

Journeying through known city sounds

By Mark Lage Senior Reporter

Editor's Note: This is the second in a week-long series of essays. Each day, members of the Arts and Entertainment staff will take their readers on a trip of sight, sound, taste, touch and smell. Hear us ya.

1. Downtown Lincoln

It seems like spending two weeks in just concentrating on downtown Lincoln should be interesting, and possibly exciting. But when you take off your White Sox and listen, it's really just about what you would expect.

Even in town like Lincoln, there is often the butt of jokes from people like me who come from really nice, cool places like Omaha. The downtown sounds are overwhelming dominated by one thing -- the automobile.

And if the cars aren't enough to drive you back to your own personal music systems, then downtown reconstruction definitely will amaze you. Daily gray-black grating and construction sounds fill the downtown air. Be it a construction with a huge swinging ball slamming into downtown's "useless" old buildings, or the metallically whining crane-construction of steel-Lego parking garages, reconstruction is the final stroke of a downtown masterpiece of ugly noise. So we must look elsewhere for something interesting.

2. Football Saturday at Memorial Stadium

We'll do a little bit better. Although most of the things you've probably heard about are in reality always disappointing. The crowd's unison chants of "Go Big Red" are famous all throughout the state, and even in other places across the country

where college football is a big deal. There's only one problem -- the crowd never has chanted "Go Big Red" in unison. The size of the stadium and the large number of people simply prohibits any kind of organization of that scale, so that the group cheers are rarely more than garbled, clumsy-sounding roars.

The band also is usually a disappointment. I'm sure the songs it plays sound good in some context, but the band also faces a severe logistical problem -- playing to 76,000 people in four general directions. What this means is that when the band is supposed to be playing something like the James Bond theme, there's probably about 19,000 trombone, six snare drums and a horn section at your seat.



In fairness to the band, though, it provides one of the great aural joys of any football Saturday -- its late in the game, brassy rendition of the Charlie Brown theme. Always wonderful.

The worst sound on Saturday at Memorial Stadium is simply the general conversation of the crowd. In a society that has made a few major steps in attitudes toward race and sex over the past few decades, a football stadium on game day is generally the most primitive holdout.

The best sounds are those that come in spontaneous, immediate reaction to what occurs on the field, and there are a variety of

these reactions. The eeriest are the choruses of boos that follow "bad" calls against the home team. Or the hissing noise that greets visiting evils like the Oklahoma Sooners or now-retired Alabama coach Bear Bryant.

The strangest sound occurs on the rare occasions when the opposing team takes control of the game -- silence. Although this is a cliché that has been beaten to death by television announcers, it's really amazing how quiet 76,000 people can be.

But of course the triumph of the home team is the loudest sound at the stadium.

In November 1978 Nebraska defeated the Oklahoma Sooners 17-16. I was there and I'm still in love with the game. The game was a 20-minute overtime thriller. The Sooners were leading 16-14 and they were trying to score. Nebraska's Billy Sims took a 20-yard run and scored.

When years old at the time -- screaming desperately, "make him fumble!"

grandmother, sitting to the left of me, was apparently more than I.

"Break his leg!" she screamed. "Kill him!"

Sims was caught and brought down inside the five, and before he hit the ground the ball squatted loose. Safety Jim Pillen cradled the ball for Nebraska at the 10 and 76,000 fans suddenly had their chance to vent six years of Sooner frustration. The stadium was overtaken by a continuous ocean wave of white, foamy noise, noise that gushed in your ears and filled them up, pumped your adrenaline, and, if you were lucky, made you forget that you were screaming about a football play.

approximately one minute I screamed as loud as my vocal chords would allow, and couldn't once pick my voice out

of the roar.

3. Lincoln Overnight

If you really want to enjoy the sounds of your Lincoln environment, you'll probably have to stay overnight. The early morning hours and the transition into dawn are the most dynamic and interesting moments of the day, most of the noisy cars are sleeping.

The night is dominated by freak sounds and noise. At this time of the year it's mostly crickets, but at other times it's birds and apparently very loud television sets and lattice-work fences.

Over the course of the night, many of the most intriguing sounds are heard. The standard sound of a car horn is a disagreement about a road down our street. Every car horn is a screech to a halt in the night. There are always plenty of animal sounds. Squirrels yelp, moans and wails.

At the time people all over Lincoln will be entering the most hated, obnoxious sound of the world -- an alarm clock of any kind. Once it's shut off they'll marvel at the early morning quiet, but you, of course, will know differently.

Local bands consider cassettes most affordable option

By Mark Lage Senior Reporter

For aspiring Lincoln recording artists the possible roads are various, many come shortly to dead ends and the most common involve the cassette.

"Cassettes are by far the cheapest to get out," said Randy Watson, who besides leading the Lincoln band The Return, has recorded a number of local tapes over the last few years at his own Black Sea studio.

But first, one must get music on to a master tape, and there are at least a couple of options in Lincoln.

Mastertrax, 1844 N St., is a 24-track full-time professional recording studio, said Jim Rupert, co-owner. The studio's standard fee is \$40 per hour, plus additional tape costs, Rupert said.

"The tape costs depend on how much they use," he said. "Some people want twenty takes for three songs, so it'll cost them a little bit more."

In addition to 24 tracks, the Mastertrax recording studio features digital mixdown capabilities and DBX noise reduction.

Watson's eight-track private studio is unfortunately no longer an option for Lincoln bands. After five years of recording releases by bands like For Against, 13 Nightmares, Trout Mystery, The New Brass Guns and Out of Habit, Watson has decided that Black Sea from now on will be the private studio of The Return.

"I started it about five years ago, and was just doing it for fun," Watson said. "But after a while the economics just took the fun out of it."

"People thought I was making tons of money out of it, but I was just paying off new equipment," he said. Recorders' abuses of his fee policies and unreliability in payment drove Watson out of the public recording business once he had all of his equipment paid off, he said. He might occasionally break that policy, though.

"I might record with Out of

Habit again," he said. "I'll only work with good friends, good bands, or people I know that I can work with," he said.

Home recording is another recording option. Roger Benes took this route to put out his "Lie Awake" tape.

Benes said he spent about a year at home working on his own 8-track recorder to produce the nine-song cassette. He also had a quarter-inch two-track machine so he could make his own master.

Which brings us to the next step in the process -- master tape in hand, where does one go to get it mass-produced and ready for the market?

Rupert, Watson, and Benes all mention BQC -- Best Quality Cassette -- in Council Bluffs as a good option for local musicians.

"We recommend BQC," Rupert said. "They do a real good job."

Watson said that 13 Nightmares took its "Black Sea" recording to Chicago to get records made, and For Against went to California for CDs, but his own band, The Return, had 300 copies of "Glossingtown" produced at BQC.

Three hundred is the minimum number they will make, and the cost for that number was somewhere between \$400 and \$500, Watson said.

According to Watson and Rupert, cassette is by far the easiest format for Lincoln musicians to market their music, for reasons of economy and geography.

Rupert said that Mastertrax turns master tapes over to its clients, and can recommend certain places to take them.

The closest place Rupert has gone through to get record copies made is somewhere in Texas, and he also knows of places in Nashville, Tenn., and on the coasts. CDs are even tougher to get made, as there are very few places that do that now, Rupert said. Both cost much more than cassettes.

The final step, of course, is sales. Many local record stores put

a variety of local releases on their shelves on a consignment basis.

Pickles usually places five copies of local cassettes for sale in each of its three Lincoln stores at a price set by the band, plus a general service charge never greater than \$1, manager Mike Bullerman said.

"After that it's up to the artist to check in and see how sales are," he said. If all the copies sell out, Pickles will write the artist a check, and then put more copies on sale. The cycle continues until the artist pulls out, Bullerman said.

Trish Dubas, manager of Twisters, said that the store also takes local tapes on consignment, and puts them on sale at the artist's designated cost, plus minor sticker and service charges.

Occasionally, with more established bands like The New Brass Guns, Twisters will pay the band outright, actually buying the cassettes and then putting them on sale, Dubas said.

Both The Return and Benes have had cassettes on sale at Twisters, Pickles and Project Imports.

The Return's "Glossingtown" came out at the end of last school year, and has sold about 100 copies, Watson said. The band, currently without a drummer, has found a permanent drum programmer for recording work, and will release a cassette single in a month or so, "so that people will know that we are still alive," Watson said.

Benes' "Lie Awake" was released about a month ago, and he has managed to get it placed in Lincoln, Omaha and Kansas City.

This is a result of Lie Awake, the band, having played fairly often in these cities, he said.

"We're known there," Benes said. "But at the stores where we weren't, we didn't get much response. It's pretty tough to get your tapes on sale if they don't know who you are."

"The sales are going great," Benes said. "I think about 400 have sold."

These are the local cassettes on the shelves at Pickles, 1637 P St. and Twisters, 1401 O St.

- B and the Hot Notes, "back in wack"
Roger Benes, "Lie Awake"
The Blue Band, "One More Won't Kill Ya"
Bob 'n' J, "We Want Off the Planet"
Bobby Curious, "The Paul Phillips Show"
The Cheatin' Snakes "Snake Fascinated!"
Christopher "The End of the Age"
Dave Dickerson, "No More Land to Give"
Elysium Crossing "Rhythm of the Rain"
Eroica, "Babelogue"
The Folksters, "what a poser"
Jared and the Doo Rites, "How Do You Doo?"
The Lemmings, "Skoomba Loomba"
Lonesome Dave and Hardly Every Holm, "The Ballad of Oral Roberts"
Laurie McClain, "Gettin' Out Alive"
John Moran, "The Taming Power of the Great"
The New Brass Guns, "White Dress"
Daniel Newton, "... somebody actually plays this stuff"
Out of Habit, "Flavors of Favors"
Private Kangaroo, "Another Bad Day for Bobby McKay"
The Return "Glossingtown"
John and Jason Shaw, "Flowers From Heaven"
"Staged! A Live Lincoln Sampler" featuring The New Brass Guns, 13 Nightmares, Elysium Crossing, The Return, Trout Mystery, Mannequin Beach, Out of Habit, Charlie Burion and the Hiccups
Scott Stewart, "Quiet Life"
Such Sweet Thunder, "Jan Chamberlain"
Dave Sullivan, "Endless Road"
Tone Def Crew, "Grand Def Audio"
Tuna Fish Jones, "Tuna Fish Jones"
Who Doctor Who, "Sudden Dose"

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