

Johnson Unit

The members of Johnson Unit, all avid "news magazine" readers, express dismay over the fact that, on the David Letterman show recently, a famous actress mistakenly attributed a recent article entitled "Famed psychic's head explodes" to The Enquirer, when, they say, it actually appeared in the Weekly World News.

The Enquirer, says John, guitarist for the Eugene-based, three-piece band, "doesn't even have the class" to cover such a story.

ticle discussing the state of economic affairs since the election of Ronald Reagan as president.

According to Steve, he and John were cutting out headlines and putting them on cassette cases, since the Weekly World News often conveniently displays headline type that easily fits on "spines of cassettes." A headline proclaiming that, since Reagan's election, "The Poor Get Poorer" held their attention.

The article "certainly opened our eyes," John says. "Because we didn't know that," Steve adds (sarcastically). "We thought everybody was doing really good with this economic recovery. It never occurred to us that there were actually poor people out there."

So, what's the conclusion? Is Johnson Unit really a political band?

Steve: "I think we're more social than political."

"We're pathological," John laughs, then adds more seriously, "No, we have more of a personal viewpoint. We try to stay away from dogma. Politics is just the art of persuasion, and if you really want to persuade somebody, you'll say anything." He quickly adds, "and we're not willing to say anything... unless it helps cassette sales."

"We don't support any political viewpoint," Steve says.

"I do contribute spray paint," Robert says, "for the Afghan rebels." But John and Steve emphasize that this effort is done "on his own time."

The song, "Chemistry," for example, perhaps one of the more memorable of the original songs on the "Poorer" collection ("Poorer" contains two non-original numbers, "Blitzkrieg Bop," by the Ramones, and "The Story In Your Eyes," by the Moody Blues), is about relying on pharmaceuticals to "give you a quick fix and solve all your problems, if not overnight, then in time for the big party," John says.

"Chemistry," he says, "decries the American predilection for a quick fix," and that the band wanted to

point out that "all dangerous drugs aren't illegal."

"I don't like playing in bars," Steve says, for reasons other than the fact that all three members of Johnson Unit are pretty much non-drinkers. "The first and most obvious reason is that people under 21 can't get in. I think it's terrible when live music is only

available to people that are of drinking age and that the music is only available in drinking situations."

He adds that people who go to bars go there "to drink, not necessarily to listen to the music. I know that depends on the individual, but..."

However, John interrupts, partially disagreeing. He says that while those under 21 may feel excluded from music in bars, there are probably many who are over 21 who feel excluded from some of the other venues where Johnson Unit plays "and would rather go to someplace that has a restricted thing... for some insane reason."

"As far as people coming to the bar to drink as opposed to seeing the music, we take care of that with a stiff cover-charge at the door," he says. All three laugh.

"We care a lot about our audience," John says, "or else we wouldn't sit and agonize over whether or not to play bars or put out these tapes at cost. If we didn't actually care about our music and the product that we're inviting everybody to buy, we'd certainly take a vastly different course than we have," a course that he says has been "hardly enriching for any of us."

"We're basically interested," he adds, "in doing what feels good to us musically and in growing as artists and human beings."

Johnson Unit will be playing at the Community Center for the Performing Arts (W.O.W. Hall) at Eighth Avenue and Lincoln Street in Eugene tonight. "The Poor Get Poorer" is available at House of Records (258 East 13th Street), Face the Music (886 East 13th Avenue), and at Earth River Records and Tapes (62 West Broadway).

In addition to John, Johnson Unit consists of Steve on bass and Robert on drums (none of the three will claim more than one name). According to the credits on the band's latest cassette-album release, "The Poor Get Poorer," John and Steve sing, and Robert "just bashes the hell out of his drums."

John says the title of the cassette album is a comment on "Robert's financial situation." He adds, on a not-necessarily-more-serious note, that "we thought we would jump on the bandwagon of... what bandwagon were we hopping that time, Steve?"

Steve explains that the title was found in a headline in the Weekly World News for an ar-

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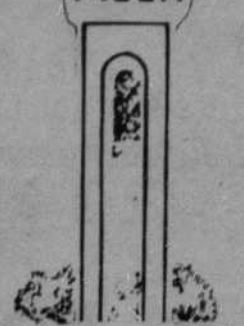
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