

From blues to rap

Diverse musicians entertain with fresh crop of albums



Courtesy of Capricorn Records

"Everyday"
Widespread Panic
Capricorn Records

The long, stringy hair of hippy blues is whisking against the face of the music scene once again if "Everyday" by Widespread Panic is any sort of omen.

Widespread Panic, when they really gun their muse's throttle, is like ZZ Top at the helm of Pink Floyd. Like a Floyd album, Widespread Panic finds its vitality in well-structured exploration.

Widespread Panic makes its six- or seven-minute song worth the time. The deep-fried melodies move in a linear direction, instead of just chasing their own tails. Guitar and organ melodies sprint across uncut trails: twisting, turning and finally intertwining like flying DNA strands through the wilderness, until a huge sun burns into view.

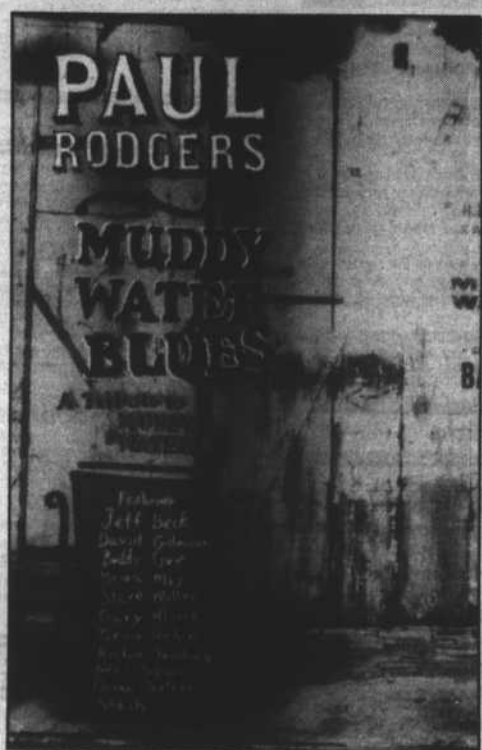
One can sense the Lizard King's ghost slithering around the vocals of John Bell, the band's front singer. Like Jim Morrison or his imitators, Bell's voice trembles and growls with unearthly narrative, as though he's just glimpsed a world just a little too scary for the rest of us. On a downside, Bell's voice seems to break down during ugly instants with cigarette decay: maybe a Nicoderm patch would help.

The Athens, Ga., band fails only when its musicians lean on their chord progressions like a crutch and fail to strive forward.

Anyone interested might consider picking up the band's first self-titled album to discover from whence "Everyday" hails. The new album is a group of quality but strongly produced tunes. The first album was only an audience and a stage short of live concert: Its songs had the mellow, gliding quality of a laid-back blues band atop a small stage.

Widespread Panic will play a free show in the Nebraska Union on April 25.

—Patrick Hambrecht



Courtesy of Victory Music

"Muddy Waters Blues—A Tribute to Muddy Waters"
Paul Rodgers
Victory Music

More than one top-notch blues-oriented album hit the stores last year, and now, a recording that comes close to outshining them all will be released Tuesday — Paul Rodgers' "Muddy Water Blues — A Tribute to Muddy Waters."

British guitar player and vocalist Rodgers got his start delivering soulful rock 'n' roll blues after forming Free in 1967 and co-founding Bad Company in the early '70s.

Later, after a solo shift, Rodgers hooked up with Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page for The Firm's two albums, then split to form The Law.

Now, in honor of blues pioneer Muddy Waters, Rodgers' silky lead vocals team up with an impressive hit list of lead guitarists — like Buddy Guy.

Guy's acoustic version of "Muddy Water Blues" opens this 15-track tribute while guitarist Neal Schon finishes up with an electric version of the same.

Jeff Beck plays three numbers, including "I Just Want to Make Love to You" while Steve Miller blazes away on "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man."

Listeners are also treated to tracks highlighting the fretting forte of Brian May, Gary Moore, David Gilmour, Brian Setzer, Trevor Rabin, Richie Sambora and Slash.

And not to be overlooked is the tight rhythm section comprised by drummer Jason Bonham, bassist Pino Palladino and rhythm guitarist Ian Hatton.

Add Rodgers' well-chosen undiluted arrangements and what you get is not only a potent tribute to Waters, but also to the superb musicianship of the contributing guitarists.

"Muddy Water Blues" links an unforgettable era of blues to rock.

—Jill O'Brien



Courtesy of Savage Records

Just-Ice
"Gun Talk"
Savage Records

How original—a rapper with the word "Ice" in his name. Unfortunately, "Gun Talk," the latest release from Just-Ice, is more on the level of Vanilla Ice than Ice Cube or Ice-T.

This isn't because he's a poser like Vanilla; Just-Ice was born in Brooklyn and raised in the Bronx. It is because his music is boring, unoriginal and grates on the nerves after about 10 seconds.

The first bad sign is right on the cover: one of those "warning" stickers that says "Caution: Illegal Bass, May Damage Your Woofers" or something to that effect.

In other words, the music is so muddy and bass-heavy, it can only be enjoyed by pasty-faced white guys who cruise around by themselves and play tapes like Just-Ice on their mega-stereos that cost as much as the big, jacked-up pickup they're driving.

There's a lot of other gimmicks on "Gun Talk" that have already been run way into the ground. The song "It's A Just-Ice Thing" is probably the 800th or 900th song this year to borrow the music from Cypress Hill's "How I Could Just Kill a Man."

On other songs Just-Ice gets into that rugged gangsta stuff, that dancehall reggae sound (you can tell by "Jamaican" titles like "Give Mi Pass" and "Informer Fi Dead") and that disco style. Yes, Just-Ice is talented — he can rap in any style we've already heard way too much of.

—Matt Silcock



Courtesy of Atlantic Records

Lasette Wilson
"Unmasked"
Atlantic

"Unmasked." Lasette Wilson's debut album, is what I consider "background" music. "Unmasked" is the kind of disc you put on real low when conversational company comes over — something you don't really pay much attention to until three-fourths through the disc someone asks, "What is this we're listening to?"

Apparently Lasette's first album was inspired by her realization that a gap between street R&B and jazz needed to be filled. Hence the hip-hop groove laid on top of an undeniably jazz structure. In other words, jazz equals architecture and hip-hop R&B equals interior design.

Lasette's list of sidekicks on the album is long and complicated. Lasette sings additional vocals on "jam on lasette," while the rest of the vocals are left to Sandra Williams, Angela Stone and Toni Smith. Mind you, that's for the few songs that induce vocalization. Most of the album is instrumental.

The focus is on the music, and for Lasette's part, that includes keyboards and all drum programming. "Programming" is the negative word in that sentence.

The first half of the disc is dedicated to this newly filled gap of music Lasette has found, while the remainder of the disc is more of a modern jazz compilation.

I'm not so sure this gap between R&B and jazz was successfully filled with "Unmasked." The new style is different in some aspects, but not different enough to kick off a new wave of music.

"Unmasked" is best on low, with the much-needed art of conversation drowning it out.

—Dana Franks

Flirtations' fun concert has serious overtones

While they "flirted" their way through clear, four-part harmonies, The Flirtations delivered an important message about being members of the gay community.

Cliff Townsend, the bass singer of the group, said, "We want to show people that being gay isn't all doom and gloom."

At their Sunday night performance at Carson, The Flirtations did anything but show doom and gloom. The most politically active, openly gay a capella singing group kept their audience laughing while being blatantly open about their gayness in song.

The Flirtations treated the audience to some remakes of traditional four-part a capella songs as well as introducing new songs with a gay message. They took a moment to reflect on Michael Callen, a member who couldn't be with them because of his sickness with AIDS as they sang a song, "Living in Wartime," written by Callen.

In a part of the performance called "One of Us" the members shared significant parts of their personal lives.

One of the members had played with an easy bake oven as a young boy; one member took his boyfriend to his high school prom; all members of the group are for abortion rights; three members of the group are single; one member was sexually abused.

Jon Arterton, singer and co-founder of The Flirtations, said the purpose of including "One of Us" in the program was to challenge some stereotypes about gay men.

The group, which has been together since 1988, has received support from both the lesbian and gay communities, which Jon Arterton said was unusual.

Their message isn't the only thing that makes the group attractive to its listeners. Each member had an impressive vocal range with a special talent of using falsetto.

Dennis Mundorf, 27, said, "If we could bring more of this type of openly gay performers into this area, students could get a broader perspective of what the gay community is really about."

—Sarah Duey



Courtesy of Fleming Tamulevich

Jon Arterton, Cliff Townsend, Aurelio Font, Michael Callen and Jimmy Rutland are the Flirtations, the out gay quintet that played the Lied Sunday night.

Group to hold discussion on 'Coming Out'

The Flirtations will be giving a special panel discussion on "Coming Out" and AIDS issues today at noon in the City Union. Anyone is invited to come and take part in the discussion.

Members Jon Arterton, Aurelio Font, Cliff Townsend and Jimmy

Rutland will be hosting the discussion. The members of the group have dealt with AIDS firsthand. Michael Callen, a member of The Flirtations, was diagnosed with AIDS in 1982 and is still dealing with the sickness.

Aurelio Font, singer in the group,

said being gay also meant living a roller coaster life.

"One day you feel wonderful and the next day you wake up to find out a friend of yours has died of AIDS."

—Sarah Duey