

The Cardboards: Avant-garde with punk

By BRYAN A.C. KELLY

"In the future. The Cardboards."

If you have seen this poster then you may wonder who they are and what they are about. The Cardboards are a new Pittsburgh group whose genre lies somewhere among punk avant-garde jazz, and Berlin Cabaret of the Twenties.

The Cardboards began in Pittsburgh's underground music scene in the winter of 1979. The band's members came together as a result of their common discontent with what they saw as a lack of original music being created in this city. They began playing at private parties and have since played such venues as Phase III, Oakland's Decade, C-MU campus, and the Lion Walk in Oakland and Northside's Mattress Factory.

Max Haste is the band's lead singer. His stage presence is nearly schizophrenic, first calm and charming, next raving and hysterical. His lyrics are clever and clear. Ron Solo plays the three synthesizers. His spacey melodies may be the music trend of the future. Keith Teeth creates the hooks with his catchy saxophone riffs and he says, "I like a few select jazz players. Post Ornette Coleman, Steven Lace, and Rosco Mitchell." He also cites influences as XTC, Wire, and the Contortions.

Bill Bored, percussionist of Puke fame, provides the backbeat and the recently added Miss Shapen occasionally sings backup vocals.

"I like a band that has a sense of humor, the Germs and Black Randy, for example," Bored explained.

"I met Keith at C-MU and Bill and I are writers for the New Magazine," a Pittsburgh punk rock fanzine. "We had been following new music so we decided to try something new ourselves," Haste said.

When asked what his influences were he said, "I like to play Dizzy Gillespie records at high speeds. That's what makes me happy."

Bill Bored joined the Cardboards when, "Keith and Max realized they wanted someone to develop with them, not an ex-drummer from a symphony orchestra," Haste said.

The Cardboards best feature is their ability to create stylistically original pieces. The bands tunes run the gamut from the delightfully bouncy ditties about Three Mile Island to the



The Cardboards (l-r): Ron Solo, Max Haste, Bill Bored, Keith Teeth.

serious. We started for fun but since people like us for one reason or another we have kept at it seriously." They are not just a band to drink to, they are a band to react with. The songs are so humorous and imaginative they compel the audience to think, not just tap their feet. Not many people sit at a Cardboard show. Once a night, Haste leads a pogo line, a latter day congo line, around wherever they are performing.

Perhaps because they are so visually captivating, the group has also been captured on film. Pittsburgh Filmmaker S. Beroes is featuring them, along with other new Pittsburgh bands; the Shakes, the Puke, and Hans Brinker and the Dykes, in an upcoming film called "Debt Begins at 20." Funded in part by the National Council on the Humanities, the film is rumored to be about a one night stand involving a punk rocking couple with Bill Bored as the male lead.

The wide repertoire of the Cardboards include such titles as, "Pretend You're Mind is a Dress—"...and change it," "I Hate Disease,"—it makes me sick," "The Guitar Annoys," and "Breakfast ID." They also do period pieces like "General Custard"—"...you're dead," "Skylab," and "The Phase III Boogie" along with somber social commentary, "Vietnam Amputee" and "No War This Week."

If you are thinking about starting a new band yourself you might well consider these suggestions. "I urge anyone to go ahead. Don't be afraid of success or failure and rely on your intuitions," and "Start Now," said Max and Bill respectively.

So if you are bored with Boston, fed up with Foreigner, convulse at country rock, or despise disco and want to hear a sample of what your local artists are producing, get out and see the Cardboards.

