

# Songs from the heart

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

EFX might be the musical version of the "Young and the Restless." Love found, love lost and love not to be forgotten.

Yikes. Judging by their music, these fellows must be a bunch of girlie rockers.

Lyrics from the four-man's demo tape features such emotionally appealing titles as "Why Can't You Love Me?" "Now You're Gone" and "Take My Heart Away." Except these tender ditties are wrapped in guitar gushing melodies ripe for the picking.

"Every one of our songs are about feelings and love," said Brad Nester, who is lead guitarist for the young group. "We're just romantic guys."

Romantic, perhaps, but hopeless no way. The group in a rather short time has put together a sackful of original songs and is quickly becoming a regular on the Detroit music scene.

EFX recently headlined their own show at Paychek's Lounge in Hamtramck and performed a concert for the students at Beck Elementary School in Redford Township.

Also the group's music has received airplay on such campus stations as Wayne State University's WYWN-AM, Oakland Community College's WOUX-FM and Oakland University's WOUX-AM.

Club dates and play lists don't tell the EFX story, though. This is a tale about friendship. All four members are recent graduates of Redford Union High School, knowing one another as kids growing up in Redford.



EFX is relatively new on the music scene, but the friendship of the band members extend to their days at Redford Union High School.

**BASS PLAYER** Dan MacDonald and Nester played baseball together in their younger days. Musically, drummer Ron Vensko started things rolling when he formed his own rock group in the ninth grade.

Lead singer and rhythm guitarist Pat Morarty and MacDonald never played musical instruments, picking them up and learning from scratch.

A little more than a year ago, EFX took to playing clubs. Though the members are underage, they

have no problems. "We can't drink," one member said.

Between live performances, the group cut a five-song demo tape in Robb Roy member Jason Kuehn's Livonia basement studio. "They (Robb Roy) are like our brothers," said Vensko about the well-known Detroit band. "They're helping us out."

No help, though, is needed in getting the collective members of EFX to express how they feel. All four

contribute in the songwriting process, penning songs from personal experiences.

"Why sing about something that's not real?" Vensko asked. "If we wrote political stuff, it wouldn't do us any good."

EFX will perform along with the Generals and the Gear in a benefit for Oakland University's campus station, WOUX-AM, Friday, Dec. 8, in Abstinence Hall. For information, call 370-4272.

## IN CONCERT

### • DANIEL LANOIS

Daniel Lanois will perform a free concert at 8 p.m. Monday, Dec. 4, at The Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 665-4755.

### • CHRISTMAS BENEFIT

Several Detroit area bands will participate in a fund-raiser Monday and Tuesday, Dec. 4-5, at the Studio Lounge, 6921 N. Wayne, south of Warren Road. Westland On Monday, Twigg Barbus and the Lizards in Jars will perform along with Point-of-View, Argosy and Network. On Tuesday, Rendezvous featuring members of Rare Earth and Brownsville Station performs along with Looker and Johnny Allen and the Appeal.

Anne Carlini of WRIF-FM hosts both nights. There will be raffles, giveaways and gift certificates. Proceeds raised benefit Children and Family Services of Michigan. For information, call 729-2540.

### • M-16

M-16 will perform Monday, Dec. 4, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

### • WILL AND THE BUSHMEN

Will and the Bushmen will perform with guests, The Indigoes, on Tuesday, Dec. 5, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

### • SUGAR MINOT

Sugar Minot will perform on Wednesday, Dec. 6, at the Blind Pig.

208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

### • ASH CAN VANGOGH

Ash Can VanGogh will perform on Wednesday, Dec. 6, at the Jukebox, 14 Mile and Woodward, Royal Oak. For information, call 549-2233.

### • TANTRUM

Tantrum will perform Wednesday through Saturday, Dec. 6-9, at Jagers, 3481 Elizabeth Lake Road, Waterford. For information, call 681-1700.

### • FRANK ALLISON

Frank Allison will perform with guest, Ichabod Stowe, on Thursday, Dec. 7, at The Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main, Ann Arbor.

### • CAPTAIN DAVE

Captain Dave and the Lounge Cats will perform on Thursday, Dec. 7, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

### • LUDICHRIST

Ludichrist will perform Friday, Dec. 8, at Blondies, 21139 W. Seven Mile, east of Telegraph, Detroit. For information, call 535-8108.

### • SUN MESSENGERS

Sun Messengers will perform on Friday and Saturday, Dec. 8-9, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

## Detroit musicians to help the hungry

A who's who of Detroit-area musicians will band together Wednesday, Dec. 6, in the "Second Annual Wheels for Meals Rock & Roll Revue Benefit Concert" for the Gleaner's Food Bank and the Food Bank of Oakland County at the Ritz in Roseville.

Caruso, See Dick Run, Robb Roy, Scott Campbell, Jugglers and Thieves, Planet of Fun, Heaven's Wish and Second Order Thinking will perform. Also, making special appearances will be members of Rhythm Corps and the Romantics.

Doors open at 8 p.m. Admission is \$2 plus a can of food with a dollar off for each additional can of food. The event is co-sponsored by WLLZ-FM's "Wheels for Meals" program and the Detroit Music Network.

"We expect this year's event to be bigger and better than last year," said Mike Caruso, member of the band Caruso and spokesman for the

Detroit Music Network. "Local musicians will put aside their differences and competitive nature at least this one night and combine their energy to make a major contribution to Detroit's hungry people."

The benefit will help cap off what has been a very successful year for the group's involved. Robb Roy was one of five finalists nationwide in the recent Yamaha International Sound Check competition.

Caruso's is in the midst of releasing its follow up to their "In the Face" EP with "I Love You... and Other Stories." Also releasing a new LP is See Dick Run with "Whack!! Ding!!"

Scott Campbell was recently selected as "Best Songwriter" in the Metro Times music poll.

The Ritz is at 17580 Frazee Road, off Gratiot Avenue, Roseville. For information, call 778-8150.

## COLLEGE

Here are the top 10 albums receiving airplay on CJAM-FM, campus station at the University of Windsor.

1. "Bound by the Beauty," Jane Siberry.
2. "Nothingface," Waited.
3. "12-Point Buck," Kildaner.
4. "Absolute Torch n' Twang," k.d. lang.
5. "The Unlabeled World," Swann.
6. "Line for Real," Allan Ginsberg.
7. "Big Planet, Scary Planet," Jazz Butcher.
8. "Dope, Guns... in the Streets," various artists.
9. "Haus der Lunge," Elastische Neustates.
10. "Monticello," Bastards.

## 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. Tuesdays).

1. "Les Miserables," Nemesis.
2. "Green Apple," Struggle Bedfellows.
3. "Apocalypse," Lab Animals.
4. "With Abandon," Dark Theater.
5. "Walden," Raker.
6. "Sex for the Handicapped," Sillies.
7. "She's Raining On Me," Hippodrome.
8. "Surry's a Head," The Idiots.
9. "Hangin' Around," Iva Zolens.
10. "For Me," Happy Deathmen.

## Bushmen rock with Southern flavor

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

In terms of inspiration, the South can count on the North. Or so Will and the Bushmen have found.

Located on the group's debut album on SBK Records is the raucous rocking nugget, "Three Girls from Detroit," a number about none other than our own all-woman group, Vertical Pillows.

Will and the Bushmen played a couple of shows with the Detroit-area group and found them to be, well, a bit intriguing.

"They were walking, talking sense of what you would think of Detroit rock'n'roll to be. Iggy, Ted Nugent and the MC-5," said Will Kimbrough, frontman for the Southern-fried rock group who pops into the Blind Pig Tuesday for a show.

If the Vertical Pillows are the stamp of Motor City rock, Will and the Bushmen are the consummate Confederate outfit. The group has been kicking around since 1984, gaining rave reviews wherever it plays.

A little R&B, a little blues and a whole lot of good time southern rock'n'roll marks Will and the Bushmen's self-titled LP.

The backwoods feel to the album is no accident. After all, these fellas do call Mobile home.



Will and the Bushmen have emerged from the South and become a favorite in the North.

WHILE OTHER groups of their ilk in Mobile started sporting a stiff British upper lip, trying to become Joy Division or Psychedelic Furs, ole' Will and his Bushmen were staying true to their roots — which ironically, a British band helped lead them to see.

Kimbrough was influenced by the Southern stylings of Greg Allman when he started playing guitar at 12 in roller rinks. When the 80s rolled in, he quickly was turned onto the Brit invasion of Elvis Costello and the Clash, the latter which was heavily

influenced by American styles of music, such as rockabilly.

"Mobile is sort of isolated about what's happening at the time," Kimbrough said. "You have to dig for it. So I had to go to New Orleans to buy albums."

The group had to more than dig to get to their current state. After founding the southern club circuit for two years, people took notice with Will and the Bushmen's independent release "Gawk." But subsequent tours took their toll, causing the band to nearly break-up.

After a move to Nashville, the band stuck it out and completed its line-up with drummer Bryan Owings joining Sam Baylor, Mark Pfaff and Kimbrough.

Then it was only a matter of a label deal, which the Bushmen obtained from SBK Records. The group went into Bearsville Studios with producer Richard Gottehrer (Blondie, Marshall Crenshaw and Royal Crescent Mob), recording a solid pop-rock offering.

"WE STARTED out trying to make a guitar pop album, sort of a Lovin' Spoonful meets Buffalo Springfield," Kimbrough said. "We ended up with a diverse album."

Naturally, comparisons to fellow Southern rockers R.E.M. follow. Kimbrough said the band's first album featured plenty of jangling guitars, but, unlike R.E.M., works with traditional song structures and a lead guitar format.

Also, Will and the Bushmen are not nearly as political as Buck and Stipe Inc. Instead, the group has focused on a rollicking good time.

"I think politics begins at home," Kimbrough said.

Will and the Bushmen will perform on Tuesday, Dec. 5, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor.

## REVIEWS

### SHONEN BLUE

— Yuji Oniki



Shonen Blue

He echoes the mournful qualities of Alex Chilton. He has the vocal style of a cross between Bob Dylan and Michael Stipe, the simple but poetic songwriting of Suzanne Vega, the relentless percussion of Peter Dinklage and the playing style of Peter Buck.

Those are all comments critics have made after hearing Yuji Oniki's album "Shonen Blue." And all of these comparisons are fairly accurate, yet none fully describe the uniquely Asian flavor of Oniki's music.

Oniki, formerly of Ann Arbor's Dreaming in Color, has said he wanted to make an album that "made sense, kind of like a symphony with its movements and close attention to the layering of instruments... to create some sort of mood."

Oniki uses unusual instruments like a tabla and a viola and the considerable skills of Detroit's own Matt Smith to create a subtle album, filled with introspection, sorrow and an undying sense of hope. It is an album that captures the moment after the experience of loss and the small, yet insistent ray of hope which promises ultimate survival. Despair and joy are mixed together in an emotion that is neither happiness or sadness. It just is.

This type of seeming paradox or dualism, plus a strong message of living in the Now, combine to form a

Zen-like consciousness that permeates the album.

In "Dropping Hands," a song about a departed loved one, Oniki sings of "whispers I can't hear of you and someone else." Anguish and resignation are partially involved in "Ave C" with the words "what she says doesn't matter much, nothing matters at all."

And the lyrics in the song "Speak Low" are simply the words "here we are" repeated in a gentle chant, echoed with delicate backing vocals by Matt Smith, for the understated finale of side two.

"Shonen Blue" is an excellent album, perfect for putting on the turntable, dreaming the day away and entering the magical world of Yuji Oniki. You'll find that you just might want to stay there.

— Jill Hamilton

### GOD MADE ME DO IT

— John Wesley Harding

John Wesley Harding's major label debut wavers between impressive (if somewhat derivative) artistry and self-indulgent cuteness. At its best, the EP suggests that Harding's full-length LP, scheduled for January, will be a real winner. At its worst, the record is tolerable throw-away entertainment.

Harding is the latest "folkster" with a rock and roll heart, and he really shines on the opening cut, "Here Comes the Groom" which falls somewhere between recent Billy Bragg and Elvis Costello's Nick Lowe period (probably in part because a member of Elvis' band helped with the record). Harding has a smooth yet strong delivery and it works especially well against the song's understated guitars and organs.

The following cut, "Talking Christmas Goodwill Blues" is sloppily written, if it's written at all. Harding strings together random thoughts about the holiday season, at times voicing a "let's all join hands and really care for one another this year" sentiment, and then sarcastically deflating the season's commercialism. Of these apologetic Christmas albums, but it's not, they really don't belong in the same song.

"Talking Christmas..." doesn't

### JOHN WESLEY HARDING



God Made Me Do It

really strive to be much more than a lead in the studio, and that's a good thing.

The second side opens with a stark reading of Madonna's "Like a Prayer." While converting the dance hit into a simple voice-and-guitar folk song is an inherently funny idea, Harding sounds earnest and actually invests the song with a meaning that it didn't have the first time around. "On the Rent," Harding's voice is again paired with acoustic guitar and organ, but this time around a subtle bongo line is thrown into the mix. The track is the EP's most original, though it is not as immediately entertaining as the others. Harding sings of a deteriorating relationship reshaping the lovers' shared room into a prison. This is pretty and moving. He ought to write a few more like this one.

As Christmas records go, this isn't up there with Dex Bingle or the Phil Spector Christmas album, but it's not the best of those dogs barking "Jingle Bells."

— John Logie

### IT'S MY TURN

— Ichabod Stowe

He doesn't mince words. Ichabod Stowe gets right to the point.

And sometimes that is both a strength and weakness on the singer-songwriter's latest release "It's My Turn" (Gaffly Records).

Images are sharp, themes are clearly focused on this album honed in folk and rock stylings.

Perhaps Stowe is seeing things clearly these days, recently joining the "thirtysomething" ranks. Throughout, he assesses his place in it all whether it's in "All Grown Up With Nowhere to Go" or "It's My Turn," the title track off the seven-song effort.

Sometimes he's deadly serious, sometimes he's humorous. Most of the numbers are written in the folk narrative despite being coupled with a pop rock or reggae beat on occasion.

The result, as they say, is a bit unusual at times. Such is the case with "All Grown Up With Nowhere to Go," which appears to bemoan the banality of everyday life with an upbeat reggae accompaniment.

The Birmingham Groves graduate shines in the pop-rock arena, displaying two radio friendly numbers "This Train is Running Out of Track" and "Put Me Back Where I Belong."

Then there are times when Stowe goes for the sparse, acoustical folk setting as "A Dreamer Never



Ichabod Stowe

Sleeps" and "Don't Block My Blow." Stowe's lyrics only become cumbersome when he tries to cram too many words into one number.

Sings Stowe earnestly in "Don't Block My Blow." "Hey, I want to let you know I'm on your side/Cause if I didn't tell you, you might now know/Hey, if you see me coming don't you hide/Well you might think I'm trying to hurt you, but it ain't so/And if you see it coming, don't block my blow."

That's a mouthful. Let it be said, though, this eclectic album will definitely have people talking.

— Larry O'Connor

"It's My Turn" is available at Sam's Jams and Schoolkids Records or by writing to: Gaffly Records, Box 6603, New York, NY 10128.