

STREET SCENE

Aggressive Gravity Kills shows a mellow side



CHRISTINA FUOCO

with the exception of over-zealous fans knocking on the bus's windows.

Singer Jeff Scheel, wearing his "unlucky boots," and mild-mannered guitarist Matt Dudenhoeffer sit on a couch with their attention focused on the interview. Douglas Firley, the band's "electro-guru," hides in the back of the bus with his furry Russian-style hat planted firmly on his head. And bassist/drummer Kurt Kerns eagerly wants to be asked more questions.

It's not what you'd expect from an abrasive, throbbing guitar-driven band. Gravity Kills' shows get so fierce and aggressive that Dudenhoeffer accidentally broke two ribs by slamming his guitar into his chest during the band's tour with the Sex Pistols.

"As it turned out we really needed that break," the platinum-haired Scheel said with a laugh. "He got to take his break bed-ridden for three weeks. We made him go (to his parents' house). We were like, 'You're going to your mother's house because we knew that Janice would take care of your every need.'"

Dudenhoeffer is fully healed now and returns to town with his band Thursday, Dec. 5, to play radio station WRIF's "The Nightmare Before Christmas" concert with Deep Purple, Danzig, The Hazies, The Hunger, Helmet and Corrosion of Conformity on two stages at The Palace of Auburn Hills.

Although the concert seems like an odd pairing of bands, Scheel said that his band fits right in.

"We are a hard rock band with techno and industrial influences opposed to the other way around. (But) we don't see ourselves like hanging out with Glenn Danzig or having a kinsip with him," he said.

Looking from the outside in, it seems like Gravity Kills burst on the alternative music scene with the hard-driving yet pop-friendly song "Guilty," which appeared on

the soundtrack to the movies "Seven" and "Escape From L.A." Scheel said that it wasn't that simple.

"Nobody takes into account the 10 years before that. It's overnight for Gravity Kills but certainly not individually. Everybody has been doing this individually for years. People think that 'Guilty' is the first song we ever wrote," Scheel said. "Songwriting is like sculpting or painting. You don't pick up a brush and the first time and once you put it to canvas you create something that other people are going to think (is wonderful). We're not prodigies. It took years to develop songwriting skills."

The four members of Gravity Kills all went to the same high school. Kerns, Dudenhoeffer and Firley have been writing and performing around Missouri in various guitar bands since the mid-1980s. Shortly after moving to St. Louis, the three decided to record a song for radio station KPNT's compilation album starting only four days before submissions were due.

Two days into writing what would become "Guilty," the former vocalist backed out. After being turned down by a series of vocalists the threesome called upon Scheel, Kerns' cousin and a long-time friend to the other members.

He cut the vocals in six hours, mixed it on the final day, and turned the song into the station's single before the deadline. The pulsating song became a radio hit and shot up the station's chart to No. 1.

"We had a radio hit and all of a sudden all the major labels were flying in," Kerns said.

The band signed withTVT records, the former home to Nine Inch Nails, and released its self-titled debut album March 5. "Gravity Kills" sold 150,000 copies within the first two months of release. Scheel admits that he'd like to see Gravity Kills do a little better.

"We're not there yet. The only disappointment — and this sounds very spoiled but we just have really high expectations for ourselves and we're really driven for us is that the record isn't gold (selling 250,000 copies) yet. We fully expect that to happen." Tickets for "The Nightmare Before Christmas" are \$10-\$15. For more information, call (810) 377-0100.

Steve Vai and his band escaped injury when the group's tour bus caught fire on Monday, Nov. 25, en route to a headlining show in Oklahoma City. The band and crew were asleep in mid-afternoon when a generator in the vehicle caught fire. Vai was awakened by the fire, and

yelled to the driver to pull over. The blaze spread quickly destroying two portable DAT machines before the fire cameras, two lap-top computers, a bass guitar, and everyone's passports, wallets, clothes, and shoes. Vai lost two Ibanez "Jem" guitars, the new orchestral scores he'd been worked on, and a hand-painted leather jacket.

"Imagine all of us, standing in a field in the middle of nowhere, with no shoes or socks on, watching everything burn," Vai said. As the fire trucks put out the blaze, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation sent a school bus to pick up the band and crew and take them to the nearest motel in the town of Sayre.

Vai and his band performs Wednesday, Dec. 11, at St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, in Detroit. Tickets are \$15 in advance for the all-ages show. Doors open at 8 p.m. For more information, call (313) 961-MELT.

Up and coming supergroup Handsome comes to town at 8 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 5, to open for Magic Dirt and Yatsura in The Shelter below St. Andrew's Hall, 431 E. Congress, Detroit. Expect to hear more from the group after its self-titled debut is released in February on Epic Records. Handsome features guitarist/former Helmet member

Peter Mengede, bassist Eddie Nappi, drummer/former Murphy's Law and Cro-Magnon member Pete Hines, guitarist/Dex Quiksand member Tom Capone, and vocalist Jeremy Chatelein. Tickets are \$6 in advance for the all-ages show. For more information, call (313) 961-MELT.

If you have a question or comment for Christina Fuoco, you can write to her in care of The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia, or you can leave her a message at (313) 953-2047, mailbox No. 2130, or via e-mail at CFuoco@aol.com.

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Returning to town: Gravity Kills — from left, guitarist Matt Dudenhoeffer, "electro-guru" Douglas Firley, singer Jeff Scheel, and bassist/drummer Kurt Kerns — play The Palace of Auburn Hills Thursday, Dec. 5, as part of the "Nightmare Before Christmas" concert that also features Helmet, Corrosion of Conformity, Danzig, Deep Purple, The Hazies and The Hunger.

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SCREEN SCENE

A sampling of what's playing at alternative movie theaters across metro Detroit as reviewed by John Monaghan.

Birmingham Theatre 211 S. Woodward, Birmingham. Call (810) 644-FILM for information. (\$6.50; \$4.25 matinees and seniors)

• "The English Patient" (USA - 1996). Four people meet in a ruined monastery near the end of World War II in this adaptation of the Booker Prize-winning novel by Michael Ondaatje. Ralph Fiennes, Juliette Binoche, and Willem Dafoe star.

• "The Funeral" (USA - 1996). A crime drama set in 1935 about three Italian-American brothers who sacrifice love and family loyalty for fast money and violence. Directed by "The Bad Lieutenant's" Abel Ferrara and starring Christopher Walken and Chris Penn.

Detroit Film Theatre 5200 Woodward, Detroit. Call (313) 832-2730 for information. (\$5.50; \$4.50 students/seniors)

• "Taxi Driver" (USA - 1976). Dec. 6 - 8 (call for showtimes). The 20th anniversary rerelease of Martin Scorsese's masterpiece must be seen on the big screen. Robert DeNiro plays Travis Bickle, the taxi driver whose desire to "clean the scum off the street" results in vigilante violence.

• "Who Killed Teddy Bear?" (USA - 1965). 7 p.m. Dec. 9. A fascinating DFT find from

the mid-'60s starring Sal Mineo as a demented busboy who makes phone calls to his girlfriend Juliet Prowse. The gritty scenes of the porn theaters and adult book stores of New York's Times Square precedes "Taxi Driver" by a decade.

Magic Bag Theatre 22920 Woodward, Ferndale. Call (810) 544-3030 for information. (\$2)

• "National Lampoon's Vacation" (USA - 1983). 9:30 p.m. Dec. 11. Chevy Chase and family head out on their first family expedition in this hit-and-miss comedy from the folks who brought you

• "Animal House" Imogene Coca has perhaps her best on-screen moments as the hapless Aunt Edna.

Main Art Theatre 118 N. Main Street at 11 Mile, Royal Oak. Films play through at least Thursday, unless noted otherwise. Call (810) 542-0180 for information and showtimes. (\$8.50; \$4 students, seniors and matinee; \$3 twilight) • "Big Night" (USA - 1996). A pair of brothers try to run an authentic Italian restaurant in the 1950s but discover that most people want simple spaghetti and meatballs. An independent comedy starring and co-directed by Stanley Tucci.

• "Vertigo" (USA - 1956). Many call this Hitchcock's most personal film because its main character (Jimmy Stewart) tries to

turn his girlfriend into the image of a lost love. Hitch did the same thing after Grace Kelly left movies to become a princess, sending the old director scrambling for the likes of other icy blondes, here Kim Novak. The ambitious 40th anniversary restoration sports new color and a remixed soundtrack.

• "The English Patient" (USA - 1996). See Birmingham Theatre listing above.

Maple Theatre 4135 W. Maple, Bloomfield. All titles play through at least next

Thursday, unless noted otherwise. Call (810) 955-9090 for information. (\$6; \$2.95 twilight) • "Big Night" (USA - 1996). See Birmingham Theatre listing above.

• "The English Patient" (USA - 1006). See Birmingham Theatre listing above.

Redford Theatre 13670 Lahser (at Grand River), Detroit. Call (313) 537-2660 for information. (\$2.50)

• "Annie" (USA - 1982). 8 p.m. Dec. 6; 2, 8 p.m. Dec. 7 (organ overture begins a half hour before showtime). The film version of the hit Broadway musical about the cartoon moppet and her adventures during the Depression. Albert Finney co-stars.

and the red sash a symbol of the blood she shed in her martyrdom.

At 8 p.m. Dec. 13, Anden, a Seaholm High School senior, will enter a darkened room donning the white gown, red sash and crown. She will bear gifts of food to her mother, as has become the nationwide tradition. A procession of white-clad attendants will follow her, the girls wearing glitter in their hair carry lighted candles and the boys wearing tall cone-shaped paper hats with golden stars on them carry lighted stars. They will all sing the

song of Saint Lucia, kicking off an evening of dinner and dancing to Panchito and orchestra.

Tickets for the annual event, held by The Jenny Lind Club of Detroit, are \$55 per person. Black tie is optional. Cocktails will be served beginning at 7 p.m.

For reservations, call Barbro Lundberg, president of The Jenny Lind Club, (810) 335-4039.

Erika Anden is the daughter of Margareta and Sven Anden, who have lived in Birmingham for 25 years.

Birmingham teen will light up room as Lucia

Erika Anden of Birmingham will portray Lucia at the annual Lucia Festival, Friday, Dec. 13 at the Fairlane Club in Dearborn.

Legend describes Lucia as a beautiful young Italian girl, who, as she was about to be married, gave her dowry to the poor and confessed to having become a Christian. She carried the food to the Christians hiding in the catacombs, wearing a candle on her head to help her find her way in the dark. Finally, she was captured, accused of witchcraft, brought to trial as a Christian and sentenced by the authorities

to be burned. However, the wood would not catch fire... so Lucia was killed by a sword on Dec. 13, 304 A.D., the very day the Swedes believed light returned to their land.

Traveling Norsemen brought tales of her loveliness and saintliness home with them, and the Legend of Saint Lucia was introduced into Sweden's early Christmas Festivals by having her appear as "Queen of Light" on Dec. 13. The single candle she had worn became a crown of seven, the pure white gown would be evidence of her purity

and the red sash a symbol of the blood she shed in her martyrdom.

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