



Charlie Pickett and the Eggs

Who? Who, indeed. In Britain and Sweden, they're known as a band on the move, but their hearts belong to **fab-u-l-o-u-s** Dania.

Profile by Marilyn Alva

By day, Charlie Pickett *crushes* hard rock. He's high on a bulldozer at Johnny Sessa's bulldozing company in Hollywood by 6 am, working the rock pit by the Sportatorium until 5, when it's time to drive home to his apartment in Dania, across the street from the Lums on U.S. 1. Except for a four-year hiatus at the University of Florida in Gainesville, where he studied political science, Charlie Pickett has been mining gravel and rock for nearly ten years.

"It's just a job. I get up. I go to work. I feel the same when I get home. It's like, 'ok, I've worked a day,'" says Charlie, who is 29, and not the type who makes a great first impression when he walks into a Lums for a coke and English muffin, as he has done on this particular Saturday.

Tall and lanky, Charlie's dressed in a pair of jeans, definitely not designer, rolled up slightly at the cuffs, and a nondescript shirt, the one that happens to be clean that day. Who cares? Perhaps the tan cotton one with the roll-up sleeves. His complexion seems to indicate a complicated adolescence, and his sandy brown hair looks like it could have used a washing. Charlie comes off reserved, a private sort of guy who perhaps has deep and keen insights into all that is important in life. His voice is

thoughtful, intelligent. Perhaps if his hair was clean and he wore a suit he could be a lawyer after all. But that is Charles Pickett. Not Charlie Pickett.

By night, Charlie Pickett *plays* hard rock. He plays hard rock and roll with his band, The Eggs, at South Florida rock lounges. Rehearsal nights are spent at Sync Studios at 77th and Biscayne in Miami where the cops walk in pairs and the ladies don't.

Charlie Pickett and The Eggs is a band on the move, a band with a future, as they say in the trade. This year's Eggs aren't the originals but they are so seemingly perfect together one marvels at how they found each other. The boys say it is not an interesting story, however.

Egg John Salton, 26, is a Miami Beach High non-graduate who at age fifteen was sent away to a reform school upstate because "I pushed this guy down for no reason at all and kicked him in the eye." John learned to play a mean guitar from some black kids at the school, which had just purchased new guitars and amps for its wayward boys. Egg Dave Froshnider ("Make it just Frosh"), 25, also from Miami Beach, says his claim to fame is that he's played in more bands than anyone in the world, more than a hundred, including the Weasles, "a prominent Miami group"

before it split up in 1978. The other Egg, drummer John Galway, 26, wears his reddish-blond locks slicked back in a duck and hails from beer joints in South Carolina. He moved to Miami two years ago because the music scene in South Carolina was "too repressed."

Standing up on the stage with his guitar and serious look, The Eggs all around him, Charlie Pickett makes an impression not at all like the one he makes at the Lums. Here with The Eggs on the rock and roll stage he evokes a *terrific* presence. But playing hard rock and roll sometimes until three in the morning with only a couple of hours of sleep before he's back on the job *crushing* hard rock makes Charlie wonder what his life is all about, all this hard rock, day and night. He's not sure, but he does know that he meets a lot more girls playing hard rock than he does mining it.

That, in fact, was the idea. Three years ago Charlie formed The Eggs because he had just gotten a divorce from the pretty blond from his Dania neighborhood, the one he had known since 14. "On my job I meet *NO* girls. I mean *ZERO*. So you've gotta do something to meet girls," Charlie explains with all due honesty. Of course, he could have met just as many,

perhaps more, stalking the cosmetics counters at Burdines, but Charlie has had a rather fond obsession with playing and singing rock and roll songs since his bored and restless days at South Broward High.

In high school, a friend taught Charlie four chords on the guitar. It was during the second act of *The Impossible Years* at the Hollywood Playhouse, where Charlie played a troubled teen in the first and third acts, that he discovered the joys of music. Ironically, he had joined the theatre troupe in high school in order to find the joys of — what else? — meeting new girls. "During the second act when I had nothing to do but wait I kept playing those four chords over and over until I could make a song. Then, whew, it became so much fun. From then on in I played nothing that was bad." And what he played was nothing but rock and roll and the blues. "I couldn't make my guitar play disco," said Charlie.

For such short-sighted beginnings, Charlie and The Eggs have nevertheless made an impressive start toward rock stardom. Their first album, "Charlie Pickett and The Eggs, Live at the Button," recorded and released this year, is attracting attention in and out of Florida and even abroad. On the local front the

album is said to be the first one of any importance to come out of South Florida since the Ciclid's "Be True To Your School." The Ciclids, a local punk group, have since disbanded.

In Sweden, "Live at the Button" has garnered a small cult following Charlie is not able to explain. In England, the popular music tabloid *Melody Maker* writes that "Live at the Button" is "hilariously whacked, sincerely twisted," and describes Pickett's music as "tough, snotty, blue-collar Yankee rock and roll." Audiences Yank and non-Yank are captivated by Pickett originals such as "American Travelust," "Doreen" and "Phantom Train" as well as some others resurrected from rock obscurity such as "Tallahassee Lassie" and "Shake Some Action."

The Eggs have played the Agora in Hallandale, Big Daddy's in Miami, and, of course, The Button on Fort Lauderdale's beach, famous since 1968 as a beachstrip rock/disco club. They play to packed houses in the West Palm Beach area. WCEZ radio station in Jupiter airs cuts from their album frequently. For that matter so do many college and public radio stations in the U.S., not to mention in England and northern Europe. In between bites of his English muffin

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at the Lums in Dania Charlie Pickett, in his tan shirt and glitterless looks, quietly reflects on his roots and his music. It's easier to draw information on his music than his private life but he finally says he was born in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains in Southeast Ohio, where his father, a farmer, owned some land. However, "no money was circulating" so when Charlie was three his dad moved the family to South Florida, where he thought he could make it in the contracting business. As it turned out, he made a decent living as a supervisor at a rock pit, the same one that Charlie now works. The Picketts lived in West Hollywood until 1965, when they moved to Dania.

Charlie loves Dania. He likes the small-town atmosphere, the neighborhoods, the vacant lots. "Little kids can ride their bikes up and down the street, and play baseball. And there are still vacant lots to play in. It's just this little strip the traffic from I-95 bypasses."

"Live at the Button" is distributed by Open Records in Fort Lauderdale; it's also distributed in New York and London. But the album cover lists Dania rather than Fort Lauderdale, right along with New York and London. "We're distributed in New York, London and

f-a-b-u-l-o-u-s Dania," Pickett likes to croon.

Charlie says he is like a folk artist in that he is not trained in music and thus not a musician. "I play what I play and if people like it that's real good." He says his band plays traditional rock and roll, modern American folk music. "We try to go straight to the heart of American rock and roll and explore its deepness. We don't have synthesizers. We don't have new instrumentations. We don't work with odd timings. We don't present theater, routine. We're a traditional rock and roll band and that is such an *undone* thing right now." This means that black blues is also thrown in. "It's rock and roll with a pull and push to it," adds Charlie. "How many people think of the beat anymore? We have beat and most rock groups have tempo and that's it."

The Eggs' music, says Charlie, works off two points of view. One is to provide *fun*. "We've worked all week and this is our Friday night, this is our Saturday night. We're gonna have *fun* tonight. That's what we try to do live." In addition, the material tries to reflect the "human spirit" — that slight bit of tragedy ("I'll tell you one thing. I'm not getting any younger and neither are you"), that slight bit of comedy ("You say there's plenty of

fish in the sea. Can you save one for me?"), that slight bit of love ("All it takes to get the shivers and shakes is just to hear you speak") or sexuality ("She really likes to shake, she really likes to roll"), and even a little philosophy ("Can you judge a man by the things he cannot hide?"). "It's natural American rock without getting too cerebral about it," Charlie says, summing up.

Charlie and The Eggs plan their first tour this fall, up the East Coast, including club dates in Atlanta, Washington, New York and Boston. They are quietly hopeful of that Big Break. But Charlie is a little older and wiser than the other Eggs and tries to keep things in perspective.

"If it doesn't pan out I won't be heartbroken because I know I've done what I've wanted to do." He'll still have the job at the rock pit and if he's lucky the boys will stick with the band, maybe cut another album, and continue wooing the crowds at the local lounges. Fifty percent of their audiences are girls, a rarity for rock clubs, says Charlie, and he's thankful for that.

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(Marilyn Alva is a Miami writer and editor who would rather be playing in a rock and roll band.)

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