

Ah, the last 10 years before the 21st century. Yep, the 1990s have arrived and prognosticators are plugging into the future to predict what will shape the last decade of the 20th century. Wondering if you'll have Frodigg or be a part of the Sandwich Generation? Find out in Street Scene's look at the 1990s on Page 6D.

STREET SCENE

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photos by BILL HANSEN

Jeff Oakes of the Volebeats croons a countrified tune while Rebecca Kaplan fiddles around in the background.

BAND OF THE YEAR

It's the Volebeats

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

At face value, the Volebeats are something of an oddity in the rock-and-roll arena. Many groups try to be different; the Volebeats just are.

One guy holds a stand-up bass, a woman plays the fiddle and another manipulates a slide guitar. No mousses in the hair, no calls for dance floor action. Just a guy with an acoustic guitar crooning in campfire style in front of his band.

If that doesn't freeze the average (meaning cynical) rock-and-roll patron, the sound will. The Volebeats play a smoky brand of music hauntingly familiar to the country stylings of the '50s and '60s.

Yet, the Volebeats do it in a way that is neither patronizing nor mocking.

A country revivalist band? No. A rockabilly group perhaps? Not quite. A cow punk outfit? No way. In the spotlight, lead singer Jeff Oakes sometimes looks as puzzled as the audience he plays on this night at Lill's 21.

The music that comes through

his guitar appears to take Oakes and the rest of his mates back a bit. The Volebeats are, if anything, a story about discovery.

"MOST OF the stuff (instruments) we started off with were broken and we ended up repairing a lot of it," said Jeff Oakes, before the band takes the stage at Lill's. "By using those beat-up instruments, it gives the stuff a different sound in itself."

"We started with these real cheap acoustic guitars you couldn't play beyond the third fret," added guitarist Matthew Smith, who along with Oakes writes a good portion of the songs.

The Volebeats, though, are about chemistry. Several natural camps or divisions exist in the band, depending on how one looks at it.

First, there are brothers Jeff Oakes and Brian Oakes. Then there are the refugee rockers — drummer Mike Murphy and guitarist Mark Niemienski, who have performed with such rock-and-roll outfits as the Frames and

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Rebecca Kaplan is a classically trained violinist, whose joining the Volebeats has further enhanced the group's pursuit of a backwoods boat.

A man's way to see sights of royal city

By Micky Jones
special writer

(Last of two parts)

You are in London, England, with the return half of a low-priced air ticket in your pocket, a Visitor Travelcard that covers your London transportation, and either a reservation or a list of the budget hotels and bed-and-breakfast homes for your selection.

Our budget allowed \$800-\$900 for a week, including about \$400 for airfare, \$30 to \$40 a night for accommodations and breakfast, \$5 for a light lunch, \$12 for dinner and a glass of wine, and about \$25 a day for sightseeing and entertainment.

If you didn't bring the literature you received from the British Tourist Authority's Chicago office, plan to pick some up at the British Travel Center, 12 Regent St., near Piccadilly Circus, where you can also reserve accommodations.

You'll appreciate the airport's free baggage carts as you wind your way from baggage pickup and customs to the Bureau de Change, where you convert U.S. dollars into English pounds and on to exchange your Visitor Travelcard voucher for the magnetic-striped card that will allow you to ride on any subway or bus system in the city.

The voucher can only be bought from a travel agent in the U.S., but you will start using the card when you board the underground train in the basement of the airport terminal for the 40-minute ride to central London on the Piccadilly line.

A QUICK and easy way for the first-time visitor to get an overall view of central London is by bus on the original London Transport Sightseeing Tour. It leaves from various pickup points every 30 minutes and is probably worth making a \$9.75 dent in your budget for the 1½-hour tour.

You can also join other tourists on various guided walking tours, covering such specialized topics as Ghosts, Ghouls and Haunted Taverns. The haunts of Sherlock Holmes, Ancient Inns and Taverns and the Trail of Jack the Ripper. Tour fees range from \$4.50 to \$5.50, or you can pick up a free walking tour guide book and do it on your own.

A must for every first-time visitor is the changing of the guard in front of Buckingham Palace. The ceremony starts at 11:30 a.m. every other day in winter and takes almost an hour. Plenty of horses, red jackets, shiny helmets, band music and pomp and ceremony. Dates are given in BTA's London Planner booklet.

Fair weather sightseeing should include a boat ride on the Thames River. There are many river tours to choose from or you can just take a 2½-mile downstream ride from Westminster Bridge to the Tower of London for \$3.25. The Tower itself is best toured in good weather as is the famous London Zoo.

For days that aren't so nice, head for Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, Madame Tussaud's Waxworks or some of the renowned art galleries and museums. The major ones are free, including the National Gallery, the Tate Gallery, the British

Museum, the Museum of London and the Victoria and Albert Museum, where a \$3 donation is suggested.

IT COSTS nothing to go into the main church portion of Westminster Abbey, but there is a \$3.25 charge to tour the seven magnificent chapels (no photography permitted). In the cloisters at one side of the nave, a large room contains brass plates from which you can make your own rubbings. There is a charge of about \$1.75 for the paper, tape and golden wax required to make a 12-by-24-inch rubbing. Larger sizes are available as are finished rubbings, if you don't want to make your own.

One of the most interesting newer museums is the Museum of the Moving Image (admission \$5), which celebrates the histories of movies and television. Another fairly new one is the Cabinet War Rooms (admission \$4.75), which consists of 19 underground rooms that were used by Winston Churchill and the War Cabinet during World War II.

Sightseeing makes you hungry so the next question is where to eat. There are plenty of fast-food places with familiar American names, even though their prices are higher than at home. But why settle for a Big Mac and fries when you can go around the corner for a real English pub lunch with all the atmosphere that goes with it.

FOR ABOUT \$5 or \$7, you can share a tiny table with local people in any neighborhood or corner pub while you quaff a pint of lager and munch on steak-and-kidney pie, chicken pot pie or a ploughman's lunch of cheese and bread. You'll meet interesting Londoners on their lunch break.

There is no shortage of good restaurants offering properly served meals and all of them have menus posted outside the door so you can check their offerings and prices before going in.

Dinner in a fancy restaurant can be expensive in London but I found many nice places where a complete dinner with a glass of wine ran only \$10 to \$12. One of them was Caspuk's in Piccadilly Circus where menu items included fish and chips, \$6, hamburger and baked potato, \$5.60, T-bone steak, \$10, and an excellent salad bar with hot chicken and fish for \$6.75. Wine is \$1.75 a glass and beer \$1.50.

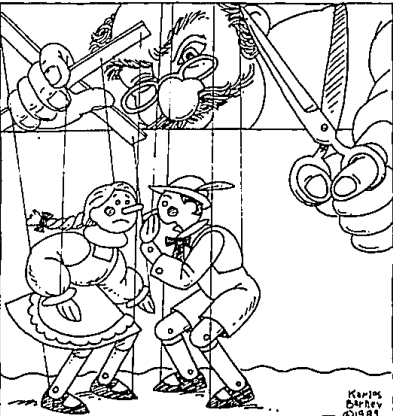
Entertainment is a prime reason for visiting London. The London stage is a world leader in musicals. Tickets are much cheaper than in New York, cheaper still if you buy them at half price plus a service charge from a booth in Leicester Square. Full-priced tickets to musicals cost \$11 to \$35, plays \$8 to \$26. I bought a ticket to "Me and My Girl," regularly \$32, for \$16 plus a \$2 service charge.

IF THEY don't have what you want at the booth, don't buy from nearby scalpers. Go to the theater box office about 90 minutes before show time and ask about last minute cancellations. Matinee tickets are readily available off-season and often discounted right at the theater.

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R.U. Syrius

Karlos Barney



KAPLAN BARNEY ©1981

Brilliant but twisted, Papa vows never again to be the victim of a marionette revolt.

Staying in London

When it comes to visiting London during the winter, or any season for that matter, you can choose your accommodation style, with the BTA literature as a guide. You can reserve before leaving home, but there are plenty of rooms in winter, so you can wait until you arrive in London, if you prefer.

Most flights arrive in London early in the morning, so you can find lodging through the British Travel Center, a service of the British Tourist Authority, in the heart of London. The center is at 12 Regent St., a two-minute walk from the Piccadilly Circus subway stop. It's a good place to change money, arrange accommodations, reserve tours, theater tickets and transportation. Open weekdays 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Saturday and Sunday 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

My choice was bed-and-breakfast in a private home, where I would meet local people and where I felt that my cameras would be safer than in a hotel room. Mrs. Clasper's townhouse was in suburban Ealing, 20 miles northwest and a 30-minute subway ride from Piccadilly.

I arranged it through London Home-to-Home, one of several bed-

and-breakfast agencies listed by BTA. The homes they represent are all in the Western suburbs, charge \$29 single or \$48 double and provide a full breakfast.

If this is not your cup of tea, or if you would prefer to be closer to the action in downtown London, then choose a BTA-inspected budget hotel. Most have only 10 to 50 rooms and are within three miles of the heart of the city. Singles range from \$32 to \$48, doubles from \$50 to \$88 per night, depending on whether you share a bath or have one in your room.

Most of these small hotels include either a continental or full breakfast in their room rates. Some of them, like the Elizabeth Hotel and the Ecstasy Chambers (both close to Victoria Station) are also listed in the very reliable guide book, "Passport to Europe's Small Hotels and Inns," by Beverly Beyers.

Even if you reserve ahead, you should examine the hotel and your room before signing the register. If it's not what you want, try another one.

— Micky Jones



MICKY JONES

If you're out on the town in London, one of the sights you'll see is Britain's Parliament Buildings and "Big Ben" clock tower along the shores of the Thames River.