

sections
Dining
Bars & Clubs
Music
Movies
Arts & Entertainment
Event Search
Traffic Cams
Weather
Marketplace
Sports
Milwaukee Buzz
Travel & Visitors Guide
Kids & Family
Classifieds & Personals
The In Click Pix
Message Boards
Home



Internet facilitates Tanin's Xpensive Dogs projects

Gary Tanin is a true veteran of the Milwaukee music scene. But for his most recent projects, he's been collaborating with a Japanese keyboardist, thanks to the ability to send tracks back and forth via computer.

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- [Dining](#)
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- [Music](#)
- [Movies](#)
- [Arts & Entertainment](#)
- [Event Search](#)
- [Traffic Cams](#)
- [Weather](#)
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SOUND CAPSULES



Gomez -- Split the Difference (Virgin)
One of the most

underrated and reliable of all the bands to emerge from the '90s Britpop scene is Gomez and on this, their fourth studio disc, they are in top form (after arguably hiccuping with disc number three). Rather than being enslaved by Beatles-esque remakes or soaring anthemic stadium rock, Gomez instead draws on American roots music, along with the melodic British pop of the past, to create a much more satisfying musical meal. Two distinctive vocalists keep things interesting and prevent the wide range of styles from ever feeling disparate. There are heavier moments like the opener "Do One," poppier bits like "Catch Me Up" and country-ish knee slappers like "These 3 Sins." What they have in common is their addictiveness. **Gomez and labelmates The Thrills -- whose new disc, "Let's Bottle Bohemia," is due out Sept. 15 -- play at The Rave, Tuesday, Aug. 3.**



5:26 a.m. August 2, 2004

Internet facilitates Tanin's Xpensive Dogs projects

By Jason Keil

Gary Tanin is a true veteran of the Milwaukee music scene. In the '70s he established himself with his work with Otto & The Elevators which eventually led to his reputation behind the scenes as a leader in music production and CD mastering.

He has worked with some of the city's most prolific and visible musicians and is the owner of MultiMusica USA, which specializes, among other things, record production and disc mastering. In the '80s, the 2003 Wisconsin Area Music Industry (WAMI) award winner for Producer of the Year gazed into the future and saw the unique possibility of combining newly emerging computer technology with music.



That foresight has led to his latest project, Xpensive Dogs. A combination of Eastern electronic sensibility and Western rock know-how results in an intense and foreboding listening experience. The group's first full-length effort, "Dog Eat Dog," which was over seven years in the making, is being released by RockIt Records. Recently Tanin took some time out of his busy schedule to talk about the project.

OMC: How did the Xpensive Dogs project begin?

Gary Tanin: The first album started back in 1996 back in the early days of the Internet. The CD I had out was called "Sublime Nation" ... and that led to a connection in Japan with a keyboard player named Toshi Hiraoka. He actually orchestrated a label deal for distribution (of "Sublime Nation."). He had been very well schooled in the business of labels and as a suggestion, he said that he had some material. That material was sent to the States and our first collaboration was a split CD with six songs that we co-wrote together ... After that, we started talking a little bit about the potential of doing a full-length album. This started sometime in 1997 and went back and forth between here and Japan to be finally completed this year.

I've never met Toshi in person and the most amazing part of this story, and I am almost ashamed to admit it, is that we've never even talked on the telephone. The whole relationship began when no one knew what the Internet was. You need a lot of trust to send your music from one side of the world to the other and at one point we did exchange agreements and all that but it was built up prior to that. I could have never afforded to fly over there and work on the record at the level we had before this flexible medium.

OMC: How does this new full-length compare to the split CD?

GT: The full-length I think sounds much more like a band record. In the case of the full-length, it started with parts that he put together that were snippets of songs, verses and choruses, and I basically had the choice of picking from many of them. I kind of put together conceptually some of the choruses and verses and sent it back to him. He then orchestrated them and sent me back those tracks and at that point I did all the rest of the production. Really, it became much more of a complete collaborative effort. In the other case, I started with finished rhythm tracks that basically had the instrumental stuff done. The second album was really much more wide open to the influence of the musicians that were involved.

OMC: A lot of musicians that you chose for the album had a very big reputation around here (Sammy Llanas, Michael Hoffmann, Paul Cobar). What was it about their talent that made them right for this project?

GT: These people were musicians that I have worked with over the years. I have either produced some of their work or been involved in a project with them at some level so I was really well aware (of their talents). In the case of Greg Koch, he is a fundamental Xpensive Dog. That was the case on the first record, and he did most of the signature guitar parts that you'll find (on the second). We could do a show with all these guitarists. Each one of them was picked for certain songs, and they basically had creative control over the ones I had picked for them. It was a real great way to work because I didn't feel like I was constraining what they were doing.

It was a real collaborative effort, but the hard part with that is trying to make it cohesive. With me being fundamentally the lead vocalist and songwriter, it was up to me that in spite of the variations to find a way to make it work. From a writing perspective, it started out with lyrics initially ... but by the time we got done with the final parts, I went back and rewrote them around the finished tracks.

OMC: What would you say your influences are?

GT: Clearly, The Beatles. The main thrust for me to get involved in music was when I first saw The Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show. From that point on, my mind was made up that I was going to do something like that. Seeing it happen, hearing the music coming through that six-inch speaker and feeling what we as a generation I think felt from that is something that you can try to achieve for the rest of your life. I think that my propelling motivation is trying to grasp little bits of that excitement, and every once in a while I get to do that, so I'm really happy.

(The album is) more Frank Zappa-esque. The first Xpensive Dogs record reviews were compared to him. Another band that clearly had an influence on me was the classic days of Steely Dan. Those records were sonically the standard that no other record could achieve. These people cared.

OMC: What made you realize that the Internet could be this tool to send music?

GT: By the time the late '70s came around and disco happened, I took a hiatus from music. At that point, not only did I think the world turned over on its head because every venue that musicians could play at had turned into a discotheque, and all of a sudden there were no places to play original music. I went to the electronic side and at that point they were hiring anybody who had a glimmer of digital understanding of the new emerging computer industry. I was hired by a defense contractor and they basically taught us everything we needed to know about digital. I wasn't necessarily that visionary, but just because of the background that I had I put two and two together and said, "When this thing becomes like a television and what I'm seeing here isn't text but something else and when they can digitize music -- the talk of it was there --- the vehicle will be music."

In addition to Xpensive Dogs, Tanin's complete catalog, including vinyl 45s and LPs and two anthologies of his work, is being released by RockIt Records, whose Web page is rockitrecordsusa.com.

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