

Songwriter shows skills

By ERIC MAYER
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"[Synthetic T-shirt] Blends are better. It's like America. We're a blend. That's why we're better. Not like Sweden. F--- Sweden," partially-famed rock songwriter and performer Stephen Malkmus exclaimed to a group of enthused Philadelphia fans at that city's primary hub for such self-proclaimed "marginal culture," the Trocadero Theatre on Arch Street.

Malkmus's increasingly left-wing political policies including the fornication of Sweden may inadvertently force him to wear the term "partially-famed" for the remainder of his musical career. Bitingly truthful words such as "F--- Sweden" are the variety that alienates even the most devoted of followers from the pack. Even your humbly liberal journalist, very conscious of his Swedish heritage, could not help but feel a bit persecuted by the fascist on stage.

The Jicks, Malkmus's backing band, released their first album under the direction of Malkmus in February 2001. The album, simply titled "Stephen Malkmus," received warm reviews and decent business from the music world upon its release. However, those who remember Malkmus's work with his former band, Pavement, are insatiated by the effort.

Pavement was one of many independent rock bands to be started in the wake of the Pixies' highly influential

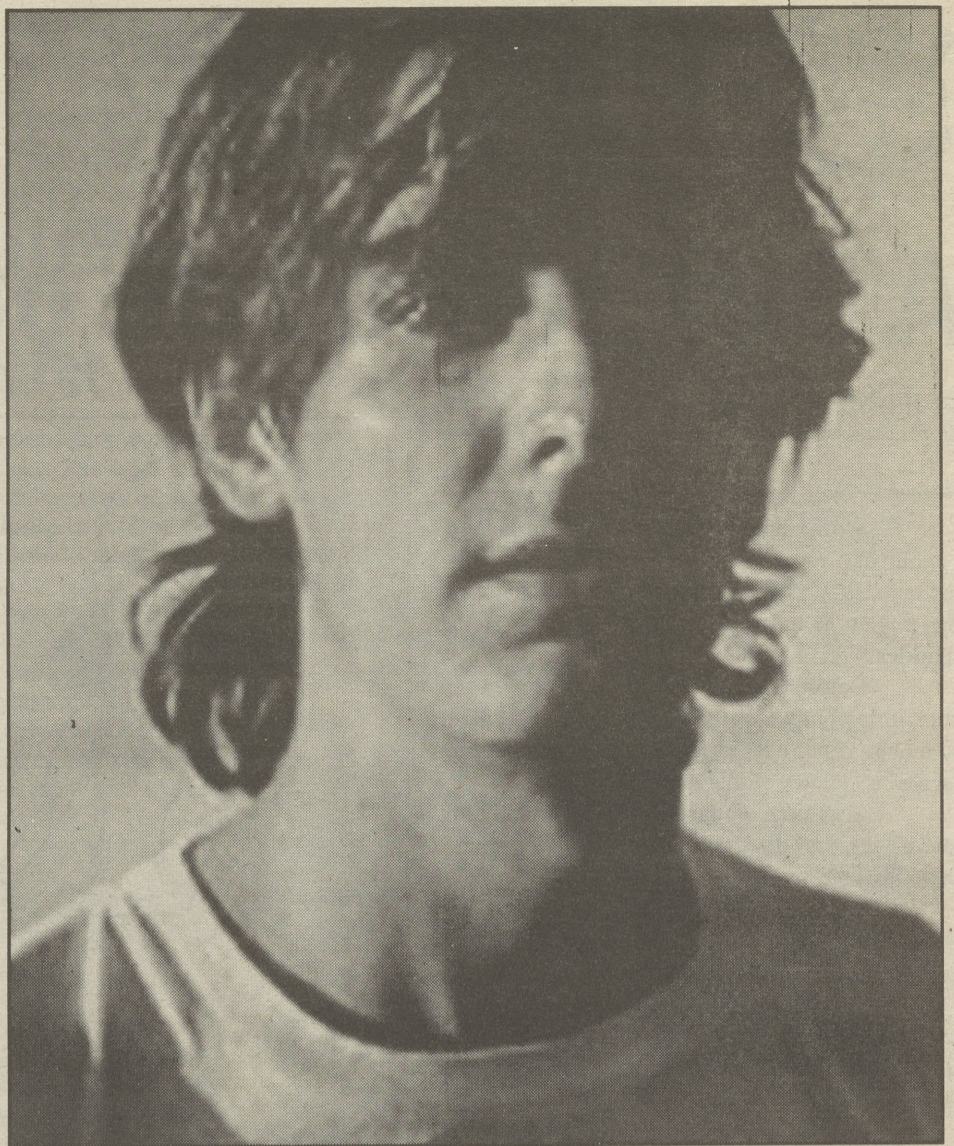
tenure. While competing directly with other successful bands such as Nirvana, Stone Temple Pilots, Smashing Pumpkins, and Sonic Youth for record contracts and MTV play, Pavement was a relative commercial failure in the context of their potential. This potential far outshone those of its contemporaries, as evidenced by the cult-like following for their early independent records.

Despite the hype, Pavement only briefly broke into the mainstream with 1993's "Cut your Hair" from the acclaimed "Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain" album. In the absence of national attention, their superlative critical stance continued across five nearly-perfect records. The band was indebted to the unique songwriting wit of Stephen Malkmus for every one of these classic albums, right up to and including their last outing, 1999's "Terror Twilight." Sadly, Pavement broke up in 2000 due to personal and creative exhaustion.

On Nov. 15, 2001, Malkmus stood on the stage with a different group of individuals playing a different group of songs. Throughout the concert, part of the second national tour this year for the Jicks, the band tried within the very greatest of their capability to capture the antagonistic fun of Pavement's warm corpse. This fun, as always, came at the expense of playing ability; versions of usually brilliant songs like "Jenny and the Ess-Dog" and "Trojan Curfew" were far from definitive.

The guitar playing of Malkmus was

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consistently impressive; his ax's combination of lead and rhythm carried each song to its climax. The remainder of the band, however, appeared amateurish and unskilled by comparison, with special emphasis on the bassist Joanna Bolme.

In addition, as is the case with many drummers, the consistent percussion by John Moen was more apparent in its simplicity at the show than on the record. The highlight of the evening was the appearance of former Pavement band-mate Bobby Nastanovich, who used his role as the

band's tour manager as an excuse to jump on the stage and scream out lyrics of "Jenny and the Ess-Dog." Nastanovich — or "Mr. Nasty" as he is called among a fringe group of somewhat depraved Pavement fans — gave the microphone every ounce of his inscrutable voice during the bridge of "Jenny." This audio-visual provided every attendee with a mixed feeling of amazement, ear pain, and hilarity.

The scene was perhaps representative of the Pavement/Malkmus experience as a whole: astounding, painful, yet utterly hilarious.

What's the season hold for you? Check out your horoscope

Aries

Honesty will pay off this month. Don't hesitate to express your feelings, especially to a friend who may be destined to become more. Also, consider how you spend your money on gift giving. Someone special may surprise you with an unexpected gift from the heart. Don't push others away — allow them to see you for who you are. The stars spell new friendships as well as new loves, so keep an open mind.



Capricorn

Your smile may brighten someone's day so beware of those who may be in need of kindness. Sometimes the best gift that you can give is a shoulder to cry on. Others tend to turn to you. People will take notice of your compassion, especially someone you may have had your eye on. Be persistent. Your crush may play hard to get, but by the month's end they will reveal their true feelings.

Libra

Your good-spirited demeanor causes those who had mistrust in you last holiday to give you lots of goodies this year. While others seem to turn to you for cheering up, make sure that you don't neglect yourself. Take some time to reflect on the past, and let go of any regrets



that you've been holding on to. The future is bright as long as you allow yourself to move forward.

Virgo

Your smooth and sharp wit give you the edge this holiday season to choose the right gifts for the special people in your life. Love and money are both significant players for you this month, so prepare for lots of nice surprises. Believe in yourself, and attempt to see yourself as others do. You may be surprised to find new confidence.



Taurus

Over the holidays, feelings will strengthen. Make sure that you stay honest and true to yourself. Watch that your past does not come back and haunt you. The New Year brings new beginnings. Share them with the one you love.

Leo

Your generous nature make the holidays this season extra special. You dazzle your loved ones with your awesome gifts. Be on the lookout for a lovely surprise of your own. The path you are on decides to split — take the right road. Over the holiday break, embellish a romantic partner with bliss under the mistletoe.



Pisces

The holiday season will bring joy and a much-needed rest. Enjoy time with friends and family. Watch for new relationships to blossom in the coming new year. Old relationships may change; some for the good, others ...



Sagittarius

Your big day will bring big laughs. Remember that when Christmas rolls around you need to be grateful for things other than gifts. Family will be in need of your help this holiday season. So lend a helping finger when wrapping is called for.



Aquarius

There is much to study and much to learn. Money is in your future. This is a good month to start remembering your responsibilities. Beware of straying from work, or you will find yourself without much money. Be nice to avuncular people.



Gemini

Ho ho ho! You lucky duck! Your birthday is five months from the holidays! You will make big advances in your relationship this

month if you get the right gift for that "special someone." Girls, remember that a way to a man's heart is through his stomach. But, please, stay away from fruitcake! Guys, if you can't get diamonds, give your girl something sentimental. If that doesn't work, give her a coupon for some lovin'.



Scorpio

Your December will be in the words of John Wilkes Booth, "HOT." This is a good month to become the rapper you've always wanted to be.



Remember this:

"Bust out some rhymes, and out some dimes; You're the street-smart mother of the Yuletide times."

Cancer

Although the holiday season is a time for joy, it is also a time of depression and loneliness for those who aren't as privileged as some of us. Volunteer at a nursing home for a day and give a holiday gift that is more powerful than any toy or necklace. Give your time to someone who could truly use it.

