

Fiasco

Continued from Page 12

awaited four-day hiatus. But upcoming break or no upcoming break, Willis is still dedicated to churning out more rock 'n' roll for his fans.

Before Wednesday's show, he decides that it's time to work on the packaging for his next solo release. So he heads for Alphagraphics, located at 14th and P streets, and a group of about 10 awestruck and amused fans follow him.

In the copy shop, Willis settles up against the counter and spreads his notebook before him. As the store's employees work on his order, he tells random stories of life on the road, his latest recordings and his next recording, which he announces will be titled "Alphagraphics."

"I recorded a 24-song album just yesterday," he says, surveying the watchful eyes of the fans who surround him.

He holds up an open hand, as if under oath.

"I recorded a 24-song CD in 4 hours. Do you believe me?"

The fans nod, and he turns back to his notebook. Willis reads his latest batch of polished lyrics, a somewhat sickly tune called "Suck a Camel's Booty Hole." In short, it involves bestiality and condiments.

Of course, the teen-agers who surround Willis love it and ask for more. And, of course, Willis obliges them.

When Willis finally leaves the store, about four or five fans stay in hot pursuit. He crosses the street, speaking with a booming voice that would be hard to imagine at a low volume.

"Tonight, I will rock Mudslide Slim's," he says matter-of-factly. "I will rock Lincoln, Nebraska."

He waves at fellow pedestrians and shouts his standard greeting.

"I'm Wesley Willis, pleased to meet 'cha!"

Some people wave back and others

simply stare, but everyone notices him. Inside Mudslide Slim's, the atmosphere is smokier and louder, but Willis is still the center of attention. He chats with the fans who approach him and tries to sell more of his CDs, as well as some of his artwork from a large plastic sheath.

He doesn't shake hands, but rather asks people for head butts. When fans agree, Willis grabs the backs of their heads, presses their foreheads against his and lets out a celebratory roar.

Soon, he stops talking to the fans and asks for a chair. He sits down and pulls one of the massive works in progress from his sheath. It is a finely detailed cityscape, a crowded expressway with large, thin-lined buses and block-like cars without wheels.

Spreading it across his lap, he goes to work on it with a marker and ballpoint pen.

Now, the fans just watch.

Meiners spends his pre-show time in a little more traditional way. He sits in a booth near the front of the establishment, sipping beer from a longnecked bottle and puffing on a recently purchased cigar.

In addition to his role as lead guitarist and founder of the Wesley Willis Fiasco, Meiners is Willis' roommate, guardian and best friend.

"He lives in a different world, one that most people have a hard time understanding," Meiners says.

"If people aren't used to dealing with people like Wesley, people who function in a different society, they have a hard time getting along with him."

"Pretty much every one of my friends functions in a different world, so I've never had a real problem with him."

Willis was diagnosed several years ago with schizophrenia, Meiners says, but his problems go beyond that.

"Obviously, schizophrenia is the worst of his problems, and that's what he's medicated for. But there is too

much going on in his head ... he's never had a thorough enough diagnosis to discover everything."

Despite Willis' obvious problems, Meiners says, he has never been a threat to himself or others.

"He never gets violent; he never throws tantrums or anything like that. The only problem we've ever had is that he used to go and check himself into hospitals all of the time when it really wasn't necessary."

"The government was paying all his bills, so I spent a lot of time trying to get him back out."

If anything, Meiners speaks of Willis with a sort of reverence. A warm grin creeps onto his face whenever the man's name is mentioned.

Meiners met Willis in 1992 in a Chicago art store. Immediately impressed with Willis' work and his outgoing personality, he offered Willis the opportunity to hold an art show in his loft.

Willis, who at the time was living in the housing projects on Chicago's South Side and surviving by selling his drawings on the street, eagerly accepted Meiners' offer and a friendship was formed between the two.

Soon after, Meiners convinced Willis to move in with him and Willis' father transferred custody to Meiners.

Willis always had been an artist, but he never had worked seriously with poetry. But he soon became interested in the work Meiners did in the recording studio he had in the loft.

"He was pretty slow to get into the music thing," Meiners says. "He didn't think there was any money in it."

"He was making enough money selling his drawings, and it wasn't until I recorded some of his songs and gave him some tapes to sell that he got really interested."

Since then, Willis has recorded about 15 solo albums, one album with the Wesley Willis Fiasco and a handful of split 7-inch singles with other bands.

Willis' massive musical output and

his dedication to all of the art forms in which he works are evidence of his approach to life.

"He has a real method to his art, and he is completely honest with it. His stuff is some of the best I've ever seen," Meiners says.

"He's the hardest-working guy I've ever met."

It's show time in Lincoln, and Wesley Willis is ready to rock.

Mudslide Slim's is packed and the windows at the bar's front are fogged over from the body heat.

The band — Meiners, rhythm guitarist Pat Barnard, bassist Dave Nooks and drummer Brendan Murphy — are on the stage and waiting. They look over at Willis, who stands by the stage, head down and eyes closed.

When Willis does climb up to the stage, the crowd goes wild. Raised beer glasses and shouts of "Wesley!" fill the air.

Willis steps up to the microphone and extends his arm, looking out at the notebook clutched in his hand.

"We drove eight hours to get here today," he says to the crowd. "We drove 480 miles to get to Lincoln, Nebraska. Did we drive too far?"

The crowd replies with an enthusiastic "no!"

Willis, still selling his act to those who have already bought, continues with a prologue to the show for almost 10 minutes, telling the crowd just how hard the Wesley Willis Fiasco will rock and just how good the people of Lincoln will have it.

The prologue soon ends, though, and Willis announces the first song, "I'm Doing It Well On This Side of the Rea."

The music starts.

Willis stands almost motionless, reading the lyrics from his notebook, as the rest of the band jumps and mugs to the audience with a wide variety of tried-and-true rock god poses.

Their sound is like that of a precision speed metal band, with splashes

of reggae, funk and straightforward rock 'n' roll thrown in for good measure.

Halfway through the set, Willis has made it to a more spiritual song, "Jesus Is the Answer," and the crowd's energy has almost reached its breaking point.

The tension soon breaks with a furious burst as the mosh pit is revived in Lincoln with a vengeance. The few crowd members who participate flail in front of the stage and bounce off the rest of the crowd.

One of them is boosted up to a support beam that crosses above the stage's front, about 12 feet above the floor. He clutches the beam and swings from it, much to the band's delight.

Another fan scales a side wall and positions himself on top of the same beam. He shuffles to the middle of it and looks down on the crowd.

The band and the crowd look up at him in anticipation. All except for Willis, who continues his vocal duties without interruption.

When the fan finally does fall into the crowd, the band rejoices and the fans who weren't below his falling body applaud and shout their approval.

Then, after one solid hour of rock 'n' roll bliss, the show ends as it started, with Willis talking to the crowd, this time from the floor.

He offers his thanks and asks the crowd for verification of his earlier promises of satisfaction. The crowd responds positively, surrounding Willis with the same awestruck look as the handful of fans in Alphagraphics had earlier in the evening.

Some fans file out of the club, others stay inside to hear Willis' final words of the evening. He is asking for a place to stay overnight, thanking the fans repeatedly and telling of his plans to go home to Chicago the next day.

"Rock 'n' roll will never die!" Willis shouts. "You cannot kill it!"

And as long as there are people like Wesley Willis around, those words should ring true for a long time to come.

Music Reviews



Various Artists
"Beautiful Girls"
Elektra
Grade: B

Under the guidance of Afghan Whigs frontman Greg Dulli, it's hard to imagine how a soundtrack album could go wrong. And the soundtrack for "Beautiful Girls" is no exception.

Dulli has a masterful ear for the soulful sounds of the past, as evidenced by his band's selection of cover tunes (which has ranged from

Al Green's "Beware" to TLC's "Creep"), and he puts that ear to use in his role as co-executive producer on this album.

The majority of the songs here, as the film's title might indicate, are homages to either a particular woman or women in general.

The highlights include the Afghan Whigs' covers of the Barry White classic "Can't Get Enough of Your Love Babe" and the Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes tune "Be For Real," Chris Issak's take

on "Graduation Day" and the surprisingly good effort from Ween on "I'll Miss You."

But no soundtrack — as of late — would be complete without a few choice cuts from "back in the day," and this soundtrack is no exception.

Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" is probably the strongest among these. The Diamonds cut, "The Stroll," is an old favorite but seems blatantly out of place here.

The only truly lacking tracks are the title cut by Pete Drogge and the Sinners and Roland Gift's turn at "That's How Strong My Love Is," which pales in comparison to Otis Redding's version.

Overall, this is a fine album that holds its own in a saturated movie soundtrack market. One could say that it is suitable, and some might say that it is superb. But, actually, it's just beautiful.

— Jeff Randall

SUITE 9
 LOUNGE & OFF SALES
2137 Cornhusker

- 22 BEERS ON TAP
- GREAT FOOD
- 10 POOL TABLES
- 8 DART MACHINES
- FOOSBALL

HOURS: Mon - Fri 6 am - 1 am Sat 11 am Sun 1 pm

Ralph's
HUNGRY EYE TATTOO STUDIO
 112 South 9th Lincoln, NE 68508
 402-477-0279

Custom • Cosmetic • Traditional
 Safe • Professional • Discreet

Open 10:00am
 closed Sun. & Wed.

CLASSIFIED

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING
 CALL 472-2588 FAX 472-1751
 8 AM - 4:30 PM Monday-Friday
 34 Nebraska Union 1400 R Street
 Lincoln, Nebraska 68508-0448

16 Computers For Sale
 Imagewriter II good condition, \$60. Macintosh Plus Computer, \$100. Macintosh SE Computer, \$120. Prices as shown or best offer. Call 472-2578, ask for Kent.

65 Stereos TVs For Sale
 Almost new Alpine car stereo, 3 disc changer, equalizer and accessories. Call 466-2696 after 5pm.

90 Vehicles For Sale
 1978 Volvo Station wagon. Good car for \$475. 474-4777.

200s Notices
 210 Announcements

ALASKA EMPLOYMENT—Fisheries, Parks, Resorts now hiring! Earn up to \$3,000-\$6,000/month Airfare Room/Board FREE VIDEO w/program! State Licensed Service. Call (919) 932-1489, ext. A39.

ALASKA SUMMER JOBS
 Fishing Industry. Earn up to \$3,000-\$6,000/month + benefits. Male/Female. No experience necessary. (206) 971-3510 ext.A57784

CRUISE SHIPS HIRING.
 Earn up to \$2,000+/month. World travel. Seasonal & full-time positions. No exp. necessary. For info, call 1-206-971-3550 ext. C57782

APPLY NOW!!!
Student Summer Employment
in Housing May 4 - August 23
 Custodial.....\$5.70/hour
 Building Maintenance.....\$6.10/hour
 Building Painter.....\$6.10/hour

Weekend schedules and occasional overtime available!

Apply in person between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. to:

- Jerry Lokie at Burr-Fedde Maintenance
- Mike Leupold at Cather-Pound-Neihardt Maintenance
- Mike Kansier at Harper-Schramm-Smith Maintenance
- LaVern Priest at Selleck Maintenance
- Lyle Harris at Abel-Sandoz Maintenance

For further information, call Central Housing Maintenance, 472-3753.