



PAM SMITH O'HARA/Miami Herald Staff

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Charlie Pickett, front man for South Florida's most notable rock band, the Eggs: 'We've hit the end of the road.'

Will Charlie Pickett have to hang up his rock 'n' roll shoes?

By JUSTIN GILLIS
Herald Staff Writer

By day, an honest-to-God blue-collar working stiff named Charlie Pickett goads his bulldozer around the Johnny Sessa rock pit in Miramar and thinks of becoming a lawyer.

By night, Charlie Pickett sits on his Fort Lauderdale porch in a straight-back chair, smells the salty breeze and talks gently about becoming a rock 'n' roll star.

These days, the guitarist and lead singer for South Florida's most notable rock 'n' roll band, Charlie Pickett and the Eggs, is a frustrated man. Frustrated to the point that he may soon abandon the band, return to Gainesville to finish his political science degree, and go to law school.

That, for somebody who prefers to warble about his nine-inch tongue and about copping drugs in Overtown, is serious frustration.

"It's just phenomenal to me that we've got all this stuff — the amazing press, the record reviews, the things we've made, the physicalness of our music," Pickett said. "Yet we haven't done a damn thing in a year to rise any further. We've hit the end of the road."

Charlie Pickett and the Eggs — once South

Please turn to EGGS / 2L

The Huck Finn of rock

EGGS / from 1L

Florida's most promising band, the band that won raves from almost every serious rock-music publication in the English language, the band everybody thought would make it to the big time — may shortly bite the dust.

The decision will be made in June, when summer classes begin at the University of Florida.

He never thought it would come to this.

Pickett, 30, and his Eggs have been around since early 1980, surviving personnel shakeups to play basic guitar-and-drums rock 'n' roll.

It isn't a brilliant band, nor is it terribly innovative, nor is Pickett a prolific songwriter, nor are the live performances as consistent as they could be.

Pickett, looking like Huck Finn and mumbling "shucks," concedes all those things.

But the Eggs are strong where it really matters: in playing gutsy, hard-driving, blues-based rockers while adding a few personal twists and eschewing pretense.

South Florida's widespread reputation as a musical Siberia was no deterrent, and the Eggs drew audiences that were usually supportive and sometimes frenzied. The band was even mobbed once in West Palm Beach.

The Eggs put out a couple of singles that drew praise. Then followed 1982's *Live at the Button*, a fresh, raw, vibrant record that left critics breathless.

"Hilariously whacked, sincerely twisted, busting out at full speed with both feet on the accelerator," wrote London's influential *Melody Maker* magazine. "Charlie Pickett and the Eggs play tough, snotty, blue-collar Yankee rock 'n' roll."

The reaction was much the same on this side of the Atlantic.

Record magazine, brought to you by the folks who publish *Rolling Stone*, even proclaimed that the Eggs could be "The World's Greatest Rock 'n' Roll Band."

Smelling success — and a chance at a serious musical career — Pickett took his band on an East Coast tour in January 1983, hitting a dozen cities and several important New York clubs and getting an avid reception all around.

The one exception was Boston, where the Eggs played one set, told an apathetic audience to stuff it and stalked from the stage.

Satisfied and only \$200 poorer, Pickett and his band rolled back to South Florida in March.

The worst mistake we ever



During the day, Eggs front man Charlie Pickett drives a bulldozer in a Miramar rock pit.

made," said drummer John Galway, "was coming back to town."

So why do they stay?

"This is my home," says Pickett. "This is where we all live."

For 10 months the band has languished, playing the limited local circuit, working on a few projects and hoping for a break. As in *Record Contract*.

It never came.

Hope is turning to bitterness, and Pickett's thoughts are turning to law school.

"It's not the audience's fault," Pickett said. "The receptive audience here made us. But it's like you're in a wasteland here.

"There's no musical management hierarchy, there's no musical booking hierarchy, there's no talent agencies, there's no nothing. You just cannot climb any ladder, because there's no ladder to climb."

For all that, hope hasn't entirely run out.

The band is working on a new extended-play record for local release in a month or two, and promises it will be its first recording of mostly original mate-

rial. To date the Eggs' repertoire has been largely new versions of old songs by groups like the Velvet Underground and the Flamin' Groovies.

An expatriate American who owns a small record label in Hamburg, West Germany, has grown fascinated with the Eggs. He just released a three-song EP he hopes will win the hearts of German music fans.

"The response to Charlie's thing is quite good here," Jimmy Pratt said last week from Hamburg. "He's like a straight-ahead rock 'n' roller. The people at the radio station like it. We think it has a good chance."

Nobody who listens to Egg music very closely or for very long can think otherwise. It's rock roots music — even the name is supposed to be evocative of rock's beginnings. "I picked the Eggs' simply because eggs are the beginning."

On a good night, Galway's drums and Dave Froshnider's bass are enough to clutch the heart of any true rock 'n' roller. John Salton's guitar is always good, some-

may shuck it



ALLAN FREUND/Miami Herald Staff

The Eggs are a hit in New York, Britain and Germany, but here? You just cannot climb any ladder, because there's no ladder to climb.

times spine-chilling. Layered on top are Pickett's own guitar work and his often sultry, occasionally laconic vocals.

He sings of rock's traditional themes — sex, drugs, alienation. Some of his best tunes, including *If This Is Love*, *Can I Get My Money Back*, were written by a cousin named Mark Markham. Markham's band, Mark Markham and the Jesters, was a mid-1960s sensation in South Florida with

the single *Back to Marlboro Country*. Markham is now a farmer in Ohio.

Pickett also writes his own tunes — sure-fire ones when he gets around to it, which isn't often enough. In his detour, he refuses to write puff or c

high enough to disqualify about 98 per cent of modern rock's lyrics.

Consider *Phantom Train*, an Eggs original sparked by 1980's riots in Liberty City.

Pickett remembers talking to his father, Charlie Sr., who wondered aloud: "What do they expect people to believe, that McDuffie committed suicide? He just sat there and flopped himself to death on the sidewalk, and cracked his own [motorcycle] helmet?"

Inspired, Pickett sat down to write.

In the song he dreams of getting on a train full of ghosts, where he sees famous people like Mark Twain and Robert Browning.

The rest of Pickett's words, offset by haunting guitar work, come tumbling out in a rush of irony:

I see Arthur McDuffie and I ask him

Hey, what happened that night? What McDuffie told me I find hard to believe

Five cops try to stop him and he still succeeds.

Strangest case of suicide I've ever seen.

Not your standard radio fare.

Without even a hint of pomposity, Pickett sees himself and his band as a small part of American folk culture.

"It's not my definition, but it's the truth," Pickett said. "Rock 'n' roll is just modern American folk music, and that's all it is. Good rock bands have always risen from the untrained folk musicians — Creedence Clearwater Revival, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix."

The Eggs, too, are self-taught musicians who cling to their raw and spontaneous sound.

"It's just like the heavenly unit, to me, to play with these guys," Pickett said. "We are not even touching where I think we could go. That's sort of the damned disappointment of it all."

And if the band folds?

"I'll just sit here on the porch and play guitar by myself," he said. "And have a wonderful time."

(Charlie Pickett and the Eggs records are available in South Florida, though not widely. They use stock records)