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THEORY

OF A DEADMAN



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OF A DEADMAN



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Gina Adams - CEO/Publisher/New Business - Rock On Magazine

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**OLD
97'S**

With their winning combination of rock energy and Texas twang, Dallas-based Old 97's have carved out a unique place for themselves on the music landscape. Across a dozen albums, their evocative songwriting and high energy musical approach has won the group both critical acclaim and a dedicated following. But the band hasn't quite reached the commercial success that critics and ardent fans alike agree are so richly deserved.

Part of the problem might be that Old 97's don't fit neatly into one stylistic category. So it's something of a challenge for their label to promote them. Are they country? Alt-country, or power pop? Rock? Something else? Lead guitarist Ken Bethea acknowledges that there's no neat, one-word label that offers a shorthand description for what Old 97's does.

Let's address power pop. To some, the term refers to the rock subgenre exemplified by bands like Badfinger, The Raspberries, The Knack...groups that made uptempo, Beatles-influenced rock with sharp hooks and concise melodies. But it's that word pop that rankles Bethea.

"To me," he explains, "pop is a kind of music where there's a producer and a separate songwriter. They write a song, and the singer or band comes in and sings it. And that doesn't even begin to describe us." By that understanding of the term, he's right. From the very start, Old 97's have charted their own path, written their own songs and played their own instruments.

Bethea acknowledges that other labels like Americana or even “loud folk” have at least some connection to the Old 97’s aesthetic. “But,” he insists, “there really isn’t another band like us.” Once again, he’s right. The idea of combining country textures with a rock approach has been done since the earliest days of rock ‘n’ roll: witness Elvis, early Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis. But Old 97’s doesn’t sound much like them.

Later generations of rockers like Eagles developed their own hybrids of rock and c&w. But no one would ever mistake Old 97’s for the slick Californians who gave us “Heartache Tonight” or “Disco Strangler.”

Asked about artists whose work has had an impact on the sound of his band, Bethea names some of the greats. While many Old 97’s songs are group-composed and arranged, singer-guitarist Rhett Miller is the band’s primary songwriter.

And Bethea describes a central component of the band’s signature sound as the product of Miller’s creativity, informed by an appreciation for David Bowie, Lennon and McCartney and Elvis Costello. Those musical touchstones offer a connection to what the band is all about.

“I don’t even listen to country,” Bethea admits with a laugh. But in the same breath, he confesses that he very much likes playing it. “Even from the very beginning before I met Rhett and Murry [Hammond, bassist], I liked playing country music on my guitar. It was fun bending those notes.” A few moments into the discussion, he hits upon a way of describing Old 97’s that suits him. “It’s modern music, played in the style of old-fashioned music,” he suggests. “That’s what we’ve always been.”

Timeless music might be an even better way of describing it. Miller’s wry lyrics and the irresistible guitar licks make a song like “Murder (Or a Heart Attack)” from the band’s fourth album, 1999’s *Too Far to Care*, a stone classic. Call it what you will, but it’s great stuff, the kind of music that makes listeners want to throw away all the labels and just appreciate the music for its greatness.

Each time Old 97’s release an album – 2020’s *Twelfth* is their latest one, by the way – the record is greeted by critical praise. And their latest single, “Turn off the TV,” rose to the #22 spot on Billboard’s Adult Alternative singles chart. But nearly a quarter century into its existence, the group still somehow flies under the radar of many who (by most measures) should appreciate their music.



The likely reason for that brings us back to that nagging what-is-their-sound question. Not fitting neatly into an existing category makes it difficult when it comes to things like marketing. “It makes it nearly impossible,” Bethea says with a good-natured (if resigned) chuckle.

“But on the good side,” he hastens to add, “when your [sound is super-specific, you ‘scratch the itch’ for a segment of the population.” And while there may not be a massive contingent of Old 97’s fans, many of those who know them, love them.

Bethea says that he’s lost count of how many times he’s engaged in conversation with a stranger, only for the dialogue to unfold like this: “You tell them you’re in a band, and they’re excited,” he says. “Then you tell ‘em the name of the band, and they’ve never heard of us.

And that’s here in Dallas!”

After the laughter subsides, he completes his example. “But then when you talk to the fourth or fifth person, they say, ‘Holy shit! I’ve seen you guys so many times!’”

Back in the 1970s when Bob Seger broke out as a national success, there was a saying about him: “He took years and years to become an overnight success.” Though Seger was a well-respected and hard working Detroit rocker since the mid ‘60s, it wasn’t until the release of *Live Bullet* in 1976 that he became a household name.

And so – just maybe – it might be the same with Old 97’s.

Superb albums, spirited concerts and a surprising level-headedness – the original lineup has stayed together all these years without a single personnel change – are all commendable qualities. But they don’t necessarily push a band into next-level, high-profile success.

What might just do that is a little motion picture called *Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special*. Released to the Disney+ streaming service last Christmas, the popular action-adventure-comedy film takes the popular Marvel superhero franchise to the next level, and onto TV screens. Alongside beloved characters like Peter “Star-Lord” Quill, Drax the Destroyer and Nebula is an intergalactic rock band, Bzermikitokolok and the Knowheremen.



The nearly-unpronounceable band is none other than Old 97's, making their feature film debut.

It's fair to wonder how the band landed such a high-profile spot. Not surprisingly, it has everything to do with the fact that the filmmakers could have been the fourth or fifth person in Bethea's example.

"James Gunn is the director and writer of Guardians of the Galaxy, and his brother, Sean, is also in it," he explains. Bback in the early days of Old 97's, one Gunn brother lived in St. Louis, the other in Chicago.

The two would make a point of attending every Old 97's show in either city.

Bethea says that he and his band mates only found out about all this six or seven years ago when they met James Gunn for the first time. "And James was like, 'I'd love to get you involved in our Guardians movie, but the music's all from the '70s.' So we didn't really fit."

Unfortunately, the same would be true when Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2 and Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3 were made. But then came the holiday special, a winking nod at the infamous stinkeroo, 1978's Star Wars Holiday Special.

Because the Disney+ film would be a change of pace, Gunn felt he had the freedom to go a different direction with the music. He also wanted actor Kevin Bacon – who had been referenced previously in Guardians movies – to appear. So in the film, Bacon portrays a fictionalized version of himself, and he sings a song with Old 97's.

Unlike Bacon, the band members were heavily made up to look like intergalactic creatures; until the music starts, they're barely recognizable as the four Texans of Old 97's. Reportedly, wrangling the musicians into their costumes and makeup took several hours. "But now I'm in the Marvel universe!" exclaims Bethea. "That so badass! It was really fun shooting the film, and it was amazing when it came out. It was mind-blowing." And it brought Old 97's to a whole new audience.





Not making too much of his brush with movie stardom, Bethea is first and foremost proud of the music he and his band mates make. And even though Old 97's haven't raked in millions of dollars or achieved worldwide fame – not yet anyway – he says that there's a simple reason the four of them stick with it.

"It's our 'fishing trip,'" he says.

"We get along very well. I like hanging out with the guys [in the band], and I like hanging out with our crew," Bethea says. "I enjoy the process of going and playing shows, and I think everybody else does, too. It's still really fun to do it."

He equates being in Old 97's to spending nearly all your time doing your favorite thing. "It's like if you're really into fishing," he explains, "and you get to drive around the country doing it with your best friends. But every time you catch a fish, there would be 1000 people that cheer. It's amazing!"



WWW.OLD97S.COM

THE EMERSON

classic with a twist

BY GINA ADAMS AND JAY LUSTER

Though the bigger venues and casinos in downtown Reno get more attention, The Emerson Cocktail Lounge, known by locals for a while now, is quickly becoming a go-to place for hip visitors willing to venture across the Truckee River into midtown. Owned by international high-fashion hair stylist Tyler Colton, he's created what he calls a, "cool boutique, mid-century, hotel lobby, bar." He wanted his place to have the cool vibe of a more metropolitan city, and he regularly receives compliments from his customers. Whether it's his distinctive menu of craft cocktails, or the unique atmosphere, they frequently tell him the bar feels more like Palm Springs than Reno.

After spending many years doing the hair of celebrities for TV shows, movies, rock stars and runway models, including fifteen years traveling with El Sol de México, Luis Miguel, he decided it was time for a change. Since he already had connections to northern Nevada, when it became time to leave New York City, coming to the self-proclaimed Biggest Little City In The World, was a great option for him.



Reno, he felt, had the vibe of a bigger city, and also seemed poised to grow, which made it the perfect place to open The Emerson Cocktail Lounge.





The Emerson's decor, menu of traditional and craft cocktails, as well as it's entertainment, has made it a distinctive destination unlike anything else in Reno. Along with its themed DJ nights on Saturdays, and local comedians every Monday at 8PM, there are special events such as Drag Bingo. Tyler explains on "the second Thursday of each month, we do a charity Drag Bingo. We have drag queens hosting it, and the proceeds goes to support our community. So far, we've raised over \$22,000 for charities in the Reno area. We've helped with cancer research, the Washoe County school district, battered women's shelters, everything. We've raised money for all different groups, and it's always fun." Another unique event Emerson's presents, is Drag Brunch. The show features actors, dancers, singers and more. It usually shows only two or three Sunday's per month, so if you want to go, watch the website, because the tickets routinely sell out in under 24 hours.

Along with it's eclectic entertainment, The Emerson boasts, perhaps, the most creative menu of craft cocktails in town. While you can always order your favorite beer, wine, or mixed drink, if you're feeling adventurous, you should try their Manhattan with Reposado Tequila, or the James Bond themed Golden Gun with Howler Head Banana Whiskey, or the Beatles-esque Strawberry Fields. Some of the drinks feature edible flowers, and are served in fun cups, flutes, and even bath tubs. So if you want to escape the bustle of the glitzy casinos, cross the bridge into midtown and enjoy the mid-century ambiance of The Emerson Cocktail Lounge.



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CANDLEBOX

Simple Lessons:

Candlebox learns from experience and builds on its successes

by Bill Kopp

In the life of a rock band, ups and downs are inevitable. High expectations are often placed on a band when it scores a monster hit with its debut. And if subsequent albums don't measure up, both the business and the listening public can lose interest. Often, that spells the end for a group. But Candlebox endured those peaks and valleys, took some time off to grow up and improve, and returned stronger than ever. With a healthy second wind, the Seattle group has been on a creative winning streak that's entering its 15th year. Candlebox is currently touring in support of *Wolves*, its sixth album of new material. Candlebox came out of the Pacific Northwest in the early 1990s, a time when grunge rock was in its ascendancy. Bands like Green River and Alice in Chains were beginning to gain a foothold outside the region, and Pearl Jam, Nirvana, Soundgarden and others wouldn't be far behind. But Candlebox would stand somewhat apart from their Northwest compatriots; their sound wasn't as deeply rooted in the then-trendy grunge style.

"We were younger than the guys in Alice in Chains and Pearl Jam and Soundgarden," says Candlebox lead singer and founding member Kevin Martin. "We didn't grow up in that [musical] community." He says that from the band's start, Candlebox drew more influence from blues-based rock 'n' roll of groups like The Who, Aerosmith and Led Zeppelin.

But Martin and his bandmates weren't isolated from alternative rock. He recalls his older sister turning him on to bands like The Clash and Blondie when he was all of six years old. "I grew up in San Antonio," he says.

"There was a great punk movement going on there from 1978 all the way to about '86." When his family moved to Seattle in the mid '80s, Martin brought that background with him.

And he was surprised by what he found. He says that the Seattle scene of that time "was so different. It was more inspired by the tuned-down, Black Sabbath dark side of rock 'n' roll." When he and three other musicians formed Candlebox in 1990, they followed a path that was informed by punk but with a firm foundation in the melodic side of things. "We didn't really connect with Seattle early on," he admits.

Candlebox self-financed the recording of an EP, *The Red Demo Tape*.

"It cost us five grand," Martin recalls. And he believes that the comparatively raw recording is a true document of the band's sound at that point. "We were firing on all cylinders then," he says. In the space of a 12-hour "lock-in" session, the band cut eight songs, including vocal overdubs and mixing. "Two of the songs didn't even have finished lyrics," he notes. He completed the lyrics during that session.

Things took off quickly for Candlebox when the band was signed by Maverick Records, a brand-new label co-founded by Madonna. "We were the first band they signed," Martin says. It was a successful alliance. "They got lucky with us, and we with them," Martin observes. The runaway success of Candlebox's self-titled debut album in 1993 paved the way for Maverick to sign other up-and-coming artists like Alanis Morissette and The Deftones.

And Maverick took a hands-off approach to the music, allowing Candlebox to make music the way they wanted to. The 4X Platinum-selling album spawned two hit singles, "You" and "Far Behind." Music videos for those tracks plus "Change" were popular on MTV as well. Martin says that he was thrilled at the band's success, but admits that he saw it coming. "We knew that if the songs were given the chance and there was an opportunity for people to hear them, they would take us where we wanted to go: to have a career and be a touring band."

Winter 1993 represented a turning point for Candlebox. "We had already sold 250,000 records," Martin recalls.





“We came back to Seattle and sold out three nights at the Paramount.” With the creative winds at their backs – and three million copies of the debut sold – the band returned to the studio in 1995 to record a follow-up album. Released in October 1995, *Lucy* was a comparative commercial disappointment. The album explored different styles than its predecessor, and fans of the early hit singles weren’t as impressed. “By going the direction we did,” Martin allows, “we alienated a lot of the people who loved us for ‘Far Behind.’” But success is relative: *Lucy* would eventually go Platinum. “It only sold a million records,” Martin says with a chuckle.

In the wake of the second album’s modest showing, Maverick did what record companies often do: they assigned a producer to work with the band, one with a proven track record of delivering hits.





In this case it was Ron Nevison, best known for his work with both hard rockers (Michael Schenker, Ozzy Osbourne) and mainstream pop acts like Chicago. “We wanted Jeff Lynne or Roger Waters,” Martin says.

Martin acknowledges Nevison’s talents and skill, but in retrospect thinks his approach wasn’t right for Candlebox. “He had a history of taking rock bands and crossing them over into the pop world,” he says. “We were just not interested in that, so it was a bit of a battle.” The resulting album, *Happy Pills*, repeated a pattern, selling fewer copies than the record before it.

Maverick was going through changes at the top, and the members of Candlebox weren’t fans of the new management. “We broke up the band to get out of the contract,” Martin says. A key-man clause in the group’s contract meant that Martin was forced to remain with the label; he would produce demos under duress. “I was writing songs that I knew they wouldn’t accept,” he says with a laugh. In 2002 he finally gained his freedom from Maverick; the label ceased operations a few years thereafter. By 2006, the Maverick catalog was owned by Warner Brothers Records. When that label decided to compile a Candlebox best-of, the band members were inspired to reunite. “We got in touch and said, ‘Let’s go back on the road and support *The Best of Candlebox* and maybe make a new record,’” Martin recalls. They did just that, and 2008’s *Into the Sun* represented a return to form, a new beginning for the group.

Martin ascribes some of that record’s creative success to the time the members spent away from the group. “We had become better songwriters and better friends, getting to know each other,” he says. The creative streak has continued unabated since then. As solid as Candlebox’s early releases are, *Into the Sun* and 2012’s *Love Stories & Other Musings* showcase a band that sounds more comfortable in its collective skin.

Disappearing in Airports would follow in 2016. Candlebox’s most recent – and quite possibly best-ever – album, *Wolves*, was released in September 2021.



Working with producer Dean Dichoso, the band adopted a live-in-the-studio approach that effectively captures the power, energy and passion of the band. “It feels the aggression, it feels the sadness, it feels the tension,” Martin says, explaining that the group took its time to write and refine the songs before going into the studio.

Future plans call for more touring in support of *Wolves*, and then sessions for a follow-up record to commence in late ‘22. And next year will mark the 30th anniversary of Candlebox’s smash debut. “We’ll probably do something special for that,” Martin teases. “Making records is fun, but it’s really about getting out there and playing those songs.” And with the 1990s receding into the distant past, whatever tenuous connections Candlebox might have had with the grunge movement are largely forgotten now: the band is measured on its own terms. And Martin says that opposed to groups that are built around one prominent member, his band has a different character. “I think people love us because of the whole,” he suggests. “They don’t know us as individuals. The majority of people know and love us because of the songs. That’s why we’re still here. And we still write some pretty great music.”



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3/10 Fabulous Cut-ups 7:00pm - 10:00pm

3/17 Jakes Garage 8:00pm - 11:00pm

3/17 Kevin Farley Doors 5pm - Show 6pm
Doors 8pm - Show 9pm

3/23 Paint And Sip 7:00pm - 10:00pm
Phoenix And Flora Boutique
5:00pm - 9:00pm

3/24 Reckless Envy 7:00pm - 10:00pm

3/31 Beer Pong And DJ Duse Beats Post
Asap Sign-ups 6:00pm | 7:30pm Balls In The
Air

4/7 DD James 6:30pm - 9:30pm

4/8 Jakes Garage 8:00pm - 11:00pm

4/14 Fabulous Cut-ups 7:00pm - 10:00pm

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Rock is dead?

Tyler Connolly says 'Long Live Rock'

by Bill Kopp



THEORY
OF A DEADMAN

It's fashionable in some circles to declare rock as dead and buried. And while it's true that other styles may have surpassed it sales-wise in the music marketplace, rock is very much alive. For evidence, one need only witness the sustained success of Theory of a Deadman. Formed nearly 25 years ago in Canada's British Columbia Province, Theory soared to the top of the charts with their self-titled debut album.

Fronted by lead guitarist, vocalist and songwriter Tyler Connolly, the band took off and never looked back; in the band's first 15 years, Theory placed every one of their albums in the Canadian Top Ten. Stateside success was a bit slower in coming, but once it did – with Theory's third long player, 2008's *Scars & Souvenirs* – there seemed to be no stopping the group. That record and the four albums that would follow each soared to the Top Ten on the U.S. Alternative Rock charts.

The group has landed a staggering 25 singles on the Mainstream Rock chart, with eight of those going Gold (500,000 units sold in the U.S.), Platinum (1 million units) or better. Along the way, Theory of a Deadman has filled arenas as an opening or headline act, in the process putting to rest any question as to whether rock is alive or dead.

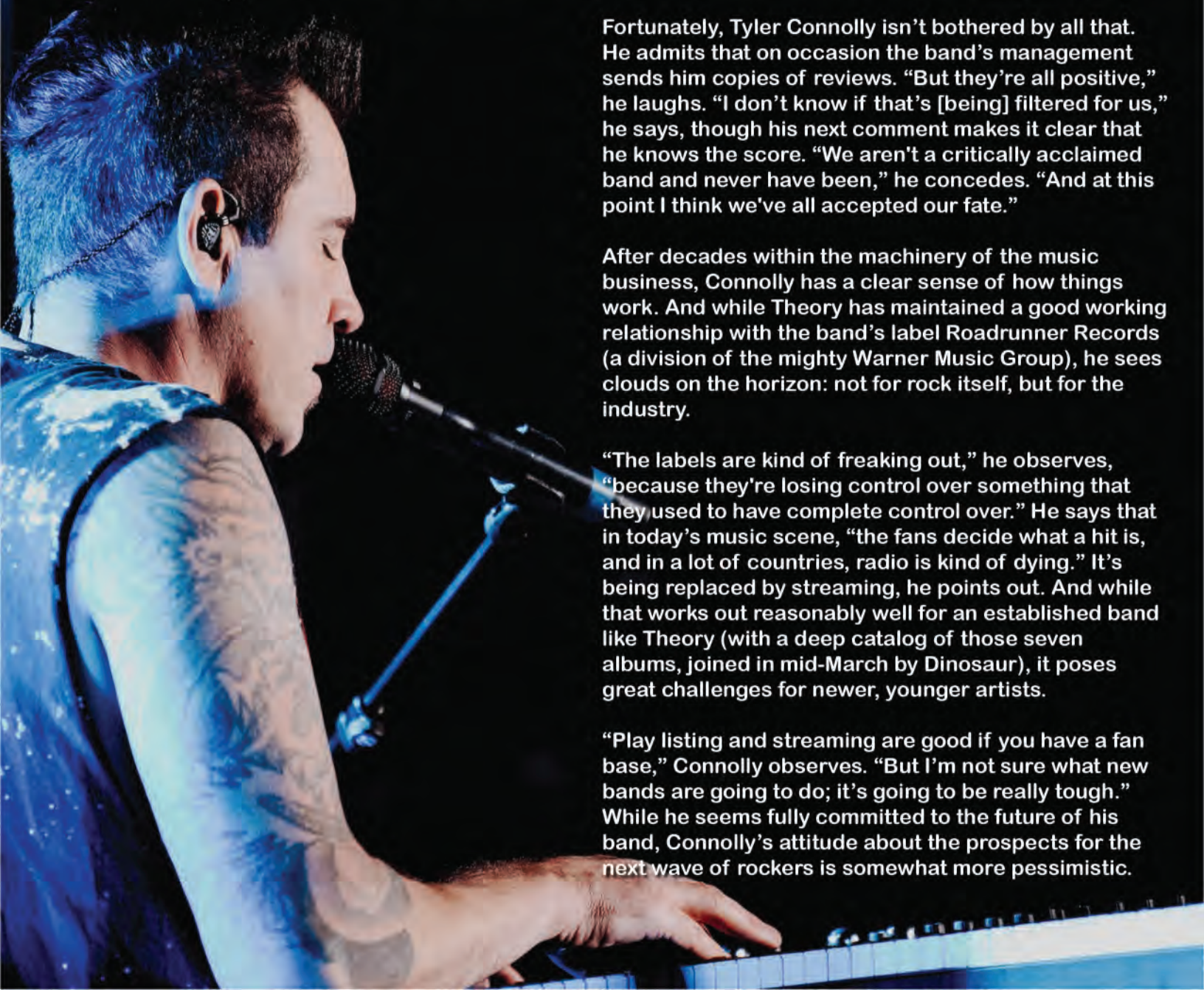
Yet when it comes to critical success, the band's track record stands in sharp contrast to its sales figures. Critics haven't always been as kind as fans; a cross-section of reviewers writing for Allmusic.com, for example, has awarded each of the band's first seven albums anywhere from a maximum of three stars out of five (for their debut and 2017's *Wake Up Call*) down to one star for 2011's *The Truth Is...*

Fortunately, Tyler Connolly isn't bothered by all that. He admits that on occasion the band's management sends him copies of reviews. "But they're all positive," he laughs. "I don't know if that's [being] filtered for us," he says, though his next comment makes it clear that he knows the score. "We aren't a critically acclaimed band and never have been," he concedes. "And at this point I think we've all accepted our fate."

After decades within the machinery of the music business, Connolly has a clear sense of how things work. And while Theory has maintained a good working relationship with the band's label Roadrunner Records (a division of the mighty Warner Music Group), he sees clouds on the horizon: not for rock itself, but for the industry.

"The labels are kind of freaking out," he observes, "because they're losing control over something that they used to have complete control over." He says that in today's music scene, "the fans decide what a hit is, and in a lot of countries, radio is kind of dying." It's being replaced by streaming, he points out. And while that works out reasonably well for an established band like Theory (with a deep catalog of those seven albums, joined in mid-March by *Dinosaur*), it poses great challenges for newer, younger artists.

"Play listing and streaming are good if you have a fan base," Connolly observes. "But I'm not sure what new bands are going to do; it's going to be really tough." While he seems fully committed to the future of his band, Connolly's attitude about the prospects for the next wave of rockers is somewhat more pessimistic.



That dour mindset informs the band's latest single, the hard-rocking title track from *Dinosaur*. Lyrics like "We're all fucked, yeah, we can't be saved," and "Tonight we're going out, going out like the dinosaur" suggest that even as the world is emerging from a global pandemic, Tyler Connolly doesn't hold much hope for the future after all.

"I tend to think that we as humans, more than ever, are quite cynical and pessimistic," he says. "As much as we want to pretend we're optimistic – 'No, everything's going to be wonderful!' – I think that inside, we're all kind of like, 'This sucks. This is trash.'"

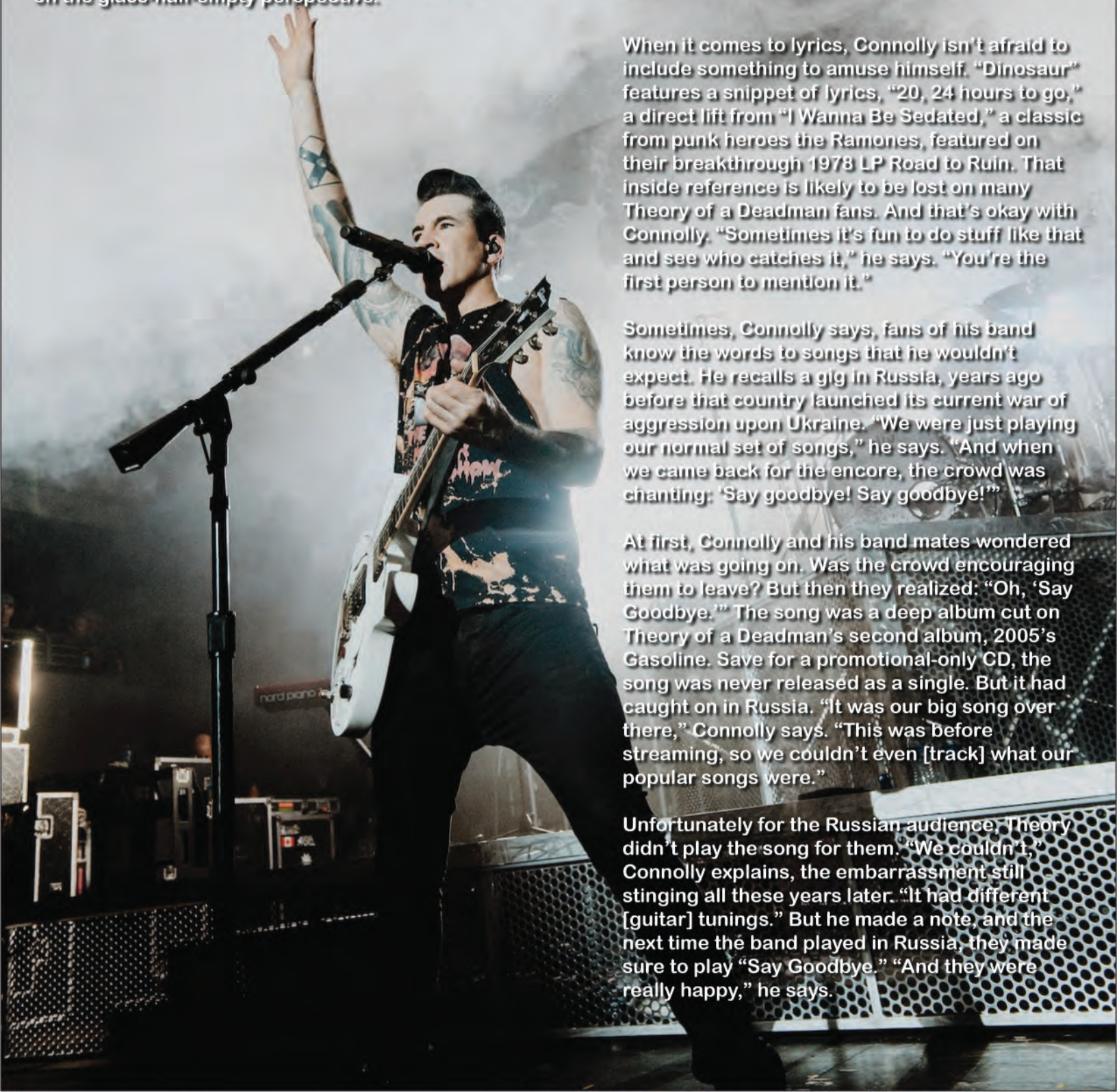
He says that "Dinosaur" builds on that kind of thinking. "I was playing on the human emotion of misery and the pessimism of the future things to come." But in the same breath, he suggests that – just maybe – he's not irrevocably convinced that we're all going to Hell in a hand basket. "I think everything's going to be fine," he says with a chuckle. "I don't think we're going to go out like the dinosaurs. [The song] is just a sentimental take on the glass-half-empty perspective."

When it comes to lyrics, Connolly isn't afraid to include something to amuse himself. "Dinosaur" features a snippet of lyrics, "20, 24 hours to go," a direct lift from "I Wanna Be Sedated," a classic from punk heroes the Ramones, featured on their breakthrough 1978 LP *Road to Ruin*. That inside reference is likely to be lost on many Theory of a Deadman fans. And that's okay with Connolly. "Sometimes it's fun to do stuff like that and see who catches it," he says. "You're the first person to mention it."

Sometimes, Connolly says, fans of his band know the words to songs that he wouldn't expect. He recalls a gig in Russia, years ago before that country launched its current war of aggression upon Ukraine. "We were just playing our normal set of songs," he says. "And when we came back for the encore, the crowd was chanting: 'Say goodbye! Say goodbye!'"

At first, Connolly and his band mates wondered what was going on. Was the crowd encouraging them to leave? But then they realized: "Oh, 'Say Goodbye.'" The song was a deep album cut on Theory of a Deadman's second album, 2005's *Gasoline*. Save for a promotional-only CD, the song was never released as a single. But it had caught on in Russia. "It was our big song over there," Connolly says. "This was before streaming, so we couldn't even [track] what our popular songs were."

Unfortunately for the Russian audience, Theory didn't play the song for them. "We couldn't," Connolly explains, the embarrassment still stinging all these years later. "It had different [guitar] tunings." But he made a note, and the next time the band played in Russia, they made sure to play "Say Goodbye." "And they were really happy," he says.



He points to Kiss as the musical masters of merchandising. "They've got Kiss coffins, Kiss pinball. And I think that as we get older, that's turning into our model. As we have a core fan base now, we're starting to do [those sorts of] things." He mentions Deadman's Brew, a branded coffee, and says that the group is working on coming out with a Theory-branded alcoholic beverage. "Just like with the music," he suggests, "we're doing things to try to get ourselves out there."

And a quarter century years after they started, the four members of Theory of a Deadman are committed to staying out there, playing their brand of 21st century rock. "Some bands actually broke up during COVID," he says. "They weren't making money off streaming or sales." Connolly emphasizes that he's grateful that his group has a body of work that continues to sell. "Hopefully forever," he says with a good-natured laugh. "We've been lucky. And I hope it will just keep going that way."



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ROCKon

MAGAZINE

Jack Starr's Burning Starr: The Ongoing Wave of American Heavy Metal

by Bill Kopp

Guitar shredders are a dime a dozen these days. But the real guitar heroes are the ones who balance their musical artistry with finesse, melodicism and power. Jack Starr fits that description: for more than 40 years he has been bringing his distinctive style of heavy metal to enthusiastic audiences around the globe. His band, Jack Starr's Burning Starr, recently released its ninth album, *Souls of the Innocent*, and is currently touring in support of the record.

Starr comes from an American family, but he was born and grew to adulthood in Paris.

"My father was working for the American government after World War II, and he stayed on for another 15 years," he says. "I'm not sure exactly what he did for the government," Starr adds cryptically.

Jack Starr's immersion in French culture had an effect upon him. When it came to music, postwar France took an insular approach to pop culture; preferring homegrown artists like Françoise Hardy, Serge Gainsbourg, Jacques Dutronc and Johnny Hallyday, known as "the French Elvis." But that didn't stop Starr from hearing - and appreciating - the music of his American forbears.

"I listened to Motown and [other] things that were allowed to seep into French culture," he says.

Classical music played a large role in his early life. "They play classical music on regular rotation on major radio stations in France," Starr says. "I listened to a lot of it growing up." And while the connection might not seem an obvious one, that music would eventually lead him to hard rock.

"I saw that there really was a strong connection between classical music and hard rock," Starr explains.

He ticks off a list of bands that explore that connection: “Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin and Emerson, Lake & Palmer and the Moody Blues and Procol Harum’s ‘A Whiter Shade of Pale’ – which was really something very similar to Bach’s ‘Sleepers Awake’ cantata – all that made me see that it wasn’t such a leap for classical and rock to fuse, to come together.”

By the early 1980s, self-taught guitarist Starr had put together heavy metal band Virgin Steele. The group recorded a demo, “Children of the Storm,” and the track was selected for inclusion on the influential U.S. Metal Vol. II compilation, released by Mike Varney’s Shrapnel Records. It would be Starr’s first big break.

“It was a pivotal moment for me,” Starr says. “I was just some young guy living on Long Island who had a bit of an ego, because everybody who plays guitar thinks they’re the next Jimi Hendrix.” He recalls seeing an ad in the pages of Guitar Player. “It said something like, ‘Do you think you have what it takes?’” He was convinced that Virgin Steele’s demo would be right for the proposed Shrapnel compilation, so he submitted a tape.

Steele says that about a week later, his telephone rang. “The guy said, ‘Hey dude’ – or some California talk – ‘you’re on the album,’” he laughs. Starr was convinced it was a put-on by one of his pals. The caller insisted that no, he really was Mike Varney. Virgin Steele’s track would indeed be featured on U.S. Metal Vol. II.

“It was really the right moment for Virgin Steele,” Starr says. “Because we needed something to hang our hats on. We had just self-financed an album, and it was really a calling card: now we could call up record stores and say, ‘Hey, we’re a new metal band, just like the other 5000 new metal bands that got in touch with you this week! But our guitar player Jack Starr must be pretty decent, because we got on this compilation thing!’”

American metal was still bubbling under at the time, but overseas, the scene was raging. The metal community in England was so strong that it developed a name: NWOBHM, or New Wave of British Heavy Metal. The Movement was spearheaded by groups like Iron Maiden, Def Leppard and Saxon, all of whom earned critical plaudits and chart success.

And Jack Starr says that Virgin Steele felt a kinship with that British movement. “We were kind of firing a salvo back at the British along with other American metal bands like Manowar, The Rods, Riot, Sabotage, Jag Panzer and Omen,” he says. “We were heralding this new kind of music, and unashamedly so.” Virgin Steele didn’t want to be mistaken for “the typical metal that was coming out of America,” which Starr says “wasn’t really metal.”



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Virgin Steele's album cover art paid a subtle tribute to the British scene. "If you look very carefully on the spaceship, there's aliens and all kinds of crazy stuff going on but, right on the side of the spaceship, it says, 'NWAHM,'" he says. "New Wave of American Heavy Metal."

But by 1984, a restless Steele had formed a new group, Burning Starr. "I was very lucky," he says. "I was able to get a very good record deal right away with Passport Records, an offshoot of Arista Records. Here I was: totally unknown two years earlier, and now I'm on a label with Bill Wyman of the Rolling Stones!"

Burning Starr's *Rock the American Way* was released in 1985 to positive notices. And that record began a metal legacy that continues to present day. The band has seen musicians come and go, with Starr the musical center of gravity but "Ned Meloni has been my bass player for 100 years," Starr says with a laugh. In 2017 the band released *Stand Your Ground*, the band's third album to the powerful lead vocals of Todd Michael Hall.

But Hall eventually left the band for what Steele describes as "greener pastures." Hall competed on television as a contestant on *The Voice*, and eventually joined Riot, another metal band with a cult following. "So to make a long story short," Starr says, "we didn't have a singer any more." For some bands, that kind of loss could have easily spelled the end.

Starr recalls asking himself, "how are we going to find a singer equal to Todd Michael Hall, who's like a vocal god?" The answer came from Bart Gabriel, a friend of the band who Starr calls "Mr. Metal." Gabriel contacted the guitarist via Skype, telling him, "Jack, I think I've found the singer for you." He recommended Alexx Panza, a young singer from Turin, Italy.

Panza was already a huge fan of Burning Starr, especially the band's first singer Rhett Forrester (who passed away in 1996). Starr recalls Gabriel telling him, "Alexx is a fan of all of your previous singers, but let's add one more thing. He saw you guys, and he met you when you were performing at a festival in Germany in 2014." Panza even waited on line after the show to get the band's autographs.



Starr was intrigued. And he laughs as he recalls seeing a photo of the singer. "He works out like a maniac: washboard abs and all that." And Panza had the chops, too. "He's got a great stage presence, and a four-octave vocal range," Starr enthuses.

When bassist Meloni heard some recordings featuring Panza, he was nearly as excited. But he did have one reservation. Starr recalls him saying, "Jack, you know, I love this singer. Great voice, but I don't know. When he sings in English, he's got this accent."

So Starr suggested that they send a Burning Starr instrumental track, "Souls of the Innocent," to Panza and ask him to record his vocals on top of it. "He sent it back [with vocals], and it was amazing," Starr says. "I didn't hear the accent, and if I did, I didn't care. It was incredible!"



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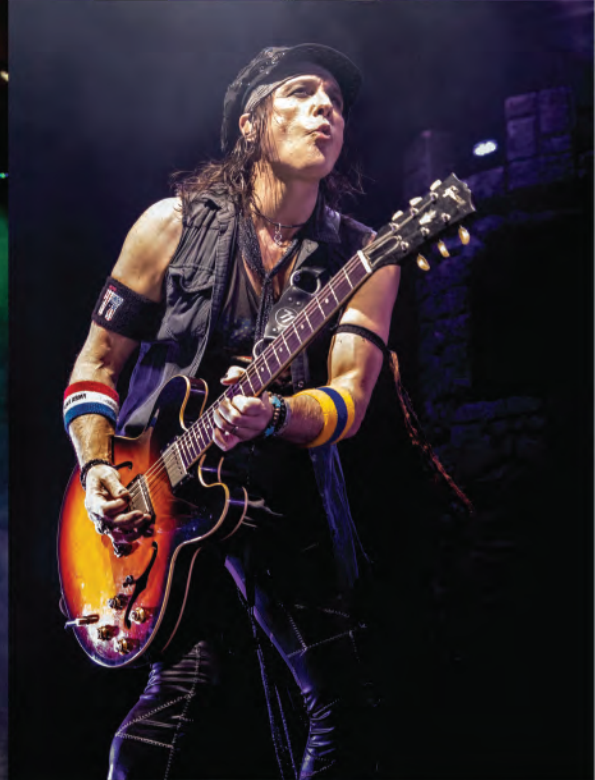
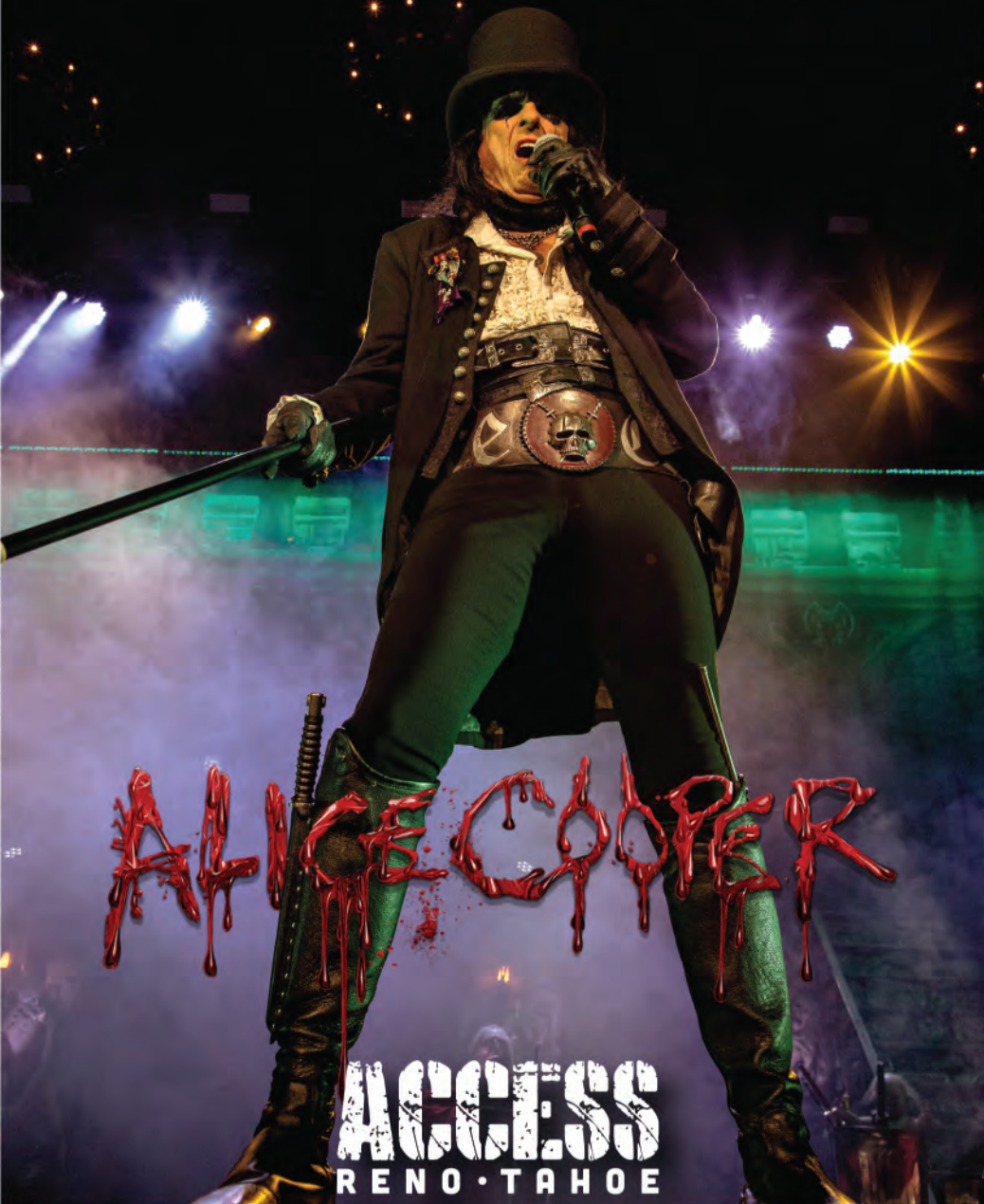
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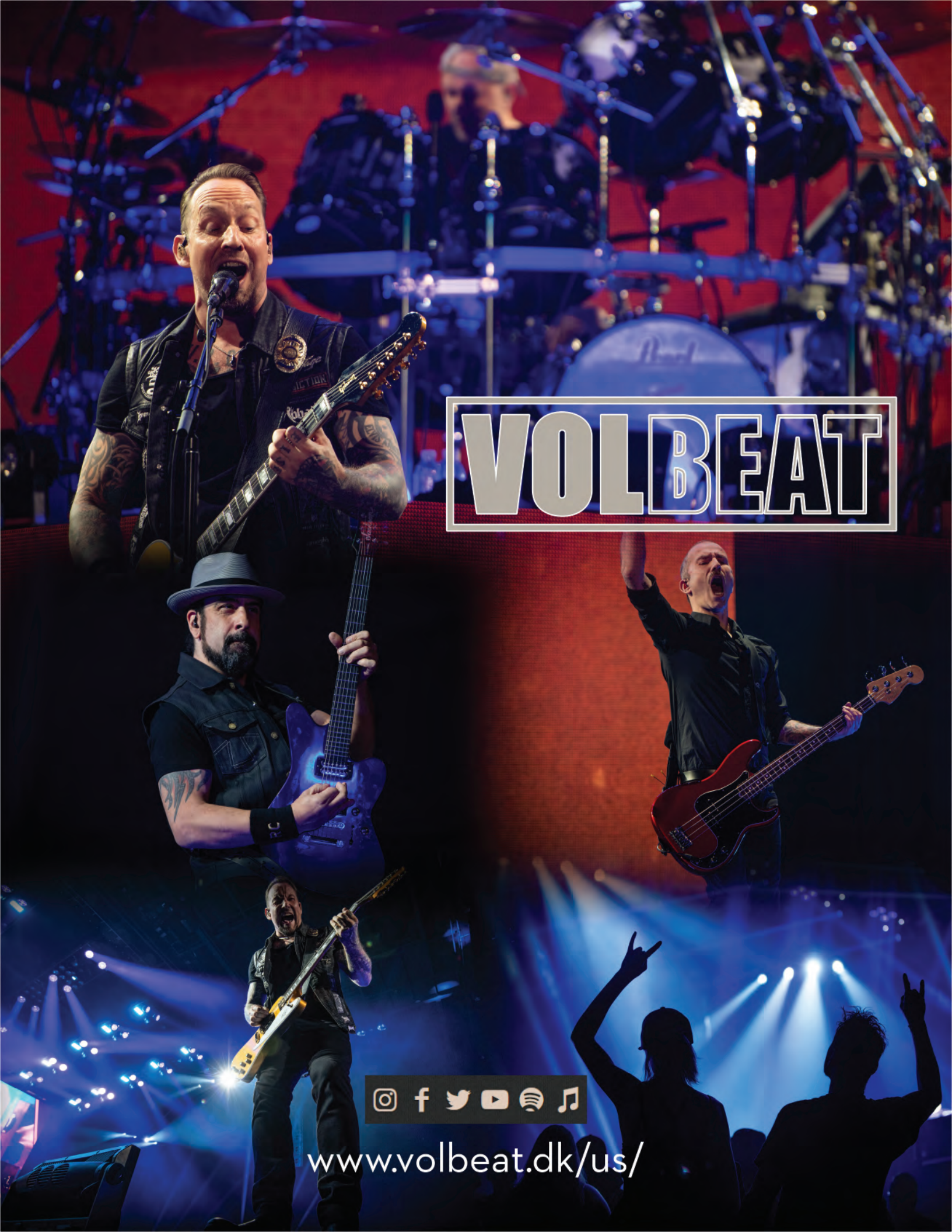
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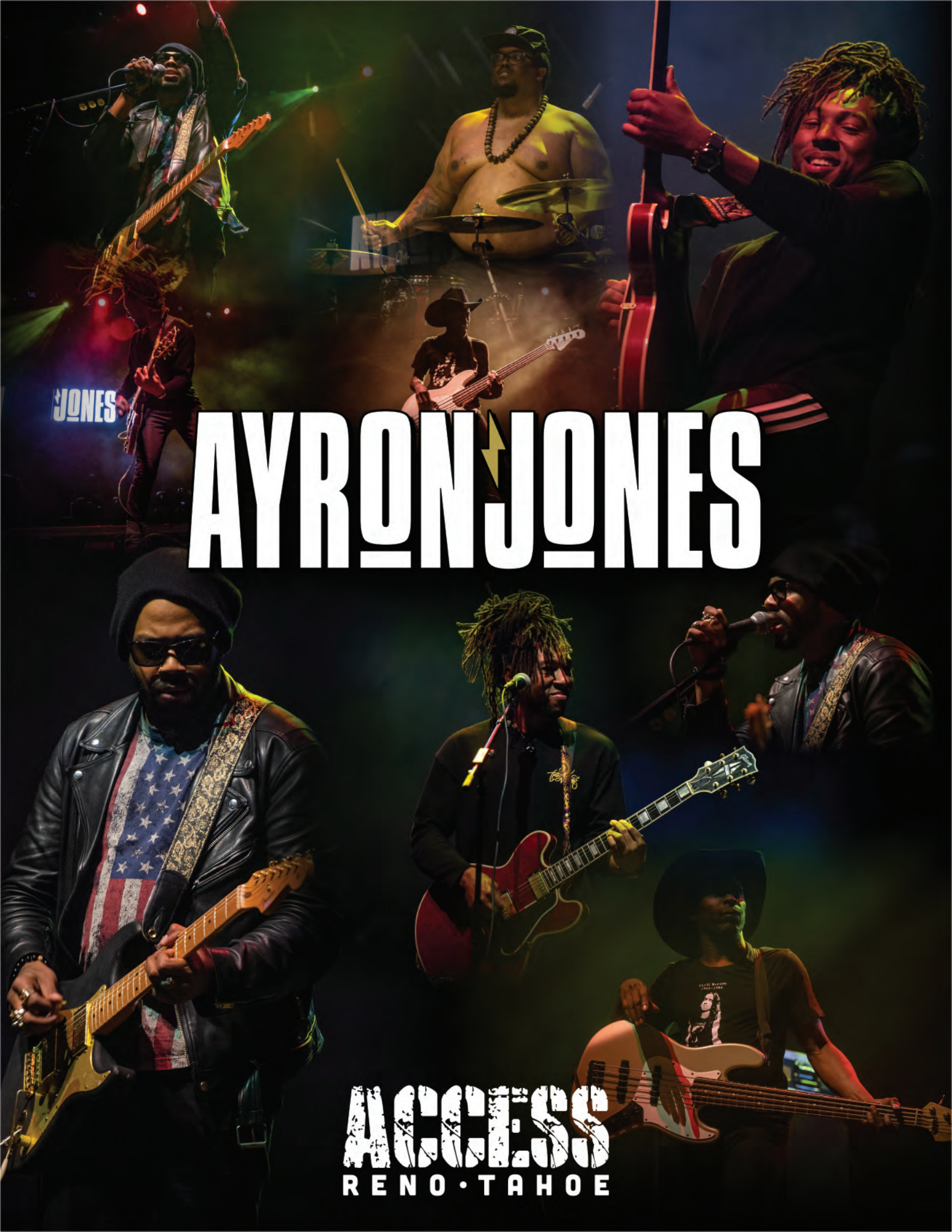


A collage of four images of the band Volbeat performing live. The top image shows the lead singer and guitarist with tattoos, wearing a leather vest, singing into a microphone and playing a black electric guitar. The middle-left image shows the bassist wearing a hat and playing a blue electric guitar. The middle-right image shows the drummer playing a red bass guitar with one arm raised. The bottom image shows the lead singer playing a yellow electric guitar. The background features stage lights and silhouettes of fans in the foreground.

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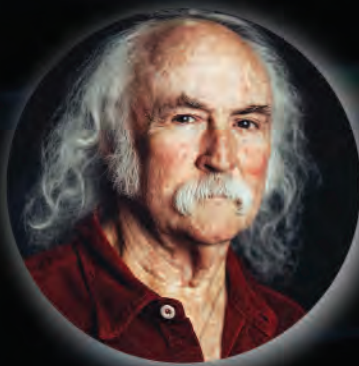
TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND

FOREVER GONE BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN

Lisa Marie Presley

February 1, 1968 – January 12, 2023

Lisa Marie Presley was an American singer and songwriter. She was the child of singer and actor Elvis Presley and actress Priscilla Presley, as well as the sole heir to her father's estate after her grandfather and her great-grandmother died. Her musical career consisted of three studio albums: *To Whom It May Concern*, *Now What* and *Storm & Grace*, with *To Whom It May Concern* being certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America. Presley also released non-album singles, including duets with her father using tracks he had released before he died.



David Crosby

August 14, 1941 – January 18, 2023

David Van Cortlandt Crosby was an American musician and singer-songwriter. He first found fame as a member of the Byrds, with whom he helped pioneer the genres of folk rock and psychedelia in the mid-1960s,[2] and later as part of the supergroup Crosby, Stills & Nash, who helped popularize the "California sound" of the 1970s.

Jeff Beck

June 24, 1944 – January 10, 2023

Geoffrey Arnold Beck (24 June 1944 – 10 January 2023) was an English guitarist. He rose to prominence as a member of the rock band the Yardbirds, and afterwards founded and fronted the Jeff Beck Group and Beck, Bogert & Appice. In 1975, he switched to an instrumental style with focus on an innovative sound, and his releases spanned genres and styles ranging from blues rock, hard rock, jazz fusion and a blend of guitar-rock and electronica.



Kirstie Alley

January 12, 1951 – December 5, 2022

Kirstie Louise Alley was an American actress. Her breakout role was as Rebecca Howe in the NBC sitcom *Cheers*, for which she received an Emmy Award and a Golden Globe in 1991. From 1997 to 2000, she starred as the lead in the sitcom *Veronica's Closet*, earning additional Emmy and Golden Globe nominations. On film, she was perhaps best known for her role as Mollie Jensen in *Look Who's Talking* and its two sequels, *Look Who's Talking Too* and *Look Who's Talking Now*.



Christine McVie

July 12, 1943 – November 30, 2022

Christine Anne McVie was an English musician, singer and songwriter. She was best known as keyboardist and one of the vocalists of Fleetwood Mac. McVie was a member of several bands, notably Chicken Shack, in the mid-1960s British Blues scene. She began working with Fleetwood Mac in 1968, initially as a session player, before joining the band in 1970. Her first compositions with Fleetwood Mac appeared on their fifth album, *Future Games*. She remained with the band through many changes of line-up, writing songs and performing lead vocals before partially retiring in 1998. McVie was described as "the prime mover behind some of Fleetwood Mac's biggest hits" and eight songs she wrote or co-wrote, including "Don't Stop", "Everywhere" and "Little Lies", appeared on Fleetwood Mac's 1988 Greatest Hits album. She appeared as a session musician on the band's last studio album, *Say You Will*. She also released three solo studio albums.



Loretta Lynn

April 14, 1932 – October 4, 2022

Loretta Lynn was an American country music singer and songwriter. In a career spanning six decades, Lynn released multiple gold albums. She had numerous hits such as: "I'm a Honky Tonk Girl", "Don't Come Home A-Drinkin' ", "One's on the Way", "Fist City", and "Coal Miner's Daughter". The 1980 musical film *Coal Miner's Daughter* was based on her life.



Olivia Newton-John

September 26, 1948 – August 8, 2022

She was a four-time Grammy Award winner whose music career included five number-one hits and many other Top Ten hits on the Billboard Hot 100, and two number-one albums on the Billboard 200: *If You Love Me, Let Me Know* (1974) and *Have You Never Been Mellow* (1975). Eleven of her singles (including two Platinum) and 14 of her albums (including two Platinum and four 2× Platinum) have been certified Gold by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). With global sales of more than 100 million records, Newton-John is one of the best-selling music artists from the second half of the 20th century to the present.



Tony Dow

April 13, 1945 – July 27, 2022

Anthony Lee Dow was an American actor, film producer, director and sculptor. He portrayed Wally Cleaver in the iconic television sitcom *Leave It to Beaver* from 1957 to 1963. From 1983 to 1989, Dow reprised his role as Wally in a television movie and in *The New Leave It to Beaver*.



Irene Cara

March 18, 1959 – November 25, 2022

Irene Cara Escalera was an American singer, songwriter, and actress who rose to prominence for her role as Coco Hernandez in the 1980 musical film *Fame*, and for recording the film's title song "Fame", which reached No. 1 in several countries.



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