

Musicians of Rochester: Reverend Kingfish

By NEAL GANGULI • JUL 29, 2019

An introduction to Reverend Kingfish

Nietzsche famously said, ‘if you stare into the abyss, the abyss stares back at you.’ Reverend Kingfish likely did so, and decided to write a song about it. After many years away from his home, The Reverend has returned to Rochester to shake things up with his guitar.



Figure 1 Reverend Kingfish at The Spirit Room
CREDIT AARON WINTERS

A self-taught musician specializing in blues, jazz, rockabilly (among other genres), the Reverend spins songs of scandal and seduction, of debauchery and overindulgence, of love and lust; no subject is off limits. Inspired by the great American roots and jazz musicians such as Charlie Feathers, Jelly Roll Morton, and Leon Redbone, Reverend Kingfish continues brings to life a classic sound in this modern age. Reverend Kingfish writes music about what’s meaningful to him – namely the darker sides of human experience.

“Booze, violence, fornication, infidelity, death – these are the stuff of human existence, and the inspiration for his songs.”

Through his music, The Reverend allows these ideas to be expressed and interacted with in a healthy way, rather than repressed.

“Repression is the fertilizer in the soil of sin. You repress and it just makes the roots stronger and the shoots come up faster. If you don’t repress and you express it, then you can deal with it.”



Figure 2 Reverend Kingfish recording at WXXI
CREDIT NEAL GANGULI

Being no stranger to collaboration, Reverend Kingfish greatly enjoys performing with other musicians when performing, having found a wealth of talented musicians within the Rochester music scene. His music is both easy to listen to but challenging to engage with; tunes that will have you tapping your foot combined with words that will have

Reverend has found when lyrical content sits on the edge it always seems to resonate with listeners, and they often come back for more. “How many times can you listen to happy music, songs about ‘I love you, oh everything is great.’ No, whether you’re talking about literature or art or music, it’s always the things that are slightly uncomfortable that are the most interesting, in my view; the things that last.”

Playing at venues like Abilene Bar & Lounge and The Spirit Room, he’s found that Rochester can be incredibly accepting of the alternative and the outlandish. It’s important to recognize that spaces exist where people can truly express themselves, and The Reverend’s music celebrates these venues and the people that run them.

“All the kudos go down to Rachel and Jake down at the spirit room, with the space they’ve created – where it’s not just me. They have all kinds of performers doing all kinds of things, and a lot of it would raise some eyebrows in more conservative circles, but they’re filling a very important role in providing that space.”

At the end of the day, Reverend Kingfish wants nothing more than to share his music with any who will listen. If you do, you just might find yourself with more pep in your step and

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