Gilmore: Keeping to his roots

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Jimmie Dale Gilmore doesn't sing, he warbles. At times, his voice aches with the desolation reminiscent of swirling soil in dust bowl times. Other occasions, Gilmore's sings with gitty-up of a honky-tonk troubadour where the two-step is in order.

A reincarnation of Hank Williams? Some have said that. A kin of Buddy Holly. Some have alluded to that as well.

One thing is for certain: Gilmore's nasally voice is his own.

"You can hear other influences in my singing, though," said Gilmore, who performs with longtime friend Butch Hancock tonight at Birmingham Unitarian Church. "I didn't try to . . . I think early on, people started commenting on it (his voice).

"A lot of people that don't like it initially, I think it grows on them. I take great pride in that."

Sometimes the voice is matched up with the precious lines, steeped in contradiction and paradox. Culled from "Dallas," a song that R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe and Natalie Merchant have taken up on stage: "Have you ever seen Dallas from a DC-9 at night? Well, Dallas is a jewel, oh yeah, Dallas is a beautiful sight."

Those observations are syncopated with lines such as these: "Dallas is a beautiful lie . . . Dallas is rich man with a death wish in his eye."

WHILE POSSESSING a wordsmith quality to his songs, Gilmore doesn't play the role of tortured singer-songwriter holed up in some artistic enclave in New York, Los Angeles or Nashville.

The Lubbock, Texas, native is as unpretentious as they come, unsoiled by a music industry that injects self-importance in mass doses upon its creators. One reason for Gilmore's down-to-earth demeanor — his residence.

In nearby Austin, there is a multitude of folk, blues, country and even rock'n'roll artists. Away from the music hubs of New York or L.A., they can experiment and utilize their creative talents before appreciative audiences.

Also, Gilmore has kept good company. Butch Hancock has been a friend since Atkins High School and Joe Ely was in one Gilmore's first bands.

All three formed the creative core of The Flatlanders, a group considered so far from mainstream country that its 1972 acoustic release, "More Legend Than a Band," was only available on eight-track tape. Rounder Records re-released the LP 18 years later on compact disc.

"WE WERE EACH other's only audience," Gilmore said. "We just played for each other. That set up a permanent quality control type of thing."

Some have said he sounds a lot like Hank Williams or Buddy Holly, but you can hear other influences in his music, according to Jimmie Dale Gilmore.

SEEING THE SHOW

Who:
Jimmie Gilmore

Where:
Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 N. Woodward, Bloomfield Hills. Call 540-9031 for more information.

When:
Monday, Feb. 25, 1991

All three enjoyed artistically successful solo careers. Gilmore in particular, having released a pair solo LPs on Hightone Records, "Fair and Square" (1988) and "Jimmie Dale Gilmore" (1989).

Gilmore is putting the finishing touches on a new album to be released this the summer on Elektra as part of the label's American Explorer series. He knocked off the LP in 14 weeks, working around the clock in the studio.

"*The instructions from the people* at Elektra was to make my own record, not to radio or to the critics," Gilmore said. "We made our record in tune to my roots, which is '50s and '60s radio — Hank Williams to the Beatles."

The yet-to-be titled album will span a wide variety of styles, delta blues, country and even some soft rock.

All of the songs on this LP are his own. In some ways, Gilmore is similar to his musical collaborator and longtime friend Hancock in terms of songwriting styles. Though, he defers to Hancock as the master of the craft.

"My songs tend more to be introspective and a description of feelings. Butch's tend to use description and imagery," he said. "To me, it's the only way. To me, it's the emotional attachment to music."

Trash Can Sinatras lift lid to snappy pop

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Let's talk some trash — as in Trash Can Sinatras.

Somehow upon extensive listens to the debut of the Scottish band on London/Go! Discs "Cake," trash and its accompanying images of filth, garbage and Tuesday pick-ups doesn't come to mind.

Rather the Trash Can Sinatras are wrought with all the trappings of a crystalline sounding pop band — gushing guitars, ether-induced harmonies and melodies ripe for the picking.

The lyrics? Well, they're a bit observational, somewhat introspective and a little thorny. And certainly not the type of wit, jaded perspective to be associated with a bunch of pouting Scottish lads who are supposed to be taking their craft seriously.

"It's no rules usually," said guitarist Paul Livingston, 20, whose faint voice coupled with a Scottish burr is hardly audible. "What makes a good pop song? Hmmm. I don't know really. A tambourine makes a good pop song."

Within a series of "I don't knows," this much is culled from a brief telephone conversation with Livingston about the Trash Can Sinatras.

Although Reader, 19, is considered the main songwriter "everyone chips in a little bit." The band has no goals in mind, except to write "a good pop song" and metal band Black Sabbath was a favorite of Livingston when he was 12.

Everyone likes Black Sabbath when they're 12, don't they? Livingston said. "I don't like them anymore."

A growing number of people are liking the Trash Can Sinatras.

"Obscurity Knocks" was released in March last year, earning the band "Single of the Week" honors by New Musical Express. A second cut, "Only Tongue Will Tell" followed and the Trash Can Sinatras began a tour of England.

Trash Can Sinatras soon headed into their own Shabby Road studio in Kilmarnock to record "Cake," which was released stateside in November. Already the LP is in heavy rotation on CIMX-FM's "The Cutting Edge."

ALONG WITH some gorgeous guitar melodies, the Trash Can Sinatras avoid the banal route traveled by many a band of their ilk on "Cake." Songs such as "Opportunity Knocks" burst with life while remaining crystalline.

The subtleties, be it the guitar interplay between Livingston and Douglas or the sometimes Morrissey-esque lyrics, reveal a band that has perhaps mastered their craft without realizing it. Or, more succinctly, the Trash Can Sinatras just may be on to something.

Livingston's probable answer to where Trash Can Sinatras constellation sits in the mass galaxy of pop musical expression: "I don't know really."

SEEING THE SHOW

Who:
Trash Can Sinatras with guests Naked Truth and Forest Animals

Where:
St. Andrews Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Call 961-MELT for more information.

When:
Monday, Feb. 25

Members of the Scottish band, The Trash Can Sinatras, includes John Douglas (from left), George McDaid, Paul Livingston, Stephen Douglas and Frank Reader.

IN CONCERT

● TRASH CAN SINATRAS
Trash Can Sinatras will perform with guests, Thirsty Forest Animals, Monday, Feb. 25, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 961-MELT.

● BRAD FELT
Brad Felt will perform in a special jazz jam Monday, Feb. 25, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.

● SKYLES
Skyles will perform Tuesday, Feb. 26, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● JAXMYTH
Jaxmyth will perform Tuesday, Feb. 26, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● CHISEL BROS.
Chisel Bros. will perform Tuesday, Feb. 26, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. For information, call 832-2355.

● AGENT FURY
Agent Fury will perform with guests, Fat Tuesday, Wednesday, Feb. 27, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 961-MELT.

● HANNIBALS
Hannibals will perform Wednesday, Feb. 27, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● GETTA GRIP
Getta Grip will perform Wednesday, Feb. 27, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● JUNE TABOR & THE OYSTER BAND
June Tabor & the Oyster Band will perform Thursday, Feb. 28, at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit. Tickets are $10 in advance. For information, call 832-2355.

● STRANGE BEDFELLOWS
Strange Bedfellows will perform Thursday, Feb. 28, at Club 3-D, 1815 N. Main, near 12 Mile Road, Royal Oak. For information, call 589-3344.

● CHEAP TRICK
Cheap Trick will perform 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 28, at Royal Oak Music Theatre. Tickets are $20. For information, call 546-7610.

● ALSO TREES
Also Trees will perform with guests, Majesty Crush, Thursday, Feb. 28, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 961-MELT.

● ETCH-A-SKETCH
Etch-a-Sketch will perform with guests, Ether, Thursday, Feb. 28, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 994-3562.

● TRINIDAD TRIPOLI STEEL BAND
Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band will perform Thursday and Friday, Feb. 28 and March 1, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● GOON SKWAD
Goon Skwad will perform Thursday, Feb. 28, at Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti. For information, call 485-5050.

● BORAX
Borax will perform Thursday, Feb. 28, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

● STEWART FRANCKE/MIMI HARRIS
Stewart Francke will perform along with Mimi Harris Friday, March 1, at Lili's 21, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. For information, call 875-6555.

● DARYL HALL & JOHN OATES
Daryl Hall & John Oates will perform 8 p.m. Friday, March 1, at the Fox Theatre in Detroit. Tickets are $22. For information, call 567-6000.

● FAMOUS COACHMAN'S BLUES FESTIVAL
Famous Coachman's Blues Festival will take place Friday through Sunday, March 1-3, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 961-MELT.

● MAGGIES DREAM
Maggies Dream will perform Friday, March 1, at Saint Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. For information, call 961-MELT.

● SCOTT MORGAN BAND
Scott Morgan Band will perform Friday, March 1, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 994-3562.

● HOPE ORCHESTRA
Hope Orchestra will perform Saturday, March 2, at Lili's 21, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck. For information, call 875-6555.

● LONNIE BROOKS
Lonnie Brooks will perform Saturday, March 2, at Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-2747.

● FRANK ALLISON & THE ODD SOX
Frank Allison & the Odd Sox will perform Saturday, March 2, at Club Heidelberg, 215 N. Main, Ann Arbor. For information, call 994-3562.

● TEMPTATIONS/FOUR TOPS
Temptations and the Four Tops will perform 8 p.m. Saturday, March 2, at the Fox Theatre in Detroit. Tickets are $25. For information, call 567-6000.

● SECOND SELF
Second Self will perform with guests, Naked Truth and Twiggy Barbust, Saturday, March 2, at the Majestic Theatre, 4140 Woodward, Detroit. Cover charge is $5. For information, call 833-9700.

LOCAL

Here are the top 10 songs receiving air play on "Detroit Music Scene," which is heard 4-6 p.m. Sundays (repeated 5:30-6:30 p.m. Tuesdays) on WITH-FM 90.9.

1. "City of Desert Sand" — Park the Karma
2. "Orchard Bitter" — The Grin
3. "Bagfull o' Bones" — Grads Hats
4. "Burning Away from You" — In Autumn
5. "Soul of the Earth" — Jimmy Bones and the Graverobbers
6. "Revolution" — Mega City Four
7. "Another One for You" — Knaves
8. "Love Let Me in" — Missionary Stew
9. "Scandalous Behavior" — Detroit Blues Band
10. "Lace" — Incurables

TOP HITS

Best selling records of the week

1. "Gonna Make You Sweat" — C & C Music Factory
2. "All the Man That I Need" — Whitney Houston
3. "The First Time" — Surface
4. "Serpentine" — Ralph Tresvant
5. "Where Does My Heart Beat Now" — Celine Dion
6. "Someday" — Mariah Carey
7. "Disappear" — INXS
8. "One More Try" — Timmy T
9. "Play That Funky Music" — Vanilla Ice
10. "Love Will Never Do (Without You)" — Janet Jackson

"Never Trouble Anything"

REVIEWS

HOKEY SMOKE — Frank Allison and the Odd Sox

With James Brown still locked up, Frank Allison earns the title of the hardest-working man in show business, just edging out Wolf Blitzer.

Playing gigs almost daily, either solo acoustic or with the rocking Odd Sox, Allison remains the area's most active and least recognized musical talent.

The key word is talent. So little talent is out there, you'd think the bands with the most would rise to the top of the scene like green fruit in foreign beer.

This band, lauded by the New York Times, was everybody's band of the year in 1989, but two years later has yet to make it out of the garage. They've been plugging away at the loyal bar circuit, one of the few acts that packs the dance floor with its very first chords. Now they finally have another album to promote, and it's full of the stuff that made them so likable in the first place — good tunes and good times.

Allison's goofy pop tales are too well-crafted to be cooped up in bars. Tiresome comparisons aside, the guy writes songs like someone who was weaned on the Beatles, Monkees, "Green Acres," "The Beverly Hillbillies," "GetSmart!" and "Fractured Fairy Tales." Every family has a similar member. The Allisons just happened to get one who could make his weirdness rhyme, so they gave him a guitar.

"Hokey Smokes" lyrical subjects range from unrequited love to personal recession to tedium in the minimum wage workplace, all packed with sharp shot observations like, "Got on my baseball hat. Cuz that is where it's at."

About a third of the LP is acoustically based, but when the band is turned loose, it cooks tightly and melodically, led by guitarist Don Beckett. Beckett assaults a slide on "Finkenteel Security" and lights up the sailing "Boat She's In" with his wailing gitbox.

The ever-churning rumor mill says that record label cronies are sniffing around Allison & Co. at the moment. They'll smell a rose in "Hokey Smoke," the multi-colored kind where water shoots out of the middle. By any other name.

John Cortez

BACK FROM RIO — Roger McGuinn

Here we go again, another Byrds rip-off.

But, for the first time in 20 years, it's brought to us by the man behind the word, "Byrds": Roger McGuinn, the guy with the groovy granny glasses and the original jangling 12-string.

He's back. He's 48. And he's wearing contacts. But the shaky vocal tones and twangling 12-string remain intact. Thank God. McGuinn assembled co-estimates David Crosby and Chris Hillman, singer-songwriters Elvis Costello and Michael Penn, and Heartbreakers Mike Campbell, Stan Lynch and Benmont Tench, along with their bosses McGuinn & no Tom Petty.

McGuinn and co-producer David Cole of Richard Marx fame, but he's forgiven. Have incorporated the Byrds' jangles and slick harmonies into a modern sound. This is no nostalgia record. It's what all the Byrds wannabes have been trying to make since "Mr. Tambourine Man" hit No. 1 in 1965.

Most of the latest release from the folk-rock and later country-rock pioneer is straight forward stuff. Based around that omnipresent electric 12-string. Notable exceptions are the soft "Without Your Love," co-written with his wife, and the haunting "Your Love Is a Gold Mine."

The Costello-penned "You Bowed Down" is another highlight, as is McGuinn's rendition of Jules Shear's "If We Never Meet Again." Another standout is the majestic McGuinn-Petty tune "King of the Hill," a tale from the dark side of L.A., the town McGuinn was the toast of 25 years ago.

Any new music fan with a sense of rock history should like "Back From Rio." Any oldtime Byrds fan with a sense of McGuinn's impact on today's rock should like it, too.

The only segment it won't appeal to are the forty-somethings who have lost their taste and tolerance en route to the middle of the road. Those who expected "Turn, Turn, Turn" with a string section will have to stick with George Winston, Bobby McFerrin and or Kenny Rogers.

John Cortez

TOO DARK PARK — Skinny Puppy

Skinny Puppy is the band, if you remember, that had one of its show raided by the police in a Cincinnati club. Authorities were tipped off Skinny Puppy was going to perform a vivisection on a live animal during their show.

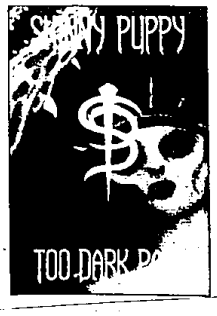
All they found was a stuffed dog backstage.

So Skinny Puppy is already a legend as a dark, foreboding entity on the fringe, scene without so much as playing a note. "Too Dark Park," the group's latest LP on Capitol Nettwork, only fortifies this image.

Screeching vocals, heartbeat murmurs, blood pulsating through the veins — ohhh, that's scary. Broken down, though, Skinny Puppy's sound can be rather repetitive with its drum machines and sometimes tedious lyrics. "Kick the habit" or "are you scared yet?" can become a little boring on a cursory listen.

Beneath the surface, though, there's more to experience. This Vancouver outfit's music is something of a brooding, nihilistic, if not futuristic, vision of gloom and doom. The images are stark and, at times, down right frightening.

In "Tormentor," we're greeted with this: "Walls trapped within yellow eyes the cutters drooling face rips apart cuts to the heart disease shown let it out."



Skinny Puppy gets its message across about the environment in "Shoreline Poison." "Trials administering tidal oil that suffocating base the fire gold pouring mercury giving river deformed" — and, ironically, animal rights in "T.F.W.O."

"Treason trapping animal hide in the vision of paradise."

Skinny Puppy is a grand manipulator of sound. One can feel the voltage surge throughout this effort, but listen at your own risk.

— Larry O'Connor