

For Oniki, it's success sans compromises

By Jill Hamilton
special writer

1989 was a very good year for Yuji Oniki. He released the critically-acclaimed album "Shonen Blue" and a prominent New York manager offered to handle his career.

But as successful as 1989 was for Oniki, 1990 promises to be even brighter.

This man who has had success court him many times throughout his five-year career. Each time he has turned it away because he wasn't willing to make the artistic compromises involved. Although Oniki's integrity has slowed his career more than a couple of times, the audience reaps the benefits of the care and time he puts into his music.

Oniki's musical career began when he was a freshman at the University of Michigan in 1985. He and some friends formed the locally successful band Dreaming in Color. The highlight of this three-piece band's career was opening for favorites like Zeigiste and Alex Chilton.

Oniki's stint with Dreaming in Color ended when he decided he wanted to experiment with different types of music. He went to Scotland for a year "just to see what was there."

"MAYBE IT wasn't the most practical thing to do because the band was doing well," Oniki said.

But, perhaps it wasn't as impractical

as Oniki thinks, because during his stay in Scotland, he spent a lot of time recording and honed his trademark sound. Oniki describes his sound as "kind of folk... no, not folk, acoustic."

While in Scotland, Oniki also developed a love of Scottish folk music. He can hear traces of his Scottish influence on "Shonen Blue."

When Oniki returned from Scotland, he lived in Boston for a year working a translator. During that time, he played four or five solo gigs at folk clubs around the city. Not too bad, considering that he was playing the same clubs as such folk luminaries as Suzanne Vega.

He returned to Michigan and began working on "Shonen Blue" with guitarist Matthew Smith of the Volokentis. The creative tension between the two men forced both of them to produce their best work ever.

Oniki was influenced by Robyn Hitchcock, Wire, Game Theory and R.E.M.'s first album, "Murmur."

"Michael Stipe used his voice like another instrument," Oniki said. He thinks that the sound of the voice is just as important as the lyrics.

Apparently, other people agree. "Shonen Blue" has been receiving very favorable reviews and Rockpool, the college music journal, has put the album on their "Rockpool Fuster." Rockpool is distributing the album to college radio stations



Yuji Oniki hasn't been willing to make artistic compromises on his road to success and as a result the audience has reaped the benefits of the care and time he puts into his music.

around the country.

"So the album is getting airplay somewhere," Oniki said. "But, I don't know where." He hopes the album is successful so that he can promote the album with more out-of-town lookings.

He has landed gigs with his band, The Plastic Onki Band, at a few

IN CONCERT

- **Dog Soldier**
Dog Soldier will perform on Monday, Jan. 22, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Sense of Small**
Sense of Small will perform on Monday, Jan. 22, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **Peter Hummelman**
Peter Hummelman will perform at 8 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 23, at The Ark, 637 S. Main, Ann Arbor. Free tickets are available at Schoolkids Records in Ann Arbor and Sam Jam's locations in Ferndale and Livonia as well as at the door.
- **Mission Impossible**
Mission Impossible will perform on Tuesday, Jan. 23, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **Death of Samantha**
Death of Samantha will perform on Tuesday, Jan. 23, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **C.J. Chenier**
C.J. Chenier will perform in a benefit for Ozone House along with Madeat Ruth and Catfish Keith on Wednesday, Jan. 24, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Abraham Nixon**
Abraham Nixon will perform with guests, Phineas Gage, on Wednesday, Jan. 24, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.
- **Huntones**
The Huntones will perform on Wednesday, Jan. 24, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **Truth**
Truth will perform on Wednesday, Jan. 24, at Jameson's, 1812 S. Main, Royal Oak. For information, call 547-6470.
- **Romance**
Romance will perform on Wednesday through Saturday, Jan. 24-27, at Jaggies, 3481 Elizabeth Lake Road, Waterford. For information, call 681-1700.
- **AntiFashion**
AntiFashion will perform on Thursday, Jan. 25, at Paycheck's Lounge, in Hamtramck.
- **Elvis Hitler**
Elvis Hitler will perform with guests, Volebeats, on Thursday, Jan. 25, at 3-D Club, 1815 N. Main, near 12 Mile, Royal Oak. For information, call 589-3344.
- **Walk the Dogma**
Walk the Dogma will perform on Thursday, Jan. 25, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.
- **Neighborhoods**
Neighborhoods will perform with guests M-16 on Thursday, Jan. 25, at the
- Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **James Glass Blues**
James Glass Blues Band will perform on Thursday, Jan. 25, at Jameson's, 1812 N. Main, Royal Oak. For information, call 547-6470.
- **Makab Rhythm Tribe**
Makab Rhythm Tribe will perform on Thursday, Jan. 25, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **Funhouse**
Funhouse will perform on Friday, Jan. 26, at Finney's Pub, 3965 Woodward, across from the Majestic Theatre, Detroit. For information, call 837-8070.
- **Allison & Odd Sox**
Frank Allison & the Odd Sox will perform on Friday, Jan. 26, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 663-7758.
- **Allison's Ghost**
Allison's Ghost will perform with guests, Phineas Gage, on Friday, Jan. 26, at the Cross Street Station, 511 Cross, between Ballard and Perrin, Ypsilanti. For information, call 485-5050.
- **Vibe Tribe**
Vibe Tribe will perform on Friday and Saturday, Jan. 26-27, at Jameson's, 1812 N. Main, Royal Oak. For information, call 547-6470.
- **Ash Can VanGogh**
Ash Can VanGogh will perform on Friday, Jan. 26, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.
- **Iodine Raincoats**
Iodine Raincoats will perform on Friday, Jan. 26, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Ivory Tower**
Ivory Tower will perform on Friday and Saturday, Jan. 26-27, at Skylights, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac.
- **Nine Inch Nails**
Nine Inch Nails will perform on Saturday, Jan. 27, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Tickets are \$10 in advance. For information, call 665-4755.
- **Duke Tomatoes**
Duke Tomatoes will perform Friday and Saturday, Jan. 26-27, at Rick's American Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **Mitch Ryder**
Mitch Ryder will perform two shows on Saturday, Jan. 27, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. Showtimes are 8 and 11 p.m. Tickets are \$10. For information, call 665-4755.
- **Reputations**
The Reputations will perform on Saturday, Jan. 27, at Finney's Pub, 3965 Woodward, across from the Majestic Theatre, Detroit. For information, call 837-8070.

Crossed Wire keeps 'wires' straight

By Jill Hamilton
special writer

Crossed Wire bills itself as an "honest, approachable" band with "no gimmicks or falsehoods in their music."

In other words, they sound ripe for exploitation in the sometimes seamy music business. But, this band has somehow managed to combine idealism and savvy into a powerful mixture that has allowed them to be successful, even prosperous.

Part of the success is due to mentors in high places who have taken the band under their wings. One such mentor is the manager of the Hechee Jeebee Club in Chicago. He got Crossed Wire started into Chicago by letting the group open up for various big acts that were passing through town.

Eventually, Crossed Wire gained a following of their own which developed into a regional following.

Another key player in the success of Crossed Wire has been manager Vinny Reed. Reed has been involved with the music business for a long time and thus has been able to get the band's music to the right people.

It was Reed that booked the group at the Ritz and Cat Club in New York. Those performances attracted representatives from several labels interested in the band.

That's not to say that the band was floundering on its own. Almost im-



mediately after their first show in 1986, opening for a punk band at a Flint club — Crossed Wire released a five-song EP. Although the record wasn't a raging success, it did receive air play on college radio and won "Best Locally Produced Record" in the 1987 Metro Times music awards.

THE NEXT three years found the band touring throughout the Midwest and opening for such notables as the Church, Hoodoo Gurus and the Call. In 1988, Crossed Wire released "in the hollow," an eight-song LP. Al-

though the album was well-received and increased the band's following, even better can be expected from the group in the future.

A&M records heard Crossed Wire and was impressed enough to pay for studio time at the White Room. Crossed Wire used the recording time to come up with an 11-song demo tape.

Kurt Marschke, the guitarist, is quite an understatement, said: "Our music has changed." The laid-back tone of his voice contrasts with the excitement of his blue eyes.

Yes, their sound has changed.

Whereas "in the hollow" suffered the production problems inherent to a small studio, their new stuff benefits from the improved recording conditions.

On the new demo, the band seems more willing to experiment with different types of songs. The recent acquisition of bassist Carey Marsh adds a needed rickety touch to Bud Bueca's drumming, Marschke's guitar playing and Chris Moore's raspy vocals.

THE INFLUENCE of groups ranging from the Doors to the Replacements to U2 filter through the various songs on this as-of-yet unreleased tape.

But having a quality product is no guarantee of a rapid release. Record company mergers have temporarily put Crossed Wire's career "in limbo." One everything is straightened out, the band will have a better idea as to when their new material will be released.

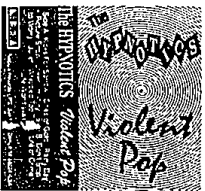
Everything seems to be going well for this up-and-coming band, but do they have any regrets?

Just one.

"I grew up listening to albums," Marschke said, holding up a compact disc for emphasis. "I always looked forward to putting one out myself. Now, by the time this (their new demo) comes out, they probably won't even make albums any more."

REVIEWS

VIOLENT POP — Hypnotics



The Hypnotics achieve that by a strategy of swirling and forceful guitar. Dr. Bob leads a legion of guitar slingers here, working numbers like "Cities of Gold" into a mangle.

Vocally, well, there are some cracks here, and lyrically, the Hypnotics are not exactly writing "War and Peace." But, after all, it's only rock and roll.

The quality of the Hypnotics is their songs, which will stick to a person like Bubble Gum on the bottom of a Converse high top. Except with "Violent Pop," you'll be very intent on being a gum shoe.

— Larry O'Connor

LOUDER THAN LOVE — Soundgarden

Soundgarden is the first band to graduate from the Sub-Pop/Seattle underground to a major label, "Louder Than Love." The band's first record for A&M, and it finds the band wholly intact, and, for the most part, unremarkable.

Despite references to their music as "psychedelic," "Zen metal," or "acid punk," most listeners will recognize this record as being "pretty Led Zeppelin." And this will refer not so much to Led Zeppelin the band, but to the genre that developed in its wake, a vaguely mystified brand of whitebread "blotze" with occasional rhythm.

But Soundgarden takes it all so seriously. It's easier to accept some of Zep's more wretched excesses because that band, whether by design or dumb luck, seemed unconscious of its own absurdities.

Zep played rock'n'roll, rather than "art" most of the time. In Soundgarden, we have all of the pretension, but none of the humor, and, incidentally, only about half of the talent.

Perhaps that judgment is unduly harsh. "Louder Than Love" does feature some terrific riffing. Guitarist Kim Thayil lays down thundering Apatosaurus-weight phrases and the rhythm section is solid.

— John Logie

THE INNOCENCE MISSION — The Innocence Mission

Every time I've seen a review of this band, they have been compared to Kate Bush. Naturally, this fact alone was enough to grab my attention, as it should any self-respecting music lover.

Unfortunately, a shrill female voice doth not a Kate Bush make! Singer Karen Peris does have that distinctive vocal style. It falls more in line with an Edie Brickell/Stevie Nicks/Candii Lauper mix. Peris, and fellow songwriter and brother Don Peris, are not as outrageously adventurous.

Musically, they are a melting pot. Throw in a few Muses, add a couple of hundred of Manics from the 10,000, a pinch of New Bohemians and a glance in the direction of Bush.

For the most part, they construct atmospheric ethereal melodies liberally spiced with heavily echoed piano and bouncy guitar. Much use is made of Karen Peris in the vocal department, including multiple backing vocals, and this may be one of the main drawbacks to this LP. Not because of their lack of quality, but what is noticeable is the absence of instrumental breaks throughout the

album (I was only aware of one guitar lead).

"The Innocence Mission" tends to drag, and this may be due to the fact that the pacing on most of the songs are similar. There is also a lack of emotional highs and lows, both musically and lyrically.

These faults are only sidestepped by a couple of songs on side two: "Wonder of Birds" and "Come Around & See Me," the latter which is a "Gris de Coeur" for someone to break the agony of loneliness: "The game shows in the mornings/do their best to entertain/and the news doesn't worry me/I don't know why I watch 1/2 like the way the TV/fills the room with human voices/and sometimes it is amusing, some times/Please, all I ask is that you come around and see me."

While I really enjoyed that song, I find it hard to justify listening to the entire LP for it.

— Cormac Wright

Only in a few instances do the Hypnotics cross pop's borders. And both of those numbers, "Rainy Day Picture Show" and "Don't Stop Worry," are written by Thomas Thomas, who serves as one of the band's guitarists and vocalists. These tunes are certainly the most accessible and keep your interest until the other numbers become ingrained in your brain.