

Walt Mink digs Walt Mink

by Tony Van Dorston

It was already March and I hadn't heard Walt Mink for several months. I definitely needed some Walt. My whines were answered at a party at my old Selby homestead two weeks ago.

In the small dark basement flooded with cigarette smoke emerged Macalester psychology prof. Walter Mink, to give us a lecture we'd never forget.

Just kidding. But do read on, and find out the story behind the band's name. The music, however, is the real story.

Walt Mink started soon after a surprisingly good set by Clownbait. Walt's loud rhythms bludgeoned the crowd like a jackhammer with the hiccups. Their performance was so tight they must have been practicing obsessively to make up for the lack of gigs.

While last year Walt Mink was good, the band is now in truly great form. If guitarist/vocalist John Kimbrough calls their style spasmodic, those are the most precise spasms I've heard in a show in over a year.

Responding to Walt Mink's energy, the crowd was wired to the point of dementia. The jerking and hopping soon mutated into a jiggling oceanic tide swaying back and forth, threatening to spill over into the band.

Bassist Candice Belanoff's playing has become increasingly complex. She pulled it off well, with her eyes often closed in either elation or concentration or both. Backing the band's errorless groove was drummer Joey Waronker, who's skill is unquestionable. In a lesser band, Joey's playing would overwhelm the other sections.

At one point someone asked John to turn up the vocals. "I have the voice of a three year old," he replied.



While his voice is odd, it grows on the listener because of the good melodies and timing.

Having heard most of their 20 originals, I really can't compare Walt Mink to any other band. That speaks well for them.

Another sign of greatness is the ability to take covers and give them the Walt Mink sound. Songs

like Neil Young's "Mr. Soul," The New Seekers' "Free To Be You And Me," Big Star's "Back Of A Car," and many others measure up to anything done on the glut of tribute albums released lately.

With a demo tape and a single on Skene! records coming out, there are many things to anticipate from Walt Mink. But don't wait too long to see them, because the band will only be together in this area for another two months.

Me: You kept saying you were stoned while you played last weekend.

John: No, no actually we weren't. We sort of choked. We hadn't practiced at all.

Me: That week?

John: Yeah, and we were just being real cocky, going 'Oh we can pull this off.' And we kind of didn't. I don't know. Better luck next time.

Candice: More pot next time.

Me: Why did you pick the name 'Walt Mink'?

Joey: Cuz it sounded nice.

Me: Did you ever talk to Walt Mink himself? Has he ever said anything to you?

Joey: Yeah, we asked him if it was O.K. if we used his name, and he wasn't sure. We had to give him the tape that we made. He took it to the Southwest . . .

John: Some insane convention.

Joey: And he said that he listened to it a lot and he liked it.

John: He dug it. It was very funny. "You guys are really good!" What did he say?

Joey: Yeah, we asked him if it was O.K. if we used his name, and he wasn't sure. We had to give him the tape that we made. He took it to the Southwest . . .

John: Some insane convention.

Joey: And he said that he listened to it a lot and he liked it.

John: He dug it. It was very funny. "You guys are really good!" What did he say?

Joey: Yeah, we asked him if it was O.K. if we used his name, and he wasn't sure. We had to give him the tape that we made. He took it to the Southwest . . .

John: Some insane convention.

Joey: And he said that he listened to it a lot and he liked it.

John: He dug it. It was very funny. "You guys are really good!" What did he say?

Joey: Yeah, we asked him if it was O.K. if we used his name, and he wasn't sure. We had to give him the tape that we made. He took it to the Southwest . . .

John: Some insane convention.

Joey: And he said that he listened to it a lot and he liked it.

John: He dug it. It was very funny. "You guys are really good!" What did he say?

photos by Lacey Eckl



Me: When you play live, you usually have the vocals mixed really low.

John: That's because we have a cheezy P.A. That's not like an intentional thing. First of all I don't have a really powerful voice at all. I have a really wimpy voice, and it's really hard for me to project. In order to make myself heard I would need a big, powerful P.A.

Me: So you have another demo tape?

John: Yeah, we just finished recording this demo in our basement just in time. We recorded eight tunes, and we're putting the two tunes on the record on it too.

**". . . pluk ka ka
pluk ka pluk ka
ka ka pluk ka
pluk ka ka pluk
pluk pluk pluk
plub plub plub
plub boom boom
boom boom."**

Me: So you're going to be selling your tape?

John: Yeah, it's going to come out the beginning of next week. I just called the Great Tapes people, and we're going to run off 50 copies.

Me: Oh, it's going to be one of those clear tapes?

John: Yeah but we're going to make little art insert things for it, so it won't be totally depersonalized. We're going to sell five or ten copies at Applause and Cheapo, and a couple at Oar Folk and places like that.

Me: How do you think that sounds compared to the record?

Joey: I'm happy with how it turned out. We put some time into it. We tried to get it to sound as good as it could quality-wise. We worked a little more on the arrangements this time. It's not perfect but we tried to do some interesting overdub things. We had fun with the four-track machine.

John: We took the Styx approach; the Tommy Shaw approach. We recorded everything separately, and the musicians were never in the same room at the same time.

Me: How many originals do you have?

John: We have 20 originals, and six or seven cover tunes.

Me: What inspired you to do "Free To Be You and

Me"?

John: Everybody within our sort of circle of people; uppermiddleclass kids, all liberal kids who were raised on Free To Be You And Me, you know. It's an awesome song. That's like an incredible song, by The New Seekers.

Me: At the show two weeks ago, you had all these time changes and stuff that sounded really difficult. Then on one song you said, "This song is going to be more difficult because it has a lot of time changes." I sure couldn't tell the difference. It all looked hard.

Candice: I guess it's sort of a deconstruction of metal, you might say.

[Laughter]

John: A deconstruction of "power-tinged pop." Put that in quotes.

Candice: We just don't know what to do after an A part, so the B part is something completely different.

John: So it's in the key of "W."

Me: It seems to be working well.

John: Thank you. Yeah, it's all in form. Difficult, it just means we're spastic. We have these insane ways of going about putting them together.

Me: For the clichéd question, do you want to name any influences?

John: Wow.

Candice: My favorite color is blue.

John: My favorite flavor of ice cream is; did you see that poster with the ice cream that had a hundred different flavors of ice cream? There's that one ice cream that has the sharpened pencils coming out of it. Joey, what kind of music do you listen to?

Joey: Um, I really only listen to Love Child.

Me: Who's that?

Joey: It's a band called Love Child.

Me: Tell the folks . . .

Joey: People should be listening to Love Child.

Me: Do you have a jazz background in your drumming?

Joey: A little bit, but not really. I played with the jazz band. I have some records [long pause] that I listen to. I have a few books that I play out of. I can fake it.

John: Before the basement flooded he was practicing four hours a day. I'd come home and hear him in the basement going pluk ka ka pluk ka pluk ka ka pluk ka pluk ka ka pluk pluk pluk plub plub plub plub boom boom boom boom. Just ridiculous. Now the weather's put a stop to all that.

Me: Candice, you used to play guitar?

Candice: Yeah, I took some guitar lessons in high school, but I only played James Taylor. His birthday was yesterday.

Before I had a bass I used



Walter Mink

to pluck the bottom four strings on a guitar. But I was under the impression for a long time that bass strings were tuned in fifths. So I learned it wrong for about a week.

Me: When did you start playing?

Candice: I started playing bass two years ago.

Me: When did you start playing together?

Candice: About a year ago. We started about February.

Me: When was your first gig?

Candice: April 4, 1989, we played the Fine Line. And that was the day we named ourselves Walt Mink. We went through three names that day.

Me: Would you care to share the other three names?

John: No, no, no, no we don't care to share the other names. They shall remain confidential.

Me: Have you been shopping labels yet?

John: No, not yet. We're going to send the tape out to a few people to see what happens. We'll just keep writing and making tapes.

Me: Were you together last summer?

Candice: No.

Me: What about this summer?

John: No, this summer we're going our separate ways as well. In fact, next Fall too. But then I think we're going to reconvene in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Me: So after you graduate you might get together again sometime in the future.

Candice: It'd be fun. If some great label pays us a huge amount of money and pays my rent for some apartment in San Francisco.

Me: You're going to attempt to maintain Walt Mink?

Candice: It's hard to say. Wherever I go I'll play. Wherever they go they'll play. It would be cool if it were around the same place.

John: We'll have to play from satellite.

Candice: Yeah, really. I'll invade the weather channel.

Joey: That's what Ornette Coleman did, he had his entire band set up, and then his son was in a different state, playing drums along with him by satellite.

John: Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder did "Ebony and Ivory" from two separate pianos, one in London, one in Los

see Walt Mink, p. 13

