

Iowa City group brings high-energy act to Lincoln

Extensive touring takes Low Gravity Band to Nebraska for the first time.

By ANN STACK
Senior Reporter

Newton had it right — gravity exists. But Low Gravity Band doesn't need to drop an apple on its fans' heads to get their attention.

Low Gravity Band, a high-energy roots-rock act, will be playing at Knickerbocker's, 901 O St., Saturday night with Lincoln's Shithook. It specializes in mellow, groove-oriented music with heavy hooks and harmonies, drummer Pat Lake said.

Hailing from Iowa City, Iowa, LGB has been together in various forms for nearly ten years now, most notably as Big Daddy Sugarsnake. The band lasted until the summer of 1995, when their lead singer quit. Their final gig as Big Daddy Sugarsnake was opening for the BoDeans at the University of Iowa.

"If there was ever a night I needed Depends, that was it," singer/guitarist Todd Allan said, referring to the emotion-filled final performance.

The five 20-somethings of Low Gravity Band live together in a farmhouse, called the "Rancho Relaxo," just outside Iowa City. They claim influences as varied as their personalities: anything from Steely Dan to Uncle Tupelo to contemporary top 40 is up for grabs.

"We get hip to certain bands, and some of it sticks," Lake said. "But we can't be thrashing through something with the high-hat when the emphasis is on Todd's acoustic guitar."

"I hope next month I'll be hip to something like Prince, and have that filter through our music," Allan said. "A lot of bands stay in a certain genre; they're afraid to try something new."

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through is the "No Depression" vibe — a style of music modeled after Uncle Tupelo's album of the same title.

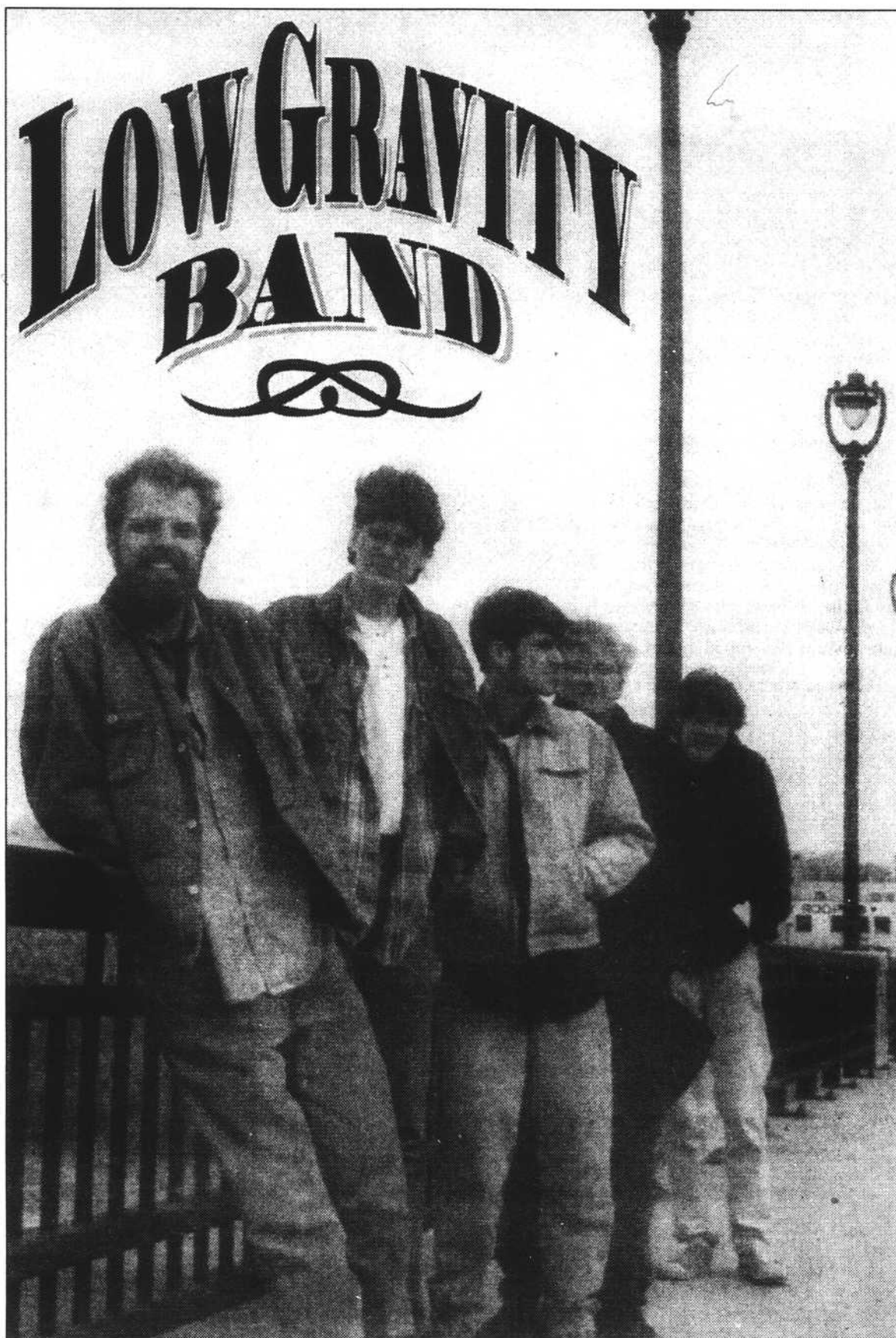
"People have told us we sound like we're from Minneapolis," Allan said. "We played with (Minneapolis band) The Wonsers and they said that."

Other national acts that Low Gravity Band has opened for include The Honeydogs, The Hazies, The Commons and Tim Mahoney and the Meenies. Their extensive touring has taken them across the Midwest — Milwaukee, St. Louis, Rock Island, Ill. and Des Moines, Iowa, to name a few places. But Saturday will be the first time Low Gravity Band will play in Nebraska.

"We're really looking forward to it," Allan said. "It's a fantastic opportunity."

Their commitments to playing music is one thing that remains constant with this band. They all have day jobs — and college degrees — but they're dedicated musicians, and the members agree they'll go to any length to make sure they're heard.

Low Gravity Band will take the stage about 10:30 p.m. There is a \$3 cover charge.



COURTESY PHOTO

LOW GRAVITY BAND, from left, are Blane Anderson, Dave Lumberg, Todd Allan, Patrick Lake and Andrew Brockman. They will perform at Knickerbocker's, 901 O St., Saturday night.

Musical tells traditional story of 'Nativity According to St. Luke'

By EMILY WRAY
Staff Reporter

Sue Buss will take a break from the hustle and bustle of the holiday season by watching "The Nativity According to St. Luke."

Featured as part of Abendmusik's 24th season, "The Nativity According to St. Luke" will be performed at 7:30 both tonight and Sunday night. Produced in coordination with the Lincoln Symphony, vocal soloists and performers from the community, the musical will be held at First Plymouth Congregational Church at 20th and D Streets.

Buss, the executive director of Abendmusik, said people attending the holiday production are motivated by the true meaning of Christmas.

"It's the joy and coming of Christ," she said. "If you take time out to watch 'The Nativity,' it's a reminder of why we have Christmas. The concert has a calming and emotional effect."

Composer Randall Thompson conducted "The Nativity" in the Nebraska premiere

during the 1975 Abendmusik season, Buss said.

"John Levick has always loved the work and we decided to do it again," she said.

Abendmusik, a non-profit, fine-arts series, first filled a niche in the community 24 years ago, Buss said.

John Levick, the minister of music and artistic director of First Plymouth, wanted a variety of instrumental and vocal music that featured local, regional, national and international performers.

"The Nativity" continues the tradition of using local performers for Abendmusik's third concert of nine this season.

Buss said that many University of Nebraska-Lincoln students and professors were chosen for main roles in the musical based on the Gospel of Luke. The Lincoln Symphony and Abendmusik Chorus serve as background for the soloists.

Featured soloists for "The Nativity" include UNL School of Music students Sarah Gilbert, Rebecca Kouma Shane and Lance Hedlund. Donna Harler-Smith, professor of

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MCI Communications abandons one-year music retailing business

WASHINGTON (AP) — MCI Communications is getting out of the music retailing business after the one-year-old venture failed to generate the profits originally envisioned, company officials said Wednesday.

The long-distance company had been winding down the venture for months and will end it Dec. 31.

"The truth is it was keeping its head just above water in terms of profitability," said spokeswoman Susan Landis. The company did not disclose figures.

MCI entered the \$12 billion music retailing business in November of 1995 with an 800 number that let people sample and buy their favorite recordings.

Many people called the music service dubbed 800 MUSIC NOW, but few were buying, Landis and others at the company said.

Among the reasons: It is easier and cheaper for people to buy from a record store; and sales in the music industry in 1996 have been terrible.

Another problem: the company began to require people to set up accounts with MCI using credit cards before they could sample the music for free. At record stores, people could sample music in listening stations or booths without any such requirements.

MCI spent around \$10 million developing and promoting the service, the company said. MCI needed to make only a minimal investment to provide the service because it uses many of the resources — transmission, billing and customer service systems — already in place.

All of the venture's employees have already been assigned to other jobs within the company.

Landis said the ill-fated venture does have a silver lining. She said it expanded the company's exposure.

In the summer, MCI phased out its online shopping service called MarketplaceMCI, located on the World Wide Web portion of the Internet, Landis said. Music, flowers, food and computer software and hardware were among the products sold.

Company officials said people visited the site but were reluctant to use it for making purchases.

Closing down both the online shopping and the music retailing ventures reflects the company's larger strategy to focus resources on the local phone business.

With the music service, callers were able to choose from among 5,000 CDs and cassettes.

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