

THE RECORD
ARTS

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2006

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SECTION C

DEXTER IS A LIKABLE GUY. WHICH POSES A PROBLEM FOR US: IS IT OK TO ROOT FOR A SERIAL KILLER? C4



“I’m not trying to be a clone, but when something really thrills you, you want to emulate it.”

DAVID BEBEE, RECORD STAFF
Renny Schweiger (left), lead singer and lead guitar of the band Rave On, and bass player Doug Collier play a Stevie Ray Vaughn number during a performance at the Fiddler’s Green Pub in Cambridge.

For the love of the music

“If it’s done right, it shouldn’t matter if it’s the original band or a tribute. If it’s live and it’s good, there’s a real connection with the people, and nothing compares to that.”

VEGAS AXL
GUNZ N’FN ROSEZ FRONT MAN

BY COLIN HUNTER
RECORD STAFF

WATERLOO REGION

It’s uncanny. The ponytail spilling from the wide-rimmed black hat, the Fender Stratocaster inscribed with the letters SRV wailing the bluesy solo of Texas Flood — the man onstage is Stevie Ray Vaughan. Ish.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, the real Stevie Ray Vaughan would be very flattered (if he were alive).

The man onstage at the Fiddler’s Green in Cambridge is actually Renny Schweiger of Toronto, a computer programmer during the week, a Vaughan doppelganger on weekends.

Schweiger and his band, like dozens of tribute acts that tour the club circuit, try to be the next-best-thing to seeing the rock stars they emulate.

Schweiger’s guitar is a replica of Vaughan’s so-called Number One, and the strings on it are the same brand as the ones Vaughan plucked. The amps, the same. The outfit, ditto.

Most important, the songs — including the blistering solos that put Vaughan in the pantheon of guitar gods — are reproduced note for note.

“I’ve seen the real Stevie Ray twice,” 38-year-old Cade Thomson hollers over the din, “and this guy (Schweiger) is great. Nobody sounds exactly like Stevie Ray, but this guy is close.”

That’s the kind of comment Schweiger loves to hear.

Ever since he saw a live video of Stevie Ray Vaughan playing Toronto’s El Mocambo, he has dedicated himself to learning the licks of the late rocker.

Bands like Stealing Dan cover their favourite musicians out of respect — not because they can’t play anything else

“I’m not trying to be a clone, but when something really thrills you, you want to emulate it.”

Sometimes it works, sometimes not so much.

Stevie Ray Vaughan never achieved the kind of mainstream success enjoyed by bands like The Beatles or The Rolling Stones — and that applies to tribute acts, too.

“We’ve played to no one before,” Schweiger said.

But other nights, like this one, the band whips a lively (read: drinking) crowd into a frenzy.

“This is great,” Schweiger says between sets. “A wonderful crowd.”

Still, that might translate into a \$100 payday for each musician in the band, and maybe an invitation to come back.

“To people who might think I’m riding on Stevie Ray’s coattails for money and glory, they should keep in mind that this is absolutely a money-losing enterprise for me,” Schweiger says.

“I do this because I love the music.”

• • •
The Bayou Boys are huge in Finland.

They’ve toured there 18 times during their 17 years together.

The number of original songs they’ve played while there: zero.

If they did play original songs, they probably wouldn’t be huge in Finland.

So they do what they’ve always done: play the feel-good, boot-stompin’ country rock of Creedence Clearwater Revival, and play it well.

“If you’re going to cover great material,” says front man Mike McDonald, “you’d better be damn good at it.”

McDonald is warming up backstage moments before a performance for several hundred people at the Black Forest Inn in Conestogo. But there’s a glitch — guitarist Steve Grisbrook is stuck in traffic somewhere near Toronto.

“We’re sweating bullets right now,” says McDonald, a veteran of Kitchener’s music scene. “But we’ll have to go on in 20 minutes, with or without him. That’s rock and roll, man.”

It has been 22 years since McDonald founded a CCR tribute band called Green River. He parted ways with Green River a few years later, but when he got word that the group had disbanded altogether, he formed the Bayou Boys to fill the CCR tribute niche.

An acquaintance convinced the band to play a gig in Finland, which snowballed into a regular set of shows, as well weekend shows around North America.

“The past 17 years have gone by real quick. I’ve become a journeyman at this tribute band thing.”

The house lights go down, and still no guitarist.

“It’s OK,” McDonald tells the house manager, “we’ll carry it for now.”

With that, McDonald takes the stage with drummer Ilkka Lehti and bass player Colonel Jessome. They break into a rendition of CCR’s Cotton Fields.

The crowd cheers as if CCR had walked onstage. Tribute bands, like most forms of entertainment, require some suspension of disbelief.

• • •
Andy Clements is giddy. He has come to Waterloo from Arthur to hear his favourite songs performed live.

And he has managed to talk

some friends into joining him, which isn’t always easy. Steely Dan is an acquired taste. The same goes for Stealing Dan.

“I’m the only person I know who loves Steely Dan,” says 40-year-old Clements.

The members of Stealing Dan — all 13 of them — know they are filling a relatively small musical niche, for a different demographic than the usual crowd at the Starlight Social Club.

“It’s an older crowd,” admits keyboardist/co-founder Peter De Sousa.

Guitarist André Clouthier adds: “This is music of that generation.”

The members of locally based Stealing Dan have no illusions of making big money or getting famous. When they split the earnings, each gets “a nickel or two,” Clouthier jokes.

Instead, they enjoy the sense of accomplishment that comes with pulling off some of Steely Dan’s challenging jazz-rock epics.

“I teach voice lessons, I was an opera singer . . . and this is for sure the hardest music I’ve ever done,” Clouthier says.

Though they’ve only played about 10 gigs in the past few years, the members of Stealing Dan have learned two basic rules about being a tribute act.

First, you’ve got to play well. If you butcher a classic song, fans will hate you. That’s why even backup players of Stealing Dan are top-notch hired guns (horn player Larry Larson plays principal trumpet in the KW Symphony).

Second, a good band name goes a long way. Stealing Dan follows the formula for a perfect tribute band name: a catchy pun that lets a potential audience know exactly what to expect.

Among the others around North America who have mastered this trick: Alike Cooper, Cool-play, Cheap Purple, Led Zepagain and Greenish Day.

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DAVID BEBEE, RECORD STAFF

Rave On, a Stevie Ray Vaughn cover band, includes (from left) Renny Schweiger, lead singer and guitarist; Will Catrambone, drums; Doug Collier, bass; and Richard Uglow, keyboards. Dancing is Dawn Duchesne.



DAVID BEBEE, RECORD STAFF

Renny Schweiger, the lead singer of Rave On, leaves the stage and plays to some audience members (from left) Melanie Proulx, Sara Gies, Jen Manser and Cade Thomson.

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