



Here, within the group's Tempe, AZ, studio, Gin Blossoms drummer Scott Kuszniak roots on singer Robin Wilson as he karokes to his band's own song in *Karaoke Revolution*.



**R.E.M.**

Gin Blossoms



**Barenaked Ladies**



**Hoobastank**

R.E.M./Hoobastank/Barenaked Ladies Photos by Getty Images Gin Blossoms Photo by Bruce Racine

**R.E.M., Hoobastank, Barenaked Ladies, and Gin Blossoms**

We can't sing. We're willing to bet that you can't, either. Oddly enough, though, we can't get enough of *Karaoke Revolution*. Via the USB headset used in games like *SOCOM*, Konami's new music game awards you points for accurate pitch and rhythm as you sing along to more than 35 chart-toppers of the past few decades. ■■■■ Our love for the game makes us wonder: What do well-known bands, those whose voices you'd actually want to hear, think of the game? We recruited members of the Hoobastank, Gin Blossoms, and Barenaked Ladies—each of whom has a song in *Karaoke Revolution*—to answer that very question. ■■■■ And to make things even more interesting, we turned it into a competition. In fact, it's a veritable...

# battle of the bands

by Chris Baker

**THE CONTEST RULES**

Each group is scored on two songs: first their own, then a second of their choice. The winner is determined when the two scores are added together. Simple, huh?



Both Michael Stipe (singing) and Mike Mills (on couch, legs crossed) would award four stars to *Karaoke Revolution* on the *OPM* scale.

## R.E.M.

You'd think a band used to selling out arenas for the better part of the past two decades would feel most at home at *Karaoke Revolution's* Royal Hall, or even its Enormo Bowl. But, "I'm OK in the subway," R.E.M. frontman Michael Stipe tells us in reference to the game's Central Station. "I like that I can sing in a subway."

After viewing a stirring rendition of "Believe" by bassist Mike Mills ("I was channeling Cher"),

Stipe says, "It seems like the choruses are the easy part, because everybody knows that. And then the melodies are really locked in, and the verses are a bit harder."

Speaking of hard verses, keeping up with the lightning-fast words to "It's the End of the World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)" is next to hopeless for the normal *Karaoke Revolution* player. Stipe makes it look easy—although, in watching him perform, one can tell he's not too concerned about singing how the game *wants* him to. He's singing

just as he will to end the band's concert later this very evening. The end result: 10,964 points. A fine total, but one that certainly deserves to be higher.

Though he may have strayed from the game's second-by-second instruction, that doesn't necessarily mean Stipe could care less about how he's judged. "Halfway through, you're panicking because you're not doing very well," he comments. "I like the crowd reactions to bad notes."

"LOUSY!" laughs Mills. "I think this game is hilarious. I think it's

lots of fun. I know a lot of people in my family who don't necessarily play videogames, but they love to sing karaoke. So I'll be getting this for my aunt."

Stipe says "the state of the world—and Bob Dylan" inspired "End of the World." Could he have even fathomed it would become a big draw in a videogame more than 15 years later? Mills can only laugh at the suggestion, but Stipe delivers the perfect straight-faced answer: "I was praying for it...almost nightly." ■■■

## HOW THEY SCORED

**Song 1: "It's the End of the World As We Know It"**  
Singer: Michael Stipe  
Score: 10,964  
**Song 2: "Believe"**  
Singer: Mike Mills  
Score: 12,093

**TOTAL SCORE: 23,057**

## HOOBASTANK

"F— you, Kansas!"

Hoobastank's Chris Hesse has just had his first trial run with *Karaoke Revolution*, doing his best to keep in tune with the L.A. band's huge 2001 hit, "Crawling in the Dark." "That's why I play drums," he says, after getting booed offstage at the County Fair.

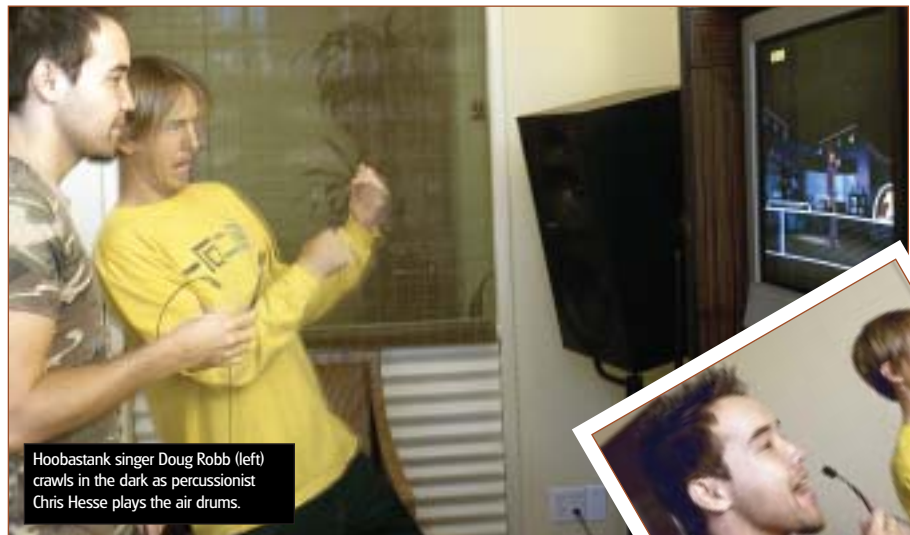
"That's exactly what I expected," adds lead singer Doug Robb, laughing at his bandmate's pathetic 1,664 points. "If they had, like, *Karaoke Drumming*, you should give that a chance. You know what would be really cool is if we went to a real karaoke bar and had me, like, totally *butcher* the song."

When it's Robb's turn to perform the song he wrote to express

"everybody's normal feelings of self-doubt," he certainly doesn't butcher the tune—it sounds great to us. The game doesn't think quite as much of his performance, though, awarding a mediocre 8,831 points in the end. As Robb surmises, you have to "remember exactly how you sang on the record, because that's what the game's basing it on."

"The game is awesome," comments Hesse. "I probably wouldn't sit at home and play by myself, but it'd be a lot of fun for a party or something like that."

"My girlfriend doesn't play games at all, and she'd really crack up at it," says Robb, a gamer whose personally created DeVry Institute now tops the polls in *NCAA Football 2004*. "It has nothing to do with videogames—it has its



Hoobastank singer Doug Robb (left) crawls in the dark as percussionist Chris Hesse plays the air drums.

Hoobastank Photo by Joe Toreno; R.E.M. Photos by Michael Sexton

The term "gin blossoms" is slang for damaged nasal capillaries caused by excessive drinking.

own element. It's like a combination between karaoke and *Dance Dance Revolution*."

Robb isn't convinced the package is everything it could be, though. "I feel like you can probably go through the songs pretty fast," he says. "Expansion packs would be good—it seems like you'd be able to dump a boatload of songs on them. I think Metallica songs would be funny—anything off *...And Justice for All*."

"And the Bee Gees, too!" enthuses Hesse. "I love the Bee Gees!"

Hoobastank's next album drops

on December 9, but it remains nameless as of press time. However, this experience just might have offered some inspiration to Robb: "It should be *Hoobastank Revolution!*" ■■■■

### HOW THEY SCORED

Song 1: "Crawling in the Dark"

Singer: Doug Robb

Score: 8,831

Song 2: "You Really Got Me"

Singers: Doug Robb/Chris Hesse

Score: 8,408

**TOTAL SCORE: 17,239**



Barenaked Ladies' Ed Robertson can't believe he's scoring so poorly on "One Week," a song he penned himself.

### BARENAKED LADIES

Midway through his performance of "One Week," Barenaked Ladies co-vocalist Ed Robertson displays an odd mix of amusement and disbelief. "Steve sings this part!" he proclaims, as the screen reads POOR during the track's non-rap-style lyrics. Unfortunately, things don't improve by the time you think you're lookin' at Aquaman. "LOUSY?!?!"

By the end of the admittedly tough song (one of a handful you actually need to unlock in *Karaoke Revolution*), having earned a measly 4,955 points, Robertson is fully expectant of the friendly taunts headed his way. "The thing about karaoke," jokes videogame network G4's Tom Russo (who kindly contributed the picture of Robertson you see here), "is *anyone* can be a star."

### HOW THEY SCORED

Song 1: "One Week"

Singer: Ed Robertson

Score: 4,955

Song 2: "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun"

Score: 10,675

**TOTAL SCORE: 15,630**

"I thought I knew that song pretty well, having *written* it and performed it hundreds of times," says a smiling Robertson. "I'm better at *PaRappa* than I am at this."

Despite the happy facade, one can sense the need for redemption—and "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" is just what the doctor ordered. So what if Cyndi Lauper didn't actually sing "Oh, Captain Lou, you know you're still number one," as Robertson does? It's only pitch and rhythm that count in this game, and he's aware of this. By song's end, he has amassed a very respectable 10,675 points.

"I'm very alarmed by the fact that I performed Cyndi Lauper better than I performed Ed Robertson," says the Toronto native. "I'm actually quite sexually confused about that right now. I might need a little time to work that out."

"It's very exciting to know that there are videogame geeks out there who will perform my own song better than I will," continues Robertson, who doesn't hit the road without his PS2 and as many as 50 games. "But the game is very cool. It's going to make people happy. Just be prepared to get your ass kicked." ■■■■



Robin Wilson digs games so much, he's offered to write a regular column for us. Look for his first one in the January 2004 issue.

### GIN BLOSSOMS

It takes a lot to break Robin Wilson away from *Soul Calibur II* or *War of the Monsters*. Self-proclaimed as "one of the most geeked-out gamers in rock," the Gin Blossoms lead vocalist is, however, absolutely psyched to boot up *Karaoke Revolution*.

Before even bothering to shuffle through all of the songs, Wilson takes on the ones he likes—"Bizarre Love Triangle," "Like a Virgin," "Red, Red Wine," etc.—the moment he sees them on the list. It's as though he could care less that "Hey Jealousy" is among the many selections.

Eventually, the time arrives for Wilson to perform his band's 1994 megahit. "Jesus!" he exclaims, hearing a sample of the cover version included in the game. (Like everyone else, he is, in a sense, covering a remake of his own song. Konami rerecorded every selection to minimize licensing fees.) Once the initial shock passes, Wilson's ready to go. With a gamer's mentality throughout the entire song, he follows the pitch-indicating arrow note for note, ending up with an awesome 27,292 points—far and away the best of any member of the four bands.

"It was a lot of fun trying to keep up with myself," says Wilson, just after his success. "The game sticks very anally to the delivery of the lyrics. And the fact is, I don't sing the song that way—I never did—so it's strange to have to sing

so technically and to put in all the little lyrical inflections that in rock 'n' roll you'd normally skip over.

"It's unlike any other game I've ever played," he tells us. "This is exactly the type of game that can bring in nongamers, because it's not a traditional videogame. There's no punching. There's no stealing cars. No jumping. If the last videogame you played was *Joust*, this might be something that kind of gets you into the next generation of consoles."

The selection of songs can only help matters. "There's a lot of classic tunes in there," comments Wilson, whose score on "It's the End of the World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)" surpasses Michael Stipe's. "I would like to see, like, an '80s expansion pack that includes stuff like the Replacements and the Pixies. Something with some edge."

A loyal *OPM* reader himself, Wilson knows exactly how he'd rate the game if he were a member of our staff. "I would give it 4 out of 5 stars," he says. "It would have gotten a 5 if the singer didn't sound so much like me." ■■■■

### HOW THEY SCORED

Song 1: "Hey Jealousy"

Singer: Robin Wilson

Score: 27,634

Song 2: "It's the End of the World As We Know It"

Score: 22,196

**TOTAL SCORE: 49,830**

## Robin Wilson: Hardcore Gamer

**What was your first gaming experience?**

It was either *Pong* or some *Star Trek* game that some kids at Arizona State put together. It was essentially *Battleship* with X's and O's on a computer screen. And then I worked at a place called Golf and Games in 1983, so it was right at the height of popularity of games like *Donkey Kong* and *Pac-Man*. Things like *Tron* and *Robotron* and *Joust*.

**Those were your favorites?**

Yeah. *Centipede*, *Asteroids*, *Space Invaders*. I'm looking to get a tattoo with the little space guys going around my arm. Some people have barbed wire—I'm gonna get a chain of *Space Invaders*.

**What got you hooked?**

*Donkey Kong*, because not only was it a fun game to play, but also there was a sense of some kind of a story behind it. There really *wasn't*, but I can sort of sense that there was.

**How do you see gaming now compared to back then?**

I couldn't possibly have imagined it. For me, the real turning point in gaming was *Tomb Raider*. As far as I'm concerned, it reinvented console gaming with the 3D environments.

**So, what did you think of *The Angel of Darkness*?**

I am *super* pissed about that one. I have no intention of trying another Lara Croft game again, ever. They're gonna have to give me a two-level demo on the *OPM* demo disc, and it's gonna have to blow me away.

**How important do you think good music is for games?**

It's not as important as gameplay, graphics, control, and camera. Music is secondary to all those things.

**Would you say the *Vice City* soundtrack is the best?**

Far and away. I mean, who would argue with that? The guy who composed *hack?*

Read this entire interview at [playstationmagazine.com](http://playstationmagazine.com).

