

Denton-based Baboon closes out regional tour in Bryan-College Station

By April Towery
THE BATTALION

An intense and energetic live band, Baboon, is preparing to close out its regional tour with Centro-Matic and UFOFU at Vertigo tomorrow night.

The Denton-based alternative/punk band includes four University of North Texas former students.

Lead vocalist Andrew Huffstetler said the band has just released a shorter CD with Grass Records.

"The EP, which we titled *The Numb EP*, has six songs, two of which will be on our new album to be released in October," Huffstetler said.

Baboon's first album, *Face Down In Turpentine*, was released in October 1994.

Baboon has been playing for almost five years. Guitarist Mike Rudnicki played in a band with Huffstetler during their college days at UNT, and the two auditioned and began playing with drummer Steve Barnett and bassist Mark Hughes.

The four guys have more than the band in common; they are also roommates.

"We live together and just practice here in our house," Huffstetler said. "We're all really good friends."

Baboon just finished a month-long tour on the East Coast and will tour the West Coast later this year.

Huffstetler said Baboon has had some great experiences during their performances.

"We were able to play with the Toadies and Fugazi," Huffstetler said. "I love playing live. We're pretty intense recorded, but there's just so much energy that

goes into playing live."

Baboon's former drummer, Will Johnson, has gone solo with his one-man band Centro-Matic. Johnson is excited about the upcoming show at Vertigo.

"Baboon is one of my favorite bands," Johnson said.

Johnson, a senior English major at UNT, said he had no grand vision of playing by himself — it just sort of happened.

"Frankly, I wanted to start a band of my own," Johnson said. "I was so nervous playing by myself," Johnson said. "I needed to build confidence. When you have a band behind you, it's not all your fault. You have backup."

"But then the David Koresh and Nazi came out in me and I just wanted to do it all myself."

Johnson records himself playing drums and bass, then sings and plays electric guitar live onstage. Johnson said it's a sight to see.

"I do a lot of jumps and kicks," he said. "It's the 13-year-old arena rock, I guess. It's kind of pop in music, and punk in approach."

Although Johnson plans to earn a master's degree, he said he does want to continue a career in music.

"The good thing about a one-piece band is that there's no internal tensions or possibility of the band breaking up," he said. "I definitely want to pursue music in the future. There's something appealing about touring in a Honda Civic. I just liked the

way that sounded."

Centro-Matic released a 7-inch EP, *The Transistor EP*, in May. Johnson hopes to release a full-length album by the end of next year.

In addition to playing all the instruments, Johnson said he also writes all his songs.

"Occasionally I have been known to do a Prince cover," he said. "Right now I'm working on AC/DC's 'Back In Black,' but most of the time I like to play my own stuff."

Besides Johnson's obsession for collecting snow globes, he said he has a fascination with playing in bizarre places.

"I played at 'This Sud's For You' Laundromat," Johnson said, "but I have high hopes to play at a gas station someday."

Johnson said the quality of his audience, not the size, is what is important.

"I'd rather have 20 people who are intent on listening than 400 who really don't care," he said.

Johnson said being comfortable with playing alone was not automatic.

"Six or seven songs into my first show, I was right in the middle of a jump when my guitar just totally went out," he said.

"I took my guitar off and just finished the song a capella. That's when I knew I could get comfortable with this and not panic. It really helped me to gain confidence."

Johnson believes the upcoming show will be a blessing for any rock-and-roll enthusiast.

"I love to sing melody and approach my songs from all angles," he said. "It's therapy."



Will Johnson of Centro-Matic

Connick Jr.'s new funk style fails with *Star Turtle*

By Jeffrey Cranor
THE BATTALION

There is good news and bad news. The good news is Harry Connick Jr.'s newest album, *Star Turtle*, is out. The bad news is he is playing funk-rock style similar to his last album, *She*, but it sounds worse.

As he did in *She*, Connick uses a five-piece accompaniment instead of his big band. But since abandoning the crooner sound that made him famous, Connick has produced two marginal albums that walk the line between mediocrity and strangeness.

Four of the 15 songs on the new album are entitled "Star Turtle" and are as odd as their name suggests. And many of the other songs are hardly memorable.

"Hear Me in the Harmony," his first release from *Star Turtle*, is his best song on the album. Using his Sinatra-like voice and outstanding piano melodies for which he has been historically acclaimed, Connick teases listeners with "Hear Me," although he still cannot quite satisfy them.

Connick grew up in New Orleans and began as an entertainer at age five when he jumped onto the stage at a blues club with his father and played the piano. Audiences have given their approval ever since.

His first eight albums were a pastiche of jazzy piano solos, big band sounds and New Orleans cabaret tunes. His voice and the spirit of his band made nearly all of his earlier songs enjoyable.

Connick's lounge singer voice found room to prosper in the

1980s and 1990s, despite a small demand for big band music.

But Connick's newfound funk rock seems to be more representation of the band and less of his voice. And although the band is good, it should not overplay Connick's magical voice as it does in most of *Star Turtle*.

Star Turtle is not one of Co-

ALBUM REVIEW

Harry Connick Jr.
Star Turtle
Columbia Records
★★ 1/2 (out of five)



nick's better works — the music and lyrics are simple, and the rhythms are highly repetitive — but it is not totally irredeemable. One still cannot help but enjoy Connick's swinging grooves, no matter how basic.

His band is much more alive than in *She*, and the background vocals and hand-clapping are reminiscent of his big band albums.

Connick also incorporates techniques of 1970s rock, jazz or gans and wailing electric guitar solos, which are alien to any of Connick's other music. In "Hear Me," the soft jazz organ helps move the song along and gives it a lighthearted feel.

The song "Boozehound" starts with a nice electric guitar solo, but the mood is quickly ruined when the sound mutates into a harsh screech and bad lyrics.

This exploration into new musical styles proves to be fruitless after two albums. But for a young talent like Connick, a return to glory is not impossible. It may, in fact, be inevitable.

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