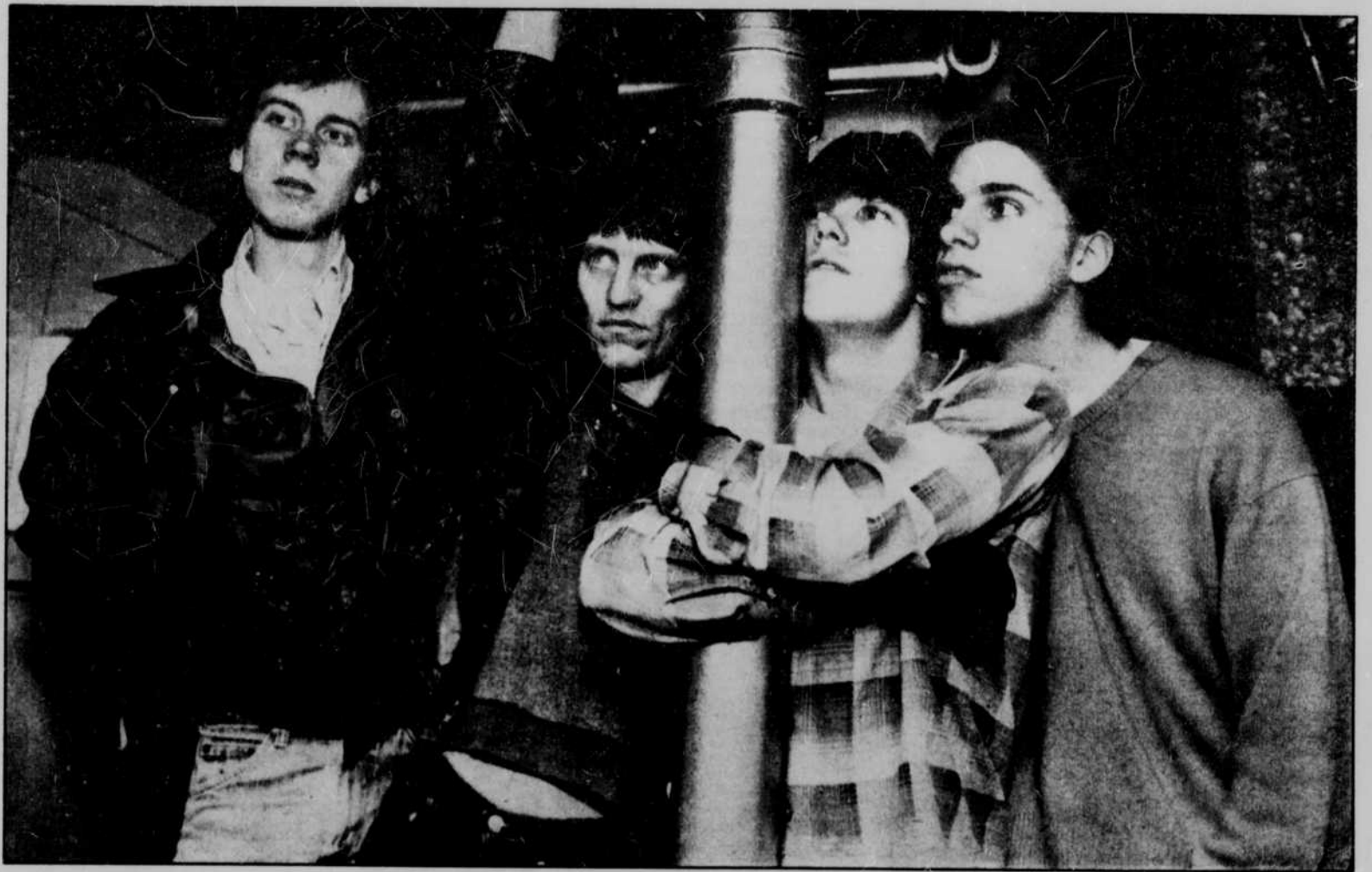


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TROUT HISTORY

By Geoff McMurtry
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Trout Mystery — Fleischli, Pieper, Sullivan, Albright

J.P. Caruso/Daily Nebraskan

The night of their first show, they opened for Little America. The two bands got along so infamously that Trout received a perverse tribute in the form of graffiti on the Drumstick's legendary backstage wall—"Little America would like to thank the Trouts for nothing." Apparently the Americans, (or Littles, whatever) didn't appreciate it when ex-Lampshade Dave Sullivan said, "I'd like to thank Little America for closing for us."

For better and worse, richer and poorer, (probably mostly poorer), that kind of rapport with and against their audience and peers has been Trout Mystery's trademark. From their sarcastic onstage asides, and guitar solos played with their tongues, to satirical versions of covers that dredge up the bottom of the trash-heap of 70's Rock 'n' Roll, Trout Mystery — guitarist/vocalist Sullivan, guitarist/vocalist Chris Albright, bassist Terry Pieper, and drummer John Fleischli — is a Rock 'n' Roll band.

A Rock 'n' Roll band that hates most Rock 'n' Roll bands. Obviously bored and disgusted with the mindless repetition and mediocrity surrounding them — especially most of the lethargic pop currently masquerading as Alternative rock — Trout is known as much for its self-subverting stage persona as for their music, although that may change with the recent release of their first tape.

"We're serious about our stage show — the choreography," said Sullivan. "But the music we don't give a hell about."

But seriously, folks . . . "I think we're a little more diverse than most guitar bands, locally and nationally," said Albright. "There are a couple great Lincoln bands, but I think the rest are very drony and Smiths-ish."

"I think right now everywhere in the world, or the nation at least, there's just been this, REM-clones," said Sullivan. "Everybody says it, but Lincoln's sound, its general basic sound, is so close to that it's scary — it's depressing. When I hear most of the stuff around here I think, 'That's the Lincoln sound, and it sounds a lot like the REM clones.'"

"I think the last original band that I heard was Mr. Mister," said Albright sneering, or laughing, I

couldn't tell which. "Music kind of just feeds upon itself, and it always has, because Rock 'n' Roll is nothing real new, it just fed upon something else, everybody knows that, but that's what we do. We just bring things from our past, things we've heard, and we create a different way of hearing it," said Sullivan.

"But at the same time, our band sounds like some other band, there's going to be another band out there somewhere that sounds like us, there's no way to get around it. But at the current time, in popularity, or whatever, we don't (sound like anybody). We're not consciously trying to sound like anybody. We move away from certain things — we move away from sounding too pretty," said Sullivan.

"I think writing songs like REM is easy, and writing the songs that we write is hard. Because we really are bringing something up that people around here aren't gonna be totally used to, and sick of."

"It's not that I can't write songs like that, I can — it's easy, that's why I don't do it. Because it's too damned easy," he added. "I just don't like that kind of music that much, I don't really like REM anymore. I used to, but I'm not really excited about them anymore."

"I don't know who we sound like, I don't know who we look like, I don't know who we act like, I don't know anything about this band. All I know is what other people tell me,

and I don't trust them," said Sullivan. "I don't want to put anybody down around here, because they're trying, and they're going for it, and we are too. We're just infantile, we don't know what we're doing," said Sullivan. "I don't worship those bands, but I can't really say too much against them either, cause obviously they're doing something that somebody likes."

"I'd like to get to this originality," added Fleischli. "I think that's a big myth in Rock 'n' Roll. I'm not sure if I agree with it. The way I play, I just play what I listen to, or it comes when I practice, or when I used to practice, and it just rubs off. It's not like you invented something new, you're borrowing from a tradition."

A tradition that, for Trout Mystery, includes anything from the Clash, to the Doors, to early British Invasion, and of course, to Kiss.

The resemblance isn't as strong as it would seem, however. Trout Mystery actively undercuts any pop-accessibility that might sneak its way into their music.

"It should be more of a challenge to the performer and the listener," said Albright.

"When you come in and see us, or 13 Nightmares, you're not gonna like us right off the bat. I like that," added Sullivan.

"Either you open your mind up to it, and let it come in, or you'll just never know . . . if you're gonna like something, cause you won't give it a chance," he continued. "I mean,

George Michael has songs on TV, that I actually like, right off the bat, but I listen to them about five times, and then they suck. If we write songs like that — and we know how to do it — people are gonna like them right off the bat, but get sick of them fast. That song 'Highway Town,' if we play that every damn show, pretty soon people are gonna go (through nose) 'Highway Town, highway town, yeah that's real nice.'

"I think that's a mistake a lot of bands fall into. They want to be liked right off the bat, and it doesn't hold up," said Sullivan.

"That's where all that REM prettiness comes from," said Albright. "The clean, jangly, Rickenbacker, drony, Smiths kind of sound."

This unconventional outlook can backfire when the audience doesn't share the same attitude, and wants to sing along with something familiar, but Trout Mystery doesn't seem fazed.

"I would rather play to 20 people that enjoy what we're doing, than to 200 people who just went to Duffy's to drink and socialize," said Albright. "You want to be that much better for those people that are really there to see you."

"I'd rather see a bunch of people sitting down and watching us, than to look out and see a bunch of frosted uniforms dancing with Coronas in their hands."

"As long as you're truthful to your music, it doesn't matter if the crowd

is 20 or 20,000," added Sullivan.

"That first show at the Drumstick, there were about 400 people, none were there to see us. Halfway through the show, I looked out, and everybody in the place was staring at us, and I knew right then it was a good thing, because these were 12 songs that these people had never heard, and we had their attention," said Sullivan.

Despite having enough original songs for a two-hour show, they often bear shouted requests for some of the more unlikely covers they've become known for — from Led Zeppelin's "The Rover" to a sort of Heavy Metal version of the Sonny and Cher classic "I Got You Babe."

"We do some to make fun of, and some that we like," said Albright. "Usually the ones that we like are fairly obscure. It usually just comes up in practice, or we'll just look up (show) in the other part of the bar, and maybe see . . . Heart or something, and we'll get real inspired by these real incredible songs. So we'll just do 'These Dreams' or something."

"Sometimes we just get really angry," said Sullivan. "To the point of, there's no sense in throwing your TV out the window, because 'Monty Python' might be on in an hour, but you've got that microphone, and you've got people watching you, and if you can drill somebody onstage — trash their song in public, it's as good as punching them in the back of the head."