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The Primal Rage of Moriah Formica and Plush

By Jason Irwin

The last time I talked to Moriah Formica, the world was a very different place. COVID had shut everything down, live music had disappeared, and the idea of a young rock band touring the country seemed pretty unrealistic. Plush, however, was just getting started. Formica and original drummer Brooke Colucci had connected remotely during the lockdowns and recorded a version of Heart's "Barracuda." That video would eventually rack up millions of views and help launch what became Plush.

Fast-forward a few years, and the Albany-born band has gone from a pandemic-era internet collaboration to touring nationally, playing major festivals and sharing stages with some of the biggest names in rock. When Formica and I caught up recently, Plush was about two weeks into its current tour, appropriately titled the Mass Hysteria Tour after the band's upcoming second full-length album. "It's been a blast because we're so excited to be able to finally play new music," Formica said. "I mean, really, since the last time we talked. Since the pandemic as well." The tour is taking Plush all over the country, from the Northeast to Ohio, Chicago, Texas and Oklahoma, including a pre-party show for Rocklahoma, before eventually heading west.

But the touring experience isn't the only thing that has changed. Formica says the band has spent a lot of time figuring out exactly what Plush sounds like — and the result is the heaviest music they've released yet. "We have really been working behind the scenes to find our sound," she said. "We've toured a lot since starting out, and we've got some really good experience under our belts. Then we kind of wanted to take that into the studio."

That work has produced "Mass Hysteria," due September 18, and the single "Animalistic," a song that gives listeners a pretty good idea of where Plush is headed. Formica describes the song as an exploration of something that seems to be in plentiful supply

these days: rage. "We just kind of wanted to make a song that was embracing that primal rage of being a human," she said. "Because I think sometimes we forget at the end of the day that we are primal beings, no matter how much we might try to fight that."

The response has been encouraging, particularly from people who have embraced the heavier direction. "I would like to say it's been really good," Formica said with a laugh. "We've gotten really positive feedback. People are really liking the heaviness of it and the fresher sound." She admits that she does pay attention to what people think about new music, but there's a balance.

"You know, are people liking what you're putting out? Are people digging it?" she said. "Because they're the whole entire reason that you get to do this." At the same time, the band has to remember why it made the music in the first place. "It's also kind of remembering what we truly believe about the song and what our intentions were when we wrote the song and when we recorded it," she said. "Just trying to remind ourselves how happy we are with what we're putting out, regardless of what other people are saying."

That confidence also seems to be reflected in Plush's current lineup. After the departure of former lead guitarist Bella Perron, Formica took on the guitar parts live, leaving the band as a three-piece with original bassist Ashley Suppa and the band's newest member, drummer Faith Powell. The transition could have been a disaster. Instead, Formica says it brought the band closer. "At first it was like, 'OK, we have a tour in a week and a half. What the hell are we gonna do?'" she said. The answer was simple: rehearse. Then rehearse some more. "And to be honest with you, it has affected the group dynamic for the best and for the better," Formica said. "We are the most united we've ever been, and we are airtight." She says the smaller lineup has also helped



Plush find its musical identity. I couldn't agree more. "It's really allowed us to find our sound too, with this next album," she said. "We've really been able to find our sound and also grow into who we are as people more, too."

There is another place where Formica feels completely at home: the 518. Plush recently played Rock the Block in Cohoes, and she notes that returning home after spending so much time on the road is always special. "There's such a nostalgia to it," she said. "It reminds me of when I was a teenager and playing acoustic gigs and open mic nights and just seeing a lot of the same familiar faces that were there supporting since day one." Those familiar faces have become more than fans. "I've really grown to become friends with—and almost like family with them," she said. Playing the Capital Region with Plush feels different from playing anywhere else. "It's almost like a big jam session with your friends and family," she adds. "The 518 does an amazing job at supporting local acts."

And then there are the not-so-local stages. Plush has shared the stage with an increasingly impressive list of rock heavyweights, including Alice in Chains, Breaking Benjamin, Evanescence, Halestorm and Disturbed. For Formica, the Evanescence and Halestorm tour in 2021 was particularly meaningful. Amy Lee was one of her biggest musical influences growing up, and Lzzy Hale

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Collective Soul



Liberty DeVitto



Blackberry Smoke



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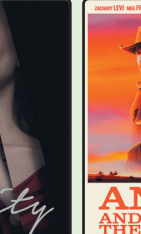
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Continued from page 3...

was another major inspiration. "To be able to see them each night and be on tour with them and just talk to them and thank them, and get advice from them, was so amazing," Formica said. "It's something that I would say definitely changed me as a person forever in the best way."

There was a time when Formica was on the other side of that equation. I remember her once asking me if I could help her meet Maria Brink from In This Moment at an event I was covering.

Unfortunately, I couldn't make it happen. Now, she is the one touring with the big names. These days, instead of asking me to get her backstage to meet a band, I might be the one asking her to help me meet somebody. Funny how things work out.

The Disturbed tour produced another unforgettable moment when Formica joined David Draiman onstage to sing "Don't Tell Me." "That was a completely surreal moment where it was like, 'This can't be right. What is happening?'" she said. For a young musician who grew up watching these bands, those moments haven't stopped. "Every single

experience is something that feels crazy, to be honest," she said. "We never foresaw it coming, you know, as teenagers or young adults."

That brings us back to "Barracuda," the song that helped start the whole thing. I played Plush's version on my radio show the morning of our interview and asked Formica what made the Heart classic such a perfect fit. Her answer went back to her dad. "My dad is very responsible for a lot of my music tastes," she said. "One of the bands that he would always play for me was Heart." There was something particularly powerful to a young Formica about hearing two women absolutely tear through a rock song. "I just remember being so intrigued by the fact that there were two sisters and two women and how fierce 'Barracuda' sounded," she said. Then came Guitar Hero. Formica believes playing "Barracuda" over and over in the video game helped cement the song in her musical DNA before she eventually learned it on real guitar. "It just kind of fell into place because I just loved the song so much," she said. "I feel like I had it in my body a little bit from just playing that game."

So, after everything that has happened since that last conversation, I had one final question (and I love doing this during interviews). If she had to choose between playing the biggest sold-out show of her life ... and catching the biggest fish of her life, which one would she take? If you don't know ... fishing is one of Moriah's favorite pastimes. So, she thought about it. A lot. "I would probably go with the sold-out show," she finally reasoned. "There will always be fish and water. But a career and the opportunity to stand on a stage in front of thousands of people aren't guaranteed. You can't predict that your career is always going to be there, that your voice is always going to be there, or that you're going to be able-bodied to do stuff like that," she said. "You can't know that at all, especially in this industry." Good call. Her voice is there, the band is tighter than ever, and Plush is heading into what may be its heaviest chapter yet. And there are still plenty of fish waiting for her when the tour bus finally stops.

If you want to see in person just how far things have come for Moriah Formica and Plush, you can catch them October 20 at the Palace Theatre in Albany with Collective Soul. (See also my interview with Collective Soul's Will Turpin in this issue.)

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RRX: A lot of people were upset that they were putting Frankie out there on stage like that, but that's not what's happening. He wants to do it, so let the man do it.

CS: That's right, that's what he loves. People don't want to stop doing what they love.

RRX: Exactly. Well, I know they've said you might be too rock to be country or too country to be rock, but what do you think?

CS: It's just music to me.

RRX: Amen to that.

The Strength Of Elephant Black

An Interview by Sarah Busone

Sarah and Dave Snediker of Elephant Back are some of the hardest-working artists in our local music scene. They recently spoke to Sara Busone about the latest Smaz Fest lineup, the current state of local music, recording, and the strength behind their band name.

RRX: So, the first thing I want to ask you is: how was Smaz Fest?

SS: It was awesome! It was a really fun way to get tons of local musicians together in one place at the same time, and it was the perfect day for it. And we got to listen to a bunch of people that we haven't actually heard from. So that was cool, and we got to make some friendships.

RRX: How did you get involved with Smaz Fest?

SS: I mean, we started playing out back in 2022, and I had reached out to people in different bands and on social media, just to find people to play with out there. The Hard Luck Souls ended up on one of the bills we played with, and Dave Smaz is just like the nicest guy ever, and we've been playing with him ever since. So, at least once or twice a year we book gigs. We got him out here in Syracuse last year, and I've booked The Fuze Box a few years back and got him in on that with us and ... it's just a really cool collaboration between different areas; music, musicians and things like that. But it was all through Dave Smaz we made that connection. And so, he reached out to us and was like, "Hey, I do this festival every year. You guys want to come and be involved?" And I was like, "Of course, whatever you got going on."

RRX: That's awesome. If you could envision what you would love to be doing a year from now, what would that look like?

SS: I mean ... what we're doing now, just more! We got two albums all written, so we're going to be recording them soon. So, hopefully releasing some albums.

DS: Yeah, it's kind of been a can't-stop-won't-stop adventure since COVID. We took some time during 2020-2021 to write a bunch of music and get together, and then went with videos, and we have been touring and recording, and we just, we really haven't stopped. We put out four albums already. And we have one that's getting close to being finalized that we're going to hopefully put out here at the end of 2026. Then we have the next one in the can and are starting to record the scratch tracks for all that, too. We love playing out; we love the community, especially in the Albany area. Yeah, just playing music. We just can't stop ourselves.

RRX: You guys are definitely prolific. I've noticed you guys really are a hardworking duo. You guys play out a lot, and of course I met you guys when I was presenting your award at the 2026 Listen Up Awards, which was a really cool, fun way to meet you guys. Tell me a little bit about that, how that felt.

SS: It kind of blew us away, to be honest. We got nominated, and we're like, "OK, let's go there and network and meet some people." And all of a sudden, we're walking on stage! So, it was pretty cool.

DS: Yeah, it was crazy. I didn't expect to win anything. We were going there for the fun of it, and because we got nominated, and we're like, "Oh, you know, it's a night out for us." We're usually working so hard that we don't go out and get a chance to see live music as much as we'd like to because we're always working on it. But it was crazy to have the first one come up ... and then for the second one to come up again, I was like, "Whoa, OK. That's funny."

SS: It did feel like a little like, "Ummm, everybody's looking at us. Like, who are these people?"

RRX: That's funny. So, as a working band, I wanted to ask you, what do you guys think about live music in the area right now? I know we've lost a couple of venues. What do you see as pros or cons? What would you change?

SS: Well, we like to play, you know? We like to play. There's a circuit that we have in our head from Rochester to Albany. We like to play wherever we can, and when we go into Albany, there are always good venues. It's kind of disappointing when the venues don't make it, and you have to find new venues. I kind of have a feeling of "if we build it, they will come" kind of thing.

DS: It's been kind of odd to me. Like post-COVID, I figured people would be coming out in droves, you know, to relax, but it seems like people got content with staying home. So, I wish people appreciated what all these hardworking musicians are doing, not to say that they're not. Smaz Fest was awesome, and there are certain venues in certain places that still get good crowds and get a good community going, but it's not as many as there used to be. You find yourself saying, "Oh, remember the good old days," kind of thing. It's still there, but you've got to be positive about everything.

RRX: What do you think about the democratization of art ... the way that people are able to sit down and make an album in their home? The way that people have more accessibility to different platforms? What are your perspectives on that?

DS: I think there's some good and bad. I don't want to date myself too much, but I can remember being in bands, and all we wanted to do was make a record. And the only way to make a record was in the studio, so you'd work for six months at a job just to get enough money to go into the studio for a day and cut a record. And nowadays it's so easy to make a record. I actually love it. You do have people that are making records that probably shouldn't be making records, but the really good stuff floats to the top and is recognized.

SS: I mean, it's twofold. It's like COVID allowed us personally to... I took courses online through Berkeley, and I was able to get a Pro Tools certificate.

So, I have the ability, and we were able to get equipment that we can record at home, and if that wasn't available, we wouldn't have put out the first album. So, our first album was completely done in-house. We recorded it ourselves. We mixed it ourselves, and we had someone master it for us. So that album, that first album that got us out into the universe, wouldn't have happened if we didn't have technology available for, like, at-home use. However, on the flip side, on the next two albums we went crazy, and we drove all around the world to record. We recorded at Abbey Road Studios. We recorded at Cyber Sound in Boston. We did a whole bunch of stuff ... we recorded in Ithaca, Syracuse, etc. But I think there is value in having the knowledge of what needs to be mixed, where and how and why. So, the availability of Logic and all of these other programs and YouTube videos ... you can YouTube anything these days. It kind of floods the market - anybody can do anything. I think, like Dave said, you know, the cream rises to the top at the end of the day. So I think it's getting more people interested in doing things; I think that's a positive for sure, and I feel like hopefully the people that are working harder, it's paying off.

RRX: I feel like you guys are the hardest working band locally. I've got to ask this ... please tell me about your band name!

SS: That's a big Dave question.

DS: OK, I've had the name in my back pocket for many years, and I always thought of it as like a symbol of strength. People have won wars off the backs of elephants, so it's like elephant back, you know? With a lightning bolt on back of the elephant, and I just had that image in my mind. I sat there when we were first getting together and playing, and I'm like, "I have this idea for a name and a logo," and she's like, "Oh, I can do that." And then she comes up with the logo.

SS: Yeah, it was pretty fun because when we first started writing music together, I was like, "Well, do you have any ideas?" "I've always wanted to name a band Elephant Back." Yeah, he had this idea for the logo, and I was like, alright. I messed with it, and we came up with it. So, it's been interesting because I think every time

we tell somebody that's our name, they're like, "... what???" (laughs)

Be sure to check out Elephant Back October 9th at Artisanal Brew Works in Saratoga Springs. They will be releasing a video for their song, "Soundbite", very soon.



Continued from Page 9...

As far as serving the local community, I do not want to exaggerate that when Seltlox is still brand new. Right now the benefit is pretty simple. If somebody here has a situation, message, decision, question, or pattern that feels hard to read, they can use Seltlox just like anybody else can. Beyond that, there is something personally meaningful to me about the fact that I built it here. I grew up around one kind of business in Schenectady, spent years helping run it, went through a period where I honestly did not know what I was going to do next, and eventually ended up building a completely different kind of company here.

If Seltlox grows into something significant, I would absolutely be proud for a technology company built in Schenectady to become part of the local business story. But I would rather earn that over time than make big promises about what Seltlox is going to mean to the community before it has had the chance to prove itself.

RRX: What has surprised you most about building and growing Seltlox so far, whether about the business, your customers, or yourself as a founder?

AW: Probably the biggest surprise has been realizing that building something and getting people to understand why they should use it are completely different challenges. For nearly nine months, most of the problems were things I could work on directly. If something broke, I could investigate it. If something did not feel right, I could change it. If a part of Seltlox was not good enough, I could keep working on it.

Then I launched it, and the problem changed.

Now I have to figure out how somebody who has never heard the word Seltlox understands what it is, when they should use it, and why they should care enough to actually try it.

That has been humbling.

I think before launch there was a part of me that viewed getting Seltlox live as the mountain. Once it was public, I realized that was one mountain. Getting people to discover it, understand it, try it, come back to it, and eventually pay for it is another one entirely.

Seltlox is still extremely new, so I am not going to pretend I have figured out growth or customers. I have not. What I have seen is that some people who actually use it seem to understand its value much faster than they understand how to describe exactly what kind of product it is.

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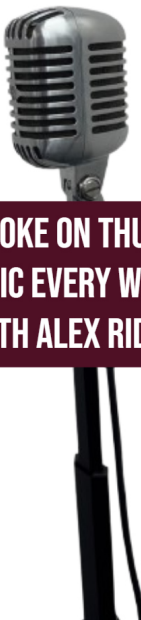
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10/31: THOUGHT PROCESS & PHEEL 7PM

An Interview SELTLOX

By: Rob Skane

Have you ever needed to make sense of a situation, get clarity on a message, or a decision? If you have, then Seltlox.com is what you're looking for. I had the pleasure of sitting down for a brief chat with Seltlox founder Adrien Washington, and this is what transpired.

RRX: What inspired you to create Seltlox, and how did the idea first take shape?

AW: It actually started with me messing around in Google AI Studio and seeing what I could make with AI even though I had no coding background.

Before Seltlox, I was using Sora to create AI videos from prompts. I eventually got tired of constantly having to come up with different ideas for videos, so I started experimenting with making little tools in AI Studio that could help me generate them. I made a few different prompt generators and some completely random little apps along the way. One was for positive affirmations; one was basically a button where different random things happened when you pressed it, and another was centered around positive news happening around the world.

The main one was called Solnyx. You could give it almost any word or subject, and it would turn that one thing into six completely different cinematic situations that I could then use as ideas for Sora videos. I kept changing and refining Solnyx until it became exactly the kind of prompt generator I wanted. Once I had done that, I started wondering if I could make something completely different. Instead of another tool for Sora, I wanted to see if I could somehow make a tool for life.

That experimentation eventually produced the earliest version of what became Seltlox. It was extremely raw and unpolished compared with what exists today, but I still remember the first question I gave it. The way it broke things down literally made me stop and reevaluate my own question in ways I had not considered before.

That was the moment that got me.

I remember thinking that I had never really had something like this in my life before. If it could make me stop and look at my own question differently, what would happen if other people had a way to do the same thing with the situations, messages, decisions, questions, and patterns in their own lives that felt hard to read?

I named it Seltlox the next day.

What followed was definitely not a straight line from that first experiment to the Seltlox that exists today. Over nearly nine months, it went through many iterations, experiments, changes, pivots, and refinements. Ideas were added, removed, and completely rethought. The way Seltlox looked changed. The way it analyzed things changed. Its capabilities changed. Even my understanding of what the product should and should not be became much clearer over time.

The first version had the spark that caught my attention, but it was nowhere close to the finished product. The Seltlox that exists today came from nearly nine months of figuring out what that original idea could actually become.

RRX: Can you walk us through some of the biggest challenges you faced in getting Seltlox off the ground, and what kept you going during those early stages?

AW: The biggest challenge was probably how much I did not know when I started. I had no coding background. I did not know how to build and launch a web application, how the infrastructure behind one worked, how authentication worked, how payments worked, or how all of the different pieces of a real software product were supposed to connect.

At the beginning, even very basic things were new to me. I had to learn how to work with the code outside of AI Studio, how to use Visual Studio Code, how to

use the terminal, how to make changes without breaking things, and eventually how to get Seltlox running locally on my own computer. Some of those early accomplishments probably sound incredibly simple to somebody who has been programming for years, but to me they were big steps because each one opened the door to something I could not do before.

As Seltlox became more real, the problems became more real too. I had to learn about hosting, databases, accounts, billing, security, privacy, legal requirements, trademarks, analytics, taxes, customer support, and all of the other things that exist around the actual product.

There were plenty of moments where something broke, and I had absolutely no idea what I was looking at. I eventually learned that panicking did not make the problem any smaller. I had to slow down, figure out what was actually wrong, and work through it one piece at a time. By the time I was dealing with real production problems involving hosting, APIs, and cloud services, I was working through things I would not have even understood the terminology for several months earlier.

What kept me going was really the feeling I had on that first night. I believed there was something useful at the center of Seltlox, and I wanted to find out how far I could take it.

I doubted myself plenty of times. There were definitely nights where I wondered whether I was trying to build something I had no business trying to build.

But I kept coming back to it.

Eventually all of those individual nights added up to a real product and a real company.

RRX: How does Seltlox serve or benefit the local community, and what role do you see it playing in the area going forward?

AW: Seltlox is an online product, so it

was not created specifically for Schenectady or the Capital Region. Someone here can use it the same way someone anywhere else can. But I have deep roots here, and my business background is here too.

I grew up in my family's business, Cappiello Foods, and started helping there when I was very young. The business was a big part of my life from the time I was a kid.

After graduating from Marist College in 2010 with a degree in business and a concentration in marketing, I joined Cappiello Foods full-time and spent more than a decade working throughout the business. I eventually became co-owner and operator alongside my mother until the business closed in January 2022. When Cappiello Foods closed, I did not immediately know what the next chapter of my life was going to be. I spent the next few years trying to figure that out and exploring different things.

In 2024, I launched an Etsy shop called ImaginedPrintz around another interest of mine, graphic design. I genuinely thought at the time that it might become the next big thing for me. It became a real little business; people bought things from it, and I still have it, but it did not turn into the next chapter of my life in the way I originally imagined it would.

I was still figuring out what came next.

Eventually I started experimenting more seriously with AI, which led to Sora, Google AI Studio, the different little apps I was building, and ultimately Seltlox.

Continued on Page 7...

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THE RECORD FILE

By Tony Mastrianni

SPECIAL HALLOWEEN SNAPSHOT OF RARE PRECIOUS ARTIFACTS!



Herein is a special Halloween snapshot of rare precious artifacts in the form of LPs as reissued by Real Gone Music. Kudos to them for securing the rights to reissue some great, long-out-of-print vinyl albums that will fascinate collectors. From classic horror to monster metal, with some exotic campiness and ingenious sounds in between. Let's dive into the interesting collectables just hitting the market. Ask for them at your local independent record store or contact the label through their website.

'Elliot Goldenthal - Stephen King's Pet Sematary (Music from the Motion Picture Soundtrack) - NEON GREEN WITH ORANGE SWIRL "DEAD CATSEYE" VINYL

While it obviously references such classics of the genre as Bernard Herrmann's Psycho and Lalo Schifrin's The Amityville Horror, Elliot Goldenthal's first-ever Hollywood score for 'Stephen King's Pet Sematary' displays the avant-garde verve one has come to expect from his subsequent work in the classical, theater, and film (e.g. his Academy Award-winning score for Frida) worlds. Employing the wordless vocals of a boys' choir, a small orchestral ensemble, and electronics, Goldenthal creates an increasingly unsettling atmosphere, highlighted by "The Return Game II (Louis and Gage)," which is like the music to the shower scene in Psycho on steroids. We've pressed this classic 1989 soundtrack in neon green with

orange swirl "Dead Cat's-eye" vinyl in honor of the revived feline who plays a key role in the film's plot...spooky sounds for Halloween and beyond!



Rod McKuen / Heins Hoffman-Richter 'Music to Freak Your Friends and Break Your Lease'... Vinyl LP:

Tired of "Monster Mash"? Through with calling "Ghostbusters"? If your Halloween playlist is begging for something different, look no further than the frightfully fun 'Music to Freak Your Friends and Break Your Lease.' Don't believe this? Take The Bride of Frankenstein's word for it--she's on the cover! Real Gone Music and Second Disc Records, in their relentless quest to leave no musical stone unturned, have given a new lease on life to one of the most unusual records of all time. Upon its initial release in 1974, this "Symphony for Tape Delay, IBM Instruction Manual, & Ohm Septet" was credited to "recognized raconteur, genius, composer, musicologist, conductor" Heins Hoffman-Richter, whom the original liner notes indicate "died from an earlobe tumor." It turns out that the late Hoffman-Richter was none other than best-selling poet and all-time cult music hero Rod McKuen. This is Rod's very own 'Metal Machine Music.' Like Lou Reed's later experiment in feedback and noise, this features no songs or traditionally structured compositions. Simply put, this wild journey through the electronic underground has to be heard to be

believed. It arrives on dark and stormy night vinyl to commemorate the circumstances surrounding the birth of Elsa Lanchester as Frankenstein's bride, in a package that replicates the collectible original release and also includes an insert with liner notes from The Second Disc's Joe Marchese. 'Music to Freak Your Friends and Break Your

Lease' will indeed act as a potent pal and landlord repellent...limited to 500 copies!



Consumers, The Bags, The Gun Club, and The Screemers among other L.A. punk outfits, 45 Grave were arguably the first American Goth/deathrock band and inarguably one of the best. Fronted by the Exene-meets-Barbarella vocal and visual stylings of Dinah Cancer (still one of the greatest stage names in a punk rock genre full of 'em), 45 Grave also featured Paul B. Cutler on guitar, Don Bolles on drums, Rob (Ritter) Graves on bass, and Paul Roessler on keyboards, and from that all-star line-up came 1983's 'Sleep in Safety' their lone studio release, and only recording with the band's original members. Probably most famous for the first appearance of the horrifyingly graphic, true-crime track "Party time," the single version of which was subsequently cut in 1985 and featured on The Return of the Living Dead soundtrack, Sleep in Safety also offered the early MTV track "Evil" and the band "theme song" "45 Grave" among other

r blandishments for those who like their rock and roll with a side of the macabre. For our Real Gone Music exhumation of this classic record, we have "embalmed" a very special edition, preserving the original album's gatefold edition complete with lyrics and adding a custom inner sleeve drawn from the band's very rare "A Tale of Strange Phenomena" press release—green with black splatter vinyl! Folks have been dying for this one to come back from the (45) grave.

Next month will look at some new LP releases as we head toward the end of the year!

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Continued from page 22...

DZ: What about jockeys?

RRX: Right? I could be a jockey.

JZ: Nowadays, if you're not 7 feet tall.

CZ: I even used to get talked down to ... like you're so short, we're gonna be looking down at you. Whatever, I've grown to be like, who cares what people think?

DZ: Don't Care; **RRX:** Don't Care!

JZ: Don't Care!

(Don't Care is a song by Zorbas Trio)

JZ: The fun thing about being tall, though, is like when you're at the grocery store and some person asks, can you help me get this? I'm like, yeah and reach to the top shelf. Like Slender Man almost.

RRX: My wife and I have a stool in our kitchen.

DZ: You gotta do what you gotta do.

RRX: But I have actually, in the past, been rejected. I've literally heard, "You're not tall enough." I'm thinking, but don't you want more legroom in bed?

CZ: Exactly.

RRX: (Gestures to John) You take up a lot of space!

JZ: Sleeping ... that's one thing that sucks about being tall. There's no bed that fits my length, my feet are always hanging off the edge.

DZ: There's pros and cons to everything.

JZ: They do have the leg surgery thing, though. It looks so dangerous.

RRX: Heightening? Shortening? Or both?

JZ: You could probably shorten too; I don't know.

DZ: People do that? That's crazy.

JZ: It's like they break your leg and put metal things in...

RRX: I really hope insurance doesn't cover that. I hope they're paying out of pocket for this.

CZ: Who would do that?

JZ: You'd be surprised.



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Last of the Old School Rockers

By "Chad From Albany" Koenig

Growing up in the tail end of Gen X, and having a passion and knowledge of rock and roll history, as well as the good fortune of having a family who didn't care when I came or went, I was able to see and experience a lot more than most in my demographic. I learned the way of the golden era of experiencing concerts by those who did it RIGHT - prior to the age of the cell phone, social media, high ticket prices, and "VIP" packages that are synonymous with those who can shell out thousands for a concert isolated from us "regulars," under a cool canopy where there are TVs available in case the concert bores you and you can catch up on that night's episodes of "Real Housewives".

As I talk to younger generations, they are baffled by stories of what was commonplace back then. So I decided that my nearly two decades of being a local entertainer would help me in having a podcast in which I tell stories, discuss the "then and now" of music and live experiences, and add some humor while being informative. This year I started that, and named that podcast "Last of the Old School Rockers" (available where all podcasts can be found), and have been gifted the opportunity to write a monthly article of the same name, with the same intent.

So last week, I saw the spectacular double-bill of John Fogerty and Steve Winwood at Tanglewood. It reminded me of the first time I saw Fogerty, 28 years prior, at Saratoga Performing Arts Center in 1998. First, the tickets then were \$27.50, \$23.50, and lawn was \$15. And no additional fees at the box office. A far cry from the \$50 I paid to sit in the crowded lawn last week. I was unable to purchase the same type of seats that I did in 1998, simply because I only have two kidneys, and although I could sell one, I was really hoping to keep it as a spare.

And I was reminded further about HOW I got those tickets. A concept foreign to anyone under 40: we used to literally sleep on the sidewalk overnight for these things. I remember for this show in particular, I just skipped school to go up early, set up a sleeping bag on the bridge above the creek going into SPAC, and just waited there for 15-20 hours until tickets went on sale at 10 am the following morning. As funny as it seems, it was alright to skip school for important things like this in my circle. To quote Bruce Springsteen, "We learned more from a three minute record, baby, than we ever learned in school." I did this quite often and have many interesting stories for another day - especially my tales of sleeping on Albany's Beaver Street, waiting for tickets to what I call "The PepsiKnickerTimes" when I don't just call it "The Knick."

At SPAC, though, much of the season went on sale on the same day. So we would get several tickets in one fell swoop. And if you were first in line, you got first dibs on tickets. Countless times have I gotten front row to heroes like Van Halen, Aerosmith, Phish, etc. This is how you did it. And those front row tickets were the same \$27.50 as the people 25 rows behind you. And scalping wasn't a billion-dollar industry, or even legal. You might get some guy selling tickets on the way in, but that was it.

Another thing about those campouts was the camaraderie. It's hard to believe a world without cell phones and social media, but you would meet some of the coolest people in these lines. This was GENUINELY being social. You have to be a special type of person to commit yourself to getting these tickets. And that commitment was fueled by your passion. And your passion got you these experiences that we won't ever get



again unless we are fortunate enough to be amongst the wealthy. And the problem is, you will just sit amongst the wealthy. And I refuse to use the word "elite," because that word dictates a higher class, and they are not a higher class because of their wealth. We are equal and as one. Just like many of the songs of the artists we pay to see preach about in their lyrics.

We would meet these people in lines; they would give us teenagers beer and weed, and we would play frisbee in the parking lot all night, listening to rock and roll from someone's boombox until their 10 "D" batteries ran out of juice. We would get our tickets the next morning and would all usually be in the general vicinity of each other, and often not speak again until the shows we got tickets for. And when the big days came, we would see each other, give each other hugs, buy each other beers ...

ahem- soda pops ... and the seats of

these concerts were filled with joy and love. All ages. All colors. All good people. We would be standing up the whole time, the entire venue. And you would only occasionally hear the nag of someone saying, "Can you sit down? I'm trying to enjoy the show," which is now unfortunately commonplace. For the price of tickets these days, we should be able to rock. We should be able to sing. We should be able to hug and love those around us because we're all there for the same thing. That was "unity."

But it's not like that anymore, at least for shows not necessarily aimed at the young. And you can't use age as an excuse. Something changed somewhere. I'm glad that I had many years of experiencing it. And those of us who did should teach the next generation how to do it the right way, and keep the spirit of rock alive forever.

An Interview

Blackberry Smoke (Charlie Starr)

by Rob Smittix

(After some brief technical phone issues on both of our ends.)

RRX: I actually think we're in business now.

CS: All right, great.

RRX: We were just talking about technology and how it works against us sometimes.

CS: Yeah, and here we are.

RRX: Here we are; we made it happen. Now, did you notice they said that AI might actually be able to kill us all within the next 10 years? It's all over the news.

CS: I mean, that's how the movie plays out, right?

RRX: It sure is. It's like we wrote the script. Now we're trying to actually go for it. So, that's what's going on in the world. What's going on in the world of Charlie Starr this morning?

CS: I'm just looking out the window on a sunny Toronto day. I have the day off, and that's nice - gonna see what there is to do in this city. And yeah, we're in the middle of this 25th anniversary tour.

RRX: Yeah, 25 years. How does it feel? Does it feel like it's been that long?

CS: No, it feels like 5 years.

RRX: Right? Exactly. When you sit back and reflect, like when you're looking out the window in Toronto, and you start to think about, how did you get here? Obviously, it was the music that brought you here.

CS: It's just like they say, when your job is something you love, it's not a job and time really flies; that's true.

RRX: And today is a day off for you, but you're still up early in the morning?

CS: Yeah, man, I'm an early riser; I'm late to bed and up early. As we get older, your body creates less melatonin or something, right? And you sleep fewer hours.

RRX: My schedule's very weird; I'm not even usually up yet. I promised when I

talked to your management that I'd have coffee in hand and be ready for you, but my wife drank all the coffee, so I'm drinking tea.

CS: (Laughs) Well, that sounds great.

RRX: So are you a coffee or a tea guy?

CS: Both, mostly coffee.

RRX: Right? It's more accessible here in North America.

CS: I guess it is. When we go to the UK, I enjoy a cup of tea.

RRX: For sure. What are we to expect out of a band that's been around for 25 years?

CS: Well, I don't know. Here's what usually happens. I'll get up that morning and look at what we played last time we were there over coffee, with whoever might be around me on the bus that morning. I'll say, hey, what do you wanna play? And I might listen to their advice, or I might turn a deaf ear to it.

(Both Laugh)

CS: I try not to repeat what we did last time or what we did the night before because it just keeps it interesting for us and for the people who are coming to multiple shows, you know? And for the person who saw us last time, they definitely don't wanna see the same thing again. With 25 years of music to choose from, there's plenty of variety.

RRX: I love that. I wish everybody would take that advice.

CS: I started seeing bands do that when I was younger, and I thought that's great. And then of course, I would see bands that would do the same exact thing, and I don't hate that either because it's a different night, but I prefer the bands that switch it up.

RRX: Absolutely, I think some of the bands that don't switch it up, when they're going from town to town ... it's kind of like they're stuck, where they have to play those songs that everybody wants to hear. I often think about ... imagine being a comedian and having to



PHOTO BY: ANDY SAPP

do the same stuff over and over. How do you keep that fresh for yourself?

CS: Well, you know? I had a conversation with Dusty Slay, who is a great comedian, and he was a guest of ours at last year's High Tide Getaway in Mexico hosted by Blackberry Smoke. Which we're doing again this year - this is a shameless plug. Last year's lineup included Dusty Slay, and he and I were sitting having coffee, talking about what we do and I said, you know it's funny when I think about it and when I kind of examine it a little more closely, you and I have the exact opposite job description. You have to do something that people have not heard every night and make them laugh with it, and I have to do things that they have heard and make them dance. It's completely a 180, and he's like, yeah, you're exactly right.

RRX: I'm very familiar with Dusty; he's hilarious, and I think that's a whole different thing, you know? I've been funny a couple of times, but I could never imagine going up on stage and trying to be funny, and nobody laughs. Even if you as a musician hit a sour note, they're still gonna applaud you.

CS: He had never seen us live. He was aware of our music, but it was his first time seeing a show of ours. We had an afternoon show on the beach that day; he and his wife came down, and we invited a bunch of artists that were there. We did a cover show; it was just fun and loose, and when we were done, he's like, you're funny man! And I was like, What? And he goes, I like your

work. That was some good material. I was like ... well, thank you, Dusty Slay. I might get a patch made that says that. I wore it like a badge and still do.

RRX: Oh, absolutely, wear that as a badge of honor.

CS: That's right.

RRX: If you had something that you could say to the fans out there right now, what is it that you would say?

CS: Man, I would say thank you for coming to see us and listening to our music and supporting us for 25 years, and let's do it for 25 more!

RRX: For sure, gotta do it for 25 more. Besides, you've got some people out there that are really giving you a run for your money. Willie's still out there; unfortunately, we just recently lost Dolly.

CS: Oh man, it's huge; people like Dolly loom large. In the music industry, she was a mainstay, you know? Just a giant.

RRX: She sure was. She was one of the biggest, and we still got some of the biggest out there today. Obviously, Keith Richards is gonna be here forever, but ... yeah man, just keep making music until you can't. Like Frankie Valli, right?

CS: Right.

Continued on page 5...



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3 Questions with Mike Valente *By Rob Skane*

Mike Valente is the founding guitarist and a creative force in the legendary band Brick by Brick. Mike plays guitar the way we love it - loud and mean. Thankfully, he was kind enough to participate in 3 questions. You can find out more about Brick by Brick at www.upstaterecordsny.com

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

MV: The moment I decided to not put the guitar down was when I was about 15. I was taught my first "riff" by my father, and I practiced it over and over, forever, it seemed. That riff was "Whole Lotta Love" by Zeppelin. Then I started learning Kiss tunes.

RRX: If you could go back and tell your younger self one thing about playing guitar, what would you say?

MV: I'd say practice more as you get older ... ha ... I barely touch my guitar unless we are rehearsing or on tour.

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

MV: Not too much, but if I find myself strumming along or f***in around, I will dig out the early stuff that I learned. I am so damn busy these days doing EVERYTHING for the band; it takes away from a steady practice schedule. I find that just doing warm-ups is where I am at these days before a show. However, if I find that we have an extended period of time away from shows, I do run through a set in my office with a practice amp.



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architecture or anything else, if you have found your voice - a voice that people can recognize that it's you in one way or another - I think you're on the right path.

RRX: Is there a particular part of guitar building that you find almost meditative or therapeutic—the part where you can lose yourself in the work?

CH: I get lost into all the different parts for different reasons. I love putting position markers/inlays in. My pyrography can be very meditative as well. Also anything that involves my mini chisels. Neck shaping is as well because you can watch the grain structure start to sort of pop and you're carving.

RRX: After building so many guitars, do you still get that little rush when you finish one and it gets played for the first time? What does that moment feel like for you?

CH: Of course I still get that rush, especially with never having built one the same in fifteen years. Each one and it's story are very close to my heart so it's always amazing to see, feel, and hear the final outcome with knowing how much work and love fo into them. It's a very rewarding career, and I feel lucky every day I go into work and, yes, every time I finish a build.



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RRX: I don't think I've ever been to a rehearsal then.

KL: Again, before anybody comes at me on the internet, that is extremely fun. I also like to do that with my buddies.

DC: Yeah, I do band practice and rehearsals for different things.

RRX: But you get down to business, and you're business-minded, you're focused, is what I'm getting.

KL: Correct.

RRX: Excellent. Anything else that you wanna say to the people?

KL: stop.drop.rewind is available anywhere you find music, including socials and all your streaming services. Of course, the best way to support any band in 2026 is purchasing things directly from the artists, so you can always go to our website stopdroprewind.com and pick up our records, either there or bandcamp.

DC: You can now get our whole catalogue with the click of a button.

KL: And of course, we'd love to see you at shows; we'll have t-shirts, CDs, hats, stickers, and all that stuff to support the band directly there. But anywhere you listen is amazing for us, and if you take the time to do that, we really, really appreciate it.

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An Interview:

Zorbas Trio

by Rob Smittix



RRX: Our special guests here in the studio today are The Zorbas Trio. If you could all just introduce yourselves please and say what you do in the band.

CZ: I'm the eldest of the trio, I am Callista. I am the singer, and I am the guitarist.

DZ: Okay, I am Demetra. I am the singer and the bass player.

JZ: And I am John. I'm the youngest, and I am ...

RRX: ... the tallest!

(All Laugh)

JZ: I am the keyboardist and kick drum player.

RRX: Definitely digging your music.

All Together: Thank You

RRX: We didn't mention it yet, but you are actual siblings.

All Together: YES!

DZ: A lot of people don't see that, though, like ... you guys are siblings? You look nothing alike. I mean ... some people can see it. I don't know.

CZ: Some people actually think that we're triplets.

JZ: They always think that you're the youngest (pointing towards Callista) and I'm the oldest.

RRX: I imagine you've been doing this your whole lives together?

JZ: I mean ... we've always done projects together. We all started music together very young but we weren't a band. We didn't necessarily play together that much.

DZ: It was a side thing for us, more or less, and then it became more serious in like ... 2019.

JZ: 2020.

CZ: Yeah, my sister and I played violin for a long time, and he's always played piano.

JZ: You both sang.

CZ: We actually were inspired by Broadway, Disney movies, and stuff. We'd always sing with them. Elsa and Anna and everything, and that was the time our Mom said, why don't you do it together? John can accompany you.

JZ: We had a gig, I think it was the first gig, in SVAN in Northville. We did a little opening thing, and that's how we first got together with singing and piano. It was originally just going to be me playing piano, but I was so terrified back then. I was like, I can't just do it alone up there. So then Mom was like, why don't you guys sing too? That just made it worlds better.

CZ: That was 2019. Then, more in 2020, 2021, we introduced more instruments. And most recently, the kick drum, which is an electric kick drum, and it really brings it together in how much of a sound it made. We were hooked and have not stopped.

RRX: Tell us something about yourselves that people might be surprised to know. We're always talking to musicians about music, but sometimes it's like ... I'm a spoon collector! You're too young to collect spoons.

CZ: Well, actually, we kind of run the Spa City Farmers Market with our parents. Our parents started Spa City Farmers Market. We have a couple of businesses: an art business, and I do some crochet on the side just to get more music equipment. So I make toys for more guitars and stuff. But it's a great place for community, putting people together, and the importance of shopping local and supporting local. Same as supporting local musicians - vendors and farmers are very important. We try to promote that as much as possible.

JZ: Yeah, she has a crocheting business and Demetra paints.

DZ: Yeah, I do art.

JZ: I like to do stop motion and play video games.

RRX: What is stop motion?

JZ: You don't know what stop motion is?

RRX: I'm too old to know.

JZ: Too old? That's like before CGI.

RRX: Oh! You're talking about how, like ... when I made a Lego video once ...

JZ: Yeah! You take a picture and then move it.

RRX: Okay, I didn't know what it was called.

JZ: Stop motion. That's what I wanted to be before I became a musician, when I was like 6 until like 7. Oh my God, no! I said the meme!

RRX: Six, Seven (hand gestures).

JZ: Our "Jack In The Box" video, we incorporated some stop motion. It's a cool artform.

CZ: It's such a time consuming artform, I have so much respect for that. Could you imagine? I think "The Nightmare Before Christmas," which is stop motion, took 10 years.

RRX: Yeah, why wouldn't it? You've got to have patience and you probably shouldn't have a cat.

CZ: Oh, yeah you're right!

RRX: Same thing if you're into puzzles ...

JZ: ... important pieces will be lost.

CZ: Another funny thing, I guess, is we have five dogs.

JZ: And they're big dogs, they're Malamutes.

CZ: Alaskan Malamutes.

RRX: Well, I hope you don't live in a tiny apartment.

CZ: Oh, no, no, no. I don't think they'd allow that. All the hair ... I walk out to go to the store, and I look like Chewbacca. I am covered in hair, head to toe, because of those dogs.

RRX: That's cool. Your music speaks for itself, but we're getting to know you as people. You all seem pretty young, to me at least.

DZ: 23; **CZ:** 26; **JZ:** 20; **RRX:** Oh, damn.

JZ: What is that supposed to mean?

RRX: It means I shouldn't have given you that shot earlier. You should've warned me.

(All Laugh)

JZ: I'll be 21 in November

CZ: He's the tallest though. We're the shorties over here.

RRX: I've had that problem being short myself.

CZ: Well, as long as you're healthy. That's what matters.

RRX: The thing is ... when you're a short guy, we actually do get rejected sometimes just because of our height.

JZ: That's a big thing now, isn't it?

Continued on page 11...

An Interview:

STOP. DROP. REWIND.

by Rob Smittix

RRX: So we got Kris with a K (vocals, bass), even though it's supposed to be CH; we all know that.

KL: It's like a gang thing, dude. We actually have beef with the CH Chris's; I can't believe you talked about them around me.

RRX: (Laughs) We got DJ (guitar, vocals). Are you an actual DJ?

DC: No, but I have had that problem before. I've done a few wedding band and corporate-like, one-night band gigs where I've been the male vocalist, and I've had people in the band who just see DJ and assume that I am a DJ and not a person whose name is Daryl Joseph.

RRX: Hey, we'll count it. And we've got Andy (drums), who most likely wrote his name on the shoes of his action figures, I would imagine.

AS: Yes, I did.

RRX: So at a 2026 stop.drop.rewind show, I know we're to expect facial expressions, of course, but what else are we to expect?

KL: We're playing a bunch of stuff off of our most recent record. Every band probably says this ... I've been telling people, not hyperbolically, that I think this is our best. So even if there's other shows that people may have enjoyed more or something like that, on our end we're able to execute it most consistently at a high level and also get the most effects that we wanna get from the audience and from ourselves out of any show we've ever run. We're constantly tweaking how we want the show to work and what we want people's responses to be, and basically we wanna hit all that stuff. I know you guys feel good about it. I feel good about it too.

DC: I think people can obviously expect an exciting show. That's sort of where Kris was going, because we're still very excited about it, and I think that comes through on stage. You mentioned facial expressions; that's part of it for sure. There's gonna be some improvisation. It's gonna seem sometimes like everything is about to fall apart. It doesn't. We know exactly where everything's supposed to go; you can trust us. If you wanna dance, if you wanna jump around, we got you. You wanna sit in the back with your arms folded and feel your feelings, we got you. You wanna just watch a guy do stuff to a bass that you haven't seen done to a bass in person in quite a while, got you there too.

We are playing some stuff that when we wrote it, we were not sure how much we would ever play it live,

and now we're doing it every day. We're proud of doing that. Some songs off the most recent record ... and I've spoken about this online, videos and things, but like the song "Luminescent," that had a nice kind of viral moment for us. I thought it was just like my pet project because I usually get one for every record where it's just ... I write pretty much everything on it, and then it's like a weird song, and nobody really cares about it. But I achieved something songwriting-wise that I think is really, really cool. We worked on that song for well over a year, and I still thought nobody's ever gonna listen to it, but that I would be proud of it when I die or something. And then it was one of our most popular songs off that record, which was a very nice surprise. Except then we had to learn how to actually play it live, like in a good way, not in the studio.

RRX: The Beatles weren't even able to recreate what they did live, almost ever.

KL: Right. Yeah, we're basically better than The Beatles; you can run that as the teaser for this segment. stop.drop.rewind, better than The Beatles.

RRX: That is definitely gonna be the headline, yes.

KL: One of the things that I like about what we do is trying to arrange ... because we still write for a larger ensemble, whether it's 4 to 2 guitars, bass, drums ... or I'll play keys, or a bunch of vocals, and we even had some stacks and things on the last record as well.

Getting it to sound good as a power trio is a challenge that we enjoy. And still making it sound good and not empty. Some of that Beatles' stuff is so layered that I don't know how you would ever do that (live), but we're trying to walk the line between the stuff that sounds good in the studio and then making different decisions to make it sound good live.

RRX: From everything I've heard, it sounds really crisp. I also really dig the fact that one song really doesn't sound like another, which a lot of bands have issues with, you know? It's just their signature sound, but you guys seem to be able to tweak it, and pretty much everything has its own kind of liveliness.

DC: I appreciate that. We do try to have something that anyone can latch onto. Something that, no matter what your musical background or your taste is, we'll grab your ear while retaining sort of a sense of what our band identity is. A song of ours should catch your ear regardless of your musical background, but you should also instantly be able to tell it's us, and that's at least my goal for our songwriting.



RRX: Did you all go to school for music?

KL: In varying capacities, but yes, we did.

RRX: Being in a band myself and having a bunch of members, most of us did not (go to school for music), but the several that have ... one thing I noticed that was different between them and us was mainly that we called it practice and they called it rehearsal.

(All Laugh)

DC: I do do that; mostly it is just to lend some gravity to what I'm doing. So, if I were at a day job and they were like, can you stay? Me saying no, I have rehearsal has a bit of gravity to it. But me being like, I can't, I have band practice, makes me sound like ... can my girlfriends come?

RRX: (Laughs) Yeah, hit the nail on the head.

KL: It's like "partner" versus "girlfriend" or "boyfriend."

AS: I also do that with the word "show". I don't always like the word "show," but it's like saying it's a gig or an event, you know? "Show" vs "concert" is like ... when your Mom's like, oh, are you playing any concert soon?

KL: It's funny how language works like that. Not dunking on anybody else's way they do stuff - I prepare an itinerary for rehearsal, for band practice. We don't drink beers and/or partake in other things that may not be legal in our state but might be legal in your state, for instance, then just hang out in the garage and play the songs from top to bottom. A lot of other groups that I've experienced, they drink some beers and hang out, which is exceedingly fun. I'm gonna put, like, a huge asterisk - but that's not rehearsal.

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RRX: The energy and the enthusiasm are clear to me when I see you guys just perform.

BB: 100%. Half the time my eyes are just closed. It doesn't matter if there's four people out there

NE: Not at all. I'd rather have 20 people singing along than 400 people just staring at us. And that's how it was last year, because we feed off the crowd, they feed off us, and people are coming there to have a good time. It's just fun, you know?

And that's the other thing because the misfits were like that; so if we f@#k up, it's just part of the show, like it was for them!

RRX: Thanks again for taking the time to sit down and share your stories. I'm really looking forward to the Halloween Show at Underground later this month!

Horror Business will perform this October 24 at Empire Underground supporting The Erotics. Keep a lookout for upcoming acts The Del-Martians, featuring current Horror Business bassist Rob Marcello and drummer Jim Kaufman; and vocalist Nick Esposito performing with Ike's Wasted World later this year.

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Liberty DeVitto

by OP Callaghan

Liberty DeVitto is a phenomenal drummer, best known for his work as the drummer for Billy Joel. But as a session drummer, Liberty has played with a ton of other artists, including Elton John, Paul McCartney, and his current band, The Slim Kings. He's a monster of a player, and will be appearing in a drum clinic on October 3rd at Rocky's Music Studio in Latham. He will be appearing with Corky Laing, drummer extraordinaire from the band Mountain, coming together to BEAT Parkinson's disease. All proceeds will benefit Parkinson's Center YMCA in honor of Bob Girouard.

So please welcome Liberty DeVitto!

RRX: How did you get your start?

LD: I saw the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan show, and I knew that's what I wanted to do - tour the world with my friends and make music everyone loves.

RRX: Did you take lessons?

LD: No, at the time no one would teach me how to play R&R. They were jazz snobs and thought R&R was horrible.

RRX: Was there one song or performer that made you want to play drums?

LD: Ringo Starr! Then there was Dino Danelli from the Young Rascals!

RRX: You've had an astoundingly successful career as a drummer. Is there a certain song, performance, or recording that you're especially proud of?

LD: That's a tough question. I made 11 albums with Billy Joel. To pick one is impossible.

RRX: Yeah, that's impressive! Who are you playing with now?

LD: I play with many people. My main band to perform with is The Lords of 52nd Street. It's myself, Richie Cannata, and Russell Javors. We are members of the original Billy Joel band. We perform all the songs we recorded with Billy.

RRX: That's quite a catalog! What can we expect at your upcoming clinic?

LD: Corky Laing and I will speak about our careers





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Collective Soul's Will Turpin: "Follow the sparks."

By Jason Irwin

Collective Soul has been making music for more than three decades, going from clubs to Woodstock '94, with radio hits like "Shine," "December," and "The World I Know," and a catalog that has crossed generations. The band brings that catalog and new music to the Palace Theatre Albany on October 20. I caught up with bassist Will Turpin to talk about the early days, staying together for over 30 years, and why it still comes down to one thing: the song.

RadioRadioX: When you look back at the beginning of Collective Soul, when did you first realize, "Holy crap, this is actually going to be something big?" Was there a specific moment?

Will Turpin: Man, we were always just—our heads were down. We were focused on creating music and carving out a career. I just remember thinking, "We need to work more. We need to do more." Woodstock '94 was a big deal, but that was just the start. I don't think I felt like we had made something and established a legacy career until 20-something years later.

RRX: I was at Woodstock '94. I believe I caught your set, too. I also got covered in mud.

WT: Yeah, you were still clean during our performance. We were on Friday night, and it hadn't rained yet. What a sea of humanity that was in front of us. Oh my gosh.

RRX: And what a time for music, too.

WT: Yeah. Friday night was a bunch of brand-new bands—Sheryl Crow, Live, Blues Traveler, and Candlebox. King's X performed, too. They weren't new, but they probably would have been my most-listened-to band in that era. A muso's band, so to speak. The Violent Femmes played around midnight, too. That was the first time I met the guys in Live and Blues Traveler. We still hang out together from time to time.

RRX: A lot of those bands from that era suffered from what some people like to call the "one-hit-wonder curse." You guys didn't. What do you think was the difference?

WT: Songs, man. I mean, it all boils down to songs. My father had the studio that we all grew up in, and he instilled in us some really strong tenets of being a band. He said the strength lies within the song. I feel like Ed's lyrics belong amongst the best of our peers. As a band, we sounded different and knew how to follow each other. You have to be a band and learn how to have fun on stage. Sometimes you've got to understand that being a band is part of being a team. But yeah, man, it's the strength of the songs. These songs are more popular than they've ever been in our entire career.

RRX: Of the bigger Collective Soul hits, what's your personal favorite to play or listen to?

WT: I love playing "December" because we turn it into like a seven-or eight-minute thing. Me, Johnny, and Jesse have fun with the middle section. Playing "Shine" is always a special treat. You see people celebrating the memories. Some people are crying, some are smiling. "The World I Know" is a grounding moment. It makes you feel appreciative.

RRX: What's a Collective Soul song that you absolutely love that you always wished had been a bigger hit and that more people had heard?

WT: There's a bunch of them. On "Dosage," "No More, No Less" was one of the songs on the sticker, but somehow it never was a single. I feel like it should have been a big crossover hit. On "Rabbit," I feel like "Fuzzy" should have been released. But it's one of those things where no one owns a crystal ball. There were songs I thought were mistakes that ended up being number-one rock tracks. It's one of those roll-of-the-dice situations. We're not known for filler. We're not known for weak songs. And the fans know the deeper cuts.

RRX: You've been playing with these guys for decades. What's the secret to keeping a band together this long when a lot of bands eventually implode?

WT: I think we were friends. They're doing a book—Marshall Terrill, a biographer, is doing a book on Real 2 Reel Studios, the studio my father opened. There's a picture of all of us at a volleyball tournament we hosted in my backyard. We had sand delivered and played two-man volleyball. It had nothing to do with music. Me, Ed, Shane, Ross, and Dean, and 20 other people were there just to play volleyball and hang out, two or three years before Collective Soul. So I think when you're genuine friends first, that makes a difference. For Collective Soul, I think it's the strength of the songs and family. We've just known each other and each other's families our entire lives.

RRX: You mentioned Real 2 Reel. You guys grew up inside that studio, and now you run it. What does it mean to you to carry that legacy forward?

WT: I'm loving it, man. I've got three or four really good releases coming out, and people are coming from all over to work with me. It's a production house. Almost everything through there is stuff I'm producing. I'm really enjoying working with The Stews. Atticus Roness has a record coming out this week that I think is a masterpiece. Hey Dreamer and Red and the Revelers are also recent projects. I just love creating, and when people trust me with their music, we have a whole lot of fun. Sometimes you've got to let go of the steering wheel and trust me. I've been doing it my whole life, and I play every instrument, so it's easy to communicate with almost any instrumentalist. I open my ears and let the universe dictate what's going to be on the records.

RRX: You were classically trained musically. How did that influence the shape of Collective Soul's sound compared with being more self-taught, like many rock musicians?

WT: When it comes to rock and roll, you try not to let any of the technical music-theory stuff creep into your mind. I'm really just creating by feel. The piano lessons and orchestration I studied allow me to open up a larger tool chest. But ultimately, the technical training came afterward. We had to come up

with words to teach and communicate with each other. Even the monks and Gregorian chants—they weren't taught music and then created it. They created music because it felt good to the human ear. That's still what you ultimately have to do, especially in rock and roll, because rock and roll throws those rules out the window. I carry that training with me, especially in production. I see things as a big staff and understand what's going on to serve the song. But ultimately, it always just serves the song. With rock and roll, you've got to create from the heart and with feel.

RRX: When you're writing new music for Collective Soul, does it still feel like the same process as it did back then?

WT: We're a little faster than we used to be. We used to jam more and suss it out more as a group. We can skip some of that stuff a little now. But when we're in the same room, the one thing that's the same is when we know. Sometimes we have to jam on it for a while before we go, "Boom. That's how we're starting the song. That's the vibe right there." That still happens by getting together and knowing when it feels right.

RRX: How do you balance the newer songs with the classic hits when you're putting together a live set?

WT: We try to keep the vibe and emotion moving without breaking it up. Sometimes we're wrong. We'll change the set list the next night. We're gonna hit some of the bangers. We're not gonna be able to play them all, though. But we're also gonna hit some of the new stuff that people like. Our fans know the records aren't filler, so they know the deep cuts. We can take them on any adventure with these songs, but we're not leaving out the big hits.

RRX: That must be kind of a good feeling knowing you have so many bangers that you can't play them all.

WT: It is. I remember in the '90s thinking, "I can't wait to have at least five hits," so our set list will be full of



hits. And we did that and more.

RRX: You've got people who discovered Collective Soul in the '90s standing next to people who discovered you through their parents. What's it feel like looking out and seeing multiple generations singing the same songs back at you?

WT: That's just magical, man. That's probably the most magical thing we get to do. You'll literally see three generations out there—a 60-year-old grandpa, a father, and a 15-year-old son enjoying songs together. I think that's part of what music is—being able to share that with your family and friends and across generations.

RRX: You've seen pretty much every version of the music business—CDs, MTV, streaming, social media. What do you think today's young bands have that you didn't have when you started, and what do you think they've lost?

WT: They made cassettes of our first three records. The major-label game was pretty much the only game in town. We started on an independent label, which was part of our success, but you

never stayed independent in those days. Today there are more outlets, for good and bad. I like that you can do more independently and that recording can be easier. But I do feel like sometimes the younger generation misses the true band vibe where they're really working songs out as a band and then they're able to go to a studio and play like a band. I'm working with a band called The Stews right now. Young dudes right out of college. They're a band—they play, sound, and record like a band. No one's got all the answers. If somebody tells you, "I know the TikTok recipe. I know the viral recipe. I can make your band successful by following these steps," that person is lying. Every band has a different path. You have to figure it out as you go. Follow the leads, man. Follow the sparks. Again, the strength of your song is going to be, at the end of the day, what dictates success.

RRX: I'm going to end with this. After everything Collective Soul has accomplished, what still makes you excited to get on a bus, fly across the country, plug in an instrument, and do it all over again?

WT: Not much, man. I get paid for all that. I don't get paid for the time on stage. That's a time for reflection. Like, "Wow, look what we've done." We enjoy playing songs and playing live music together. I like seeing old friends on tours or cruises. After 32 years, I feel very fortunate to play live music. But no, you don't wake up going, "Wow, can't wait to get on this plane and then get on a bus for three hours." Everything becomes a job at some point. Everything gets monotonous. But the moment I can't play on stage and create music with my friends, that will be a sad day, and I'll desperately miss it. The time to get to the stage is kind of laborious.

RRX: Well, we are looking forward to seeing you in Albany on October 20. We're enjoying the new record, and congratulations on an amazing musical career.

WT: Right on. Thanks, man. Appreciate your time, too.



An Interview:

Heather E. Schwartz: Quiet Girl Center Stage

by Larry Felton

Heather Schwartz performs as Quiet Girl Comedy. I sat down with Heather to talk about where that name came from and how she learned to perform on her own terms.

RRX: Before we talked, I watched some videos of your performances, which left me wondering how you ended up calling yourself Quiet Girl Comedy. You were a lot of things in those videos, but quiet wasn't one of them.

HS: In sixth grade, my friend and I were given the responsibility of counting the votes for the superlatives for our yearbook. I desperately wanted to win Most Musical Girl. We counted them up, and I was super close, but not there. Instead, I won Quietest Girl.

I was horrified! Why would anyone even make that a category? That wasn't how I saw myself. What I wanted to be recognized for was my musical ability and my desire to be onstage.

I remember auditioning for our sixth-grade musical. I practiced the song in my room and thought, "I sound exactly like Olivia Newton-John. I'm sure of it." Then I got to the audition and couldn't really sing out. I was really quiet, like a wallflower. Needless to say, I did not land my dream lead role.

That kind of thing kept happening throughout my life. I would perform, but it took so much out of me. There was more anxiety than enjoyment.

RRX: So even though performing made you anxious, you kept coming back. How did that work?

HS: I would give it up sometimes. I'd say, "This just isn't my thing. I'll stop doing this." Then I would see people performing and think, "Oh, I would love to be like that. I want to do that. I know I have it in me."

Years later, I took an improv class and had so much fun. We were playing games, playing pretend, blurting things out.

Pretty quickly, I started performing. I still had extreme anxiety about it, but I

I loved improv so much that I thought, "Well, I guess if performing is the price I have to pay for doing improv, I'll do it." I had that mindset for a long time.

RRX: What was it like performing with all that anxiety?

HS: In the past, if I had a show scheduled in a month, as soon as it was scheduled, I couldn't eat. I'd spend each day worrying about it. My appetite would be way down, so I'd feel weak because I wasn't eating enough.

I could always power through once I got there. I could get onstage and do the thing I needed to do. But it took so much energy. It didn't feel joyful. I would think, "This is supposed to be fun. I'm supposed to be having fun, and I'm not."

RRX: I got the feeling from watching you perform that you're having fun. What changed?

HS: For a long time, I kind of felt like I needed to become this other person—the person who was comfortable performing. Then I realized I didn't need to become comfortable with it exactly. I needed to support myself as a person who is uncomfortable.

And over time I started embracing the idea that I can still be considered a quiet person throughout all of this. I can own that label. I'm not the ham. I'm not the person everybody always said was going to be onstage someday. I'm not the class clown.

I'm never going to be that person. But I can still do the things I want to do.

RRX: One of the pieces you're best known for is "Heather's Junk Drawer." Where did that come from?

HS: I felt like I wasn't doing my own work as a performer. I felt like this voice was there and had grown and developed, but I didn't know how to let it out because I couldn't see an avenue that I fit into.

I'm not a stand-up, but what I naturally wanted to do wasn't fully improv either.

I was obsessed with people who did solo shows, so I gave myself permission to rehearse solo. I would go onstage with nobody else in the room and just do things.

I kept exploring what my own voice sounded like and what felt natural to me. I thought, "How can I get myself onstage solo and actually feel comfortable doing it?" I realized I could get onstage if I had all my stuff with me—my million security blankets.

That became "Heather's Junk Drawer." It's a 20-minute comedy piece where I bring my own junk drawer onstage and get the audience to help me try to clean it out. But it never happens. I unpack things, tell stories, sing songs, and invite people to play along. Really, I'm more interested in the objects than I am in getting rid of them.

RRX: How do audiences respond to "Heather's Junk Drawer?"

HS: That surprised me. People always come up afterward and say, "Oh, I have that thing," or "I don't know why I keep this either."

We're all kind of hoarding these objects that are nostalgic or useful or useless or possibly needed for taxes or something. It's almost a universal human experience that we don't always talk about.

RRX: Your newest project, "Love Yourself More," takes some of these ideas in another direction. Where did that come from?

HS: The world was just seeming so hard and difficult, and I was feeling frustrated that there was nothing I could do that would really make a difference.

I started thinking about kids and thought, "What could I teach them? What would I say if I could say something?" And I thought that if everybody could just love themselves more, that would make a difference. No matter what is going on, if kids love themselves, that is a support that can help them get through it.



So I decided it had to be a show. It uses songs, interactive elements, and a lot of improvisation. I'm always watching the kids and noticing what they might need.

Through a Saratoga Arts grant, we're bringing the show to three local libraries in November and early December, and I especially want disabled children, families, and young adults to feel welcome.

It's a big deal for some families to come out into the world. I want it to feel worth the effort. Maybe it isn't going to go perfectly, because things don't go perfectly. But if they can say, "There were five minutes there that worked, and that kid got a message that helped," cool.

I want to be part of that.

See Heather E. Schwartz perform Love Yourself More Nov. 14 at 3 p.m. at Saratoga Springs Public Library; Nov. 21 at 11 a.m. at Schuylerville Public Library; and Dec. 5 at 11 a.m. at Ballston Community Public Library. Heather's Junk Drawer comes to Bard & Baker in Troy Nov. 15 at 5 p.m.

Continued from Page 34...



We play loud and slow, and it's been incredibly fun. The crowds have been really responsive, which has led us to gig at least twice a month.

RRX: Where can we see you playing? What does the future hold?

JG: You can catch us playing all over upstate New York, from No Fun and Ophelia's to basements and coffee shops. We plan to record a full-length album this winter and then hit the festival circuit hard next summer.

RRX: What do you do outside of drumming?

JG: In my 20s, I started DJing so I could gig nonstop. My first DJ gigs were in dive bars, where I'd set up in a corner and spin reggae and jazz all night. Building a small following around the city eventually led to playing underground club music at loft parties in Brooklyn.

I still DJ around Troy today, mostly for drag and burlesque events, under the name DJ Mercy.

In 2022, I started an art magazine, which eventually led me to open my own magazine shop and bookstore, Paper Moon. Paper Moon is located at 6 Brunswick Road in Troy, in the same building as Collar City Guitars, Factory Tattoo, and J. Gernon Framing.

Opening the bookstore has allowed me to connect with unique art scenes from around the world and bring some of that work back to Troy.

RRX: Anything else you'd like to share?

JG: Upstate New York has been an amazing place to grow up and perform, and I love having the opportunity to give something back through my bookstore. I post upcoming events and other information at PaperMoonTroy.com. And practice your rudiments!

RRX: I'm playing paradiddles as we speak ...

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Capital Region Timekeepers: Joshua Gruft

By OP Callaghan

A little about me ...

I love old movies and spend a lot of my spare time watching TCM or some of the other vintage cinema streaming services. I will often watch the same 20 or 30 films, as I have my favorites. A few weeks back, I watched "Paper Moon," featuring Ryan O'Neal and Tatum O'Neal, as a couple of grifters traveling through the Midwest during the depression. Not only was Tatum brilliant and lovable, but her real-life father, Ryan, was detestable and genuinely a terrible person. I went down the rabbit hole and found out that Ryan is kind of a lousy person in real life too. But enough about me. (Cue transition music)

Joshua Gruft is the owner of Paper Moon, a gem of a bookstore right here in Troy, NY. I shop there regularly, as its eclectic selection of new and used books, magazines, and independent publications always has something interesting. I knew that Josh was also a DJ, but I recently learned that he is also a great drummer! His traditional training and punk influences make him a percussive giant, and I am thrilled to introduce him to all of you. So without further delay, let's welcome DJ, bookstore owner, writer/publisher, composer, and drummer extraordinaire, Joshua Gruft!!!

RRX: Welcome, Josh. Tell me how you got started playing drums.

JG: Thanks for the invite, OP! I started playing percussion in my fourth-grade concert band. I'm so grateful for those first few years of playing rudiments over and over. From eighth through tenth grade, I played in a military-style marching band; our big gig every year was the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City. All of those foundational skills still come in handy. Once you become a walking metronome, nothing can stop you.

RRX: We hate to play the rudiments, but goddamnit if they aren't the most important foundation! Do you come

from a musical family?

JG: My great-uncle on my mom's side was an Ecuadorian cumbia saxophonist. I never met him, but I love listening to his records. Other than that, my family was filled with music lovers. There was always music playing in the house. '70s rock from my dad and '80s Spanish pop from my mom.

My parents also took me to a lot of concerts, everything from James Brown to B.B. King to Green Day to Limp Bizkit to Weird Al to Rob Zombie. There's nothing more inspiring than seeing live music.

RRX: Certainly! Is there one moment in time, or a piece of music, or a specific drummer, that really solidified it for you that you wanted to be a drummer?

JG: Green Day was my favorite band growing up. As soon as I saw the "Basket Case" video on MTV, I wanted to play exactly like Tré Cool. I would put on my headphones and tap along to "Dookie" on a practice pad for hours. Even the way he set up his drums inspired me. I still use a jazz-style four-piece setup today.

RRX: Tre is a master of the rudiments! Who are some of your other influences?

JG: I love funky music. Any time I play drums, you can expect to hear a little James Brown or Fela Kuti in there. After my drum teacher taught me all of Tré Cool's fills, we spent months learning every drum part on James Brown's "20 All-Time Greatest Hits!" CD.

I'm also a big fan of Brazilian and Turkish rhythms. I once joined a belly dancing troupe and played darbuka just so I could dive deeper into Turkish music. I even quit a band once because they wouldn't let me throw in some bossa nova from time to time.

Aphex Twin's manic breakbeats and J Dilla's heavily swung rhythms have also had a huge influence on the way I approach drums.

RRX: Very cool! Tell me about your first



kit. What are you playing now?

JG: My first kit was a beautiful green woodgrain six-piece Mapex with two rack toms and two floor toms. I had already started gigging by 15, and lugging that entire kit around got old pretty quickly.

My next kit was a white three-piece Tama from the '90s, and that became my workhorse. In college, I was playing in jazz and funk groups while traveling by subway, so I bought a small three-piece nesting kit from Drummers World in Manhattan. The bass drum and floor tom opened up so the entire kit could pack inside itself.

Very early in my career, I learned to bring as little gear as possible. To this day, I feel most comfortable behind a small kit.

My cymbals are a mix of Sabian, Zildjian, and Paiste. My hi-hats even have a Zildjian top and Paiste bottom. I round out the kit with a Pearl Chad Smith Signature black-nickel snare and Pro-Mark Japanese oak nylon-tip sticks, 5A most of the time, or 5B if I'm playing with a louder group.

RRX: Tell me about some of your playing experience.

JG: In my teens, I played in punk bands on stages all across the Albany-Schenectady-Troy region. In my 20s, I played drums in jazz clubs in New York City. Clubs would book only one band for

the entire night, so that's where I learned how to handle extended three- and four-hour sets.

In my 30s, back in upstate New York, I played in jam bands and started getting serious about producing music on my own. Being primarily a drummer hadn't given me much songwriting experience, so I spent a lot of time producing instrumentals, mostly for local rapper Wavy Cunningham.

Working with Wavy allowed me to concentrate on recording, production, and songwriting. We released a lot of music before eventually realizing we should just start a band. These days, we mostly get together and jam with other artists.

Now, at 40, I'm back playing punk clubs and basements with Selfless Demise. There's really nothing like performing for an underground punk crowd.

RRX: Tell me about your latest band, Selfless Demise!

JG: About three years ago, I met our singer, Will, aka Tw3ak, the loudest rapper I've ever heard. In November 2025, I finally convinced him to start a band with me, and Selfless Demise was born.

Continued on Page 31...

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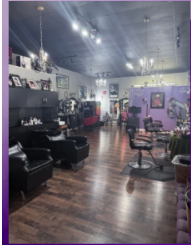
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Music Notes

The Art and Science of Music

By Peak Music Studios

Your Child Wants to Quit Music. Now What?

Oscar Wilde once wrote, "Children begin by loving their parents; as they grow older they judge them; sometimes they forgive them."

There is some comfort in knowing parents were apparently being blamed for everything long before social media. Parenting may be the most important job in the world for which there is no reliable instruction manual, very little formal training, constantly changing requirements, and a customer who will eventually explain, in considerable detail, everything you did wrong.

And yet we do it. We encourage. We worry. We drive them to lessons, rehearsals, games, and performances. We pay for instruments, equipment, and accessories we did not know existed until someone explained that our child absolutely needed one. Then, one afternoon, your child announces, "I want to quit." Welcome to parenting.

For parents of young musicians, this can be an especially difficult moment. Music does not always reward a child immediately. Progress happens slowly. There are plateaus and frustrating weeks when seemingly nothing works. A video game may congratulate you every thirty seconds. A guitar will happily allow you to play the same wrong note for six months.

The question is not simply whether your child wants to quit. Do they actually want to quit, or do they simply want the difficulty to stop? Those are not the same thing. A child may genuinely discover that guitar, piano, dance, baseball, or some other activity is not for them. Children should be allowed to discover who they are. But sometimes "I don't like this anymore" really means "I don't like being bad at this," "This used to be easy," or "I haven't made progress lately." All of those feelings are real. None necessarily mean it is time to quit.

Parents have a difficult role here.

Encourage without controlling, expect effort without turning practice into a fight, and recognize real unhappiness without teaching children that discomfort is always a reason to stop – that is a narrow road, and most of us occasionally drive into the ditch. One of the easiest mistakes sounds like this: "I am paying for these lessons, and you are going to practice."

From the parent's perspective, that makes perfect sense. From the child's perspective, something else can begin happening. The guitar is no longer the guitar. The guitar is now the thing Mom and Dad yell about. Eventually the child says, "I hate guitar." Most of the time they do not hate guitar. They hate fighting about guitar practice.

That is why, particularly with beginners, build the habit of practice before becoming obsessed with the duration. Fifteen focused minutes can accomplish a great deal. For a child, even tuning the guitar each day can be difficult, and a win. The goal is to let them experience a basic cycle: Practice = Improvement = Better Performance = Pride and Self-Confidence. Once young musicians experience that enough times, they begin to trust the process. Eventually, they begin motivating themselves.

Parents do not need to become the practice police. Ask questions instead. What are you learning? What is difficult right now? Show me something you could not do a month ago. Listen to them. Attend performances. Celebrate progress. Treat the work as meaningful. Then let the teacher do much of the technical evaluation. Your child already has a teacher. They still need a parent in the audience.

Somewhere along the way, however, I think our modern approach to education has become confused about one word: fun. Of course children should have fun. Music should contain joy, creativity, excitement, friendship, and moments

when a student suddenly realizes, "I can actually do this." But fun cannot be the sole purpose of the experience.

Sometimes I imagine taking the philosophy of "if it isn't fun, stop doing it" back to ancient Egypt. The Great Pyramid is under construction. A worker is moving an enormous block of stone under the Egyptian sun. He stops and announces, "This isn't fun anymore." Management gathers. There is concern. Perhaps he needs a different stone. Maybe a smaller stone. Perhaps today should be Pyramid Fun Day. Someone suggests snacks. Another worker reports that he no longer enjoys geometry. Construction is suspended. Five thousand years later, tourists arrive and admire a five-foot-high pile of rocks.

The point is obviously not that music education should resemble forced labor in ancient Egypt. Please do not quote me as advocating Pharaoh-based guitar instruction! The point is that anything worth building eventually becomes difficult. Fighting with a child will not build a lasting relationship with music, but teaching a child to quit whenever something stops being immediately satisfying will not build one either. Somewhere between those extremes is where real education lives.

Music requires something increasingly difficult to teach: discipline. You cannot swipe past the difficult part of learning or scroll around the months required to develop coordination. There is no "skip ad" button for frustration. A difficult song, a bad performance, an audition that did not go well, or trying something ten times and succeeding on the eleventh are not evidence that something has gone wrong. They teach a young person how to prepare, recover, tolerate frustration, and continue.

Our job is not to remove difficulty from our children's lives but to help them

discover that difficulty can be overcome. So before allowing a student to quit, find out what is actually wrong. Has progress stalled? Is the material too difficult? Too easy? Where is the child developmentally? If the teacher doesn't know, find one who does. Do they need a new song, a performance, a group, a different challenge or goal? Sometimes what appears to be a motivation problem is really a progress problem. Fix the progress problem, and motivation often returns.

This does not mean a child can never stop playing an instrument. They may eventually decide that music is not something they want to pursue. That is very different from learning to walk away whenever learning becomes difficult. You cannot pull on a plant to make it grow faster. You provide the right conditions and give it time. Children are much the same.

Eventually, what you hope to hear is something much more important than a perfect chord: "I can do difficult things." Your child does not need to play Carnegie Hall or become a pro. They may put the guitar in its case someday and go years without playing. But the listening, coordination, memory, creativity, pattern recognition, and discipline involved in making music do not simply disappear.

Perhaps that is the real goal. Not simply raising a musician, but raising a young person who understands that meaningful things take time, frustration can be survived, and effort changes ability. And someday, after years of doing your best, your grown child may still explain all the mistakes you made raising them. Oscar Wilde warned us. If we are very lucky, perhaps eventually they will forgive us.

And if, somewhere along the way, they learned not to run from every difficult thing they encounter, we probably did something right.

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An Interview

Ian Fidance

by Chad Koenig

RRX: First, I wanted to say that I feel out of place not bringing a bag of seafood and shellfish as a gift, like you did for Ron Bennington when you were interviewed on his Portcast. What was it like being a part of that? (Ron Bennington is a beloved comedian and host of The Bennington Show on SiriusXM, and has an interview show called Portcast where he interviews comedians while receiving chemotherapy for Stage 4 Colon Cancer. Fidance and Dave Attell lovingly but comedically brought in a bag of fresh seafood as a gift.)

IF: I'll never live that down (laughs). I thought, "If I was in the hospital, what would I want?" I would love a prime rib or something. I panicked on what to get him. I wanted to get him a steak from NY's Smith & Wollensky's, but I thought, "Probably not the best for someone battling colon cancer, but you know what is a good idea? OYSTERS!"

RRX: You were on Jim Norton's podcast, and I laughed when he mocked you for bringing them in and said, "Ya - let's have a celebratory mollusk!"

IF: That was great. Jim had the line of the show, though, when he said, "What are you supposed to give a guy with stage four colon cancer, tickets to NEXT YEAR'S Super Bowl!?" That was the best line.

RRX: What's it like doing his podcast? Being interviewed in his house while his dog is running around in the video in the background pooping on the floor.

IF: It was great. I spent half of the time there trying to convince him to get a cat! I've been doing comedy for 16 years, and I looked up to these guys. Now Attell is like a dad to me, and I get to talk to Norton on the phone. It's a job, but it's become a really great life.

RRX: You are becoming one of the greats. You are getting acknowledged by guys like Ron Bennington and other New York comics as one of the best in the business.

IF: Wow. That's really great to hear.



IF: Yeah, I love cats. I have my two cats' names tattooed here on my arms - Samson and Glenn. Every time I pack my luggage to leave, Samson jumps in with one of his toys and wants to go with me. It's like they don't want me to leave.

RRX: As you can see, I'm wearing a T-shirt of the NES Pro Wrestling game for you in homage to your YouTube show, "Ian Do."

IF: Ya! I did a two-part episode with AEW (All Elite Wrestling)!

RRX: I'm a fan of AEW. Do you watch the products?

IF: I'm absolutely familiar with AEW. I started watching during the pandemic. Their storylines are amazing. Two of my dear friends work with the company doing props, and they hooked me up with being able to do the episode on my travel show. Everyone was so kind. It was such a wonderful experience.

RRX: Even as a lifelong wrestling fan, I was learning stuff as you were working with the ring crew, and then while you were learning how to be a character in the ring. People think the ring is like a trampoline. It's not. It's wood.

IF: Yeah, when I got choke-slammed by Stori, who is a 6'4 female wrestler, I

truly felt like my lungs went through my chest. And one thing I love about this travel show is being able to show some of these jobs that people take for granted. People have always given shine to the talent, but I wanted to bring attention to those behind the scenes. They are the reason that these shows exist, so working with them was amazing. I'm so happy with how it turned out, and that true-blue wrestling fans have loved it, which means a lot.

RRX: It's a very educational episode. You were also doing an episode as a punk rock singer, which I imagine shredded your vocal cords.

IF: I sang with a great hardcore band based out of Salt Lake City called Spent. They asked me to sing on a track for their new album, and we went into the recording studio. I was like, "Ya. My voice is shot, and I still have two hours of doing stand-up and a meet-and-greet. I'm done!" The show has been amazing, and I've been getting nothing but positive feedback, which is rare these days.

RRX: What other cities do you want to go to and jobs to do?

IF: I would really love to do roofing and flooring, as I used to be a

carpenter, and to do woodworking with someone. But honestly, any job in any town, I would do. It's all fascinating to me. I'm now 11 years sober, and I do have people asking me to come to work at their brewery or weed farm. I can't do it. But I'm a hypocrite because I smoke two packs a day, and if I were asked to work at Phillip Morris, I'd be like, "I'll be there in a heartbeat!"

RRX: I come from a paving family. Is that something you would want to try?

IF: Paving driveways? What, do you come from a Romani Gypsy family? Haha! Man, that is hard. I grew up working a million different jobs. I'd watch paving and welding videos at night, and those guys are just superheroes. It's no joke.

RRX: Now you're here for the first annual Saratoga Comedy Festival. What have you thought about it so far?

IF: It's great! Any time locals can come out and enjoy comedy is wonderful. Travis (Stealey) did such a good job of putting this together, and people are having so much fun. I know the comics are. And I have to give credit to the volunteers who are helping as well. These festivals don't work without them. It's good to see everyone with a smile on their face.

RRX: Thanks for taking the time to do this. And enjoy the Saratoga Comedy Festival!

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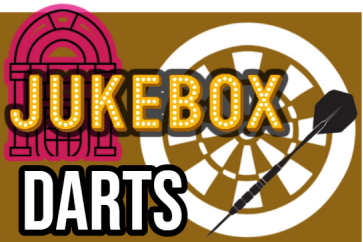


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No Filter: An Interview with

Caity Gallagher

By: Lisa Irwin

Troy, NY-based musician Caity Gallagher is making her mark with her unique sound, heartfelt songwriting, and passion for performing. Recently, Lisa Irwin had the opportunity to interview Caity to learn about her music, songwriting process, inspirations, and what's ahead for this talented Capital Region musician.

RRX: I first heard you play at the Argyle Brewing Company's Cambridge Depot a few years ago and thought you were amazing! I really appreciate you taking the time to do this interview with me. While preparing, I noticed that you perform as a solo artist, as part of a duo, and with a full band. Your style has been compared to musicians such as The Cranberries and Jackson Browne. What elements of those artists' music do you feel most connected to, and how have they helped shape your own sound?

CG: I've always found that I prioritize lyrics and melody when writing. I feel like telling a story and weaving something within each song that others can relate to and find comfort in is my main focus, and then I try to combine that with a catchy/memorable melody. I think that songwriting style embodies the '70s Laurel Canyon vibe mixed with a more '90s pop/rock style.

RRX: I know this varies among musicians, but when creating a song, what usually comes first for you—the lyrics, the melody, or the overall feeling you want to capture?

CG: I'm almost always lyrics first. I'll have an idea for a hook, or a couple of verse lines, then create a story around the feeling of those words. From there, I usually strum out a few chords in a folk progression, and find a melody that fits. Once I have an outline of the song in that way, I can play around with changing the key, adding other orchestration elements for recording, etc.

RRX: Your songs are praised for turning intimate experiences into stories that

many people can relate to. What's the most unexpected place or moment that has inspired a song?

CG: I always find inspiration while driving. I feel like it must be one of those instances where your mind is focused on something else, so your subconscious can flow freely without overthinking. But it's happened countless times that I've had to pull over on the side of the road and type out a lyric idea before it's forgotten (which is actually where the chorus of "Hour Drive" came from). I've also found that I get song ideas and am not really sure where they come from or who/what they're about. And then years later I'll be singing my own song and find the meaning in it that probably shaped its writing originally, but that I didn't consciously connect to at that time.

RRX: Your music has been described as storytelling. Is there a song you've written that feels like a chapter from your own life?

CG: Definitely "My Days." It details the struggles of finding your own footing and having a sense of self-assurance outside of the opinions and support of others. I wrote that song as more of a journal entry than anything else, not really planning to record or perform it live. It felt more personal and self-focused than any of my previous work, and it was something that initially I wasn't sure would resonate with anyone else. I did get over the apprehension of that and decided to release it, and it's become one of my favorite songs to play. It actually resonated so deeply with one friend that he used it in a scene for a movie he was producing!

RRX: Thank you again for taking the time for this interview! Do you have any upcoming projects, performances, or exciting things in the works that you'd like to share?

CG: I've been working on some new material that I feel very connected to and excited about, but no timelines on

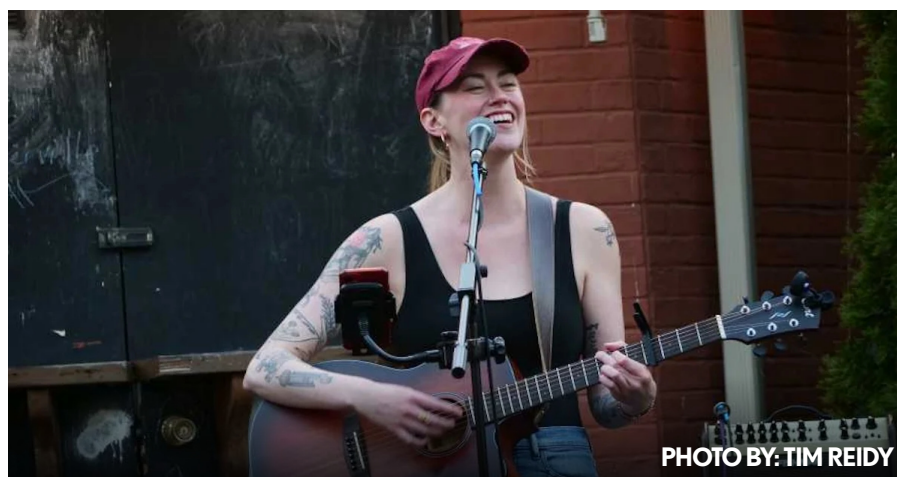


PHOTO BY: TIM REIDY

when these tunes will be recorded or released yet! I have the opportunity at the end of September to attend a songwriting camp, and I'm really looking forward to solidifying some of these songs there. I do have one very unique and exciting show coming up on Saturday, October 24th, at The Troy Savings Bank Music Hall. Zan Strumfeld Productions is hosting their fourth "Ooky Spooky Musical Showcase." Nine other acts and I will be performing original music based on Capital Region history. Writing a song based on historical news articles is something completely out of my comfort zone, but it has been extremely enjoyable. I can't wait for this show.

With new music on the horizon and exciting performances ahead, Caity Gallagher is an artist to keep an eye and an ear on. If you want to discover even more about Caity's music, check out her official website, <https://www.caitygallaghermusic.com>, and follow her on Instagram.

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Cindy Guitars

By Rob Skane

Cindy Hulej crafts amazing guitars using wood from New York City buildings; some of the wood is close to 200 years old. Cindy began as an apprentice at Carmine Street Guitars, working under Rick Kelly, a legendary luthier. She is now an in-demand custom guitar builder. As a matter of fact, you should have her build your next guitar! Please find Cindy at cindyguitars.com

RRX: What was it about building guitars that first grabbed you? Was there a particular guitar or builder that made you think, "I want to do this myself"?

CH: The first guitar builder that caught my eye was Rick Kelly, who has been my mentor (I call him my angel) for 15 years now. I found a big thread about him on the Gear Page, and I followed it for years as a teenager. I grew up with guitar, my father was a player his whole life and he would work on his here and there and I always watched him. It didn't come until later, when I was in the place to figure out what I wanted to really do, that I kept circling back to how cool it would be to work with Rick. I didn't want to leave NYC and go to a luthiery school out west. I

admired Rick's shared love and knowledge about NYC's history, old growth timber, and artwork (although I didn't realize just how into it he was until I actually met him). We hit it off right away the first time I stepped into the shop, and there's nobody like him ... I call him the walking encyclopedia. He made me start my own brand from the get-go which I wasn't expecting or had even thought about, but even that is in his principles of "I work on my customs and you work on yours." I think it's just one of the many things he is very stand-up and smart for.

RRX: What do you love most about the actual process of building a guitar—the woodworking, the electronics, shaping the neck, or that moment when you finally plug it in and hear it for the first time?

CH: I love everything about the build process, truly. I love pulling nails, making templates, routing (although the machine we use is very dangerous so you have to be in a sharp state of mind to be on it), the tedious sanding, the artwork if someone wants it, soldering, mixing the finish ... it's all exciting. The best thing is getting to see the instrument on stage or hear it on an

album. As long as the customer loves it, I'm very happy, and it keeps me going.

RRX: When you start designing a guitar, do you usually have a very specific idea in your head, or does the instrument tend to reveal itself as you work on it?

CH: It goes both ways. Sometimes I have a sketch and the guitar ends up a whole different visual, but other times, especially if a client has a specific idea, it's pretty on point. No matter; it's a very "back and forth process" with the client and very personal.

RRX: How much of yourself do you think ends up in the guitars you build? Is there something about your guitars that reflects your personality or your way of seeing things?

CH: I put so much love, time, thought, inspiration, and evaluation into every guitar and all the artwork I do. It is all an extension of me and who I am. I am hoping, at this point, if you see one of my guitars, you know it's mine. Whether you're in luthiery, the art world, music,

Continued on Page 21...

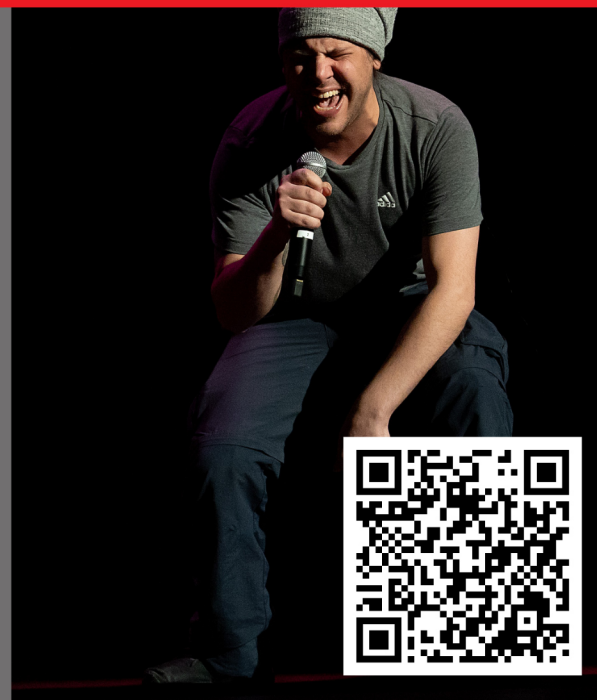
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Canna Talk

By MBF & 400 River

Ever tried cooking with cannabis? It's easy to make your own edibles and beyond right at home. Preparing your own cannabis creation is a really fun way to experiment with the plant. There are quite a few different ways that you can incorporate cannabis into your meal or snack. Some are

totally homemade and others use products sold at most dispensaries, so there are plenty of options when it comes to dosing your food.

The Quick and Short Science Behind Edibles

Simply ingesting raw cannabis buds is not going to get you high. In order to get your cannabis ready for preparing edibles, you need to decarboxylate it. Decarboxylation is the chemical process that occurs when cannabis is heated, and inactive compounds like THCA are converted to bioavailable THC. When thinking about creating edibles, keep in mind that THC and other cannabinoids combined with fat, like oil or butter, are more easily absorbed in the body.

Not Homemade

Stop in your local dispensary and see what goodies they have. Almost all dispensaries will have an ample selection of edible products. Gummy edibles are certainly the most common type of edibles that you will find. Chocolate is another classic combination with cannabis. There are a handful of companies in NY truly excelling at cannabis-infused chocolates. While slower to roll out here in NY, there are a few companies out there making non-gummy or chocolate edibles. There are some cookies out, maple candy and Rice Krispie-style bars. If you're like me and prefer salty options, there are a few out there, but you'll be more likely to find a sweet treat than a savory snack.

The edibles category includes drinks too! It is a thoughtful idea to stock get-togethers with some cannabis-infused drinks in addition to, or in place of, alcoholic drinks. As more folks start to be mindful about their alcohol consumption, THC-infused drinks are a nice touch. Stir sticks containing cannabis-infused powder are easy to shake into non-carbonated drinks. Drink drops or shots are awesome if you are looking to craft your own mocktail or infuse while on-the-go.

Kinda Homemade

If you are looking for an easier way of preparing homemade edibles, all you need is a THC tincture from your local dispensary. This is a great way to incorporate cannabis into items like salad dressings, drinks, or anything that doesn't need to be heated. Since the THC in a tincture format is already activated, it doesn't need to be decarbed again.

My suggestion would be to use tinctures in a fat-based preparation. A frosting would be an amazing way to easily include a tincture into cake or cupcakes. As I mentioned above, a salad dressing would be a great option to infuse with a tincture. If there is any "weedy" taste in the tincture, it would be mostly covered up by the other ingredients. A compound butter would be another fun idea. Combine softened butter with fresh (or dried) herbs for a savory option, or maple syrup, cinnamon, and nutmeg for something on the sweet side. Oil-based tinctures won't incorporate really well into drinks, but I have been seeing a lot of cocktails with oil floats recently.

Using cannabis concentrates is another great way to infuse dishes. RSO (Rick Simpson Oil) is already decarbed and a great option. Rosin edibles are becoming super popular. Rosin is a full-spectrum cannabis product that is

extracted using only heat and pressure. (RSO oil, on the other hand, uses solvents like food-grade ethanol.) Since rosin is still technically raw cannabis, rosin does need to be decarbed before adding into whatever you make. From my research, one of the best ways to do this is to place the rosin in a glass container and then heat it in the oven for around 20 to 30 minutes at 220-250 degrees Fahrenheit.

Homemade!

Making edibles at home is fun and easy, plus I always feel like the end product is WAY more potent than what you buy at the dispensary. Here are two of the most popular ways to infuse at home with no equipment. I won't be providing specific recipes with quantities; a little cannabis goes a long way in these preparations. (It's notable to mention that there are some very cool gadgets out there. Levo and Magical are two of the most popular machines that will decarb and infuse. You can set the temperature and time, and these come with detailed instructions.)

In the past, there have been two main ways I've made homemade edibles. They both involve decarboxylating your cannabis first. In order to decarb, you will need cannabis, a grinder/scissors, an oven, and a baking sheet. Set your oven to 220 degrees F. While your oven is heating up, grind or cut up your cannabis and place it on the baking sheet. Cook for 10-20 minutes, stir, and bake for another 10-20 minutes until golden brown. Let cool before using.

Alcohol tinctures are easy to make. Place that decarbed cannabis in a mason jar. Fill the jar with Everclear and stash it in the freezer for at least a day. The freezing cold helps preserve the various cannabinoids during the extraction process. (You can use Vodka and keep it in a cool, dark place like a pantry as well.) Strain before using to

ensure there are no flower particles in your tincture. From there, this product must be diluted.

Let's finish off with probably the most popular way to make edibles - using cannabis-infused butter. Cannabutter is one of the most tried and true ways to get baked while baking. I simply combine my cannabis with butter and let it cook in a Crockpot set to low. I used to let this concoction infuse overnight, but that's not actually necessary for a potent butter. Most of the cannabinoids release into the butter within an hour, so that cuts down on cooking time tremendously. Once the butter is infused, strain and chill. If you aren't going to be using this up quickly, I'd suggest cutting the butter into portions and freezing it so it doesn't go bad. From there, you can substitute this cannabutter for butter in any recipe.

Enjoy!





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Horror Business: an Interview with “The World’s Greatest Misfits Tribute”

By: Jorel Spain

Horror Business is a long-standing local band that began in the basement of an Albany tattoo parlor in 2002. Over the past 24 years, they have performed at nearly every rock club in Albany and beyond and were named “Best Tribute Band” by Metroland two years in a row (2008-2009). They have performed as headliners and in support of other local bands such as Blase Debris, The Erotics, and Society High. Their high-energy performances have become a Halloween season staple at Albany area clubs, performing masterful renditions of classic-era Misfits songs and other Danzig-related material. I had the privilege of sitting down with two of the founding members, Billy Beer (guitar) and Nick Esposito (vocals) (Bassist Rob Marcello also contributed comments via text), to hear the story of how “The World’s Greatest Misfits Tribute” came to be.

RRX: Guys, thanks for meeting up with me here! I really appreciate you taking the time to come and sit down with me. So first off, tell me - how did Horror Business come together?

BB: So basically, it started with me just bringing my guitar amp over to my buddy's tattoo shop [Slingin' Ink] just so I could jam and not piss off any neighbors. I just started playing some Misfits songs in his basement, and then Nick came over and started singing some songs. Then the tattoo artist, Jim Hardy, was like, “Show me the bass lines on this. I'll get a bass and play!” and the other artist, Christian, was a drummer and brought his drum set up, and it just happened. We never said, “Hey, let's be a Misfits tribute band.” Yeah, that is how it started, you know, downstairs at the tattoo shop.

RRX: How did the first Horror Business show happen?

BB: Our first show was at Shaughnessy Hall. Paulie from Society High came over and brought some flyers over and was like, “Hey, would you guys like to open up for us sometime?” And I never really thought about it, but I was like, yeah, cool, that would be awesome.

NE: That was the catalyst.

BB: That's what started it all, and the cool thing about that is Danzig's brother was in the audience! He and my brother worked at the state together, so it was a pretty cool thing.

NE: Oh, it was great! I also worked with him at the state. I didn't realize who he was at first, so I asked him, and he said yeah! So I gave him the flyer.

RRX: What other bands and artists do you cover?

NE: Samhain, of course, and Stooges occasionally. And a couple Danzig solo songs.

RRX: What are some of your favorite songs to play?

NE: I'd say “Teenagers from Mars” is my favorite one to play, and “Where Eagles Dare,” too. Oh, and “All Murder All Guts All Fun.”

BB: ...which we don't do very much!

NE: And “Death Comes Ripping” because it's more of a hardcore feel, you know. I always wanted to sing in a hardcore band, but the opportunity never happened really.

BB: “Mommy” into “London Dungeon” is great too!

NE: LOL We like them all!. We're going to say every one of them, aren't we?

RRX: What's the hardest song to play?

RM: Hardest song is the one someone requests live, and we give in and play it, having not practiced it (LOL)!

RRX: Do you have a favorite show or standout performance?

BB: I think we both agree on the CBGB's show just for the status of it. And the Atlantic City Jersey show I liked a lot.

NE: Yeah, same with me. Yeah. You know, it was the last week that CBGB's was even open.

BB: So that was a special time, sad time.

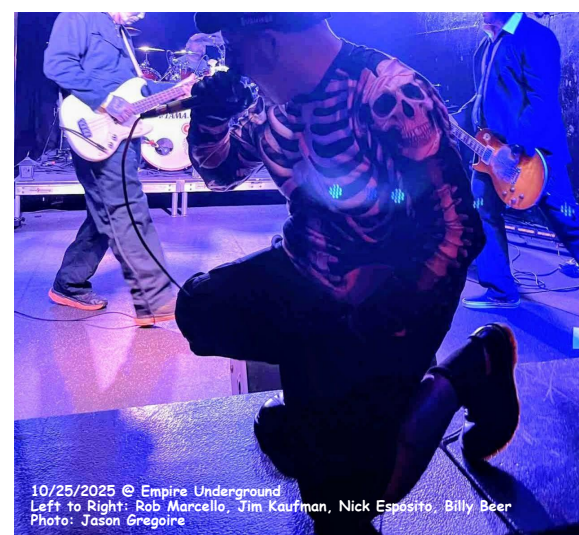
RRX: What's the best thing about performing in a tribute band?

NE: Everybody knows the songs already. It's music they love.

BB: We ask people to come up and sing all the time. People do whatever they want. It's built-in fun because they already know all the lyrics. That's the best part. We get to have fun with it too. We're having fun. Everybody's having fun.

NE: We also got the Metroland “Best Tribute Band” two years in a row. It's nice to be acknowledged like that, especially when there's a lot harder-working cover bands. We were playing steady a lot of shows then, not like now when we're doing maybe 1, 2, or 3 shows a year. Society High was doing a lot of shows at the time, and they asked us to be in just about every show they did.

RRX: Why do you like performing this music in particular?



10/25/2025 © Empire Underground
 Left to Right: Rob Marcello, Jim Kaufman, Nick Esposito, Billy Beer
 Photo: Jason Gregoire

NE: We've loved it forever, together.

BB: We've been friends for 40 years, we've always loved the Misfits, and we actually both bought the first Danzig album together!

NE: It just fell into place that way

RRX: What other bands have you played in?

BB: Other bands I've been in. The Erotics, Blase Debris, Murderer's Row, Bomb, and then Horror Business is the one that started it all.

NE: I'm doing a side project, doing Elvis and random songs with Ike from Ike's Wasted World. We did the thing for the Humpy's Benefit, and we got a couple more lined up in the next couple months.

RRX: Great, so you guys had a pretty long hiatus from your 2019 show at Pauly's up until last year's Dark Echoes Expo at Empire Underground. What was it like coming back after that long, and how did that show come together?

BB: I mean, it felt like a breath of fresh air. I mean, it's like you don't do something for so long. You know, you don't even realize you miss it ... I just love playing live, ya know? I don't sit in my room and noodle. I don't write, you know; I just love to do something, be physical with it. It's not a sport, but you sweat, and you get it all out of you, and it's cathartic.

Continued on Page 24...



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EAT IN/TAKE OUT

The Prog Digest

By Klyde Kadiddlehumper

It's been a cruel, cruel summer. Leaving me here on my own. It's a cruel, cruel summer. Now you're gone.

By the time Bananarama released this to the world, Klyde was already a proud law school dropout. Making more bad decisions, listening to all kinds of things, and learning the art of making the perfect vodka gimlet. Already understanding that as time goes on, the quote "Now you're gone" would become a theme. You know, like how cats seem to go missing for no apparent reason and finding them is a circuitous route at best.

Well, over the last month or so, three really well-known and a number of others have gone—well, not missing, but they have gone, nonetheless. No, we are not going to do the typical retrospective, and this is not a tell-the-story-of-thus-and-so.

In Klyde's warped and twisted reality, there is a method to this, and it is all connected.

The end of the story, sorta, is that we lost Jaye P. Morgan (singer and most notorious Gong Show cast member ever), Dolly Parton, Cheetah Chrome (aptly of the punk band Dead Boys), Tim Curry (whose self-professed most sad lost love was Miss Piggy), the less than aptly named Frank Beard, as well as friend of Sebastian Bach, bassist Kevin Chown (and member of Chad Smith's Bombastic Meatbats).

The beginning has to do with the number of "ologists" in Klyde's world, about to expand by one. Gets the old noggin going.

So, it all has to do with the Jungian theory of Synchronicity. Not a reference to The Police, but nice try.

The occurrence of meaningful coincidences with no direct physical cause.

Rather than being all high-minded about this, let's get to the more easily accessible way to look at this.

Douglas Adams, author of the 5-book trilogy, "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy," also wrote two detective novels with the main character Dirk Gently. "Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency" and its follow-up, "The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul," are based on Dirk's concept that his detection was based on the Interconnectedness of all things. If he were

hunting for a little old lady's cat, his bill might include, for example, a new fridge. It was part of the process and the bill was the bill ... even if he didn't find that damned, I mean cute, fuzzy kitty - he was to be paid. Around him, chaos ensued. No one could ever figure out how the sofa, destined for the second floor, got stuck on the landing in between, with computer models not able to figure out either how it got there or how to get it out.

"The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul" includes an angry Eagle. Mostly angry because the Eagle can't figure out how it became an Eagle in the first place, being a fighter jet and all.

Oh, and Odin is in an old folk's home and gets increasingly angry since the fees he paid were substantial, but he has lived longer than anyone figured at his age.

And, as usual, Thor is making a mess of a number of things.

Oh, that Douglas had not passed so early, before finishing the third - "A Salmon of Doubt."

So, you can easily see how thinking about the addition of a new 'ologist' to my stable leads us here. You know. Cardiologist. Gastroenterologist. Hepatologist. Endocrinologist. Mixologist.

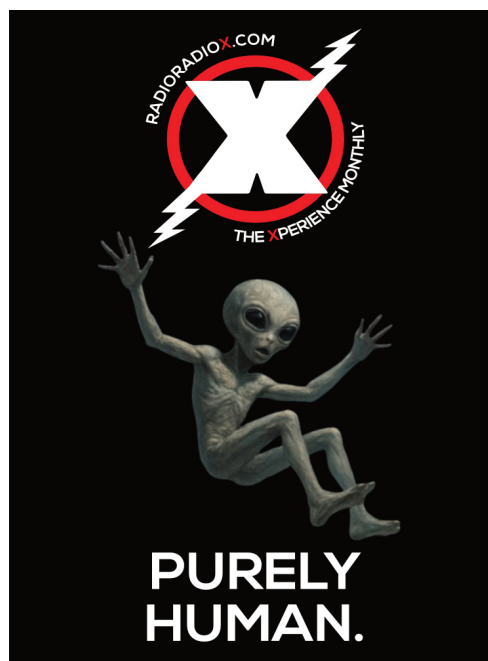
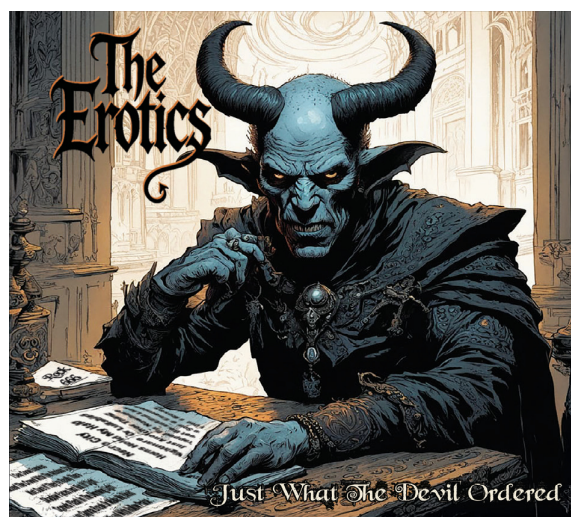
And thus, the thoughts of the crazy things we will do to not end up, at least for now, as one who is gone. Amongst those gone much earlier is the author who wrote of a man finding cats and solving mysteries of which he was not aware. Through methods that simply depend on allowing that which is around him to occur, as it will always end up where it ought to be.

Perhaps, it is better if fewer people listen and take us to where we WANT to go, and just let us meander to where we NEED to be.

Ultimately, that is right where we started.

Gone.

Until next time.

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