

Arts & Entertainment

Iowa rock 'n' rollers sweat for success

By Mike Frost

The Midwest often conjures up images of small towns, agriculture and county fairs. But now, a growing cadre of musicians is proving that the Midwest should also be associated with some of the purest rock 'n' roll music around.

One such group is Boys With Toys, a lively trio from Iowa City, Iowa. They are proud to come from the same geographic region as Mitch Ryder, John Cougar, Dwight Twilley and the Motown sound. "The Midwest is a lot less trendy, a lot less expectant," said Bradley Jones, the band's lead guitarist.

Jones, a University of Iowa graduate, said he had always been interested in starting a band ("What else can you do with an English degree?" he said), but he wanted to find the right people to play with. "It was kind of a waiting game, really," he said.

About a year and a half ago, Jones found the right people. Now he, bassist Joel Carey and drummer Tommy Meyer, both from Ames, Iowa, are concentrating on perfecting their sound.

"If you had to define it, it's just kind of American rock 'n' roll with a lot of radio pop thrown in," Jones said. He said there is nothing better than a simple trio for playing that brand of pure rock 'n' roll.

"If you're listening to a dashboard radio, the best sound you can get is a big electric guitar, just strumming," he said. Jones prefers this simple approach to the multi-layered sounds which currently dominate the pop charts. "I'd like to start a revolution that would bring that sound back," he said.

Clearly, Jones has lofty goals for the band. He said his commitment to the trio is a permanent one. "Everything's for the band," he said. "You have to be a team. And I'm really proud to be on the same stage as these guys."

The group has done some recording, but so far, no examples of their studio work are available commercially. Jones said the band will release recorded material once they feel more comfortable in the studio. "We need to transfer that stage spirit onto vinyl," he said.

Just as their recorded work needs time to develop, Jones said the band's live sound also needs the same chance to evolve.

"We started out doing rockabilly material," he said. As the band began to introduce more original material, the rockabilly sound fell by the wayside. "The great rockabilly songs have already been written," he said.

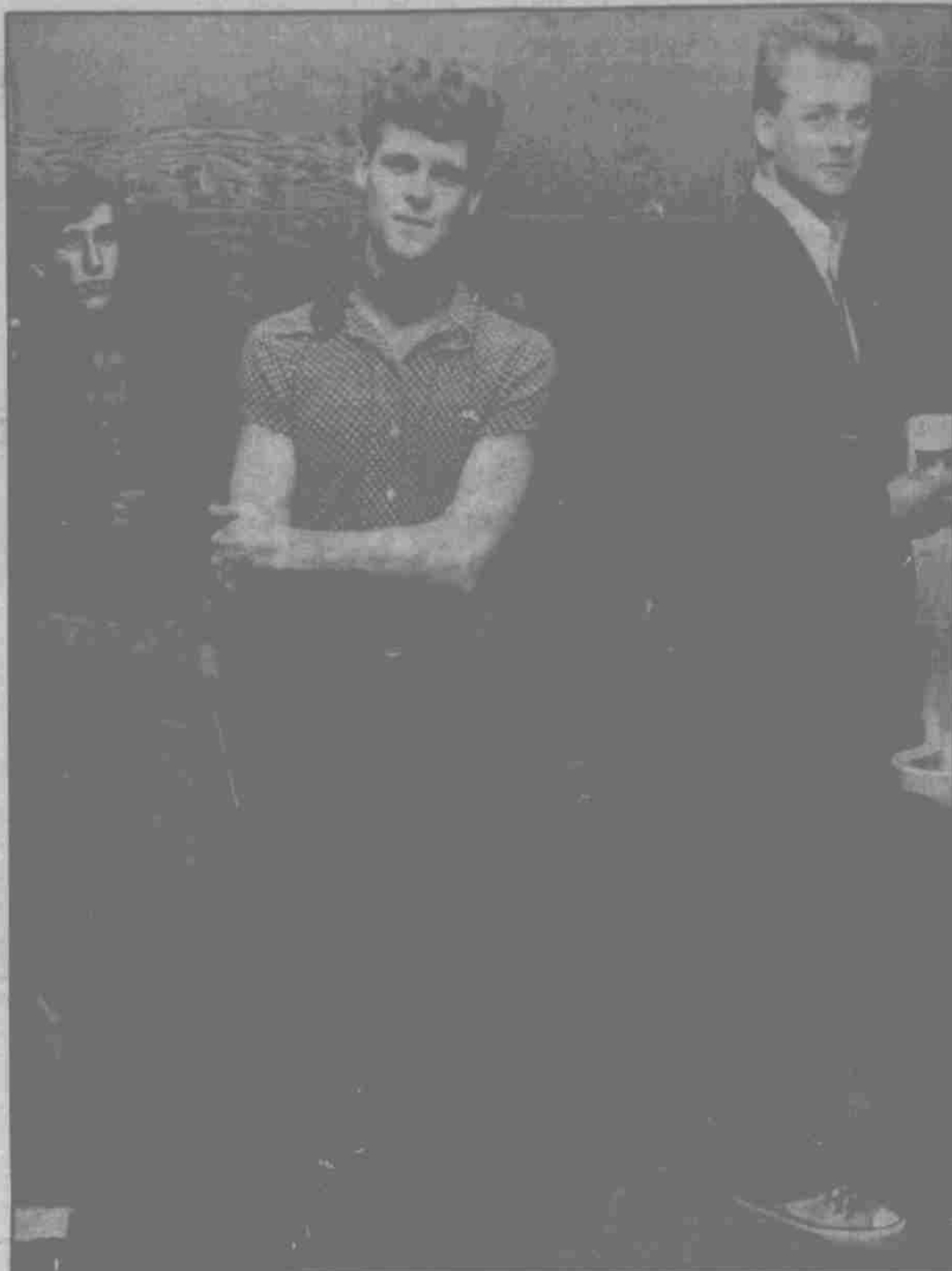
The band still includes healthy doses of rockabilly in its stage shows, along with its provocative amalgam of American musical genres. The band's sound lends itself best to live performances.

"When we're on stage, we like to sweat," Jones said. The best crowds, he added, are the ones who are ready to sweat along with them. "The audience at the Drumstick is really good," Jones said. In fact, he said, college audiences as a whole seem more receptive to the Boys With Toys sound.

"We played in St. Louis Tuesday night. It seemed like everyone there was trying to pick up members of the opposite sex," he said. "No one wanted to sweat. College kids want to sweat. They want to have fun."

Lincoln college students will have plenty of chances to perspire this weekend. The band is appearing at the Drumstick, 547 N. 48th St., through Saturday. The cover charge is \$3.

Not only will the audience sweat, but they'll be able to see firsthand how Boys With Toys got its name. "For us, the stage experience is everything," Jones said. "The name comes from how we feel when we're on stage. I feel just like a boy with a big electric toy," Jones said.



Boys With Toys

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NDT actors approach Beckett's abyss

Review by Eric Peterson

This weekend's Nebraska Directors' Theatre production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is very effective in bringing out both the slapstick elements of the play and its darker side. William Schutz, who plays Estragon (Gogo), and Lynette Welter, who plays Vladimir (Didi), can carry on a vaudevilian exchange with a great deal of wry charm, but something as simple as the two disturbing chimes beginning each act prepare the audience to be wary of the abyss; and when Welter screams "A charnel house!" at the sight of the audience (and all human beings), the abyss opens a little.

The NDT production of *Waiting for Godot*, directed by Michael McAlister, shows tonight, Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. at the Nebraska Directors' Theatre, 421 S. Ninth St., Suite 112.

Gogo and Didi are the great comic pair of the play, and Schutz and Welter's characterizations are very nice. Schutz's expressive face is grand at some moments, like when he smiles beatifically at Pozzo's poetic efforts. "Tray bong. Tray tray bong!" Schutz says with forced admiration. Gogo is fully aware of his own suffering and compares himself to Christ. "All my life, I've compared myself to him," Schutz says matter-of-factly.

This undercutting of the inevitable Christ symbolism is an example of the easy and unpretentious wit of *Waiting for Godot*. The rapid answer exchanges, which Welter and Schutz play with the game archness traditional to vaudeville, mask the boredom and fear of loneliness which are so prominent in a world where God is expected but never appears.

Welter plays Didi with vigor. She can react with convincing sympathy to

Gogo's hurt leg. She can also be morbidly curious and mocking, as when she mercilessly — and expertly — mimics Lucky's miserable panting or prances around singing a macabre song, pausing in mid-stride when she forgets the words. She sings with special relish the part of a cook who found a dog and "beat him 'til he was dead."

The setting is a little plain of crumpled newspaper with a coat rack bravely imitating a tree, putting forth hats in the spring. This becomes especially effective at moments like the one when the four major characters lie sprawled inert in the newspaper and lose all human shape, looking as transient and lifeless as everything else.

Diane Pitzel plays a messenger boy with naivete, hands in pockets and a lock of hair sullenly hanging over one eye. It might have been good to see slight fear or uncertainty at points.

The NDT production uses four women in a play which has five male parts.

Having women play some of the men in *Waiting for Godot* works successfully. The gender change is particularly interesting in Pozzo's case.

Played by Cassie Moore, Pozzo becomes a character whose bluster and forced confidence become more obvious than in many traditional interpretations of Pozzo. There is no way to make a pencilled-on mustache, with curled ends, look real. As melodrama villain Moore plays a Pozzo who is generally more pretentious than threatening. After Pozzo has gone blind and reappears in the second act, Moore's hair, freed and entangling, becomes curiously affecting as a sign of Pozzo's helplessness. Moore is very strong in her final cursing of time and its hatefulness. She looks to one side of Didi and blindly rages at her destiny, the one moment of the play when there's no distance between the character Pozzo and the audience.

Cil Stengel plays Lucky, a savagely

ironic name for the character whose undeniable misery gives the lie to the masking comedy. Pozzo drags him by the neck on a rope, ponders whether to kill the burdened creature or sell him — and Lucky seems unaware of anything but suffering.

Stengel's incessant panting, her numb and ghastly look, are haunting. Her monologue becomes a powerful scene. The mute Lucky starts, in a shaky voice, to babble about God and esoteric philosophers. Lucky grows ecstatic, and Stengel for the first time addresses the listeners and the audience. At first entertained by the freak show, Gogo and Didi become afraid it's gotten out of hand; Pozzo hides his head. They pull Lucky's thinking cap off and all collapses after the strain. Thinking *does* have consequences, after all, and avoiding change and irrevocable decision is the only real action of *Waiting for Godot*.

Madmen and English Dogs



By Dan Wondra