

Band Spotlight

JACKOPIERCE

Alternative duo returns

By Michele Brinkmann
THE BATTALION

The Dallas band JACKOPIERCE returns to College Station tonight to perform one last concert before starting its European tour.

Jack O'Neill and Cary Pierce are JACKOPIERCE, a duo who sing and play the guitar. JACKOPIERCE formed in 1988, when Pierce and O'Neill were students at Southern Methodist University. Since then, they've graduated from fraternity party performances and moved up to touring the world to promote their first major-label album.

They will perform a free concert at Rudder Fountain today at 4 p.m. and will play at the Texas Hall of Fame at 9 p.m. The band Vertical Horizon will open the show.

The duo usually plays at Wolf Pen Creek Amphitheater but is playing at the Hall because it wanted a change of pace from the usual venue. JACKOPIERCE usually draws more than 3,000 fans at its College Station shows, which is the most fans they have ever performed in front of.

"College Station was one of the first places we played outside of Dallas," O'Neill said in a previous interview with The Battalion. "A&M has been more than supportive."

For those who have never heard JACKOPIERCE, Pierce describes the band as "like alternative but not alternative."

JACKOPIERCE delivers mostly story-songs with Simon and Garfunkel-like harmony with intelligent and emotional lyrics, which Pierce and O'Neill write themselves.

Todd Traylor, manager of Marooned Records, said his store used to be the only one in town to sell JACKOPIERCE, but since the duo released its album "Bringing on the Weather," the first album released on major record label A&M Records, other stores in Bryan-College Station now sell their albums.

Traylor said sales of the duo's four albums have not increased much since it signed with A&M.

"Our store always sells more JACKOPIERCE than any other store anywhere," Traylor said. "To an extent sales have increased but sales have always been consistent for all four albums. We sell the same number of all four albums."

Since Marooned opened in 1990, he said of the store's top five best-selling albums, JACKOPIERCE fills four of the spots.

"In the last year, our two best-selling groups are Pearl Jam and JACKOPIERCE and we have sold twice as many JACKOPIERCE than Pearl Jam."

JACKOPIERCE performed on "Late Night with Conan O'Brien" this summer, less than a year after joining A&M Records.

Pierce said signing with A&M means a lot more work.

"It's not just town-to-town anymore," Pierce said in a previous interview with

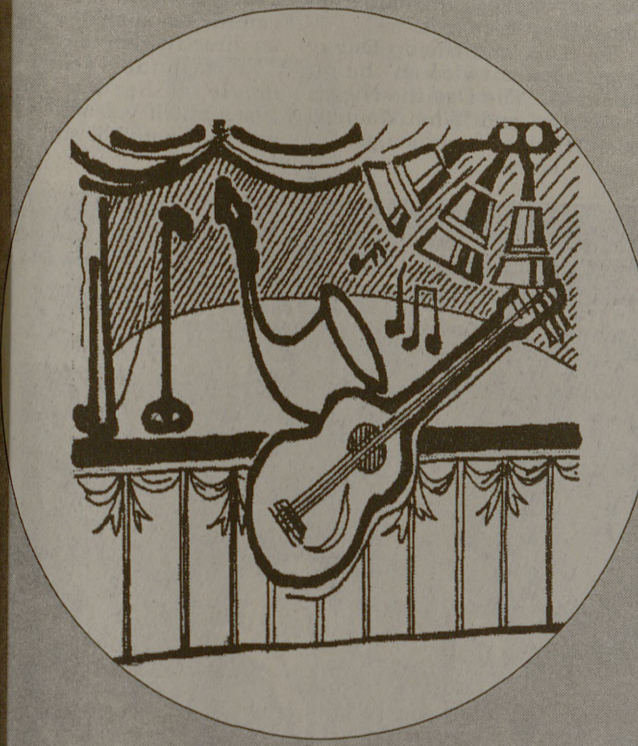


Courtesy of Kiva-West Recording Studios

The Battalion. "We have phone interviews, in-store concerts and radio interviews. But we are lucky because we already had the groundwork."

O'Neill said signing with A&M made business easier because it has the power to get the album to the public. But because JACKOPIERCE draws more fans with the major label, O'Neill said the duo is under closer scrutiny.

"We have more pressure to deliver the goods," he said. "All the work we have done so far is forgotten. This is our chance to be new again."



Panic Choir defies music trends

By Margaret Claughton
THE BATTALION

The Panic Choir, playing at 3rd Floor Cantina tonight, is a band bent on being out of the ordinary.

The band, which tours by R.V. and prefers camping in national parks to staying in hotels, harbors the philosophy of making each performance count and each song their own.

Lyricist, guitarist and vocalist Kevin Johnson said he hopes the band's future success will stem from its unique style.

"This band is not part of a trend," he said. "None of us would have it any other way."

The Panic Choir's signature sound embodies the folk-like aspect of Peter, Paul and Mary, the nouveau-aesthetic appeal of The Sundays and the 60s peace, love and rebellion characteristics of Jefferson Airplane.

The band's manager Peter Raspler said part of the band's appeal is its fusion of different musical styles.

"The Panic Choir has excellent musicianship," he said. "And the fact that it is a band that produces diverse music of high quality and has a female front-person appeals to many people. They have a lot of variance and a real original style."

Johnson and his wife, lead singer Carol Johnson, started The Panic Choir in Venice Beach, Calif. as a duo playing small-stage coffeehouses.

"We knew we had the potential to have a really great sound if we could form a full band," he said. "But in L.A. we had a hard time finding the right people. No one there was any better than mediocre."

So, the Johnsons packed up and moved to Austin. There they found all the band members and all the raw talent they needed.

Bass player Mike Hynes, originally from Detroit, brought in an rhythm and blues background. Guitarist Charles Rieser had studied jazz in Maine and the drummer, Rob Hooper, had developed his unique style while in Dallas.

"There were some really great musicians in Austin," Johnson said. "We found some with incredible talent."

Johnson said the band's process of song creation helps them to harness the talent its diverse members offer.

"I'll be working on the lyrics of a piece,

and get a rough idea of the melody," he said. "I'll go to Carol and she gets it going more. Then we get together as a band and just go crazy with it."

Through his lyrics and the band's melody, Johnson said the band wants each song to have a message.

"We try to make every song a pic-



The Panic Choir
Courtesy of Peter Raspler Management

ture," Johnson said. "Every song has its own emotional life."

Johnson's lyrics, he said, are largely inspired by the early work of Natalie Merchant, formerly of 10,000 Maniacs.

"I heard them perform 'The Wishing Chair,' their earliest album, in 1984 and it changed me completely," he said.

"I was amazed and captivated by her lyrics. I wondered how she, so young, could know and express all those things. It made me pay attention to the lyrics I write a lot more."

The Panic Choir re-released their debut album in November of 1993 titled "Soul and Luna."

Raspler said the album both sold well and was well received by radio.

They are currently working on a new album which Johnson said will have more of a concept and story line.

"Our first album was basically an assortment of all the different things the band can do," he said. "This next album is going to have songs with a common theme."

Though the band does not have a deal with a large record label, Johnson said he likes the label they currently play under, Crystal Clear Sound, out of Dallas.

"They help us take the necessary steps to get a good recording out for the band," he said. "They really help the bands they believe in."

Johnson said he isn't worried that being on a smaller label will hinder their success.

"JACKOPIERCE started on the same label," he said. "A lot of independent labels are doing really well recently."

The Panic Choir is the type of band that will fulfill the needs of many music listeners who crave original, non-trendy music, Johnson said.

"Especially in smaller towns like Austin, Corpus Christi and other college towns, there are a bunch of people dying for something genuinely good and original," he said.

"We work to make each show a full experience with a beginning, middle and an end so that every person leaves with a positive experience."

Petty tribute sounds like bad Karaoke band

By Jeremy Keddie
THE BATTALION

Various artists
"You Got Lucky":
A Tribute to Tom Petty
Alternative Rock
BackYard Compact Disc
** (out of five)

The new compilation album, "You Got Lucky: A Tribute to Tom Petty" attempts to honor Petty but falls short and demonstrates how much better Petty's original versions are.

The disc contains 10 tracks of Petty's greatest music, performed by various generally-unheard of artists. Most of the covers of Petty's music are rooted on the west coast, as shown by the distortion and feedback.

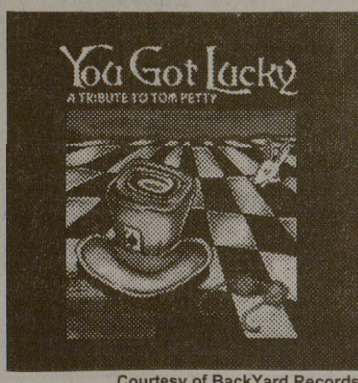
Everclear's cover of "American Girl," the lead track, follows Petty's version almost identically, with the exception of guitar distortion.

Engine Kids attempt "Breakdown," and it starts off strong with a grunge rhythm and a steady beat on the high hat. But the chorus evolves into what sounds like a group of high school students singing

on a bus after winning their football game, with the added element of marijuana - everything is slowed down. The cover is nearly twice the length of the original version, simply because of the chorus. It's frustrating to listen to.

"Here Comes My Girl," performed by Throneberry, provides the first palatable piece. Although the version is almost identical to the original, Throneberry personalizes it with light variations in the rhythm guitars.

The fourth track, "Even the Losers," as performed by Nectarine, is simply boring on CD.



Courtesy of BackYard Records

It might make great moshing in concert, if you can get past the monotone of their lead singer.

"Stop Draggin My Heart Around," covered by Loud Lucy with Louise Post is welcomed after making it through the previous flops. The lead singer has a colorful voice with a harsh edge placed to it. The guitarists add their own deviations from the original tune without being over-frivolous with the distortion.

Punchdrunk's version of "Nightwatchman" is the best song on the disc. The bass-driven band is tight and clean, unlike most of the others. The percussionist's use of various sounds, such as what sounds like the striking of a glass jar, adds to the driven voice of the lead singer.

Fig Dish's "Don't Come Around Here No More" has a touch of swing to it, but with a full distorted guitar sound similar to Smashing Pumpkins. This tune could have been pulled off as its own.

Throughout the album,

Diffie's album rocks with country lyrics

By Jay Robbins
THE BATTALION

Joe Diffie
"Third Rock From the Sun"
Country
Epic Records
** 1/2 (out of five)

Take out the twang accent and a few of the more corn-pone numbers - like "Good Brown Gravy" - and Joe Diffie's "Third Rock From the Sun" is just rock. But by its own claim, if no one else's, the album orbits earth's country music racks.

And though, musically, Diffie's latest effort has little in common with the work of major country icons such as George Strait and Reba McEntire, the sentiments of each song lie square in the down-home gut.

Ironically, the three most memorable tracks on the disc rock their country roots the most.

The outstanding title track spins words and electric guitar into a terrific fast-paced ballad that almost forces jitterbuggers out onto the dance floor. The convoluted way a police chief's infidelity indirectly sparks a

panic over a giant alien at the mall is inspired humor.

Since Garth Brooks hit the charts with "Ain't Goin' Down Till the Sun Comes Up" in 1993, several artists have experimented with the traditional country ballad. "Third Rock From the Sun" and its "cause and effect chain of events" causes listeners to forget any effect of those other releases.

The best song on the album, "Junior's in Love," sings another hilarious picture, this one of a blue-collar love triangle between Junior, Wanda and Shorty.

The heavy bass line and drum beat make the song perfect for listening in a car stereo while on the highway with the windows down.

"I'd Like to Have a Problem Like That," by the same song-writing team who crafted "Third Rock," resonates with the sentiments of anyone who's ever resented the lucky few who are "too rich, too thin, too young or too in." Its upbeat mood appeals to the country-boy cynicism that automatically ridicules people who can't appreciate their good fortunes.

Unfortunately, the other numbers on the album play sour notes. "That Road Not Taken" and "From Here On Out" fall into the same dramatic-and-slow-with-lots-of-string-section trap that has ruined dozens of potentially good performances in recent years.

A couple of others, namely "Good Brown Gravy" - which even had Billy Dean's help as writer-background vocalist - and "I'm in Love With a Capital 'U,'" are just plain dumb with a capital "D."



Courtesy of Epic

See Diffie, page 4

See Tribute, page 4