

# STREET SCENE

The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

OMF Monday, January 20, 1992

## IN CONCERT

Monday Jan. 20

- **Paradise Valley Jazz Jam**  
Alvin, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit.  
823-2353
- **Cylinder Head**  
Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti  
483-5050
- **The Erj**  
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.  
996-2747

Tuesday Jan. 21

- **Chival Bros. featuring Thornetta Davis**  
Alvin, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit.  
823-2353
- **Crowbar Hotel**  
Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor.  
996-8553
- **Cheryl Wheeler**  
The Ark, 633 1/2 Main St., Ann Arbor.  
761-1451
- **Blue Edge**  
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.  
996-2747

Wednesday Jan. 22

- **Sun Messenger William Elijah's W.E. Jam**  
Alvin, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit.  
823-2353
- **Qone In 60 Seconds**  
Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor.  
996-8553
- **Scott Campbell**  
Student Center of Wayne State University, Gullen Hall, Detroit. Show is at noon and open to the public.  
977-3444
- **The Fabulous Thunderbirds**  
With Steve Nardella at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, between Michigan Avenue and Ford Road, Dearborn.  
846-1929
- **Duke Turnatoo**  
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.  
996-2747

Thursday Jan. 23

- **Greenfallon**  
With Sea-Uby-Gun and Burnt Weeny Sandwich at Lili's 21, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck.  
874-6555
- **Volbeatle**  
With Don't Look Now Jug Band at Alvin, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit.  
823-2353
- **Holmei**  
With Superchuck at Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor.  
996-8553
- **Samaritans**  
Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti  
483-5050
- **The Opaque**  
With The Skoundrels and Frock-Wall 150 at Psyche's Lounge, 2932 Canfield, Hamtramck.  
874-6254
- **Seduce**  
The Blitz, 17580 Frazer, 10 1/2 Mile and Gratiot, Roseville.  
774-8150
- **MOD**  
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.  
996-2747

Friday Jan. 24

- **Oriental Spas**  
Studio Lounge, Wayne Road, south of Warren Road, Westland.  
729-2540
- **Mirror Mirror**  
With Mental Landscape and Some Assembly Required at Psyche's Lounge, 2932 Canfield, Hamtramck.  
874-6254
- **Michael on Fire**  
With Waykool at Alvin, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit.  
823-2353
- **Missionary Slew**  
With Red C at Lili's 21, 2930 Jacob, at Jos. Campau, Hamtramck.  
874-6555
- **Hannibals**  
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.  
996-2747
- **The Samaritans**  
Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor.  
996-8553
- **Big Dave and the Ultrasonics**  
Moby Dicks, 5452 Schaefer, Dearborn.  
581-3630
- **Mimi Harris**  
Ted's Pub, 38 S. Main, Clawson.  
435-4755
- **Generals**  
The Ark, 633 1/2 Main St., Ann Arbor.  
761-1451
- **The Clumpa**  
Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti.  
483-5050
- **Cannibal Corpse**  
With Abelist and Gore Gals at Todd's, 8139 E. Seven Mile Road, east of Van Dyke Road, Detroit.  
366-7000DS
- **Hannibals**  
The Blitz, 17580 Frazer, 10 1/2 Mile and Gratiot, Roseville.  
774-8150

Saturday Jan. 25

- **Ann Arbor Folk Festival**  
With Lyle Lovett, Odetta, Livingston Taylor, The Four Bitchin' Babes (with Christine Lavin, Julie Gold, Megan McDonough and Sally Fingeret), Len Chandler, John Gorka, Robert Earl Keen Jr., Fred Small and Jan Krut with Paul Murphy at Hill Auditorium in Ann Arbor. For information, call 761-1451.
- **Jam Rag Night**  
With League of Nations, Beer on the Pagan, The Opaque and The Chapter at Alvin, 5756 Cass, across from Wayne State University, Detroit.  
823-2353
- **Oriental Spas**  
Studio Lounge, Wayne Road, south of Warren Road, Westland.  
729-2540
- **See Dick Run**  
Lili's 21, 2930 Jacob, at Jos. Campau, Hamtramck.  
874-6555
- **George Bedard and the Kingleps**  
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor.  
996-2747
- **A Family Required**  
With The Soap Dragons at Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor.  
996-8553
- **Hawling Diablos**  
Moby Dicks, 5452 Schaefer, Dearborn.  
581-3650
- **Duke Turnatoo**  
Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, between Michigan Avenue and Ford Road, Dearborn.  
846-1929
- **Mimi Harris**  
Ted's Pub, 38 S. Main, Clawson.  
435-4755
- **Culture Bandits**  
Finney's Pub, 3965 Woodward, Detroit.  
831-8070
- **League of Nations**  
With The Opaque at Alvin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit.  
846-1929



Bringing Crowbar Hotel together musically are John Latini and his brother Jim, Kurt Wolak, Bob Groves and John Biscaglia.

## Crowbar Hotel finds lyrical groove

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

On first appearance, Crowbar Hotel bears resemblance to a typical lounge act. Neon lights, keyboards and the ceiling fan whirring above could be construed as cursory indictments.

But when John "Jones" Latini takes a left-handed stab at his guitar and grows into the microphone, the misconception quickly fades like smog in a windstorm. Crowbar Hotel is nothing less than an engagingly tight live outfit.

Tearing through an hour-long set at Sully's, the five-man outfit touches all the bases. There's the influence of experimental jazz, a few howls of blues inspiration and world music sensibilities with the veneer of gritty, urban rock'n'roll expression.

"Certainly there's a groove going," said Latini, in his distinct Queens, N.Y., voice. "I think the songs are somewhat intellectual. The words are made to be listened to and people will listen to them if you put them across in the right way."

If Crowbar Hotel hasn't figured out the right way, the band at least holds the map.

THERE HAVE been a few detours, though. In Crowbar Hotel's emergence, of the last nine months, the band's roots on the area circuit actually extend back three years.

Kurt Wolak and Latini were members of Private Drive, an ambitious outfit whose energetic live sets featured an assortment of covers and

original numbers. That association, though, "crashed."

Latini and Wolak — whose clinical and analytical nasal tone contrasts that of his collaborator — found a new set of musicians who shared in their vision. They enlisted lead guitarist Bob Groves and bassist John Biscaglia.

"We found players that fit the style of music we play," Wolak said. "We're a little more composed now. The songs are distinctive for reasons other than Jones' voice."

The most important addition is more than just music for Latini. His younger brother Jim "J.B." Latini left his home in New York to join, making Crowbar Hotel's lineup complete. His tenacious style of drumming provides an edge.

For his older brother John it's a chance to make up for lost time.

"I get to know him now and hang out with him," John Latini said. "We get to shoot hoops and stuff like that. We had eight years between us (John is 32, Jim is 25). When you're young, it seems like a lot. With him moving here it's just peer to peer now."

WITH HIS arrival comes a legacy of Latini songwriting. Both John and Jim collaborated on numbers in New York bands they played in. Those numbers have been imported into the Crowbar Hotel's blistering sets and on the band's EP "The Starting Five." Other band members have composed songs in what has become an all-originals attack.

Several numbers embrace the energy and uncertainties of urban life, seemingly sketched in

chalk on a neighborhood curbside. Latini's lyrics possess a combination of Elvis Costello's wry wit and Lou Reed's piercing commentary.

And in an area where visits to the city are viewed with wariness and outright abhorrence, songs like "Schoolyard Sweetheart" seem to be almost a celebration of urban dwelling.

Part of the reason is certainly Latini's gravelly voice, which sounds like he's gurgling a mixture of metal shavings and whiskey. So soulful and heartfelt, he can lend immediacy and authenticity to politically charged numbers like "Freedom Road" without sounding the least bit naive.

CERTAINLY, not lost, though, is the musical adroitness of Wolak on keyboards, Groves on guitar, Biscaglia on bass and brother Jim Latini on drums. The band always easily a rock pop rave-up like "Red Light" to complex jazz-tinged numbers.

The group has always put a lot of stock into their live shows. The studio version of Crowbar Hotel has yet to reach fruition, though the band's EP is a viable product by any standard.

Talks include releasing a self-produced compact disc, which would be recorded in a basement studio Wolak is building. In the meantime, Crowbar Hotel is happy to play the stage.

"Our influences and emotions are coming out through the vehicle of music," Latini said.

Crowbar Hotel performs Tuesday, Jan. 21, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. The band also performs Wednesday, Jan. 29, at Sully's, 4758 Greenfield, Dearborn. For information, call 846-1929.

## REVIEWS

### MONKEYSUIT — Hannibals

The Hannibals second release, "Monkeysuit," is more than a musical statement from one of the area's more formidable bands. There is a need here to transcend the restrictive boundaries imposed by the "college circuit." And yet they have to enter to the very audience that has supported them in the past.

The line is a fine one and the four-some doesn't walk it tenuously.

Rather, the Hannibals plunge ahead unabashed with declarative vocals and powerful guitar-charged rock'n'roll. The earmarks of a university-reared band are still there: A tangle of R.E.M.-influenced jangly guitar, a cross section of universal themes and worldly pursuits in the lyrics.

"Monkeysuit," though, reveals a bigger and more of a sonic bite to the Hannibals sound. The band pushes the limit of its abilities, yielding several highlights and, conversely, displaying some frayed edges as well.

"Shaken," the opening cut, features with Chris Gehrkin's driving guitar augmented with Chris Johnston's end-of-the-ether vocals. This is what the Hannibals do best, using

pastoral imagery to convey a base of reflection and then letting rip with cutting and passionate rock'n'roll.

"Course of Mississippi" has an engaging beat and proudly wears the mud from treading too near the banks of exhaustion with its buoyant roots guitar approach and infection of blues harmonies.

On "Even As We Speak," the band is quick to dispel any preconceptions of being Midwest, hayseed outfit as this number takes a funky, uptown tone.

If anything will sustain this LP, it's the subtleties. "Monkeysuit," a number about the dreadful emergence into the corporate world, provides an intriguing bit of country guitar resembling the theme from "Bonanza," while "Long Days" with its soft acoustic meanderings and hypnotic vocals rivals "Shaken" as one of the choice cuts on "Monkeysuit."

As a vocalist, Johnston relies on the emotional wall and throaty growl for emphasis. This leaves his voice to sound overwrought at times while, at his worst, as in the turgid "Walk Alone," he is guilty of perpetuating bombast.

Weighed against what the Hannibals offer overall, this might be registered as an observation rather than a complaint.

— Larry O'Connor

### It's punk, pop with a Chunk

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

Superchuck's sound is the unlikely synthesis of anarchic punk and uncanny mainstream pop sensibilities. This Chapel Hill, N.C., quartet doesn't need their alternative credentials validated by anyone.

Superchuck implodes with a caterwaul of noise, grumpy guitars and drooping bass lines and sullen vocals. In the stew, though, are delicious hooks that don't need to be counteracted by NutraSweet. The indelible riffs and melodies emerge through passion and virtue of intent.

"I like it to be a combination of things — good guitar lines and good vocal lines," says guitarist and vocalist Mac McCaughan, 24, in a telephone interview. "Sometimes, the vocals are an important part, sometimes they are just added on top of a catchy riff."

The complexities of the band's music would belie any brief summations. McCaughan introduced



The members of Superchuck like to think that good guitar lines and good vocal lines that make their sound what it is.

forces with bass player Laura Hulance and some other friends from his Chapel Hill neighborhood. Balance and McCaughan worked at Pepper's Pizza while the slogger was home from school at Columbia University in New York.

In the beginning, Superchuck gigs were few and came only during McCaughan's break from school. The group managed to release a single on Merge Records, the label operated by McCaughan and Balance.

Another spell from school allowed Superchuck to record their self-

titled LP, which garnered critical acclaim from numereographed fanzines to establishment newspapers like the Chicago Tribune.

The band's follow-up on Matador, "No Pocky for Kitty," is eliciting similar praise for its pop-punctuated punk squalls. Reviewers make cursory comparisons of Superchuck's music to Dinosaur Jr.'s guitar blitz, which McCaughan disdains.

Superchuck will open for Helium on Thursday, Jan. 23, at the Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. For information, call 996-8555.

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