

Caught 'em in Autumn

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Earthpig is vacating his lair. Like some A.A. Milne fuzzy guy gone wrong, he'll shuffle in and out of his queer little abode, gutting its cloistered innards piece by piece: TV's with birthdates ranging from 1949 to 1965, his "ladies" - the loveless mannequins of his spooky photographs - and, of course, his garage-sale score taxidermy collection. If he sees his shadow upon emerging, we may have to endure a longer summer, or, if he doesn't, we might hope for an early winter chill. Odds are, however, all that will be triggered by his move to a bigger pad are more photos from his new darkroom and more gigs with his band, Earthpig & Fire. After all, now they'll have room to rehearse.

Being an amorphous, ever-changing beast, this month's model of EP&F features a different cast from its springtime incarnation, which sported Chris Searles and Jeff Haley as Fire. Nowadays, the Pig (*aka* Adam Bork) sits with his cozily tilted Strat beside Brad Fastener (*aka* Magneto USA's Miles Zuniga), who, according to Pig "plays a powerful good bass," while Kevin McKinney (ex-Soulhat lead singer) does his usual monkey business behind the drumkit. This lineup promises to change just as surely as will Earthpig's platform shoes and polyester shirts, so it's a must-see. And a must-hear.

The absurdity of Earth-pig's persona is matched only by the beauty of his guitar tone and the secret poignancy of his lyrics, which obsess about characters that could saucily step from one of Roald Dahl's children's stories - freaks, dirty bird little boys, and happy morons. "Who in the world is Earthpig?" asks a hard-to-find bumper sticker made by the Piggy's mum. Answers another resoundingly: "Earthpig is." Or as our favorite Pig lyric elucidates: "Well, I'm the Earthpig/And my belly's kinda big." Clear as mud. - **Mindy LaBernz**

Brown Hornet

Like any respectable citizen, I love songs about doo-doo. Brown Hornet's under-recognized 1994 cassette *The Advanced Mitt* starts off with a song called "Mt. Doo," but that's only one reason they're such fun to listen to. Drawing on a variety of sources ranging from early Dead Kennedys to Japanese noise to Ravi Shankar, Brown Hornet is always a work in progress. Here's a band that leaves you with a different sonic impression every time you see them to an extent where you're not even sure it's the same band playing. Some nights, they pursue a punk or ska axiom, while other gigs find them immersed in experimental noise. According to guitarist Chef Poonstick, that's the idea behind this eight-man ensemble. "For us, shows are more a reflection of our current frame of mind," says the affable Poonstick. "We have a lot of songs, so we can pick and choose from show to show depending on our attitude."

In two years of local gigs, Brown Hornet has maintained a small-but-faithful following of friends and well-wishers that seems wholly independent from any of the many scene pigeonholes. This marginalization is partially due to the band's commitment to a free-form aesthetic. "I really don't want to learn too much about music because I kind of think it's a trap sometimes," says Poonstick. "There's another, more respectable road to take, but I didn't take it." Brown Hornet's road did earn the respect of New Orleans' Cutting Edge Music Conference, where they showcased with their Crescent City cousins, Lump. The band is also preparing for the winter release of a double CD with an additional 90-minute cassette thrown in for good measure. While such a prolific output is bound to have good and bad turns, Brown Hornet never stops to inspect the damage. They just keep on spewing forth frenetic energy in every direction until someone pulls

The Cov'rs

"I've been into punk rock for 15 years," states Cov'rs bassist Rick (who, like many punk musicians, apparently has no last name). "The same with Dave, our drummer. I wasn't hearing the music I liked being played anymore, so I started playing it."

And the music Rick and Dave started playing with guitarist Marty and vocalist Tristin is rare even in Austin punk circles: U.K.-style skinpunk minus the racism, stripping that most stripped-down of stripped-down rock stylings to its core of working class pride and big choruses. Along with the very Clash-like thrashings of Dead End Cruisers, they're drawing sizable enough crowds to local rock bars, backyard parties, and warehouse gigs to suggest there's an audience for common-man stomp-punk. And it's especially fun watching the Cov'rs mount the stage, looking a lot like the crowd they've just stepped out of (cruelly dyed-and-slashed denim and hair, studs, suspenders, big boots), tossing rock & roll posturing to the wind, letting their brute-force melodicism sing for itself. It's like seeing a slightly more sussed, Americanized Sham 69 rise in your own backyard, right down to their cover of "Hey, Little Rich Boy."

It's too soon to tell where it'll lead. Vinyl has yet to appear on the horizon, which means the Cov'rs remain at present a fun night out. But a fun night out is becoming increasingly rare in the eternally self-conscious Austin rock scene, which has gotten even more fragmented with the dissipation of the garage scene (which itself had gotten ridiculously exclusionary), and which still suffers from the same fickleness which has always killed forward motion locally. If the Cov'rs, along with a handful of other punk upstarts, can help build something to counter those negatives, they'll be a true force. - **Tim Stegall**

Burn

"The show's real human-driven, reflecting the frustration against everything that goes on as musicians battle uphill," Burn's Clay Campbell says. Is Campbell pulling a Vedder? Whining before the platinum records? Not really. Although Burn may not have much to complain about right now, it's best to let them vent onstage when you consider that industrial music without anger is much like funk without an accompanying party - a lot less fun.

Luckily, the shows Campbell speaks of are shows that also have Austin's industrial community talking - ever since an impressive Back Room crowd greeted Burn at their debut show last February. Burn co-founders Campbell and Mike Robinson, both contributing guitars and vocals and both formerly of Skrew, have since programmed a full set of MacIntosh-bred songs that when delivered by a rotating live band, which has featured members of Auschwitz 46 and the Skatenigs, literally does seem to be on the brink of chaos. But even with the industrial pedigree and promise of angst-driven sets, it was a well-circulated two-song demo, "Nail" and "Inflict," that quickly fueled the hype for both the scene's fans and an array of major label A&R types who've been fighting the mosh-pits to get their own first look - effectively making Burn's handful of shows since "showcases."

Campbell says that while they're waiting for the right label with the right follow-through approach to come to the table, the band's been writing, testing a new bassless incarnation, recording more demos, and trying to find replacements for a collection of musical and technical equipment suffering from ungodly amounts of live show wear 'n' tear. In October, the band will return from its hiatus with a live "ritual" perhaps heavier on bondage, the occult, and performance art. "Dealing with the labels and hearing about their setbacks as we discover more of our own is like bashing your head against the wall," says Campbell. "And the more we

bash, the more we lose control, and ultimately it's all the more intense of a live show, perhaps bordering on spectacle." - **Andy Langer**

Miss Xanna Don't & the Wanted

If it's true that there's a country music renaissance in progress here, that's news to Miss Xanna Don't. The Boston refugee was Beantown's reigning queen of country before relocating to Austin in 1993 with a handful of music awards and fans who still bemoan her loss. But wowing 'em on the East Coast is quite different from impressing Austin audiences, where country music is shaped and defined here much as it is in Nashville. None of that matters to Miss Xanna Don't, who possesses a voice as big and brassy as her trademark beehive hairdo, and a sense of humor as colorful as her voluminous skirts: the point is the performance. Torchy and twangy as her obvious influence of Kitty Wells and Patsy Cline, Don't twists classic barroom country with gender-bending muscle reminiscent of k.d. lang, and then some. A typically subversive set list might include covers like the Rolling Stones' "Dead Flowers" as well as originals like "River of Red." Add to that a tightly knit back-up band, The Wanted, and all she's missing is the attendant hosannas. None of the recent compilations of local "new country" bands have seen fit to include Miss Xanna Don't, which likely means she's doing something *really* offbeat and therefore *really* worth watching.

- **Margaret Moser**

The Walking Dead

You probably weren't aware that country music and the cowboy lifestyle were big in Canada. Well, they are. There's an event held by our northern neighbor called the Calgary Stampede that's among the world's biggest rodeos and runs 12 days strong. The original Walking Dead, formed by Alberta native Lucky Holloway - a fan of Merle Haggard, and Waylon Jennings during their "acid years" - played the Stampede. They played songs there about love gone bad, staring down into the bottom of a bottle, and broken guitars lying in the wake of barroom brawls; all tried-and-true themes of country music. A few years ago, when Holloway relocated to Austin, he found himself with one of his old Great White North compadres, and a bunch of old band T-shirts, so he decided to revive the Dead.

Their current lineup includes former Godjamnit guitarist John Wilson, bassist Jake Garcia (better known for playing funk/fusion), and drummer Chippr Tait. Together they still lay down good, solid tears-in-your-beer music; not "progressive" country or "young" country - it's just country, pure and simple, only cranked up to "11". On the band's *This Carnival of a Life* CD (*"I was nursin' a broken heart/and avoidin' a Texas jail/So I took a job mindin' the carousel"*) they spice up their sound with the likes of 8 1/2 Souvenirs' Glover Gill on piano, Scott Blesener on fiddle, and a touch of steel guitar from Miss Xanna Don't & the Wanted's Larry Tracy. Live, they cut loose as a four-piece on songs with titles like "Match Made in Hell" and "Thirteen Unmatched High Heeled Shoes," though Tait describes a dream fifth member as "a female steel guitarist who can sing." Following a trail blazed by Johnny Cash and tracks laid down by Wayne "The Train" Hancock, the Walking Dead are currently holding Emo's regular Monday night country slot. And, as Walser might say, "They're gettin' those orange-haired kids ta dancin'!". - **Ken Lieck**

The Gourds

What hath Uncle Tupelo wrought? Since that country-rock band's breakup, it's not too hard to find bands continuing the hippie-meets-Hank legacy of Gram Parsons and his peers. Tupelo spawned offshoots in the Bottle Rockets and Wilco, with the Jayhawks making their own separate rise to prominence. But, there's surely room for another group in there, provided it has a distinctive style to set it apart from the herd. That's where the Gourds come into the picture. With Kevin Russell's lonely-yet-joyous voice, his

sweet mandolin, and Claude Bernard's accordion, the Gourds' nice-guy sound occupies the space between the Band and the Subdudes. After only a year of playing since moving here from Dallas, their act is coming together with an almost alarming quickness, as is their fan club. If progress continues at this rate, one wonders how long Hole in the Wall and the Electric Lounge will be able to contain them.

Russell, who formed the Gourds with his former Picket Line Coyotes bandmate, bassist Jimmy Smith (drummer Charlie Llewellyn rounds out the quartet), happily says "Yeah, I think everybody knows what they're doing by now. I like country, but the others in the band aren't really that country. That's my influence. I would like it to be more country, but everybody in the band comes at this from a different angle. We don't want to be pigeonholed, and we don't want to become one of these bands that seems to mock country. You listen to old Carter Family stuff like 'Wildwood Flower' or 'Single Girl, Married Girl,' and those are good songs, not that hooting and hollering stuff." Although Russell says the Gourds' direction came independently of the aforementioned groups' rises to fame, he's aware of his place in a larger trend. "There's always a weird undercurrent of this stuff, people who like country but can't write Garth Brooks." -

Lee Nichols

Breedlove

The question that causes the most commotion is a fairly simple one: How long has the band been together? Suddenly, the young Austin quintet, splayed out comfortably in the underground office of Steamboat, erupts into a small-scale riot, complete with finger pointing and vocal one-upmanship. When the laughter has died down, it's determined that Breedlove has been together since December 18, 1994. No wait, January '95, really. No... For a band that's only been together approximately nine months, their history is already cause for debate.

McAllum High School is where Breedlove's short history begins: McAllum and two bands called Rainshine, and Third Power. The former featured Dyer, and later his cousin, guitarist Tyrone Vaughan Fullerton ("no hyphen between Vaughan and Fullerton," says the son of Jimmie Vaughan. The band gives him a collective look. "I'm experimenting," he informs them). Meanwhile, bassist Josh Dawkins and drummer Jason White - Billy's kid brother - were anchoring Third Power. Three months of rehearsals later, keyboardist Ezra Dawkins joined, and with him came the living room where they made their debut to family and friends.

What quickly ensued was a 21-song set list ("we have yet to work up a cover"), a peppering of local gigs, and management from Jan Mirkin (Ian Moore). Today, the young band is already veteran to the Texas touring circuit, having established a route that includes Denton, Waco, San Antonio, Lubbock, Abilene, and Dallas. "We get the best response in Dallas," says Vaughan Fullerton. Except for Austin that is, where the young band is pulling down crowds big enough to fill Steamboat on a Friday night. Could it be the magic word: Vaughan? "We haven't played that card yet," says the youngest limb of the famous family tree. "But people in Austin know [who I am]. They come out to see if I'm any good. If we can get them in the door, that's cool." And they *are* flocking through those doors. Later that evening, it's easy to see why. Locked into a hard-pounding groove that's equal parts Doors, U2, and all things blues, the band lurches through a two-hour set that never breaks momentum. Its one original after another, and they all sound studio worthy. The young, enthusiastic frat crowd agrees. A following is building and worship is growing. Arc Angels part two, anyone? - **Raoul Hernandez**

The Headhunters

Working the blooze bars on Sixth Street is the musical equivalent of ditchdigging: hard work, no fun, and little reward. But, it's what you gotta do if you're gonna play the blues. Some folks can't accept that and

become worthless hacks, doomed to a life of spitting out the same old tired standards night after night (anyone for "The Sky Is Crying?"). Others do, and use the scene as a proving ground and bill-payer until their break comes along. After close to a year of toil among the never-weres and still-could-bes, the Headhunters are finally beginning to see some dividends.

The band - Randall Stockton, harp/vox; Freddy Cruz, guitar; Kevin Wright, drums; and Jack Johnston, bass - takes its act on the road to North and East Texas with increasing frequency, and will open for Lou Ann Barton at Poor David's Pub in Dallas next month. Closer to home, the Headhunters have played Emo's, the Flamingo Cantina, and the White Rabbit, but their bread and butter remains their gigs at Joe's Generic Bar every Wednesday and frequent weekends. "It's a bit of a pain to say [to the alternative clubs] 'We're the blues band that went over well,' " Stockton says. It's not a surprise the Headhunters go over well; they do for blues what perpetual Emo's fave Wayne "The Train" Hancock does for country: take it back to its roots while keeping it firmly rooted in the Nineties. It's also not surprising for a set list to contain songs by Ike Turner, Jimi Hendrix, Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Willie Dixon, and Little Walter, as well as a healthy number of originals. It's a dirty job, this waiting for a break, but Stockton and the Headhunters are happy to be doing it. "Slowly but surely, we just plod away trying to take care of the music," he says. The rest, God willing, will take care of itself. - **Chris Gray**

Raggamassive

They're not the best-known reggae band in town and maybe not the best period. They don't even draw the biggest crowds at Flamingo Cantina, though the all important DTS (dance-to-sitting) ratio is at least one-to-one. But Raggamassive is bringing on a righteous buzz for themselves and some self-righteousness from others.

"They aren't really roots," sniffed one reggae fan. "It's not like reggae was in the beginning." Well, "in the beginning" was around the time of the Beatles' *Revolver*. Ska, rock steady, and a horde of American and Caribbean styles formed the distinctive one-drop percussion and heartbeat bass of roots (and often Rastafarian) reggae. "We call ourselves 'ragga' because we have a rougher down-to-earth style," says band leader and bassist Guno Ronde, late of Killer Bees, "and 'massive' because our sound is massive. We play some roots, [but] we like crossover and hip-hop." With no apology. The bass can be a rapid popping, the drumming a sharp R&B backbeat, and the keyboard a bill of Sixties pop riffs. Cortney Audain (Timbuk 3) and MC Overlord are among the many guest artists who have appeared with the band. You get toasting, rap, dancehall, dance and roots. Did I say dance? On one occasion, Raggamassive featured two female exotic dancers. Dancers are a trend among touring acts. But unlike in Raggamassive, these dancers were choreographed and could belt out back-up vocals.

"That's out," says Ronde of the dancing. "We need to get professional dancers, and we're not there yet. It was something we tried and it didn't work." Ronde's honesty is refreshing and revealing. The seemingly simple addition of dancers means production. Can two pro dancers be found? Who will choreograph? We hope that the experiment resumes down the road. Meanwhile, Raggamassive has already shown both daring and a humbling acknowledgment of the outside world's creativity. Roots authenticity, best band, best crowd ... bollocks! Their goal is simple: "We're ready to rock Austin," sez Ronde. -**Stephen McGuire**

The Magdalenes

You're lost on a lonely dirt road somewhere out in the Davis Mountains watchin' the dust rise lazily in the rear view. It's about 6:30 on a Sunday night in very late October. It's not quite Halloween, but it feels like it. The high altitude air is very crispy, the huge sky is a fading purple, and the setting sun casts a reddish-

golden glow on the leaves of the few trees on the mountainsides. Fort Davis could be near, but you're not sure. You need directions, but the cows won't do you any good. About two miles in the distance, you see a light burning in the window of an old rickety church dominated by a leaning gothic steeple. When you get there, something's amiss. The air is booming and the walls are shakin.' You look in the window and four scruffy guys are rippin' through gospel covers like hell itself were about to split asunder.

"Full-tilt-hillbilly-gospel" is how the group called the Magdalenes describe their sound. You listen, thinking maybe an old Austin band known as the Hickoids have somehow changed their wicked ways and found the big guy in the penthouse. "This has gotta be a joke," you think. The Mags speak of their live set on the Christian station KSAV and you laugh. They stare blankly at you. As they blast out a cover of "Satan Your Kingdom Must Come Down," you feel like that little bible belt kid again, only this time even more confused. You realize Dallas no longer has a lock on religion-inspired weirdness *a la* Reverend Horton Heat and the Church of the Naked Subgenius. It's a virus feeding on millennial madness. You ask the band for directions and they say "follow the path of the lord." Trundling down the road, you listen to a copy of the Mags' *Yahweh or the Highway*, realizing that on the path of righteousness you're never lost. Amen. - *Joe Mitchell*