

AGGIE life

FRIDAY
April 19, 1996

Page 3

Eugene-Eugene looks to increase following

By James Francis
THE BATTALION

Some say music is an acquired taste. It comes in a variety of forms, and the people who follow the tunes are no different.

Eugene-Eugene will perform at the Brazos Brewing Company Saturday at 10 p.m.

"I see the band growing, pushing towards a bigger audience ..."

— EUGENE SMITH JR.
keyboardist, Eugene-Eugene

Brothers James and Ernest Gibbs play guitar and drums, respectively; Ralph Moncivias is the band's saxophonist, and Shawn Drury is an occasional female vocalist joining the band at different sets.

The Gibbs brothers hail from a musical background in their family, but there is one other individual who, although the only member of his lineage to partake in music, shares the band's experiences.

The man responsible for the band's double name is Eugene Smith Jr., the group's keyboardist who said the group is "a mix of rhythm and blues and jazz with contemporary gospel."

He said his major influence is Stevie

Wonder, with the band Chicago as an alternate favorite.

"I like Stevie Wonder because of the messages he has," Smith said.

As for Chicago, he said he sees it as "one of the top brass bands," and he enjoys the feeling he receives from them.

Another feeling Smith takes pleasure in is the audience participation at the group's many performances.

"I look for people who take the time to listen to the music, people who like to move when we are playing and give us a response to know whether we did a good job or not," he said. "We try to project a very clean image of Christian people who love to play music and live life to the fullest."

The band, diverse in its performances, plays a grand amount of Earth, Wind and Fire from the 1970s and 1980s.

At locations ranging from the Hilton to churches and dances to the Walden Retirement Community, the group performs upbeat, hip-hop music and gospel songs to classics such as "Moon River."

Although Eugene-Eugene has been a group for almost 10 years now, improvement is always an option.

"I see the band growing, pushing towards a bigger audience — more from state to a national level," Smith said.

Smith said he sees himself as more of a producer and songwriter as the future approaches.

As the head of Master Dreamer Productions, he also publishes a magazine, Back to Basics, which is filled with art, poems and short stories for the African-American community.

"It's all about going back to doing things the way they used to be," Smith said.

Jasmine Blue strives to mature after first album



By Amy Protas
THE BATTALION

With the exception of one, all the members of Jasmine Blue are childhood friends. When they were in middle school, the members were all in bands. At the time, they did not realize that one day, they would come together and record an album.

Jasmine Blue came about when Karl Kunz, the band's rhythm guitarist, returned to Bryan from Waco.

Marshall Love, vocalist and percussionist and a 1995 Texas A&M journalism graduate, said he had not been involved in music until he found out Kunz was back from Waco.

"Karl and I grew up together in Bryan," Love said. "We parted ways when he went to music school in Waco. I didn't have much to do with music until I came back from studying abroad in Italy in 1994. When I got back, Karl and I met up and began writing songs together."

Kunz helped Love write an operetta for his senior honors thesis. The operetta is called *Figurine* and was performed on the A&M campus.

In October 1994, the band acquired Jonah Salih, a sophomore computer engineering major.

Love said Salih can only be described as a guitar virtuoso.

"Jonah's sister brought him over to our apartment one night," Love said. "He picked up a guitar, began playing, and we knew then. He's an incredible virtuoso guitar player. He began composing difficult melodic parts to fit over our music."

In 1996, the three, with the help of two studio musicians playing bass and drums, recorded *Motherlover*.

Kunz said recording the album was an exciting experience.

"Recording the album was cool," Kunz

said. "I used to be in the studio all day for class. It was great to go into the studio purely for creation purposes. It's a tight band getting recorded by a good producer, and it really shows up."

Before recording the album, the band mainly played acoustic sets.

"The only gigs we've done have been in town as acoustic acts," Love said. "Recording the album was exciting because we didn't know what the music was going to sound like by adding bass and drums. We liked it, but we also still like the songs in the acoustic format."

After recording the album at Guinea Pig Studios in College Station, the band obtained two new members: Watt Bigham, a freshman mechanical engineering major and bassist, and drummer Rodney Ramirez.

Bigham said he started playing the bass at a young age.

"I always thought Black Sabbath was cool," Bigham said, "so when I turned 10, I got a bass. The guitar thing never really appealed to me. It all seemed pretty pedestrian."

The influences of the band run the gamut from Van Morrison to Yes to Jimmie Hendrix to Kiss. The band mentioned Rush as the most common influence.

Kunz said their sound can best be described as rock 'n' roll.

"When we say alternative, it's alternative to Seattle," Kunz said. "The '60s had its own style of music, and we're rooted deeply in '60s music. We're definitely not Smashing Pumpkins. We're roots rock with soul."

Kunz said the band would never have been able to record the album without the help of their friends.

"We appreciate all the support we've been getting," Kunz said. "We really rely on our friends. We have a real tight circle of friends, and there's so much technical stuff going on that they help with. The album is just the end result for all these people that are getting paid nothing. They're really helping us."

Band yearns to perform



Cowboy Mouth

By Libe Goad
THE BATTALION

Cowboy Mouth is escaping from the kettle of music in New Orleans and serving its home-grown sound to the rest of the nation.

The band is playing at the Dixie Theatre Saturday night.

After playing together for four years, the band recently signed on with MCA Records and toured last fall with old-time friends, Hootie and the Blowfish.

Fred LeBlanc, Cowboy Mouth drummer and lead vocalist, said he and guitarist Paul Sanchez, bassist Rob Savoy and guitarist John Thomas Griffith have played with Hootie and the Blowfish for six years.

The two bands would exchange dates, playing together and always looking for a good time.

"We'd watch them get out and get drunk," LeBlanc said.

Their camaraderie paid off. After Hootie and the Blowfish hit it big, they invited Cowboy Mouth on a tour of the nation.

The bands played together like old times, but with much larger audiences. LeBlanc said Cowboy Mouth found many new listeners along the way.

"The best part was playing with old friends for three weeks," he said.

In Los Angeles, the corporate rock ears were ready to listen.

LeBlanc said that after the show in L.A., record offers fell into their lap. The

band signed with RCA and spent the next few months creating *R U With Me*.

The new album should sound much like the band's three previous albums, LeBlanc said. But the July release will have the force behind a major label to help them along.

"We've learned a lot of things," he said, "and we took much more time on this one."

Though Cowboy Mouth has moved up a notch in record labels, they stick to their original style — anything goes.

Of course, the band comes from a heart of diversity in New Orleans. There, the Neville Brothers and Marsalis family dug their roots. The Crescent City also birthed the beginning of rhythm and blues, Cajun and zydeco.

Mixed in with the music of Better than Ezra and Dead Eye Dick, the band is a clear reflection of its roots.

On the band's last album, *It Means Escape*, the members' different influences showed through.

The album presents a mixture of pop, noisy guitar songs and a song best sung by a cowboy on the range.

"When Paul and I formed the band," LeBlanc said, "we wanted the musical dexterity of the Neville Brothers and the intensity of the Sex Pistols."

And so Cowboy Mouth began.

The band members each came from a musical background and each brought in a different musical taste. Sanchez' acoustic guitar preference, Griffith's country guitar, Savoy's Cajun rhythms

and LeBlanc's passion for the Beatles, the Sex Pistols and the Clash met somewhere in the middle to form Cowboy Mouth.

And unlike many bands, the members searched out a name that would sketch out the band's personality, LeBlanc said.

The name comes from Sam Shepard, the brooding western playwright, in a play where two people look to one another for advice.

LeBlanc says one character tries to convince the other to become a performer. He tries to make a friend think he can use his talents to become a musical savior.

"He tells him to be a rock 'n' roll Jesus with a cowboy mouth," he said.

"Cowboy Mouth was the only name that we could all agree on."

Another thing the band agrees with is getting back on stage.

LeBlanc said the long months of recording has made him lustful for performing live.

"Our shows are based around the idea of old Gospel shows," he said. "We want to cleanse and purge the crowd of bad spirits."

It's the good spirit that keeps the band rolling. LeBlanc said having fun inspires him to keep his creativity churning.

"The main thing we want to get across is a sense of passion and happiness."

"I do what I do," he said, "because I think we are f—king great."

Plebeian Monarchs finds meaning

By Amy Protas
THE BATTALION

What started out as a band for a high school talent show has evolved into the Plebeian Monarchs. The Monarchs are producing an album and are currently touring. The band is playing on Northgate Saturday at 8:45 p.m.

"Music is a church, a place where you go and worship."

— STEVEN COLLINS
guitarist/vocalist, Plebeian Monarchs

Greg Vanderpool, the band's guitarist and vocalist, said the band was able to form again after the members got out of college.

"We were separated by college, but have recently brought it back together," Vanderpool said. "We've gotten into what we really want to be. We want to take it more seriously."

Vanderpool and Steven Collins, guitarist and vocalist, are the original members of the band. Collins asked Steven Scheifley, a drummer, if he wanted to join the Monarchs.

Scheifley said he had been interested in music since he was extremely young.

"I play drums and I basically started when I was three years old," Scheifley said. "I'm 25 and the oldest member of the band. I've been playing forever, it seems like. I

used to turn on the radio station and beat on pots and pans along with the music."

Eventually the band obtained Chris Godbey, a bass player. Vanderpool said the band's name has significance behind it.

"Originally, we were just the plebeians," Vanderpool said. "Eventually, we added Monarchs. Plebeians are common people, and of course, monarchs are kings. This name is not about us as individuals, more about the concept. It shows the contradiction of being common and being a king."

Collins said the band's style can be compared to The Police or U2.

"Our music is really anthem-esque," Vanderpool said. "An anthem is something you sing with patriotism. It's similar to what we sing. When you sing the 'Star Spangled Banner,' you sing it like you mean it. That's what we try to do."

Scheifley said although the music is somewhat mellow, it is still rock.

"It's definitely rock," Scheifley said, "but in a U2 and Police style. We're very vocal-oriented. Greg is good about harmonizing with Steve. I love listening to music that has the harmonizing element. We're not a loud band. The lyrics are more of a positive nature."

The band considers Daniel Lanois, who produced some of Peter Gabriel's and U2's music, a strong influence.

"I would like us to aspire to be similar to him," Scheifley said. "His music is highly spiritual, yet down to earth. It's something you can sink your teeth into."

The band's other influences are Bruce Springsteen and Charlie Sexton.

Spiritualism is something that is extremely important to the Monarchs.

Collins said music embodies spiritualism.

"Music is a church," Collins said, "a place where you go and worship. It doesn't exist in physical realm except for sound. When you go to church or you are watching a movie, it's not as powerful until the music comes in. It's a universal medium. Everyone who can hear the music can understand."

At the beginning of the summer, the Monarchs will be releasing an album called *Equus*. It is named after a play written in the 1970s by Peter Shaffer. The play, as with the album, deals with what people put up on a pedestal.