville Gator's first LP that doesn't share the billing with his more-than-competent backup ensemble, The Heartbreakers. However, it's not a great shocker that all The Heartbreakers expect appearances on the LP, proof of how tight the group actually is. It's even less of a shock that T.P.'s buddies from his most recent project, The Traveling Wilburys, also show up for the ride.

"Full Moon Fever" is produced by Wilbury Jeff Lynne, with help from Petty and right hand Heartbreaker Mike Campbell. Six of the dozen songs were written by the Petty/Lynne combo, and fellow travelers George Harrison and the late Roy Orbison also provide some guitars, vocals and advice.

Some people may accuse this album of masquerading as "Traveling Wilburys, Volume III," but it is distinctly Southern — distinctly Petty. "Free Fallin'" is a strong opener, a stirring ballad about leaving a love behind — a frequent T.P. theme.

The initial single, "I Won't Back Down," features strong vocals drawn by Petty, with harmonizing

BIG DADDY

— John Cougar Mellencamp



From the time he added his real last name to the rock 'n' roll persona he was, John Cougar Mellencamp has been trying to go back to his roots. And, to overcome another cliché, Mellencamp's also sought to do it "his way."

With his 1985 tour de force "Scarecrow" (the first LP where the Mellencamp name was displayed), the winds of change began to blow. The arrangements were stark, almost course, and the lyrics had a new bite to them (particularly in reference to the plight of the American farmer). It was by far Mellencamp's best work.

Then "Lonesome Jubilee" followed in 1987 with a lot of the same provocative lyrics, but the music had taken a distinct turn from the rock'n'roll of Mellencamp's younger, rebellious days. The "back to the roots" bit had surfaced in a big "Um at home in rural Indiana" way. Accordion, violins and steel guitars were used to bring it all home. The LP had its moments, but was laced with inconsistency.

Now, "Big Daddy" arrives in 1989 with the roots firmly entrenched and the John Cougar we knew and loved withering away. The entire LP seems to be a statement by Mellen-

camp to the world, especially if they're record company execs, that he's moving in his own chosen direction.

For confirmation of this statement, just listen for the single "Pop Singer." Seemingly oblivious to the days when he used to write songs like "Play Guitar," now we have a series of down home yarns about life with folks like "Theo and Weid Henry" and "Jackie Brown." And all the accordions, violins and steel guitars just start to near him after awhile.

The only real song with a socially conscious bent to it is "J.M.'s Question."

"Big Daddy" borders on the self-indulgent at times, and that's a tough thing to say about a man like Mellencamp. He basically is saying to his fans, this is who I am — like it or leave it.

That decision is up to you. — Bob Sadler

BRAIN DRAIN

— The Ramones

RAMONES

— The Ramones



Yep. They're back. The band whose primary aim is to get to the end of a song as quickly as possible and fit as many power bar chords as they can into the process. The slandance kings.

Anybody familiar with the Ramones already knows what this album sounds like. As you may suspect, there is no radical change in sound.

The Ramones sound the same today as they did 10 years ago but somehow this is not to their detriment. Other bands would be accused of not progressing but the Ramones are such a cartoon band institution, it would be akin to asking Disney to change Mickey Mouse's voice.

The Ramones have always had a problem producing a consistently good album, although their singles fall into the realm of classics. This LP is no exception. This single is "Pet Sematary" from the Stephen King movie and damned fine it is, too. Pure Ramones kitch.

The songs that work on this LP all involve Joey Ramone in the composition. His voice is the one most easily identifiable with classic Ramones and again his songs on "Brain Drain" hold true to the surfer-punk truth.

Songs like "Don't Bust My Chops" has him verbally abusing a girlfriend in a display of Ramones machismo. "You're a stylin' queen and an alley cat/oo many chocolates has you fat, fat, fat, you're always wearing that cheap perfume/I can always tell when you're in the room."

When Dee Dee Ramones sings, it seems as if he wants to give the Ramones a social conscience, e.g. "Fashimbeni Fits the Crims," or "Learn to Listen."

Thankfully, Joey gets the majority and jumps right back with his ampleton love songs, e.g. "If ever your body lying next to mine, oh oh baby, yeah I would sure feel fine, I said baby baby I'm all screwed up or 'I want you and all of your charms, I found out a little too late, I said come baby baby come back."

More rock rules. — Bob Sadler