

The Beat

By **Jenny Poust**, Staff Writer

Band of Brothers

Well, maybe not blood brothers, but Erik Christ and Gary Wertman sure do love to tease and beat up each other when they're not making music.

It took Erik Christ and Gary Wertman 15 years, but they've finally put out their first record as the two-piece Lehigh Valley-based band Design For Life. But it's not as if the 28-year-old and 30-year-old, respectively, have been slacking all this time; the duo has been writing songs together "forever."

You might have noticed that we've only mentioned two guys so far. That's because there are only two guys in DFL. Christ plays keys, Wertman plays guitar and both fellows sing. But after one listen to the band's album, *Letters In Boxes*, you'd never know it was recorded in Christ's attic with just a guitar, keyboard and mic. With a basic understanding of how to play bass, drums and various strings, Christ programmed each part into a keyboard as "the song wanted," and voila, the result sounded like a full band.



DFL is interested in one day putting together an electric act, but for now the guys are happy just making music as an acoustic duo. That is, when they can find a way to silence all the guitar riffs, bass lines and drum rolls constantly playing in their heads. So to block out some of that noise, we made sure the Guinness was flowing when we met with Christ and Wertman at a local pub to talk about all things DFL.

PULSE WEEKLY: You guys have been friends and working together musically for a long time. Why'd it take so long to start a band and put out a record?

GARY WERTMAN: We were both pretty concerned about the fact that our egos would have us fighting.

PW: What do you mean?

GW: I wanted to be the main guy; every project I've ever been in, I pretty much did that. 'I'm in charge. I'm the singer. Step away from the monitor.' As a result, I ended up being a jerk.

ERIK CHRIST: I've heard him called a lot worse.

GW: But when we're working together, that whole thing just disappears. We're like different guys. Once you know someone for 15 years, you trust him with your life and you can say, 'That sounds like crap,' and he won't cry about it.

PW: Since there are only two of you, did you share songwriting duties?

EC: Some of the songs I wrote by myself, some Gary brought to the table entirely, but even the songs we wrote on our own, the other person added a lot of creative input.

GW: When I work on my own, my stuff doesn't sound anything like what's on the album. I think it's finished, and Erik starts tweaking it. Same thing goes for him. Nothing on the album is, 'This is the way I wrote it, and it's staying that way.'

PW: What about the singing duties? Did you have to fight over who did that?

GW: Erik sings three quarters of the album; after a couple black eyes, I gave up.

EC: Yeah, I'm taller and have a longer reach. He didn't really have much of a chance.

GW: I don't have the same vocal endurance, and if I get stuck having to sing half the set, [gasps]. I don't want to endanger the gig.

EC: I've been singing professionally since I was in 4th grade.

GW: And I've been smoking professionally since 5th grade. [laughs]

PW: You guys really seem to want to do whatever's best for the music's sake.



What?

Design For Life, Ben Lang & Charlie Maz

Where?

Jabber Jaws
(1327 W. Chew St.,
Allentown)

When?

Saturday, February 26, 8:30
pm

How much?

FREE

Huh?

610.432.6524 or
dfl.airsyndicate.net

EC: We aren't doing it because we want to be rock stars – I'm too old ... [a brief argument with Wertman, who's older] OK, so technically I'm not too old, but I know that if I saw some guy like me, wandering around stage, crying about teen angst ...

GW: So what's up with Rod Stewart?

EC: That's a good question. But we're digressing. Don't get me wrong; if rock stardom came in a box the way the movies portray it, sure. But in reality, that limo isn't really yours; you're just renting it from the record company.

GW: We used to want to be rock stars, but then Erik worked at a couple places and found out what was really going on.

EC: [noticeably quieter] I used to work for the William Morris Agency – in L.A. with international talent, in NYC with urban contemporary. Eminem, Erykah Badu, The Roots.

PW: Was it a bad experience?

EC: Nobody's ever accused the music industry of being a terribly legitimate business to begin with. William Morris was a great experience: I had a lot of fun, worked with a lot of great people, but the nuts of bolts of what it is to work in the music industry, especially if you are a musician, is it's as ugly as it seems, and worse. I don't want it that bad.

PW: So what kinds of hardships are you guys willing to put up with to get your music heard?

GW: I've had stage fright for years. The first time I ever played out was at Scarlet O'Hara's, years and years and years ago. I had two songs to sing the whole night, and by the second song I almost threw up on the microphone.

EC: That's a reason to get people to come out to our show; you never know, Gary might yak.