

## Guitarist Michael Hedges not a typical Windham Hill artist

Musicians often dislike the labels that the public and press pin on their work, because stylistic tags tend to be limiting or misleading. Others simply have no idea how to categorize their own music.

Michael Hedges doesn't have that problem.



"I would describe it (his music) as savage myth guitar," said the Windham Hill guitarist, who will perform Jan. 22 to a sold-out audience at The Punch Line. "I like that because it takes away from any preconception that my music would be tame (a common assumption with Windham Hill artists.) That's why I use the word 'savage.' It puts a kind of lively connotation to my playing, which I think it is... And 'mythic' gives you kind of a mystery and intelligence that you wouldn't normally associate with 'savage.'"

The myth part also refers to his current album project, titled "Taproot" or "Tap Root" (he's not sure how to spell it yet), which he said is about 80 percent recorded and should be out this fall. "Taproot" is also the name of a myth he's penned, on which his forthcoming album is based.

"This one has a definite story that goes along with it, but not exactly concurrently, and not to confuse it with a soundtrack," explained Hedges, in a phone in-

terview from northern California, where he lives. "It's more or less like a sound movie that has a story track, but it's not necessarily chronological. I can explain it a little simpler, by just saying that the titles of songs are events and places and characters in the myth."

Although such a conceptual album is a departure from Hedges' previous four recordings, it shouldn't surprise his fans. Hedges has never been particularly predictable. In fact, during a previous trip to the Upstate, he was a little too unpredictable for the staid members of the audience.

It was an impressive night at Clemson University's Tillman Hall, maybe three years ago. Hedges was the second of three Windham Hill acts on the program, which was part of a fine arts series commonly attended by folks expecting more orthodox performers than Hedges.

After pianist Liz Story peacefully lulled her audience with her pretty pastoral pieces, the lights went down for the set change. The lights came up a few minutes later, as a dreadlocked Hedges, dressed in a bright flowery jacket, roared into his raucous version of Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower" on acoustic guitar.

By his second song, a quarter of the audience — mostly the older echelon — filed out, not comprehending the renegade on stage.

Hedges, 36, now has a modified buzz cut ("it's just a lot easier to take care of"), but he's still good at jump-starting an audience. Recent perfor-



Guitarist Michael Hedges claims a 'savage myth' style

mance reviews and his last album "Live on the Double Planet" indicate that he can quickly alternate between moody, floating instrumentals and attack-style guitar work accompanied by vocals.

Maybe that mix stems from his student days at the Peabody Institute in Baltimore when he'd study classical guitar and composition by day, and pound out pop and rock songs in local bars by night.

Now the guy comes up with a musical myth. And he says he's experimenting with drums, percussion instruments and key-

boards to add richer textures to his work. A band someday may not be out of the question.

But solo, Hedges puts out more energy than many bands. The show sold out last week, said Punch Line operator Mike Avery. Pleased with the response for a concert at his 275-seat comedy club, Avery said he is considering booking more musical acts in the future.

Townes Van Zandt Tickets are available at the door — but you might want to get their early — for Texas songsmith Townes Van Zandt, who is set to weave his tales of desperation Jan. 20 at Al's Pump House.

Like his best buddy Guy Clark, Van Zandt is a cult legend in Texas, where he has influenced many better known artists, including Nanci Griffith, Lyle Lovett and Steve Earle. He is sometimes called the Jackson Browne of Texas and is identified with razor-blade songs about solitary ramblers who run away from love.

He's recorded about 10 albums over the past 20 years, many of which have been hard to find. But last year, in addition to the release of his "Live and Obscure" album on Sugar Hill Records, Van Zandt's entire catalogue on Tomato and Poppy Records reportedly was re-released.

Several of his tunes should be familiar: "Pancho and Lefty" recorded by Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard; and "If I Needed You" was a hit for Don Williams and Emmylou Harris.

Tickets are \$6 at the door. Showtime is 9 p.m.

By the way

Those who were lucky enough to witness Marcia Ball's invigorating show last week at Al's Pump House may want to get another shot of adrenalin — albeit the diluted version via television — by watching her and her band get down Jan. 27 on "Austin City Limits." The 9 p.m. ETV program will also feature bayou folk band Beausoleil.

Those who missed her show may get a glimpse of the abundant energy the Austin pianist and her bandmates poured out at their Greenville gig.



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