

STREET CRACKS



BOB SADLER

Opening night: The neon lights shine bright for first night at the newest jewel in the Hitech crown, The Second City — Detroit.

First night jitters bypass Second City

BY BOB SADLER
SPECIAL WRITER

The laughter was so uproarious last week at the premiere of The Second City — Detroit, it could have knocked the fresh paint right off the walls. At the actual first performance on Wednesday (Thursday's gala opening featured appearances by John Candy and George Wendt and a live preview show on WDIV-TV), there was quite a buzz in the lobby about the transformation of the former Hughes & Hatcher building into a theater, restaurant and bar.

As loud as that buzz was, the buzz got even louder when Detroit mayoral candidate Sharon McPhail made the scene. Despite her best attempts to just be a mom rooting for her daughter, Angela Shelton, a member of the cast, she was swamped by television reporters within seconds of her arrival.

From the overall appearances of things, it looks like the Chinese fire drill construction job worked out just fine in this latest Hitech family venture, much like the recent assembly of Tiger Plaza at Michigan and Trumbull — completed just before the first pitch on opening day. In comparing the theater digs at Woodward and Montclair to the other Second City stages in Chicago and Toronto, Detroit stands alone.

"They (those in Chicago and Toronto) would be envious, of course," said Lynn Okler, producer of The Second City. Detroit and the person responsible for preparing the cast for the opening. "But you didn't hear me say that."

Once seated in the 350-seat theater, the anticipation really began to build. To borrow the overused cliché, there isn't a bad seat in the house. The cabaret-style seating is arranged in a seven-tiered semi-circle, so that tall people in front don't obstruct the view and no one is more than 35 feet from the stage.

A computer glitch in the Riata (Italian for "to laugh" by the way) restaurant Wednesday caused some late dinners, which in turn led to later seating in the theater. As a result, the nervous cast had to wait an additional 40 minutes to go on stage with their first revue, entitled — in typical Second City fashion — "Power to the People Mover."

See **SECOND CITY**, 9A

AT THE MIKE

■ Can't Get In at Second City? ... Chaplin's West may have the solution for you as the improv troupe, Midwest Comedy Tool & Dio, checks in for performances Tuesday through Sunday, Sept. 21-26. Call 533-8866 for reservations.

■ The magic of "Kojak"? ... Sorry, about the only thing Telly Savalas could make disappear was that trademark lollipop. However, Kojak has been known to perform a trick or two in his day. You can catch his comedy and magic show at Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle in Royal Oak Sept. 28 through Oct. 2. Call 642-9900.

■ Not again, Pig! ... Thank goodness her relationship with Erno Phillips ended years ago; the wretched quotient was just getting too high. Judy Tonita brings her unique perspective on things to Chaplin's East Oct. 15-16 for a special engagement. Call 792-1802 for reservations.

— Bob Sadler

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Street Scene next week:

- Christina Fuoco's interview with Frank Allison.
- Lisa Rudy's gastronomical excursion into the world of Cheap Eats.
- John Monaghan's look at the alternative movie scene.
- Street Sense by Barbara Schiff.

Strong draw: In the last nine years, The Alligators have become one of the strongest draws among blues fans.



Alligators: Singing the blues



BY MARK GALLO
SPECIAL WRITER

Blues has been slandered and ignored by the mainstream music-buying public for decades, but it just doesn't go away.

The Alligators know all about perseverance. During the past nine years, since forming out of the ashes of Houndstooth Jones, they've grown into one of the strongest draws in the area, both for blues cognoscenti and dancers alike.

Certainly, it's an advantage to have some of the most knowledgeable and enthusiastic blues freaks in town banded together, but this is a band that comes fully equipped with chops and substance, too.

"This band got together about the same time Stevie Ray Vaughan came out of the chute," remembers vocalist/frontman Dave Kramer. "All of a sudden blues was becoming popular."

The problem was the first incarnation of the band just wasn't cutting it for Kramer, particularly in light of the exposure that Vaughan, Robert Cray, the Fabulous Thunderbirds and other bands were bringing to the genre. Reshuffling was in order.

"Once Waitlin' came in, the thing

went from being a sappy R&B/top 40 blues band to something with a little more substance, a little more heart," he said. "He used to show up at my house on a Friday night with an arm load of album and say, 'Here, learn this. This is the blues. He educated me.'"

STREET BEATS

Fast approaching 42, Kramer's been at this since he was 13 years old, but he defers to Waitlin' Dale and guitar sensation Steve Schwarz as the resident blues professors in the ranks. He's the first to admit that it took a lot of hard work, little bit of luck to arrive at the enviable position of one of the local pillars.

"We've worked hard," he said. "Some of the changes have been painful. . . ."

"And then the scene's changed, too," added Dale. "At first you could go out and do all the blues hits — 'I'm a Man,' 'King Bee,' 'Hoochie Coochie Man,' 'Sweet Home Chicago.' Well, you can't do that stuff anymore. Through the years, we've evolved into doing more originals."

Adds Kramer: "The scene has definitely matured with a lot of

bands coming on, and with the maturity of the scene and the fact that we've been able to stick, that forces you to become more creative; forces you to adopt an attitude where you listen to a Stevie Ray Vaughan or a Thunderbird, or any of these contemporary, relatively new acts and say, 'Yeah, that's cool stuff.'"

"Then you realize, 'Why sound like them?' Sound like yourself, so people listen to you! I don't want to be compared to anybody. I want people to say, 'Hey, there's the Alligators! I think our sound is unique. There aren't a lot of people around who do it the way we do it.'"

"I have yet to find a band that functions anywhere near the level of this one," said Robert, "R.D." Jones, a veteran of the local legends, the Progressive Blues Band.

Drummer Mark Seyler Jr. attributes much of the band's success to their familial relationship, and attempting a discussion with the band is to expect answers from all corners.

"We have a nice base of some traditional Chicago and swing," Seyler said. Dale finishes for him, "We try to be a more diverse group instead of just doing, like Chicago blues. For awhile, we got into a few ruts, but we want to be a danceable blues band instead of a drinking blues band."

There aren't many bands who belong in the same category with the Alligators who are without a recording contract. To a man, this is a

band on a mission. Guitarist Schwarz brings to mind West Coast heroes like Junior Watson and Joel Foy; bassist Jones is one of the best, walking-est players I've heard; Seyler works a shuffle and second line riff as tight as any drummer out there.

"The appropriately monickered Waitlin' Dale has no problem with pulling a cord through the crowd or standing on a chair and earning a nickname; and Kramer infuses everything with an electric soulfulness that works crowds in some of the best and least known clubs in the area into a frenzy. This band is the real deal."

"This is a music of emotion," Kramer said. "Let's face it, playing blues is an emotional style of music. Blues is born of emotion, it's carried by the emotions and it touches the emotions of all the people you're with. I think about this all the time. I want to be doing this when I'm 67 years old."

The Alligators will perform Oct. 1 at Stan's Dugout, 3360 Auburn Road, Auburn Hills. Call 852-6433 for more information. They will also perform Oct. 8-9 at the Rivertown Saloon, 1977 Woodbridge, Detroit (687-6020); Oct. 22 at Moby Dick's, 6452 Schaefer, Dearborn (681-3650); Oct. 23 at Red Doggy, 449 N. Main, Milford (688-2171); and Oct. 29 at the Soup Kitchen Saloon, 1885 Franklin, Detroit (269-1374).



BILL HANSEN

Spectacle: Members include Eric Campbell (from left), Nicholas Sheren, Loren Jackson and Travis Hawthorne.

Spectacle serves up a mellow 'light rock'

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

For Spectacle, the term "light rock" doesn't mean the type of the music patients would hear in a doctor's office, or visitors would hear in an elevator.

It's the type of music that the Dearborn-based quartet prefers and cares to share with its audience.

"It's the type of music that's mellow and soothing," said drummer Eric Campbell who cites Lollapalooza side-stage veterans Sebadoh as an other example.

"I don't like music with a hard edge; I like music that massages my brain. For me, that tends to be beau-

tiful-sounding stuff," he added. Campbell and the rest of Spectacle — vocalist/guitarist Travis Hawthorne and bassist Nicholas Sheren, both of Dearborn, and guitarist Loren Jackson of Livonia — don't compromise any musical preferences for Spectacle. They carry their direct influences into their music. Recently, they showcased their wavering, melancholy-guitar sound on the CD "Developing in a World Without Sound" on Royal Oak's Castellon Records.

Although released in late summer, the group's CD, its first, has already received positive reviews from area

See **SPECTACLE**, 9A

Monday, Sept. 20
MARY MCGUIRE AND MYK RISE
Four Greenfields, Royal Oak. (acoustic rock)
266-2962

Tuesday, Sept. 21
2 TIGUANA'S FROM EARTH
The Grand Cafe, 3316 Grand River, Farmington. (acoustic rock)
615-9181

MARY MCGUIRE AND MYK RISE
Mt. St. Ann, Novi. (acoustic rock)
349-7038

CHISEL BROS. WITH THORNETTA DAVIS
Aldin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit. (blues)
832-0593

Wednesday, Sept. 22
ORANGE LAKE DRIVE
Mt. St. Ann, Novi. (blues)
334-7411

GEORGE HIGGINS AND A.K.S. BAND
Attie Bar, 11687 Jos. Campau, Hamtramck. (blues)
365-4194

SLIDE OFF SATURN
With Triang Vision at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor.
996-8555

MARIA MCKEE
With David Gray at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. (alternative rock)
961-MELT

SLEEP ON DRUGS
With D.J. Derrick Carter at Industry, 15 S. Saginaw, Pontiac. (industrial tinged alternative rock)
334-1999

IN CONCERT

OVER THE RHINE
With Red G at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. (roots rock)
996-8555

Thursday, Sept. 23
THE OPAQUE
With Bermuda Mohawk at 3-D, 1815 N. Main St., Royal Oak.
589-3344

RUSTY REID BAND
With Harmonica Sheh at Attie Bar, 11687 Jos. Campau, Hamtramck.
365-4194

THE INCLINED
With Dig at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor. (funk rock)
996-8555

LOVE BATTERY
With Small Ball Paul at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. (alternative rock)
961-MELT

CRABES
Industry, 15 S. Saginaw, Pontiac.
334-1999

MBX
Charlie's, 102 Greesbeck, Mount Clemens.
465-5454

Friday, Sept. 24
INO/DNO
Plays a Dennis Archer Benefit at Division Casino & Urban Coffee House, 1301 W. Lafayette, Detroit. (reggae)
265-7040

MATTERS
With Small Ball Paul at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. (alternative rock)
996-8555

See **IN CONCERT**, 10A