



September 2026 || Vol. 8, Issue 9

THE XPERIENCE MONTHLY

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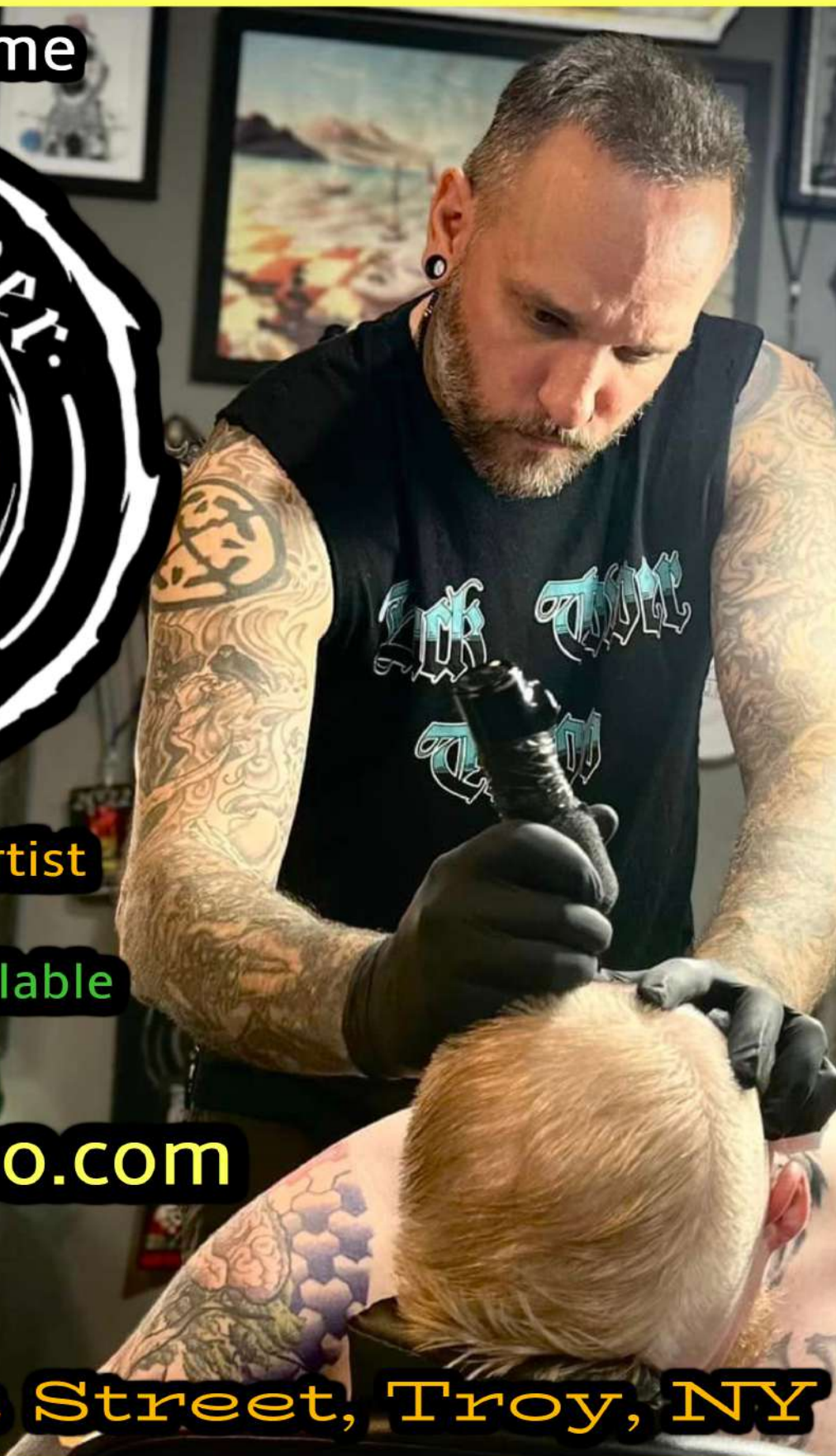
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ZAKK WYLDE

An Interview by Rob Smittix

RRX: Mr. Wylde, how are you doing?

ZW: Brother Rob! Just chilling. We're in Spain right now; we were somewhere in France last night, rolling with the French chapter "Berzerkers" yesterday at some festival. We went on late last night; it was almost midnight. Definitely past my bedtime, but we did the show and went into Monday. So yeah, it was pretty cool.

RRX: You're always travelling, you've got all these bands that you're in, so I appreciate you making time for me when I'm sure ... you don't have a lot of it to spare.

ZW: It's all good, man. Just like I tell my kids: be like your father, do what you love. That's it. It's a one-page book. It says that, and it says "the end," and that's it. One page.

RRX: I love that. Well, yeah ... so, I'm over here in New York, and you're six hours in the future. I was just wondering, what does the future hold?

ZW: Well, I guess what I'll do is ... I'll try and get the winning lotto numbers, and then I'll just text it over to you. Because if the lotto wins here, you could pick the winning lotto numbers back home. You gotta be in it to win it, man. You gotta be in it to win it!

RRX: (Laughs) I do appreciate that absolutely, man. And ... I gotta tell you, man, your tour manager Talena has been great to work with.

ZW: Talena, she's amazing, man. The whole process is awesome.

RRX: You got yourself a very well-oiled machine, and after doing it all these years, I mean ... you've gotta have that because ... I can imagine the lifestyle is not for everyone.

ZW: Well, no, that's what I'm saying. But you gotta just surround yourself with people that know what they're doing, and you roll with the people you love. It's pretty simple. That translates in life as well, you know? Because who has time for it, man? I was just reading something about when you're 60 years

old, you've reached a point in your life where you shouldn't have to deal with people in your life, blah, blah, blah. You deserve peace of mind, and you deserve this because you're at that age. At 60. You should be acting like that when you're 5 years old. What are you, kidding me? When you're old enough to know, you know what I mean? Why would you live your life any other way?

RRX: You're right.

ZW: Forget that. If somebody's a tool bag, you cut them off. I'm like ... Rob, whatever happened to that guy Frankie? You say, that guy? I had to cut him off, dude. It's just like this, that, and the other. You give me a grocery list of things that went down, and I just say, "Oh well, you live, and you learn." Goodbye. It's that simple, man.

RRX: It is 100%, and I think the same thing goes with the relationships too, because people get stuck; they get trapped.

ZW: Without a doubt. Like Dime and Vinnie; there's not one point in life where you should be miserable, ever. When something bad happens, it's like, alright, well, you know? We lost the Super Bowl; that sucked, but hey ... tomorrow we'll go barbecue and celebrate that we even made it this far, and then next year we just go in and knock their teeth out. How else are we supposed to look at it? You can't finger-point at anybody and want to blame whoever ... oh well, we got this far. Tomorrow or next week, we win it all. But in the meantime, let's go fire up some ribeyes. Why would you wanna live your life any other way? You wanna wallow in the misery? Just get out of here with that because we all get kicked in the balls. It's gonna happen sooner or later. It's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when. It's how you react to it.

RRX: You ain't kidding. You've been doing this for a long time. You got all these different bands that you're in and have been in, but one of the coolest things that caught me by surprise was



Photo By: Jeff Graham

... My Darkest Days song, "Porn Star Dancing," and all of a sudden, we got Zakk Wylde and Ludacris on the same song.

ZW: (Laughs) The guys called me up, and they were like ... "Zakk, would you mind putting some fiddly diddly on this thing?" I was like, yeah, sounds great, it'll be hilarious. I just wish I would have been there for the video shoot; that would have been fun. But I was off location. Because they were like, we don't want Zakk to ruin this in any shape or form. So we'll just film him separately somewhere else.

(Both Laugh)

ZW: But whenever I get asked to do those things, I mean ... if I could fit it in or whatever, I always have a good time doing it. Because I'm playing, so it's all good.

RRX: Exactly. No, it looked like a lot of fun, but it was also the most unexpected collaboration I've ever encountered.

ZW: Yeah, totally.

RRX: Anyone out there that you haven't worked with that you think would be a good collaboration?

THIS MONTH'S FEATURES



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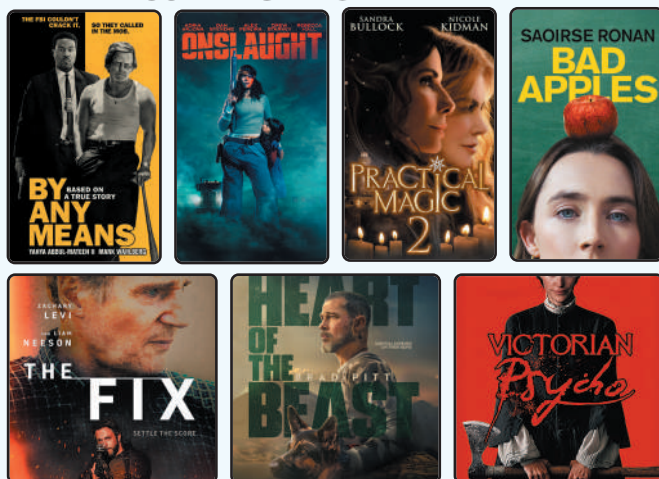


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ZW: Well, no ... I mean, because when they ask, "Zakk, if you could put a band together with guys that are no longer with us or in the past, this and that, who would it be?" And I go, "I'm already in it." I'm in the band with the bunch of guys I wanna be in a band with, you know what I mean? I'm already in that band, and I wouldn't change a thing about what I'm doing at all.

RRX: That's the best. You got exactly what you need and exactly what you're looking for. Was there anything else that you would tell people to encourage them to come out to the shows?

ZW: It's gonna be quite the toe-tapping event. Even when we're rolling with the Black Label American Crusade with Zakk Sabbath and Dark Chapel, it's a high-calorie-burning event. So, this way, if you're on a strict diet, when you come to this concert, the amount of dancing you'll be doing, you'll be able to buy that extra slice of pizza and have no guilt in eating that slice of pie. That's the advantage of this show. That's all I can offer.

RRX: That's the best. I appreciate your time and thank you so much for doing

this.

ZW: All good, Rob.

RRX: Don't forget to send me those lottery numbers from the future.

ZW: Without a doubt, brother. You gotta be in it to win it!

RRX: Amen. Thanks, brother.

ZW: All right, Rob. I'll talk to you in a bit, buddy.

Continued from page 14...

Congratulations to Naava Wilson, Lily Lothrop, Emily Pinkerton, Elizabeth Conant, Arbor Mae, Josh Robin, Dave Womer, Matthew Klane, Mark Shipley, and Lucio Barbarino for being picked for Ink26.

Join us at the next Song City: Thursday, September 10th at The Waiting Room in Troy with performers Madison VanDenburg, Lucio Barbarino, JB!! aka Dirty Moses, and Mama Jean.

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EM: I wish I had a canned answer for that. I love harmony. I love the changes from chord to chord, and that's probably the reason I wake up in the morning. It's so fun to play gigs and to have all these adventures with different musicians and to play all this different music. All of that is always fun. What makes me wake up in the morning is my absolute love and appreciation and

devotion to music harmony, the chord structure, the chord changes. So the way I can answer that question is: what lights me up is when the chord progression strikes something emotional in me, and then I get to go on the ride with it. I hope that makes sense.



Continued from Page 9...

This time, one of the musicians threw a drumstick at him. Bruk ducked. He thought it was part of the show. He loved it. From that day forward, Bruk became convinced that shouting "Free Bird" was the highest form of musical criticism. It didn't matter what kind of music was being played. Drums? "FREE BIRD!" Flutes? "FREE BIRD!" A woman singing a beautiful ballad about the death of her husband? "FREE BIRD!" A choir performing a sacred song at sunrise? "FREE BIRD!" At that point, even the elders agreed that perhaps Bruk should be hit with something.

Eventually, the tribe simply stopped inviting Bruk to musical events. But this did not stop him. He hid behind rocks, climbed trees, and even once crawled through a tunnel beneath the village so he could pop his head through the floor during a performance. "FREE BIRD!" The musicians were furious. The audience was furious. The elders were furious. Bruk was delighted. He had no useful skills, no trade, no ability to hunt, and absolutely no understanding of music, but he had discovered that if he interrupted other people's hard work loudly enough, strangers would remember him. In the primitive mind of Bruk, this was fame.

And so the legend of Bruk was passed down through the generations. The wheel was invented. Fire was improved. People learned to write. Empires rose and fell. Ships crossed oceans. Concert halls were built. Amplifiers were invented. Electric guitars appeared. Humanity sent men to the moon and put tiny computers in nearly everyone's pocket. And somehow, through the mysterious passage of history, Bruk's spirit survived.

His descendants are still among us. They wait through an entire concert. They listen to the opening act, the second song, the guitar solo, and the singer explain how much a song means to them. They may even spend \$80 on a ticket. Then, at precisely the moment when everyone is enjoying the music, they summon the ancient wisdom of Bruk. "FREE BIRD!"

Nobody knows why. Nobody asked for it. The band probably isn't going to play it. And there is a very good chance the person yelling it doesn't even particularly like the song. It is simply tradition, a sacred ritual passed down from a poorly supervised caveman whose parents taught him only two words and apparently never followed up with a third.

So the next time you're at a concert and somebody screams "Free Bird!" at a band that has spent years writing, recording, and performing its own music, remember Bruk. Remember the ancient cave. Remember the two-word education. Remember the bird that flew away. Remember the great civilization that somehow invented the electric guitar but failed to invent a way to prevent Bruk from getting into the building.

And remember that somewhere, thousands of years ago, a confused young caveman discovered that yelling two random words at musicians got everybody's attention. He never learned anything else. He didn't become a warrior, a hunter, or a farmer. He didn't invent the wheel. He just yelled "Free Bird." And somehow, against all odds, that became his greatest contribution to civilization.

And, if you missed the moral of the story, it is this: If you are the person standing in the crowd screaming "FREEEEE BIRDDDD!" at the band, congratulations. You have achieved what generations of human evolution have tried desperately to avoid. You are a stupid caveman. Somewhere deep inside you, Bruk is smiling. He is probably holding a rock, wondering if it is a sandwich.

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Off The Record Trio

An Interview by Lisa Irwin

Off The Record Trio is a popular '60s-style band based out of the Capital Region. Lisa Irwin recently had a chance to interview them. To learn more about Off The Record Trio, please visit: www.offtherecordtrio.com.

RRX: As I was preparing for this column and deciding who I wanted to interview, I immediately thought of Off The Record Trio. Thank you so much for taking the time to answer a few questions for me. I love the energy and style you all have. Your shows are lively and fun to watch. Can you tell me a little bit about the members and how Off The Record Trio started, and about your vibe in general?

OTR: Thank you—that means a lot to us.

Off The Record Trio grew out of a shared love for the music with our friend Lou Sansivero. Over the years, we had the pleasure of playing with Billy Harrison and now with Geo Doody. Between the three of us, we have decades of performing experience, but what really brings us together is the idea that there are so many incredible songs from the '60s that people haven't heard live in years—or maybe ever. We love mixing those forgotten gems with the songs everyone knows, so people are constantly saying, "Oh my gosh, I haven't heard this in forever!"

Geo Doody brings a deep knowledge of the music, Bob Resnick is the heartbeat of the band with a groove that keeps people moving, and I (Joanna Palladino) get to tell the stories and connect with the audience through the songs. It's a true collaboration.

Our vibe has been described as part vintage cocktail party, part dance party, and part musical treasure hunt. We want every show to feel like you're hanging out with friends who just happen to have a really great soundtrack.

RRX: You are an award-winning trio and have won the Capital Region Eddies Award four times. Winning once is exciting. Winning four times suggests

consistency. What's your secret to keeping a show fresh after all these years?

OTR: First of all, we are truly amazed and humbled that we continue to be recognized. We know the Capital Region is blessed with an incredible array of talented cover bands, and we know we are lucky to even be in their company. I think our secret is - we never phone it in.

Every audience is different, and we treat every show like it's someone's first time seeing us. We change the set lists constantly, pull out songs we haven't played in years, add new material, and pay attention to the room. If people want to dance, we'll lean into that. If they're listening closely, we'll tell more stories about the music and the artists behind it.

We're also genuinely friends, and I think audiences can feel that. There's a lot of laughter onstage, plenty of improvisation, and we navigate when something unexpected happens. Sometimes those unplanned moments become everyone's favorite part of the night.

We also collaborate with other musicians, and their energy helps keep our shows fresh! Luke McNamee often plays with us and brings a different element with his saxophone. Mike Kelly and Ross Rice sit in every once and awhile on keys, and their playing expands our song selections.

RRX: When people leave an Off The Record Trio show, what do you hope they're talking about on the drive home?

OTR: I hope they're saying, "I forgot how much I loved that song and it still makes sense!"

Or maybe, "Who originally did that one?" because we've introduced them to something new.

More than anything, though, I hope they're smiling. Life is heavy enough. If for two hours we helped people forget about work, politics, bills, or whatever



was weighing on them—and they laughed, danced, sang along, or held someone's hand during a ballad—then we've done exactly what we came to do.

RRX: You've played a lot of live shows. What's the most unexpected moment that almost derailed a performance but ended up making it unforgettable?

OTR: Live music has a way of reminding you that perfection is overrated.

We've had power glitches, weather interruptions, forgotten lyrics, and equipment that decided to quit at exactly the wrong moment. Usually I experience costume failures - ripped seams, broken jewelry, and broken shoes. I just laugh it off and keep dancing.

Those moments remind us that people aren't there to watch machines—they're there to share an experience with real people. Sometimes the "mistakes" become the stories everyone remembers.

RRX: Again, thank you so much for this interview. One last question. Do you have any upcoming projects or things in the works that you can share a sneak peek of with me?

OTR: We're always digging for songs that deserve another chance to be heard, so audiences can expect some new additions to the set list this year. We found some previously unreleased

songs from lesser-known girl groups and will be adding them to our set list this month.

We're also looking for opportunities to bring the Off The Record experience to new venues and festivals throughout the Northeast. We love introducing people to music they didn't know they missed.

And who knows? We've learned never to say never. There are always ideas floating around—whether it's another live recording, a cool video shoot, themed shows centered around a particular era or artist, or collaborations with some of the incredible musicians in the Capital Region (check out our three-band bill at Ophelia's this fall with the Va Va Voodoos and the Del-Martians). The best part about this band is that we're always looking ahead while celebrating music that has stood the test of time.

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Bruk: The Legend of "Free Bird!"

An original story by Jason Irwin

Long before concert halls had velvet curtains, before electric guitars could make your pants vibrate, and before anyone had invented the phrase "Please silence your cell phones," there lived a young man named Bruk. The ancient historians describe him as "a child of great potential," which was apparently the polite way of saying, "Nobody knows what happened to this kid." Bruk was not a particularly bright child. He wasn't the brightest member of his family. He wasn't even the brightest member of his cave. One afternoon, he spent three hours trying to eat a rock because his father told him it was a "stone sandwich." His father eventually admitted that he had made that up, but by then Bruk had swallowed two pebbles and was feeling pretty good about lunch.

His parents, Ug and Munga, were not exactly what you would call good parents. They loved Bruk in the same way a bee loves a fish: they acknowledged his existence, but mostly left him to figure things out for himself. Ug spent his days hunting and his nights complaining about the quality of the mammoth steaks. Munga spent most of her time yelling at Ug. "UG! YOU BRING HOME NO MEAT!" "I BRING HOME MEAT YESTERDAY!" "THAT WAS YESTERDAY!" "THEN WHY YOU STILL TALK ABOUT IT?" It was a difficult household, and Bruk was raised primarily by whoever happened to be closest to the fire.

Because Ug and Munga were too busy arguing to actually teach their son anything, they decided to simplify his education. They taught him two words: "free" and "bird." That was it. "FREE," Ug would say whenever he found something that didn't cost anything. "BIRD," Munga would say whenever there was a bird. Eventually, Bruk put the two concepts together. Free bird. This became his favorite phrase, his personal philosophy and, eventually, the beginning of one of the great curses ever placed upon live music. He didn't know what a metaphor was, or a simile,

or even a noun, but he knew that if you put those two words together loudly enough, people tended to look at you.

One afternoon, Bruk wandered through the woods and spotted a small bird trapped beneath a branch. He lifted the branch, the bird flew away, and Bruk raised both arms toward the heavens. "FREE BIRD!" he shouted. He had done something good. Unfortunately, this was also the high point of his intellectual development. A few days later, Bruk discovered that if he walked into the village marketplace and shouted "FREE BIRD," people would look at him. This was very exciting. He didn't understand why they were looking at him, but he had discovered the intoxicating power of attention, and Bruk was a man who could never be accused of knowing when enough attention was enough.

So he began shouting it everywhere. At the fire. "FREE BIRD!" At the river. "FREE BIRD!" During tribal council while the elders were discussing an upcoming woolly mammoth hunt. "FREE BIRD!" The elders were not amused. One elder finally stood up and said, "Bruk, please stop yelling that." Bruk nodded solemnly. He understood. Then, approximately nine seconds later, he yelled, "FREE BIRD!" By the time Bruk was a teenager, the village had developed a warning system. If someone saw him approaching, they would shout, "BRUK IS COMING!" and everybody would hide their birds.

As the years passed, Bruk became known throughout the region as the man who shouted "Free Bird" at inappropriate times. He yelled it when hunters returned empty-handed, during weddings, during funerals, and once while a man was having a tooth pulled with a sharpened stick. "FREE BIRD!" The dentist dropped the stick. The patient screamed. Nobody knew what Bruk wanted. Neither did Bruk. Scholars would later debate whether he was requesting a bird, demanding that somebody release one, asking for a bird without paying for it, or simply being an



idiot. The scholarly consensus eventually became: yes. One particularly respected elder suggested that Bruk might someday develop a third word. The elder was mocked for such wild optimism.

Then one evening, something happened that would change the course of history.

A traveling group of musicians arrived in the village. They called themselves The Mammoth Stompers. They had drums made from animal hides, rattles made from bones, and one particularly talented caveman who could blow into a hollowed-out log and produce a sound remarkably similar to a dying moose. The entire tribe gathered around the fire. The musicians began to play. The crowd danced. The Mammoth Stompers played faster. Everyone cheered. It was, by all surviving accounts, the greatest concert the Stone Age had ever seen. And then, from somewhere in the back of the crowd, came a familiar voice. "FREE BIRD!" The musicians stopped. The dancers stopped. The moose stopped dying. Everyone turned around. There stood Bruk, grinning like a man

who had just discovered fire for the second time.

He had created something magnificent. He had yelled "Free Bird" at musicians, and everybody heard him. One finally asked, "What does that mean?" Bruk thought very hard. He looked at the musicians, the crowd, and the sky. Then he said the only words he knew: "Free bird." The musicians shrugged and started playing again. When they finished the song, he yelled it again. "FREE BIRD!"

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THE RECORD FILE

By Tony Mastrianni

MADONNA SAVED SUMMER 2026: STILL THE QUEEN OF THE DIVAS!



Let's face it, it was a dreadful summer, with the music industry not releasing too many major artists' albums. The new Stones and McCartney releases were nothing to rave about. However, one big record towered above the slag heap. Although I have had a love/hate relationship with Madonna for many decades, I can now attest that the dance floor is very much alive again. Madonna was the rage of the Summer of 2026 with her latest album (a two-LP), "Confessions II," on the Warner Records/Maverick label. Reuniting with producer Stuart Price, Madonna sets the stage for an evolution of the groundbreaking world she created with the album "Confessions on a Dance Floor." Across the 16 continuous mixed tracks of this double album, she explores diverse themes like love, trauma, loss, and healing. The album reinforces Madonna's enduring belief that dance music is far from superficial; the dance floor is a lifeline, a place for escapism, connection, and survival. This spring, she previewed the album, inviting fans to the dance floor with the Billboard Dance Airplay No. 1 hit "I Feel So Free." She also debuted "Bring Your Love," featuring Sabrina Carpenter, at Coachella, marking 20 years since her festival debut (which subsequently topped the UK Club Chart as well). Her voice is superb throughout the 2 LPs.

The album features her daughter, Lola Leon, on the sentimental track, "The Test," which the two co-wrote, with deeply personal lyrics reflecting the healing and progression of their relationship. Madonna also collaborates for the first time with Dutch DJ and producer Martin Garrix on the lamenting "Bizarre," an exploration of the complexities of love. Additionally, Belgian artist Stromae brings his unique style to the seductive "My Sins Are My Savior." Producers Andrew Watt and Cirkuit join Stuart Price on two evocative songs, "Danceteria" and "L.E.S. Girl," chronicling Madonna's early years in New York City, celebrating the legendary club, the friendships that shaped her, and the unique life only Madonna could capture. At the first-ever halftime show for the FIFA World Cup 26 Final on July 19 from New York New Jersey Stadium, and with a global audience exceeding 1.5 billion viewers, her "Confessions II" track "Read My Lips," featuring Colombian singer Feid, became an anthem of the tournament.

Bottom line: pseudo-divas come and go, but this diva, now 68 years of age, still outperforms all imitators. Hundreds (if not thousands) of young women in search of stardom around the planet have sung and danced to her drum for the past five decades, and all have fallen short of the glory of Madonna.

ONE LAST GEM FROM ELECTRO ROCK MASTERS, SOFT CELL!

These guys can dance to the odd beat! Electronic music legends SOFT CELL, a.k.a. singer and frontman Marc Almond and multi-instrumentalist and producer Dave Ball, have released a feel-good, kitsch video for their new single, "In Heaven (When I Dance With You)." Out digitally on all platforms, this track is the second single taken from "Danceteria," Soft Cell's sixth and final studio album, which will be released in late September (via Republic of Music). "Danceteria," the album, is a classy and playful

I farewell to 47 years of Marc and Dave making music as Soft Cell and features career-defining performances from our electronic pop legends. Reminiscent of Sparks, Pet Shop Boys, and with lyrics Lady Gaga would kill for, the album takes you on a vivid journey through a day in early '80s New York, bouncing round the clock from night to bleary daybreak and headlong back into the club. The 12-track album will be simmering with great sounds, which comes as no surprise. Thanks for all the great music, guys!

ELEPHANT'S MEMORY FINALLY REISSUED ON REAL GONE MUSIC!

Led by the leadership of saxophonist and vocalist Stan Bronstein, Elephant's Memory is best remembered for backing John Lennon and Yoko Ono on "Some Time in New York City," "Approximately Infinite Universe," and "Live in New York City." (They also recorded an album for the Beatles' Apple label). But before those brushes with fame, the band earned a reputation as a political street band in Greenwich Village, and you can see them in action on the front cover of this album, released on the Metromedia label in 1970. The opening track, "Mongoose," was a minor hit and is one funky, irresistible ride (ex-Country Joe & the Fish member David Cohen contributes guitar and keyboards), and the rest of the record brings that gloriously grimy, late-'60s Greenwich vibe ... it's no wonder Elephant's Memory contributed a couple of tracks to the "Midnight Cowboy" soundtrack.

For its first reissue in any format, this album was remastered by Mike Milchner at Sonic Vision and pressed on clear vinyl with black swirl. A blast from the past, and one of the most intense demonstrations of cacophony of this era. Another superb reissue from this great indie label!

THIS NASHVILLE ARTIST IS A BEACON OF STORYTELLIN'

Let's take a left turn here and head for Nashville. I have an old friend there who takes the country out of country (what??) Yes, sometimes country music gets too countrified and simple-like. Let me introduce you to Lance Cowan, who might be breaking out with his new album, "The Air That I Breathe," on Patio Records. Lance's professional journey is a study in the art of narrative, weaving through three distinct, yet interconnected careers that orbit the same principle: The Art of Storytelling! He was a writer/correspondent, a public relations manager, and a singer/songwriter. He has the Midas touch with his lyrics. He weaves his tales all through this album (his third). He seemingly has perfected his writing skills (and his vocals are very good). If musicianship is in question, let me assure you that the players on his new album are brimming with high credential contributors—such as Dan Dugmore (James Taylor, Linda Ronstadt), Pat McGrath (Carrie Underwood), Phil Madeira (Emmylou Harris, Phil Keaggy), Bryan Owings (Emmylou Harris), Dave Pomeroy (Don Williams, Elton John), Chip Davis (Alabama), Billy Davis (Dolly Parton) and Sam Bush and Jimmie Dale Gilmore.

Mr. Cowan's stories take the clunky out of country, and he will intrigue and entertain the listener with strong character. Certainly not your everyday country record. If you are looking for an alternative country singer with character who will entertain the hell out of you, then look no further! And the music is fine.

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2.. 3.. 4.. - The Wrath of Grapes

By Chris Busone

Yes, friends and readers, many was the night on many a stage that I raised many a cup as my friend and bandmate Jimmy Lazz spoke those inspiring words from behind his Ludwigs, thereby setting off a chain reaction which caused bystanders, band standers and band members alike to raise a glass of their favorite potent potable and gleefully gulp in a unified celebratory swallow.

Gloriously intoxicating days were these, when drinking on stage was not only acceptable but encouraged by onlookers and club owners who would send trays of shots filled with strange brews and mixtures up to the bandstand for us to consume, cheered on by the crowd. Numbing nectars with names like Screaming Nazis, Kamikazes, Fuzzy Navels, and Nipples, both Buttery and Slippery. (FYI - if you have either of these nipple-related afflictions, you should seek medical attention immediately. If you have a Fuzzy Navel, just change your sweater, dude.)

There were Harvey Wallbangers, which were basically a Screwdriver with a shot of Italian liqueur, but if you added Sloe Gin and Southern Comfort, you had yourself a Sloe Comfortable Screw Up Against The Wall. We knocked back things called Zombies, Alabama Slammers, Tequila Mockingbirds, Whiskey Business, Rum Diaries, and Irish Car Bombs. And we drank them without the slightest pause or pretense, without knowing what was in them, and caring even less. "Whatever gets you there!" was our battle cry.

But alas, my brothers and sisters in intoxicants, nowadays imbibing to excess is looked down upon, and those sodden who are with the devil drink are shunned by polite society. No longer are people enthralled or bemused by the blasted bassist or gassed-up guitar god. Gone are the days of the lubricated lead singer desperately holding onto his mic

stand for dear life, as he chortles the wrong lyrics in demolished key signatures.

And if you're that member of a friend group that always seems several sheets too many to the wind and "walking on round heels" as my dad used to say, your current cohorts may set you adrift on a sudsy sea without a life raft.

Here's a good rule of thumb: if your friends are discussing the affordability crisis and pontificating over the possible repercussions of the upcoming midterm elections while you're hanging onto the bar doing the swizzle-sway and hunting for bear with a switch, you might be feeling no pain right now, Otis, but you may as well just check yourself into the Mayberry drunk tank cause the townsfolk are tired of your act.

Best you find yourself some '80s holdovers who are nicely irrigated with horizontal lubricant and off their trolley and in their cups. Home is wherever you lay your hat, and pass out. Nite-Nite.

Hell, even the TV "Friends" got on Fun Bobby's case just for wanting to make his coffee Irish. I mean, he was just trying to liven things up a bit, you uptight white people. No wonder you don't have any Black friends, Monica. Try pulling that stick outta your a\$\$, Oh, and like you're all NOT addicted to caffeine? ...Could those cups BE any bigger? ...Geesh.

That said, if the go-go juice is your thing, you shine on, you crazy glassy-eyed diamond. Let your frothy flag fly!

Paint the town maraschino cherry red. Put your best foot forward and trip over the curb. Bet your best friend that you can jump off the balcony into the above-ground pool. You could do it! You could!!

Or, you could dial it back a bit.

I myself have seriously cut back on my own alcohol consumption these past several months. (That thud you heard was several of my close friends passing out from shock. We'll give them a moment to recover.)

Yes, after four or five decades of the loudmouth liquid, and "one's too many and a hundred's not enough," I decided it was time for a change. No one told me I should, or talked me into it. I wasn't getting hate mail from my liver, and I'm a happy drunk, so there were no issues. I just felt like I wanted to.

So what took so long, you ask. Why didn't I get on the wagon sooner? (Or is it off the wagon? I'm never really sure.) The answer is a simple one: I didn't want to. And any good Sunday school teacher will tell you, ya have to wanna. It's like anything else in life. You know it's right when you hear that voice in the head telling you so.

Now, that is not to say that I won't have a drink with my wife on a date night/ dinner date, or toast a jolly good fellow on his jolly good birthday. I haven't quite instituted the 18th amendment, but I'm reeling in my intake of the sauce in a significant way. I simply save my self-imposed drink maximum for clinkable occasions.

Coco Chanel said, "I only drink on two occasions; when I'm in love, and when I'm not." Send the lady a Cosmo and put it on my tab.

As for me, I have to say that I don't miss having to do the math in my head as to whether the amount of drinks I've had is equal to, or greater than, the coefficient related to the variable of time that I've spent between cocktails, multiplied by the glasses of water I drank, in relation to how much I weigh and what I ate, and then solve for "R". It's that complex equation we all do that determines whether you can drive



home safely without getting caught up in the illegal/immoral money-grab they call DWI checkpoints.

Another plus is waking up without the wrath of grapes, which makes the mornings a little more enjoyable.

But fear not, my wet friends, we can still raise a glass to Jimmy Lazz's classic toast, as that is just too amazing to pass up. Just, for me, not too many or too often.

And for the record, I think it's OFF the wagon, cause you're definitely drinking if you're ON the wagon, because all the booze is ON the wagon cause that's how it gets delivered, right? I mean, why are we even mentioning the wagon unless it's carrying booze, huh? Answer me that. So if you're OFF the wagon, then you're not drinking, 'cause now you're just out on the street, and there's no booze out there on the street, so you're NOT drinking cause the wagon with all the booze ... oh, that thing ... that's down there somewhere, like blocks away. And also, I'm not sure why the driver kicked me OFF the wagon in the first place, 'cause I wasn't half as bad as those other people in the back and ... wait, WAIT! I'm OFF track here. But I had this! I did!

Or maybe not. Whatever, let's just toast. I'll count it off: 2...3...4 Salute!!

An Interview

Scott Womer (Song City & Ink26)

by Rob Smittix

RRX: So tell us about all of these big things you've got going on.

SW: Focusing on all the big things, right?

RRX: Song City has been around for quite some time ...

SW: Yeah, we are going into our fifth season. So ... five years.

RRX: And how long have you been doing Ink?

SW: This is the third year for the Ink Songwriting retreat. We did one in '23 and '24, we took '25 off, and we're back in '26 with it. So, this is Ink26. It's a 4-day, 3-night songwriting retreat. We use Silver bay, the big YMCA camp in northwestern Lake George.

RRX: Okay.

SW: It's this huge camp; they've got huge hotels all the way down to little 4-person family summer cottages they can rent. You know? We have a place called Oak Cottage, which is not at all a cottage; it's more of a lodge that sleeps 14 or 15. Multiple floors, decks all over the place ... really beautiful, just perfect. So, we rent that for the four days. There's plenty of room for everybody to sleep. Huge living room, big fireplace ... that's our home base when we're there. That's where we're sleeping, eating, and co-writing, that kind of stuff. But the great thing about going up in October, beyond the colors and being right on the lake, is there's nobody up there. Spring and summer are their big season.

RRX: Of course.

SW: They've got so many buildings there, and it's wonderful for songwriters. One day they can go to this beautiful, huge auditorium and set up on the stage with a baby grand and write. And then the next day they might be in a little stone chapel with pews or one of the old rustic cabins or just go down to the lake docks. There's so much variety. I really embrace the idea of what it looks like for a room or a scene to be a co-writer. The way we write in a cathedral is different from the way we

write in a cabin. You actually begin to take on in your writing the atmosphere of the physical places that you are.

RRX: I'm a songwriter; I write lyrics and play a lot of instruments poorly.

SW: (Laughs) Me too.

RRX: But ... I write a song almost every day, lyric-wise.

SW: Wow, that's great.

RRX: It's not like I always complete it that day; maybe I'll just do a verse or something like that. I only bring this up because a retreat like this for someone like me would be awesome. It would be great to get away from the city that surrounds us, get out to the wilderness, and put your feet on the ground. I think with someone like me, the lyrics would be so much different, and the song would come out exactly like the surroundings.

SW: It's interesting - Rick Rubin, the famous producer, has kind of become music's guru right now. He sits and pontificates on different parts of art, and he wrote this great book called "The Creative Act: A Way of Being." If you haven't read it, I would read it; it's brilliant. For the first couple years, we actually gave that book as part of the package for the retreat. This year we're giving the writer Jeff Tweedy from Wilco's book "How To Write One Song," and it's a really practical book. Where Rick Rubin's book is very philosophical about art and music, Jeff Tweedy's is about exercises that you can use to help you in your writing. It's a very practical handbook. We used to use Rick's, and he's very much about taking time to get out and to walk and to discuss things. He talks about picking seeds: you're just out there not really thinking about it; you're just grabbing thoughts, ideas, pictures, and melodies. Then go back, sit down, and begin to arrange things. So we do morning walks that are mandatory. After we have breakfast, we take morning walks either by yourself or with others, maybe by the lake. We breathe and pick up the seeds of ideas.



Maybe talking to a co-writer about different things to plan to write about or whatever. Then everybody spreads out for the rest of the morning to any of these locations, either by themselves or with somebody else, and works on writing. Then we come back, and there's lunch. Melanie O'Malley, who runs O'Malley's Oven in Troy, is up there for the entire four days and does all of the cooking; it's all homemade and just amazing. She grew up in a musician family; her father's a luthier, makes guitars ... so she knows that whole scene. She loves being up there. We all meet and have a big dinner together at the table and talk. And then some nights, maybe in the evening, we'll have discussion time about things that they are thinking about or want to talk about as a group. Sometimes they're playing stuff they've written before, and on the final night they play stuff that has come out of the week so far. We even do bonfires, you know?

RRX: It's all very inspirational. Just staring at a fire in general will get you thinking. The sky and the stars up there; just stare out, and thoughts can just come. So at the end of the journey, do you showcase what you've done for the week?

SW: Yeah, in a sense. That happens in two different ways. On the final night of the retreat, we sit down, glass of wine or whatever, fire in the fireplace, and we go around, and everyone plays for each other ... and it's usually not necessarily 100% finished work at that point. They maybe got the majority of the song done, and they've moved on to another

maybe got the majority of the song done, and they've moved on to another song they're working on. Maybe they've collaborated with somebody else ... so you never know, but they'll go through and play what they've had so far. Then two months later, on December 10th, we will do a showcase at The Waiting Room in Troy, where Song City is. At that point, they will have had a chance to go home and finish it all up. Then we'll do a full production of all 10 writers in completed form of versions of the songs that came out. It's kind of the final recital.

RRX: How does one apply to be a songwriter for the next one?

SW: I think it's between June and July that the applications are out there. Just go online to songcitytroy.com/ink; there's a fairly simple one-page application. It talks about your past experience, what you'd like to get out of it, gives a couple links for songs that you've written, a place for lyrics, and a description of yourself. It's a fairly straightforward application. All of the applications come in over a month, and I've got a selection team of six people (it changes each year). I send them all of the applications, and they send me back their recommendations, their top 10. Once we compile them, we look at "do we have variety?" Then it's a matter of not just looking at the individual, but here are 10 people with genre diversity.

Continued on page 5...



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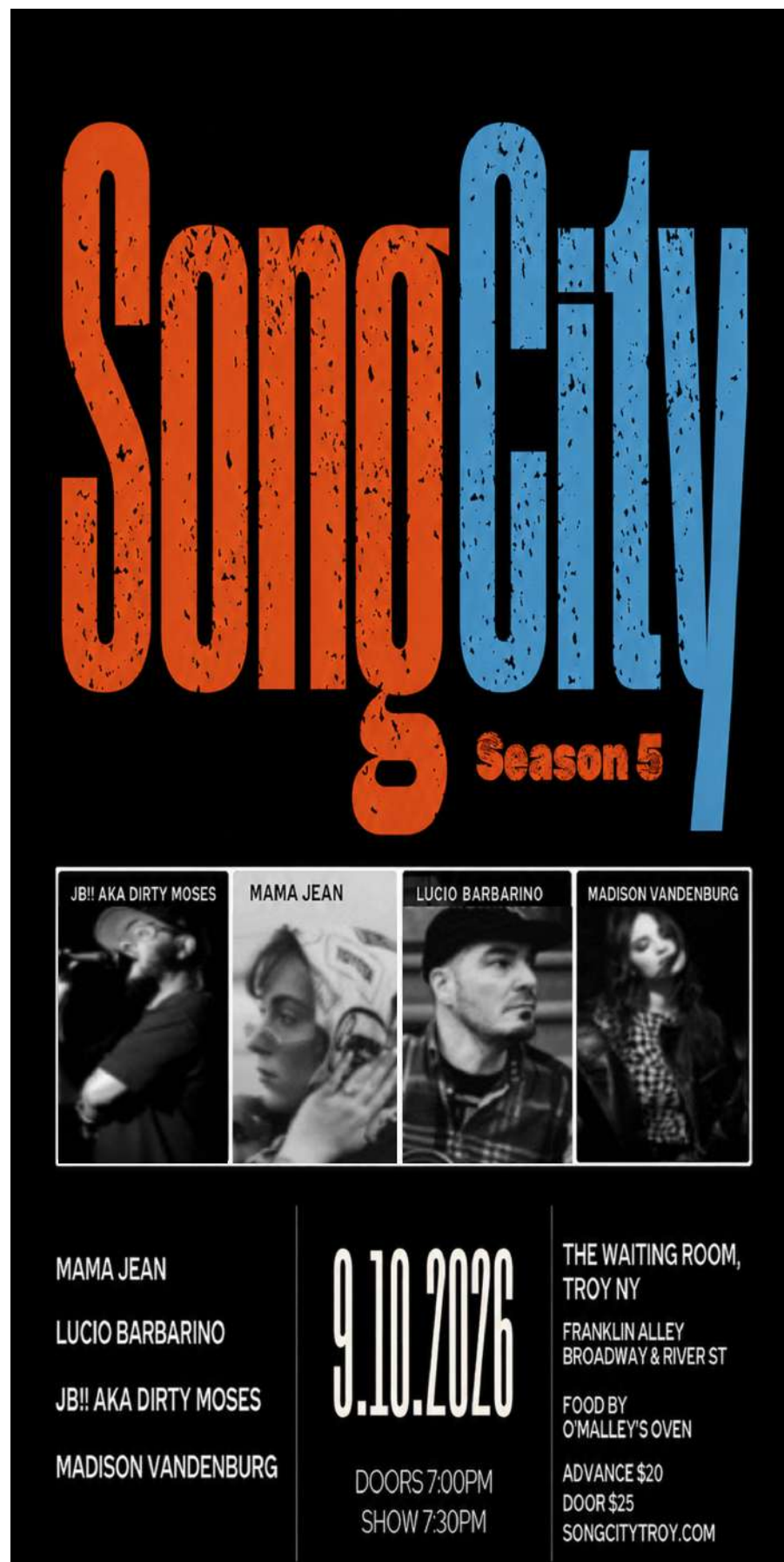
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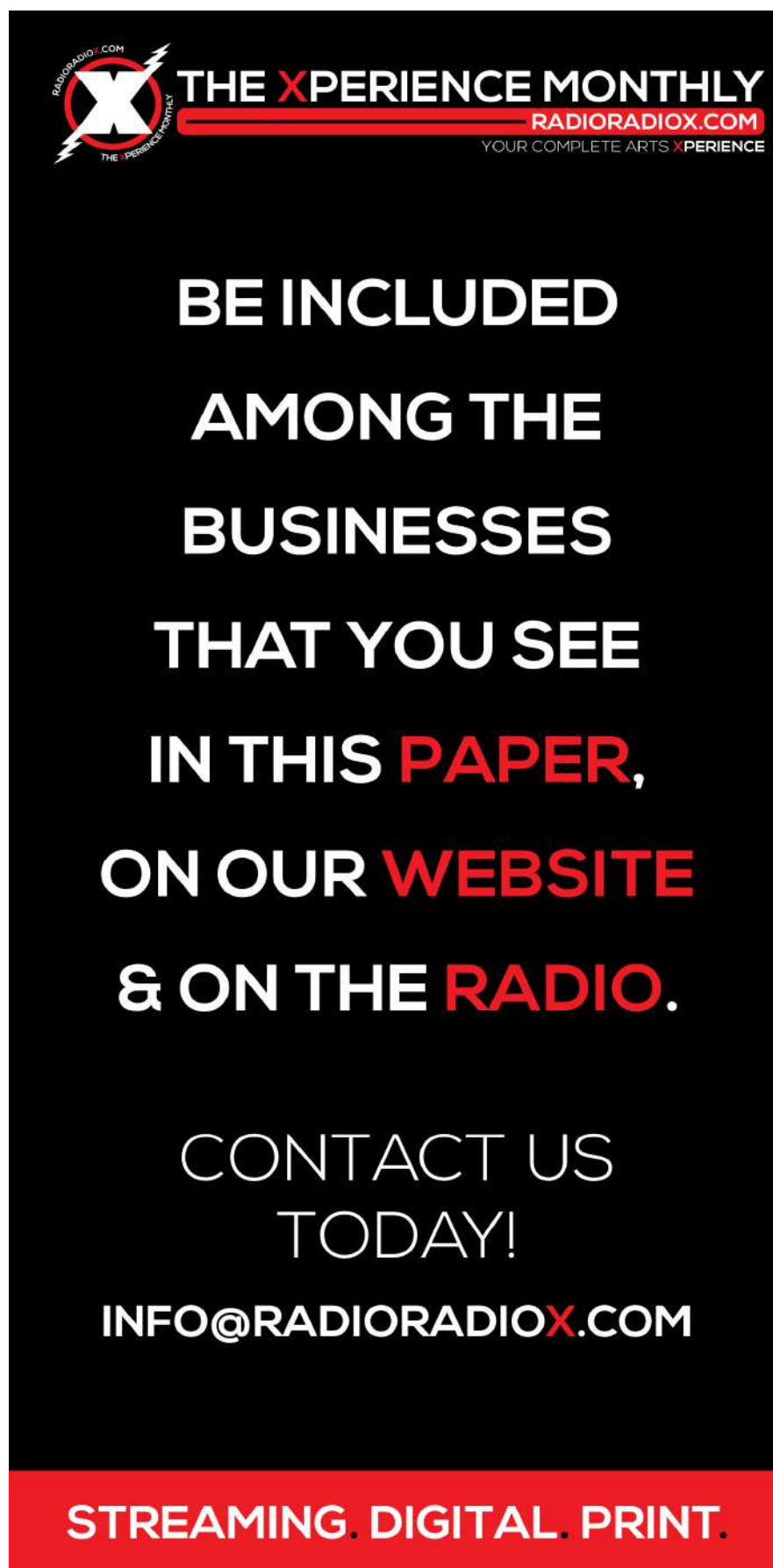
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3 Questions with Matty Finn *By Rob Skane*

Matty Finn is a working musician. I mean it, check his schedule - he's gigging nonstop. He plays and sings from the heart, and that's rare these days. You can find him at mattyfinn.com

RRX: What was the moment that made you pick up a guitar and never put it down?

MF: There was a local (Albany) acoustic duo which was kind of a rarity in those days (early '90s), other than on "MTV Unplugged." "VH1 Storytellers" was still in the making at the time and debuted in 1996, which was the same year I first began my full show public performances. The incredible sound of that duo's booming acoustic guitars, both having masterful counterpoint ability and polyphonic technique with both their guitars and their voices, hit me like a locomotive. That alone was a huge part of me developing my personal technique.

RRX: If you could go back and tell your

younger self one thing about playing guitar, what would you say?

MF: Never put the guitar down for more than a day or two. For me, now that I'm free of stressful jobs, people, and situations ... I not only want, but I have an extreme need to play every day. It's an incredible feeling. A release of dopamine, cortisol, melatonin, and serotonin, which are all natural hormones. When these are in correct alignment, the feeling/groove in which I'm achieving is untouchable. Makes me feel as though I'm just plainly on top of the world when entering into that zone.

RRX: When you're not onstage or recording, what kind of stuff do you play when no one's listening?

MF: I play anything and everything constantly, although I seem to consistently land on classic/contemporary rock/folk and a bit of blues and country from the '40s on into

the '90s. Always adding new old songs to my "deepish" repertoire. It's what keeps me a good distance apart from others as far as my shows go. Yes, I play the common and the classics when warranted or requested. My wheelhouse, though, is the somewhat forgotten lesser hits that crowds all remember and love. We can all play "Don't Stop Believin'," which was a top 10 hit, but I'm going to give you something like "Lights" (#68) or perhaps "Anytime" (#83) ...

It's been said that I'm multidimensional, with a very soulful voice, whether performing soft background/crooner type music or rock & roll/upbeat shows, depending on the venue's needs.

In summation, I refuse to toot my own horn. I'd much rather people take in a show or three of mine and come to their own conclusion.

And the music never stopped ...



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Continued from Page 47...

Up. Down. Back. Forth. Slowly. Hypnotically. Relentlessly. I had discovered I was sitting behind "the human bobblehead". Then, everyone sat. Except him. And suddenly I was staring at this enormous hat oscillating above a completely stationary human body like some kind of malfunctioning carnival attraction.

At some point, apparently having been sucked into his vortex, I lost control of my lower extremities - totally unaware that I was doing anything ... I apparently began using my feet to attempt to make his empty seat touch the back of his legs. My "Row-N-Seat-Buddy" looked over and asked: "What are you doing?" Excellent question. "Um ... I think I've been hypnotized. I have no control over my lower extremities." This seemed like the only reasonable explanation. Eventually I escaped the gravitational field of "Hat-Man-Dude" and returned my attention to the stage. And there was Brandi Carlile. Still singing. Still telling stories.


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An Interview:

Aged in Whiskey, Rhythm & Chords

by Sara Busone

Leslie Barkman of Lou's Blues and The Hammerhead Horns sits down with Sara Busone to discuss WAMM Fest 2026, her many projects, the art of songwriting, and what she enjoys about current performers in the area today.

RRX: You just did a big show out in Valatie, right?

LB: Yes, we did.

RRX: And that was in the gazebo in the middle of town, correct? How was that?

LB: Hot. It was really hot, but it was lovely. Because ... the thing that I loved most about it was a group of women who got all the dirty little songs that I sang. You know, I love to do metaphor. (Laughs)

RRX: I like that. So, you describe your musical styling as Old Lady Blues ... can you speak to that a little bit?

LB: Sure ... Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, Wallace ... they wrote great songs, and I can identify with them as women writing and the situations that they found themselves in, especially with men. And they could sell songs. They knew how to sing a song to sell it, and that's an art. And the more you try it, the more fun it becomes. It's really fun to sell a song. You have to absolutely commit to it, which is what those ladies did.

RRX: So you really look at it from a songwriter and performance point of view, almost like the architecture of songwriting. How would you describe songwriting and performance ... what inspires you?

LB: First, a chord pattern ... a key ... maybe even one note that I – I just sit at a piano and I play with sound. I'm not that technical. I don't know a great deal about music theory. But I have to have a pattern. I have to have an idea of where things are going, so if I find something that I think I like ... the sound ... then I hear a rhythm in it, and I collect thoughts all the time. So, I have five or six songs I'm working on right now simultaneously, and I've got ... maybe one verse for each song. Or maybe I might combine them. But it's about the rhythm and the chord pattern. Often, I will take a walk after I find a little rhythm in a melody so that I can see how it feels to say those words. Like poetry, you have to have iteration ... it has to be easy to sing. You have to be able to articulate it.

RRX: So, the Hammerhead Horns ... you joined right after the band formed. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

LB: During COVID, I had jams in my backyard. I invited bands to come into my backyard, and invited people in to hear them. And I invited the Hammerhead Horns because one of the first things I did in terms of interviewing people was, I interviewed Mike Kelly. Then the Man in the Hat, and so he came with Hammerhead Horns into my yard, and they played, and they asked me to sing a song, "God Bless the Baby." That was the first song I sang with them in my yard, and then a couple of times they asked me to join them when they were out playing, just for a song or two. And now they say they can't do it without me.

RRX: Tell me a little bit about the band?

LB: Trombone ... Jeff Roberts. Bob Button on trumpet. Bob Assini on drums and spoons. Mike (Kelley) on piano. I play a little piano, but Mike is a genius on piano, and he plays the bass with his left hand continually while he's doing all sorts of crazy things with his right. For me, it's been an opportunity to focus on selling songs because that's what my motive in singing a song is: to make sure I identify with that song and make sure I get the message across. Plus, I love to act sexy ... I do.

RRX: That's very cool. So, you really enjoy the art of performance as well as the writing.

LB: I've been told I used to perform on the bar when I was three.

RRX: Tell me a little more about that!

LB: Well, I was born in the fifties, so during that time, families went to bars. Kids played in the parking lot, parents got drunk inside. Everybody got a pizza. I have a song about that. It's called "Aged in Whiskey," which I feel like I have been. And then, in school, I was always doing musical things, you know. When I was raising my children, I was in church being held down by the choir director to not move too much.

RRX: So there it was! As a child, you could see it.

LB: Yeah, I just loved it. It's easier for me to perform for people sometimes than it is to socialize.

RRX: I get that. Do you feel like you have to get in character before and after the show, like you have to shift, or does it just happen naturally?

LB: It happens naturally, and I never feel like I'm in a character. I feel like I'm just being me.

RRX: So tell me about your other band, Lou's Blues.



Photo By: Timothy Reidy

LB: Well, I put together a band, Lou's Blues. Then COVID hit. It was a real blues band with screaming guitar (laughs) ... Joe Lowry (playing) guitar, and I have to tell you there is nothing that makes my heart sing like a guitar. I just love that sound ... makes me feel warm. And I have a soul, but I'm not a great blues singer in terms of having a rough voice ... like Chris (Busone) has a rough voice ... he has a really rough voice, and I'd have more like a pure kind of sound. But I love blues.

RRX: Tell me a little bit about WAMM. How familiar are you with WAMM Fest? Have you attended any of the jams?

LB: I went a couple of times. My schedule didn't let me do that too much. Plus, it's getting hard to carry my piano. So that's been my activity lately. I need a roadie really bad. (Laughs)

Continued on page 34...

Continued from Page 52...

Finding the right people for the role and setting that aside before we even commit to doing the show, which isn't always the case. You know? Since we are not a not-for-profit, we're also one of the few theater companies locally that pays everybody involved in the show a stipend; that's very important to us. That's another reason why we didn't go the not-for-profit route.

RRX: I respect the hustle as a small business ourselves.

AH: I'm just a believer that if my work is good, people are gonna come and see it!

Breathing Time

Cast: Nick Martiniano, Chad Reid, Rhiannon Artico, Laura Graver, Emily Bryan, and Jacob Bell.

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

Friday, September 18, 2026 — 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, September 19, 2026 — 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, September 20, 2026 — 2:00 p.m. (Matinee)

Friday, September 25, 2026 — 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, September 26, 2026 — 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, September 27, 2026 — 2:00 p.m. (Matinee)

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Bob Seger Saves the '70s *by Art Fredette*

Disco didn't suck, but it was vapid!

The '60s came to an end with more of a whimper than a bang. The heady days of Woodstock and Haight-Ashbury had imploded with Altamont, and experimentation in music had morphed into doe-eyed singer-songwriters and overblown, self-indulgent prog. Meanwhile, under the surface, in urban areas, a new funky dance music was gaining popularity. This music would later be co-opted and turned into what became disco. A true cash cow was born. Rock and roll was under attack by formulaic beats and wispy vocals from the Diva du Jour. Deney Terrio and John Travolta were here for your children or worse, your parents.

Think about it - boomers dumped tie-dye and went out en masse to get polyester wrap-around dresses and the worst fashion curse of all time, leisure suits. Gone were moccasins and in were vinyl platforms. Hair was slicked back, and a plethora of gold chains replaced the peace symbol. Let's boogie! and do it in the ugliest clothes possible! Hey, while the kids are at home, a couple lines wouldn't hurt. Also, while we're at it, let's have our hero bands cut disco songs to cash in. Nobody wants to miss a payday. We just spent a decade crawling in the mud and worshipping the power of flowers. At least this fad is indoors, and people bathe more.

The Bee Gees, arguably one of the best vocal groups of the '60s, went all in. The "Saturday Night Fever" soundtrack was omnipresent. Falsetto sell-out the theme of the day. The Rolling Stones gave us almost six minutes of "Emotional Rescue." Hey Mick, stuff that fine Arab charger up your ass. The Dead did "Shakedown Street"; hippies gotta eat too. Van Morrison - yes, even Van the Man - fell in line with "Wavelength." Then, of course, the most atrocious example of them all: "I Was Made for Lovin' You," by KISS. Really? I knew Gene was a brand manager, and Paul was a bit of a fop, but how in any world could you do this to Ace?

UGHHHH! KISS was entry-level metal for my entire generation. How does a band that did "Strutter" and "God of Thunder" betray us like that? Unforgivable! Rod Stewart ... "DA YA Think I'm Sexy?" No, but you used to be great! You look like a tart. Dude, you were in the Faces!

And on the edge of it all was Bob Seger. Seger was not a newbie to the music scene. He had been around for a long time, and he believed in rock-n-roll. Listen. I know "Old Time Rock & Roll" is overplayed wedding music. Hell, I did the wedding DJ thing for over two decades; I get it. If I never hear that song again ... good! Also, let's address "Turn The Page." All I have to say about that song is, yes, please, turn it and shut the damn book. What a whine fest. But Bob never sold out!

While everyone around him was going disco, Seger kept swinging. Was his band the best band technically? No. There weren't any guitar gods, drum heroes, or keyboard wizards on stage - nope. These guys were a bar band, a good bar band. There were probably better players in the local scene, but that isn't the point. The point was they cared about rock-n-roll. Check out "Live Bullet" or "Nine Tonight"; it is all there. Nothing programmed, nothing studio-sweetened. Just a band, some good songs and the desire to play. You wouldn't hear this music on the light-up dance floor as you did your best Travolta moves draped head to toe in synthetic fiber and doused in Hai Karate cologne. This was the music for the people who still bush drank around a bonfire. The music of the guys driving trucks. The music for people who loved real drums, a well-formed lyric, guitar, bass, and rock. Bob never sold out. Songs like "Nutmash City Limits," "Ramblin Gamblin Man," and "Hollywood Nights" are smokin'. Then there are the story songs: "Night Moves" and "Main Street" are damn good songs. He carried the torch until his contemporaries realized the error of their ways and came back home, because rock and roll never forgets. Thanks, Bob!



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The story of the Shoofly Pie Tug of the Year!



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IN THE INDUSTRIAL RAMP-UP INTO WWII SHE WAS DESIGNED TO SERVE AS A HARBOR MINE TENDER. THE WATERWAYS JOURNAL PROUDLY DESCRIBED HER 64 FEET AS “HUSKY, WELL BUILT, ALL WELDED” — BUT THIS WAS A BIT MISLEADING. WELDING WAS STILL NEW TECHNOLOGY. SO AT A SHIPYARD ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF CHICAGO, HER COMPLEX CURVES AT THE STERN OF THE SHIP WERE RIVETED, THE OLD FASHIONED WAY. BY WOMEN. (THAT WAS NEW-FASHIONED.) THIS SHIPYARD WAS ONE OF THE FIRST TO EMPLOY MIDWESTERN WOMEN WHO ARE NOTED FOR THEIR PRAGMATISM AND STRONG ARMS.

SHOOFLY WAS LAUNCHED IN DECEMBER OF 1941, FOUR DAYS AFTER THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR. THE ARMY PUT HER TO WORK ON A TOP-SECRET PROJECT, LAYING ANTI-SUBMARINE INDICATOR LOOPS AT THE MOUTH OF NEW ENGLAND HARBORS. THESE WERE SUBMERGED CABLES LAID ON THE SEA BED AND USED TO DETECT THE PASSAGE OF NAZI SUBMARINES. YOU’VE LIKELY NEVER HEARD OF THIS PROGRAM BECAUSE IT WAS A NIFTY IDEA THAT RESULTED MOSTLY IN FAILURE. (ONCE OR TWICE THEY THINK THEY SPOTTED A SUB?) WE CAUGHT NO NAZIS.

AFTER THE WAR, SHOOFLY WAS PAINTED HIDEOUS BRIGHT ORANGE AND CONVERTED INTO A FIREBOAT THAT GUARDED THE MOTHBALL FLEET ANCHORED OFF MOBILE, ALABAMA. IN 1985 SHE WOULD BE GIVEN TO THE CITY, AND IN 1993 SHE WAS THE RESPONDING VESSEL FOR THE DEADLIEST CRASH IN AMTRAK HISTORY. UNDER HEAVY FOG A TOWBOAT PILOT HAD LOST HIS BEARINGS AND STRUCK A RAIL BRIDGE. EIGHT MINUTES LATER A FULLY LOADED PASSENGER TRAIN DERAILED INTO THE BAYOU, KILLING 47 PEOPLE. SHOOFLY HELPED PUT OUT THE FIRE AND BECAME THE BASE FOR A HIGHLY PUBLICIZED RESCUE OPERATION.

AFTER RETIRING AS A FIREBOAT, SHOOFLY WAS AUCTIONED OFF TO AN UNLUCKY GUY WHO PROMPTLY LOST HER IN A POKER GAME WITH A TEXAS SHIPYARD OWNER.

SHE WAS LATER BOUGHT BY A MAN PLANNING COASTWISE TRADE. HE THOUGHT THERE WAS MONEY IN THE ‘RED BEANS AND WASHING MACHINES’ ROUTE TO HAITI, WHICH LACKS A CONTAINER PORT. PERFECT FOR A SMALL SHIP. AS A WARM-UP THE TRADER (CLAIMED TO HAVE) SMUGGLED 4,000 POUNDS OF POT FROM JAMAICA TO NEW ORLEANS, HIDDEN INSIDE SHOOFLY’S 3,000 GALLON FUEL TANK. THEN LATER IN HAITI HE MET A... WORKING WOMAN. SHE SIGNED ON AS CREW, THEY GOT MARRIED, HAD A SON. SHE GOT TIRED OF THE BEATINGS. MOVED OUT. DIVORCED. SO HE HIRED SOMEBODY TO MURDER HER. THE MURDERER WAS INEPT, GOT CAUGHT PLANNING OVER BEERS. NO MONEY TO PAY THE LAWYER? NO WORRIES, THIS LAWYER ACCEPTED THE BOAT AS PAYMENT, AND SOLD IT FOR HOT CASH.

A COASTAL SALVAGE DIVER SPENT THE NEXT FEW YEARS PLYING THE MID-ATLANTIC COAST, SNIFFING FOR TREASURE IN HIS SPARE TIME. AND ONE DAY HE GOT THE GOLD. BUT ALSO THE BENDS. ALSO THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE MOB? THIS PART’S FUZZY. SO HE SOLD THE TUG TO THE TIDELAND INSTITUTE.

TUG SHOOFLY PIE IS NOW BASED IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, WHERE SHE IS A MOBILE LABORATORY FOR CULTURAL EVENTS ON THE WATER. SHE CAN OFTEN BE SEEN AROUND THE HARBOR WITH A BAND ON THE ROOF, AND HER HOBOPHONIUM SOUND SYSTEM (MADE OF TUBAS AND OLD SHOES) IS A DISTINCTIVE SILHOUETTE.

LAST WINTER, NEW YORK HARBOR FROZE UP THE WORST IN THIRTY YEARS. THE REGULAR COAST GUARD ICEBREAKERS WERE OVERWHELMED. SO ANY STEEL TUG THAT CAN WIGGLE WAS CALLED INTO SERVICE. IN BITTER COLD SHOOFLY BROKE ICE ON NEWTOWN CREEK, CLEARING A PATH FOR HEATING FUEL BARGES. WE ENCOUNTERED 7 INCH THICK ICE, WHICH WE (CAREFULLY) SMASHED. CRUSHING ICE WITH A 68-TON BOAT IS AS SATISFYING AS YOU IMAGINE.

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CAPTAIN N.D. AUSTIN



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SEPTEMBER 11TH, 12TH AND 13TH

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6:30 PM - 7:30 PM: TENTATIVE LIVE MUSIC BY TROY SAMBA (VISITOR'S CENTER)

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12TH

10:00 AM - 6:00 PM: TOURS OF DOCKED TUGS (OPEN TIMES VARY BY TUG)

10:00 AM - 11:00 AM: TUG TALK (PEEBLES ISLAND):

10:00 AM - 11:30 AM: LIVE MUSIC BY CURRAGH (VISITOR CENTER)

10:00 AM - 3:00 PM: BOAT RIDES (AT BATTERY/BOAT LAUNCH AREA AT FOOT OF 1ST STREET)

10:00 AM - 6:00 PM: FARMERS MARKET, BOUNCE HOUSE (AT LOCK 2)

10:00 AM - 4:00 PM: WATERFORD FIRE DEPARTMENT OBSTACLE COURSE (AT LOCK 2)

11:30 AM - 12:30 PM: TUG TALK (PEEBLES ISLAND): "2026 TOTY SHOWCASE - THE HISTORY OF THE SHOOFLY PIE" BY N.D. AUSTIN

11:00 AM - 2:00 PM: FACE PAINTING (AT LOCK 2)

12:00 AM - 2:00 PM: LIVE MUSIC BY TOM HARDING (VISITOR CENTER)

1:00 PM - 2:00 PM: TUG TALK (PEEBLES ISLAND): "A TUGBOAT MEDLEY - AQUARIUM/ LET THE BARGELOAD IN" BY NEW YORK STATE MARINE HIGHWAY

2:30 - 5:30 PM: LIVE MUSIC BY OVERTURE FEATURING GINGER MILLER

3:00 PM - 5:00 PM: LIVE MUSIC BY THE WORD (LOCK E-2 PARK)

3:30 PM - 4:30 PM: TUG TALK (PEEBLES ISLAND): "TOPIC TBD" BY RUSS VANDERVOORT

2:00 PM MARINERS LINE TOSS ROUND 1 (VISITOR'S CENTER, OUTSIDE)

6:00 - 9:00 PM LIVE MUSIC BY WILLOUGHBY STATION

8:45 PM: FIREWORKS!

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13TH

10:00 AM - 3:00 PM: TOURS OF DOCKED TUGS (OPEN TIMES VARY BY TUG)

10:00 AM - 3:00 PM: BOAT RIDES (AT BATTERY/BOAT LAUNCH)

10:00 AM - 2:00 PM: FARMERS MARKET AND BOUNCY SLIDE (AT LOCK 2)

9:30 AM - 12:00 PM: LIVE MUSIC BY SCOTT STOCKMAN (VISITOR CENTER)

10:30 AM - 11:30 AM: TUG TALK (PEEBLES ISLAND): "REVOLUTIONARY NEW YORK & THE ERIE CANAL" BY BRAD UTTER

11:00 AM - 2:00 PM: FACE PAINTING (AT LOCK 2)

12:00 PM - 1:00 PM: TUG TALK (PEEBLES ISLAND): TBD

12:00 PM: MARINERS LINE TOSS COMPETITION, ROUND 1 AND FINALS (VISITOR CENTER, OUTSIDE)

1:00 PM: AWARDS CEREMONY AT LOCK 2



An Interview:

Various Fields

by Larry Felton

On a Sunday afternoon in early August, I visited the Blake Annex to watch Hayes Fields and his sons, Lex and Tre, record Episode 103 of their podcast, Various Fields. Hayes is an actor, musician and member of the MopCo Improv Theatre company. After the podcast wrapped, the three sat down to talk about how a family project grew into a showcase for the Capital Region's creative community.

RRX: Before there was a podcast, what was life like for the Fields family?

Hayes: Creativity has always been part of our family. When I was growing up, we'd go to my mother's and father's house and we'd do skits. We'd pretend to be in an elevator or make up little scenes.

When Tre and Lex were growing up, that same spirit stayed with us. We were cartoon adjacent, comic book adjacent, always talking, joking, making each other laugh. As a father, it was a delight to watch them grow into these incredibly creative people.

RRX: Where did the idea for Various Fields come from?

Tre: Dad was doing more acting and wanted another way to get himself out there. We'd all worked on different creative projects, but this was the first time we'd really come together as a family.

Lex: He said, "Let's do a podcast," and we all said, "Let's see what happens."

Hayes: We'd never done a podcast before. We didn't know what we were doing, and that became part of the idea. My father used to say, "We don't know nothing." We figured we'd just start, learn and get better.

RRX: What has the podcast added to your family?

Tre: Growing up, Sundays were church and family. As we got older, everybody's schedules changed. We stayed close, but life naturally pulls you in different directions. The podcast became one thing we could all commit to every week.



Lex: That's what surprised me most. You start slowly pulling apart and you don't even realize it's happening. Now every Sunday I get to see my dad and my brother. Even though we're recording a podcast, we're also just hanging out.

RRX: At what point did you realize the podcast could become more than just the three of you talking?

Hayes: Our family has always believed in reaching out to people. We talk a lot about encouraging literacy, getting people registered to vote and helping wherever we can. The podcast gave us a platform to do those same things more publicly.

RRX: Your family has a phrase: "Seek out to reach out." What does that mean?

Hayes: I always said that to these guys growing up: seek out to reach out. Look for opportunities to help people.

Lex: Dad said that to us almost every night before we went to bed. Now we have a place where we can actually do it. Maybe somebody has an art project or a story to tell. We can say, "Come on. Tell your story. We'll throw your voice out into the world."

RRX: Did you always know what kind of podcast this was going to become?

Tre: Not really. Pretty quickly we

realized we didn't want the show to be only about us. We wanted other people to share what they know.

Hayes: The internet already has enough people yelling at each other. We wanted to build something different. I hope people feel like they're sitting at the table with us. Maybe they don't have that kind of family connection where they are. We hope they can laugh with us, listen with us and just spend some time with us.

RRX: You've let people see the podcast evolve over more than a hundred episodes. How important is it to let the rough edges show?

Tre: Dad has always believed in doing the thing first. As we've gotten more experience, the production has improved, but I like that people can go back and watch us figuring it out. Hopefully someone watches us and thinks, "We could do that."

RRX: The podcast has also become a showcase for the Capital Region's creative community.

Lex: That's become one of my favorite parts. In the beginning it was mostly the three of us. Now we're bringing in local artists, musicians, performers and community members. We get to shine a light on people doing really interesting work.

Tre: If we can help connect creative

people who might never have met otherwise, then we're doing something worthwhile.

Hayes: Albany has been wonderful for us. It's big enough that there's always something happening, but small enough that people can actually build relationships.

RRX: What have these first hundred episodes taught each of you?

Lex: Confidence. I've always been loud and outgoing, but this taught me to trust my own voice. When I say something now, I know why I believe it.

Tre: Meeting all these creative people has reinforced something for me. Your passions are your passions. You shouldn't be embarrassed by them.

Hayes: I finally became comfortable saying, "I'm a podcaster." Sometimes you have to speak something into existence. If you keep doing the work, eventually the words become true.

RRX: What do you hope the next hundred episodes become?

Lex: I hope we become an even bigger platform for other people. If somebody has a story, an idea or a project, I want them to know there's a place where somebody wants to hear it.



Tre: Everybody has something worth sharing.

RRX: Let's finish with a little improv. My father...

Tre: ...was the inspiration for this whole podcast.

RRX: My sons are...

Hayes: ...people who I would have wanted to be my best friends growing up.

RRX: The next hundred episodes are...

Tre: ...a work in progress.

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Continued from Page 23..

RRX: I imagine that's a lot of gear.

LB: Well, just the piano's heavy ... They don't usually have a piano set up in places that are having jams.

RRX: That can be particularly challenging.

LB: Well you know, these guitar players, they forget piano players exist (laughs).

RRX: What do you think about live music in the area right now? Challenges? Benefits? What would you like to see different?

LB: I'm excited for the young folks because there's a lot going on for them. Caity Gallagher ... Zan ... when I was first taking my piano around and going to places, they were there. In fact, Caity came to my house once when she was first starting... I said, "You know, there's nothing I can teach you, you know." But she's wonderful. And I'm interested in their perspective on things too. I don't understand some of the music ... I saw a woman dressed in a birdcage singing and, you know, combinations of instruments... I'm very excited about it. I think that's wonderful and that people are doing it. I go to these blue jams, and I see young people coming, and they're wonderful.

RRX: So you've got these great shows coming up, WAMM coming up, you've got your different bands ... you're prolific!

LB: I'm trying everything. My grandmother played piano. My grandmother recorded me singing when I was a little girl. She taught me to harmonize. She let me sit next to her at the piano. She played for all of our family at parties. She played anything anyone wanted to sing, and my whole family and friends would just surround her for hours, but lucky me ... to sit right next to her. And I have her dresses from the twenties and thirties!

RRX: Oh wow! You do?

LB: Yes, I do, and I wore one the other day at Tawasentha Park.

RRX: Oh, you've performed there?

LB: Any band would love to perform there. They have the best sound system.

RRX: And you've got to wear your grandmother's dress! They had such great attention to detail and fabrics back then.

LB: Yes, and they knew how to make women's bodies look good. I can't find anything to wear in the store these days. (People) in fashion need to focus on us old folks, us older people! (Laughs) I just want to thank Hammerhead Horns for giving me the opportunity to focus on these old songs from when I was growing up!

Leslie Barkman will be performing at WAMM Fest 2026 at Slidin' Dirty in Troy, NY on September 20th



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That creates an obvious question: if we can fix the vocal in the studio, why bother learning to sing better? The answer is simple. A corrected vocal and a great vocal performance are not the same thing.

When most people hear the term voice correction, they immediately think of pitch correction. That is certainly part of it, but modern vocal editing can go much further. We can adjust timing, tighten background vocals, change note lengths, smooth dynamics, reduce unwanted noises, and manipulate things such as vibrato and formants. It is remarkable technology, and I use it. The problem starts when we expect the technology to create something that was never present in the original performance.

Suppose a singer is supposed to sing an A and lands noticeably flat. I can take that note and move it until the software tells me that it is now an A. Technically, I have fixed the pitch. But what if the singer tightened while trying to reach the note? What if the vowel distorted? What if they pushed too much air, lost resonance, entered the note late, or scooped awkwardly into it? Now I have a perfectly tuned version of a poorly sung note.

We can take this idea to an extreme. Imagine taking a recording of Arnold Schwarzenegger speaking and using every modern studio tool available to force every syllable onto perfectly chosen musical pitches. With enough editing, we could potentially make every note register as "correct." Would that

suddenly make the performance comparable to Frank Sinatra? As Arnold said, "Come on, don't bullxxx me!" We would have accurate pitches, but we would not have Sinatra's phrasing, control, tone, timing, or musical instinct. Pitch is only one element.

When a great singer produces a note, many things are happening: pitch, resonance, breath pressure, vowel shape, articulation, dynamics, onset, vibrato, timing, phrasing, and emotional intent. All of those elements combine into what the listener actually experiences. Two people can sing precisely the same melody, and one can leave you awestruck with beauty while the other can leave you heading for the door.

Consider Sinatra. His greatness was never simply a matter of singing the written notes correctly. Listen to the placement of a word, the way he delays a phrase, moves into and away from a note, or uses breath as part of the musical line. If we reduced Sinatra to a series of pitches on a computer screen, we would miss much of what made him extraordinary.

Whitney Houston provides an even more dramatic example. Of course she possessed tremendous pitch accuracy, but that was only the beginning. Her control of dynamics, registration, resonance, vowel modification, ornamentation, and emotional pacing made a melody come alive. A computer might move another singer's notes to the exact pitches Whitney sang. It cannot manufacture the physical coordination, musical choices, and emotional commitment that created her performance.

The principle also applies to singers who were never known for pristine vocal technique. Jimi Hendrix was not Frank Sinatra, and no one needed him to be. Hendrix had an unmistakable vocal personality. Rock, blues, jazz, and

countless other forms depend on bends, scoops, slides, falls, rhythmic displacement, and sounds that sometimes exist somewhere between conventional pitches. Correct every moment of a Hendrix vocal until every pitch sits mathematically in the center of a tuning grid, and we might make the recording technically cleaner and artistically worse.

Human voices are not pianos. A piano gives us C, then D, then E. A singer moves through the spaces between those notes. The human voice slides, bends, approaches notes from above or below, and uses vibrato around a pitch center. In many styles, those movements are not mistakes. They are the style.

That distinction matters when we use correction software. If every deviation from the center of a note is treated as an error, we can slowly remove the very things that tell the listener there is a human being behind the microphone. We can make a singer more accurate while simultaneously making the performance less emotional and more computer-like.

Voice correction also cannot automatically create good tone. If a singer strains to reach a high note, I can move that note until it is perfectly in tune. What I now have is a perfectly in-tune strained high note. The software cannot replace the resonance that was never produced, the breath coordination that was missing, or the freedom that was lost because of tension. The original physical event matters. This is why good producers and engineers will sometimes spend less time trying to repair a bad take and simply say, "Let's do that again."

My preferred studio process is performance first, comping second, correction third, and processing last. First, get the best performances we can. Then, if necessary, build the final

vocal from the strongest moments of several good takes. After that, correct the small things that remain. A note may be slightly flat. A harmony may enter a little early. One phrase might need tightening. Those are exactly the jobs these tools do well. Once the performance is solid, EQ, compression, saturation, reverb, delay, and the rest of the studio can help present that performance in the best possible way. Technology can rescue a recording. It cannot create artistry.

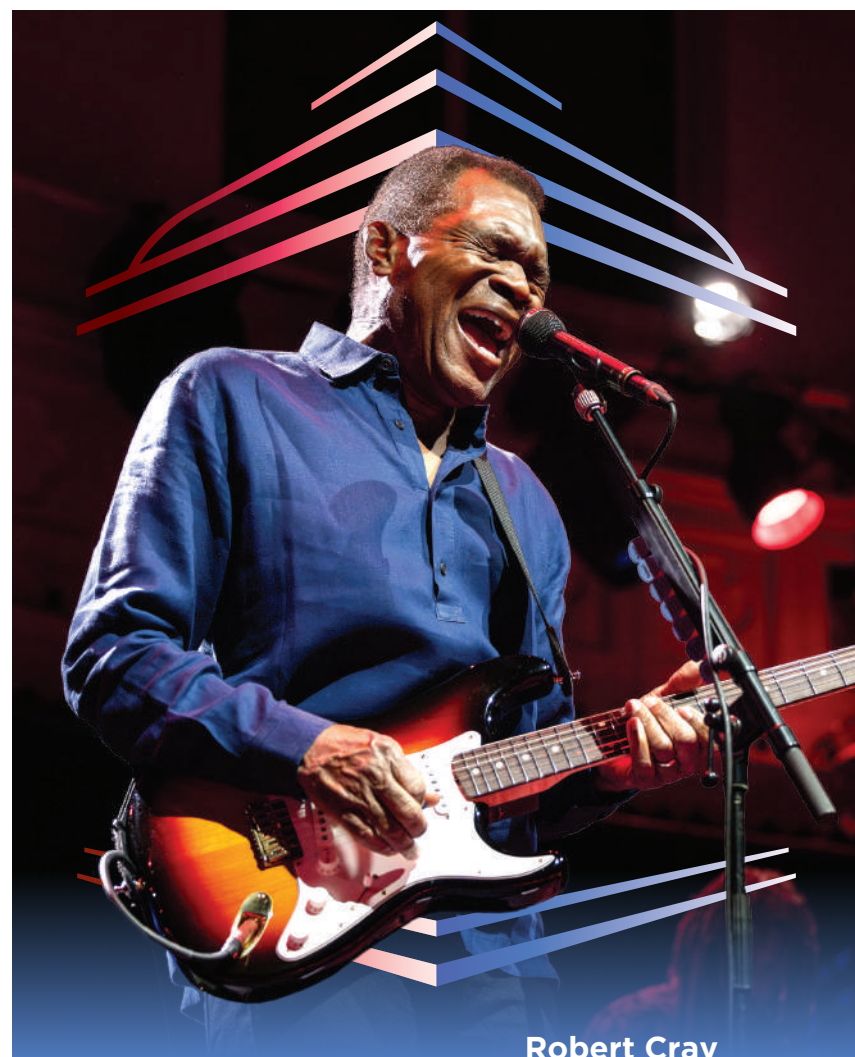
Think of photography. Start with a beautifully composed, properly focused photograph, and editing software can make something excellent even better. Start with something badly lit, out of focus, and poorly composed, and software may rescue pieces of it, but you are asking the computer to reconstruct information that was never there. Vocal production works the same way.

Give me a vocal that is 95 percent there, and modern technology can do wonderful things with the remaining five percent. Give me a performance where we need to rebuild half of what happened, and we may eventually create something technically accurate, but technical accuracy is not the same thing as a great performance.

That is why singers still matter today, when nearly anything can be edited or falsified. Technology has made it much easier for us to create an accurate vocal. It has not made it easy to create a great vocal.

Use the technology. Correct the slightly flat note. Tighten the harmony. Fix the timing problem. Make the recording as strong as it can possibly be. But don't confuse repairing a performance with developing the ability to perform. We could probably make Arnold Schwarzenegger sing every note of a Sinatra song in perfect tune with enough studio work. What we could not do is make him Frank Sinatra.

The computer can move the note. The singer makes the note meaningful.

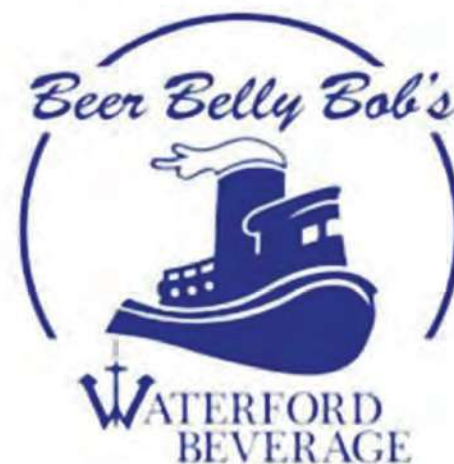


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An Interview

Eileen Markland

by Liam Sweeny

RRX: You play everything from jazz to rock to Celtic, playing in hybrid-type bands where everyone tends to bring their own influences. With your broad musical knowledge, do you end up being a connective or a glue kind of person, or more of a specialist kind of person?

EM: That's a very interesting question. I don't know that I've ever thought about that. I love to challenge myself. And I am completely someone who enjoys the bonus of being around wonderful people that I ultimately grow close to and have decades-long relationships with. But it's the music that drives me. So essentially, you're asking me if, say, I play with a rock band, you're wondering what my function in that scenario is given my experience with other genres.

RRX: Right. If you have a rock Celtic or a rock fusion or a rock something else, or two or three different types of musical styles that were being blended together, I call it a hybrid band.

EM: Oh, OK. One of the projects I'm in right now is totally a hybrid project. And I would say that what I bring is openness to exploring what hasn't been done before.

RRX: You've worked with several symphonies, including the Berkshire, Albany, and Binghamton symphonies. With so many more performers, is it vastly different than playing in a band or a smaller ensemble? And is it harder to play with performers that you may not know as well, even though you are all playing off the same script, so to speak?

EM: That's a really good question - everyone reading the same music and playing in an orchestra. In that world, in that kind of serious, classical music world, it's that everybody understands the same rules. Which is, you show up, there's an established leader, a conductor, or maybe there's an organizer of the small ensemble, and you all read off the same music with the same markings, and the conductor has the ultimate say. Your role is to follow what is out before you as precisely as



possible, and that's the world that I started in when I went to college. I know that world very well, versus being in a band, which is more of a free-for-all, wild-west kind of situation, where the structure isn't as defined. There are unspoken rules. There's certain etiquette that nobody has ever really talked about, but after you've been in the world a while, if you're relatively observant, you'll get it.

I mean, this is how I stepped into it, because I came from a background where everything was very regimented. By the way, I'm extremely grateful for that. I would not change even though that's not where I spend the majority of my musical time these days. I am so grateful that that's my background because a lot of good things came from it. So I would say that it's kind of challenging in the music world for me because I don't always know what the rules are, but I think I've spent enough time in it that I have a pretty good idea of what the rules are. But then it can change from group to group, whereas in the classical world ... I mean literally, in a symphony you have an HR department, so you know if someone's not following it, you can call HR. If you're in a band, no matter how successful or what level, if you will, it's still pretty loosey-goosey.

RRX: So you're a violinist, but you also play the viola and the cello and even the Irish tin whistle. Bands are always

looking for a unique sound and/or instrument to set them apart. Does playing what you play open up playing opportunities more readily, or is it the opposite?

EM: I think that I've been fortunate because, for a long time - it's not so much the case now - but for a long time, the people who do what I do have been few in number, so you know it's kind of like, who are you gonna call? Well, there's her, and then that's pretty much it. But the younger musicians that are coming up, younger violinists and fiddle players, are a lot more broadly experienced, much sooner. So I wouldn't say that's so much the case now. But yes, I think that I've had more opportunity because what I do is relatively unique, and it used to be much more unique.

RRX: So young people are starting to delve out now, are starting to get into instruments that maybe weren't considered much before.

EM: I think it's more stylistic. I think there are fewer violinists than there were when I was coming up, but the ones that are coming up now aren't afraid to play the fiddle. It's not as ... I guess it was kind of looked down upon by a certain segment of society who got their children violin lessons, and I don't think that's so much the case anymore. I think people have relaxed a little bit.

RRX: You're currently based in the Berkshires, is that correct?

EM: Yes.

RRX: It's an area that is neighboring the Capital Region, but it has its own voice and its own culture. What makes the area an attractive place for music, in particular the kinds you play?

EM: The Berkshires - I love it because it is strategically placed between Springfield and Albany. So you can get to a city if you would like to, and obviously I do. And there's this sort of rural artistic culture that really thrives here. And it's not like being somewhere more isolated, where you don't have access to institutions of education or cultural events. We do in the Berkshires; in fact, we have Tanglewood and Jacob's Pillow. So we have a lot of access, but yet there's this slower pace, laid-back, sort of neighborly attitude. So it's really a great place to live. It's strategically placed, and it has this kind of warm rural feel.

RRX: Nice. I didn't know Springfield was a bigger city. I didn't know that. I mean, comparatively.

EM: It's probably a little smaller than Albany. I'm trying to remember the last time I looked at the population of Springfield. But, you know, they have a symphony, and there are colleges here, like full four-year colleges. There's some stuff happening in Springfield. I would say it's the city of Western Massachusetts, even though North Adams is technically a city, but that's questionable. There's Worcester, and then after that it's Springfield, and there's not really much after that,

RRX: When you move between styles, do you find combinations that you particularly enjoy? Is Celtic rock more fun to play than, like, a blues-jazz kind of hybrid, or does it depend on the particular music or the particular players?

Continued on page 5...

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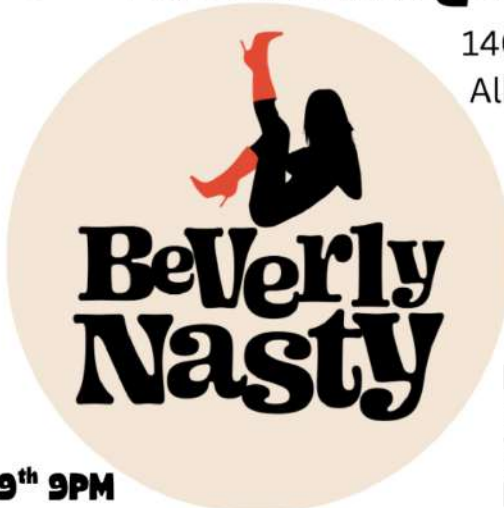
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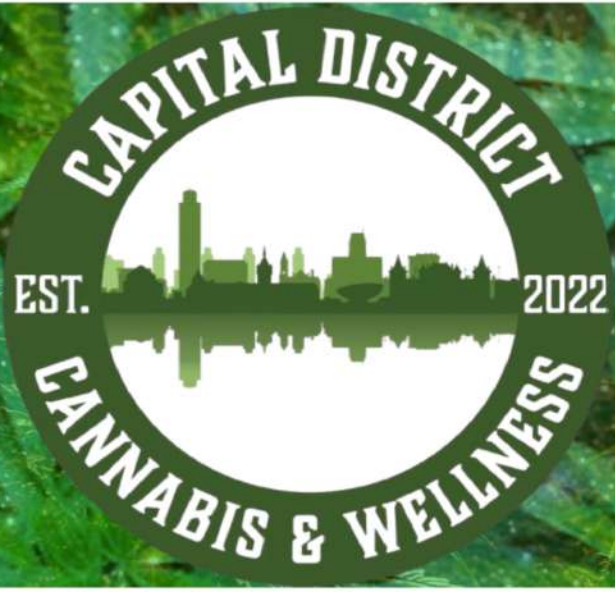
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An Interview

Travis Stealey

by "Chad From Albany" Koenig

I was excited to hear that the Saratoga Comedy Fest will be debuting this year when I saw it come up online. The lineup looked tremendous with Robert Kelly, Ian Fidance, Jaye McBride and Kyle Kinane amongst the headliners. I was always stoked to see friends in the local comedy scene such as Dan Geurin, Korey David, and Andy McDermott, as well as a brilliant comic that I now call my friend, Danny Braff, who I met recently at the Comedy Dojo in Morris Plains, NJ.

As a lifelong comedy fan and supporter (and, even after nearly 20 years on the mic, I am scared to try it myself, although it's a bucket list thing for me), I had to see one of my heroes a couple of weeks ago at the Albany Funny Bone - the legendary Adam Carolla.

His opening comic was a young man named Travis Stealey. I had never seen or met him before, but he was fantastic. Afterwards, we just happened to be outside of the club after I met Carolla and complimented his work. I brought up the festival, and it turns out that he is one of the organizers of it. We struck up an immediate friendship, and I told him I needed to interview him about this great event.

The Saratoga Comedy Festival will be held on September 11-12, 2026, at the Saratoga Springs City Center. Apart from the aforementioned acts, this festival boasts world-class talent such as Dustin Ybarra, Shafi Hossain, and Chris O'Connor and Kerryn Feehan, who co-star alongside Shane Gillis on the smash hit (and brilliant) Emmy-nominated series, "Tires," on Netflix. This festival has a diverse cast of characters performing, and with tickets starting at only \$65, you are getting 60 comedians for the price to see one or two of some of these acts.

RRX: You and I met when you opened for Adam Carolla at the Funny Bone. How long have you been doing standup, and how often are you at the Funny Bone in Albany?

TS: I've been doing standup for about 12 years now. I'm at the Funny Bone once or twice a month on average, either hosting or featuring, and sometimes headlining.

RRX: Tell me - what influenced you to come up with the idea to create Saratoga Comedy Fest?

TS: I performed at a bunch of festivals before, and they are always spread throughout various locations and usually in major cities, so you have to travel to the different spots to see each act. I went to a festival in Las Vegas, and it was all in one building; you could walk from room to room, and it was great. I wanted to do that here so you don't have to travel and can get in as many shows as possible.

RRX: Why did you choose that location?

TS: Saratoga is always busy. And always has events going on. This location (Saratoga City Center) is perfect because it's one building with multiple rooms in it. And it can hold plenty of people.

RRX: Is there food and drink available at this festival?

TS: Yup. There will be a few full bars, and a food vendor there, so everyone can walk out of one room and grab a bite or a drink and go catch the next show!

RRX: That's convenient. I love it. How long have you been planning to do this?

TS: This has been an idea for years now, but in spring of 2025, the wheels really started turning to make it happen

RRX: How did you decide who to book?

TS: I wanted to book a variety of comedians. This way, everyone can look at the flyer and schedule and say, "I'd like to see that one." Plus, with so many other comedians booked, you'll be leaving with a few new favorites you never knew about.

RRX: Who else was involved with the creation of this?

TS: Myself and another local promoter, Joseph Revette, who runs Revhouse Promotions. We both thought this was a great idea, and we both have experience running shows and performing on them; it was a no-brainer. We both just haven't done anything this big yet, haha.

RRX: You have a great lineup of comedians. What brought you to choosing them?

TS: Kyle Kinane was always an influence as a comic. Then we became friends, and I knew he would be perfect for this. Ian Fidance is a madman in the best way possible and another person I can call a friend in the comedy world. The show "Tires" is one of the #1 shows on Netflix, so we booked Chris O'Connor and Kerryn Feehan from the show for the festival. And of course, the legendary Robert Kelly! There is also a bunch of comedians that may not be known yet, but they are just as, if not funnier than, the headliners that I wanted everyone to see.

RRX: I'm looking forward to coming to this. Robert Kelly, Ian Fidance, and Danny Braff are some of my favorites. And locally, Dan Geurin is one of the greats! Do you have a lineup available yet at this time?

TS: The schedule will be released to the public probably in the last week of the month. This way everyone can map out their schedule and catch every comic they want to see.

RRX: What do you want to see most come from this festival?

TS: I want to see everyone laugh and have a good time. The world is a mess, and we all need an escape from reality for a little while. Hopefully this festival does that.

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Brandi Carlile - Human Tour - August 18, 2026

By The Vibe Dog

There are concerts, and then there are incidents.

After many years of voluntarily surrendering evenings to live music, I have developed a reasonably reliable system for determining which is which.

You arrive. You find your seat. You look around at the people who have paid an alarming amount of money to sit in front of, behind, or beside you. You wait for the lights to go down. Somebody eventually walks onto a stage and makes a noise loud enough to justify the entire enterprise. Simple. Civilized. Predictable. Then somebody tells you that Brandi Carlile is one of the greatest live performers on the planet. That is where things become dangerous.

Because everybody I knew who had seen Brandi Carlile live said essentially the same thing: "Best concert I've ever seen!" Well, that's a hell of a thing to tell a man who has been going to concerts since dinosaurs were still arguing over whether arena rock was getting too commercial! Expectations are dangerous animals. So, I entered the Koussevitzky Music Shed at Tanglewood on August 18 carrying a crap-ton of years of accumulated concert baggage and one enormous question: Could Brandi Carlile possibly be as good as everybody claims? The answer arrived shortly after Jensen McRae and her magnificent band tore through a forty-five-minute opening set that this audience actually listened to.

That's worth noting.

Opening acts are frequently treated like the musical equivalent of the safety instructions on an airplane: technically necessary, occasionally useful, and largely ignored by everyone who has already decided what they came to see. Not this night. McRae had the crowd. Then Brandi Carlile walked onto the stage with her for "God Has a Hitman," McRae's track featuring Carlile. And suddenly the evening had stopped warming up. It had begun. What happened next was less a concert than an extended demonstration of what happens when a world-class musician is given a microphone, a great band, several thousand willing accomplices, and apparently no obligation whatsoever to behave like a conventional rock star.

Carlile told stories. Lots of stories. She told stories before songs, after songs, during songs, around songs and, on at least one occasion, because a piece of stage equipment had apparently decided it needed its own moment in the spotlight. She sat down at the piano.

The monitors weren't working. Normally, this is the point where the technical crew begins communicating in increasingly desperate hand signals while the audience stares at the ceiling. Carlile simply explained that she couldn't give the monitor guy too much crap because he was her brother-in-law. "His name is Jerry." Jerry was now part of the show. Eventually, Carlile switched the piano from Fender Rhodes mode to Acoustic Piano mode and - miracle of modern science - the monitors came alive. She looked at the audience. "Should I just play this song on the piano?" The place erupted.

Then she confessed that she had actually wanted to play the song on the piano all along. She had played with us. Beautifully. And we thanked her for it. This was the trick Carlile kept pulling all night: she made imperfection look intentional. She made technical problems funny. She made forgotten parts entertaining. She made thousands of strangers feel like they had somehow been invited over for dinner and nobody had bothered to tell them there would be a concert afterward.

Then came the stories ... Her first airplane ride at seventeen: white-knuckle terror, destination Idaho. Three years later, she and "The Twins" - bassist Phil and guitarist Tim Hanseroth - flew from Washington State to New York City. Their expectations of New York had apparently been assembled by "Home Alone," hearsay, and the imagination of three people who had never seen the place. They expected snow. They'd been told skyscrapers were separated by tiny slivers of blue sky. And they desperately wanted to see cockroaches ... New York, being New York, immediately came through. NYC had apparently rolled out the welcome mat! Then Carlile talked about Elton John. She had idolized him. To her, he was practically an angel. Then she worked with him. The angel turned out to have some human characteristics. And that was apparently the best thing that could have happened. Once she stopped worshipping him and started treating him like a colleague, the music got better.

They performed "Who Believes in Angels?" with Dave Mackay attempting the unenviable task of recreating Elton John's piano work - work that, Carlile noted, Elton himself had approved. There are moments when a piano player must feel that his career has become a hostage situation. I believe this may have been one of them.

Then came the audience requests.

Dangerous territory.

"Dreams" was selected, and suddenly Phil, Tim, and Brandi were conducting an archaeological excavation into their own memories. Who sang the Beach Boys part? Who had the Sgt. Pepper part? Who was supposed to sing what? Nobody seemed entirely certain. Then, somehow, it all clicked. The song happened. The audience exploded. "Turpentine" followed, and this time the crowd was drafted into active service. Tim taught one section their harmony. Brandi and Phil handled the others. For a few glorious minutes, the Koussevitzky Music Shed became a giant human vocal instrument. Then came the zipline story.

Carlile had built a zipline in her backyard. And somehow convinced her wife to test it. This is either marriage or a highly sophisticated insurance fraud scheme. Her wife is British, she explained, and has a peculiar habit of answering questions with questions. "Are the kids in bed?" "That's not appropriate for you to not know where the kids are, is it?" Then came Bonnie Raitt.

Carlile spoke about seeing shows at The Gorge in Washington, including James Taylor, and about her lifelong admiration for Raitt. She had sung the same Bonnie Raitt song every night as a countdown to seeing her perform. Then she sang it. "I Can't Make You Love Me." And for a few minutes, all the jokes disappeared. There are certain songs that remind you why you came to a concert in the first place.

That was one of them. By then, I had stopped wondering whether Brandi Carlile could live up to the hype. She had already backed the truck over it. Twice. Then came my own personal concert experience, with... "The Mad Hatter". A couple in front of me left their seats. Two new people arrived. No worries, right - I mean ... concert seating is a fluid ecosystem. The one who sat directly in front of me was wearing a hat so large it appeared to have its own weather system. I moved left. The hat moved left. I moved right. The hat moved right. This was no longer a concert. It was geometry. Then everyone stood. And I discovered that "Mr. Hat-Man-Dude" and I were exactly the same height. But here's the thing: Everyone else was moving with the music. "Mr. Hat-Man-nequin wasn't. His body remained perfectly still. Only his head moved.

Continued on Page 21...



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Canna Talk

By MBF & 400 River

There is so much going on in NYS cannabis, so I wanted to really delve into it with key players in the market. This interview will be the first in a probably non-consecutive series featuring folks who have helped grow New York's legal cannabis industry from the ground up.

This month, I decided to interview the owner and head cultivator at none other than MB Farm, Rich Taylor. We've been working together for the past four years, since the start of NY's legal cannabis program. In those four years, he grew a brand from zero, formed partnerships with tons of local cannabis operators, opened the state's second microbusiness dispensary, and takes care of our indoor cultivation operation. Let's hear what Rich has to say.

MBF: Did you come from an agricultural background? How did you originally get into cannabis cultivation?

RT: Yes, I did. I started off in 2013 growing hops for my farm brewery. The state allowed hemp cultivation starting around 2017, I think, and I decided to apply for a license. Creating my own recipes for my beer led to growing hemp with the hope of using hemp in beer, in addition to the traditional hops. I experimented a lot with that and saw how using different strains of hemp could impact the beer's flavor. In the process of growing hemp, I became fascinated with the plants.

There are so many great benefits that the plant provides. After growing hemp for over four years and familiarizing myself with the plant, the state prioritized hemp cultivators to get cannabis cultivation licenses.

MBF: What draws you to cannabis and keeps you showing up every day?

RT: More than anything, I enjoy the cultivation aspect of the business. It's so interesting working with cannabis

because there really is new information coming out every day. The plant wasn't studied seriously since it was considered a "drug," so a lot of information was completely anecdotal. There is something to learn every day. This is a labor-intensive business, so I work to cultivate the highest quality cannabis flower I can and then use that in the products we create.

MBF: Did the hemp business get you prepared for the cannabis business?

RT: I would say generally yes. Our first year growing cannabis, we grew acres of plants. This was really similar to growing hemp, and not too much of a change. The evolution of my cannabis business has led to us growing indoors, which is a huge change. There is more focus put on each individual plant, as opposed to growing in bulk. The volume of products we sell now is significantly higher than with hemp-based products, so that was something to get used to. We also have way more variety, so there are lots more products to manage.

MBF: Give us one snippet of information about the cannabis plant that just blows your mind.

RT: It amazes me how quickly the plant can go from a tiny clone to a beautiful, huge flowering plant in such a short amount of time. Most of the plants that we grow will become fully mature in the span of 120 days. I love to see the differences in how the different strains grow up and mature. There is a lot of variety in the cannabis plants.

MBF: Give our readers a quick overview of what the market was like the first year or two of the program here in NY.

RT: The market the first few years was very slow. The slow rollout of licensing for retail dispensaries meant that the market for cultivators to sell into was very small. Because of this, it was difficult to sell the product we had

grown. We spoke to a lot of dispensary owners who had the impression that their stores would be open shortly, but that was not the case. It was a really difficult time for most of the operators in the industry, regardless of whether it was on the cultivation side or the retail side.

MBF: Why did you decide to go with a microbusiness license as opposed to just a cultivation license?

RT: After the second year of operation, when we were allowed by the state to participate in CGS (Cannabis Grower's Showcase), I was convinced that I wanted to remain a part of the retail side of the industry. While my primary interest is on the cultivation side of things, it has been really interesting to see how the retail side of things works and interact with customers.

MBF: You've worked many hours at 400 River as a budtender. Are there any cannabis products that you wish would get more love?

RT: Our Sasquatch is amazing. It actually does get a lot of love, but it's one of my favorites at the moment. This is a gummy product that we did to honor our local cryptid, and we are on our second iteration of it. Other than that, I know that most cultivators would probably say lower THC flower/products. My goal is to create high-quality products, but that doesn't always mean high THC products. It seems like the market is really demanding those high THC products, but having moderate THC and high terpenes is something that I would like to see catch on a bit more.

MBF: Any advice for those looking to get into the cannabis industry? What about starting their own cannabis business?

RT: Like most other businesses, the difference between a hobby and a

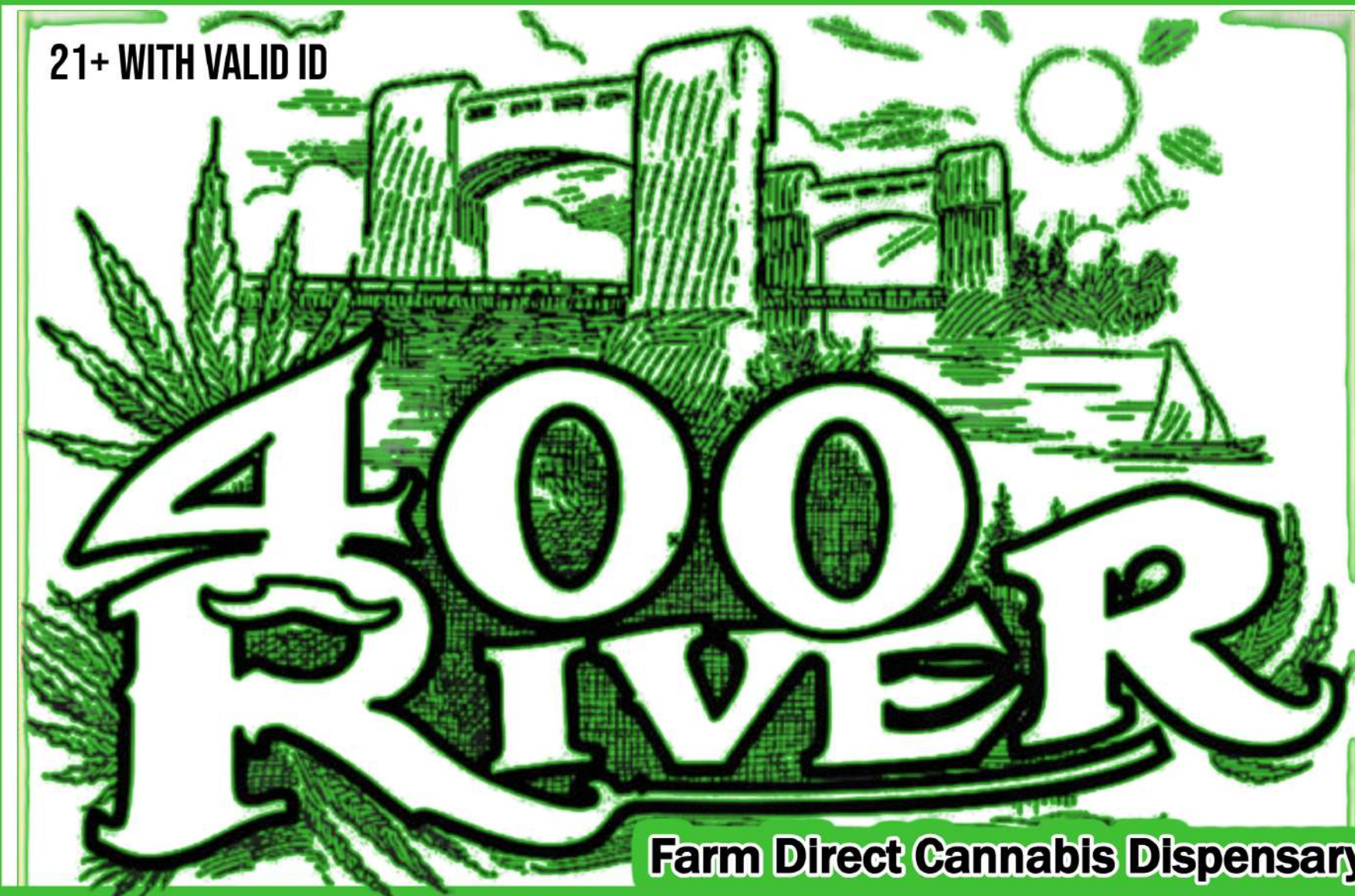
profession is a great divide. It can be a great opportunity, though, because there are so many aspects of the industry.

Cultivation is just a small corner of the industry. There is a need for lab techs, retail managers, processors, sales representatives, graphic designers, and more. So, depending on your skill set, there are a lot of varied opportunities within this industry.

As for starting a cannabis business, I would recommend having a job in cannabis or preexisting experience, or just a lot of money. Growing on a commercial level is way different from having a few plants at home. There are also so many layers of bureaucracy and difficulties because of the federal illegality that make it harder to manage this business than any other business I've owned. If you can navigate that, though, there are a lot of fun and cool opportunities in NY cannabis.



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Aaron Holbriter

(Creative License Theater Collective)

An Interview by Rob Smittix

RRX: You've got some stuff going on, and I think it all starts with Creative License Theater Collective. Tell us a little bit about that.

AH: Creative License was formed by my partner, Casey Polomaine, and me in 2014. We started performing at the Albany Barn, and then in 2021, after the pandemic, we were invited to be the resident non-musical theater company at the Cohoes Music Hall.

RRX: That's awesome. First of all, starting off at The Barn - I love The Barn. I wish that existed when I was single. I have spent some time there. I've chilled out there, and I was like, man ... I almost want to tell my wife I want to live here.

AH: Yeah, so Casey, my partner for Creative License, was until last year the Executive Director at The Barn, so you've probably run into her.

RRX: Oh yeah, I'm sure. That's a really cool place, but Cohoes Music Hall, I mean ... that's the big time! That's Eva Tanguay, that's the fifth oldest music hall in the country.

AH: Yeah, I've lived in Cohoes for ... God, 35 years now, 30 years at least, and I had done some shows with another company years ago at the music hall. It's such a great venue. It just evokes so much theatre history, right?

RRX: Sure does.

AH: You just feel all of it when you're performing there, and it's a very unique feeling.

RRX: You know how you can go up and give a little token of appreciation to Eva and ask for her blessing?

AH: Yep, we always do it before every opening night. The whole cast and crew make a sojourn up to the altar and leave an offering for Eva.

RRX: I've gone ghost hunting, and I've been in cemeteries at night, and I don't usually feel much, but being in Eva's area, you really feel something. It's a claustrophobic area, and I'm like ... alright, here you go, Eva, thank you, I'm out.

AH: Yeah, for sure.

RRX: So, "Breathing Time," I see that you're the director on that. What goes into being a director, and what's "Breathing Time" all about?

AH: Casey and I kind of ... we are the sole people behind Creative License. We're a small company; we don't have a board of directors, we don't have any of that. It's just me and Casey diving in and making stuff happen. We're constantly balancing the jobs of being the producers as



well as the directors and the costume designers and finding people to be the set designers and the lighting designers. There's a lot of crossover between being a producer and then taking on the role of director, which is more just working with the actors, putting the show together, and building the show itself as an entertaining piece of theater. It's a lot of work, but the end result is always worth it because we always know that the show that we're putting on stage is 100% the vision that we're putting forward. It's very artistically fulfilling in that way. As opposed to working for another company, which is not to disparage that, but you know? Working for another company and going in and putting on the show that they want (which is also fine), but it's nice to have that sort of independence and that artistic freedom.

RRX: Oh, absolutely. "Breathing Time" is from the creator of "House of Cards" or something?

AH: Yeah, it was a play written by him (Beau Willimon) not long after "House of Cards" came out. He also wrote a play called "Farragut North," which was turned into a George Clooney movie called "The Ides of March." It was a fairly popular movie. So, he's pretty well known. It's a very interesting play. I'll be honest, it's a little tricky to talk about, only because of a thing that happens in the play that sort of needs to stay ... (Laughs)

RRX: Yeah, you don't wanna do a spoiler alert.

AH: But primarily, it is about four characters who have shared relationships and the way we're describing it ... the New York Times, when they reviewed it back when it was off Broadway, called it "a simple study in how ordinary relationships can be shaped or put in perspective by much larger events."

RRX: Hmmm, alright.

AH: So without getting too much into the details of the plot, you've got two guys who work together, and their typical morning routine - talking things through and their relationship. Then we jump ahead, in the second act, about three weeks, and we meet two people directly related to the first act.

RRX: Okay, I love good theater, even the small stuff that you see at the Steamer or whatever it's called.

AH: Yeah, yeah, Steamer 10 for sure.

RRX: Every time I'm watching a theatrical performance, I'm thinking about how talented these actors are up there, keeping everybody engaged that long. I don't know if I could do that.

AH: We pride ourselves on working with really the best people that we can find for the roles. We go to great lengths and don't often rely so much on just straight auditioning. Our goal really is to just reach out to people who we've worked with or who we know or who we've seen in other stuff.

Continued on Page 24...



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The Prog Digest

By Klyde Kadiddlehumper

WARNING! WARNING! WARNING!

This column is certainly not Prog-related. It is completely, 100% rock and roll. Kinda. And, perhaps, a small lesson about the past.

I've mentioned how long before printing these columns are written. In this case, just a shade over two weeks.

What many of us thought would never happen did last evening.

Ritchie Blackmore was onstage and performed with Deep Purple. After 33 years.

This is either more proof, if you needed it, that we are decidedly headed to an apocalypse or certainly a teaser.

We'll get to the very simple reason for the 33-year split – and yeah, it's pretty simple – in a bit.

Blackmore was a founding member of both Deep Purple and Rainbow ... both on and off, leaving Purple for good in '93.

Now, we get to the part where, of course, there is a woman involved.

Ritchie met a Rainbow fan in 1989. Born Candice Lauren Isralow, then called Candice Loren when she began modeling at 12, and later Candice Night. A Long Island girl (born in Hauppauge), she also worked as a rock and roll radio host at a nearby "unnamed" radio station.

At their initial meeting, she and Blackmore talked ghosts, music, travel, and philosophy, and eventually became good friends and moved in together in 1991.

The two created Blackmore's Night in 1997. OK, so ... Blackmore is known for some killer riffs. However, Blackmore's Night is something, um, different. They are a neo-medieval folk rock band. If I knew what that meant, I'd tell ya.

Perhaps the idea came from Tull's "Songs from the Wood" or "Minstrel in the Gallery." Who knows.

In October of 2008, after 19 years (15 engaged), Blackmore and Night married.

They've a daughter, Autumn Esmerelda, and a son, Rory Dartanyan.

Aside from the couple, there are five other current members and 28 past members.

Instrumentation is seriously interesting, if not confounding. Blackmore plays acoustic and electric guitar, mandolin, mandola, domra, hurdy-gurdy, and nyckelharpa, while Night handles vocals, chanter, cornamuse, shawm, rauschpfeife, tambourine, and woodwinds. Perhaps one day we'll look at some of the really interesting instruments out there, both old and new.

Describing the feel is not a simple task.

Blackmore is a serious monster when in with Purple or Rainbow. Certainly not the case in Blackmore's Night – at least not how we all think of it.

Far more melodic and ethereal at times, Night's vocals can soar, and her lyrics might remind some of Stevie Nicks – although Klyde, to be frank (well, not Frank, but frank ...), finds them a little lighter than Stevie. Pleasant, just not as powerful.

Melodically, the music is nice, easy to listen to, and well produced. Live recordings really show best why they are popular. Of course, I do find that I end up with a serious appetite for a turkey leg ...

As for the rift between Ritchie and Ian Gillan, it's the same old story we see all the time in the entertainment world. Massive egos. Mine's bigger than yours. My groupies are hotter than your groupies.

So after 33 years, hatchets were buried (in whose back I still can't decide) and the two reconciled. Perhaps as time has passed they, as with so many of us, simply can't remember what the heck they were really arguing about.

What did he play with Purple? "Smoke on the Water," of course.

At this writing, it was only a couple of days ago. A friend was there and completely

blown away. Saw the clip and it was seriously cool.

There is, however, still a mystery. Constant Companion is a Long Island girl; however, if it wasn't WLIR – who cares, right? So, we still have no idea where Candice had a show on the radio. Knowing full well there are plenty of transplants up here, one of you all must know what station that was.

So, if you do, post it to radioradiox on Facebook, and if we can confirm you are right, Klyde will come up with some tix to something cool, and you get to go. Damned if I know what that will be, but it's on my dime.

Now, adjust your codpiece and get to it!

Until next time.

Klyde



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