



CDT PHOTO / MICHELE MOTT

If I had a hammer: Carpenter by day, musician by night, Julian's John Phelps strums his guitar while sitting on the steps of his under-construction living room. Phelps will have a CD release party Saturday night at the Milesburg Holiday Inn.

By **WILLIAM LEBZELTER**
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Julian carpenter John Phelps celebrates the release of his first CD

JULIAN — John Phelps, 44, has worked with some great names in a quarter-century of professional guitar-playing.

First there was Chicken, the band he played with as a 19-year-old in Bucks County. Then came Annie Oakley, a Hazleton group whose leader Phelps met while hitchhiking home from college.

Later in the '70s, Phelps veered toward Hollywood with the band Zane Trace before settling in Centre County in 1981 with two future members of the band he'd play with for much of the '80s, Cliff Turner and the Afterburners.

So it's only fitting that Phelps' first CD comes with a catchy title. "Till My Fingers Bleed," recorded at Audible Images Recording in Port Matilda, could also describe an occupational hazard of the guitarist's other passion,

carpentry.

"I've always liked wood," Phelps said on a recent afternoon in his Julian living room.

"I always got into it," he said, leaning forward in his chair toward an imaginary plank, "and looked a little deeper and said, 'Look at that grain.'"

About a year ago, Phelps and his wife Roxanna and their four kids moved into the house he built along Railroad Avenue. Phelps recorded the CD the same way he is completing the house — a bit here, a bit there. When he ran low on money, he traded his carpentry skills for time in Bill Filer's recording studio.

The result is a hard-driving

CD that echoes guitar-heavy bands that have influenced him, Deep Purple and ZZ Top.

A couple of tracks are exceptions to the hard rock rule.

Cliff Turner and the Afterburners join Phelps on "Nobody Told You,"

a horn-filled number that goes back to 1980. (More

constant pres-

ences on the CD are Bill Keller, Bill Quay, Jake Wilkins and Jim Taylor of The John Phelps Band.)

"Sittin' in the Rain" was a last-minute acoustic addition that brought the running time of the disc to one hour, four minutes.

"There's 74 minutes on a CD," Phelps said. "I said, 'If this is the only CD I ever put out I'm going

to put on as much as I can.'"

Phelps said the music came naturally to him; the words he had to work harder for.

"When I write lyrics, I have to let my mind go blank," he said. "It's almost like catching something that's wild. You get an idea, and you have to jot it down on paper."

Phelps is thrilled with the sound quality of the CD, mastered by Bob Klotz of Port Matilda. "It came out probably 200 to 300 percent better than I thought it would," he said.

But the guitarist/carpenter is not content to stand pat. He's already writing songs for another CD that will lean more toward blues.

"When I'm 67 years old sitting on the porch, I'll be playing the blues," he said.

For now, Phelps admits his reputation for raucous rock is deserved.

"I get the biggest kick out of plugging it in and cranking it up," he said.

