

## Arts & Entertainment

# Brave Combo gives polkas new life

By Chris McCubbin  
Diversions Editor

Let's clear up this rock 'n' roll thing. The secret to rock 'n' roll isn't electric guitar and a rhythm section, it isn't the Bo Diddley beat, and it sure isn't Day-Glo Spandex and a light show. The secret to rock 'n' roll is to play it fast and loud so it changes the pulse. Forget the technique, but never lose the momentum. Make them dance. Make them need to dance.

### Concert Preview

By this definition, Brave Combo is a rock 'n' roll band. One of the best. That they happen to play polkas isn't important.

But it is important, because, cultural bias and the generation gap aside, polka is great music. It's exciting, it's sophisticated and it's sexy.

You don't care, you say, you still can't stomach Ernie Kucera and the Six Fat Dutchmen. I can't either. The insular complacency of the polka establishment wracks my whole body with violent waves of indifference. But that's not the music's fault.

But that's what's great about Brave Combo which is, by the way, playing tonight at the Zoo Bar. Brave Combo

changes the context, gooses the music with a jumper cable, and all of a sudden you realize that polkas are, somehow, still crazy after all these centuries.

The legend goes like this: Brave Combo began in Texas, touring mental hospitals and doing an occasional wedding. A few years ago they released an album, "World Dance Music," and became overnight critic's darlings, garnering notoriety for turning the theme from "Rosemary's Baby" into a waltz and doing the Doors "People are Strange" as a Yiddish hora.

After "World Dance Music," the band acquired bass and tuba player Bubba Hernandez, who added lots of great Mexican-American material to band leader Carl Finch's already prodigious repertoire of European folk music and American pop songs.

Now the band's new album, "Polkatharsis," is out on Rounder Records. If the new album lacks "World Dance Music's" manic edge, it outdoes its predecessor on sheer audacity, taking on such fantastically square chestnuts as "The Happy Wanderer" and "Anniversary Song," and winning.

Miracles happen at Brave Combo shows. A past-middle-aged, Bavarian-born polka-meister can share the floor with your average collegiate sludge-rock foot shuffler and neither will feel any shame or resentment.

Brave Combo's music sets up a



Brave Combo

Courtesy of The Zoo Bar

mystic field of sonic vibration that drives every tired and musty thought out of your reality-addled brain except

"I need to dance, I need to dance," leaving you purged, exhausted and clean — polkatharsis, indeed.

The show starts at 9 p.m. Cover is \$3. Beg the band to do its (as yet unrecorded) assault/cover of "La Bamba."

## Legend barely hidden in 'Angel Heart'

By Charles Lieurance  
Senior Reporter

You can tell when a legend has been around a little too long. First, it becomes the skeleton on which to hang a first rate comedy, and then, in its final plummet from grace, it becomes fodder for TV sitcoms.

### Movie Review

Occasionally, although not often, even after the legend has run the gamut of movie vehicles for Saturday Night Live alumni and fall TV pilots, some courageous and imaginative soul manages to place the carion in some new configuration.

The legend of Faust selling his soul to the devil for worldly prosperity and then attempting to breach the bargain certainly has been around the block a few times. Alan Parker, who gave the world "Fame," "Midnight Express," Pink Floyd's "The Wall" and "Birdy," has reconstructed Faust from the ground up, leaving only the basic premise intact, for his newest film, "Angel Heart."

#### Faust legend

"Angel Heart" is the Faust legend dressed in so many costumes and concealed in so many cinematic ruses that the infrastructure is, at first, revealed only in "dimestore" in-jokes. The names of the characters sound like a biblical punfest: Louis Cyphre (Robert De Niro), Harry (Harold?) Angel (Mickey Rourke), the lawyers Winesap and Macintosh.

Over this, Parker drapes a genre-hopping, terrifying and hideously violent plot that continually makes use of magician's sleight of hand to keep the audience guessing. As

major plot points are revealed, Parker veils the information in a sex scene. While he's shoving a resistant, squealing rabbit into his hat, we're staring at actress Elizabeth Whitcraft's bosom. By the time the rabbit actually emerges, its ears firmly in Parker's grasp, the audience is hard-pressed to explain the miracle.

Rourke as Angel is a miracle. Rourke, who has been mostly a memorable face in his previous roles, now becomes a memorable actor. His performance as the down-and-out private investigator hired to find a missing prewar crooner by the (dare I say it) Mephistophelean Cyphre is a mighty amalgam of Bogart's Spade and Marlowe, Jack Nicholson's Jake Giddes, and the irascible losers that populated innumerable film noirs of the '40s. As with the best hardboiled detective plots, Angel learns as much about himself during the film as he does about the missing person.

It was once said, when referring to Jack Nicholson's role in "Chinatown," that only he could play the leading man in a film while wearing a mass of medical tape over his nose. Rourke, in "Angel Heart," does a fine act of oneupsmanship, shuffling through the film wearing a baggy, stained suit, sporting a plastic tan guard over his nose and remaining in a perfect state of unshaven slovenliness while still exuding an offbeat kind of sex appeal.

#### Genre genius

But the stroke of genius in this film is not its recreation of a genre, but the genres that feed into it to make the film entirely unique. Parker, who was working from a novel called "Fallen Angel" by William Hjortsberg, pours the supernatural, religio-kitsch and, hold onto your seats, metaphysics into the mix.



Courtesy of Tri Star Pictures

Mickey Rourke as Harry Angel in "Angel Heart."

The effect is virtually seamless, a complex and gorgeous film that makes you forget that underneath the maze is a cliché, a labyrinth you've wandered so many times before that you're ashamed you didn't recognize the scenery.

The performances are superior right down the credit list, from Lisa Bonet's controversial movie debut to the local Louisiana actors who play redneck cops in the New Orleans scenes to blues great Brownie McGhee as guitarist Toots Sweet.

The monochromatic look of the film, achieved by eliminating all of

the primary colors in the frame, is startling. The sun never shines, a storm is always on the horizon, and the world is populated by more shadows than human beings.

And throughout there is the presence of evil in the form of street thugs, in newspaper headlines about senseless murders, in nightmares and in the form of the devil himself.

#### Grisly entertainment

Parker's "Angel Heart" is a grisly entertainment that probably loses its mass audience in the first hour. The couple behind me in the theater took to discussing whether or not

Lisa Bonet could still do the "Cosby Show" after a blistering exhibition like this one.

Come to think of it, how will Denise ever be able to show her face around the Huxtable house again?

For the non-squeamish who can handle a path this dark, the film has cinematic rewards well beyond the Hollywood status quo. For those who are still getting over the killing of Bambi's mother, I'd recommend safer seats.

"Angel Heart" is now showing at the Cinema Twin.

## Lanford Wilson's play 'The Fifth of July' begins Thursday night

Lanford Wilson's "witty, wistful and exquisite" play, "The Fifth of July," opens Thursday in University Theatre's Studio, third floor, Temple Building.

Alternately funny and moving, the "Fifth of July" deals with a group of former '60s activists and the changes

which maturity wrought in their lives and attitudes in the years since leaving college.

They are gathered for a reunion at the old Talley farmhouse in Lebanon, Mo. — the author's birthplace — and with their reminiscences come the

revelations of lost dreams and shattered hopes. At once poignant and marvelously funny, "Fifth of July" is a compassionate portrait of a generation

"Fifth of July" was the first of three plays written by Lanford Wilson about the Talley family. It opened at the Cir-

cle Repertory Theatre in New York City in 1978, to be followed in 1979 by "Talley's Folly" and in 1981 by "Tale Told."

After opening on March 12th, "Fifth of July" will continue March 13th, 14th, and 16th through 21st at 8 p.m. Tickets

are on sale in the Temple Box Office, located on the first floor of Temple Building, 12th and R Streets. Phone (402) 472-2073. Box office hours are from noon to 5 p.m. weekdays. During performance nights, the box office is also open from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.