

# PHANTASTIC!



Myles Weissleder  
Assoc. A&F Editor

Phantastic Phunny Phunk is just one way to describe the display of musical genius we were honored to have performed at our own Hawkins Hall Auditorium. Last Wednesday night, Phish, a highly unique band from Burlington, Vermont made their Plattsburgh debut. Since forming in 1983, Phish has achieved a popularity level that most bands would die for.

Since Plattsburgh is somewhat out of the way, we were spared the usual mass of fans that travel long distances to catch these guys' live shows. However, we did attract a large number of folks from neighboring Vermont, and some from the Canton, Potsdam, and St. Lawrence areas. The reason people travel long distances to see Phish is quite clear: they know how to have a good time.

Phish is a four piece band; each member has his own unequalled style in the production of an eclectic brand of music. Trey Anatasio (lead guitar) writes most of the music and is responsible for choreographing most of the crazy antics observed on stage; Mike Gordon holds a bass line that seems to have a life of it's own; Page McConnell (keyboards) complements the sound with a prominent Duke Ellington influence; and Jonathan Fishman (percussion) syncopates the groove to the extent that the drums do not just hold the beat, but are a highly integrated component to the bands' unique sound.

As showtime drew near, the opening band, The Authority, (coming all the way from New York City) phoned in with the bad news that the real "authorities" got a hold of them while they were enroute to the gig. Apparently, while speeding up the highway, a member of the crew was detained for driving with a suspended licence. Mike Nowicki from PSUC Activity Coordination Board along with the rest of us, began to worry that they might miss the show. As the cut-off time came near, it was almost inevitable that The Authority was not going to play. Five minutes before the cut-off time, they arrived, and immediately jumped up on stage. They only had enough time to play about

five tunes, but the crowd was not displeased in the least bit. The Authority preached their funky jive to an ever-increasing audience, as people slowly filtered into the auditorium.

The Authority is the "houseband" at Wetlands of New York. Wetlands is noted as being one of the most worthy clubs for music in the east. They can be seen there at least once a week, usually on Friday nights. Right now, though, these guys are busy touring the East Coast at such venues as Aiko's in Saratoga, Zodiac Club in Syracuse, The Stone Balloon in Delaware, The Bayou in Washington, D.C., and Nightingales (homebase for the Spin Doc's and Blues Traveler) and Wetlands of NYC.

Phish took the stage at about 9:30, after the crowd was justly warmed up with the heat of New York City jive. They were now ready for the phunk for Vermont.

Phish opened up with one of Trey's favorite new songs, *Llama*, a very energetic song that started the evening off on the right foot. The band played two seventy-five minute sets which included many songs from their two self-released albums, *Lawnboy* and *Junta*. Including: *Squirmy Coil*, *Reba*, *Dinner and a Movie*, *Bouncing Around the Room*, *Golgi Apparatus*, *David Bowie*, *My Sweet One* and *You Enjoy Myself*. In an exclusive *Cardinal Points* interview, Trey did not want to reveal the meaning of the crazy and ambiguous lyrics in *You Enjoy Myself*. All he told us was that he had written it in when he was in Florence, Italy with

band member Jon Fishman. The end of this fifteen minute song is made up of a four piece spacey accappella harmonization that can easily take you into another world. It is different every time they do it. This is just one element that makes Phish a leading force in the scene of new music.

Trey, in response to the question, "How would you describe your music?" commented that his job was to make the music. They were interested in how other people describe it. "You can't pigeon-hole it...there are too many influences." Which is true, Phish's music draws from styles as diverse as funk, blues, jazz, calypso, and bluegrass. Unlike most bands that attempt to fuse different styles, Phish's strong compositional skills make these odd juxtapositions seem natural. Their songs combine the complex harmonic and rhythmical aspects of jazz with infectious grooves of funk and R&B to create an exhilarating organic sound.

Their performance is not just four guys standing around playing music. They have the energy of a Green Mountain waterfall. They do not stop moving from start to finish. During some of their songs they implement trampolines and strobe lights, to which the crowd, as if an electric shock pulsed through the floor, jumps up and down in sync with the bouncing Mike and Trey.

Their mellow side involves a well practiced unamplified barber shop quartet, of which Fish (Jon Fishman), garbed in only an extra-large designer pillow case with arm and head holes, takes

the lead. At our show, Fish sang the lead in a "lovely" *Sweet Adaline* as the first encore. Fish is also famous for using an old Hoover vacuum cleaner to produce obscure sucking sounds during certain songs. Their bluegrass roots come from Mike, who seems thrive on the bouncing bass lines throughout the Phishized versions of old classics. Their rendition of *Uncle Pen* is a fine example. Page enjoys the stride piano style, and implements it in many of their songs. He also seems to be the commandant over some slow ballads such as *Lawnboy*, which we did not hear.

In reference to practice, Trey comments that when they are not on tour (after a brief vacation), they practice as a band for a least five hours a day. It is their persistent practicing regime that makes them so tight. They know each other's style so well, that when they get up on stage, they are able to play off one another that they can improvise and still sound tight. When playing live, the improvisation aspect of their songs is quite evident. Trey notes, "A lot is improvised, when we are improvising, it seems tighter - we're keyed into each other."

When Phish goes up on stage, they are working from a preplanned song list but they don't necessarily stick to it by any means. Trey explains, "Some songs we'll play every eight to ten gigs. Some songs I love playing and could play every night. We try not to, because we don't want other people getting sick of them. Personally, I could



C.P. Photo Mark Lopus

# Phenomenal Phish (con't from p.7)

play *Foam* every single night. I will never get sick of it. That song is just about my favorite song we do. I feel the same way about *Llama*, I love it."

In the interview, Trey expressed excitement about the release of their new album, *Picture of Nectar* which is due out in early 1992. The band just got signed by Elektra Records. This was something though, that the band was not in pursuit of. Trey explained, "We weren't avoiding it or pursuing it. We certainly *were not* pursuing it. They pursued us. We never called them, they just started coming to the gigs...just because we were getting popular. It was that stage of the career." Trey expressed that this career move will in no way affect the way they will be playing, "...there is no connection whatsoever. I love to play...nothing has changed. The only thing that will change is the distance we want to travel in order to play in different markets. Elektra might open up possibilities of us playing in Europe. We would really love to play in Europe."

The only small technicality of having a national label as compared to an independent label, is the matter of fans taping their live shows. Right now, Phish allows and encourages people to bring

recorders and microphones into their shows. They told Elektra, "People are definitely going to keep doing it. Period." The reason people enthuse over collecting and listening to Phish bootlegs is obvious: why not bring the fun home with you? It has gotten to the point where fans can be overheard saying, "Hey, have you heard the Dartmouth '89 tape? It's hot!" (As a fan myself, I have to agree.)

After the show, more than heavy breathing and sighs of amazement were heard. People from far away places commented on how making the trip to Plattsburgh was definitely worth their while. Plattsburgh students were so ecstatic, that many of them commented that this show was the best time they ever had on campus in the four years of going to school here.

Phish has shed a new light on Plattsburgh. The show did not sell out. That could be looked at in many ways. There was more room to dance because of it, but it also showed that a lot of people missed a hell of a good time. The ACB mentioned that they might try to get Phish back in the Spring. That will be an event to look forward to. The Phish Hotline is (802) 655-9068. P.S. *Suzi Greenberg* was a SUNY system graduate.