

Arts & Entertainment

Band sings of reality, follows dream

By Deb Pederson
Senior Reporter

We were young, and time stood still/ in our hearts/ Never showed us/ the fearful years, the flowing tears, the pain of hearts/ that held us to our dreams/ We lived inside of them/ We hide in them.
"Face the Changes" by Cockey Monroe

Local Band

It was a cool, starlit night. The battered maroon Monza zipped north of Lincoln on Highway 34. It turned off onto a gravel road near a factory and steered through the back roads to an old white house.

The driver parked in the back and walked to a door that led into the ground.

The door opened into a hallway that led to a heavily insulated recording studio.

Synthesizer and keyboard player Ken Nelson crossed the studio and went into the control room where the other three members of Cockey Monroe, a local rock band, and the sound technician were "mixing down" the song "Face the Changes."

The five friends cracked a few jokes and bantered a bit, but mostly they listened to the tape — listened for the pitch of the synthesizer and the tone of the congas, scrutinizing each note in the song like a painter putting the finishing touches on a canvas.

Cockey Monroe has spent many nights like this in the studio, writing and recording songs and then sending them off to New York in pursuit of a dream — a dream to make it to the big time. But like lyrics in "Face the Changes," reality puts a few twists in the road to New York City.

"Face the Changes" is about people who have dreams that are blocked by reality, said lead singer and guitarist Danny Shonard. But the people try to regain their dreams when they can, Shonard said.

Reclining at their favorite table in their usual bar haunt a few days later, Nelson and Shonard explained the realities of playing original rock music in the Midwest.

One reality: continuous lack of money. The other reality is trying to have the music accepted, they said.

"I guess the hardest thing is relating the original music," Shonard said. "Especially in the Midwest. People aren't geared for it and they really don't understand what we're doing, so it's really kind of tough to relate to the crowd that way."

"But we've been pretty successful, too."

Cockey Monroe has played at Chesterfield's, The Drumstick and Bill's Saloon and in Omaha at The Lift Ticket and Howard Street. They have played in some New York bars, too, Nelson said.

Their arrangements are influenced by underground groups, including Roxy Music, Ultravox and David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust character, he said. Their music uses synthesizer and exotic percussion that's easy to dance to.

Cockey Monroe's music fits in one of two rock music trends, Nelson said.

Shonard said that one trend goes back to rock's roots.

"Root music is fun to play," but it's a letdown for the public because it has been done already, he said.

The other trend goes one step past roots music, he said. Peter Gabriel fits in this category, he said.

Nelson said Cockey Monroe's lyrics philosophize different aspects of life rather than dwelling on the usual man/woman relationships, Nelson said.

"That stuff's been said a thousand times," Nelson said. "It gets boring. And there is a lot more to sing about in life, like reality, like 'The Visitor' and 'Sha La La.' That stuff actually exists."

"The Visitor" is about a lonely girl and a guy who rapes her, Shonard said. After the girl fights the attacker off, she finds that she wants him back because she is so lonely.

Shonard said some of his friends wondered why he wrote a song like that.

"I wrote about it simply because it does exist," Shonard said. "There are lonely people out there who would take a situation like that and it would turn around on them because they are so lonely."

The band's songs also touch on social issues: "When the Strangers Came" is about terrorism and fascism, and "Standing Between Us" is about social classes that can't be changed, Shonard said.

Still, Cockey Monroe does have a few songs about relationships.

"Tear for a Tear" is about two people who fall in love, then fall out. They reunite to try to regain what they had, only to find that they can't, Shonard said. Its lyrics bring the yearning to life: *Every passing moment/ I pray for a day/ when our hearts will hold/ love we lost in play.*

"We have a thing in mind and we are trying to say something, but we relate it to our experiences," Shonard said. "Maybe somebody can gain something



Cockey Monroe

Courtesy of Cockey Monroe

out of a song that we didn't really even mean, but they'll hear it and relate it to themselves."

Shonard writes the lyrics and the melody, but the whole band — including Terry Pieper on bass and backup vocals and Al "Vito" Loblillo on percussion — works on the arrangements, he said.

"The Lyrics imply what the music does," Shonard said. "If it's haunting lyrically, it becomes haunting musically. Melody dictates it, but the lyrics express it. So if you've got that, then the whole thing kind of melts together. That's where these guys come in."

What the band lacks in technical proficiency, it makes up for in creativity, Nelson said.

"Any major pop phenomena that's ever been has not been technically proficient musicians," Shonard said. "They've all been guys like us."

The band members fight harder because they aren't the best technical musicians, Nelson said.

"That makes us strive a lot harder to make what we do better."

The love for their career continues to drive the band toward its dream.

"It's kind of like a blind burning desire that, for some reason, keeps you there when you could very well walk across the street and do something else and be successful," Nelson said.

"You couldn't continue doing this while not making any money at it if you didn't have some kind of love for it," Shonard said.

Cockey Monroe is scheduled to play at Chesterfield, Bottomsley and Potts Sept. 20 and open for the Finsters there Sept. 21.

Writers invited to enter local mystery contest

By Deb Pederson
Senior Reporter

Thunder raked the deserted mansion with electric intensity, causing the black-garbed figure to halt in the shadows of the hallway.

The storm's noise covered his sounds, and the heavy fog concealed his movements. Still, his job wasn't easy.

He reached the library door and turned the knob...

Lee Ridge, owner of Sumner Street Books at 2340 Sumner St. has a contest for people who would love to finish the story above.

Ridge is sponsoring a mystery writing contest for Lancaster county residents.

Aspiring Agatha Christies need to submit readable copy of 6,000 words or less, either typed, hand-printed or on a computer printout, to the bookstore, 475-9643, by Oct. 15.

The winner, who will be announced

on Halloween, will get \$50, Ridge said.

The winning entry will become the property of the bookstore for promotional purposes, but the author will be able to submit the story to magazines and other publications, she said.

Ridge said she started the contest because she realized there were few opportunities in the area for people to write.

"Lots of opportunities exist for people in dance, theater, art or music," she said. "So I thought I'd help. People should be encouraged to write."

Stories will be judged on the basis of plot, characterization and entertainment value, she said. The judges are Ridge and Brian Steacy of Denver. Steacy is a former journalist.

Any type of mystery can be submitted, including suspense, detective, "whodunnit" or spy stories, Ridge said.

Halloween was picked for announcing the winner because "It's a mystery day," Ridge said.

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