

the bears



MICHAEL WILSON

The Bears — Chris Arduser, Bob Nyswonger, Adrian Belew and Rob Fetters — play Southgate House on Friday.

RODNEY WILSON CIN WEEKLY CONTRIBUTOR

Not many Cincinnati-area residents have been on MTV. There have been a few — Carmen Electra, Nick Lachey, sure, and maybe your younger sister was in the frenzied crowd at a taping of TRL. But, by and large, this is a distinction that the vast majority of Queen City dwellers cannot claim.

The Bears have been on MTV ... a few times ... really late at night.

"We got almost famous, but not quite — a little bit of airplay on MTV at 2 a.m.," says Rob Fetters, local rock icon and one quarter of the band. The "almost famous" comment could be a melancholy observation about the fleeting nature of popularity were he not referring to more than 20 years ago

— and speaking about a band still very much in existence.

'MIDDLE-AGED GUYS'

A couple decades in, the Bears (Fetters, guitars; Chris Arduser, drums; Adrian Belew, guitars; Bob Nyswonger, bass) aren't interested in being MTV's next big thing anymore. They're not trying to keep up with the newest trends. The band members are simply interested in writing great pop songs, just like they've always done.

"We're middle-aged guys with a very strong belief in the pop song as something that can make a difference in people's lives," Fetters says. "We're people who grew up when the right record on our stereo would help us face the day — we just think it can be a

very powerful cultural thing."

With a rich history starting in Sylvania, Ohio, where three high schoolers had a cover band, the members of The Bears have developed long musical resumes that include names such as The Raisins, psychodots, The Graveblankets and Bucket. Add to that stand-out solo careers and a laundry list of studio experience, and you have some of the most seasoned players to call Cincinnati (and in Belew's case, Nashville) home. And, after lifetimes spent playing music, the members still make music for the pure love of making music.

EUREKA!

The most recent album, *Eureka!*, finds the band making pop that's provocative. Songs like "Idiot in the Sky" and

The power of the pop song – and life outside the fast lane – drive legendary Cincinnati foursome's new album

"Keep Your Counsel" bounce along with poppy glee, all the while addressing weighty topics such as survival and the human condition.

"There's a sense of reality about it," Fetters says. "When you're as old as we are, you're not writing about getting high and girlfriends anymore. We've been there and now we're into a new realm of raising other humans, raising our kids. That fascinates us more than life in the fast lane."

Written by all four members, *Eureka!* was created in what's become the band's signature manner.

"What we do is we all write," Fetters says. "We have a benign competition where we get together and pass around a guitar, play songs and agree on what material from each member fits our band the best at the time. There's no hard limit on it, but it's kind of like, when we know it's right, it's right."

SUCCESS

Traditional notions of pop music success say that when a band's moment in the sun (or, in the case of late-night cable airplay, the moon) passes, so too does the band's relevance. The members of the Bears have a different notion of success.

"We set realistic, attainable goals," Fetters says. "Our idea of success as far as the band is, first, hopefully making music that won't embarrass us in 10 or 20 years – that we like and we're proud of and feel good about. That's the No. 1 goal.

"And second is to take responsibility for ourselves," he continues, referring to the band's recent decision to go it alone, selling records without the involvement of record labels, managers or middlemen. "We're not putting our careers in the hands of anybody else. ... Because the

JUST THE FACTS

WHAT: The Bears with Erika Wennerstrom (of the Heartless Bastards)

WHERE: The Southgate House, 24 E. Third St., Newport

WHEN: 8 p.m. Friday, May 4

PRICE: \$20-\$22; show is non-smoking with limited seating.

PARKING: Several pay lots around Newport on the Levee, including the Levee garage (\$5)

CONTACT: 859-431-2201, www.thebearsmusic.com or www.southgatehouse.com

'THE FAMOUS ONE'

Rob Fetters jokingly refers to his bandmate Adrian Belew as "the famous one," and it's true that this Covington native has had many remarkable experiences in the recording industry.

Once a drummer in the Ludlow High School marching band, Belew has gone on to tour with such icons as Frank Zappa, David Bowie and the Talking Heads.

He's been a member of bands including King Crimson and Tom Tom Club, and he's built a still-active solo career that's included radio hits and a Grammy nomination. He's also a prolific studio musician, playing on albums by artists from Paul Simon to Tori Amos to Nine Inch Nails.

Belew's celebrity was sealed in 1992, when his name was mentioned in an episode of *The Simpsons*.

Bears isn't a band that has to happen – it's a band we want to happen.

"I think I'm much more interested in longevity than altitude," Fetters says. "We're all miraculously happy that we've been able to play music all our lives and get away with it."