

Majosha achieves elusive 'coolness' by not even trying

By ALISON PIKE
Staff Writer

After listening to the lively funk sounds of Greensboro-based Majosha, one would hardly believe that a short time ago this trio was performing musical revues at country clubs in Pinehurst and Michigan. Yet playing 45-minute medley sets of songs like "New York, New York" is exactly how bassist Ben Folds, guitarist Millard Powers and drummer Dave Rich perfected their musical rapport and realized that as musicians, they had something to offer.

Majosha combines finely-tuned musicianship with energy to produce tight, clean-edged funk music. The group's music has style and versatility. Song types vary from melodic and danceable (like "Soldier of Love" and "Clueless") to solid groove (as in "Where's Bohemia"). Listen to the XTC-influenced "Get That Bug" one time and the chorus will volley back and forth in your head for days.

Perhaps Majosha's greatest attribute is its originality. Establishing an individual sound in an area where local bands come a dime a dozen can be difficult. What are Majosha's secrets? A trio of E's,



Greensboro trio Majosha challenges the musical establishment with their brand of funk.

as in effort, effect and expression.

Majosha spends a lot of time working on songs and music. Ben Folds, the main songwriter, says it can take him up to a year to complete a song. Words or theme come first, he says. Later the lyrics are combined with musical arrangements that come from "stockpiles" he has on reserve. It's a matter of pairing the right arrangement with the words. Great effort is also put into musicianship, Folds says.

"Most bands don't consider what effect their music has. That's why most of them sound the same. It's more attitude than musicality. We think of effect first and then how to get it."

Folds says that lust for fame and fortune is not what motivates the members of Majosha. The band exists because the trio has ideas it wants to express. "Our big thing has always been music," Folds says. "They (other bands) are in it for a different reason. For instance, most started playing just because

they wanted to be in a band."

Ideas for songs evolve from observations that Folds makes, mostly about the different stages in life. "The songs are about an age group of 18 to 25 years. They're about growing up. 'Clueless' is about the end of high school and the start of college, and the generation gap that exists there. 'Get That Bug' is a stress song about how you get really stressed out when you graduate from college. Once you get out of one stage, you look back and see how silly it was. It looks so different when you're older."

As Folds points out, though, this kind of topic is not what is "cool" in the music industry. "People in the industry don't know a lot about music. You have to be cut-and-dried and use certain language. 'Badlands' and 'alibis' and 'lies,' — those are the 'rock 'n' roll' words."

Arousing the industry's interest is like getting a job, Folds says. "They're hiring a certain type and

you never know what they're looking for. Our big frustration is how to fit into their slots. They want you to be the tortured artist type like the Cure, or the ripped jeans type. We would be willing to change what we wear," Folds says jokingly, "but I don't think I'd wear Spandex pants."

But getting a record contract is not Majosha's ultimate goal. The trio views it as just one rung on the ladder to success.

"A record contract is like a high school diploma. You have to have it, but it's not the end of the road. A lot of bands get contracts then don't do anything."

So what really makes Majosha different? Folds has a simple answer. "Every band thinks they're doing something different. A lot put more effort into being different than into the music. That makes us different."

Majosha will perform tonight at Under the Street in Durham. Opening the show will be Chapel Hill's own Dillon Fence.

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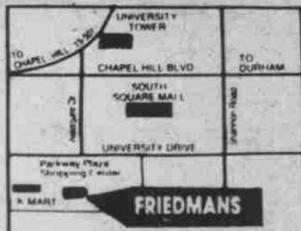
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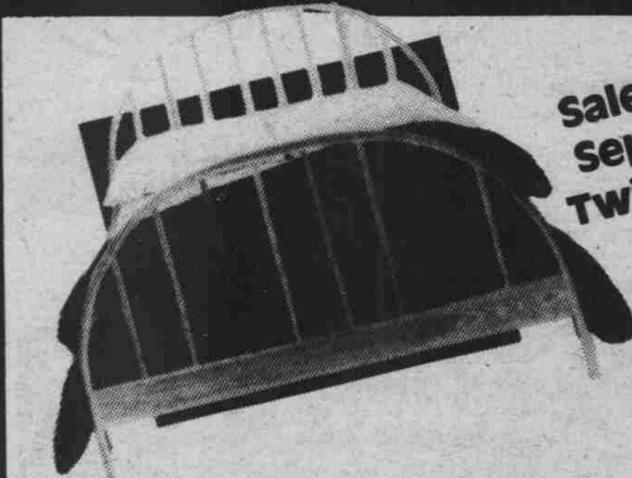
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