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February 2025
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3 The Perfect Storm

Liam Sweeny acts as whistlestop for an emerging national band.

22 Keith Morales

Rob Smittix scans the horizon with Deputy Director of Albany Events.

26 Les Claypool

Rachael Skinner talks with legendary Primus bassist.

Joe Putrock . Laura LaFrata . Bezzolay
Young Hardcore Scene . UMIKO Kotori
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The Perfect Storm blends genres, and with the help of MTS and Virgin Universal, is climbing the international charts.

RRX: Tell me a little bit about the band. Let's make introductions to everybody out there. What are you guys all about?

James: We are The Perfect Storm. We had formed in January of 2022, during the end of the COVID stuff. We started off kind of like a cover band and then in the early, I'd say fall of that year, we decided to record an album. We played out at some places like the Rustic Barn, for example, trying to get our album noticed. Well, we've been on the radio, and now our album comes out on February 21st of this year through Virgin Universal and MTS. Currently, our song "Magic Feeling" is on national and international radio as well.

RRX: Oh, that's great. That's awesome. It's always good to hear stories about people who are from this area that really are able to reach out. I love it. OK, so you started out playing covers, and I know there's always like this dividing line between bands who play covers and bands who play originals. We all know the dividing line, we all have our feelings one way or the other about it. But you bridge the barrier. You went from playing covers to doing your own stuff. What was that like? Did you just kind of get wanderlust from playing covers, or did you always have a feeling that you're gonna end up doing original stuff?

Ethan: So I think we always had an idea that we wanted to do original things. We would jam out and come up with random riffs, practicing and soloing back and forth. It all just started

growing together. We had a chemistry where we could write songs together, and we all had a similar play style, so it all just kind of seemed to fall into place. But outside of that, we were all doing our own solo things as hobbies before that. So we all liked to create music over the years, and we would send songs back and forth. It seemed like the perfect mold to try to get together and do something bigger than what we were doing by ourselves.

RRX: Putting albums together is a unique and special experience; no two alike. Take me through your process of how you guys put everything together on that first album.

Ethan: We would get together, do a quick demo track. During the week when we can't get together, I'd be

Continued on Page 5...





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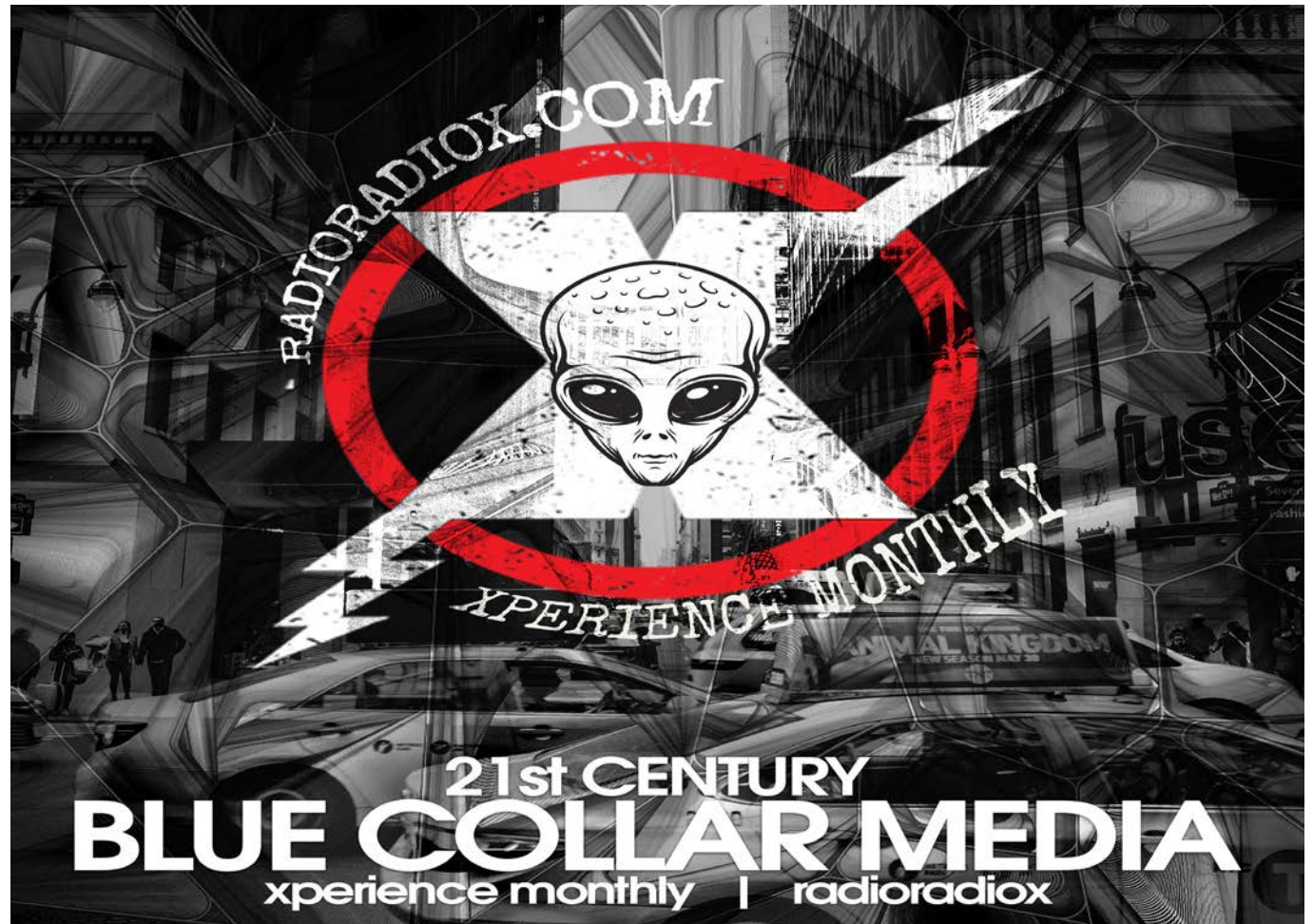
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CONTENTS

- 3** 🎧 **THE PERFECT STORM** CHART-TOPPING MULTI-GENRE BAND
- 8** 🎧 **JOE PUTROCK** AREA DRUMMER
- 16** 🎧 **LAURA LAFRATE** MODEL, SKYDIVER
- 22** 🎧 **KEITH MORALES** ALBANY EVENTS
- 26** 🎧 **LES CLAYPOOL** BASSIST, PRIMUS
- 34** 🎧 **YOUNG HARDCORE SCENE** SAME MUSIC, DIFFERENT CULTURES
- 36** 🎧 **BEZZOLAY** AREA RAPPER
- 40** 🎧 **BRETT CARLISLE** NEW SINGER FOR GREAT WHITE
- 42** 🎧 **UMIKO KOTORI** LITHUANIAN PERFORMER
- 44** 🎧 **THE ALEC LEWIS BAND** LOCAL BAND

Continued from Page 3

working on refining some of the things, adding different parts. James would be trying to figure out different elements that we could add to the songs, and then every Saturday, we get together for about eight or nine hours and we'd start recording and trying out the different elements that we were working on during the week.

Our album's image came together; we fit our ideas together and made sure everything flowed nice and smooth. But when we'd get together, a lot of times, that's when we would find a different element that we didn't think of while we were sitting there working on parts by ourselves. You get ideas from the bandmates when you get together, and you start figuring out how to make their ideas work with what you're trying to go with for the song you're working on.

James: It's a talented bunch of guys here. We all have our likes and some of them are similar, and some of them are different. And we were able to blend a lot of different styles and things together and make it work pretty well. We feel we have a quality album that listeners will find unique and listenable. But at the same time, it's commercial, where it can get out there and be on the radio and things. And so far, it's been moving on the charts. It's not something that has throwaway songs; it's stuff that people can actually listen to and appreciate and hopefully listen to for a long time.

RRX: Now, you guys have all done your own side projects, stuff like that, before this. None of you were coming fresh out of the box as a musician, so you've all been in other things. So now, having a deal with Virgin Universal and MTS, what would you say is the difference between trying to do all this stuff on your own, and then having that superstructure, I guess you could call it, helping you?

James: Having Virgin Universal

and MTS behind you really makes a tremendous difference. You can try to push this stuff, but the way they can push it is unbelievable. I mean, you go from hitting certain local things to where now we're international. And, literally, like overnight. It's amazing the marketing power that they have and the connections and the outlets that they can put things on. It's, you know, one of those things really where you can go from being unknown or known in a small pocket to now being on charts and things worldwide.

RRX: OK. Getting away from the mechanics and stuff like that, tell us a little bit about the album itself. Describe it for me. What are we expecting when this comes out?

Mattie: I think we covered all our bases. And I think the name, we kind of put the name into that too, you know? The Perfect Storm. We're on three different genre charts right now. I just think it's got a little bit for everybody; it brings everybody to the party.

Ethan: I would say with the album, we go through almost every stage of life, or maybe every stage of love. We go through the early stages, the good times, the bad times, the life lessons that people learn through long marriages or long-term relationships. We've got the whole ups and downs of life, the way we structured it.

James: We also had a lot of different genres. Recently, we were on Buck McCoy's in Nashville, WNHE - New Music Monday. We won their radio competition, and they just put us into full rotation now in Nashville, on a country market with the "Magic Feeling" song. That song's in Country, but it's also in the AC Hot 40, and it's also in the Pop Hot 40. MTS had told us that we're on iTunes, what, what number were we? 43. I believe it was for iTunes 100 pop in the UK. So we managed to hit 43 on the Top 100 chart.

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“There are thousands of great pictures of Seth (Powell) and Mike (Pauley), but very few of me!” mused Joe Putrock. “That’s what happens when you spend so much time behind the camera!” As the drummer for the Charlie Watts Riots, Putrock is used to sitting in the back. But when he’s not behind the kit, he’s behind the lens, as one of the area’s most well-known and accomplished photographers. He’s a great guy, and a great drummer, so please welcome Joe Putrock!

RRX: How did you get started playing drums? How old were you when you started?

JP: I started playing the drums around fourth grade. Not having the air for the French horn (my first try at an instrument), and not wanting to learn music theory enough to play the trumpet (my second attempted instrument), I settled on the drums. This made me, and my music teacher, much happier and I loved the fact that all I had to carry was a pair of drumsticks and not lug around a French horn.

RRX: Have you taken lessons, or are you self-taught?

JP: I took lessons for a little while, but then basically relied on watching MTV and trying to replicate what I saw on television. I often wonder if I had YouTube when I was a kid if I would have been a much better drummer as an adult! The access to instruction, videos, and tutorials is really unbelievable.

RRX: Who are some of your influences?

JP: My main influence was always Phil Collins. The stuff he did with Genesis, his solo stuff, and the Brand X records were all I would listen to as a kid. There was also Chester Thompson, who was the touring drummer for Genesis (among others), Stewart Copeland of The Police, Steve Gadd, Liberty DeVitto from Billy Joel’s band, Kenny Aronoff from John Cougar’s band, Tony Thompson who played for the Power Station (I was a bit too young for his playing with Chic), and a ton of other drummers that I didn’t even know by name. Before the internet, and liner notes, oftentimes I was influenced by drummers that I didn’t know by name until years later.

RRX: Do you come from a musical family?

JP: I am the only person in my family that plays an instrument. That being said, I came from a household where music was very important and where all of my extended family members had incredibly diverse tastes in music. My grandmother always had country music playing on the radio, my aunt was always listening to the Beatles or Elvis, my uncle is the one that got me into Genesis, and my mother would be listening to Marvin Gaye and the Village People one minute and Kenny Rogers and Bobby Vinton polka records the next. There was never a shortage of things for me to listen to as a child.

RRX: Tell me about your first kit.

JP: Oh man, I remember it like it was yesterday!! It was a used silver/gray Reuther five-piece that my mother bought me for graduating eighth grade. I grew up with two siblings and a single mother; I still don’t know where she got the money for it. I pounded on that thing constantly. I’m sure I loved that drum set way more than my neighbors did!

RRX: What was your first gig?

JP: St. Paul’s School, playing the

snare drum part to “Don’t You Want Me” by the Human League and playing the bass drum part to “Say, Say, Say” by Michael Jackson. Probably sixth or seventh grade. I really thought I had made it at that point and that my career as a rock drummer was cemented.

RRX: I think it did! Do you play any other instruments?

JP: I would love to say that I did, but nothing else ever worked out.

RRX: What do you do when you’re not playing? Any other careers beyond rock stardom?

JP: I have always had day jobs, mostly revolving around photography or music. Shooting bands, shooting for music publications, sound guy at a live music club, etc. Whatever the job, it had to be flexible so that if I had a gig, I could have the time off to go play it.

RRX: Tell me about some of your playing experiences. Who have you played with?

JP: I have played with an incredibly varied bunch of people. I was always willing to play for whoever needed someone. Oftentimes it was just one gig here, two or three gigs there with someone else. I played for several years

with Howard Glassman and his band the Coal Palace Kings. Most notably, I spent probably a decade with Seth Powell, Brendan Pendergast, and Mike Pauley in The Charlie Watts Riots.

RRX: Any particular gig (good or bad) stand out?

JP: None really stand out more than any of the others, but it seems (or at least I like to think) that I can remember so much of it. Everyone has gigs that they drove three hours to play for a bartender or set up in front of another act to play a 20-minute opening slot on three square feet of the stage. Those weren't great, but they were still a gig. I've been very fortunate to play really great gigs though, with really great people. There is one funny gig now that I think of it ... Jed Davis needed a fill-in drummer for a couple of gigs, one of them being Larkfest. The drums on the record were played by Anton Fig, of the Late Night with David Letterman Band and Kiss, so I really

had my hands full. Didn't have much time to learn the stuff and the parts weren't easy. I did my homework, wrote out charts, practiced, and had everything all set. We're playing the gig in front of a pretty decent-sized crowd, the first song starts, and the wind picks up and blows my charts all over the Dunkin' Donuts parking lot!!

RRX: Yikes! What are you playing now?

JP: Unfortunately, I'm not playing much at all these days. It's funny—when you're younger you have no money and garbage jobs, you borrow drums and cymbals, and gig whenever you can because it's all you want to do. You get older, have a good job, can afford any drum set and cymbal setup that you want, but don't have the time to get out somewhere and play. I have an Alexis kit that I have set up in my office now. I get to play, and my neighbors don't hate me. I would love to start gigging again. If anyone out there is

looking for a drummer, practices for two hours a week on Sunday morning, gigs once or twice a month (tops) in front of at least 50 people (preferably on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday evenings), provides someone to transport, load in and load out my kit, pays well and plays exactly the type of music I want to play, please get in touch with me!

RRX: Hahahahahahaha! Dream gig! Put together your dream band, with you on drums.

JP: It sounds kiss-ass, but when Seth Powell and Mike Pauley were on, I can't think of another band I would want to play with. When we were locked in, playing in front of an energetic crowd, it was some of the best playing experiences I have had. We had some really great times.

RRX: Not kiss-ass at all. Very sweet. Demented, but sweet. Have you ever been arrested? Was it Seth's fault? Does he have dirt on you?

JP: Never been arrested, but the one time I've been pulled over was because of Seth Powell! We were playing somewhere in Massachusetts, and they have those weird left turns where you turn right, and then it spins you around to where you are perpendicular to the road you were on. For some reason, I was driving, and Seth says, "Just take the left, it doesn't matter!" So, I do, and then of course—flashing lights.

RRX: What do you like to do when you're not playing music?

JP: Luckily, I still shoot quite a bit. Photography has always been my main thing and continues to be. Being a middle-aged guy, I have started playing pickleball, of course. I read quite a bit, and make artwork, but whatever I'm doing, you can bet there is music on.



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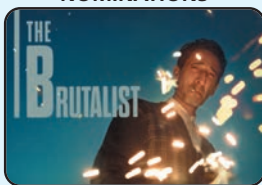
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BY CHRIS BUSONE

I'd like to take a moment to say a few words in praise of the almighty Cover Band.

Yes, I can hear the sound of pearls clutching and the groans of the show promoters, club owners, and purist musicians who are appalled by the notion of bands who play other bands' music.

"What's this?!" they exclaim as they recoil in horror. "This abomination is in breach of our musical values, which state emphatically that bands must only play their own original compositions and adhere to our standard of what is worthy of being heard. I'm triggered!"

To those of you who relate to that last statement, I submit, respectfully, that you go eat a bag of d***s.

Ok, maybe that's a little harsh, but for chrissakes get over yourselves.

That said, let's drill down on the long-storied history of bands covering other artists' songs and continue to poke fun at those whose asses are clenched so air-tight that they simply don't get it. Let's start with the purest and most American of music: jazz.

John Coltrane's cover of "My Favorite Things" tops my list, but there are so many more awe-inspiring examples of jazz artists covering modern pop music. Herbie Hancock's cover of "Scarborough Fair," Miles' covers of Michael Jackson's "Human Nature" and Cindy Lauper's "Time After Time," Pat Metheny's "Don't Know Why" by Norah Jones, and Oscar Peterson's amazing take on the Gershwin brothers' "Fascinating Rythm" are just a few. And Chet Baker, for his part, did so many amazing covers it's hard to pick one, but I love his version of the Sinatra standard "I Fall in Love Too Easily"

with Sammy Cahn's heart-wrenching lyric. And if you don't stop what you're doing and listen when Chet's "My Funny Valentine" comes on, I don't know how to talk to you.

We could go genre by genre, but let's just get to rock & roll cause that's where we're headed anyway.

The Beatles - four lads from Liverpool who counted among their ranks at least three of the best songwriters to ever scratch paper with pen - not only started life as a cover band, but even after their initial success, recorded and released covers by Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Barrett Strong, and the Marvelettes. Same is true for the Stones, Zeppelin, Hendrix, the Animals, Van Halen, and the Allman Brothers ... s**t, even the Ramones did a Dave Clark 5 cover! And even Bob Dylan, the man most of the planet considers the best songwriter of them all, did a cover of "House of the Rising Sun" on his first album. The list goes on and on. So there is no shame in being the type of band that plays tunes someone else wrote.

On the subject of types of cover bands, in my estimation, there are several: from wedding bands and human jukeboxes, to tribute bands, to the type of bands I personally have been associated with - the half-and-halves. We are the bands that do covers, but in our own style, and contort them to the point that they are just barely recognizable. I'll play these types of covers and generously sprinkle in my own original songs. The formula is: hook the crowd's ears with the covers, and before they know it, they're listening to your tunes. It's a variation on the "spoonful of sugar" theme. This has

worked well over the years, and before long, people are requesting my songs rather than the covers.

But because we play the covers in between, these nitpicking knobs poo-poo us as a "cover band," not an original band that does covers. No matter, we display the "cover band" crest proudly above our mantelpiece.

As for the other types of bands I referenced, certainly, wedding bands and human jukeboxes provide an indispensable service. Who would want the band at their wedding playing all originals? "And now, for the father-daughter dance, a song I wrote about the conflict in Northern Ireland. Freedom!!!" So much for "Daddy's Little Girl."

And while tribute bands aren't necessarily my particular brand of vodka, that doesn't mean they don't deserve our respect. I may not agree with your choice to dress up like ZZ Top, but I'll fight to the death for your right to wear a long fake beard (I'm pretty sure Patrick Henry said that to the guys on the Dutch Master's box). I have friends who are in very successful tribute bands, and those guys put asses in the seats. Lots of them. So, somebody loves them.

And at the end of the day, I guess that's where I'm going with this. Let's not look down our noses at any artist just because what they do doesn't line up with our own personal (and, in some cases, narrow-minded) preferences. Let's support one another in our differences rather than turn up our noses at others for being different. (I know that's a lot of nose metaphors, but stay with me, I'm going somewhere with this.)

So, if you're still one of those hard cases who gets a rash on your ass at the mere thought of a "cover band" on the bill of one of your shows or in your "original band only" club, please refer to the instructions concerning the contents of the aforementioned bag, and continue getting the hell over yourself, while the rest of us enjoy the music.

And to all the cover bands out there, of every type, don't you ever stop. Keep the music and the good times covered, and tell the naysayers to kiss your uncovered ass.

Now, who's got the intro to "Mustang Sally?"

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- 2/8: The Bennett Brothers 7pm
- 2/9: Super Bowl Party (Food spread at 1/2 time)
- 2/13: Open Mic featuring Ky McClinton 6pm
- 2/14: Moon Boot Lover- Valentine's Day Show!
- 2/15: Brian Kane & The Beginning 8pm
- 2/16: Bluegrass Jam 5:30 (moved from 3rd Sunday because of Super Bowl)
- 2/20: Open Mic featuring Jeremy Walz 6pm
- 2/21: Kelly Maguire 7pm
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- 2/28: The Wheel (The Grateful Dead & Beyond) 8pm
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Laura LaFrate

BY LIAM SWEENY

Laura LaFrate. Photo provided.

Laura LaFrate is a model, skydiver and all-around adventurer who so loves long walks with her pup that they'll both be making tracks from coast to coast.

RRX: OK, so tell me a little bit about yourself. What do you do for a living, and what do you do for fun?

LL: OK. My name is Laura Lafrate, and I was a full-time model for about 15 years. I actually got into that by accident. After my first month of college, I realized that I just wasn't focused enough to be in that kind of student

setting. I talked to my grandfather, and he said, "If you can get out, get out now. School is always gonna be there, but you can only have certain experiences when you're young with no responsibilities." So I ended up getting into a pageant, forced by my mother. I ended up winning, and I signed a modeling contract. From there, I was able to travel to South Africa, Italy, Switzerland, France, and so forth and so on. When I came home, I was contacted by America's Next Top Model to be on Season 18. I went on that, and I ended

up getting 2nd place in the show.

It was a learning experience. I realized from the show that I love modeling, but I don't like fame. It's a very different thing in that a lot of people believe what they see on TV; they think it's the real truth, and that's who you are. After I got home, I got death threats. I got people showing up at my house. No privacy, no security, and I spent about the next year just sitting at home isolated because I couldn't take it. I was a young kid. I had just turned 20. I didn't have that much life experi-

ence under my belt.

One of my favorite movies ever was "Power Rangers," the very first Power Rangers. And I remember Tommy, the White Ranger, jumping out of the airplane with his skyboard, and I always wanted to skydive. My mom ended up working with the skydiver. And he said, "Well, I'll take her." I went up for the weekend, and after my first jump, I just knew that this was what I wanted to do.

I ended up working during the day, sometimes nights or weekends or whatever, but any free chance I had, I

would drive down to Newport and work on my license, and jump and jump and jump. And it just really opened me up to a whole different world and new people. It's basically like Neverland. You know, kids that just never want to grow up, and people from all different backgrounds and ethnicities. It was just really beautiful that you could have such a group of people that come together for one thing, and just have the time of your life. That's really what got me into it and what kept me with it.

RRX: So would you say that there is a skydiver culture in our area, or is it a broader adventure culture? And in either case, what of that culture is, like, greater than the sum of its parts?

LL: If you're talking specifically about the Capital Region, there used to be a skydiving culture here. But the problem, like any business, is that there's high risk. So, there used to be a drop zone very close to my parents' house in Scotia, but because of the flood, it ruined the landing area. They were completely washed out. There is some stuff in Saratoga, but really New Paltz is the main hub in New York.

But the one thing is, is that if you're a skydiver, you have family all over the world, in every state, in every country. I can drive; I'm going to go on this cross-country trip with my dog in a couple of months. And I know for a fact that any job I'm gonna go to, there's gonna be someone that I know, or knows someone that I know, and it's just a family that you'll have for the rest of your life. And that's something that I really related to as a kid, because I didn't have that sense of community and family. So it's just a really wonderful feeling to know that I can show up anywhere and I'm always gonna be welcome.

RRX: You recently got injured. Can you tell us a little bit about that and how your thirst for adventure aided in your recovery?

LL: For the first part, the reason that I got into the accident was 100% my fault. And I take full responsibility for that. I was living in Mexico for the last 12 years. I was in a tumultuous and abusive relationship, and I finally separated and I said, "I need to get back to my family, my skydiving family." I did not take into consideration that I had not jumped there in a while. I was using a rig that was not mine. I didn't do test jumps. Also, I was just so overwhelmed. I didn't do the correct procedures like my forefathers of the sport taught me to do. You have to take every single jump like it's your first time. And my ego took over, so I jumped the rig that wasn't mine, a parachute that was too small that I shouldn't have been using. I fell too fast, and I did not flare fully like I should have. And uh, yeah, help me real quick.

RRX: Well, what happened, the last part, what happened?

LL: It was a naked skydive. It was actually the tradition every year. And so I was doing it, and the ground where we used to jump (back in the day when I was jumping there) was all grass, but they had let it overgrow. So I was jumping into a very bumpy terrain. What I did was like on my old parachute, I used to half flare and then fully flare out as I'm sliding in. Because when you're naked, the last thing you want is to have grass burns. I did not do the full form. I did not do the full function, and I ended up eating the ground. I bounced and I broke three vertebrae in my back.

RRX: So now that you've recovered, what are your plans vis-à-vis skydiving?

LL: What I'm gonna do is, this next season, I'm gonna get a big canopy, so I land very slowly, and I'm gonna go right back to square one, start from zero. So I'm gonna do that.



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PHOTO: Front: Alay Medina (Director), Left to Right : Andre Cowan (Program Aide), Keith Morales (Deputy Director), Max Seiler (Program Coordinator), Ysrael Quezada (Financial Coordinator)

BY ROB SMITTIX

RRX: So we've got Keith Morales on the line, and I just wanted to talk to you, man. Very happy and excited about the 2025 season that Albany's got coming up and what you do for the city. So, that's why we're here today, and Happy New Year, by the way.

KM: You too, my man.

RRX: Definitely. What is your actual title?

KM: Sure. I do a lot of things, but I'm the Deputy Director. I handle logistics, programming, and basically overall operations of the office. And we're a staff of five people.

RRX: You've been doing this for how many years now?

KM: With the city, almost seven years. And doing the music stuff for years before that.

RRX: Now, we all know about the events: Alive at Five, the Tulip Festival, and everything else in between. But is there anything else that you do that doesn't really relate to the events, that

maybe people don't realize that you do?

KM: Yeah. With our office in general, the Office of Cultural Affairs, we handle things like the Martin Luther King March, which people don't really realize we do that. We do the tree lighting for the City of Albany, we do parties at the end of the year for our volunteers. So, we don't just do concert events. We do a Cash for Coats drive, which raises over \$30,000 a year, and we basically buy brand new coats for thousands of kids in Albany who may not be able to afford them, their families might not be able to afford it. There are a lot of things we do, and then we support the Mayor's Office in any way we can with random, various events where there are press conferences and things like that throughout the year.

RRX: OK, so there is definitely more to it than meets the eye. Any favorite events that you have that you're a part of?

KM: Tulip Festival is amazing. It's a

blur because it's such a big event. I like the Trick or Trot (Pumpkin Run) 5K, which is a newer event. It's been going on for the last three years, and it's basically a Halloween-themed race that we moved to Washington Park. Everyone gets dressed up in various Halloween costumes, and they race, they run, or they walk. That's the cool thing about it; you don't have to just run it. It's your family. You can bring a stroller, dress your kid up in a costume, and walk through that event. I think that's probably my favorite because it's unique and it's a little different. Alive at Five, obviously. That's my favorite concert event because I see people like you guys every week, and I just love the music. It's different genres every week and different people come to the shows. I guess my third favorite would be the Jazz Festival because I really like what we've been doing with it.

RRX: Last year at Tulip Fest was just a blast. Seeing so many old friends

from WEQX and all of that. But at Tulip Fest, I begged you to fill me in on what you had going on for Alive at Five. And you told me to keep the secret that KRS-One was coming in. I don't know how I kept the secret, but I was so excited, man. That was one of the best concerts of the entire year. I feel like you really set the bar high for yourself with that one.

KM: Yeah, I might have screwed myself because how do we one up that one?

RRX: When I look at hip hop, and when I look at who could have been brought to town, I feel like that was the best choice.

KM: Yeah, I agree. I mean ... we've had Big Daddy Kane, we've had Doug E. Fresh, all of these guys, but that is the man. KRS-One's energy ... I've never seen energy like that on the Alive at Five festival stage, not in a while, you know? The way he came out roaring!

RRX: And I was so happy for Ohzhe,

who opened up for him. It seemed like, at that particular point in time, he kind of took a win for the entire hip-hop community in the area. He was our guy. That was our Kendrick Lamar for the day.

KM: You're right, because that was so unique. It wasn't supposed to happen, it wasn't planned. KRS-One got out of the van, and he goes, "I'm ready to go," and we had 15 minutes until Ohzhe's set was done. We still have to do introductions by the mayor, and we gotta do this and that. He's like, give me the microphone, I'm going up there. And then Ohzhe saw him and was like, "Yo, what's up KRS-One?" And then we couldn't stop him at that point. So KRS-One just grabbed the backup mic, went up there, and all that was spontaneous, that's the crazy part about it all.

RRX: I loved it. I didn't score the KRS-One interview, but I said to myself, "I gotta talk to Ohzhe after this, man." I got it all firsthand from him the very

next day, and the excitement was still there. I also look at Tulip Fest, right? So, being in a band myself, I know that ... if you're a local musician and you play Tulip Fest, you've made it. I don't know what has changed in the spectrum of things over the years, but it seems more possible and likely for upcoming local acts to get onto at least the Playhouse Stage. It didn't really seem obtainable for a lot of us local musicians before. Unless, you know, you have been a staple that's been around for 20-something years. It seems like that has changed a little bit.

KM: Yeah, we've definitely put an emphasis on that on purpose. Like you said, I remember going to college and going to Tulip Festival, and it's the amount of talent that's in Albany, and it's not being featured. Like, why not? We have the Main Stage, let the big bands go there. There's so much talent here, so the point of what we've been doing with our booking on purpose is

booking up-and-coming bands as well. Give them the shot, because it's great to see a band play there this year, and then next year, all of a sudden they're on the PearlPalooza stage, or they're opening for Alive at Five, or maybe they're going on their own tour. Give them that little jumpstart. They're supporting Albany, constantly playing all over the place, and they're good enough to do it. There's a lot of talent here, like I said, so why not do a 518 stage? We have 80,000 plus people walking through the park, sitting in the amphitheater, and they can sit down and see Caity Gallagher, Girl Blue, or Side-B, you know? So many different bands; Camtron5000 ... you don't know who you're gonna see, but you're gonna sit down and see talent, and it's exciting.

RRX: Well cool man, it sounds like we've got a lot of things to look forward to in 2025. We look forward to working with you on a lot of that stuff. What else should the people know?

KM: Give a follow to Albany NY Events. We're gonna put all of our information there. When we announce our lineup, that's gonna be there first. We are a staff of five, so we appreciate the support. Without our volunteers, we couldn't do it! Shout out to Alay, Andre, Ysrael, Max, and myself, who are the ones that are putting this together with our volunteers.

2025 EVENTS:

Tulip Festival – Saturday, May 10 & Sunday, May 11

Alive at Five Summer Concert Series – Thursdays: June 5, 12, 19, 26; July 10, 17

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Trick or Trot Pumpkin Run 5K – Saturday, October 25



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Les Claypool

BY RACHAEL SKINNER

Les Claypool. Photo by Rachael Skinner

Les Claypool is one of the most remarkable bass virtuosos of his time. His unique bass-playing style showcases a wide array of eclectic techniques, characterized by an innovative combination of strumming, plucking, and creative whammy bar manipulation. This results in the funky, gritty, and raw sound that has become synonymous with Claypool's bass playing, making it exceedingly difficult for other musicians to imitate. His mesmerizing flamenco and funky slap bass skills are unique to his style of performing and, when paired with his distinctively unique vocals, have set an exceptionally high benchmark for what it means to be the King of Musical Eccentricity. He is widely acclaimed for his contributions to the thrash-funk band Primus, which ultimately provided him with a platform to explore all of his creative pursuits over the years. Claypool's passion, creativity, and soul are vividly expressed in all of his musical endeavors.

He refrains from confining himself to a single performance style and consistently approaches his music with a genuinely innovative creative process. Recently, I had the incredible honor of being able to have a chat with Les, and I would love to share with the universe what we discussed.

RRX: How was it celebrating with Maynard for his 60th birthday during the Sessanta tour. Did anything unforgettable unfold that you would wanna share with us?

LC: Well, the thing about the tour itself - is none of us are really sure. Like, how does this even work? We're all gonna be on stage? What the hell are you talking about? And it ends up being spectacular! It was one of the funnest tours, I think, and we all agreed on this. One of the funnest tours that any of us had ever done. Just because we were engaged the entire show. Oftentimes, you do a show - like we're out on this tour right now, and I very much enjoy the

opening band, but I'll watch them a few times throughout the tour, and then you're just kinda hanging out and doing your thing. Whereas this - you were forced to sit there on stage and watch every night's performance, and be involved, and be engaged - and it was spectacular! As far as his actual birthday, we did a show at the Hollywood Bowl, and the Tool guys came out and played. I sat in, and I did the backup vocals on *Ænima*, and that was pretty spectacular. And I got to wear a hat with golden ram's horns!

RRX: I actually saw you guys, at the Frog Brigade last year, and I asked you what your favorite scary movie was. You said it was "Evil Dead II," and I thought that was really cool.

LC: Well, "Evil Dead II" is a spectacular film in general. It's influenced a lot of filmmakers. It definitely influenced us as we were making videos and whatnot. Just the techniques used in making that film.

RRX: I know you've mentioned "Evil Dead" in your lyrics as well. My parents had a video store growing up, so I grew up watching all horror movies. "Evil Dead II" is one of my favorite movies as well. I could totally see where you get your inspiration, especially with the claymation in that movie, within your music videos.

LC: Well, Sam Raimi is a king. He's a champion.

RRX: Have you ever drank dandelion wine before?

LC: Nothing about dandelion wine. I did years ago when we were on tour; we ran out of weed and were in the van back then.

Someone said, "I hear if you smoke dandelions, you can get high." So, me and Larry LaLonde and our guitar tech at the time jumped out at this truck stop and gathered a bunch of dandelions, packed them in the bowl, and smoked them. And it was the most disgusting thing we've ever done - it was horrible. I

can taste it and I get this horrible taste in my mouth when I think about it. It doesn't work! Don't try it!

RRX: Out of any live performance that you have ever played, what is the craziest thing that you have ever witnessed that sticks out to you, and you think about it from time to time and are, like, "Wow. That was really wild!"?

LC: I mean, it's hard to say. We used to play this place in Tijuana called Iguanas. It was this infamous place because everybody from San Diego and whatnot would come down. They're all underage, and they'd go down and get blasted out of their minds and go to this punk rock club. They had three tiers. It was all concrete and steel, and it had three different tiers. And, we have these crazy pits, and I remember this one guy just diving out of the upper balcony into the mosh pit, and he came up, and he was just completely bloodied. And he ran to the merch booth where our road manager was selling t-shirts, and my road

manager said, "Holy sh**!" and gave him a t-shirt to wipe up his face and gave him the t-shirt to put over his face, and the guy/kid just ran right back into the mosh pit. There were people diving off the upper balcony onto the speakers and then off the speakers into the pit, so that was pretty wild!

RRX: How is it playing with Puddles Pity Party?

LC: Well, Puddles is amazing. Do you know of Puddles?

RRX: I only heard of him after I saw that he was touring with you, and I've been watching a little bit of him. He is very creative and I'm really excited to see him live.

LC: Yeah. We've had some spectacular openers on this tour, too. Obviously, Coheed is very cool. We had Guerilla Toss in the beginning, and then we had Too Many Zooz, which were spectacular. Now, Puddles Pity Party. I've known Puddles for years; he's kind of been peripheral in our world, and he's sat in

with this with Duo de Twang before and whatnot. He's a very, very talented fellow.

RRX: I actually discovered Neal Francis through you too, when he opened for the Frog Brigade, and I thought they were really cool. So, there is another band that you kind of led me on to. I feel like your projects always lead me on to other bands that I like to listen to.

LC: You know, management always tries to push us towards bands that will, you know, help sell tickets. Then I am always pushing them towards bands that are just cool and that are weird. You know - we found Too Many Zooz. They just popped up on my Instagram one day, these guys busking in the subway in New York. Then I said, we gotta have those guys open for us, and so we had them. They were amazing!

RRX: You have so many amazing side projects. What is your favorite one that you would consider close to your

heart like Primus is?

LC: When I'm doing one of these projects, to me, it's not a side project. That's my focus, that's what I'm doing. You know? Obviously, the Claypool stuff, whether it's Frog Brigade or Fancy Band or whatever you want to call it, it's just Les Claypool. It's that key. So obviously, that's a very important thing to me. You know, Primus, this is a democracy. We get together as musicians, and we write our parts, and we do our thing. Whereas, any of the Les Claypool bands, it's me writing most everything, and I bring in musicians to fill roles just like you would if you were making a film and you're bringing in actors to fill roles. I spent a lot of years doing things that aren't Primus. So, I want to make sure that people know it's as endearing to me as Primus is.

Primus is where I got the platform to be able to do these other things.



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Singin' Guru

BY JEFF AND CRYSTAL MOORE

Dear Singin' Guru,
 You talk a lot about the "right" workouts. What does that mean?

Sincerely,

Need to Know

Dear NTK,

Glad you asked, and I imagine you asked because vocal lessons with anyone reputable are expensive. And they are expensive for a reason. A good vocal coach examines your voice from the perspective of a doctor, psychologist, producer, coach, and business mentor.

Everyone has different starting points for their vocal journey. Common points that we address include:

Aural Ability: Your ability to hear and recognize pitch.

Pitch Production: Your ability to produce a clear, accurate pitch.

Closure: Addressing unnecessary breathiness in your voice.

Interval Movement: Your ability to move fluidly between pitches.

Register Transitions: Smooth movement within and between vocal registers.

Speed of Movement: Developing agility and precision.

Rhythmic Capabilities: Enhancing your sense of timing.

Learning Style: Tailoring techniques to how you learn best.

Motivation and Style: Aligning your training with your musical goals.

Performance Metrics: Evaluating how well you deliver in live or studio settings.

It's a long list because there's no one-size-fits-all solution. That's why so many

vocal coaches default to having students warm up and sing songs. If this is all your coach does, find another one. If your voice isn't being challenged directly, or your weak points aren't being addressed, you're wasting time.

A good workout for your voice is like a good workout in the gym: it's effective for a week or two. After that, it needs to be adjusted to match your new capabilities. Yes, you develop new capabilities over time.

Anyone can improve with consistent effort, but you must abandon the idea that using workouts designed for someone else will help you. Doing the exercises published for Beyoncé won't necessarily work for you because your voice is not her voice. Attempting to copy someone else's routine will likely lead to frustration rather than progress.

Just like any investment, the money you spend on your voice should yield real returns. That's why great singers — even established ones like Beyoncé — still consult with vocal coaches. They understand that improvement is a lifelong journey.

Dear Singin' Guru,

I have a recording contract, and the producer wants me to take singing lessons for two months to improve my pitch matching and reduce the amount of grit in my voice. Can this be done in time to record?

Sincerely,

Singer in a Hurry

Dear Singer in a Hurry,

The short answer is yes, you can improve in two months, and you will see noticeable changes if you work out regularly with the right exercises (see above question).

Whether it will be enough for the producer is another matter entirely. Improvement in singing is highly individual, but with focused effort and the right techniques, you can achieve significant progress.

Many people believe that improving as a singer is like discovering a secret formula: learn a scale, memorize a tip, and suddenly, you're a vocal virtuoso. That's a myth. Sure, some singers may seem to have an innate advantage, but even the most "natural" voices in the industry are shaped by relentless effort. No one with a platinum-selling voice gets there simply by being born lucky or looking good — it takes consistent, hard work.

Let's bust a common myth:

Myth: «I'm naturally awesome, so I don't need to work hard.»

Reality: Anyone with real talent works their butt off.

Even singers who are not traditionally "gifted" can become stars. Look at Kurt Cobain; a genius songwriter who wasn't a virtuoso guitarist or a natural voice talent. Or consider Dimebag Darrell, who became a guitar icon through obsessive practice. Freddie Mercury — often praised for his "natural" abilities — was rigorous about vocal workouts. Likewise, pop stars like Ariana Grande and Beyoncé are meticulous about their vocal training. Even Axl Rose, the ultimate rock bad boy, dedicates time to warm-ups and exercises before performances.

Here's the real question you need to ask yourself: If you've landed a recording contract but your voice still isn't where it needs to be, why haven't you been working daily on improving it? That's a painful truth to confront, but it's a crucial one.

Now let's reframe the situation:

Better Question: «Since I have a recording contract and my voice isn't up to par, what can I do to improve my voice and con-

tinue growing throughout my career?»

Vocal improvement is like physical fitness: you can reach impressive heights, but without consistent maintenance, you'll lose it. In just two months, here's what you can focus on:

Daily Workouts: Spend at least 20 minutes a day on targeted exercises. Start with scales to improve pitch accuracy, then include techniques to reduce grit - such as breath control, relaxation, and strength building.

Feedback and Guidance: Work closely with a vocal coach who understands your goals and can tailor exercises to your needs.

Healthy Habits: Stay hydrated, get adequate rest, and avoid habits that can damage your voice (like smoking or excessive yelling).

Mindset Shift: Embrace the idea that vocal training isn't a one-time fix. It's an ongoing commitment to your craft.

As you begin this journey, remember: vocal work pays dividends. With discipline, you'll not only meet the demands of this recording project but also set yourself up for long-term success. And yes, the "correct workouts" matter — but that's a question for another day. Keep singing, keep improving, and keep proving you belong on the stage and in the studio.

Yours Truly,

The Singin' Guru

Got a question? Contact the Singin' Guru at jeff@peakmusicstudios.com. And check out the Guru author's website for their most recent book release: "Your Singing Questions Answered: A Handbook for Beginning Singers." On sale at Amazon and other retail locations.



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For Your Own Good

BY ROB SKANE

Sometimes music just blows your mind, right? It's hard to describe the feeling that overwhelms you when it happens - but I know you know, you know?

Example number one: the J. Geils Band. Holy smokes, they were an incredible live band. The first concert in a hockey arena that I ever attended was J. Geils at the Syracuse War Memorial. Yeah, Syracuse ... in February. 11 feet of snow on the ground, most likely. Lake effect, you dig? Anyway, kids - check out the "Full House" LP. That particular record is a jaw-dropping collection of rocknroll, rocknsoul, the blooze and, to some degree, revved up country ("Hard Drivin' Man"). They did that record in 1972. Half a goddamn century ago.

And, to my ears, that record has stood the test of time. They were blazing during the two nights in Detroit when they recorded that one. And, here's the thing - hands down, bar none and without question, Magic Dick on the Licking Stick stole the show on that LP with "Whammer Jammer," the Juke

Joint Jimmy tune. Magic Dick was the Harmonica Hendrix, and the magnificent rawness of his performance is the standard that all mere mortal harp players could only dream of achieving. Listen to it. But, then listen...to... it... You'll thank me next time you see me and we'll hug and it might get weird - but, so what? It's all about the music, right?

Next up, the Lyres. I LOVED this band beyond words. The "On Fyre" record melted my brain. It's ok - there's pills for that these days. Anyway ... back to this record. It's Farfisa, barely-in-tune and perfectly played rocknroll electric guitar, bass, and drums. Danny McCormack starred on tremolo guitar on this one - everything he played was exactly what each tune called for. I think, anyway. I mean, if you disagree, write your own friggin' column ...

Jeff "Monoman" Conolly kinda was the Lyres to a large degree, and I think everyone I know has been in this band but me. This record was underground Boston garage rock at its absolute finest

- if you knew, you knew. Monoman played organ and sang the tunes. The Lyres do a stunning version of "Tired Of Waiting" on this record, too. But "Don't

Give It Up Now" and "Help You Ann" will just explode out of your speakers with ragin' full-on exposed-nerve ga-garageland hearts full of strychnine.



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The Young Hardcore Scene

BY LIAM SWEENEY

It's a Troy night outside of No Fun, a gathering place for an eclectic batch of both music and patrons. Hoodie weather, and kids (only by virtue of my own age, but some dipping into the teens) stood outside in groups as the inside was packed to the front doors. A wander inside and you'd see merch tables for bands maybe you'd never heard of if you were north of a mid-life crisis, but the graphics, the sketch art, is unmistakable to anyone with a taste for metal, more commonly branded today as "extreme music."

They pull a kid out by his arms and legs. Little guy, dressed in a white T-shirt and white pants, no signs of blood. He's gasping for air. He's gotten the wind knocked out of him in the pit, and the people outside – strangers - get him seated in a chair and make sure he's alright. He wants back in, but they're convincing him to take a moment.

Extreme music encompasses metal and hardcore, and a myriad of subgenres like thrash, death metal, doom metal, metalcore, and more imaginative listings. It is a universe of ferocity, and a source of pride to all who listen. An enduring font of community. And on that night in Troy, I caught a glimpse of a new age and a new community.

Jake Roberts of the band Urine pointed out a good distinction between the sensibilities of hardcore past and hardcore present and cites social media as a double-edged sword at play.

"So straight out the gate, one thing

that I will say is both a blessing and a curse to the hardcore scene nowadays is social media, 100%," he says. "I think it's a great thing and I think it's an awful thing for bands. Because it's given a lot of bands that lived those struggles ... you know, I'm not gonna sit here and say that I had the worst life in the world. I didn't even have that bad of a life. I've had my tragedies, you know, but there are some people obviously who have come straight out of the gutter, and they put all that emotion into their music. And it's good for them to get it out. But I think social media also created this world where people feel like they are struggling more than they actually are.

"I'm trying to think of a good way to word it," Jake continues. "So some bands definitely are coming out with the same attitude, the same problems, which is, you know, great for the nostalgia factor, not as great for the progressive times. But either way, it's still happening. Then you have this whole new generation of bands that are saying it's OK to be exactly yourself. You don't need to have that extreme, covered-in-tattoos set. You don't need to have the addict's past. You don't need to have this whole backstory to being what you are. And I personally think that a lot of the more older heads see that in the sense of, like, being a poser."

While the younger extreme music scene has a generational gap from what came before it, it grew from the same love for the music and the community.

Angie from the band Halo Bite talks about her introduction into the music she would come to pursue.

"I never associated myself as a 'hardcore kid,'" she says, "until finding some meaning in it recently. Being born in 2003, I didn't get to experience firsthand the immense wave hardcore was in during the '90s and early 2000s. I grew up listening to bands like Helmet, Quicksand, and Merauder, for example, without associating them with 'hardcore' yet. I just thought those kinds of bands had a unique and different interpretation of aggressive music from other forms of aggressive music during the time, like grunge or metal. However, what separated aggressive music from hardcore for me was the community behind it. Live hardcore shows don't compare to anything else. The explosive, unapologetic, and intimate energy towards the band and the music is what made me familiar with the 'hardcore' name. It wasn't until I started to go to hardcore shows that I started to feel like I belonged."

Jason Krak (not there that night) is a DIY punk show promoter with a collective known as Crisis Isolation. He's seen a rising, younger metal scene grow from the inside, and he's been around long enough to have broader experience of the area's punk and metal lineage. He's noticed that many of the changes between this scene and the one that has existed for decades have been influenced by the changes in our overall culture. He notes movements like MeToo as more influential

to the younger scene.

"I think that the younger scene is much more open-minded," he said. "And is about accountability in the music scene and the MeToo movement in the music scene. For a long time, people who were involved in the scene, I feel like they didn't put as much importance on accountability when there are musicians and promoters who have had sexual assault allegations or things like that. I feel like in the past, it was a murky area, whereas now, with the younger crowd, that is absolutely not acceptable. I've had shows myself where we've taken bands off or canceled the show, and it's because of allegations that have come up and accountability, and I feel like that's a part of the new scene."

Accountability was never, however, wholly unknown to the older scene. Vegas Nancy, current singer of Faded Line and longstanding figure in the hardcore community talks about what it used to mean keeping the older scene safe.

"When I was coming up in the scene, dancing in a hardcore pit was still new," Vegas says, "promoters and clubs were being told, 'watch out if you book hardcore bands, the kids are coming with brass knuckles and other weapons,' so some of the promoters and clubs were just passing on shows in fear of someone getting seriously hurt. Now, there were people sneaking weapons in (there still are to this day), but the hardcore community is one of the only genres that can pretty much police

themselves, new and old school, so security can feel a little better knowing this.

“I have had the unique pleasure of being on both sides of the coin (as a musician in heavy bands and a long-time bouncer/security guy), so when I am onstage, I try to make sure security is treating the kids well and letting them have a blast, and when I am bouncing, making sure the kids are having a blast and going home the way they came to the show!”

While Krak draws distinctions between the older scene and the newer scene, he notes that the newer music itself, while it can be just as aggressive as older metal and hardcore, preaches to a new anger coming from a different well than existed in the nineties.

“I feel like the younger scene is very in tune with the fact that, for example, the rent’s insanely expensive. What do they get for it? What’s their future? The world’s getting flushed down the toilet. And, you know, what do they have to say for it?”

Angie believes that the anger and emotion that finds catharsis in hardcore, past and present, also benefits from diversity in bands; that those feelings can come from the experiences different social groups have.

“I think the older scene and younger scene have some similarities in how they deal with their hate through this avenue of music, but I do feel it has evolved with the help of diversity. From what I know, anti-fascist and straight-edge themes were the most popular amongst the “older” hardcore folks in terms of hymns about hate; and although I do know many current hardcore bands that preach on those same themes, the increase of diversity within hardcore is what enriches those themes a f*** ton more.”

In hardcore past and present, and really in all music, there’s an argument over what fits in what genre. But Angie notes that the younger scene is aiming

to challenge that.

“Some old heads do possess a ‘gatekeeper’ mentality that I see some younger kids pick up too,” she said. “For example, the talk on ‘what’s hardcore’ and ‘what isn’t.’ F*** that. Hardcore means an open mind. Hardcore is about love and respect. I believe that once people understand that hardcore means those things instead of all the other rules they have made up, that gap between old heads and youngsters in the hardcore world will close up. Hardcore music is simultaneously an outlet and enclosure for many people. I believe there shouldn’t be any hesitancy towards wanting more people to be a part of its special nature. Therefore, I think people should keep challenging the existing barriers of hardcore; create a new meaning that respects its roots but comprises a new bloom.”

Krak feels that there is a lot that the older hardcore scene and the newer hardcore scene can do for each other if they can come together, but it starts with communication.

“I don’t think there’s as much a divide, as there needs to be better communication,” he said. “It could be beneficial for both scenes to work together. The older scene has experienced a lot of things they can share with the younger crew because not everything was recorded, archived. There’s a lot of hardcore history even in our area that wasn’t archived, so it’s still like a tribal, word-of-mouth type thing. So there’s those kind of scene elders, and it’s like, as a scene elder, are you gonna be a jerk, or are you gonna be open-minded?”

As for what the newer scene can bring the older scene, he said, “I feel like a lot of the young people are grasping what they think is important in hardcore and punk and making attempts at it, and a lot of times they’re gonna make a totally new form of hardcore punk, or make it fresh in a new way.”



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Bezzolay

BY ROB SMITTIX

Photo Credit: 80am Productions

RRX: So how you doing, man?

Bezzo: I'm doing good, bro.

RRX: I'm really digging the New Year's vibes that you sent over to me.

Bezzo: Oh, thanks, bro. I was in the process of making music and I was like, let me make a song for my cousin for his birthday and it turned into something else. First, it just started out as a birthday song for him, my cousin, and my best friend.

RRX: Ah, so "New Year, New Money." Yeah, it's totally equated to the new year (2025), but it sounds like the new year was originally a birthday.

Bezzo: Yeah, it's actually a Capricorn song. That's why the song is called "Garnet," because that's the first song of Capricorn, and it's actually part of a 12-song process for every month.

RRX: No kidding.

Bezzo: We'll be doing the next zodiac in the list.

RRX: I like that. See, that's thinking outside the box right there. You got a whole series coming.

Bezzo: Yeah, I got a lot of music I'm dropping this year. It'll be my biggest release of music in one year.

RRX: Well, that's the best man, sky's the limit now. I first became familiar with you from the Tiff Gabana "My City" remix.

Bezzo: Oh wow. That was a while ago.

RRX: It's like a decade ago now, right?

Bezzo: Yeah, I was on the original and the remix version.

RRX: That's right. Yeah, so that's what got me familiar with you, and I've been paying attention ever since. When you sent in the song "Garnet," I was playing it in the office, and my boss was like ... we gotta get an interview with you. I was like, that's cool. My boss very much appreciates old-school hip-hop, but he's not really the hip-hop kind of guy, so for him to say that ... he must have really heard something in your music.

Bezzo: Thanks, I appreciate that so much.

RRX: So how long have you been at

it?

Bezzo: I'm gonna say, what, 29 years?

RRX: How old are you now?

Bezzo: 42. My first rhymes ... I ain't let nobody hear them for a year. I started writing when I was 13, turning 14. My first beat I ever wrote to was the Wu-Tang Clan's "Glaciers of Ice" (Raekwon). Back in the day, they used to have the promo tapes with the instrumental side beat.

RRX: Oh yeah.

Bezzo: That was my favorite beat, and I used to write from the beginning of the beat to the end of the beat and then go again and just write new rhymes. But I had learned that process from someone.

RRX: OK, so you had a mentor.

Bezzo: Oh, I've had some of the ... I'm not gonna say the best, but in my lifetime, who taught me how to rap, and how to curate music and all that. I have some good names under my belt.

RRX: No, that's the best. Good to have people in your corner, people that you could bounce ideas off of and learn from. Not everybody has that.

Bezzo: Yeah, I got introduced to hip-hop real early, at age 6. I didn't know what hip-hop was. I didn't know anything about hip-hop until my grandmother died. My grandma died, and for some strange reason, there were like 300 people at her funeral. I couldn't understand it. Like, why? Who is this lady? Why are all these people here to see her pass?

RRX: Right.

Bezzo: I didn't know. So when we came home, we had like a family reception at my mom's house when I lived in the Bronx. I'm from the Bronx. I'm from the Sedgwick area, Sedgwick Projects, and Sedgwick Park. I'm blocks away from all of that. So I was raised in it. So when I came to realize, my mom introduced me to my cousin, and sure enough, it was Melle Mel.

RRX: No. Wow!

Bezzo: Mm-hmm

RRX: Well, yeah, that's legendary right there

Bezzo: His real name is Melvin Glover. His mother and my mother are

cousins, but they were like best friends. My mother grew up with Melvin before he went to Hollywood and became a superstar; they grew up together. That's why he was at my house; because he and my mom were really good friends.

RRX: Wow. No, that's something, man. So you've really got the foundation there.

Bezzo: I'm from New York, but I like West Coast music, you know what I mean? I grew up on Snoop Dogg. I grew up on Eminem. I mean, I love New York music; Jay-Z is one of my favorite rappers. I'm an honorary Rough Rider. I ran with Rough Riders, but I really like West Coast music. That's why my style is kind of different. But anyhow, I left New York (City). I mean, situations happened where I had to move away. So I come to Albany, and I'm by myself. But I got the drive, so what I did when I came up here was ... what most black gentlemen do when they come up here; they become street dudes.

RRX: Right.

Bezzo: I chose to use every street dollar I made to go to the studio. I didn't buy no cars. Yeah, I got clothes, I bought jewelry once ... but every dollar went to the studio and learning how to record. And that's all I did, from about 19 to 24, before I went to prison. That's all I did, was go to the studio, perform, and hang out with other rappers. If you don't know about the gentleman by the name of Dirty Moses (aka JB) ...

RRX: Oh yeah, I know him.

Bezzo: Dirty Moses teaches me all the time, to this day. That's one of my favorite guys in the whole world. I move up here. I'm 19 years old, and I'm street-rapping. I'm bust bust, gang gang, let's get it. I'm from the hood, right? But I didn't know there was a whole other rap scene across Lark Street.

RRX: Yup.

Bezzo: I mean ... I live on Clinton, Second Ave, Grand Street ... I didn't know there was a whole other world of rappers on the other side.

RRX: Isn't that something?

Bezzo: Right! So one day, I'm outside just walking up Central, and I walk up Lark because I wanna get some Chinese food, something like that, and I just see mad people out here. I go up in one of the old taverns across the street from Bombers, and they rapping in there. But everybody backpack rappers; ain't no thug rappers. Moses is there. I get my opportunity. I'm talking crazy. I talk my s***. After I'm done and I get a drink ... sure enough, Dirty Moses pulls me over to the side. He's like, yo bro, you nasty. I'm like, thank you. He's like, yo, but check it out, look around the room. I look around the room. He's like, what do you see? I'm like, to be honest, 75% of the people in here are white. He's like, yeah, so you gotta understand, you gotta make music that they're gonna appreciate without changing who you are. So, I'm like, oh I gotta be a backpack rapper. He's like, no, you just gotta tone it down. So that's what I had to learn. I literally switched up my whole style. I stopped talking about guns, stopped talking about hustling, and I had to learn how to do that. And in that process, I met W. Steel, who was a predominant producer from California. We started a group called Type Official. So now I'm in the mix with the backpack rappers. I'm fully immersed in their world. We made a double album. I had a merchandise situation and ended up going on tour.

RRX: There is so much more to Bezzolay's story, but for the purpose of the article, we'll have to end it here. Anything else you'd like to get out to the readers before we go?

Bezzo: Yeah, I just wanna tell everybody they could Google me at Bezzolay or Bezzo House on social media platforms and streaming services. We are dropping a project a month for this year, plus a song a week for my fans. We're doing a lot of cooking this year; I'm producing a lot of records. I'm gonna hands-on produce half of those projects, plus a dozen projects for my peers.

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Brett Carlisle

*Bridging Generations
Through Music and
Perseverance*

BY LORI MCKONE

Brett Carlisle's rise to fame is a testament to his unwavering passion, perseverance, and natural talent. As the new lead vocalist of the iconic rock band Great White, Carlisle is bringing a fresh energy to the group's legendary sound. With his roots in heavy metal and a voice that can seamlessly transition from aggressive to soulful, Carlisle is proving himself to be a force to be reckoned with in the music industry.

RRX: What was your first concert or musical experience that left an impression on you?

BC: My dad was always listening to Van Halen and KISS and stuff like that. He had the KISS Alive albums—I thought the solo on “Detroit Rock City” was the coolest thing in the world! I first saw them during the KISS Alive 35 tour with Buckcherry, then later with Motley Crue. Being that young and knowing all of the songs and seeing the pyro, and the lights, and the makeup and everything—it was just so cool!

RRX: You received your first guitar at age eight for Christmas and you taught yourself to play. What was it like the first time you held a guitar and started playing?

BC: It was frustrating at first because I didn't have any instruction or devices where I could go on YouTube and look up a tutorial or something. When I first got it, I didn't know tuning was a thing. You know, you see people playing - it looks so easy, and they're playing a solo, and you're like, “I don't know what to do right now.”

RRX: How long was it before you were able to put some chords together and play a song?

BC: The first couple of years, I was

inconsistent. But throughout middle school and high school, once I figured out what was going on, I'm just by ear with everything. I would wake up early in the morning, and I would be practicing as soon as I came home from school. From the time I got home, to the time I fell asleep. And then I wake up in the morning, I'm like, “Hey, can I still play that thing?” That's when I started getting consistent.

RRX: If you rely on self-reflection, tapping into your own experiences and emotions teaching yourself guitar or singing, how did you cultivate this skill at such a young age?

BC: I'm pretty good with patience. Sometimes, things don't work out the first time the way you expect them to, but with persistence, it just comes back around. If I'm working on my voice and I hear something that I can't do or I don't know how to mimic or replicate, I'll drive myself crazy until I figure it out and I'm good and comfortable with it.

RRX: When did you decide to pursue singing, and did you have formal vocal coaching?

BC: I'd love to have some coaching. I feel there are some things I could be doing better, technically, maybe. I've just been using my voice memos on my phone to record myself singing - in the kitchen with some good reverb, or in the car, or wherever - and then I listen back and say I don't like how that word came out. I just keep listening back, kind of just chipping away at what I want things to sound like, redoing it until I'm satisfied with how it sounds. So yeah. I just record, listen back, and redo.

RRX: You mastered the guitar in high school. Was there any pushback



Brett Carlisle. Photo provided.

from your parents when you discussed becoming a singer instead?

BC: My dad felt I was too good at guitar to be a singer. “When you can cover something like Skid Row, then you can call yourself a singer,” he told me. I sent him a recording of me singing the end of “I Remember You” by Skid Row, and singing the big note at the end of the song caught him a little off guard. But after he heard me a few times, he became very supportive. When I nailed that final high note, my father simply said, “I guess I'll shut up now.”

RRX: Where does that self-confidence come from, especially at such a young age to become a self-taught musician and vocalist?

BC: I think that confidence comes from setting goals, whether they're small, attaining them, and working your way up to big ones. I knew with guitar and singing certain songs I was going to sit there for hours, days, and weeks until I learned them. Then I'm like, okay, now what? If there's something I put my mind to, it might not be easy, but challenge is fun, right?

RRX: The first time you sang in public was at your school prom. Walk us through your musical journey and when did you decide you wanted to pursue music as a career?

BC: The band I was in, in high school, we played a couple of friends' birthday parties, house parties, and stuff. We actually played prom to save some money for the senior class—it was the first time I sang in front of anybody. Every time we played for our friends or did something at school, it was just so much fun. I feel like it was never even a decision I had to make. It was “This is what I want to do, and I'll find a way to do it.”

RRX: What can fans expect from Great White with Brett Carlisle at the helm?

BC: We've got about six or seven ideas we're throwing around, so hopefully, something will come out soon. I don't want to change what they're doing at all. Mark says we need to bring the pain with this stuff and make sure our music shows everybody that we're still here. When we've been writing, any ideas that I've

had, they've embraced and been very excited about and accepting of. Michael can write some pretty, swifty, cool stuff on the piano, and Mark comes in with his riffs. Blending the two, they can be rocking like their early stuff or more bluesy, ballad-like. My transition from singing heavy, aggressive tunes in AON to more bluesy, ballad-like songs is not too far from what they already do. The stuff we've been writing is interesting, really cool. We want to make some stuff tough, diverse, and so far, it's really good. I'm really excited!

RRX: Do you feel pressure to live up to Great White's legacy or are you just doing your own thing?

BC: I mean, they might not get as much radio play as the classics or be as well-known as the classics because they are what they are. But for the fans wanting to hear something new, we're excited for them to hear it and hoping to reach some new people. Bands can put out new music, and you might hear it on the radio once, but then they go back to playing the big ones off the first couple albums. It's understandable. It is what it is.

RRX: What inspires your songwriting process?

BC: The most genuine things come from pushing the boundaries and exploring. It has to come from a creative place. That's usually where the best stuff comes from. It's about embracing the unknown and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable. When you listen to Van Halen's first album or Mötley Crüe's "Shout at the Devil," they're not trying to sound like everyone else. That's why a lot of our favorite bands and artists—their first album is their best or the coolest because they don't quite have a process yet, and they're trying to figure themselves out. You don't need outside validation, either. If you love it, then nothing's missing.

RRX: What are your goals for Great White's new songs?

BC: I want our new songs to be a reflection of the excitement and energy

we're feeling right now. I want us to show the world that we're still here, we're still doing well, and you know, "Damn, Great White, okay, we hear you!" That's not just about me being in the band or anything, that's growing up a fan, too.

RRX: How has your addition to the band affected Great White's dynamics?

BC: I love seeing the guys excited. They're excited because they don't have to question what's going to happen every night. I'm consistent every night; they don't have to worry about my range or what songs we're doing, so everybody's amped up right now.

RRX: What's the most unforgettable moment you've experienced on tour? What's at the top of your list?

BC: There have been so many memorable moments, but one that stands out was when we played a show in New York when Skid Row canceled. At the very end of the set, people started freaking out in the crowd, pointing and yelling, "Stop, stop, stop!" I didn't know what was going on, but I yelled for security, then we left the stage. Afterwards, I saw a guy on a gurney being taken to the ambulance. I didn't know what happened, but I wanted to say something. He had no pulse for like 90 seconds or so, and they brought him back. I went over to him, and I was like, "Hey man, I'm glad you're okay." He sits up and he's like, "Can we take a selfie?" Oh geez, what!

As Brett Carlisle continues to make waves with Great White and All or Nothing (AON), one thing is clear: this talented young artist is here to stay. With his infectious enthusiasm, impressive vocal range, and dedication to his craft, Carlisle is poised to leave an indelible mark on the music world. As he embarks on this exciting new chapter in his career, fans can't help but wonder what's next for this rising rock star. One thing's for sure—with Brett Carlisle at the helm, the future of rock 'n' roll is looking brighter than ever.

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The Alec Lewis Group



BY LIAM SWEENEY

The Alec Lewis Group. Photo provided.

RRX: What was the very first reaction to your music, from the first person to ever hear so much as a practice jam or the demo of your first song?

ALG: We are blessed enough to be affiliated with The Jive Hive, which is an incredible space and music haven for local artists and something you MUST look into if you aren't familiar. Alec (guitar and vocals) and Noah (lead guitar) are a part of the Jive Hive team and thus are in the good graces of Tom O'Connor, the owner. Tom is an incredibly generous benefactor to the local music scene and unabashedly opens his doors to any one he can. So, we have been able to use the Jive Hive as our rehearsal space since our beginning. Thus, Tom in his comings and goings was the first person to hear our developing rehearsals week after week. It is hard to remember a single first

reaction, as he is typically around for most of our rehearsals, but from the start he expressed big excitement, despite our clumsier beginnings. He always brings a critical, yet encouraging ear. We are close enough to know he doesn't BS. He knows how to critique but make you feel good about it.

RRX: We have to play somewhere, and sometimes those places have more going for them than a stage and a power outlet. What is a memorable place you played, and bonus points if it's not a well-known place.

ALG: I am a (live) sound engineer at heart and that means that I pay critical attention to how an audience will experience the music. The size and vibe of the venue will determine things like what drum kit our drummer uses, what amps myself and Noah use, what our PA for that gig will be, etc. I am meticulously

careful in assuring we offer an accessible and enjoyable show for every space. And while we are a high energy funk band, I LOVE playing small rooms. So this is even more important. I don't want anybody to leave the room because the snare drum is deafening, or the bass is overwhelming, or an amp is blaring right at their face. I want people to be able to talk and enjoy themselves in the likelihood they are not there specifically to see the band (and honestly, this makes you more likeable to strangers!!) So, all this to say, we have had a handful of REALLY great shows at this spot in Troy called 518 Craft. It's truly an incredible hang. It's tight and cozy and intimate and feels like a coffee shop that sells alcohol. Our last show there right before Christmas was the best crowd we'd ever played to and the most positive energy any of us had felt on stage. There's something magical

about packing a small bar when your sound is balanced and right for the room, people are just going to have a good time and they can't help it.

RRX: With the exception of singing, everyone has an instrument, an inanimate object that has the distinction of being a lifelong friend. Smooth or temperamental, these objects have a character. So pick someone to answer, can you tell us something special about what you play, your technique, your instrument?

ALG: Anyone who knows me (Alec) or is a musician who follows our band knows that the only answer to this question is the Stratocaster. I am admittedly a Fender man. But Fender or not, there is no guitar I wanna pick up other than a stratocaster. And obviously, I REALLY love mine. A stratocaster is a crucial element to our sonic character. To the point where I "strongly discourage" / "will not

allow” Noah (lead guitar) to play anything other than a stratocaster. And my enthusiasm has even rubbed off on him to the point where he recently sprung for a new Strat and has stopped asking to play his Tele all together. From sonics to the aesthetic symmetry I am married to the “two strat funk band.” This harkens back to practically all of my favorite guitar players being notoriously Strat players (Cory Wong, Mark Knopfler, John Mayer). And for all my strat enthusiasts out there, we heavily favor 4th and 5th positions.

RRX: We do this for the fans. For the blisters also, but mostly for the fans. Who’s one your best fans? Without necessarily giving their name, what are they like?

ALG: We have more than a few very loyal fans. Musicians and friends from the scene, as well as family. However, as I believe most musicians will tell you, there is nothing more heartwarming and rewarding than your first “total stranger fan.” We played a show in June 2024 at The Lark Tavern in Albany and had a great set. A week later we played a show at No Fun in Troy and were approached by a couple (let’s say their names are Zak and Sara) who said they stumbled into Lark Tavern randomly the previous week and ended up staying for our whole show, loved it so much that they came out to No Fun only days later. They were over the moon with encouraging and thoughtful words about our playing, songwriting and overall vibe. They’ve attended more than a few shows since then. Zak even came to a show on his own accord when his wife was out of town. He said “Don’t tell Sara I was here, she’ll be pissed I saw you guys without her.” So while we live off our friends and family’s support and love, there is a special significance to absolute strangers seeing you and wanting more.

RRX: I know when pitching it helps to tell someone it’s “this meets that.” So let’s try that with you. If you had to give me two bands that meet each other in

your sound, what are those bands? More than two bands?

ALG: Our influences are fairly specific. And I frequently reference these influences as a sort of north star for our band while writing new material. I find that this helps maintain a consistency across our music and gives our repertoire a succinct and identifiable blueprint. I have three main inspirations musically for this band: Cory Wong and the Vulpeck universe, Dire Straits, and Steely Dan (likely in that order). I believe our music certainly is an extension of these artists.

We have high energy funk grooves inspired by Cory Wong, Vulpeck and The Fearless Flyers. We have mid tempo, minor key bluesy tunes that I aim to remind people of Mark Knopfler with his kind of finger picking style. And I think the Steely Dan influence is not so direct in our music, sonically, but I don’t think people are surprised by the fact that Steely Dan is one of my favorite bands.

RRX: Let’s talk about your next project, your next few. Just not the ones you’re working on now. The ones you have your eyes on for the future. What’s coming to us?

ALG: We are a relatively new band, having played our very first show in February 2024. And we are releasing our first studio project very soon on 2/7/2025. It will be a four song EP titled Don’t Cross Me. Being a sound engineer myself, I take recording very seriously. I have music under my own name as a “solo artist,” this will be the first official release of The Alec Lewis Group as a band and separate project. And rightfully so this was a big group effort. Drums recorded at The Jive Hive and built up from there at my home studio. Myself and Noah worked throughout the summer and fall of this year honing in the guitar and bass parts. It is a guitar record. It is tight. It is punchy and catchy. It’s sarcastic and quirky. It’s fun and I think you’ll agree, so please give us listen come 2/7 and search for The Alec Lewis Group wherever you stream your music.



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Prog Digest

BY KLYDE KADIDDLEHUMPER

Welcome to the month of two made-up holidays.

One, where if your wife/lover/significant other/partner says “Oh, don’t get me anything,” they really mean, “I don’t want any of that nasty ol’ cheap chocolate in a heart-shaped box. It better be expensive Belgian chocolates.” You know, all hearts and sweets and stuff ... phooey.

The other is actually a holiday in the household of Klyde and Constant Companion – Groundhog Day. Our anniversary (for reals). If I forget that one, I will be knocking on your door ‘cause I won’t have a place to live.

Anyway – for most, they are not a huge deal.

The big deal these days is Artificial Intelligence.

This one is in the same vein as Autotune in my book. Then again, even the authors of Autotune do have limits. There is actually a set number of times beyond which you can no longer apply Autotune to a track before it tells you to get a new singer. Well, at least that is what it said on Facebook, and they do all that fact-checking ... huh, what? What do you mean they don’t fact-check in the US? Ah well, you can believe everything you read in this article ...

Now – AI – that is a different thing altogether. It can retrieve facts and the like pretty easily. It can also (if it has a large enough set of data) write songs – or at least the lyrics and give you style notes for different bands.

Klyde made a couple of requests. “Write me a Gentle Giant song.”

I got five verses, two breaks, and style

notes, including:

(Heavy, driving bass line with a jagged, angular guitar riff enters. Drums pound a complex, shifting rhythm.)

(Derek Shulman, soaring vocals)

Cogs in the machine, turning slow and cold

Gears grinding, a story yet untold

Logic unbound, reason overthrown

A fractured mind, a lonely, hollow throne

Or -

“Write me a ZZ Top song.”

(Heavy blues guitar riff in E)

(Billy Gibbons, vocals)

Well, I woke up this mornin’, sun shinin’ in my face

But somethin’ felt outta place, a feelin’ I couldn’t erase

Went down to the kitchen, fridge was lookin’ mighty bare

No cold beer, no juicy steak, nothin’ fit for a rock and roll millionaire

For some, this is considered “progress.”

I call BS. Whatever happened to actually having talent and writing your own? Sure, if you want to emulate a style – cool. But if you are a lazy no-talent, without an original thought in your head ... a cut-and-paste world is just your speed.

Reminds me of the 1988 debut album from Kingdom Come – who claimed to have never heard Led Zeppelin.

Reality is that there is nothing new under the sun – not really. Every style has sidebars, forks and branches,



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derivatives, and some paying homage. There are tributes. There are wannabes. Some will surpass their idols, others will not.

Think of it this way. In a past life, Klyde was working with a friend on a project. There was artwork involved. The owner brought out a very small piece and put it on an easel. Klyde’s jaw dropped.

The Mona Lisa is small but awe-inspiring. Jackson Pollocks’ tend to be large and overwhelming, and really cool.

In this case, the small (perhaps 4 x 5 inches or so) piece left me speechless. It was a Leonardo. A self-portrait, of which

there are many. In a room. No velvet ropes. No glass. No security guards. I will never forget it.

There are musicians who leave me much the same way. The AI-powered, autotuned, derivative junk just leaves me cold.

I am going to keep harping on this. Go out and see live musicians. Grab some vinyl you have never seen. Xperience Monthly does three things. Art. Culture. Music.

Try all three sometime.

Until next time.

Klyde



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**JOHNSON ELECTRICAL PROUDLY SERVES THE
CAPITAL DISTRICT AND SURROUNDING AREAS**

ALBANY-TROY-CLIFTON PARK-SARATOGA-SCHENECTADY-HUDSON-ALL SURROUNDING AREAS

RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

NEW CONSTRUCTION
REMODELS
ADDITIONS
DESIGN BUILD
EV CHARGING STATIONS
GENERATORS
CATV SWIMMING POOLS/HOT TUBS
EXHAUST FANS
ELECTRIC HEAT
RECEPTACLE/SWITCH CHANGE OUT
SERVICE ENTRANCE REPAIRS/UPGRADES
LIGHT FIXTURE/CEILING FAN CHANGE
OUT OR NEW INSTALLATIONS
TROUBLE SHOOT & REPAIR
MALFUNCTIONING SYSTEMS



*Avetta
Certified
Member
Company*



COMMERCIAL SERVICES

TENANT FIT UPS
REMODELS
ADDITIONS
RETOOLS/PROCESS RESETS
MAINTENANCE
STANDBY/COVERAGE
GENERATORS
CONVEYORS
CONTROLS
LIGHTING MAINTENANCE
INTERIOR & EXTERIOR
LIGHTING RETROFITS
LIGHTING CONTROLS
BEMS SYSTEMS
EV CHARGING STATIONS
GENERATORS
SHUTDOWNS
PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE
PANEL/TRANSFORMER
MAINTENANCE



empirelivealbany.com

BOX OFFICE HOURS 11-4 Monday thru Friday

FEBRUARY EVENTS

7th - **ATMOSPHERE** - Empire Live

8th - **HIPPO CAMPUS** - Empire Live

13th - **BIG HEAD TODD & THE MONSTERS**
Empire Live

14th - **LAUREN MAYBERRY** - Empire Live

14th - **GIMME GIMME DISCO** - Empire Underground

15th - **CHARLI PARTY** - Empire Underground

16th - **SUBRADIO** - Empire Underground

18th - **GET UP KIDS** - Empire Live

21st - **SKARHEAD** - Empire Underground

22nd - **THE EROTICS** - Empire Underground

22nd - **DYNASTY WRESTLING** - Empire Live

23rd - **ROCK N ROLL JIU JITSU** - Empire Live

27th - **ABORTED** - Empire Underground

28th - **INTERNAL BLEEDING** - Empire Underground

Tickets are available at Ticketmaster.com or the box office located at 93 N. Pearl Street, Albany.

