

Iowa's House Band

Rock group hails small-town roots

By CHRISTOPHER HEINE
Staff writer

Thirteen years ago, Barb Schilf of the House of Large Sizes stood still and tight on stage with her bass guitar.

People who have gone through the early processes of learning bass understand looking and feeling like an amateur surgeon trying hard not to cut into the wrong notes or chords.

Schilf couldn't even permit herself to watch her husband, Dave Deibler, jumping on the tips of his toes freely, looking like a blonde kangaroo.

"I had to concentrate pretty hard at first," Schilf said.

But it wasn't long before she was po-going in unison alongside Deibler. She created possibly the most innocent and joyous performance visual in the history of rock 'n' roll.

Now, having long mastered the bass, her braided pigtails rotate regularly as she bounces with the band's enthusiastic, pillar-strong rhythms.

The Cedar Falls, Iowa, group has been a staple act of the Midwest rock scene since its inception with its well-received shows.

To its credit, HOLS has always been willing to work from the ground up, and is proud of its humble success.

"We basically have the same attitude we've always had," Schilf said. "We just want to enjoy what we're doing."

Schilf said the band has found enthusiastic audiences in Chicago, Minneapolis, Seattle, San Francisco and Austin, Texas.

Having played in several of the nation's largest cities, both Schilf and Deibler iterated with emotion a particular pet peeve of playing in big towns.

People don't understand why they stay in Iowa. "I think it's strange that we have to defend where we live," Deibler said. "Somehow everyone believes New York and Los Angeles are these great places. We're perfectly fine in Cedar Falls."

And the fact of the matter is the band wouldn't be what it is without its small-town existence.

HOLS new drummer Brent Hanson, who commutes from Minneapolis, said the proof is in



IOWA PATRIOTS and state darlings House of Large Sizes has garnered an avid following across the Midwest. Wife Barb Schilf and husband Dave Deibler replaced longtime drummer Mark Munn (left) with newcomer Brent Hanson last year.

COURTESY PHOTO

the songs.

"Lots of the things that inspire Dave to write songs have happened around here," Hanson said.

The Minnesotan said he became a fan of the band when his former group, Whoops Kitty, toured with HOLS a few years ago.

"They're such a great live band that watching them night after night made them my favorite band," he said. "I think they're likable because they are humble, but at the same time know that they are good."

Although HOLS takes on modern rock that is too unique for commercial radio or MTV, the band has a sizable, national audience.

Its fanatic, grass-roots following has grown year by year as the band has toured the country continuously. Meanwhile, the band's album sales have climbed: HOLS' 1998 W.A.R.? release "Glass Cockpit" has sold more than 5,000 copies, dwarfing the number of units sold on its first full-length release. This might sound like a decade's worth of little headway to people unfamiliar with

Concert Preview The Facts

What: House of Large Sizes
Where: Duffy's Tavern, 1412 O St
When: Tonight at 10 p.m.
Cost: \$5
The Skinny: Entertaining performers bring inventive Iowa rock to Nebraska

the record industry. But consider the thousands upon thousands of U.S. bands who have yet to sell 20 compact discs outside their own states.

Deibler said the band's current audience is enough to keep him happy. And members of HOLS makes enough money on the road to not need day jobs, he said.

After all, Deibler once washed Lear jets at Duncan Aviation while living in

Lincoln in 1982.

The 35-year-old said HOLS tours six months out of the year, and he appreciates his more creative new profession.

"You'd always like to do better financially," Deibler said. "But I'm getting to do what I've wanted to do since the third or fourth grade."

The singer-guitarist sometimes refers to his band as a "small-business practice."

Deibler's choice of words could be misinterpreted as unromantic. Rather, his statement represents much about the band and its reasonable, Midwestern outlook.

Small business or not, the message has been getting out that HOLS is a formidable group.

Longtime local musician Bernie McGinn said the band puts on likable performances.

"They are really entertaining with lots of jumping up and down," McGinn said. "They have a stage presence that, like any good live band, is infectious. They're like AC/DC on Prozac."

The AC/DC comparison is merited in Deibler's guitar work, which is usually minimal while he sings well-metered verses in a voice that is only comparable to Jon Kimbrough of Walt Mink.

The choruses arrive with Deibler's guitar thundering to rock's past, oddly reminiscent of both classic rock and punk rock at the same time. Schilf usually joins at this juncture with pretty, prairie-girl yelps of back-up melodies that nail down anything her husband left over in the tenor-to-soprano range.

And at every reasonable opportunity, between verse stanzas or at a bridge, the great display of dual bouncing up and down is back in the house.

Schilf jokingly said the band's most-used rock move has a most basic origin.

"In the early days, a lot of the shows we played didn't have stages," she said. "So we were probably just trying to see who was in the back of the crowd."

'Monsters of Grace' creates 3-D hypnotic visions

By LIZA HOLTMEIER
Senior staff writer

A severed hand. A helicopter-carrying hawk. A 10-yard foot.

With images such as these, the aptly named "Monsters of Grace" melds 3-D animation with new-age minimalist music.

This Thursday, the 73-minute operatic experience comes to the Lied Center for a one-night only showing.

The brainchild of renowned minimalist composer Philip Glass and designer/director Robert Wilson, "Monsters of Grace" unites the latest computer animation technology with Glass' hypnotic music to create a musical theater experience for the 21st century.

Paul Barnes, an assistant professor of music at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said the work abandons traditional narrative plots for a circular approach to time.

"There is not a logical



MATT HANEY/DN

progression of events," said Barnes, who saw the New York premiere of "Monsters of Grace." "It's a series of images circling in and out."

These images are projected onto a full-sized movie screen on stage.

As the music establishes the mood, the bespectacled audience experiences a three-dimensional stream of virtual and surreal visions.

A pulsating cable mutates into a tube and then reveals itself as a blood vessel in a severed hand.

A glistening snake materializes on a tray of cups and bowls, and winds itself around the porcelain.

A full-sized helicopter is plucked out of the sky by a swooping hawk.

The images are brought to seats of the audience with the aid of the 3-D glasses provided before the show.

All the while, the Philip Glass ensemble, led by Glass, performs the Middle-Eastern flavored music.

The performers sing, in English, lyrics from the spiritual poetry of the 13th Century Persian mystic Jelaluddin Rumi.

The score complements these lyrics by incorporating samples of Persian and Middle-Eastern instruments such as the dumbleq, the saz and the baglama.

Barnes, who regularly does piano transcriptions for Glass,

said "Monsters of Grace" strays from typical harmonic progressions. This allows the listener to focus on pure sound.

"It forces you to listen to music in a radically new way. You're much more interested in creating a meditative atmosphere," Barnes said.

Barnes said the fast-paced, frantic world had embraced Glass' music because of its meditative qualities.

Glass is largely recognized as the most well-known minimalist composer of our time. His eclectic body of work includes film scores, symphonic works, and music for dance and theater.

This is his second collaboration with Wilson, one of the most well-known designers in Europe.

The two first collaborated on "Einstein on the Beach," a 4½-hour opera with no plot and a sung text of numbers and syllables.

Many called it the event that changed the face of musical theater.

"Monsters of Grace" retains the hypnotic experience of "Einstein on the Beach," but shortens it to a more comfortable 73 minutes, Barnes said.

"Monsters of Grace" also breaks new ground by fusing high art with the high tech.

"It's an other-worldly experience," Barnes said.

Lied Center The Facts

What: Monsters of Grace
Where: Lied Center for Performing Arts
When: Thursday at 8 p.m.
Cost: \$32, \$28 and \$24, half-price for students
The Skinny: 3-D computer animation meets the minimalist music of Philip Glass