

## STREET SCENE

# Music '95: Critics pick year's best

## Best records of 1995

1. Various artists, "American Folk Blues Festival — '52-'55" five-CD box set, (Evidence)
2. Keb' Mo', "Keb' Mo'", (Okeh/Epic)
3. Mimi Harris and the Snakes, "Paradise," (Snake Den)
4. Jim Lauderdale, "Pretty Close To The Truth," (Atlantic)
5. Brooks Williams, "Knife's Edge," (Green Linnet)
6. Otis Rush, "So Many Roads," (Delmark)
7. The Hillmen, "The Hillmen," (Sugar Hill)
8. Peter, Paul and Mary, "Lifelines," (Warner Bros.)
9. Molly and The Heymakers, "Big Things," (Mouthpiece)
10. Forbidden Pigs, "The Other White Meat," (Triple X)

—Mark E. Gailo



Ginger: They make the grade with their album "Far Out."

## Top 10 albums of 1995 in no particular order.

1. Lisa Loeb and Nine Stories, "Tails" (Geffen)
2. Del Amitri, "Twisted" (A&M)
3. Clutch, "Clutch" (EastWest)
4. Charm Farm, "Pervert" (PRA)
5. Blur, "The Great Escape" (Virgin)
6. Catherine Wheel, "Happy Days," (Mercury)
7. Wilco, "A.M." (Warner Bros.)
8. Ginger, "Far Out" (Nettwerk)
9. Speedball, "Do Unto Others... Then Split" (Energy)
10. Jonatha Brooke and The Story, "Plumb" (Blue Thumb)

—Christina Fuoco

## Top 10 records

1. Daddy Stitch, "The Douglas Chapter," (Skillet)
2. Rolling Stones, "Stripped," (Virgin)
3. Pretenders, "Lose of View," (Sire)
4. Morrissey, "Southpaw Grammar," (Reprise)
5. AC/DC, the single "Hard As A Rock" from the album "Ballbreaker," (Eastwest)
6. Edwyn Collins, the single "A Girl Like You" from the album "Gorgeous George," (Bar None)
7. Grant Lee Buffalo, the single "In My Room" from the "Friends" soundtrack, (Reprise)
8. Specula, "Erupt," (Scat Records)
9. Matthew Sweet, "100 Percent Fun," (Zoo)
10. Various artists, "Rock Baby Rock It: Sun Rockabilly, Vol. 2," (Sun)

—Todd Wicks



Boy George

## Best shows:

1. Blur, St. Andrew's Hall in Detroit, Monday, Oct. 2.
2. Soul Coughing, The Shelter below St. Andrew's Hall, Friday, June 9.
3. Orange 9mm, St. Andrew's Hall, Friday, March 24.
4. Wilco, 7th House in Pontiac, Thursday, June 15.
5. Afghan Whigs, St. Andrew's Hall, Sunday, June 25.
6. Mike Watt/Foo Fighters/Hovercraft, Friday, May 5, St. Andrew's Hall.
7. Henry Rollins, spoken word performance, Majestic in Detroit, Saturday, Sept. 22.
8. Boy George, State Theatre in Detroit, Saturday, Nov. 25.
9. Tom Petty, Pina Knob Music Theatre in Clarkston, Friday, Sept. 1.
10. Clutch, Phoenix Plaza Amphitheatre in Pontiac, Thursday, June 22.

—Christina Fuoco

# Band of the Year

## Speedball puts the pedal to the metal

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO  
STAFF WRITER

Local rock act Speedball has a lot in common with guitarist/vocalist Chuck Burns's love of drag racing and motorcycles.

On its debut album "Do Unto Others, Then Split," Speedball puts the pedal to the metal, speeding through its 10 songs with its relentlessly addictive guitar riffs and hook-laden lyrics until it crashes head first into the end of the CD.

The first single, "Hog," is a hard-rocking testament to motorcycle riding: "Live fast, die young. Get on your hog and ride," Burns sings rolling his "G" of "Slumber" is another highlight of the album with its Clutch-like monotone vocals that build tension until they explode into the chorus "refuse to feel the pain. Some things just never change. Refuse to play the game."

That's exactly what Speedball is doing — refusing to play the music industry game of tooting out a few gimmicks and seeing if the audience catches on. Speedball lets the music and its on-stage rush of attitude do the talking.

The band is one of the future voices of the Detroit rock scene and as a result is The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers' 1995 Band of the Year.

Beginning Jan. 5, the nation will have a prime opportunity to catch on to Speedball's style of Motor City Rock 'n' Roll when it goes out on tour opening for Motocore. Canadians got a sneak peek of the tour when they began Tuesday, Dec. 26, in Toronto.

"Do Unto Others, Then Split" (arguably the best album title of the year) was released nationally on New York's Energy Records in late June and a tour followed but this run through the country places them in the rock race.

It's been three long years of hard work for Speedball which besides former Westland and Garden City resident Burns includes drummer Mike Alonso, guitarist Bill Kozy, and bassist/backing vocalist Jeff King.

The band was formed in Los Angeles, although three quarters of the band is originally from suburban Detroit. (King was a military brat who lived throughout the United States.)



Speeding along: Detroit rockers Speedball — from left, drummer Mike Alonso, bassist/backing vocalist Jeff King, guitarist Bill Kozy, and vocalist/guitarist Chuck Burns — are The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers 1995 Band of the Year.

Alonso moved west first in 1988 with his band Katmandu, which recorded an album for Epic Records. Burns and Kozy, who are long-time friends of Alonso, moved the following year.

The three remained friends in L.A. and when Katmandu fell apart the three, along with Alonso's roommate King, got together and jammed. At the time, Burns was playing in a side project of Tracy Guns of L.A. Guns called Killing Machine, and another band called Mother.

As the band practiced, Alonso said, it was apparent that Speedball was their calling.

"Every song we wrote just got cooler and cooler. (We thought) 'Let's do it,'" Alonso explained last summer.

Eventually, Burns put the pedal to the metal, spun his tires and left Killing Machine, which released an al-

bum on Polygram Records. The fledgling band gigged around the L.A. club circuit until the pressures of being under the record industry microscope got to them.

"This was the first band I ever played guitar and sang in," said Burns, a former drummer. "And here we are and I'm playing in Hollywood. We immediately started getting interest (from record labels). I didn't feel that I was up to par with the rest of the band. I needed time to grow as a singer/guitar player. It was easier to come back here and do it because there's less pressure here."

Returning to Detroit has allowed the band to "discover our niche (and discover) exactly which direction we wanted to go in. We were fighting with it a little bit. Now we're focused on exactly what we want to sound like."

"Do Unto Others, Then Split" was recorded at Sabella Studios in Roslyn, N.Y., with producer/mixer Steve Thompson at the helm. His credits include Guns N' Roses, Metallica, Soundgarden, Madonna, Yoko Ono, Blues Traveler, and Public Enemy.

King said he's not sure when the band will start working on its new album.

"It depends on when the record company wants to do it. We have the material though."

By then, Motor City rock 'n' roll should be on the map once again.

Speedball, Hoarse, Big Block and Plain play St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit, on Sunday, Dec. 31. Doors open at 8 p.m. for the 18 and older show. For more information, call (313) 961-MELT or (810) 646-6666.

## Sponge gives Big Block a helping hand

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO  
STAFF WRITER

A common complaint amongst Detroit bands is that there's no camaraderie between acts in the city.

Big Block, the 1994 Observer & Eccentric Newspapers' Band of the Year, got a phone call this summer that showed that the opposite was actually true.

"Out of the blue Vinnie called us from Europe and said he was going to be the States in a couple weeks. He said get your (stuff) together and come on the road with us," singer/guitarist Nick Lucassian said of the one-named lead singer for the Detroit band Sponge.

"We dropped everything. It was weird. It was a God-send, you know. It was great to tour and everything but not that much came about from it. (But) We got a chance to experience touring as far as like connections with people that could possibly put us on the road to getting a record deal."

The band did 13 shows in 16 days with Sponge and Warner Bros. recording act Poster Children travelling from Ohio to California. Inexperienced with playing venues the size of college basketball arenas, Lucassian said Sponge took care of them.

"They totally hooked us up with everything that we needed. They made sure that everything was straight so we didn't have to worry about too much," he said.

Playing those sized venues was a far cry from the gigs they do here.

"It was a big change from just playing around here. You know, going out on the weekends and doing shows. We just kept our heads together and really focused on the music."

New music will be Big Block's focus for 1996. As soon as the White Room Studio in Detroit frees up from its commitment to Detroit blues artist Robert Bradley, the engine will step in to record its follow-up to "Guardrail" (Rustbelt).

The new album will carry on Big Block's trademark hook-laden, supercharged, melodic rock.



Big sound: Big Block — from left, singer/guitarist Nick Lucassian, guitarist/singer Kenny Tudrick, drummer Scott MacDonald, and bassist Joe Proper — spent two weeks of the summer touring with Sponge and the Poster Children.

"There's really no gimmick with us, and not that a lot of bands do. They all sort of have that same rough sort of rock grungy edge to it," Lucassian said.

"We concentrate on our melodies. Most bands' intensity comes from super loud amps and screaming, but you can be calm about it and still have a lot of intensity."

Just as "Guardrail" reflected the foursome's lives at the time, the new

material documents the last two years.

"A lot of it has to do with the experiences on that (Sponge) tour," Lucassian said. "It's about moving out and going forward. The engine (referred to in the name) represents motivation — getting in your car and pulling it out of park and just splitting or getting stuff done."

That explains the motivation behind Big Block.

■ "Most bands' intensity comes from super loud amps and screaming, but you can be calm about it and still have a lot of intensity."

Nick Lucassian  
Big Block