

By CHRISTOPHER P. AUMAN

Fix Your Wagon has a singer named Singer, a guitarist named Riff, and a drummer named Windmiller. "Everybody writes about that," says David Singer, who doubles on guitar. "They're not stage names." State-issued photo identification was offered as proof. And on bass: Brendan Phillips. "It's his real name," Singer notes.

Riff, Singer, and Phillips have been pals since they met at Francis Parker, a North Side grade school. A little over two years ago, determined to avoid the nine-to-five monotony of post-collegiate adulthood, the three friends formed Fix Your Wagon as a vehicle for escaping that reality. Singer and Riff, already competent musicians from the self-taught school of guitar playing, convinced Phillips to charge a bass guitar and amplifier to his credit card, then taught him how to play it. A drummer change added Windmiller to the line-up, and led to Fix Your Wagon's current incarnation.

Pillow Talk, the band's debut full length, has just been released. This follows a seven inch single, "Maybe I Can't" b/w "Anything Gun," released on the band's own Unmentionable Records in '92, and an EP on the *Ultra Modern Offspring* compilation, which featured bands on the co-op label Crank Records.

Crank Records is almost an anachronism by today's musical standards. The label is co-owned and operated by five local bands: Whitey, Ball Sniffer, Tarpit, and Speed D.S.T.R., as well as Fix Your Wagon. The bands use the label to release their records and use the money the label generates to fund future projects. They also help promote each other's

shows and distribute each other's records when they tour. "It's not a very Chicago attitude," Singer concedes, "but it's a very supportive environment." (Look for a new box set - pizza box to be exact - of Crank seven-inch singles.)

Pillow Talk, Crank's third release, was helped by some big names in the

Chicago music scene. The bulk of the album was recorded by the band with Brian Deck (drummer for Red Red Meat) at Idful Studios with knob twister Casey Rice in the mix, and two tracks were recorded by Steve Albini. Despite the controversy this indie rock guru's name can generate, the band found Albini quite accessible. "He does what he does better than anyone else. Anybody who says Steve Albini is a dick or hard to work with," says Singer, "is misstating the facts."

The finished product is a slow and flowing blues-laden record built on solid

guitar work and a steady rhythm foundation. *Pillow Talk* captures a sound reminiscent of early Rolling Stones (a band that receives thanks in the liner notes). Unlike Mick Jagger, however, Singer's vocals are subtle and blend into the recording, which can be misleading when he is singing less-than-subtle lyrics in songs like "Antarctica," about being fed up with the modern world, and "I Hate Califor-

nia," in which an entire state is condemned for being the destination of a love interest.

The biggest outlet for Singer's disgust with politicians-past is the anti-revisionist song "Ronald Reagan." "My loathing resurfaced when Nixon died," Singer explains. "God forbid that [Reagan]

should die and then be lionized when he's an out and out criminal."

Don't get the wrong impression; there is no overall expression of negativity with this record, as may be implied by those three tracks. "Lolita," a song of affection for a sibling, and a hopeful rendition of Louis Armstrong's "A Kiss To Build A Dream On," give *Pillow Talk* balance.

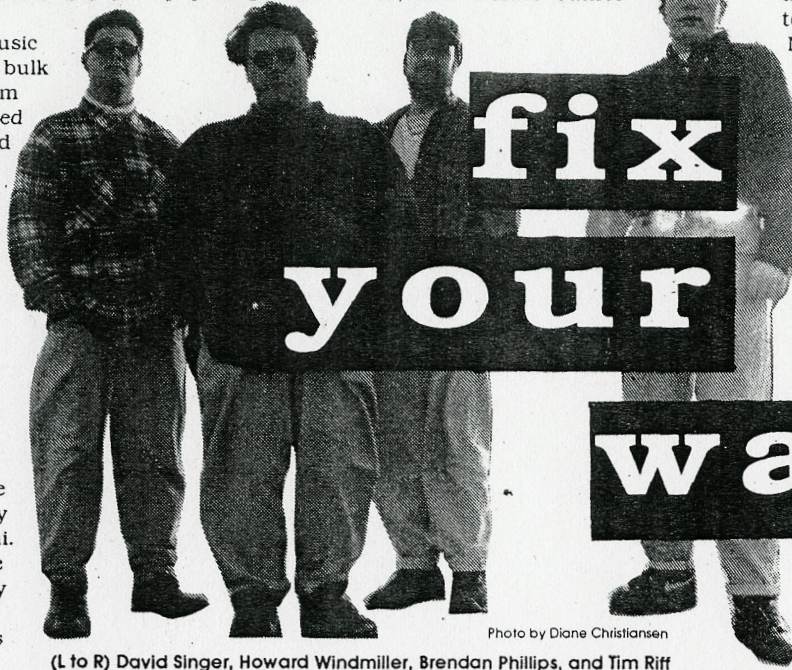
Fix Your Wagon has recently finished a six-state mini-tour that brought them to and from the South By Southwest Music Conference in Austin, Texas - the indie rock showcase mecca where breaking bands display their talent in front of more than a few major-label representatives.

"There were tons of industry people everywhere," Singer notes. This could mean big things for the future of Fix Your Wagon, who did not leave the conference without shaking a couple of hands and talking to some industry people who saw the band perform. "Some of them are very nice," says Singer of

the label reps. "Some of them are kind of shady. It's hard to know who to trust at this point."

The band is wisely keeping any talks with major labels under their hats for now and are concentrating on touring. Look for them to play in your neck of the woods as they hit the road this month. So far, this wagon trail is keeping FYW on the right rock road. ▼

A Sleepy Chat With



(L to R) David Singer, Howard Windmiller, Brendan Phillips, and Tim Riff

Photo by Diane Christiansen



paula abdul

head over heels