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Lincoln band strives for variety

By Mark Lage
Senior Reporter

J.J. and the Blades is a relatively new Lincoln band that plays music ranging from Elvis Presley to U2 to the Violent Femmes. The band also works on its own material.

The band formed in early December. They have played at Sweep Left, Bash Riprocks and many parties, the members said.

The members are Michael Stodola, lead vocals; Orc, lead guitar; Jeff Smalley, bass; J. Scott Weldon, drums/vocals; Wayne J. Vandell, keyboards/vocals. Vandell also plays some guitar and bass for the band, earning him the title "MVM -- most valuable musician" from his colleagues.

Stodola, Smalley and Weldon are all University of Nebraska-Lincoln students. Vandell will attend UNL next fall.

The band members couldn't seem to come to an agreement as to which one of them is J.J., but Stodola said that Blades means "fine young gentlemen." He attributed the term to Ulysses Grant.

J.J. and the Blades formed primarily through newspaper ads, although Weldon, Smalley and Orc had played together before in a band called One Night Veto. The Blades is Stodola's first band.

'Things can happen here.'

—Vandell

Vandell was the last to join the band in December. He said that he has played in many bands over the past nine years. But this one is differ-

ent, he said.

"This group of guys works well together," he said. There is a sense of both cohesiveness and lightheartedness in J.J. and the Blades.

"In the other bands I've been in, there have been gaps in both musicianship and attitudes," he said. "But we're still fresh. We've still got a few dreams and goals, although we're trying to stay down to earth. Things can happen here."

Other band members agreed. "We still don't know what everybody else (in the band) is going to be doing," Weldon said. "There are always new ideas. Things are always changing."

"We're very varied and versatile," Vandell added. "We're always changing songs and trading instruments." "We like all kinds of music," Smalley said. "You can't categorize us."

Vandell added that while other bands focus on one area, such as progressive music or classic rock 'n' roll, J.J. and the Blades are strong in everything.

The goals for J.J. and the Blades right now are fairly simple ones.

"We want to play really great music that people can enjoy right away -- either dancing to it or just sitting back and listening to it," Stodola said.

"We want to get as good as we can as fast as we can," Weldon said. "And I think we're going to be really good."

The band members also wanted to thank other bands in Lincoln for their help and their experience.

"Bob from Lie Awake has been very helpful," Weldon said.

"We're not in this for the competition with other Lincoln bands," Stodola said. "We support others and we hope that they support us."

Cover misleads; this 'necessity' not really needed

By Janet McAllaster
Staff Reporter

Jet Black Berries
Animal Necessity
Restless Records

The cover was misleading -- it was interesting.

But the harmonica was the first clue that Jet Black Berries' new album, "Animal Necessity," is not worth listening to unless one is into mediocre, annoying country-punk.

The first song, "Tore Up the Tracks," wears after less than one minute. The quick, repetitive beat never varies, but seems to go on monotonously forever and ever.

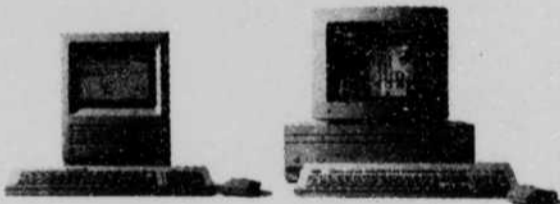
The "tune" is pathetic. The wimpy bass line never changes, either, but only starts over again and again.

And forget about finding quality in the vocals. This guy has no hope of ever being able to carry a tune and his voice is indistinctive and, needless to say, below average. It's not clear who this vocalist is since Kevin Patrick and Gary Trainer are both listed as vocalists for Jet Black Berries.

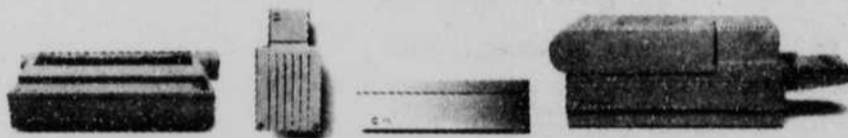
The other members of the band are Mark Schwarz on organ and harmonica, Chris Yockel on guitars, Roy Stein on drums, and Wayne Naylor on bass and backing vocals.

The second song starts out promising, but ends up going nowhere. A Dead Kennedys fan could get into the beginning of "Murphy Man," but all excitement fades once again in less than 60 seconds.

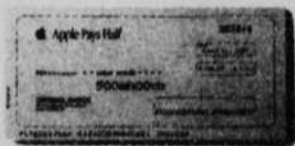
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