



On record

Billy Rancher is on his way

Billy Rancher has ambition. Similar to another West Coast songwriter, Jim Morrison, Rancher wants the world, and he wants it now.

And he just might get it.

Right now, Rancher and his Portland-based band the Unreal Gods are thought of as a question mark in the music business.

Even though Rancher has signed with Clive Davis and Arista Records to record next month in Los Angeles, the relationship has not been a smooth one.

Davis, the Columbia record mogul responsible in the sixties for such acts as Santana and Janis Joplin, finally entered the picture after four different Arista vice presidents had checked Rancher out.

Not only did it take nine months to finally ink the record contract, Arista has been hesitant about everything from the band's name, to how to market them, to whether to have the band back Billy at all.

"They move so slow, it's pathetic sometimes," Rancher says.

When Rancher was finally signed, dealing with Davis was not always the easiest proposition.

"Clive Davis is very eccentric; he's sort of like the Wizard of Oz. It's very hard to get in touch with him. He stays in a Beverly Hills bungalow and when he comes out, it's almost nocturnal. You have to go through a SS appointment book. He likes to keep to himself and be the dominator," Rancher says.

And when Davis was listening, Rancher says, he was confused by the Gods' different styles of music.

Then there was the question of the name — the Unreal Gods.

It seems people in Arista's marketing department are scared of the moniker — Betty Lou in Des Moines might not like it.

Rancher is willing to alter the band's name which it has had since its inception June 18, 1981, even though he says it's close to his heart. He'd like to keep Rancher "because that's my real name," but he realizes the importance of being reasonable in order to get ahead.

"There's a lot of bullshit that stands in your way when you're dealing with corporate marketing plans. You've got to bend some ways," he says.

The latest contender for the band's name is Mustang Rancher, an allusion to the Nevada brothel.

Rancher believes that name would "bring eroticism into the open, would say look, this isn't the Hanging Gardens of Babylon but this is the 20th century."

With all this, it's no wonder Rancher describes the

band as being in a holding pattern, like a jet ready to take off on a runway.

Billy Rancher and the Unreal Gods are the latest entry in the rock sweepstakes out of Portland.

In the last few years, Johnny and the Distractions and Quarterflash have signed contracts and had success with varying degrees.

Rancher didn't look up to any of these bands when he and the Unreal Gods were a struggling band trying to find their niche in the Portland scene.

"When you're trying to get successful so you don't have to work a kitchen job, you really look for ways to criticize people, I think. It's a sad human trait because it's competitive. You want to be the guy that's making it work," he says.

But still these bands didn't inspire too much awe in Rancher.

Quarterflash put Rancher to sleep; he didn't understand their success. And Johnny and the D's had a sound much like the already established Bruce Springsteen.

"Johnny was at the wrong place at the wrong time," Rancher believes.

The sound Rancher hopes to achieve with the help of Men at Work's producer Peter McIan is one with broad appeal.

He'd love to do a dub reggae (a spare, primitive form of reggae) record, but he acknowledges that first he has to "get a foothold in the market."

"I would like to go for an international sound encompassing many styles as far as the jungle and calypso fields. There'll be traces of that. It'll all be in a pop format, I'm sure," Rancher says.

Rancher sees the Gods as a distinctive band arising out of their very diverse influences, which range from rockabilly to classical to reggae.

My whole approach to music is just take the whole melting pot, stir it around, pull something out of it and who knows what'll come out of the pot. Just a funky song," he says.

Self-confidence is the dominating quality that shines through when one talks to Rancher. It's not an obnoxious brashness but an optimistic assurance in his own abilities.

It's an assurance that allows him to say "the nation doesn't respect Portland too much as being a leader in any type of sound, but that's what we're trying to change."

And it's this assurance which prompts him to say



Photo by Bart Danielson

Portland musician Billy Rancher (foreground) and the Unreal Gods may have to change their name to do it, but they'll be recording in Los Angeles next month.

things like, "I think we're going to do it. My main goal is to chase Duran Duran out of America, make them stay back in England."

Sometimes this assurance borders on naivete.

When Rancher says he wants to hook up with a "quality filmmaker" to film some videos, he really means it — he wants "that Swedish guy."

When told Ingmar Bergman is retired, Rancher replies he's going to write him a letter.

"I would like to make a real nice film like 'Fanny and Alexander.' Because if we can put as much delicacy into a song, then maybe Bergman can do it real justice."

Paul Sturtz

Taking note

I vow not to be too tough on the consumer. It is America after all, and we as citizens are almost immune to the plague of commercialism which runs rampant. Those money-making holidays can't come soon enough for retailers, and neither can new, exciting, sell-well products. Individual true-happiness-in-life for too many Madison Avenue executives hinges on just the right catchy phrase to entice the Jones family to fill up at one fast-food restaurant instead of another.

Of course, shoppers aren't always innocent: There are those of us who

Finding America's hottest new game: no Trivial Pursuit Kim Carlson

dismember each other trying to get our hands on original dolls that come with original adoption papers, and other similar nonsense. Peculiar bunch, we Americans.

Take the new game, Trivial Pursuit. It's a commercial sensation bigger than the Cabbage Patch dolls; bigger than "Where's the beef?"; bigger maybe than Michael Jackson. Why? What makes people go crazy over a simple game?

"It's different from other games," says Frances Krumdieck, owner of Parlour Games in Eugene. "It's such a

fun, big party game."

Other game professionals agree.

"It's the kind of game everyone is drawn to, even people who think they don't know trivia," says Al Villanueva, manager of Endgames in Eugene. "Everybody thinks it's the only game in town."

Ironically, though, Trivial Pursuit is the only game *not* in town.

Since its March, 1983 debut in America, it has become the most sought after board game in years. As far as popularity and sales go, Pente, another recent game sensation, pales in comparison. Local shops are inundated with requests for the game, but not even those who are usually in-the-know, seem to be able to predict when the next supply will come in. "We spend a lot of time yelling into our sales rep's answering service," says Villanueva, "but it doesn't seem to help."

On a paltry day Villanueva says Endgames gets between 10 and 20 calls from people in pursuit of Trivial Pursuit. On one recent Saturday the store received 62 requests. "It's really amazing," Villanueva says of the public response — or "mindless mania" as he calls it. "It's a real nice head trip."

Trivial Pursuit contains 6,000 questions on different subjects taken from six topics: History, Entertainment, Arts and Letters, Science, Sports and Leisure and Geography. It was originally created by a company in Canada, according to Villanueva, but the rights to Trivial Pursuit were recently sold to an

American company — the same company that produces the ever-popular word game Scrabble. However, the Scrabble people weren't prepared for the overwhelming popularity of the game; only recently did they build a new, exclusive factory with the sole purpose of making Trivial Pursuit.

So now the games are trickling into the market, says Villanueva, adding that his store gets shipments of 18 to 36 games at a time, but it's still not nearly enough to keep up with the demand: Endgames has a waiting list of about 120 people in Eugene; the two Portland stores have a 400-person tally.

Krumdieck says her store no longer keeps a waiting list — it was too much of an overwhelming task. I called to talk Trivial Pursuit with her before noon, but nevertheless I was the day's tenth inquirer.

Trivial Pursuit, when it is available, is not inexpensive; the suggested retail price is \$39.95. And there are substitutes, other games on the market which are similar to Trivial Pursuit. The TV Guide game, the People Magazine game, the Entertainment Tonight game, and Ripley's Believe It Or Not, are all trivia games dealing with specific topics. Parker Brothers' TIME, which has 8,000 questions and sells for a mere \$29.95, is an equally challenging game says Villanueva, but not quite as popular as Trivial Pursuit. "People want the original," says Krumdieck.

Trivial Pursuit also has its own editions. There's a Silver Screen Edition

and an All-Star Sports version, both of which require players who are experts in the respective fields; Villanueva says they are "both real hard." In some parts of the country an edition of Trivial Pursuit called the Baby Boomer has been released. According to Villanueva it covers subjects that baby boomers are familiar with — "everything from atomic power to flower power."

Trivial Pursuit is, as one game-junkie described it, truly addicting. It's no wonder the Oregon Daily Emerald's advertising manager, Susan Thelan, almost had to fight for a copy. Last week Thelan heard a rumor that Eugene's Payless Drugstore had a few Trivial Pursuit games for sale, so after work she raced over to buy one, only to discover that all the games were gone. Thelan spied a salesclerk who told her that Trivial Pursuit had been sold out, but to follow him; he led her to an already opened copy at the checkstand. Although there were other shoppers lurking around who had seen the extra copy and wanted the game as well, Thelan was the person who succeeded in securing it.

"I felt lucky," Thelan says now. "I left eight people behind without a game."

I haven't had the opportunity to play much Trivial Pursuit these days with William Shakespeare and William Styron demanding much of my time. But when I recently borrowed my friend's copy, my appetite to play was all-consuming. You might say I've learned to sympathize with the shoppers.