

Street

Hancock: Lone Star state of mind

Butch Hancock is one of the most prolific of the Texas songwriters, writing passionate songs. Yet fame continues to elude him, but it may be more of a case of him eluding it.

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

A simple, Texas style greeting initiates the telephone conversation. "Hi," says the voice on the other end. "This is Butch."

It's geniality almost seems to mock the shroud of mystique perpetually surrounding Butch Hancock and his fellow Lone Star songwriting brethren.

The aura of which is puzzling to Hancock himself, whose songs are steeped (ironically) in the forthright tradition forged in a guitar-harmonica style. He's not sure as to what his role is in this pervasive myth whipped up like a detached shrub on a desolate road, and the best explanation he's heard for it came from a Finnish woman on a bus while on tour in Europe.

"Someone asked approximately the same question... the guide sort of looked off in the distance and thought heavy like and said, 'It's the image of the lone rider under the free skies,'" said Hancock, a native of Lubbock, Texas.

"It was a real poignant thing. 'I don't know if I've contributed to it or detracted from it because I've been on both sides of it.'"

In Hancock's case, it was a tractor rather than a horse. The image of a solitary figure contemplating life's complexities amid the vast openness of the Texas plain is still vivid and indeed romantic.

"When Hancock would tell behind the wheel in the West Texas hills, he'd finish a row of crops and put down a few words."

The result of which became "West Texas Waltzes (and Dust Blown Tractor Tunes)," Hancock's first solo effort that launched a prolific songwriting career spanning two decades and 12 albums. Emmylou Harris recorded Hancock's "If You Were a Bluebird" as did Texas songwriting compatriot Joe Ely.



Farm tunes: Butch Hancock used to write songs while riding a tractor on his father's farm in West Texas. Today, he's considered one of the state's best musical commodities.

The grainy image of the Texas songwriter, though, was perhaps cast when Hancock and friends Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Steve West, Tony Pearson and Ely performed in a short-lived, long-sought-after band.

The outfit born out of friendship and inspired by having a good time produced one album, the critically-acclaimed "More a Legend Than a Band" in 1971. The lost treasure wasn't released domestically until 20 years after the fact.

Other enter moves may draw Hancock's attention an oddity. He releases his own albums inde-

pendently, including the latest masterpiece "No 2 Alike" that features 140 songs recorded during a six-night stand in at the Cactus Cafe in Austin, Texas.

The effort is available by subscription through a series of 14-hour-long tapes.

Hancock said those will be the last released on his label, working in the meantime on scoring a record deal. "We're hoping to push the right buttons here and there and somebody will pick me up as an artist," he said.

He is largely influenced by Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan. His numbers are very visual, unblinking at times into complicated wordplay.

"I've always liked to play with the language," he said. "That's the tool I use. At an extreme, I'm a little more apt at getting bored with wordplay at times. Ultimately, whether the song works or not, whether it's complicated or simple words, if the theme comes across that's most important."

"Butch Hancock will perform with Julian Dawson Fridays, May 22 at Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 Woodward. Tickets are \$12 at the door."

SCREEN SCENE

Being alone doesn't mean being lonely



BARBARA SCHIFF

Dear Barbara:
I liked your three choices when confronted with a situation you cannot accept. I have had one I cannot accept for about 20 years. This is a divorce. I was forced to get.

Grow and develop to become a person who can be happy alone. Then you don't have to accept the loss of self-esteem that invariably comes with playing second fiddle. It is my experience with passive and dependent people, male or female, that they do not opt for the good, third choice. That choice is to be capable of being alone and liking it if the unfortunate circumstances make that necessary, or be open to using good judgment about a person who is trustworthy and can love, if those are the lucky circumstances.

The question for you, as well as for many others, to solve is how you can become a separate, adequate person unto yourself. If you can become that kind of person, then the option of finding a man who loves you, one with whom you could be top prize, will be more likely.

I am very much aware of the many men and women who are unable to make the third choice and, therefore, must accept whichever is the better of the two unhappy choices. They must then accept unhappiness as a way of life.

I understand that you would like to do the best you can for your daughter. This will not be accomplished by letting your husband, her father, return. The message you will be giving her is that both you, and she, should take whatever you can get. You will be a role model for dependence.

Since you wrote that you would truly appreciate a reply, I have, responsibly, even though I realize that you may not like my answer, For the sake of other readers of this column, will you keep us informed of which choice you made and how it turned out.

Barbara

My questions is: Now that I have a had a chance to get back together with my husband (because the women who ruined our marriage ran away to another state with another man), should I pursue this course? I am not a lady who openly chooses a man. He is in Florida. I am here in Michigan. He has sent me a car, so we are an extremely good relations. He says as soon as this car is paid for he will be back. My daughter (his) has grown up without a father. It would be good for her to finally have the feeling of support.

I would truly appreciate a reply.

Thank you. Signed N

Dear N:

Your letter is very interesting. In it you describe a problem that most of us must come to grips with sooner or later. Often the circumstances are different, but the problem -- how much humiliation we will endure so as not to be alone -- is the same. I am answering with you in mind, as well as the many other men and women with this predicament.

You too have three choices:

• Stay the way you are, alone and unhappy. Your pleasure then can come from self pity.

• Play second fiddle to the woman in Florida. In this case, you will still not be safe or happy. Your husband could leave any time as he did before.

If you have a question or comment for Barbara Schiff, a trained therapist and experienced counselor, write to Street Sense, at 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

Singer turns stories into personal songs

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

With Alex Lunelsky, a.k.a. Mooshka, every story concludes with a song title.

The Scottsfield resident and lead guitarist of the since disbanded local band Phineas Gaea recalls without prompting how he had to go down to Texas to fetch his girlfriend. On the way back, they pulled over to the side of the road and Lunelsky began marvelling at the star-filled sky above.

"The story should have a happy ending but it doesn't. Not long afterward, he and his girl broke up."

"And that's how the song, 'Stars, come about,'" Lunelsky said.

Lunelsky's voice cracks with emotion as he sings in plaintive, but heartfelt narrative about the sudden realization his relationship is doomed under the illumination of the night time sky. "And I'll never forget the night I gazed out at the stars and was moved to tears while you stayed back at the car. Couldn't recognize you, whoever you are."

Such raw emotion spills over into many of Mooshka's songs, which are captured on the EP "Sketch."

Some numbers focus on the aforementioned relationship. Another, "Great Divide," speaks to the emptiness he feels about the demise of Phineas Gaea, a young and promising group who split up last year.

His songs may be labeled cathartic exercise. Yet Mooshka doesn't appear, scared or bitter. He's a rather jovial surt sitting at a table at Griff's Grill in Pontiac, wearing a red beret that looks more like a shower cap.

"A lot of people are like 'Alex, your songs are depressing,'" Lunelsky said. "But I'm not a



Story to sing: Alex Lunelsky, who performs under the moniker Mooshka, speaks of personal detachment in some of his songs on his EP "Sketch."

depressing person. I ride my bike and everything. I'm just like everyone else.

"Some songs are like that. I don't write about tangent things. I write about my reaction to things."

His reaction to the breakup of both his band and relationship with his girlfriend was to take a respite from performing for awhile. That didn't last long as he found himself picking up an acoustic guitar and writing songs.

The transformation from a lead guitarist in a rock band to a solo performer hasn't been difficult.

See MOOSHKKA, 7A

IN CONCERT

Monday, May 18

- UCLY HEAD**
Fox Theatre, Woodward Avenue, Detroit. 565-5050
- GOING PUBLIC**
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 966-2747
- PARADISE VALLEY JAZZ JAM**
2100 Lundy Smith at Alvin's, 5756 Cass. Detroit. 462-2355

Tuesday, May 19

- LOU REED**
Fox Theatre, Woodward Avenue, Detroit. Tickets are \$22.50. 565-5050
- MISSIONARY STEW**
4th-Dist Battered at Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. 966-8555
- CHISEL BROTHERS WITH THORNETTA**
Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. 966-8555
- MATRICES**
611 Church, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 966-2747
- SUN MOUNTAIN FIDDLER**
The Ark, 637 1/2 Main, Ann Arbor. 761-1451

Wednesday, May 20

- NEIL YOUNG**
Fox Theatre, Woodward Avenue, Detroit. 567-7000
- VOODO HIPPIES**
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 966-2747
- CULTURE SHOCK**
Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. 966-8555
- SERAIAN**
Westland Free Methodist Church, Vener Road, north of Palmer Road. 728-2000

Thursday, May 21

- NEIL YOUNG**
Fox Theatre, Woodward Avenue, Detroit. 567-7000
- JOE AND THE COFFEE MAKERS**
With In Autumn at Griff's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. 869-3252
- ORIENTAL SPAS**
Studio Lounge, Wayne Road, south of Warren, Westland. 728-2540
- MUSHROOM HEAD**
With Big Daddy Sketch at 30, 1815 N. Main, Bay at Oak. 569-3252
- SKYLES BAND**
Rick's Cafe, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 966-2747
- WISHING FIELD**
Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. 966-8555
- ERIC BOGLE WITH BRENT MILLER**
The Ark, 637 1/2 Main, Ann Arbor. 761-1451

Friday, May 22

- TREMOR REVIEW**
With 3 D. Insults, Soul Station, Swamp Reddellows, Chris Richards, Shouting Club and Swampy Richards at The Ark, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck, Show Starts at 9:15 p.m. 875-6555
- DETROIT BLUES FESTIVAL**
With Poochdog, Jerry Hicks, Motor City Blues Project, Savoy Brown, Mick Taylor Band, Albert Collins and Icecreamers, James Taylor, Blind Dog Blues Band and the Hep Cats at Hart Plaza. 398-7600
- LEAGUE OF NATIONS**
With Claim to Fame at Griff's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. 834-9292
- ORIENTAL SPAS**
Studio Lounge, Wayne Road, south of Warren, Westland. 728-2540
- CYLANDER STREET**
Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti. 485-5050
- RED C**
With Spiral Dance at Griff's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. 834-9292
- BUTCH HANCOCK AND JULIAN DAWSON**
Birmingham Unitarian Church, 651 Woodward, at Love Rice. Tickets are \$10 in advance, \$12 at the door. 646-4950
- TRINIDAD TRIPOLI STEEL BAND**
611 Church, 611 Church, Ann Arbor. 966-2747
- WORLDING DIABLOS**
Ann's, 5756 Cass Detroit. 462-2355
- FREEMASONS**
With Crazy Jacks at Hamtramck Pub, 2048 Cass, off I-75. 465-9700
- TRUST FUND**
With In Autumn at Finney's Pub, 3965 Woodward, Detroit. 844-8070
- DICK SIEGAL AND THE MINISTERS OF MELCOI**
Blind Pig, 208 S. First, Ann Arbor. 966-8555
- FRED SMALL**
The Ark, 637 1/2 Main, Ann Arbor. 761-1451

Saturday, May 23

- TREMOR REVIEW**
With Inquechous, Happy Accidents, Curvique, Voiceless, Eton Bone and X-Treme Band, Albert Collins and Icecreamers, James Taylor, Blind Dog Blues Band and the Hep Cats at Hart Plaza. 398-7600
- DETROIT BLUES FESTIVAL**
With Poochdog, Jerry Hicks, Motor City Blues Project, Savoy Brown, Mick Taylor Band, Albert Collins and Icecreamers, James Taylor, Blind Dog Blues Band and the Hep Cats at Hart Plaza. 398-7600
- LEAGUE OF NATIONS**
With Claim to Fame at Griff's Grill, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac. 834-9292
- ORIENTAL SPAS**
Studio Lounge, Wayne Road, south of Warren, Westland. 728-2540
- PEELMOSS AND THE FUNGI**
Cross Street Station, 511 W. Cross, Ypsilanti. 485-5050

Sunday, May 24

- CLUTCH CAROLS ANNIVERSARY**
With Second Self, Trash Brats, Gongster Gun, Crossed Wire, Noc Barangs, Brotherhood Rescue, Churn Farm, Majesty Crush, Forehead Steve and Blue Nation at Phoenix Center in Pontiac, Show starts at 10 p.m. 334-1988
- DETROIT BLUES FESTIVAL**
With Louie Blue No, Chisel Brothers with Thoretta Davis, Son Seals, Duke Junatoke, Johnny Winter, Big Daddy Romance and Butler Twins at Hart Plaza. 398-7600
- STATE OF PANIC**
Rave party at State Theatre, Woodward Road, Detroit. Admission is \$6. 961-5450
- BOP HARVEY**
With Groove Spoon at Majestic Theatre, 4160 Woodward, Detroit. 833-9700
- SAFFIRE -- UPPITY BLUES WOMEN**
The Ark, 637 1/2 Main, Ann Arbor. 761-1451