

# STREET BEATS

## Covingtons: Not quite the '60s

By John Logie  
special writer

The Covingtons' story starts with Fred Munchinger's mother. "My mom bought me this electric guitar for \$2 at a garage sale, and it had a sticker on it that said 'Covington,'" Fred recalled. In a twisted echo of Arthurian legend, the guitar signified to Fred that there should be a band called the Covingtons and that he should be the lead singer for this band.

Munchinger had been discussing forming a band with drummer Greg Bowes. The pair hooked up with guitar player John Michaels, and the Covingtons were born.

After trying to secure the services of other bass players, Munchinger, with nominal competence (filled in when the trio opened for Captain Dave and the Psychedelic Lounge Cats at the Halfway Inn in Ann Arbor).

"We were just a three-piece with seven songs," Michaels said. "In order to fluff up our set list we had to have one song like 'Interstellar Overdrive,' a 15-minute song to make a half-hour long show. It was really raw and raunchy, '60s-based guitar music."

Both Munchinger and Michaels recall being happy with the original, stripped-down Covingtons' sound. But it wasn't long before the band started expanding their line-up. Having to play bass "kind of held Fred down," Michaels said.

"At one point, we were playing with the Victims of Circumstance, and Fred sang 'You're Gonna Miss Me,' with them and just went nuts," he said.

From there, the band moved to a bar, adding to a bass player and a slow lead. And then the band decided to add a keyboard player.

"WE GOT THE keyboard before



The Covingtons include Fred Munchinger, Greg Bowes, John Michaels, Bob Kaufman and Tom Conway.

we even had keyboardist," Michaels said. "We said, 'OK, we're going to get this Farfisa, and then we'll find someone who will play it for us.'"

The band expanded to a quintet with the addition of a keyboard player. Then, after the bass player's departure, the Covingtons recruited two ex-members of the Victims of Circumstance — bassist Bob Kaufman and guitar player Tom Conway. After a few shows as a five-piece, the band started expanding their line-up. Having to play bass "kind of held Fred down," Michaels said.

"At one point, we were playing with the Victims of Circumstance, and Fred sang 'You're Gonna Miss Me,' with them and just went nuts," he said.

From there, the band moved to a bar, adding to a bass player and a slow lead. And then the band decided to add a keyboard player.

"WE GOT THE keyboard before

But the '60s inspiration doesn't end there. The Covingtons sometimes dress "funny," favoring suit jackets similar to those sported by '60s geek rockers like the Nightcrawlers or the Vectors.

"We dress up nice to play wild rock'n'roll," Munchinger said. Munchinger and Michaels write most of the Covingtons' originals. Their first song, Munchinger's paradoxical psychodrama, "I Hate You, Baby," is characteristically simple, but undeniably entertaining.

"FRED USUALLY writes about losing some chick, but he doesn't care because he's too cool to lose any chick," Michaels said. "It kind of sounds like 'Stepping Stone.' With four chords, you're bound to end up with that. It's the excitement that makes it fun."

Conway recently bought the eight-track recording equipment that was used at the now-defunct Garageland Studios, and the Covingtons hope to have a recording available this summer.

Until then, they are looking to continue churning out forgotten garage classics, bizarre psychodrama like Dave Allen and the Arrows' "Blues Theme" and an increasing number of originals. If they do that, Michaels said they will have surpassed their own expectations.

"We started out because we figured out that instead of just going out and getting hammered on weekends, we could go out, play, and get hammered. It gave us one more thing to do. And the beers are sometimes half-off, depending on how we play."

## The Freemasons find niche in music

By Jill Hamilton  
special writer

The guys in the Freemasons are into using aliases. No less than two of the four members of the band choose to go by stage names instead of their actual names.

So, did they take the Gun 'N' Roses route and choose glamorous and vaguely dangerous aliases like "Slash" and "Axl"? Well, not exactly. They picked the tamer monikers of "Mitch Matthews" and "Van Biesel."

Mr. "Matthews" said he uses the alias for a several reasons — his real name "sounds like a weather forecaster's name" and because it's sort of fun to have an alias.

The Freemasons pride themselves on having no former members of Bitter Sweet Alley, Halloween, Toby Reid or Flash Kahan among their ranks. The band does, however, consist of former members of The Good Catholic Boys, Red September and Dancing Smoothies. Officially, (although The Freemasons don't include Greg Marten on vocals and guitar, Mitch Matthews on vocals, bass, mandolin and harmonica, Mike Crimmins on lead guitar and Van Biesel on drums and percussion, but already the members think they have found "it" — that elusive combination of musicians where everything seems to work.



The Freemasons include Greg Marten on vocals and guitar, Mitch Matthews on vocals, bass, mandolin and harmonica, Mike Crimmins on lead guitar and Van Biesel on drums and percussion.

"WE DID some jamming on some songs, like some Replacements tunes, and we were on the exact same wavelength, just like that," Matthews said. "It was rough, but it sounded good."

Their pounding, guitar-driven rock sound apparently hits the spot for the band members. Even though they all have quite varying musical tastes — ranging from polka to Neil Young to the Red Hot Chili Peppers — they all like the Freemasons' sound.

"It's the first band I've been in that, even if I weren't in this band, I'd go see it all the time," said Matthews, happily.

This synchronicity came in handy

at a recent gig at Finney's Pub when the P.A. system blew up and the band was left without sound. Marten suggested that they do something acoustic and proceeded to play a song that he had written.

"It was so cool because it wasn't loud and it was left without sound," Matthews said. "It was the first time any of us besides Greg had heard the song."

The audience loved the song and now it has become part of the Freemasons' regular song set. This type of thing is business as usual for the band — they know their job is to do what the audience wants.

"The people who come to see a show want to get up and dance,"

Matthews said. "If you're paying four or five bucks, you want to laugh and have fun. We're there to entertain."

THAT'S WHY you'll find a Freemason's concert short on political distillates. If you don't have anything to say, don't say it, Matthews said.

"A band like U2 has traveled around the world so they can write about these things," he said. "Every one writes about South Africa, but I say go down to Detroit — we've got it just as bad."

"I see 18- and 19-year-olds singing about politics... they probably haven't even voted yet. They should write about something they know like something that is irritating them at school."

The Freemasons, on the other hand, presumably know better because, as Matthews puts it, they "are degreed people." Marten is working on a history degree, Biesel is an engineer at Chrysler, Crimmins is the head video editor for a cable channel and Matthews is a teacher at a central for troubled boys in Farmington Hills.

"We're really serious about the band but we know there's a million to one chance that we'll make it," Matthews said. "We wouldn't do it without something to fall back on."

In the meantime, the band plans to continue playing the local club circuit and making demos on a trusty old four-track.

## LIVE REVIEW

### SECOND SELF

— Saint  
Andrew's Hall

A true sign a band has made it: A record deal? No. A wall-to-wall crowd at Saint Andrew's? No.

A group can tell if it's reached the pinnacle in local circles when people start professing longtime associations with them. Like, for instance, everyone and their mother in this area is a friend, knows friend, went to school with or played basketball with Bob Seger.

In the line-up outside at Saint Andrew's Hall recently, people were trying to outdo one another in the who-knows-who department. "We know the drummer, Jeff," said one group. "Yeah, we're friends with Andy," added another.

Once inside, everyone got to meet the music of Second Self. These are fine times for the Detroit quintet — A recently-released LP "Mood Ring" on a major label, a healthy push from EMI and ramblings of a big breakout.

No doubt, this fueled Second Self on their homecoming. The band tore through a 12-song, hour-and-10-minute set with vengeance.

This was the stark Gastineau dance after the quarterback sack, the lap around Wembley after winning the F.A. Cup.

Exuberance, at times, interfered with music. Rough edges were exposed, sometimes guitars and vocals were a bit out of sync. But it was soothed with the tale of the home crowd's acceptance and the moment itself.

One thing is apparent. Second Self has arena-sized visions as a support act. The show was complete with the obligatory drum solo, incessant gesturing and a hastily called encore. At times, the band looked like Donald Trump locked in as manager of a travel lodge.

As a front man, Michael Nehra goes the physical route. He struts and chews off the lyrics to rockers, such as "Dream Train" and "Ghost Dance," and splits them out. The highlights of the evening, though, come when he carefully sings the words to stellar numbers such as "Red October" and the set-closing "Lose Those Shadows."

Bruder Andrew Nehra flew around the stage on bass and Jeffrey Fowkes flailed away on drums, providing a bevy of movement on stage. Only Greg Glampa was grounded, providing some piercing guitar work that has become the trademark of the Second Self sound.

When it was over, Fowkes tossed his drumsticks into the crowd. On this night, at least, there was somebody who wanted to catch them.

— Larry O'Connor

## IN CONCERT

- **Goon Squad**  
Goon Squad will perform on Monday April 9, at Rick's American Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **Faith Healers**  
Faith Healers will perform on Monday, April 9, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Wah Wah Night**  
Sub Pop recording artists Nirvana will perform with Tad and Victim's Family on Tuesday, April 10, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. Tickets are \$5 in advance. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Cancer Benefit**  
Frank Allison and the Opossums will perform Wednesday, April 11, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. The show is a benefit for Students Against Cancer.
- **Guitar Jr. Johnson**  
Guitar Jr. Johnson will perform on Wednesday, April 11, at Rick's American Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **Ash Can VanGogh**  
Ash Can VanGogh will perform on Wednesday, April 11, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Walk the Dogma**  
Walk the Dogma will perform with guests, Granfaloon, on Thursday, April 12, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor.
- **Beer on the Penguin**  
Beer on the Penguin will perform on Thursday, April 12, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Lonnie Brooks**  
Lonnie Brooks will perform on Thursday and Friday, April 12-13, at Rick's American Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.
- **Bootsy X**  
Bootsy X will perform on Friday, April 13, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.
- **Patty O'Connor**  
Patty O'Connor will perform on Friday and Saturday, April 13-14, at Bird of Paradise, 207 S. Ashley, Ann Arbor. For information, call 662-8310.
- **Iodine Raincoats**  
Iodine Raincoats will perform on Friday, April 13, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.
- **Black Planet**  
Black Planet will perform with guests, Kuru, on Friday, April 13, at Finney's Pub, 3965 Woodward, Detroit. For information, call 831-0070.
- **Jeannie & the Dreams**  
Jeannie & the Dreams will perform on Saturday, April 14, at Rick's American Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

## TOP 10

Best-selling records of the week:

1. "Escapade" Janet Jackson.
2. "Black Velvet" Alannah Myles.
3. "Room" B2's.
4. "Price of Love" Bad English.
5. "I Wish It Would Rain Down" Phil Collins.
6. "I Go to Extremes" Billy Joel.
7. "No More Lies" Michelle.
8. "My Friend My Love" D-Mob Introducing Cathey Dennis.
9. "We Can't Go Wrong" Cover Girls.
10. "Just a Friend" Biz Markie.

(Source: Cashbox magazine)

## LOCAL

Here are the top 10 songs on "Detroit Music Scene," which is heard 4-5 p.m. Sundays (repeated 3:30-6:30 p.m. Tuesdays) on WDTN-FM 96.7.

1. "Sad Me" Blue Nimburs.
2. "Druthers" Goshier & the Peas.
3. "Ground Sound" Sensitive Big Guys.
4. "Jolt" Banz Revival.
5. "Who's the Friend," Elements.
6. "My Friend My Love" D-Mob Introducing Cathey Dennis.
7. "Walking By Your House" The Gear.
8. "See Said," Jimmy Bonas.
9. "Good Thing" See Dick Hux.
10. "Nightmares" Joey Harlow.

## REVIEWS

### FLOOD — They Might Be Giants

Remember those quirky guys in junior high who named their fetal pig Dennis and played chopsticks with their feet in music class?

They're grown up now, and they're in a band called They Might Be Giants, and they're as quirky as ever. They Might Be Giants enjoyed reasonable success with a minor hit last year, "Ana Ng." The duo's latest, "Flood," their major-label debut, is a 19-song LP that would make a fine EP.

About one-third of the album is thoroughly enjoyable, fun music with insightful, often amusing lyrics. The required single is the infectious "Birdhouse in Your Soul," a rhythmic jaunt that gets fairly decent rotation on MTV, if that's any barometer of success.

"Your Racist Friend," another highlight, is a big college radio song about an uncomfortable encounter with a bigot to which most can relate. The meeting ends on a sour note, and the "racist friend" apologizes, saying it is all in jest, but that's no consolation to the Giants, who conclude in their frenetic nasal



twang, "Can't shake the devil's hand/And say you're only kidding." The humor shows in "Dead," where the speaker "accidentally" takes on off the shelf before the expiration... I won't ever be around any more/I'll be up there on the shelf at the store." One regret he has is that he "didn't apologize for when I was eight and I made my younger brother/have to be my personal slave."

The biggest problem with the rest of "Flood" is that so much of it sounds like the soundtrack for an old Disney cartoon, particularly "Whistling in the Dark," a baritone tale with full orchestration that could have been lifted from "Jungle Book."

They Might Be Giants have a lot of good things to say on "Flood." But, in the end, they say too much.

### COVER ME — Various artists

This is one of Bruce Springsteen's best albums — and he doesn't even show up.

Instead, Rhino Records has compiled 15 cover versions of Springsteen's tunes, drawing on artists from Johnny Cash to the Pointer Sisters, from the Replacements to the Hollies.

Because of the personal, highly stylized nature of his work, Springsteen isn't the easiest artist to cover. But no one embarrasses themselves here. On the whole, it's a pretty enjoyable album for Springsteen fans and non-fans alike.

Some of these records — the Pointers' "Fire" and Gary U.S. Bonds' "This Little Girl" — even made it big on the pop charts. Likewise, Patii Smith's "Because the Night" was a late '70s FM radio staple.

Then there's Southside Johnny and the Ashbury Jukes, who made a career out of recording Springsteen-penned tunes. Inclusion of "The Fever," "Talk to Me" and others, almost makes this their greatest hits album as well.



While those South Jersey band buddies stayed pretty close to Springsteen's own style, the Hollies polished the rambling "Fourth of July, Ashbury Park (Sandy)" into a shiny pop bauble. The British Invasion band was one of the first to recognize Springsteen's songwriting talent, covering his songs as far back as the mid-'70s.

One of the album's few disappointments is the absence of Hollies vocalist Allan Clarke's near-impossible-to-find cover of "Born to Run." Thankfully, Natalie Cole's sharp, high-tech "Pink Cadillac" is also absent.

That aside, what's left is quality stuff. The best moment belongs to U.S. Bonds and '60s soul mate Chuck Jackson, who turn the obscure "Club Soul City" into a four-alarm burner. Neither man has a record contract today, which just shows you where talent and good taste will get you.

— Wayne Peal

### SETTLING FOR LESS — The Colors

The Colors are oldtimers of the local music scene. They started back in the early days of the 1980s — 1984 to be exact — when the members were just starting high school.

Since then they have released two records, "Vivid Colors" and "Malos Colores" — and had songs featured on three compilation records, "It Came From the Garage" on Metro-American records and "End of the World A Go-Go" and "Folk songs from the Twilight Zone" on Tremor.

Of these, "Malos Colores" was the most successful and allowed them to garner some tour dates with such luminaries of the alternative scene as The Dead Milkmen, The Botsol and The Saints.

Now, The Colors have started working with Rage Records, a New York independent label that also handles local rockers Crossed Wire, to work on promoting this latest nine-song LP "Settling for Less."

The songs are of a strange breed that can be angry and out of control at one moment then swiftly become beautiful and philosophical in the



next. In other words, these guys want to play punkish, wild music but find that they are too talented to make truly ugly music.

The best reason to throw "Settling for Less" on the turntable is for Dan Manion's cool lyrics. He writes pretty depressing stuff but always manages to lighten his words up somehow with a clever turn of the phrase or strange, twisted metaphors.

In the title track, brother Charles Manion sings, "Life is like a lollipop/Just when you think you've got it licked/It breaks apart into pieces/And you're left holding the stick."

But, don't be misled by the sound of the lyrics, "Settling for Less" is not a gloom-o-rama album. The music is powerful and light and makes for a good driving-the-car-with-the-music-blasting listen.

— Jill Hamilton