

Bands

Miserichord's working for more playing time

By JENNY LIVINGSTON
Staff Writer

There haven't been too many musical groups with Latin names since the days when Gregorian chants were hip. But now there's the Raleigh based Miserichord, which derives its name from a Latin word meaning mercy and dispensation from the rules, a name for monastery sanctuaries.

"We're all reverent people in our way, but we break our share of the rules," said lead vocalist John Sudnik. Breaking the rules is finally paying off.

The band's been seen in major clubs in Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill. It's played with Leaving Trains, The Bad Checks, Teasing the Korean and Royal Crescent Mob, among others. It's gotten air time on WRDU's "Future Classics" show. And now, after a two-month break to record and recoup, Miserichord is ready to play out again.

"I'm starting to get bored not playing out," said drummer Jeff Who. "It's time to go back underground."

Miserichord arrived on the Triangle scene this summer after its move from Sarasota, Fla. The band members describe their former home as "that geriatric town south of Tampa," where the average age is somewhere between 60 and 80. They came to the Triangle area in search of a music scene and people their own age.

They've found both, but things haven't all been easy since then. In October, thieves liberated Who's new drum kit and two cabinets from their van parked outside The Brewery in Raleigh.

To help the band replace its stolen equipment, the Brewery hosted a benefit show for Miserichord featuring The Bad Checks, Don't Talk, the Dayroom Monitors and End Over End in November. But the show only netted the band about \$200. The money didn't go far in replacing the

equipment and Who is still playing his old set, Sudnik said. The band members will probably use the money to fix their six-year-old Dodge van, formerly in the employ of the Florida Association for Retarded Jewish Citizens.

The van has served the band well, not only as transportation, but as furniture. The three removable seats from the van double as couches in Miserichord's home/practice studio. The Raleigh house is occupied by Sudnik and Who, with bassist Bev Stanton and guitarist John Gottfried — together they make Miserichord what it is.

What is it, then? That's a question even the band has trouble answering.

"We're a real mixed bag — we all came from such different backgrounds," Stanton said.

Indeed, although they all met in Florida, Stanton is the only member who was raised there. Sudnik's from Detroit, Gottfried's from Pittsburgh and Who (though he denies any loyalty to the North) spent much of his life in Chicago.

They range in age from early 20s to early 30s, and both sexes are represented. Their musical tastes and influences run from hardcore to classical. And yet they've managed both living and playing together for the past two years.

The result of this unlikely alliance is a sound that is fresh, vital and (believe it or not) new. In a music scene full of hardcore clones, Dead-head teeny-bopper bands and more than its share of REM-ish pseudo-new-music poseurs, they are unique — they don't sound like anybody.

Their music is a strange brew of raucous rhythms, ingenuous melodies, and near-Gothic darkness. Stanton and Who provide more than background for Gottfried's imaginative guitar work and Sudnik's weird but compelling vocals.

Sudnik has been singing only about as long as Miserichord has been



Miserichord will play at Durham's Under The Street on Jan. 30

playing together. Trained as an actor, he describes himself as more performer than singer.

"Calling me a singer is like calling Brooke Shields an actress," Sudnik said.

But his voice sounds all the more genuine for its lack of formal craft. He takes an actor's approach to singing, hitting the feeling more squarely than the notes. The rest of the band complements that style, seeming more committed to expression than perfection.

They cover a lot of the standard themes: alienation, love, etc., without sounding hackneyed. Political themes are vaguely touched upon but not preached to their audiences.

"We don't want to be preachy," said Sudnik. "In the main scheme of things, music's not that important." Maybe. But even as a non-commercial band, they are not averse to the idea of a little well-deserved commercial success.

"We'd like to pay the rent," said Gottfried.

So, in their pursuit of rent money, Miserichord will keep playing in the Triangle among its own age group.

CAT'S CRADLE



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- Friday, Jan 15
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¹TIME MAGAZINE, Richard Schickel ²TODAY SHOW, Gene Shalit
³NEW YORK TIMES, Vincent Canby ⁴USA TODAY, Mike Clark
⁵SISKEL & EBERT, Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert
⁶NEWSDAY, Mike McGrady

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