

Minneapolis band hits local stage with blend of 'absurdist jazz-rock'



Shane Opatz/assistant photo editor

Erik Fratzke, on bass guitar, accompanied Matt Jacobs on drums, playing with the rest of the Auto Body Experience at the Red Carpet last Tuesday. The Minneapolis quartet was received by an enthusiastic crowd.

so they could laugh at the band's lyrics.

A music review

by Andy Valenty

Humor's lowest common denominator is the pun, and one of music's highest forms is jazz. Mix the two together, plus a dash of intellect, rock-and-roll and general weirdness, and what do you get? An out-of-body—should I say—an Auto Body Experience, one of the truly unique, accomplished and funny bands on the local scene.

The Auto Body Experience embody parody with a serious glint in their eyes. The Minneapolis quartet, led by guitarist Scott Yoho, wielded its sharp knife of irony in the Red Carpet last Tuesday night. The band was welcomed by an enthusiastic audience which spent much of the time looking for its collectively dropped jaw

Instrumentally, the Auto Body Experience is one of the best contingents locally. The range of tunes is wide, considering how complex and unique each of the band's originals are. The musicians are composed and confident, able to stay on top of the ever-evolving arrangement, while throwing in master licks which can even surprise themselves.

Bassist Eric Fratzke, who has been a member of the Experience for just under a year, contributes to the ensemble with big, muscular playing which runs the gamut from complex jazz to heavy metal and disco. Fratzke took off solo during "Seedless Hydroponic Cucumber" and jammed all over the high end of the fretboard, much to Yoho's chagrin.

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A lot of the Auto Body Experience's material could be called absurdist jazz-rock. Yoho and keyboardist Tom Hambleton make a frontman team which appears to be showy, but then makes fun of showmanship at the same time. The pair's devious writing, playing and singing fit together like a hand in a twisted glove. Hambleton takes the stage like a "regular guy" but can transform into the cartoon consciousness of various characters. The keyboardist does as good an imitation of Droopy the dog as he does a number on the ivories.

Yoho, a former SCS student and member of St. Cloud band Airtight and Minneapolis band The Crops, is a gifted songwriter and guitarist. The Auto Body Experience performs "The Worms Don't Hear" and "The Craziest Things," humorous songs Yoho wrote while in The Crops. On stage, Yoho is aware of the full groove while nimbly running up and down the neck of his guitar.

Yoho seems to have favorite targets for his puns. The guitarist makes clever fun of businessmen on "They Whack Balls," "Business as Usual" and "Is Mr. Carlson In?" Animals and plants are on the next rung of the pun chain, with songs such as "Animals' Rights" and "Near the Cheese," a new song about love and love of food, complete with cheesy visual puns on flashcards to drive the point home. The song was such a hit that when Yoho messed up the joke, he went back and rearranged the cards and called "do

overs," much to the crowd's approval. It was funnier the second time.

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A major reason why the songs work so well is that the grooves turn on a dime, and timing's important to the effectiveness of the band's comedy. Drummer Matt Jacobs is on the spot with the correct fills for the country, jazz, metal and polka parts.

The polka parts? The quirkiest event of the night was when the Auto Body Experience chummed out their wedding band/Led Zeppelin-polka medley. The band gives new meaning to "there's a bustle in your hedgerow" on this headbanger's nightmare. What's funny is the song works and doesn't reach the point of being overdone.

About a dozen of the tunes played on this astonishing night out will appear on a CD called "The Auto Body Experience," which will be released sometime in May or early June. Yoho hopes to be back to St. Cloud for a CD-release party, and in the meantime says he wants to "let people know we're all we're cracked up to be, while spreading the gospel of us to the world."

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