

Whatever Cracker's secret might be, it's not practice

By ROGER CATLIN
Courant Rock Critic

■ POP / ROCK

Cracker has already played more than 100 shows this year, but the band spent the other day practicing for what leader David Lowery says was only its "fifth or sixth time."

Lowery, who previously headed cult favorites Camper Van Beethoven, says "over the years, I've become more and more bored with traditional band rehearsals. I don't want to get burned out on the songs we're doing."

So far, audiences haven't gotten bored. The band's first single, "Teen Angst (What the World Needs Now)," conquered the rock world in the summer, followed by the current "Happy Birthday to Me."

Rather than wait until all the singles on the debut album are released, the trio this week put out a four-song EP called "Tucson." It was recorded July 3 on a rare day off from touring.

"The record company wanted us to record a B-side," Lowery says. "We thought we'd surprise them and record a whole album. We never got that far, but we got six songs, four of which we finished. So instead of using them here and there, we said this was a body of work, and we talked the label into releasing it."

Breaking up Camper after three members quit to join their side project, the Monks of Doom, full time was something Lowery didn't want to do, but neither could he replace half the band and retain its name.

So he retreated to his hometown and fell in with a couple of old high school pals, Davey Faragher and Johnny Hickman. The drummer is a rotating position. Currently, it's



Russell Young / Virgin

■ **Cracker, which plays tonight at the Sting in New Britain, released a four-song EP this week.**

Michael Urbano.

But as for the Monks, Lowery says, "I think they're a little upset, a little jealous that they put out three records now, and I go back and play with my friends from high school, and we get lucky. I can understand that."

The Veldt opens the show tonight at the Sting in New Britain.

WHAT'S NEW

Motown legend Smokey Robinson plays his first Connecticut show in years when he appears tonight and Friday at the Foxwoods High Stakes Bingo & Casino in Ledyard. The shows are set for tonight at 9 and Friday at 11 p.m. Other big-name entertainers coming to the casino include David Brenner Saturday and Red Buttons Oct. 31. A Native American Dance and Song Festival is planned for the casino grounds Oct. 22 through 25.

Ever the activist, Bob Dylan became the first artist to cancel a show at the Palace Performing Arts Center in New Haven because of the stagehands' strike. His Oct. 27 show was canceled before it went on sale; he subsequently booked a show for that night at the Burlington (Vt.) Memorial Auditorium.

His shows at UConn's Gampel Pavilion Oct. 24 and the Paramount Performing Arts Center in Springfield Oct. 28 are still on. And Palace officials say the strike is not otherwise affecting ticket sales or bookings there.

Nevertheless, when tickets go on sale Friday for a Nov. 20 show by Joan Baez, who sang "Joe Hill" at Woodstock, it will be at the Paramount in Springfield — not the Palace.

Les Lobos returns to the state for two nightclub shows next month — at the Sting Nov. 21 and Toad's Place in New Haven Nov. 22.

A Soul Asylum / Lemonheads double bill plays Toad's Nov. 19. Failure opens the all-ages show. Also coming to the club, Steelheart Nov. 3, NRBQ Nov. 27 and Richie Havens Nov. 8 in a benefit for the Connecticut Citizens Action Group.

Guitarist Joe Walsh plays the Sting Nov. 11. Connecticut's own Rhythm Syndicate headlines the annual Halloween bash sponsored by WTIC-FM. Also on the bill are Joe Public, Stevie B., George Lamond, Pamela Fernandez and the Barrio Boyz. Tickets to the Oct. 31 event at the Radisson Hotel in Cromwell are free through radio giveaways.

The Nov. 27 Bryan Adams show at the Hartford Civic Center will go on sale before the end of the month.

Bon Jovi's surprise show at Toad's Place Tuesday raised \$3,500 for Paul Newman's Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashford. It was one of three club shows for the band, the others in Phoenix Friday and in New Jersey

Monday. The Toad's show was originally planned for Sunday night, and the Third World show set for Tuesday was moved up two days to accommodate it. The band wanted to rest Jon Bon Jovi's voice before the Toad's gig. The band's album, "Keep the Faith," is due out Nov. 3; Bon Jovi will be around in a somewhat bigger arena next year. A Feb. 18 date is being held for the band at the Hartford Civic Center.

Although the Band was the only group on the multi-act "Arkansas Traveler Revue" not to join headliner Michelle Shocked during her headlining set at Toad's Place Oct. 4, at least it performed, in apparently what was one of its last dates on the tour.

The Band reportedly was unwilling to stick around 90 minutes after its set just to join Shocked for one song at the end. (It must be bad enough for a one-time arena-filling band to be a backup band in the first place.) And Shocked was, well, shocked. So when the revue showed up last week in Boston and New York, the Band never appeared.

A slew of New York bands play the University of Connecticut Student Union in Storrs Nov. 6, including Youth Gone Mad, Affirmative Action, Sound Bite House, the Astro Zombies and Small Am I. Don't forget the big show there this Saturday with Superchunk, Jawbox, Velocity Girl and Monsterland.

Bop (harvey) plays Saturday at the El 'N' Gee in New London and returns to the Sting Oct. 24. Also coming to the El 'N' Gee this month: Roomful of Blues Friday, the Tribulations Tuesday, Pato Banton Oct. 27 and the Reducers on Halloween.

Write to Roger Catlin in care of Sound Check, The Courant, 285 Broad St., Hartford CT 06115. Please include a telephone number.