

Opossums: Lean, mean rock 'n' roll IN CONCERT

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

"That's Opossums with one p," said Marty Fletcher, kindly correcting the scribe on the reporter's notebook.

There are no frills or amenities with the Opossums, a relatively new four-man outfit by way of Ann Arbor. Not even an additional letter.

The spark that this band produces, though, is the musical equivalent of making a bonfire by rubbing two twigs together.

The Opossums recently released their first LP, "Marsupial Era" (Panic Horn). Two days were spent recording the project, yet band members believe they couldn't have done better if they stayed two years in the studio.

A listen to the LP bears this out. The Opossums certainly possess in their paws one of the best releases of year.

Some might call it dumb luck — not quite.

As three of four band members fill in around the table in the basement of the Heidelberg Inn (bass player Tom Dunham is fishing up in Canada), it easy to see this is a solid core of friends in perfect harmony.

No one interrupts the other while speaking, and one member dutifully pours beer into each empty mug without being asked.

DRUMMER RANDY SABO, guitarist and singer Marty Fletcher, and guitarist Mark "Reno" Neff are all from Chelsea. Fletcher and Neff used to strum bluegrass numbers by the lake.

At one time, these fellows were teamed up with Ann Arbor natives Frank Allison. After cutting a single together, they went their separate ways.

Sabo and Fletcher used to make up the Folkminers, an Ann Arbor group that disbanded last year.

"When we knew that we were going to talk to you, we decided we wouldn't talk about the Folkminers."



There are no frills or amenities with the Opossums, a relatively new four-man outfit by way of Ann Arbor.

Fletcher said, "We're a totally different band."

"We're sick of the bands where we were the kids and we had a mother (yelling) at us and telling us what to do. This is our own band, and it's working out fine."

"Yeah, now Marty's the mother," Neff added.

The band is like family. More and more people are taking to the group. The Opossums began performing the Ann Arbor club circuit last December. Their reputation as a lean, mean rock 'n' roll outfit spread quickly.

With just 11 songs in their arsenal, they did something rather unusual. They headed into the studio. Most groups would perhaps wait a year or two before investing that type of money.

Not the Opossums, whose confidence belies their ages (band members are in their early 20s).

"WE HAD some songs that we thought were pretty good songs," said Fletcher, who, andies a majority of the song writing. "We went in there and recorded it. It had a feel to it."

"I listened to it. I don't know what to make of it," Neff added, "I like it, but I haven't heard anything like it before."

The spontaneity of the event gave the record a live feel. The sound is basic American rock 'n' roll. Yet the Opossums don't sound like a revivalist band and comparisons to '80s punk also miss the mark.

Band members are not about to

commission a study on it yet. Instead, they intend to use their debut LP as a calling card. Plans include releasing it in cassette form and possibly in CD later.

Presently, the band is resting up for what promises to be a busy fall schedule. The Opossums will keep Ann Arbor as a base for the time being, perhaps venturing to Detroit for a show or two. Also in the works is a tour of the Midwest cities such as Chicago, Milwaukee, Wis., and Minneapolis, Minn.

"We have to show our (stuff) now," Fletcher said.

The Opossums will perform on Friday, Sept. 8, at Club Heidelberg in Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.

• FYC

Fine Young Cannibals will perform with special guests, Neneh Cherry, at 8 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 5, at the Fox Theatre in Detroit. Tickets are \$20. For information, call 567-6000.

• CORRUPT

Corrupt, with Cynacide and Violent Interactions, will perform on Wednesday, Sept. 6, at Blondies, 2113 W. Seven Mile, Detroit. For information, call 535-8108.

• VICIOUS HIPPIES

Vicious Hippies will perform Wednesday, Sept. 6, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 998-8555.

• WITHOUT WARNING

Without Warning will perform along with Culture Shock on Thursday, Sept. 7, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.

• ROXX

Roxx, with Louis Love and Scaru, will perform on Thursday, Sept. 7, at Blondies, 2113 W. Warren, Detroit. For information, call 535-8108.

• TANNHILL WEAVERS

Tannahill Weavers will perform on Thursday, Sept. 7, at the Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 761-1451.

• FIGURE 4

Figure 4 will perform on Thursday, Sept. 7, at 3-D Music Club, 12 Mile and Main Street, Royal Oak. For information, call 589-3344.

• FUNHOUSE

Funhouse will perform on Thursday, Sept. 7, at 3-D Dance Club, 1815 N. Main, Royal Oak. For information, call 589-3344.

• TAZZ

Tazz, with Vigilante and Alyze, will perform on Friday, Sept. 8, at Blondies, 2113 W. Warren, Detroit. For information, call 535-8108.

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• OPOSSUMS

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• ASH CAN VANGOGH

Ash Can Vangogh will perform Friday and Saturday, Sept. 8-9, at Jamrock's, 1812 N. Main, near 12 Mile Road, Royal Oak. For information, call 547-6470.

• ORANGE ROUGHIES

The Orange Roughies, with Strange Bedfellows, will perform on Friday, Sept. 8, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75.

• JUNIOR WELLS

Junior Wells Blues Band will headline opening night festivities Friday, Sept. 8, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. Also performing will be Joanna Connors and Her Blues Masters, Madcat Ruby's, Pressure Cooker and Steve Nardella. For information, call 998-8555.

• LAURIE LEWIS

Laurie Lewis and Grant Street will perform on Friday, Sept. 8, at the Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 761-1451.

• JUICE

Juice will perform with special guests, My Planet, Saturday, Sept. 9, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.

• SYRANT

Syrant, with Screaming Freaks, will perform on Saturday, Sept. 9, at Blondies, 2113 W. Warren, Detroit. For information, call 535-8108.

• VOLBEATS

The Volbeats will perform on Saturday, Sept. 9, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, off I-75.

• VAMPIRELLA

Vampirella, with Vigilante and Wraith, will perform on Sunday, Sept. 10, at Blondies, 2113 W. Warren, Detroit. For information, call 535-8108.

Spanking Bozos: Bit of this, bit of that

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Spanking Bozo is so urban, HUD director Jack Kemp could be the band's manager.

The four-member group, led by bass player and singer John Collins, mixes an unusual combination of rap, psychedelia, world beat and funk to make a sound that will put your woofers and tweeters into electronic convulsions.

When you say city, you say Spanking Bozo. So who better to play the 1989 "Dally in the Alley," which takes place Saturday, Sept. 9, in Detroit? The Dally features music, poetry, art and crafts demonstrations.

The event takes place three blocks west of Woodward Avenue, between Forest and Hancock. The Detroit Council of Arts, United Community Housing Coalition and WDET-FM are sponsoring the event. Proceeds from the sale of T-shirts, posters and beverages will help the homeless.

Another purpose of the event is to bring together those who make up the arts community in Detroit.

Musically, that's not too difficult. Spanking Bozo is part of burgeoning music community in the city, which tends to shun the pretentious suburban club scene.

Other bands in the community include the Blanks, Kora, Forced Anger and Son of Sam to name only a few. All play different styles of music, but a common thread brings them together.

"THESE BANDS all pull for one another to

'I grew up with funk all my life. I've trying to get rid of the soul sound in my voice for a while, but it never left.'

— Stefanie Dillard

make it," said Collins, who lives in Detroit.

Spanking Bozo has been making music for seven years. The group has endured personnel shake-ups and a name change (They were Soviet Sex before finding out another band already had the handle).

The present lineup includes Stefanie Dillard, guitarist Derek McBride, and drummer Gary Vanderkerk along with Collins. Spanking Bozo is featured one three compilation albums, including the recently released "Maniacs from the Motor City."

The biggest breakthrough didn't occur on vinyl, though. Instead it came with the addition of Dillard, whose soulful voice further enhances the Bozo's urban sound.

"I grew up with funk all my life," said Dillard, who is a technical engineer at WXON-TV Channel 20. "I've trying to get rid of the soul sound in my voice for awhile, but it never left."

Good thing for Spanking Bozo it didn't. Incidentally, Collins said the band's name came to one member while watching television, which, perhaps further validates warnings about sitting in front of the tube for too long.

Dillard also has contributed in the way of some heady lyrics. But at this interview at the Original House of Pancakes in Southfield, Collins does most of the talking.

COLLINS SAID he's a devout Libertarian and a fan of the works of author Ayn Rand. He can swing conversation from the fellowship of bands in Detroit to a messed up tax system that penalizes small business, all the while sipping coffee.

Yet his music doesn't reflect any political views. The sound is much like the way he paints, another one of his artistic pursuits.

"I paint in an impressionistic style," Collins said. "Our music is very layered."

Psychedelic music appears to be the next big wave. Bands in England are already cultivating a new sound, combining the old with the new.

Collins is quick to defuse the notion that his group is a revivalist one.

"We were doing psychedelic music four years ago," he said. "I'm glad it's coming back though."

Spanking Bozo will be one of several bands that will at "The Dally in the Alley" art and music fair, which takes place on Saturday, Sept. 9, three blocks west of Woodward, between Forest Avenue and Hancock. For information, call 833-3443.



Funhouse will perform Thursday, Sept. 7, at 3-D Dance Club in Royal Oak.

LOCAL

Here are the top 10 songs receiving airplay on "Detroit Music Scene," which is heard 4-5 p.m. Sundays (repeated 5:30-6:30 p.m.) on WDRH-FM 90.9.

1. "Geraldine B.C." Ceppa Joe.
2. "Factory Line." The Rogues.
3. "Hard Life." Rubber.
4. "Tomorrow's Just Another Day." Son of Sam.
5. "Riding White Aliigators." Sublime Wedge.
6. "Shook at Dark." No Right No Wrong.
7. "Reaters." Wire.
8. "All the Heroes." Generals.
9. "Ice Daughter." Nemesia.
10. "Untitled." Elowise Letge.

BLUES

Here are Robert Jones' 10 favorite blues albums. Jones hosts "Blues from the Lowlands," which is heard 10 a.m. to noon Saturdays on WDET-FM 101.9.

1. "Great Bluesmen at Newport," various artists.
2. "Death Letter Blues." Son House.
3. "Chicago: The Blues Today," various artists.
4. "Mean Mothers," various artists.
5. "Guitar Wizard," Tampa Red.
6. "Whose Muddy Blues?", Elmore James (with John Brim).
7. "De Old Folks at Home," Taj Mahal.
8. "Fly Cooder," Fly Cooder.
9. "Folk Blues," Waddy Watson.
10. "Blind Willie Johnson," Blind Willie.

REVIEWS

LIVING ON THE EDGE

— Civilians



Yes, there's homelessness in this country, and the situation in South Africa does stink. Tell us something we don't know.

On that front, the Detroit group Civilians hardly breaks any ground. Here, it's not so much what's being said, but rather the way they say it.

The Civilians on "Living on the Edge" display remarkable musical depth on this seven-song cassette. There are some diverse elements here — mainly funk, rock 'n' roll and a little blues — that are strung together to make for some rather enjoyable cuts.

Each of the seven songs is different. From the funk-tempoed "America" to the jug-band-flavored "The Whole World's Going to Hell," the Civilians show a willingness to stretch the boundaries.

One common theme brings these songs together — politics and its effects. Whether it's campaigning "in the dance floor" ("Politics of Motion") or for racial unity ("Brother to Brother"), the Civilians makes its platform known.

Sometimes the lyrics can be optimistic as in "Brother to Brother": "Here we stand together holding different colored hands/Wondering if we can really unite... and because it's brother to brother, sister to sister, too/If we have a chance to really love one another, maybe the world could dance."

Other times they can be bleak. After all, this tape does ends with the number, "The Whole World's Going to Hell."

On a more upbeat note, the guitar work by Joe Mitchell on this tape is excellent. The soaring guitar work carries "Living on the Edge" into another dimension, and the bluesy lines on "Crossroads of Love" provides just the right touch.

Instead of living on the edge, the Civilians have an edge with this tape.

— Larry O'Connor

SWING THE HEARTACHE (THE BBC SESSIONS)

— Bauhaus



This double album retrospective has been released probably in the hopes of riding on the coat tails of the success of Love and Rockets. Love and Rockets are Bauhaus with the dramatic vocals of super-ego singer Peter Murphy.

Bauhaus was a band that was the forerunner of that curious band of music, Goth, that blends a heavy-metalish guitar sound with a peculiar mode of dress that has many young people, a majority of whom are girls, in England dressed in black Victorian garb.

The official reason for the release is the band's 10th anniversary. These recordings are from the British radio sessions for the noted DJs John Peel and David "Kid" Jensen shows and so are a little rawer than studio versions of the songs.

They also include numerous cover versions of songs Bauhaus used

while sound checking — songs such as Marc Bolan's "Telegraph Sam," Brian Eno's "Third Uncle" and David Bowie's "Ziggy Stardust."

Bauhaus has an acquired taste, which a lot of people have obviously acquired, judging by the Bauhaus T-shirts that are prominent at most gigs and by the fact that six years after they broke up, their back catalog is still selling well.

This release does not include their first single, "Bela Lugosi's Dead," which was a powerful and frightening song and notable for the fact that Peter Murphy had not succumbed to his "Junior Bowie" fetish yet.

Unfortunately, he had by the time of these recordings.

For the Bauhaus cognoscenti or inquisitive Love and Rockets/Peter Murphy fans, this LP has 18 more songs to fill the need in 10.

— Cormac Wright

STEROIDS!

— No Right No Wrong

Novi is hardly the music capital of the world. But No Right No Wrong could very well make it into the center for suburban new wave.

This talented threesome leans a little heavy on the synthesizer, but more than makes up for it with an abundance of energy and humorous lyrics.

The band has apparently been around for awhile, making this its fourth release. No Right No Wrong deems their music as the "next wave," combining rock'n'roll, punk and new wave.

And, yes, all those elements are here. This group's dance sound is somewhat reminiscent of the B-52s, but can veer off into different directions as this recently released nine-song cassette reveals.

The song subjects appear to be those that would most likely affect a suburban male on the cusp of adulthood. You know, jilted by a girlfriend ("Out the Door"), uncertainty ("Incongruities") and, of course, those nasty steroids.

Except No Right No Wrong takes a wry look at all those heavy things weighing on young people today.

— Larry O'Connor



Hey, and who's bitter? Nothing bothers us, not even a breakup as "Out the Door" suggests.

"Two sex girls like you come and go/so here's some advice that you should know/your pants are too tight for your mind to grow/so pick up your things and go!"

The lyrics might inspire chuckles, but the zest in which No Right No Wrong tackles their music sells the package. They burst from the woodwork and the misanthropic is tight.

This is a first-rate production on any level. Fortunately, No Right No Wrong just happens to be right down the street.