

## STREET SCENE

## The Bigger Lovers breed warm, fuzzy pop sounds



STEPHANIE A. CASOLA

It's no real secret — I'm a cat person. Dogs? Dogs are fine. But I prefer to share my space with a 20-pound, 12-year-old black-and-white feline named Nikki. She's awfully cuddly (most of the time) and has this amazing ability to sit almost upright on a couch. I've never seen anything quite like it.

What on Earth does this have to do with music? Stay with me.

You can imagine my surprise while shuffling through CDs in my car one day when I uncovered a photograph of Miles. It's an oversized cat belonging to Bret Tobias, singer of Philadelphia's best kept pop secret, The Bigger Lovers. He appears on the inside cover of the band's debut, *How I Learned to Stop Worrying*, sitting upright on a couch. Being the largest of Tobias' pets, Miles is often referred to as "the bigger lover." Are you catching on yet?

"People seem to like the cat," admitted drummer Patrick Berkery. "He has people now." It all started with a feline.

But it only takes one good listen to *How I Learned to Stop Worrying*, to get you hooked. The instant those Beach Boys harmonies and The Who-style guitar riffs hit your ear drums you won't be able to resist it. I couldn't.

So I wasn't about to pass up a talk with the band's newest member, Berkery, who was busy in Philadelphia, anticipating a first visit to the Motor City.

A music fan since age 4, he remembers when his relatives would buy him toy drums and guitars. By Christmastime, age 8, little Patrick unwrapped his first real drum kit and a musician emerged. "I really wasn't so good at baseball," is his only explanation.

His aunt exposed him to the sweet sounds of The Beatles. His sister loved Prince and The Police. Music was unavoidable. "I was coming of age when MTV just started to happen."

When he's not playing music, Berkery is writing about other people who play music — as a journalist frequently gracing the pages of *Magnet* and *Philadelphia Weekly*. "It's the only other thing I can do."

## I'm with the band

When fellow Bigger Lovers Bret Tobias, Scott Jefferson and Ed Hogarty roped Berkery in to play drums, around the fall of 1999, it looked as though they were on a road to rock stardom. Just about to make a first record, The Bigger Lovers got picked up by a major label. "When I came to be in the band we had a done deal with Interscope," said Berkery. "When the merger went down with Universal, we got the heave-ho."

But the band, and Berkery, stuck it out. "They are probably the best songwriters I've ever worked with," he says of Tobias and Jefferson. "It was always important to me to be able to pull it off live."

It took some time to work out the kinks on stage, but the band discovered they had more to worry about. *How I Learned to Stop Worrying* almost never saw the light of day.

The Bigger Lovers recorded it nearly two years ago for Mood Records (home to bands like Whiskeytown). Completed with producer Daniel Presley (*The Breeders*, *Imperial Teen*) by February 2000, the record had an initial release date of March 2000. March turned to April and April to August. The label then lost its distribution, but still owned the rights to this record.

The band was forced to buy back the own record and shopped it around until they found a label willing and able to release it. Enter Black Dog Records (Marah, Continental Drifters), a small outfit based in Mississippi.

In March 2001 the long wait was over. "It was just a matter of being patient," said Berkery.

Radio airplay in Philadelphia has helped bolster a following. Favorable write-ups in newspapers and magazines were another bonus. But The Bigger Lovers music speaks for itself. Songs like the addictive clap-along quality of *I'm Here*, the candy-coated chorus found on *Therese*, and Beatlesque build of *Casual Friday* are met by a pleasantly unexpected twang of a lap steel in the record's farewell, *Out of Sight*. It's a pop delight delivered by able, eager musicians.

## Next on the set list...

The band's new material could be described as more "Kinks-ish." "It's a lot more immediate-sounding," said Berkery. "It won't be as over-the-top produced."

"He's hoping this time around a bigger label will latch onto The Bigger Lovers."

"We don't have any delusions of grandeur that we're going to become The Rolling Stones," he added. They've come this far alone. No booking agent. No manager.

And The Bigger Lovers survived it all without a hint of scandal fit for VH-1's *Behind the Music*.

"I'm past the point where I'm in my late 20s and I think 'I gotta be a rock star,'" he said. "We can do this. If we have to have day jobs, so be it. People seem to really like what we do and we like what we do."

Isn't that all that matters? Don't miss The Bigger Lovers open for The Muggs, along with

## HEAR THIS

What The Bigger Lovers' Patrick Berkery, is listening to...

- The New Pornographers
- The Waxwings
- The Soft Boys

local upstarts, The Nice Device, 10 p.m. Friday, July 20, Gold Dollar, Detroit. Call (313) 833-6873.

Stephanie Angelyn Casola won't deny her penchant for pop music. She writes for the *Observer & Eccentric* Newspapers. To send cat toys or talk shop, call (734) 953-2130 or by e-mail at scasola@e.homecomm.net.

**HOUSEHOLD HINTS • HOUSEHOLD HINTS • HOUSEHOLD HINTS**

**HOUSEHOLD PROBLEMS?**

Tune-in Bob Allison's

*Ask Your Neighbor*

(WUNZ 690 AM • Mon.-Fri. 9 am-11 am)

- How to Cook It
- How to Find It
- Where to Do It

www.askyourneighbor.com

**HOUSEHOLD HINTS • HOUSEHOLD HINTS • HOUSEHOLD HINTS**

**"TWO BIG THUMBS UP!"**

EGERT & ROEPER AND THE MOVIES

"It has landmark written all over it."

Jay Cerr, BOSTON GLOBE

COLUMBIA PICTURES AND SQUARE PICTURES PRESENT

**FINAL FANTASY**

THE SPIRITS WITHIN

www.finalfantasy.com

See the "SPIDER-MAN" TEASER TRAILER WITH "FINAL FANTASY: THE SPIRITS WITHIN"

**"THE SCORE" IS A TWISTING CAPER WITH A SWITCH THAT WILL BLOW YOU AWAY.**

WATCHING BRANDO, NORTON AND DE NIRO DO THEIR THING IS A TOTAL DELIGHT.

Larry King USA TODAY

"AN INDIGENOUS SUSPENSE CAPER. FRANK OZ SCORES BIG TIME. EDWARD NORTON IS ABSOLUTELY SENSATIONAL. DE NIRO IS AT HIS SCRUPULOUS BEST. AND IT'S A PLEASURE TO WATCH BRANDO. A DISTINCTIVE FILM VIVID, METICULOUS, CUNNING WHEN YOU SEE 'THE SCORE,' YOU'LL KNOW IT'S A WINNER."

Gene Shalit, TODAY

"ONE OF THE YEAR'S BEST. The Score is an opus with heart-pounding suspense. Edward Norton's performance is phenomenal. Ruth Mermann, WHAT'S THE 411? NETWORK

"ELECTRIFYING FROM THE FIRST FRAME TO THE LAST. One of the most amazing casts ever assembled... Delivers the hottest heist film in years!"

Bill Bingham, WESTWOOD ONE RADIO NETWORKS

"FINALLY! A GROWN-UP CLASSY FILM FOR THE SUMMER. Director Frank Oz delivers a finely crafted film... from the acting to the cinematography."

Steven Odell, WUP TV

**THE SCORE**

www.thescoremovie.com

**NOW SHOWING**

AMC LAUREL PARK	AMC LIVONIA 20	AMC FORUM 30
MJR SOUTHGATE 20	SHOWCASE ATTYN	SHOWCASE DEARBORN
SHOWCASE PONTIAC 1-3	SHOWCASE LIVONIA	SHOWCASE WESTLAND
STAR FAIRLANE	STAR GRATIOT AT 15 MILE	STAR GREAT LAKES CROSSING
STAR JOHN R AT 14 MILE	STAR LINCOLN PARK 8	STAR ROCHESTER HILLS
STAR SOUTHFIELD	STAR TAYLOR	UA COMMERCIAL STADIUM
WESTVIEW WEST RIVER	FORD WYOMING D.I.	NO PARKING OR COUPONS ACCEPTED

**"Madame X is a MASTERPIECE"**

Richard Marsh, *Deborah Price and Guide*

**"Madame X SIZZLED"**

Phyllis Morris Gashy, *Deborah Price Herald*

Villy Cat Productions Presents

**MADAME X**

A Musical Drama by Paul Bruce

Don't miss the exclusive pre-Chicago engagement of this award-winning musical drama.

Three weeks only!

July 19-August 5

Mendelssohn Theatre, Ann Arbor

Box Office (734) 763-8587 TicketMaster (248) 645-6666

www.SeeMadameX.com ticketmaster.com

**CRITICS ARE LAPPING IT UP!**

**"TWO THUMBS UP!"**

EGERT & ROEPER AND THE MOVIES

**"OUTRAGEOUSLY FUNNY"**

LARRY KING, USA TODAY

**"EDGY ENOUGH TO AMUSE AUDIENCES OF ALL AGES"**

THANKS, TIME

**"EXUBERANT FUN!"**

YOU MAY NEVER LOOK AT YOUR PET THE SAME WAY AGAIN!

**"THE SUMMER'S BEST FAMILY FILM"**

THEATRE MAGAZINE

**Cats & Dogs**

THINGS ARE GONNA GET HAIRY

PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED

Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13

www.catsanddogs.cad

**AMC FORUM 30**

AMC LIVONIA 20	AMC WONDERLAND	BEACON EAST
BIRMINGHAM 8	MJR SOUTHGATE 20	NOVI TOWN CTR. 8
SHOWCASE ALUMINUM HILL	SHOWCASE DEARBORN	SHOWCASE PONTIAC 1-3
SHOWCASE STERLING HTS.	SHOWCASE WESTLAND	STAR FAIRLANE 21
STAR GRATIOT	STAR GREAT LAKES CROSSING	STAR JOHN R
STAR LINCOLN PARK	STAR ROCHESTER	STAR SOUTHFIELD
STAR TAYLOR	UA COMMERCIAL STADIUM	UA WEST RIVER

JULIA ROBERTS BILLY CRISTAL CATHERINE ZETA-JONES JOHN CUSACK

**America's Sweethearts**

Revolution Studios Presents A Face Production A Revolution Studios Production Starring JULIA ROBERTS BILLY CRISTAL CATHERINE ZETA-JONES JOHN CUSACK "AMERICA'S SWEETHEARTS" ANNA KATZ STANLEY TUCKER CHRISTOPHER MULLER STEVE COHEN "AMERICA'S SWEETHEARTS" ANNA KATZ STEVE COHEN "AMERICA'S SWEETHEARTS" ANNA KATZ STEVE COHEN

PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED

Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13

sony.com/AmericasSweethearts

**STARTS FRIDAY, JULY 20**

Revolution Studios Presents A Face Production A Revolution Studios Production Starring JULIA ROBERTS BILLY CRISTAL CATHERINE ZETA-JONES JOHN CUSACK "AMERICA'S SWEETHEARTS" ANNA KATZ STANLEY TUCKER CHRISTOPHER MULLER STEVE COHEN "AMERICA'S SWEETHEARTS" ANNA KATZ STEVE COHEN "AMERICA'S SWEETHEARTS" ANNA KATZ STEVE COHEN

PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED

Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13

sony.com/AmericasSweethearts

**STARTS FRIDAY, JULY 20**

**"SCARY MOVIE 2 IS MORE OUTRAGEOUSLY FUNNY THAN THE FIRST ONE!"**

Marshall Fine, GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

IT'S INSANE! THE SCARIEST MOVIE EVER! THE SCARIEST MOVIE EVER! THE SCARIEST MOVIE EVER!

THE SCARIEST MOVIE EVER! THE SCARIEST MOVIE EVER! THE SCARIEST MOVIE EVER!

**SCARY MOVIE 2**

PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED

Some Material May Be Inappropriate for Children Under 13

www.scarymovie.com

**NOW SHOWING**

AMC LIVONIA 20	AMC WONDERLAND	AMC FORUM 30
BIRMINGHAM 8	NOVI TOWN CTR. 8	NOVI TOWN CTR. 8
SHOWCASE ALUMINUM HILL	SHOWCASE DEARBORN	SHOWCASE PONTIAC 1-3
SHOWCASE STERLING HTS.	SHOWCASE WESTLAND	STAR FAIRLANE 21
STAR GRATIOT	STAR GREAT LAKES CROSSING	STAR JOHN R
STAR LINCOLN PARK	STAR ROCHESTER	STAR SOUTHFIELD
STAR TAYLOR	UA COMMERCIAL STADIUM	UA WEST RIVER
WESTVIEW WEST RIVER	FORD WYOMING D.I.	NO PARKING OR COUPONS ACCEPTED