

New Community Represents Milwaukee's Musical Future

BY BILL CONROY

You might see the lead singer for Dear John stripping off his clothes while sucking on a microphone.

You might see the guitarist for Alien Farm striking out a psychedelic-punk solo while dressed in a priest's smock and wearing a painted face.

Or you might see the The Squares' lead singer clad in blue jeans playing a folk-rock ballad on an acoustic guitar.

It's called New Community. The idea is to create a music coop that can stage three acts on a weekend night for \$3 bucks at the door.

Dan Hintz, vocalist for Alien Farm, which is one of the New Community bands, claims that as many as 13 bands have rallied behind the idea of New Community, which he likes to describe as a genesis for a new Milwaukee music culture. Most of the bands in New Community, he explained, are tired of banging their guitars against the walls of the local club scene.

"There are less and less clubs in town that book bands that play original music," said Mike Benign, a singer and rhythm guitarist for Umbrella Man, another local band that claims allegiance to New Community. "Our band and others have trouble getting booked into clubs that are looking for a more mainstream appeal.

"So our own interests are being promoted by participating in New Community because we get a guaranteed job, plus we get to meet other musicians and share ideas."

New Community was created to offer

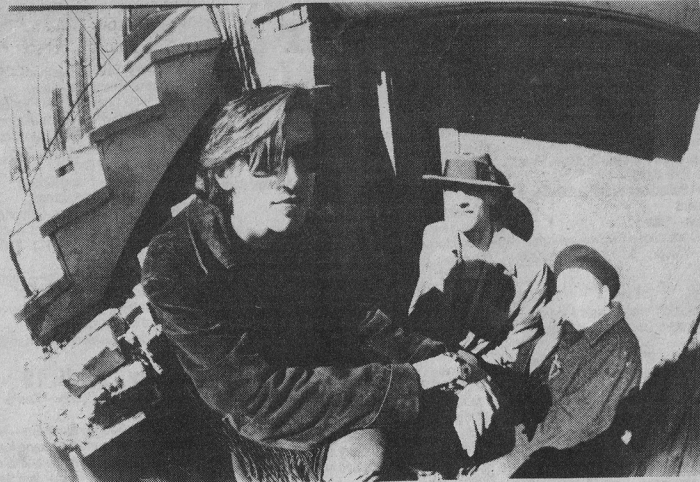


photo by James McCarter

bands and the audience an alternative, a new scene.

"Most of the bands that are part of New Community were bummed out with continually battling to get booked into the club scene," Hintz said. "So we decided to figure out a way to subvert the process."

Jim Warchol, who does vocals and plays guitar for the Wild Angels, which is also a New Community band, explained that the club scene in Milwaukee has become a "vicious circle" because there are more bands than good club dates, and in most cases, it's the same bands that get the good dates.

"Many bands are in a situation where they need to play on weekends to get a good draw, but if they don't have a good draw, they can't play the weekends," Hintz said.

"It's a Catch 22 that's been invented, and it's inherent in the system of how they book bands" added Scott Noegel, guitarist and musical improviser for Alien Farm.

Sour grapes? After all, the big-name bands in town have paid their dues.

Most of the musicians in New Community are in their early 20s and are just breaking into the local scene.

"I don't buy that argument at all," Hintz stressed. "All it does is create a self-perpetuating hierarchy in the Milwaukee music scene.

"New Community is seeking to totally destroy that."

The concept behind New Community is to offer an audience a bill with three acts on a weekend night for \$3 bucks. The bands in New Community rotate gigs and the order of appearance, and they split the take at the door.

It's meant to be a fair way of showcasing original music without having to deal with the stresses of ego and competition on or off the stage.

New Community has staged three shows to date, all at Club Garibaldi, 2501 S. Superior. Hintz explained that the past shows have been limited to musical performances, but he said the intention is to open the shows up to artists from all mediums.

Another goal of the band coop is to find

other clubs that are willing to host New Community shows.

"I hope within six months this will be something that people have in their heads, that every two weeks on a Friday or Saturday night they know their's going to be a New Community show," he said. "The shows will feature three very different bands and also a whole bunch of other interesting things, which may be tape-loop collages, installation art, poets, videos or anything."

The other appeal of the New Community, says Hintz, is the diversity of the audience that turns out for the shows.

"Just the fact that you are bringing together three different bands and their communities means you're going to have a diverse cross-section of people," he said.

Hintz, Warchol and Noegel stressed that no one owns or controls New Community. It's anarchy in motion, a "morphic field" as Hintz describes it.

However, the three New Community spokesmen said, when it comes to organizing the shows, they could be described as the "structuralists" behind the scene.

"We're not part of New Community," said Marcy James, guitarist for the all-female band the Sirens. "We are looking at playing other cities like Madison and Chicago, so New Community isn't something we're into at this point."

"But we think it's a good idea, especially if they can get it to the point where they are playing other clubs."

According to the New Community spokesmen, Milwaukee is considered one of the hottest music spots in the nation, right up there with Athens, Georgia, and Austin, Texas. They said the city has an abundance of talented, original bands.

But Noegel stressed that Milwaukee is lacking a unified musical culture to support its scene.

"The artists in this city are starving, and our rent isn't even as expensive as New York" he said. "And what that does is spawn people to sell out because they say, 'We can't do it this way'"

"So wherever there is this culture growing, it's important to unify it as fast as you can and as strong as you can, because if

you don't, too many good bands are going to be swallowed up."

Noegel added that New Community is a vehicle designed to supplement the Milwaukee music scene. It's open to any original music band that wants a stage for their music.

"New Community is an effort to show other places that we have music here, we have poetry, we have culture" Noegel said.

"This is the home of the community, the home of the culture."

Warchol said the Milwaukee music scene has an undercurrent that is potentially self-destructive. He said often the art of the music is lost in the scramble to "get higher up the local ladder.

"Yeah, we've had a couple of bands that really couldn't sacrifice their egos to play," he said. "They'd say 'We're opening up for loads of national acts, and we don't want to hang around and see if New Community takes off or not.'"

"But it's not whether it takes off. The point is that the acts that are part of New Community are working together, helping each other, and showcasing each other so more bands can get more exposure."

"Each band is out there trying its damndest."

The next New Community show will be at Club Garibaldi on April 3 and will feature Drake Scott, the Ball Turret Gunners, and Alien Farm.

Garibaldi will host another New Community show on April 25.