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THE MOSQUITOS: Vance Brescia (second from left) wouldn't mind if the group were a big hit.

Hey, is anyone out there?

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'FIRST AND foremost," says lead singer/guitarist/writer Vance Brescia of the Mosquitos, "is to get your music heard. If you can't do that, you've got nothing. So if you gotta make some concessions to get it out, why not? If your music's got integrity, it's gonna show anyhow."

Brescia's remarks are a good reminder of reality for most rock 'n' roll bands—who are, like the Mosquitos—unsigned to a major label. "Ten percent of something," he says, "is better than 100% of nothing."

In the Mosquitos' case,

something could be close.

They've gotten good notices from their five-song album on Valhalla and their leadoff cut on ROIR's "Garage Sale" tape. They're a local favorite and were named best new band in the New York Music Awards this year. Their song "That Was Then, This Is Now" is a Top-40 hit for the Monkees. Mainly, they're a good band that does its own good pop/rock songs.

That last point can be confirmed by picking up the record or catching them tomorrow (2-8 p.m.) in a free show at Tompkins Square Park, or on Aug. 27 at the China Club. But over the long haul, for them, it's not that easy.

"Sometimes it feels like a holding pattern," says Brescia. "But all you can do is keep working. I think my songs are getting better. And we're young compared to other bands that did this for years before they made it."

Like the other Mosquitos—Mitch Towse, Tony Millions, Ian Morrison and Steven Prisco—Brescia supports himself with second jobs: solo bar gigs, roadie work. The Mosquitos' group income, he says, goes to support their tours.

Which are, in the end, their ticket up: play a lot of gigs, stay tight and count on Brescia's songwriting, which is a cut above the ordinary.

"Since I was 2 and heard the Monkees, the records I've liked have always been great songs," he says. "Simple songs. Even 'Strawberry Fields Forever' or 'Sympathy for the Devil'—they were musically complex, but they had a clear idea at the center. I'm forever trying to cut my own songs down."

HE'S ALSO TRYING to cut down any idea that the Mosquitos are a "garage band," some sort of '60s revival outfit. "Not at all," says Brescia. "I mean, sure, we were influenced by that era, but we never went around wearing paisley. Also, music today doesn't sound like 1965, and it shouldn't."

"What I'd like, ideally, would be the freedom of the '60s—that sense of no limitations, that you could have lots of strings or just a guitar—combined with the aggressiveness of the '80s."

And here, of course, is where reality returns. To reach the masses, they must first reach a record label. "You hear a lot of unsigned bands talk about their integrity and how they'll never sell out," says Brescia. "All that does is guarantee that in three years you'll be working in a hardware store."

"When I write a song, I'm conscious of whether it could sell—and what's the harm in that? I don't think it's a crime to want to write a hit."

And neither did Gershwin, Berlin or McCartney.