

## BALTIMORE ... OR LESS

## Oh, say can you hear a city anthem?

Transplants hope the right people will rock to their new 'Baltimore.'

By Todd Richissin  
SUN STAFF

So far, nobody's flat-out said the song, proposed as the new "Baltimore anthem," is anathema to Baltimore.

A possible reason: The only people actually proposing the song are Josh Cohen and Gabe Gilligan, the two 30-year-old guys who wrote and perform it and have been busy marketing it like some kind of sugary new delicious cereal that will end baldness and help you lose weight.

Only they're not marketing it as successfully.

So far.

With time, though, and with enough pushing, prodding and packaging, Cohen and Gilligan hope their "Baltimore" will become the city's signature song, like the Big Apple's "New York, New York" or the "Cleveland Rocks!" of Drew Carey's hometown.

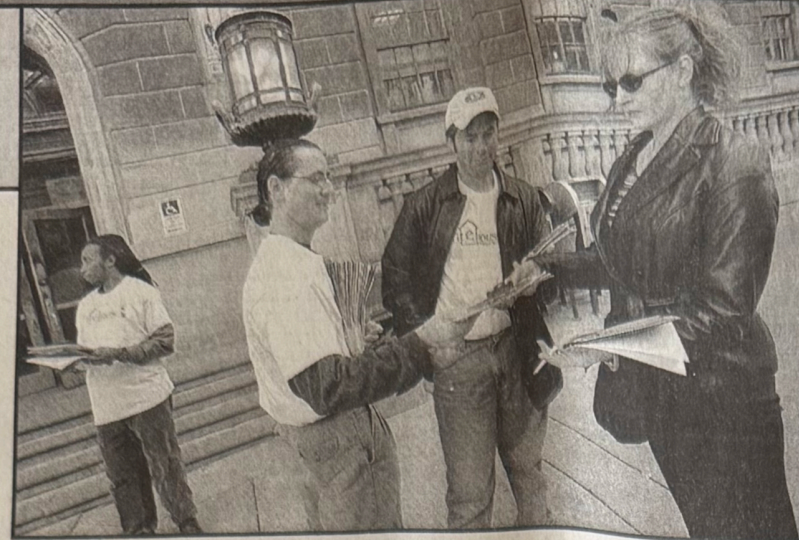
Notice that in the aforementioned formula for success, actually playing the song doesn't seem to be much in the mix. Not yet, anyway.

For now, public relations is their tune. They've already spent time this month pounding the downtown pavement, handing CDs of their single — performed by their band, Fitehouse — to anybody who wanted one and to many people who did not.

They pleaded for signatures on a petition aimed at Mayor Martin O'Malley urging him to designate the song as the city's anthem in "a bold move" that could boost Baltimore's "image on the national scene."

We will offer no critique of the song here.

But we will point out that *Sun* music critic J.D. Considine said this after a listen: "It's hack work. The entire song is cliched and predictable. It's cluttered; it shows



**Theme sellers:**  
Fitehouse members (from left) Ellis Baylor, Josh Cohen and Gabe Gilligan plug the song on the street.

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PHOTOS

little imagination or inspiration; and it's poorly executed at that."

### Mayor 'kind of' likes it

Good thing the mayor has different taste from *The Sun's* music critic.

"I kind of like it," reports O'Malley, who, in fairness, we should point out, plays in his own band while Considine does not. "The lyrics are a little uneven, but it's pretty good."

In this case, though, the music is rather beside the point.

Cohen and Gilligan are salesmen as much as (maybe more than) musicians. And their strategy to make "Baltimore" the city's rock anthem — a strategy which coincides with their desire to make it on the entertainment scene — is at least as much about marketing as music.

"There's no question we did this to get attention," says Gilligan, Fitehouse's lead singer. "Every band will do that at some level — either by hanging from the rafters somewhere or smashing their instruments onstage. That's the history of rock and roll."

"That doesn't mean we're not committed to good music."

Along with band members Edward Plant Jr. and Ellis Baylor, they have burned about 1,000 copies of the song on CD.

They've mailed out about 600 of them along with surveys in a slick folder, the cover of which is cut in the shape of the Bromo Seltzer Tower. The CDs have gone to politicians and city department heads, school officials and music teachers, an effort they claim has cost them about \$6,000.

And counting. And, in whatever small increments, perhaps paying off.

Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend received a copy and wrote to the band: "Your enthusiasm for Baltimore City and our State is truly appreciated. Please continue to keep me informed of your efforts and progress in reaching all of your goals."

### Birth of an anthem

Well, sort of. She didn't actually listen to the song, says her spokesman, Chip Brown.

"But she read the lyrics."

Good enough.

Her comments were slapped on press releases that accompanied another mailing of the song to the

media. So were responses from a Baltimore assistant police chief and an assistant fire chief.

And when Don Wehner, who books bands in Baltimore and produces independent promotions, was contacted for a comment for this story, he wanted to know how to get in touch with the band.

So that's how it happens? This is how an anthem is born? A mass mailing goes out, a lieutenant governor bites, the promotion feeds on itself, a desperate reporter makes a few phone calls and Fitehouse soars?

Is this how a song/anthem/band really makes it?

"There are examples in the music industry of bands that have just exploded like that, but they're few and far between," says Wehner. "In today's world, you have to really get out and tour, develop a fan base. You buy a van, a couple jars of peanut butter and jelly, some white bread and hit the road."

There's still a need, he says, to go through those days of playing in front of seven drunk-to-the-point-of-deaf people night after night in dive-bar after dive-bar. Playing at "soft dates" — free events such as Artscape — is a good strategy too, he says.

Cohen and Gilligan say they have no objections to that. They've played some dates at Wy-

### 'Baltimore' by Fitehouse

When a big city kid has seen all  
the bright lights  
Makes a change 'cause it's right  
Takes his car down to southern  
shores,  
Warms him up as he opens the  
door  
Thinks he's found the cure ...  
Well darlin' that's me, I'm here,  
and I'm gonna stay  
When you took your love away  
I traded it in on Charm City  
nights  
On the rebound, in this town,  
I've found a new fire to light ...

So if you ask me how it shows,  
Baby I'm lovin' it ...  
And if you ask me how it goes,  
baby I'm livin' it

Just a step away from the  
nation's capital  
Would make any city feel  
insecure  
But not when it comes to my  
Baltimore  
Built from the field of the  
Oriole,  
With a strength that endures ...  
So baby send my heart back  
care of Mobtown  
I think a new woman's got me  
now  
Love this city, gonna settle  
down  
There's no way I'll stray from  
This new life I've found ...

And if you ask me how I know,  
Baltimore's givin' it!

going to surrender to corporate America without first trying their hand at a band — as a living.

Using their marketing background, they began looking for a city that would work as a base, then they drove around the East Coast checking various candidates out.

"When we got to Baltimore, we fell in love with it," Cohen says, never mind that our fair city wasn't even on their list of potentials. They were visiting his brother in Fells Point.

They're computer whizzes, good enough to work when they want to for good enough coin that they don't have to work when they don't want to.

That's when they work on the music. And on pushing that anthem.

O'Malley says he doesn't know about making Fitehouse's "Baltimore" the city's anthem. After all, there's already "Baltimore Our Baltimore," a wretched enough song.

But they can take heart.

Francis Scott Key never played Fletcher's or the 8x10, and he sure as heck never played Wyatt's Saloon.

It was, in a very real sense, marketing that made "The Star-Spangled Banner" the country's national anthem.

Francis Scott Key's brother-in-law took the poem to a printer, had it copied and distributed it to as many people as he could.

And, of course, a national anthem was born.

It only took a little more than a century.

### CRITIC'S CHOICE: ART

### The pioneering camera of Bourke-White

Through her work for the fledgling *Fortune* and *Life* magazines in the 1930s and '40s, Margaret Bourke-White became one

