

# Street

(F) ★ 5B

MONDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1993

## ART ON THE EDGE



BILL HANSON

**Cone Crazy:** Kaiser Suidan creates wheel-thrown cones that mimic the flowers in his Birmingham garden.

## His clay work has new slant

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN  
SPECIAL WRITER

**K**aiser Suidan works in clay crafting functional and non-functional objects that speak to each of us individually but always with a wink and a nod.

His whimsical ceramic tables and chairs, mugs, teapots, tabletop sculptures and walls riveted with clay cones are meant to accent the living space, adding a quick picker-upper to nearly any environment, whether work or play.

"Kaiser Suidan: New Works in Clay," a body of wheel-thrown clay created over the last year, has been called visionary by Artspace in Birmingham where it is now on display. Gallery director Linda Flondy said "forms are often suspended on a vertical surface removing the work from its natural context, the horizontal plane."

"These are all about painting; all the work stems from my love affair with gardening," said Suidan during an interview at his Birmingham studio. "The cones are about painting. They're mimicking flowers abstractly. When you get a number of them on the wall what the cones are, they're flowers, a whole garden of flowers."

For six months now, Suidan has been crazy about cones. Hundreds of them in varying stages of completion line the work surfaces in his studio. In fact, he almost named the current exhibition "The Possibility of the Cone."

His garden is filled with them, looking like so many tops alongside the perennials. In a recent statement, he refers to the conical work as "an interpretation of my experience with the garden and my fascination with its energy and vibrant beauty. I address the ordered system of the garden and the natural forces from which it gives way to allow the free expression of sensuality, movement and energy."

"I have a passion for clay," said Suidan. "Coming from a gardening background, the clay is coming from the ground. I like the physical part of working with the clay."

A 1992 graduate of Center for Creative Studies — College of Art and Design in Detroit, Suidan sailed through school on scholarships singing from those provided by the Detroit Art Institute to Benson and Edith Ford. Although his passion for clay was first aroused in high school, not until four years ago after quitting a "regular job" he worked at for 11 years, did he finally succumb to the need to utilize his abundant creative energy.

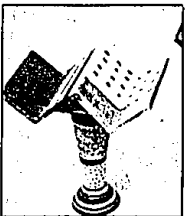
Originally, Suidan had installed 40 cones on the wall of CCS' Center Galleries for a ceramics majors' show. So when the time came for his senior thesis, it seemed quite natural to raise the question: Why not 200 cones on a wall?

Almost that many are currently installed at the Brazil Coffee House in Royal Oak.

As you look around the studio, it's cones as far as the eye can see. A cone shaped coffee cup with a

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A clay table: It is reinforced with a steel rod and sports an accordion-like top.



## LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Street Scene next week:

- Christina Fuoco's interview with Wally Pfister.
- John Managhan's look at the latest in alternative movies.

# Band Of The Year

**Best band:** Four-part harmony is the key to The Verve Pipe — guitarist A.J. Dunning (from left), guitarist/lead vocalist Brian Vander Ark, drummer Donnie Brown and bassist Brad Vander Ark.



## The Verve Pipe wins raves for its music



In late 1992, The Verve Pipe debuted with "I've Suffered a Head Injury." This year they released one of 1993's best albums, "Pop Smear." But that's just part of the reason why they're The Observer & Eccentric's Band of the Year.

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BY CHRISTINA FUOCO  
STAFF WRITER

When members of the bands Johnny With An Eye and Water 4 The Pool reformed into The Verve Pipe in mid-1992, they were cautiously optimistic about their future.

The ensuing events, however, are enviable by any local band's measure. Their debut CD "I've Suffered a Head Injury," a collection of unreleased songs from the two bands, received critical acclaim in December 1992. This summer they played a showcase at the legendary CBGB club in New York's Soho district, followed by a first-place finish at the U.S. Yamaha Soundcheck music showcase. Last week, The Verve Pipe won two 1993 Detroit Music Awards for best vocalist and guitarist.

All this firmly places them among the top alternative rock bands in Michigan.

Few bands have established their name in such a short time. It seemed to come easy for The Verve Pipe. Lush harmonies and thought-provoking lyrics carry the East Lansing-based band's songs. For the most part they treat people they meet — club owners, fellow bands, whoever — with genuine respect. These are some of the reasons they've been named The Observer & Eccentric's 1993 Band of the Year.

Last week, The Verve Pipe released its sophomore effort "Pop Smear" with a packed party at the 1,500-seat State Theatre in Kalamazoo.

The album showcases singer/guitarist Brian Vander Ark's matured voice as well as his ability to turn often ironic lyrics and sometimes sarcastic wit into a hook-laden song. That, he said, attests to his "love of

the English language."

"I work on that kind of stuff; I love the English language," he said. "It's so easy to make a play on words."

He handles upbeat songs in a growling tone but has the ability to soften for sweet ballads like "The River," "Out Like A Lamb," and "Is It Worth It?" On stage, the former Royal Oak resident is a gripping stage presence whose style is characteristic of more experienced performers. Unlike other bands whose lead singers study other performers, Vander Ark's talents come from within.

"To be absolutely honest with you, I don't go to any concerts by label acts," Vander Ark said matter-

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of-factly. "It's probably the most politically correct thing to say that I go to one concert a week to study (stage performance), but I don't."

"I really don't go to any shows partly because I don't want to rip off anybody."

During the last year, Vander Ark — along with songwriting partners drummer Donnie Brown and bassist Brad Vander Ark — has grown to become more comfortable with speaking his mind. As a consequence of Vander Ark refining his talent, "Pop Smear" is significantly darker than "I've Suffered a Head Injury."

For example, in "Spoonful of Sugar," Vander Ark sings: "Singing born of this nation of white bread foundation we're taping a king, beaten of his crown. My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of irony, spoonful of sugar wash it down."

He takes a lighter approach with the rappy "Senator Speak." He lashes out at ex-Vice President Dan Quayle by blending an endless stream of tongue-in-cheek lyrics, cartoon and political speech sam-

ples with The Verve Pipe's trademark harmonies. In "Wanna Be," he rips into millionaire rock stars by singing "Now love me I'm a millionaire, running out of ditches but I'm keeping the faith. Now, should I repeat the second verse? Or maybe the third? It's becoming absurd."

"It just comes with writing," the newly shorn Brian Vander Ark said, flopped down in a chair backstage at the Detroit Music Awards last week. "I'm a better writer now. I can see how it fits musically where before I never really had the opportunity to." Guitarist A.J. Dunning, the newest member of the group, added that collaborating with Brown on songs like "Honey" and "Wanna Be" has allowed Vander Ark to free his talent that was corralled by his previous bandmates.

"Don had a lot more to offer (than previous bandmates). That's going beyond the drums. They're on the same wave length," said bassist Brad Vander Ark, Brian's younger brother.

Although the band earned a Detroit Music Award nomination for "Best Modern Rock Band," Vander Ark labels the band "pop" — hence the album's name.

"How can I write anymore of a hook without being Michael Bolton? We're so close that if we take it one step further, it'll be (corny)."

Vander Ark said he hopes that record companies will overlook pop's history and take his music seriously.

"Pop music has gotten a bad rap during the last 20 years. A lot of pop music has been looked over because of bad pop music."

Musically, the 12-song album concentrates on the band's acoustic side but is not without rock. The first song, "Pretty for You" begins with a chaotic clattering of cymbals, guitars and drums, blends in acoustic rock and ends with an almost loungey jazz fade.

Driving guitar, Brown's booming backbeat and Brad Vander Ark's funky bass string along "Senator Speak." Trumpets and trombones in "Out Like A Lamb" add new dimension to the song. String sections trickled throughout "Pop Smear"

are a sweet, subtle frosting to the songs.

Bypassing horns and strings when playing live doesn't hurt The Verve Pipe at all. That was one of the things that judges at the Ticketmaster/Yamaha Soundcheck contest noticed.

The band's booking agent, Dan West, entered The Verve Pipe on a whim while visiting Chicago, the contest's headquarters. Soon afterward, they were booked to play round one at Lounge Ax in Chicago. They won that and played the Midwest finals at Pine Knob Music Theatre in Clarkston.

Judges at the U.S. finals held in Dallas, Texas, including Danny Goldberg, president of Atlantic Records, chose The Verve Pipe to represent the U.S. during the "MusicQuest" showcase in Japan in October.

Although "chance" and "accident" are implied in conversations with The Verve Pipe, Dunning believes it's the band's "work ethic" that has steered his group toward success.

"We're a hard-working bunch," he said sitting back in his chair. "We do it to death and do it some more."

Brian Vander Ark agreed. "We've got a really good business sense; we're very strict about who we talk to and we treat people well," he said. "We treat people nice. A lot of bands are really competitive. They don't have any friends (and) then if their ramp goes down, there's no one there to help."

Vander Ark added that the multitude of "Battle of the Bands" held in Detroit are partially to blame for the fierce competitive attitude. "It's something deep rooted in the Detroit scene. The less competitive we are, the more successful we'll be. That's why we're where we are."

The Verve Pipe performs Friday, Dec. 17, at the Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor, with Whirling Road. For more information, call 996-8555. The band's official Detroit-area record release party for "Pop Smear" will be Saturday, Jan. 8, at the Majestic, 4140 Woodward Ave., Detroit. For more information, call 833-9700.

## IN CONCERT

**Monday, Dec. 13**  
THE JARIUS SHAHID QUARTET  
Avin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit, (jazz)  
832-2355

**Tuesday, Dec. 14**  
CHIBEL BROS.  
Avin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit, (blues)  
832-2355

DAVID MOSHER  
With Dan Hall at The Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main St., Ann Arbor, (folk)  
761-1451

ABREE NAIM  
With Michael McDermott at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit, (alternative rock)  
961-MELT

LOLLYPOP GUILD  
With Jason McCouley Berry at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor, (alternative rock)  
996-8555

**Wednesday, Dec. 15**  
NEW WORLD JAZZ  
Avin's, 5756 Cass, Detroit, (jazz)  
832-2355

CARL CACHO-MEGRETE/BRENDAN & JANE  
The Ark, 637 1/2 S. Main St., Ann Arbor, (folk)  
761-1451

DIG  
With Drop Nineteens at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit, (alternative rock)  
961-MELT

JES GRU  
Rock's, 611 Church, Ann Arbor, (punk rock)  
996-2747

INDIA GREEN  
With Bermuda Mohawk at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor, (alternative rock)  
996-8555

996-8555  
ROBERT NOLL  
Melo Musicale, 2919 Biddle, Wyandotte, (blues)  
282-8900

**Thursday, Dec. 16**  
WHITE ROOM CHRISTMAS PARTY  
Featuring Walk on Water and 12 other bands at The Shelter below St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit, (alternative rock)  
961-MELT

CURTIS HEADS  
With Clockworks at Blind Pig, 206-208 S. First St., Ann Arbor, (alternative rock)  
996-8555

H&K  
Charlie's, 102 Groesbeck Hwy., Mount Clemens, (rock)  
465-5454

USLY BIT PROUD  
Avon Bar and Restaurant, 3982 Auburn Road, Rochester Hills, (rock)  
832-2707

ROBERT NOLL  
Christmas party with Detroit Blues Band, Steve Gorman, Randy Vain Sonic Blues at Fecocast Theatre, 31 N. Walnut, Mount Clemens, (blues)  
463-1800 or 458-3828

FLIPPER  
With Festy Cadavers and Horse at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit, (alternative rock)  
961-MELT

YODU KIPPERS  
3-D, 1815 N. Main St., Royal Oak, (alternative rock)  
569-3344

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