

# Arts & Entertainment

## Cody knocks out packed house

By Pat Higgins

As Commander Cody still sings, "There's no such thing as having too much fun." The good Commander knocked out an overflow house at Judge's with his boogie-woogie piano and good-humored approach last Thursday.

Cody ran through all the tunes that made him semi-famous back in the '70s. "Hot Rod Lincoln," "Seeds and Stems" and "It Should Have Been Me (With That Real Fine Chick)" drove the crowd to a near frenzy.

It was a bizarre sociological mix of urban cowboys, rural cowboys, Greeks and Deadheads there, all united in their allegiance to the party guy.

Cody's tale is kind of a traditional decline-and-fall record-biz story, though.

Once upon a time, Commander Cody and the Lost Planet Airmen were a passel of hippies who played wired-up country music and made a bunch of records.

"We were ripped off for literally hundreds of thousand of dollars," the Commander, a.k.a. George Frayne, said in an interview during a technical screw-up Thursday night. "But what can we do? Try to sue Warner Brothers, who hide everything behind 19 layers of their corporation?"

To start the show, Commander lurched onstage and belted out "Too Much Fun." He made many references to mood-altering substances, such as alcohol, but claimed that he had cleaned up his own act.

"I hate to ruin my image, but 'I don't drink anymore,'" the Commander said, waving a Budweiser, "I mean, except at gigs. Believe it or not, I'm into

health now."

As part of his physical fitness campaign, the Commander has taken to the gridiron. Back home in the Bay Area, he plays football on the beach with the likes of John Matuzak and Ted (the Mad Stork) Hendricks of the Los Angeles, Oakland, Raiders.

"Matuzak and Hendricks are pretty wild guys to hang out with. I've always been a Raiders fan, but it's kind of disgusting that they moved to LA," Cody said. "Don't even ask me how much I'm losing by not betting on the card because of the strike."

Cody had shared the spotlight with the Lost Planet Airmen. Now he pretty much is the whole show. It took him a while to adjust, and it cost him his solo contract with Arista.

"Arista and I parted company several years ago," he said. "I'm on Peter Pan records now and they don't have any money to support records very well. It took me years to improve my singing. The Arista records really don't have good vocals."

Commander Cody and the Lost Planet Airmen used to play baseball stadiums with the likes of the Grateful Dead.

Nowadays, he's nervous about a club date. He was visibly angry about the technical hassles.

"This is a big gig for me — a full house on a Thursday night," Cody said. "The music industry is already in a depression. Clubs are closing all over. There's no money out there."

As long as the Commander is around to do songs like "I'm Going to Put a Bar in the Back of My Car (and Drive Myself to Drink)," there's going to be an audience for his shenanigans.



Staff photo by Craig Andresen

*"I hate to ruin my image, but I don't drink anymore."*

*— Commander Cody*

## Motels singer turns words of hurt into hit lyrics

By David Wood

I chatted with a dream lover last week. Life is good sometimes.

The Motels will be at the Warehouse in Omaha on Tuesday, and Martha Davis, the band's beautiful singer, songwriter and rhythm guitarist, was reached by phone Friday. Everyone should know who she is; anyone who has been near a radio has heard her sing "Only the Lonely" and "Take the L."

*Take the L out of lover and it's over.*

Less than a year ago, the words were no more than the sad state of an affair for Davis. Her four-year romance with the lead guitarist was coming apart; the band threatened to fall to pieces.

Instead, Davis made the words of hurt into the lyrics of a national hit. The album the Motels put out went gold a few weeks ago. "All Four One," the band's third album, has been in the Top 100 for almost a year, kept aloft by the two hits.

"I was this close to throwing in the dishrag," Davis said. "It was . . . very emotional . . . I had to sit back, take a deep breath, count to 10."

The "All Four One" effort has transformed the Motels from a mildly new wave band with an OK following into a national smash. The Motels are a band in transition in many ways. Having concluded three weeks on a J. Geils tour, the band is off on a tour that will take them all over the United States and ultimately to Australia. It will keep them busy until almost Christmas.

"It's better to go to the clubs," Davis said. "I prefer small places to huge places, because you can pack them in and it's — what do I want to say? — un-intimidating."

When I called her in Evanston, Ill., she had woken minutes before from napping after a 60-hour bus ride from Vancouver, British Columbia.

*"I think we've eaten in every Husky."*

How could life on the road be any less stressful than earlier problems?

"There's no one involved who isn't a complete angel and a joy to work with . . . the crew, the bus driver, they're all wonderful . . . We've really been getting into something we call bus-dancing. We dance and fall around to old R & B stuff while we're traveling. It's good for balance and coordination."

Davis seemed instantly friendly, alert and cheery. She has a rich, warm phone voice. I should confess I have been particularly taken with her since a couple of years back when I saw the Motels open for the Cars in Omaha. I remarked she had smoked a lot that night, then went on to admire her singing.

"I've never had any problem with my voice, and I've never had any problem with smoking," she said and laughed. She isn't a big smoker, she said; the cigarettes are mostly a stage prop for effect.

I asked the standard "What is the single biggest obstacle you have overcome in your career?"

"Fear," she said.

Davis first performed in 1971, she explained, "at a totally nutty gig in San Francisco on Halloween night. There were a couple hundred people . . . a naked man painted blue . . . I was afraid when I went out on stage but, all of a sudden, it was fantastic. It was the best thing that's ever happened to me."



Photo courtesy of Capitol Record

*"Music is its own growth process. You can sit down with a guitar and thank it afterward."*

*— Martha Davis*

She had been invited to sing with the band, which included two later members of the Motels, only three days earlier, when she was asked by "a girlfriend who was the bassist."

The appearance must have made a good impression that led to many engagements, I said.

"Eight years as the Motels," she replied. What has been her single biggest achievement?

"My children," she said without hesitation. Davis, 31, has two daughters, 14 and 16, and recently has adopted a 16-year-old nephew.

Has music been her sole, lifetime dream?

"Well, it has been my soul, and it has been much of my life. I started playing guitar when I was 8; I started writing songs when I was 15 . . . It was a very solitary

thing, a kind of personal therapy . . . Mom had a fabulous record collection, and my dad brought home that guitar. He played it for a while and sang."

When she was 18 and 19, she thought she might want to be a painter, but eventually she destroyed her work in frustration. Music has been her chief drive since.

"From the music on the radio I heard growing up, I thought rock 'n' roll was . . . minimal . . . and boring."

It wasn't till I heard Bowie and Roxy Music that I started thinking it was something else and got into rock 'n' roll."

The three Motels albums all have come out on a major label — Capitol. That is a coup for even a Los Angeles band. The first album was displayed well in stores, I remember, and I initially bought it for its great cover. The poster for the album hung for a while on Johnny Fever's wall in "WKRP in Cincinnati."

It was nominated as both the best and the worst album cover of 1979, Davis said. She also said that her "daughter's girlfriend's father" was a producer on "WKRP."

"Capitol has a particular love for this band," Davis has had complete control over the music and graphics, but the first two albums sold only well enough to recover most of their cost. "When we started on our last record, they came in and said, 'This is going to be it, kids.'"

Davis wrote "40 or 50" songs from which 10 were chosen.

"I lock myself in a bedroom with an acoustic guitar, a bottle of red wine, cigarettes and a cassette recorder . . . I play the tape to the band, they can't make it out and I plug in my Les Paul . . . I only bring the best songs. I've been doing this long enough to know which they are."

Where does she want to go with her songs in the future?

"Music is its own growth process . . . You can sit down with a guitar and thank it afterward."

For now, the Motels are a boom band, destined to stay on the playlists for a while. A third song will be released from the album — "Forever Mine," which would have been my radio pick from the start.

*Maybe just a place in time/My forever mine.*

"It's the first happy song I've written without a hint of dismay and despair in it . . . We end the show with it now," my dream lover said. "It's a good song, and to hear it live is something special."