

STREET BEATS

Babylon Hotel attracts a crowd

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

A dictionary, the Bible and 400 names later, meet Babylon Hotel. Or should we say, welcome to the Babylon Hotel. Either way, drop in. This four-member outfit impresses with its neo-progressive music honed in finest pop/rock sensibilities by people who have visited a few libraries in their time.

Two of four members sport a type of academic degree. Drummer Dave Hoff is wrapping up his bachelor's degree with an interdisciplinary major in psychology, public relations and business administration at the University of Michigan and bassist Lance Larsen is finishing up at the Centers for Creative Studies.

Aside from the studies, this group works hard at producing music. They do their own bookings and promotion in addition to writing songs. And they encourage one another.

"It's the same way a business graduate worries about his resume," said Hoff, who lives in West Bloomfield. "It's a business."

"Well said," added lead vocalist Liz Thomasian of Southfield.

Well said, indeed. But let's get to the crux of the matter. Anyone can use some monosyllabic words and sing about the environment and other great sociological issues of our day. Can this band play?

THE QUESTION is answered succinctly in a nugget of a demo tape. There are five songs, all different and all compelling.

Three things quickly stand out in Babylon Hotel's case. One is the soulful renderings of Thomasian, whose vocals can adroitly handle



Members of Babylon Hotel include drummer David Hoff, bassist Lance Larsen, lead vocalist Liz Thomasian and guitar player David Galens.

ballads and rises above the primal guitar rock sound.

Two, is the atmospheric guitar play of David Galens. Three, is the ability to pull it off without a bit of pretension, a fault of many a group who bills itself as a thinking man's band.

"It's a fine line to walk," said Galens, who was an English major at Michigan State University. "You have crossed over that line — you have to feel it. You have to want to get it across."

Babylon Hotel has been able to get it across in one way or another. The

band originally started out under the moniker Sam I Am, performing out of East Lansing. A few clubs have still mistakenly billed the outfit under that title.

The crew grew tired of the name (not to mention a few bands already went by Sam I Am). Galens sat down with the Bible and dictionary and came up with 400 alternatives.

BABYLON Hotel was picked out of the lot because, according to Hoff, "it has a ring to it."

Babylon Hotel doesn't have a nose-in-the-air attitude about gigging.

They love to play anywhere, feeding off the energy from the crowd.

On this night, the group is opening for Robb Roy at Key West in Detroit. Babylon Hotel has performed at Grillo's Grill in Pontiac, the Rainbow Inn in Inkster and the Blind Pig in Ann Arbor.

Wherever Babylon Hotel plays, they draw a response. Be it lyrically or musically.

"I don't expect applause," Hoff said. "I hate it when people don't pay attention. What I like to think we get attention."

IN CONCERT

- **Mel Triffid**
Mel Triffid will perform on Monday, April 2, at Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Caplain Dave**
Caplain Dave and the Psychedelic Lounge Cats will perform on Tuesday, April 3, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Conqueroats**
Conqueroats will perform on Wednesday, April 4, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Elvis Hitter**
Elvis Hitter will perform with guests, Heretix, on Thursday, April 5, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Ann Arbor. For information, call 961-MELT.
- **The Final Clash**
The winners of the Blind Pig's "Battle of the Bands" will take place on Thursday, April 5, at the club, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Big Chief**
Big Chief will perform at 9 p.m. Friday, April 6, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Tickets are \$5 in advance. For information, call 961-MELT.
- **Soul Station**
Soul Station will perform on Friday, April 6, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, Hamtramck. For information, call 365-9760.
- **Mitch Woods**
Mitch Woods and His Rocket 88s will perform on Friday and Saturday, April 6-7, at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn. For information, call 846-5377.
- **Cinecye**
Cinecye will perform with guests, Zombie Surfers and Happy Tom, on Friday, April 6, at Paycock's, 2932 Caniff, Hamtramck. For information, call 874-0254.
- **Crossed Wire**
Crossed Wire will perform with guests, Ann B. Davis, on Friday, April 6, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Fade**
Fade will perform on Saturday, April 7, at the Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Caniff, Hamtramck. For information, call 365-9760.
- **Michael Penn**
Michael Penn will perform on Saturday, April 7, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 961-MELT.
- **Oira Haza**
Oira Haza will perform at 8 p.m. Saturday, April 7, at The Latin Quarter, 3057 E. Grand Blvd., Detroit. Tickets are \$12.50 in advance. For information, call 99-MUSIC.
- **Dirty Dozen**
Dirty Dozen Brass Band will perform two shows at 8 and 11 p.m. on Saturday, April 7, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Peter Murphy**
Peter Murphy will perform with guests, Nine Inch Nails, at 8 p.m. Sunday, April 8, at The Latin Quarter, 3057 E. Grand, Detroit. Tickets are \$14.50 in advance. For information, call 99-MUSIC.



Mitch Woods and His Rocket 88s will perform Friday-Saturday, April 6-7, at Sully's in Dearborn.

Big Chief: Music without the sugar

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Bassist Matt O'Brien asks bandmate Phil Durr for some sweetener for his coffee.

"Oh, look," said Durr, a graduate of Birmingham Seaholm. "Big Chief sugar."

The coincidence is in brand name only. Big Chief's music is not sugar, nor Nutrisweet. Four out of five dentists would not recommend it as a replacement for sugarless chewing gum.

The sound is grungy, funky and downright dirty.

Some might dismiss it as heavy metal after a cursory listen. But there's more than meets the ear.

For instance, the Big Chief number "Brake Torque." A less than attentive music consumer would assume the guitar driven number is about, what else, "it cars. Not so, according to vocalist, Barry Hensler.

"Brake torque is something every high school kid has done," said Hensler, whose blondish mane is draped over his right shoulder.

"You hit the brake and the gas at the same time. To me, it presents an image of frustration. And, in a sense, it's something about sex or being blocked in."

SOMETHING ABOUT Hensler, he is a former member of the Necros, a hardcore outfit of noteworthy mention in the 1980s. The Necros released a few critically-acclaimed albums and toured with the likes of Megadeth and Circle Jerks.

Big Chief offers a new creative outlet for Hensler and his band-



Big Chief band members are Matt O'Brien, Phil Durr, Barry Hensler, Mike Danner and Mark Dancy.

mates, who comes from such divergent outfits as Tom, Gomp, McDonald's, Laughing Hyenas and Crossed Wire.

The band has a single, "Chrome Helmet," out on the Sub Pop label (Soundgarden and Mudhoney) and another on Get Hip label in Pittsburgh.

Along with drummer Mike Danner, guitarist Mark Dancy, Durr and O'Brien, Hensler has figured out the equation. Many bands, including several local outfits, cite MCS and Iggy and the Stooges as influences. This leaves several leather-clad, palm-implanters.

Not so with Big Chief. Why? They play their music in the spirit of the aforementioned gods of guitar grunge. In Big Chief's case, one of the key ingredients is funk. Remem-

ber Funkadelic and the Ohio Players?

Big Chief does.

"Disco killed funk," O'Brien said. "John Travolta screwed up funk. Blame it on John Travolta."

OF COURSE, Detroit funkmeister George Clinton still reigns and Big Chief is a converted lot.

Plans include covering an entire album of Clinton's in the future. "Their hero has even given his blessing."

"He told us to keep the funk alive," Hensler said. Hensler is quick to add, though, funk is only one "flavor" in the Big Chief sundae. Heavy metal — in the Black Sabbath and Jimi Hendrix sense of the word — is also an undeniable influence.

"The real loud, crunching guitars have always appealed to us," Hens-

ler said. "We don't want our music to fulfill some 14-year-old's fantasy about destroying women or having a macho stance."

There are few venues in Big Chief circles. One is limiting the number of local appearances. The band will perform Friday, April 6, at Saint Andrew's Hall. The group opened for Soundgarden there a few months back.

If things go well, Hensler said Big Chief won't have to play in the area again for another three months. A tour of Europe would be more appealing at this point.

The British music press, in particular, has taken a fancy to metal/punk groups from the States. Big Chief believes they have the stuff to satisfy appreciative European ears.

IN THE meantime, though, the band is putting together an album — hopefully to be distributed by a major record label. The signing of Sub Pop's Soundgarden by A&M offers hope.

Hensler got a glimpse of success with the Necros. He recalls one time opening up for Circle Jerks in Miami. Bouncers were harassing people and Hensler told the audience to revolt and a disturbance unfolded, complete with police and ambulances.

"It's easy to start a riot," he said. "The difficult part is maintaining one."

Big Chief will perform Friday, April 6, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Doors open at 9 p.m. For information, call 961-MELT.

COUNTRY LOCAL

Here are the top 10 songs on WWWW-FM.

1. "Little Girl," Reba McEntire.
2. "Seein' My Father," Paul Overstreet.
3. "No Matter How High," The Oak Ridge Boys.
4. "Just as Long as I Have You," Don Williams.
5. "Chains," Patty Loveless.
6. "One Second Thought," Eddie Rabbit.
7. "Tell Me Why," Jana Brown.
8. "Hard Rock Bottom of Your Heart," Raddy Travia.
9. "Leave It Alone," The Forester Sisters.
10. "Southern Star," Alabama.

Here are the top 10 songs (no particular order) on "Detroit Music Scene," which is heard 4-5 p.m. Sundays on WDR-FM 90.9 (repeated 5:30-6:30 p.m. Tuesdays).

1. "My Time," Capra Joe.
2. "When I Met You," Seaside Big Gays.
3. "In the Dark and Crying," Jimmy Bones.
4. "High Inlight," Blue Nimbus.
5. "Put Me Back," Ichabod Stowe.
6. "Boy Meets Girl," See Dick Ran.
7. "I Won't Step on You," Mocheas Lobster.
8. "The Fighter," Soul Station.
9. "Smoking and Drinking," The Gear.
10. "I've Been Watching You," Johanne Quest.

REVIEWS

AFFECTION

— Lisa Stansfield

According to modern folk lore, disco died somewhere during the late '70s. But, every year or so, someone comes out with an album that sounds damn similar to disco.

This music is not, of course, referred to as disco. Instead, it is called by some sort of euphemism like "dance music" or "extendo-club mix-o-rama." In other words, people love to listen to disco music as long as they don't realize that dance mixes of the 1990s are pretty much exactly the same thing as disco mixes of the 1970s.

In the case of the new album, "Affection," by Lisa Stansfield, several terms are used to describe the remarkably disco-esque music. Among the euphemisms, "club beats," "trident demi-house groove" and "spritightly soul."

A press release for Stansfield's album says, "You may believe you've heard her before only because Lisa is the voice you've always wanted to hear." Or maybe it's because she've heard the same stuff before — in the disco era, the "Flashdance" era, in every era where disco music, by any name, has been popular.

Lisa Stansfield is billed as being unique because, get this, she is a white woman singing soul music. This is unique? Anyone who had listened to anyone from Pat Boone to the Rolling Stones knows that its



nothing new for a white person to rip off the music created by black people. Even if it was a new concept, it doesn't seem like something anyone would want to brag about.

Stansfield doesn't break any new ground, either lyrically or musically, on this album. The songs are all about a crazy little thing called love. Love for yourself, love with a friend, relationship-type love, love, love, love. Whatever your love-song needs happen to be, Stansfield, like the Hallmark Card company, has just the thing for the occasion.

Stansfield can't seem to figure out whether she wants to be Michael Jackson, Anita Baker or Donna Summer. It's odd, her image seems very calculated as far as appearance goes — she even wears a painted on beauty spot. Too bad you can't paint on musical talent or originality.

— Jill Hamilton

I DO NOT WANT WHAT I HAVEN'T GOT

—Sinead O'Connor

Ah, it only seems like yesterday. There was Sinead O'Connor performing before a nationwide television audience, her head shaved and the Public Enemy my logo stenciled on the side of it.

But marriage, motherhood and a critically-acclaimed debut record have apparently changed the Irish songstress. Gone from her follow-up, "I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got," are the militant howls and primal screams found on her first album.

What were once Lions and Cobras are gone of contentment. O'Connor is little less rambunctious and more reflective, and maybe, dare we say, a bit more mature.

That's not so bad, contrary to the belief of many of her fans. To make "Lion and Cobra II" would merely be regurgitating the anger of her less-than-Brady-Bunch adolescence. It wouldn't have worked.

Not to say "I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got" is a stellar sophomore effort. The LP is a bit unfocused as O'Connor grapples with a thing called contentment for perhaps the first time in her life.

— Larry O'Connor



A few numbers stand out on their own. The first one is already getting plenty of radio air time, "Nothing Compares 2 U." The Prince-written number displays O'Connor at her soulful, albeit a tempered, best.

The a capella drone of "I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got" closes the LP on a high note. The song echoes the havoc of new-found success. "I have water for my journey/I have bread and I have wine/so longer will I be hungry/the bread of life is mine."

— Larry O'Connor

CHANGESBOWIE

— David Bowie

If you weren't able to pop for last Christmas' critically acclaimed (but pricey) "Sound + Vision" set, don't worry. Bowie and Rykodisc, his new label, boil it all down for you here. And add it all.

Not to be confused with a similarly named greatest hits package issued by RCA several years ago, "Changesbowie" is actually the most comprehensive overview ever presented of this ever-changing rock star's career.

For the first time — even including last year's multi-album set — Bowie's 1980s hits are placed alongside his earlier work.

From "Space Oddity" to "Young Americans," from "Golden Years" to "Let's Dance," these are the tunes Bowie is performing on his current, nothing-but-the-hits tour.

Even though there are 18 songs included, there's a naturally bound to be a favorite or two overlooked. Local fans will probably be disappointed at the omission of "Panic in Detroit," "Fame," meanwhile, is presented in a new dance-club-friendly remix that wouldn't be bad as a CD bonus, but the quirky original is missed. Rykodisc built its reputation on clean, well-mastered CD releases — allegedly a key reason Bowie chose the tiny label over larger, more well-behaved rivals — and the sound quality here generally doesn't



disappoint.

If "Heroes" sounds a bit muddy, the acoustic opening to "Space Oddity" and guitar-ranch crunch of "Rebel, Rebel" are ear grabbing, especially on CD, the rest of Bowie's material will be released in the Listen-by-album fashion, over the next few months.

Nonetheless, this set is a welcome introduction to one of rock's boldest, most-challenging artists.

— Wayne Paul