

LET GO! STREET SCENE

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MUSIC NOTES



CHRISTINA FUOCO

Toad calls in from the green

Toad the Wet Sprocket drummer Randy Guss called a few weeks ago "a little out of breath" from playing golf. He apologizes then puts the phone down. A few seconds later, he comes back and says, "Sorry, I just had a great shot." He's not calling from a pay phone in the club house. Guss is literally on the green with his other favorite toy — his cellular phone. "This is the coolest thing," Guss was practicing for the big golf show-down with Hootie and the Blowfish the next day. "They're really good golfers," he said. (Scores were unavailable at press time.) The sport has played a major role in the Toad the Wet Sprocket-Hootie and the Blowfish tour which hits the State Theatre in Detroit on Tuesday, April 23. Toad guitarist Todd Nichols met Hootie and the Blowfish at "Fairway to Heaven," a VIII-sponsored golf tournament in Florida.

On a more serious note about the tour, Toad the Wet Sprocket is keeping with its established history of social activism by inviting RAINN (the Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network founded by Tori Amos) to set up information tables at every concert.

"To us, those organizations have always been important. We know a lot of people who have been sexually assaulted or assaulted as children or as adults or both. (Having RAINN at the shows) is a way for people to hear about it and get help, too."

The organization, which can be reached at (800) 656-HOPE, links callers with their nearest local crisis center.

The Downriver-based rock band Tiles has signed a European distribution deal with Polygram/Polydor records. Plans are for the band to embark on a press tour to coincide with the overseas release of their self-titled debut record.

You can catch The Tragically Hip on "Saturday Night Live" on Saturday, March 25, before they play their show at the Royal Oak Music Theatre on Wednesday, April 5.

If you have a question or comment for Christina Fuoco, you can call her at (313) 963-2047, mailbox number 2130 on a Touch-Tone phone, or write her at The Observer & Eclectic Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. She can be reached through e-mail at CFuoco@aol.com.

Orange 9mm: Cross aims high

Unhappy with the lack of national attention Noc Barrage was getting, Matt Cross jumped at the chance to join NYC's Orange 9mm. The fruits of his labor paid off with this band when they signed to Eastwest/Elektra records.

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER



Having been a musician since he was in his early teens, Matt Cross had become a familiar face in the Detroit music scene.

He and his brother's industrial/metal band Noc Barrage lodged itself in the upper echelon of the city's talent.

Those who didn't know him from Noc Barrage, probably know him from his days of checking IDs at and kicking troublemakers out of St. Andrew's Hall and City Club.

Cross seemed pretty happy with what he established in the Motor City. But it all changed when his friend, Quiksand drummer Alan Caga, called. He told him vocalist Chris Traynor of Orange 9mm were "desperate for a drummer."

"I said, 'Well, have him call me or send me a tape.' At that point Noc Barrage wasn't doing much of anything," Cross said. "We'd been together for over four years and it was the typical Midwestern band story. You work your (butt) off and nothing ever comes to you."

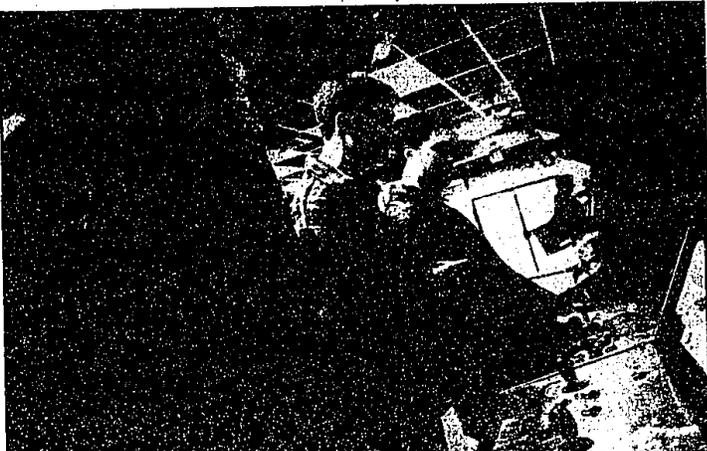
"I'd personally been playing in bands for almost 10 years and I said, 'enough is enough. This is just too much stress and I'm sick of doing this and not seeing any fruits of all my labor.'"

Five minutes after he hung up with Caga, Malik called and the two hit it off, but Cross made sure Malik knew what kind of musician he was dealing with: "I forwarded him, if I felt your band I'm going to live, breathe, eat, and die this band."

Malik's answer: "That's exactly the way I work."

Almost immediately, Cross drove to New York with his drums to audition. The weekend in the Big Apple changed his life.

"I quit three jobs, broke a lease on an apartment," said Cross, now 24. "I had to get rid of my car and all this stuff. I really pretty much severed ev-



Coming home: Former Noc Barrage drummer Matthew Cross (far right) joins Chaka Malik (from left), Davide Gentile and Chris Traynor in Orange 9mm which plays St. Andrew's Hall March 24.

everything that I was doing in Detroit to do this. It was pretty scary."

Admittedly a scary venture, but two months later it paid off. Orange 9mm, which had generated record company interest before Cross joined, was signed to Eastwest/Elektra records.

"It was really, really good timing," Cross said with a laugh.

Just after settling in New York Cross and the rest of Orange 9mm — Traynor, Malik and bassist Davide Gentile — moved to California for two months to record with much-heralded producer Dave Gerden (Jane's Addiction, Alice in Chains). Their debut "Driver Not Included" was released Feb. 28.

In the midst of a tour with fellow hard-core rockers Sick of It All, Cross makes his Detroit debut with Orange 9mm Friday, March 24, at St. Andrew's Hall. Those expecting to hear Noc Barrage-style music, will still hear Cross's thunderous, muscular drumming but with a much different style.

"In Noc Barrage, it was very tight,

precise and machine-like in style and feel; in Orange 9, (the music) relies on a groove and a vibe," he said. "It's just a much looser feel, much more rock kind of feel."

The freedom is felt outside the musical realm as well, said Cross, who returned to New York after the album was recorded.

"With Noc Barrage we would have to work around everybody's job, and everybody's girlfriends and wives to practice. In this case, basically we practice seven hours, seven days a week, which is nice," Cross said.

There was also that "no-holds-barred" situation during the recording of "Driver Not Included."

"It was great only in the sense everything we wanted we had at our disposal. When you record with Dave (Gerden), you're in a position to say, 'These are the drums I have (but) these drums sound a lot better, and then you have them. That was nice," he said.

The location was less than desirable. The drummer said it was rough

being uprooted from New York so soon after settling in.

"For me, moving from Detroit to New York and not really knowing anyone in New York, was really hard," he said. "The band was working so hard that I didn't have time to make new friends at all. Then a couple months later we move to Los Angeles for two months. I thought, 'Now I gotta come to this place!'"

Although he's comfortable in New York, he's looking forward to playing in front of a hometown audience.

"The only thing I'm really thinking about is seeing my family, and hopefully some of my friends that will come down there," he said. "But I have thought that that will be the night when a big stack of monitors will fall on my head with my mother, my aunt and all those people there."

Orange 9 mm plays St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit, Friday, March 24, with *Clu and Down By Law*. The all-ages show begins at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$8.50. For more information, call (313) 961-MELT.

Rustic life is inspirational for Jewel



Jewel: Performs at the Brazil Coffeehouse, Royal Oak.

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

The life of Alaskan singer Jewel would be inspirational to anyone.

The childhood of the blonde-haired, angel-faced Jewel resembles an almost Alaskan version of "Little House on the Prairie." Her family's log cabin on 800 acres in Hasvillie had no running water and no television. Her parents, originally from Switzerland, moved here during the war when the United States was giving away land for free.

"My dad was raised in the same kind of log cabin; it was very rustic," Jewel said. "There was no heat; we had a coal stove. We didn't really buy that much groceries."

As for entertainment, Jewel and the rest of her family had to rely on their imagination.

"Each of us was taught to write poetry; each of us was taught to sing," she said. "Whenever I was sad I would write. Whenever I was happy I would write. On holidays we would always make baskets for each other or we would weave things. It taught us to be creative."

The story doesn't end there. Her junior and senior years of high school, she moved to Michigan to attend Interlochen academy.

"I liked it a lot," Jewel said of Michigan. "It was cold. I was hating the cold. I was hoping that it would be a lot warmer than Alaska, but it was just as cold, I think. It taught me a lot about craftsmanship."

Not wanting to return to Alaska, she moved to California, where her mother was vacationing. She took up surfing and waitressing, but she and her mother barely made ends meet.

"I scraped food off of people's plates that they didn't finish; I eventually got fired," Jewel said. Unable to afford an apartment, she and her mother moved in to their respective cars.

"We thought we would do what we wanted in life," Jewel said. "It was a turning around point. I wasn't going to live the rest of my life doing things that I hated, so I started singing in a coffee shop. It was a really good time."

Jewel camped out in her Volkswagen van, living on a shoe-string budget and getting by on a diet of carrots and peanut butter. The rest of the time she surfed, wrote poetry, read, and hung out in various coffee shops.

everything I wanted."

But then, after a few shows, the mere 20-year-old Jewel was signed to Atlantic Records and released her 14-track album "Pieces of You" on Feb. 28, most of which was recorded live at The Innarchange Coffeehouse in San Diego, Calif.

Her angelic, incredibly wide-ranging crystalline voice is elegantly laced with a quivering, vintage country sound. At times she sounds like Tori Amos backed only by a minimal amount of string instruments. The poignancy in her lyrics add an element of surprise to the innocence in her voice.

"Morning Song" tells the story of a woman who begs her lover to call in sick to work and keep her company all day. Jewel sings of her belief in angels and the warmth they provide in "Angel Standing By." In the title track "Pieces of You," she's shockingly open about her views on prejudice. Jewel admits that sometimes — although not often — listeners are taken aback by her comments.

"I think it's what people think on their own without really talking about it too much. It's just shocking to hear people say it — especially a blonde who's pretty good looking," said Jewel, whose parents' Nestlé and A&W were popular folk singers in her hometown.

She brings her talent to Brazil Coffeehouse in Royal Oak every Thursday for three weeks beginning March 23. To her, doing a residency tour is much more effective than a large-scale tour.

"I just think as far as how much money you spend and how much audience you get, I think it you get more for your dollar," she said. "If there's 10 people there, or whatever, you win maybe five of them over, and the second trip there's 20 people there. I think it's a lot smarter than a big tour."

It is also helping her achieve her life-long goal: "All I dreamed is that I could eat everyday and do what I love. I wake up everyday gazing going, 'Hoe Hee, I still get to sing and eat and get paid for it.' (But the money from record company) is like a big scary loan. Who knows? Hopefully, the record will do well enough to cover that."

It should. "Pieces of You" is easily one of the best records, so far, of 1995.

Jewel performs free, all-ages shows at 9 p.m. on Friday, March 23, March 30 and April 6, at Brazil Coffeehouse, 305 S. Main St., Royal Oak. For more information, call (810) 399-7200.

SOUND Bites

The Plants

- Members:
- Kevin Ackerman: vocals/guitar
 - Chris Glynz: bass/vocal
 - Jim Predhomme: drum/vocals

Just the right mix of musical nurturing and the correct dosage of spotlights are all members of Plymouth-based The Plants are asking for in order to flourish. A simple request maybe, but the desire is hard to kill.

Recently, the trio released a three-track demo which is intended to line up gigs and pass on to industry gurus who just might root the trio in a recording contract. The band's guitar- and harmony-based modern rock material is full bodied with the right mix of vocals and energy which The Plants hope will attract attention.

Typically, The Plants perform a mix of covers and originals. The feedback has been positive, Predhomme said and is evident on the recent demo. The three-song tape contains the robust guitar-based "The Mother's Sons," an acoustic-spirited "This Morning" and the solid strutting "Paper Girl." All the material is written by the trio who confesses to jamming out songs once individuals have sparked inspiration.

"One of my best songs was written in a car," explained Chris Glynz of the song "Paper Girl." "I was driving back from Mackinac Island."

The Plants play *Lil'it*, 2930 Jacob, Hamtramck, Saturday, April 1, (313) 875-6500; and Friday, April 14, at *Griff's Grill*, 49 N. Saginaw, Pontiac, (810) 334-9292.

— Kyle Green

Have a listen

To hear music by Orange 9 mm (message 17), Jewel (message 18), Toad the Wet Sprocket (message 19), The Plants (message 20), Big Blue Couch (message 21), Sister Seed (message 22), and The Roots (message 23) you can call the Street Scene Music Line at (313) 963-2025 on a touch-tone phone. Fast-forward to the corresponding message by pressing 33. To repeat a message, press 4.