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'Dick Tracy' debut is impressive, entertaining



Photo by Mark Billingsley

'Dick Tracy's' lead singer, Sara Kovanda.

By Pat Higgins

Jaded rockers with a lust for kicks would be well advised to investigate "Dick Tracy," a hot new band that made its debut last weekend, opening for the Eyes in an impressively tight and entertaining performance.

"Dick Tracy" included former members of the Specs and Omaha's Rebates who were highly successful among the underage crowd. A key advantage for "Dick Tracy"

unusual hairstyles. Nonetheless, Kovanda is the center of attention.

"I'm definitely into visuals and I really enjoy acting crazy onstage. I used to play keyboards but I enjoy the freedom of moving around while I sing," Kovanda said. She is visual, too, sporting a spiky red hairstyle and Carnaby Street miniskirt onstage.

"I'm really interested in clothes and fashion as part of music. They're a very important part of it," Kovanda said. "I think that miniskirts are going to be the next trend."

In the last couple of years women have been more prominent in rock, particularly among English New Wave bands.

"Women in rock is a big thing now. Both men and women seem to enjoy the change. I'd like to play guitar sometimes but it seems like every girl in the world is playing guitar now," Kovanda said.

Assertive woman

Kovanda makes the creative decisions and the band agreed that she runs the show.

"These guys all play their instruments so well that it's amazing," Kovanda said. "We all get along very well personally and musically. My previous band got rather weird for a while. I think they were threatened by an assertive woman. Besides that, they like to play a lot of gross music that I hated."

"I get along a lot better with the men in bands when I wear pants instead of a dress. But I am trying to do something new and unique. Women are usually either sex symbols like Debbie Harry or Pat Benatar or else they are one of the boys like Chrissie Hynde. I'm trying to do something different," Kovanda said.

"Dick Tracy" plans to take a break from performing for the next month while working up more original material.

"We wanted to see what kind of a reception we would get and we're quite pleased. We think we can attract a lot of people," Kovanda said, adding, "I'll try anything once as long as it's tasteful."

profile

is the group members' average age of 20, which seems to add a bit more youthful spirit to their show.

"All the other bands around Lincoln have existed for centuries," said lead singer Sara Kovanda. "We're trying to do something fresh."

"Dick Tracy performs tunes by the Pretenders, X and Gang of Four, among others, who are the musical/political avant garde of rock circa 1980.

"I lived in Los Angeles for a while and seeing bands like X and the Rezillos really knocked me out," Kovanda explained. She is 20 and has been performing professionally for the last three years.

She initially was singing with an FM Top 40 outfit that toured the Midwest ballroom circuit at venues similar to the Royal Grove.

"Then I started listening to Elvis Costello and David Bowie and it totally changed my attitude towards music," Kovanda said.

Star quality

Kovanda has star quality onstage as she prances around like a young Mick Jagger while belting out effective vocals. The band members share the spotlight fairly well due to their instrumental competence and their

Steely Dan's 'Gaucho' continues their svelte style

By Casey McCabe

Steely Dan/*Gaucho*/MCA

Gaucho is musically precise, lyrically up to Steely Dan's high standards, and flawlessly produced by Gary Katz.

While all this adds up to be another substantial notch in the belt of these faceless superstars, listening to the album sometimes produces a feeling similar to what would happen if you went to a Woody Allen movie and found out he was well-

three years later, Steely Dan was a guaranteed profit-maker for the first time in their career.

The Dan has done nothing to jeopardize such status, though they have never been a band to mold themselves around the qualities of popular accessibility. The public has come to them, and that is one of Steely Dan's most admirable feats.

Still, through the course of *Aja*, and now *Gaucho*, it's apparent they've outgrown the type of rock'n'roll that surfaced on such past works as "Black Friday," "Bodhisatva" and "Night by Night." Nor is there anything with the grandiose strength of "Rose Darling," or "The Royal Scam." They also don't play anything quite as weird as "Charlie Freak" or "Throw Back the Little Ones" from *Pretzel Logic* and *Katy Lied* respectively.

This is too bad, for despite the fact that *Gaucho* is a particularly fine album, it sets up a paradox for Steely Dan. If one was to let the smooth flowing arrangements and silky female backing vocalists cloud over the words that Donald Fagen is singing (which isn't hard to do), one would be under the mistaken impression that Becker and Fagen had made their peace with the world.

In past work, their penchant for cynically-bizarre lyrical circumstances was glaringly punctuated by the music, to make one neat state-of-the-art package of alienation. The same package could change in form and function several times over the course of an album.

Gaucho is composed by the same two guys who gave us such cheery, optimistic tunes as "Any World (That I'm Welcome

To)" and "Don't Take Me Alive" and though the package is more comfortable to swallow, they still retain an air of tongue-in-cheek cynicism. Now the listener doesn't have to feel as unhealthy for enjoying it.

The lyrics are enjoyable too, much like abstract art. You may not know what something means, but you still know what you like. Two of the best on *Gaucho* are "Babylon Sisters" and "My Rival," finely

crafted tunes about tentative love affairs and misplaced machismo. At times they take on the tone of a cheap detective novel:

*"I struck a match against the door
Of Anthony's Bar and Grill
I was the whining stranger
A fool in love
With time to kill"*

From "My Rival"
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album review

adjusted. You're happy that the artist is growing old more gracefully, but you kind of miss indulging in their foibles.

Gaucho continues to hone the svelte jazz-influenced standards Walter Becker and Donald Fagen pursued on their sixth (and ironically their "breakthrough") album, *Aja*.

Steely Dan was one of the few truly innovative bands of the 70s, incorporating a bit of jazz into their curious blend of dissonant musical lines and odd rhythms. Cynical both musically and lyrically, Becker and Fagen often proved they could rock, as well as confuse the critics.

When *Aja* hit the stands in 1977, the more mature version of Steely Dan was wildly successful, causing a new appreciation that took their previous five albums off the discount racks and turned them gold. With the release of *Gaucho* more than

