
Petland Making a science of pop.

BY DAVID SIMONS

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Eric Teather spent his formative years hooked on the synth pop of Depeche Mode and the Smiths — with a generous helping of metal men Judas Priest and Iron Maiden. “Then I kind of skipped over the whole grunge thing in the '90s, which sort of explains why we sound the way we do,” says Teather, front man for Wilmington, Delaware's Petland.

Mixing present-day pop hooks with '80s-style electronica and metal, Teather, bassist Michael Bolan, keyboardist and violinist Andrea Piña, and drummer John Paul Travis have reached a new creative level with their latest release, *Miss Roboto*, a tongue-in-cheek homage to oft maligned art-popsters Styx. The band recorded the album last year at Teather's Manic Music home studio.

“The intent was to do a musical parody of every sci-fi rock project ever put out, even though there's not that much outward humor in the songs themselves,” says Teather, who by day punches the clock at a local chemical-manufacturing outfit. “It was fun to put together.” Petland evidently learned a thing or two from Styx's mistakes. “No, we're not mounting an overblown stage show like they did,” says Teather, “even if Michael still wants to dress up in a rubber robot costume on occasion.”

Petland's members use equal parts dexterity and technology to achieve their genre-blending sound. “We run some samples, which Andrea handles from her Alesis keyboard or John Paul triggers from his drums,” says Teather, who runs his PRS guitar through a small Mesa/Boogie amp. “At the same time, we work pretty hard to make sure the vocals sound as good live as they do on record. What we can't physically re-create onstage, we just make up for in energy.”

Teather dislikes music that sounds canned. “One thing I can't stand is a lot of premade samples,” he says. “I saw this band in Philly once. They had the drummer chained to a rhythm track, the bass player was faking his parts, and the singer was lip-syncing. It was like karaoke. That kind of stuff really bums me out. As a result, I never want it to sound like we have a synchronized MIDI sequence going in the background.”

To get the word out on *Miss Roboto*, Petland (named after a

regional chain of pet-food stores) undertook a thorough college-radio promotional campaign with the help of online marketing agent Space 380 (www.space380.com). That effort paid off: *Miss Roboto* recently broke onto the (CMJ) chart *College Music Journal* and, at press time, is still climbing.

"It's working," says Teather. "So far we've added 90 college radio stations, and we're being tracked by many others. It's like 250 spins per week. That's a big deal for us." Combined with demographic information gleaned from online purchases of *Miss Roboto*, Petland is able to plot a tour with considerably less guesswork. "Knowing who your listeners are before you get going makes the going that much easier," Teather says.

For now keyboardist Piña doubles as the band's primary booking agent. "We'd love to get management," says Teather, "but we have total control, and the proceeds from the CDs and the shows go straight into our pockets."

Petland is not above trying a few time-honored visibility techniques. "Though I do most of the singing onstage and I have the front-man ego, we're really trying to feature Andrea more," says Teather, grinning, "mostly because she's so much better looking than me!"

David Simons is a New England-based music journalist.

To hear a clip from Petland, go to www.onstagemag.com and click on **ONLINEEXTRAS**

ESSENTIAL FACTS

Petland

Home base: Wilmington, Delaware

Selected recordings: *Antenna*

(Manic Music, 1999);

Automatic Sheep

EP (Manic Music, 2001);

Miss Roboto

(Manic Music, 2001)

Web site: www.gopetland.com

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