

Bluegrass bands try to bring in younger crowd

By ANN CANTRELL
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Next Friday night will be anything but typical at 40 Watt Club — with stories of a grandma's wooden leg and a boy falling down an elevator shaft put to bluegrass music.

Johnny Roquemore writes comedic lyrics he puts to music with his band, Johnny Roquemore and the Apostles of Bluegrass.

His songs show his "unusual world view." "I'm usually pretty surprised how excited they are," said Roquemore of audiences.

The band has brought in more of a younger, college crowd through their comedic lyrics, Roquemore said.

He said students are more attentive and excited if the show is funny.

"The younger crowd is starting to get turned on towards it," said banjo player John Nipper.

Nipper said a younger crowd is beginning to get into bluegrass because of its high energy.

Rich Mullinax, upright bass player for 16 Tons and the Blackmon Brothers, said comedy is a tradition in bluegrass music and early bluegrass players were expected to be comedians as well.

As bluegrass has developed over the years, comedy has had less and less of a significant presence.

"I think there isn't enough comedy in bluegrass," Mullinax said.

BLUEGRASS NIGHT

Featuring Johnny Roquemore and The Apostles of Bluegrass, 16 Tons and David Blackmon
When: 8 p.m. Friday, March 17
Where: 40 Watt Club
Cost: \$7

At the show, Mullinax will perform with 16 Tons and David Blackmon.

Mullinax said 16 Tons' music is more of a straight up bluegrass, while David Blackmon's music infuses jazz and blues.

Bluegrass music, itself, is a fusion of Irish and Scottish fiddle and Southern blues.

These styles came together when Irish and Scottish immigrants settled in the region, Mullinax said.

He said bluegrass music always lacks drums. Instead, the upright bass keeps the beat for the band.

Mullinax has organized several different bluegrass nights over the years in Athens. He said the style of music has been well received no matter the venue.

"Athens is open to all styles of music," Mullinax said.

Johnny Roquemore also said his band has been well received in a wide variety of places, including Jekyll Island where it played for a wealthier, older crowd who had never even heard bluegrass before.

"We had a fabulous time presenting bluegrass to them," Roquemore said.



▲ Bluegrass Night, Friday, March 17 at 40 Watt Club, features David Blackmon (top left), Johnny Roquemore and The Apostles of Bluegrass (bottom left) and 16 Tons (right).



SPECIAL | THE RED & BLACK

Music still fun without incense

By RACHEL WEBSTER
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Athens' smoking ordinances forced the Tom Petty Tribute band to change its onstage practices.

"We used to burn incense, but we got yelled at in Athens because you can't have smoke inside," said singer/guitarist Bob Yeti.

Even without the incense, Yeti said audiences have enjoyed the band's Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers cover songs.

The Macon-based band includes Yeti, drummer/vocalist Cooper, bassist Joe Grizzle and guitarist/vocalist Ryan Burkhardt.

During shows, "everyone's having a good time and singing together and smiling," he said.

"It's really easy to be a frontman in this band because everyone is having such a good time," he added.

Yeti grew up in Orange Park, Fla., near Tom Petty's hometown, which gives his singing an authentic sound, he said.

"Being from the same area where he's from, my voice just sounds like his," Yeti said. "I have this horrible Florida accent."

Although none of the band members have seen Petty in concert, they do own concert DVDs he has released.

"We watch (the DVDs) and we joke around with each other like, 'That's you, that's you, play your part,'" he said.



TOM PETTY TRIBUTE

When: 10 tonight
Where: Last Call
Price: Free

Yeti said.

"Some of the sets we play are from his actual sets — we play in the order he played. We take some live liberties like he does," he added.

Even with this detail, Yeti said the band is not a true tribute band because the members don't go out of their way to look like Petty's band.

"I guess our style is pretty similar to what they wear onstage, like dress shirts," Yeti said.

The music matters more to the members than their appearance.

"We get up there and play the songs to the best of our abilities," Yeti said.

The band tries to appeal to a large crowd by playing diverse Petty tunes.

"We probably play something off every single one of his albums," Yeti said.

He added that the band also plays some Bob Dylan and Traveling Wilburys songs that include Petty as a collaborator.

Even the more obscure songs draw smiles from the audience, Yeti said.

"There are certain songs that we play and ... the audience is like, '...I can't



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▲ Tom Petty Tribute (bottom) will play cover songs by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers (top) tonight at Last Call.

believe they're playing that one," he said.

The band has found a fan in Eyal Reisin, owner of Last Call, where the group had its first Athens show.

"They're really, really good," Reisin said. "It's a great show."

The venue features three to four cover bands per month, which is probably more than other venues, Reisin said.

"I just try to do what the public wants, and it seems like they like the cover bands," he said. "They like to hear songs they've heard before."

At Last Call, Reisin said cover bands draw larger crowds, although the venue also plays host to many original bands.

Folk music remains a large part of diverse music scene

By AUBREY SMITH
For The Red & Black

Though present-day Athens boasts one of the most varied music scenes in America, that was not the case in the mid-80s when a group of University students and local Athenians founded the Athens Folk Music and Dance Society.

Today, the group regularly holds hoots — a gathering of local acoustic musicians — to give performers a chance to showcase their talents.

Twenty years ago "there weren't a lot of bars and most of the music was heavy rock," said Barbara Edwards, long-time treasurer of the the society.

In response to a music scene dominated by rock, the society began having dances to raise money and hiring folk singers to come to Athens and perform.

This month's hoot is Monday at Little Kings.

It will be led by the traditional old-time band String Theory, and those who attend can expect to hear an array of fiddles, banjos, harmonicas, mandolins and guitars on stage and plenty of singing and audience participation.

"You can expect to hear every string instrument imaginable, and there is even room for some drums," said Phil Burns, director of the North Georgia Folk Festival and a member of the society.

"This group's sole mission has been to promote traditional mountain music and the kind of dancing associated with fiddle music," said President Susan Staley.

Besides hoots, the society also has monthly contra dances, which are similar to square dances.



SPECIAL | THE RED & BLACK

▲ String Theory will play Monday at Little Kings. (Left to right) Dick Daniels, Tommy Jordan and Ned Gardiner.

The next contra dance will be Saturday, March 18 at the Oconee County Arts Foundation main building in Watkinsville. The dances always have a live band and caller.

This month Peavine Creek from Atlanta will perform, and Doug Singleton will call. No partner is necessary, but beginners should arrive at 7:30 p.m. for a free half-hour of instruction prior to the dance.

The society is a "great way to make contacts and meet people if you're interested in traditional music," Staley said. "We're group-centered and inclusive. We play music as a group and dance as a group. The AFMDS survives on making people feel welcome."

Burns feels good after listening to a day of music.

"I have to get involved," he said. "I've met a bunch of wonderful people because of it."

The society also is a

FOLK MUSIC

Sponsor: Athens Folk Music and Dance Society
What: Hoot
When: 8-10 p.m. Monday
Where: Little Kings
Cost: Free
More information: To participate, contact Susan Staley at 208-0985. Also, visit www.afmds.info.

What: Contra Dance
When: 8-11 p.m. Saturday, March 18 (instruction at 7:30)
Where: Oconee County Arts Foundation in Watkinsville
Cost: \$6 (early instruction is free)
More information: www.afmds.info

University student organization.

"We have a lot of UGA students in addition to faculty and staff in the AFMDS," Staley said.

Membership and volunteer information are available on the society's Web site www.afmds.info.

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