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STREET SCENE

STREET BEATS

The Color of Skies — Four Hands

The interplay at work on "The Color of Skies" (Overland) is reminiscent of that of Bert Jansch and John Renbourn more than any other. That the four hands in question belong to acoustic guitar and percussionist Jeff Harshorn of Warren, and Michael Vavrekis of Sterling Heights, is cause for local boasting rights as an added bonus.

Here are 14 pieces, spanning 70 minutes, of brilliantly mesmerizing playing and writing. All instrumental and all original, the material runs a stylistic gamut of Frapp to McLaughlin to Segovia influentially, while retaining a fresh and unique slant of its own.

"Northern Lights," for example, has the familiar stamp of Frapp in its circular drone motif. "Adrift in Legendary Myth" has the delicacy of John McLaughlin's finest solo work and "Skywatch" has the feel of classical guitar work.

While this may be appeal to fans of the likes of Scarus and Farn or Acoustic Alchemy, I suggest aficionados of progressive acoustic music will be more likely to take this to heart.

Exquisite music transcends barriers, though, and this is as delightful as any acoustic music of the past couple of years.

— Mark E. Gallo

Mark E. Gallo is a freelance reporter from Farmington Hills.

Primordia — Brainbox

Since its inception, Nettwerk Records was one of those labels that only released interesting, creative albums. When you saw the Nettwerk logo, you knew the album was probably something worth adding to your collection.

Apparently, that is no longer the case. "Primordia," the latest from Brainbox, is nearly unlistenable. Each track sounds like a short, computer-generated rhythm looped over a boring drum beat. A few of the tracks have "vocals" which are little more than a sample of a woman sighing. Each track lasts about six minutes which means you can only listen to the first few songs before wanting to rip the disc out of the CD player and fling it at the nearest wall.

The only positive effect this album has is that you become nostalgic for Nettwerk's releases of the late 1980s when most of the bands contained at least one member of Skinny Puppy. Even the worst of those albums is light years ahead of Brainbox.

Brainbox is the latest project of Toronto-based artist Tom Third. He is probably best known for his soundtrack work for various art projects, most notably the Mervyn Cadell song "The Sweater." Of course, that music would be really obnoxious without the words taking the spotlight.

Third has described "Primordia" as "music you can listen to when you have friends over." That probably would not be a good idea unless you want them to leave quickly.

— Eric Darling

A freelancer from Vasar, Eric Darling is the former music director of WUDM at University of Detroit Mercy.

Harbinger — Paula Cole

First listen here may put you in a mind of a gorgeous vocal mix of Annie Lennox, Marti Jones and Sarah Hickman. Paula Cole has more than just an exceptional gift for vocalists, though. What sets Cole, who has toured as an opening act for Peter Gabriel, apart is the majestic combination of that extraordinary voice and her gift for evocative songwriting. Ironically, the standout piece here is exactly what you can expect Cole not to be.

"She is my holy Mary," she sings ("I Am So Ordinary") "And I am so ordinary/And she is your Queen Cleopatra/And I'm just your morning after."

The best of exceptional songwriting, I maintain, will forever be the impact of the words on paper, stripped of musical accompaniment, and Cole's are stark and evocative.

"Happy Home," talking for its subject the occasion of Cole's mother's choice to raise a family, rather than pursue a career ("I remember the pain in my mother's eyes/I remember the pain of her companion years ago"/"the powerfully delivered "Black Bees," a commentary on her *Two Marbles*

See REVERBS, 7A



'Bush' whacked: The English rock band Bush — Dave Parsons (from left), Nigel Pulsford, Gavin Rossdale, and Robin Goodridge — recently played a sold-out show at St. Andrew's Hall in Detroit.

Bush savors its stateside appeal



When a California radio station said "too bad" and played "Everything Zen," British rock band Bush found its stateside popularity snowball. Now it's hoping for the same kind of response in its native England.

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Bush had a pretty good idea that their debut album "Sixteen Stone," was going to be successful. Even before the LP was released, record industry insiders were telling Bush how good it was.

Then the English rock band's first single, "Everything Zen," was leaked to radio station KROQ in California.

"(The program director) loved it and wanted to program it immediately, but they told him that they haven't got it out yet," said drummer Robin Goodridge.

The influential radio station basically said "too bad" and played it anyway. Soon Bush's popularity snowballed. "Everything Zen" be-

came a top 10 radio hit and Inter-scope records rushed to release the album.

Noted producer Matt Mahurin (Alice in Chains, Metallica, Peter Dinklage, U2) produced the video that was recently slotted into MTV's "Buzz Bin," a predictor of most things successful.

"We were settled in England, doing what we do and then they had asked us to come over to America because the single had been leaked all over," Goodridge said.

The tour is what brought Bush to St. Andrew's Hall last week for a sold-out show — a far cry from the band's past jobs as painters, ice cream vendors and mop-ed delivery boys for a kosher-sushi restaurant called So Sue Ma.

As guitarist/vocalist Gavin Rossdale, who's even lanky bundled up in a winter coat and scarf wrapped tight around his neck, warms up his voice, desperate fans were repeatedly shooed from the doors during the 6 p.m. soundcheck for the 8 p.m. show. The \$5.50 tickets were a hot commodity.

In order to do the headlining tour, Bush turned down spots opening for Jimmy Page and Robert Plant, as well as Van Halen, Goodridge said. The only sign of any British brotherhood is a dead-on cover of Oasis's "Live Forever" with Goodridge on vocals.

"We thought it would be better to go out on our own and play clubs," said Goodridge who kicked back in a green chair in the Bums Room at St. Andrew's Hall. "The Zep-heads probably wouldn't like us very much."

"Sixteen Stone" has had wide appeal, however. "Everything Zen," with its irresistible churning guitar and "I don't believe that Elvis is dead" chant, has become a staple on album-oriented and alternative rock stations.

In the band's home country of England, it's another story and Goodridge is pretty frank about it.

"Nobody knows about us." "Sixteen Stone" is scheduled to be released at the end of the month in the United Kingdom. So far, there has been minimal coverage of the band in music magazines like "Melody Maker," "Express" and "Mojo." Other bands that have fared well in the United States like The Stone Roses, Oasis, Portishead and P.J. Harvey have filled the pages of the tabloids.

Goodridge and guitarist Nigel Pulsford said timing is the sole reason for the non-stop airplay of songs by those groups. British musicians aren't staging an invasion of the U.S. musical waters.

"It's a total coincidence that four English bands have managed to get an album out at the same time," Goodridge said.

"Why has it been successful here? Who knows? In England what we do is try to create songs and melodies," Goodridge said.

Onyx adds marriage, gallery to his life

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

Producing and playing keyboards for alt-pop rockers Charm Farm was a good experience for Tommy Onyx. The group played a substantial amount of respectable gigs and Onyx won a handful of Detroit Music Awards for his work.

Yet last year he found himself burned out, so he left the group and returned to touring with Detroit-based music heavyweights Inner City. A stop in the exotic Indonesian country of Bali, which houses a major Asian disco, changed his life. He met his future wife, Gina.

"She was a promoter at a club in Bali that Inner City was scheduled to perform in," he said. "She met us in the airport and took care of us while we were there. We were working those couple days, putting the shows together, so we were around each other a lot."

As the romance story lines typically go, the two fell in love and Gina (pronounced Gee-na) moved here. Driving out east to visit Onyx's brother, the two hit a major snowstorm and sought refuge in a Pennsylvania truck stop. That trip put them on the path of accomplishing a dream that both of them had — to open a gallery.

"When I was in Chicago, I always wanted to have

a gallery," said Gina, who learned English while attending school in the Illinois city before returning to Indonesia. "Something from my own country to make me feel comfortable."

"(Indonesian) art had a huge impact on me and I figured there has to be some way to express that (and) some of the culture back home," Onyx added.

The Onyxes, who married on Oct. 11, 1994, a year to the date that they met, opened Gili Bali Primitive, a gallery at 351 Hamilton in Birmingham, dedicated to Gina's homeland, made up of approximately 13,600 islands.

"What we try to do is represent, as best we can, the culture of the whole country," Onyx said.

The gallery has a variety of items, ranging from a Dutch- and Chinese-influenced, ranging from a tin ornament for scaring away evil spirits "because it looks so scary" and there's a whole dance ritual where a man will dress up as Barong, Onyx said.

"It's a bit different than what I've seen around here," Onyx said.

Each piece in the gallery has a bit of lore attached to it. For example, a knife, called a Keris, is specifically made for one person because it is believed that everyone has magnetism in their body, Gina said.

"Everything made out of metal has to be made especially for that person," she added.

A ghost mask, called bang, hangs in the window near the door to ward off evil spirits. It's used in ceremonies for scaring away evil spirits "because it looks so scary" and there's a whole dance ritual where a man will dress up as Barong, Onyx said.

It almost scared away one of their friends as they moved into the store. He opened up an armchair to see the heavy head. It didn't frighten an either, however, who talked to the couple about Indonesian superstitions. He's considering doing a novel based on those superstitions.

All the pieces come from grueling shopping trips to various locations in Indonesia, primarily Java and Bali. (It's a 36-hour flight and takes two weeks to recover from jet lag, the couple said.)

Music is still a preeminent part of Onyx's life. He and Gina postponed a planned trip to Bali so he



New endeavor: Former Charm Farm keyboardist Tommy Onyx and wife Gina have opened Gili Bali Primitive in Birmingham.

could wrap up a solo recording. A single "Feculent," that he did with singer Dana McCoy captured the attention of Billboard magazine which called it a "cross between Deep Forest and the Broad New Horizons."

"I'm hoping to do more work in the future now that I'm an independently contracted producer," Onyx said. "I'm not really worried. I'm happy with what I have now."