

'Panic on 13th Street'

"I came from a real small town, and when I came here, I thought 13th Street was a lot like, not quite the Panama Canal, but like the Mississippi River or something...because it's like this big body moving through, and there's stuff moving down it all the time, lots of things happening, but the pace is real slow and peaceful on it."

— Rob Cassotto

Rob Cassotto is a student, a janitor and a drummer in two Eugene bands, Johnson Unit and Snakepit. He also is one-quarter of Dunhill, a local production company.

Dunhill isn't a full-fledged record company yet, but soon will be if the four partners who make up the company have their way. Until now, they've only released cassettes, most recently "Panic on 13th Street," a hometown summary of basement musical antics from nine Eugene groups.

"I would just like to say that my own feeling on this is that, gosh, what do you know, it's a cassette. It's a greaseball project," explains Al Cassotto, self-appointed Dunhill social organizer and a member of Snakepit.

Steve Nordby "does all the technical stuff," according to Al Cassotto. "He's like the

engineer, because he knows a lot about that."

Although John O'Neil, wholesale/retail manager of Dunhill, wants to release vinyl recordings because of their higher notch of respect, he acknowledges the value of cassettes. "It's cheaper. And it's more like...guerrilla warfare. We have technology in our homes to dub off cassettes if we want to and get them out, but how many people have record stampers and stuff?"

In the disc-stuffed basement of House of Records, where O'Neil works and Dunhill cassettes are sold, Al Cassotto searches for a word. "Egalitarian, well, you know like cassettes. Anyone can play one. And record on it," he says.

"Cassettes are really handy to have round, it's really neat to have one in your pocket just in case the need arises to hand one out to somebody that wants to hear it. But if you mail them out to radio stations and magazines...they're sort of thrown away, recorded over," O'Neil says.

However, the egalitarian nature of cassettes can also be a downfall. Because a lot of groups put out their own music, there are some inferior products, and the disdain of the general

public is one result.

"Well, I think there's a lot of alternative bands now, so people aren't just buying anything because it's alternative, whether it's a cassette or a record," Rob Cassotto says. "I think the market is glutted, and it's a lot harder to break through."

Copies of the tape were recently bought by a San Francisco distributor, Systematic, so Dunhill will have its own chance to test its fate in the vast flea market of independent music shopping.

Still, the local archival merit of "Panic on 13th Street" will remain intact. "I just think the theme was that these are local bands who are playing all original music in terrible basements, and the life span for these groups isn't very long. So sometimes, if they're lucky, they record before they break up," says Al Cassotto.

"We didn't really have a plan," says O'Neil. "It just fell together. We didn't have a big master plan as far as cutting anybody out or promoting the scene."

"Panic on 13th Street" compiles songs from both defunct and existing bands, recorded mostly on four-track equipment. The influence of Husker Du/R.E.M.-style, re-intensified

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'60s pop glares through on Snakepit and Mind Garage tracks; and are more melodically filled out by St. Huck; the idealistic-in-leather-jackets ajax garage sound of the Johnson Unit; the sub-cutthroat synth and bounce from Moose Lodge; the tune-maiming reverb by Cargo Cult and classic thrash on E-13's "Cheesehead Alert."

Bovine Impulse stumbles from the field in three jumpy songs, with hoarse social commentary like:

*The last nightmare I had I saw cows
They dressed much like you
Slugging beer, driving cars
Fighting wars, acting bored
Chewing a cud of concrete and blood
Spit ran down their chin
Grazing in havoc
And that neighbor kid down the street fell in.*

The tape ends on an apocalyptic note with the Michael Billings Guitar Project's "Dominance," an instrumental exercise in anxiety dynamics.

resembling an abbey of monks turned loose on methedrine and untuned guitars, recorded in some broken glass cathedral.

The tape is very much a musical scrapbook, as Al Cassotto explains, "everybody on the tape has either lived on 13th Street or at least spent long hours just hanging out on 13th Street."

The interview ended on a historical walk down the scruffy bohemian avenue, with too many landmarks and acquaintances to recount. Rob Cassotto's off-the-cuff anecdote helps sum up the atmosphere: "One time Jake Smith from Cargo Cult was walking along 13th Street and was drinking a bottle of wine, finished the bottle, tossed it over his shoulder, knocked out Steve Mertz' front teeth. So you've got Smith, who's on the cassette...Mertz, from Prince Puckler's, and kind of like the Uncle Ray of his generation...13th Street...a bottle of wine...and blood."

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