

FAT Chance — A Record Spinoff for the Wheels

AT LARGE

PETER STACK

I went to an official record release bash the other night for a band that has a hit song called "My Girl Passed Out in Her Food." It's danceable, hummable and gross.

I ditched my wimpy Japanese car a block from the Townhouse in Emeryville, where pickup trucks with gun racks have been known to stomp on pint-sized hatchbacks. Wearing dork slacks and nerd loafers, I strolled casual-like into the cowboy capital of the near East Bay to catch Chuck Wagon and the Wheels, a band of ill repute.

Chuck and Co. just released their latest record on the FAT label, FAT being the small company that is the only surviving kin of the once-loved KFAT radio that beamed bodacious funk of every kind from a dumpsy studio in Gilroy. FAT is strangely headquartered in sissy Sausalito.

The Wheels and old Chuck have a huge following in the San Francisco Bay region. Their record party was a virtual hog call for the biggest crowd of road-apple stompers ever to squeeze into the Townhouse. The place was so packed, the rats had to camp out in Oakland for the night.

Wagon and Wheels are one of my faves on the long-neck beer bottle and pearl-button shirt circuit. And they're absolutely the only good thing to come out of Tucson, Ariz., since it got a Mercedes Benz dealership.

Among their major hits: "Why Don't We Get Drunk and Screw," "Red Hot Women and Ice Cold Beer," "Disco Sucks," "One Less Jogger on the Road" and my personal favorite, "Asshole From El Paso." They're currently toying with a new song tentatively titled "Breakdance Barf."

All of these horsepucky songs, plus a few more, are contained on the band's latest album, which is called Chuck Wagon and the Wheels Live, a real catchy title. It seems the band was recorded on one of its raunchier dates at Charlie Steele's in Redwood City. The performance was randy enough to qualify for FATness, a *declassé* distinction that makes any former KFAT fan get hard nipples and goosebumps.

The band was blasting out "Rasta Mother" when I arrived. Smashed against the south wall of the Townhouse was 230-pound Gregory J., a real FAT guy, who was selling FAT T-shirts, FAT posters and the new FAT record. Gregory J. looks like something out of a B-grade Texas biker movie, not the kind of guy you want to share the backseat of a Honda Civic with.

The record release situation was full of flaws. People seemed to be far more interested in dancing and sucking brews than in buying the record from the FAT man. And besides, the place was crawling with pretty girls. I thought up a good axiom for the occasion: Horny cowboys would rather ogle UC-Berkeley coeds than buy records.

Besides, the colorful cover for the new Chuck Wagon disc had not arrived from the printers in time for the party. So all the records were in plain white envelopes with "Special Pre-Release Limited Proof Edition" rubber-stamped on them. Not exactly Jim Beam for the eyes.

"Hey, the Beatles had a white album, why can't

we?" said Chuck Wagon plaintively between songs.

I talked with Wagon backstage. "We'll probably make zero money on this deal," he said. "Ain't no matter though. We're so broke we had to take a house band job at a chili joint in Santa Barbara. But maybe some cash will flow. We're pretty hot in Europe right now, so when these record guys get the word like over to France, I figure we'll do all right. We're heavy duty Frogbait at this point in our careers."

FAT, a funky growth company, is just now hitting pay dirt as the only representative in the world of the dead radio station that stood alone in the vanilla-pudding spill that is FM radio sameness.

FAT's mail order business of country, crossover rock, bluegrass, blues, Cajun, Hawaiian and folk records has taken on global proportions. They want FAT in Europe, they want it in the Orient. They want it all over the U.S., even in ugly Amarillo, Tex., where a serious ukulele music freak has been isolated and identified.

The FAT mail order catalog is also a magazine full of FAT viewpoints edited by former KFAT deejay Amy Airheart and KFAT engineer Herb Pallant. On the cover is a blimpy cowboy driving a '49 Buick convertible with long-horns bolted to the grille and a license plate reading "2 FAT."

"I'm happy to be a FAT guy," said Charles Wagon, who's skinny. "It's my only excuse for not being rich and famous, which is real FAT, if you know what I mean."

1983, SF Chronicle