



Fleetwood Mac reimaged and coming to SCV

- MICHAEL PICARELLA
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Twisted Gypsy is, from left to right, Milo Todesco, Aaron Kusterer, Niki Bente, Erik Szabo, Melia Scaletty and Tim Gilmer. Photo courtesy of Twisted Gypsy

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Twisted Gypsy isn't the music group your mom and dad remember. It's a Fleetwood Mac tribute band with a twist.

Santa Clarita Valley residents Tim Gilmer and Niki Bente, who play Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks, respectively, from the British-American rock band known for hits like "Landslide," "Little Lies" and, of course, "Gypsy," said Twisted Gypsy feeds their hunger for playing rock music while also giving them the opportunity to step into the shoes of performers they grew up loving.



Niki Bente, left, and Tim Gilmer are Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham respectively in the Fleetwood Mac tribute band Twisted Gypsy. Photo courtesy of Twisted Gypsy

The Fleetwood Mac tribute band is set to appear on Aug. 18 at the Senses Block Party in Old Town Newhall, and then on Aug. 20 as part of the city of Santa Clarita's Concerts in the Park series.

"The chemistry in this band is one of the best I've ever had," Gilmer said alongside Bente in an interview with The Signal. "In my years of playing — about 40 years of playing — I've never been in a band that is so much like family ... It's a happy place to be in, and I've never felt that. It's beautiful. It really helps the energy on stage and I also think that translates to an audience because we have a lot of fun up there."

Gilmer, originally from Chicago, said his family moved out west in 1979 when he was 14.

"I had a hard time making friends," he said. "It wasn't until after high school that I started making friends. And it was because of music."

Gilmer started playing guitar his senior year of high school, and about a year after he graduated, a drummer friend asked if he wanted to play rhythm guitar in his band.

“So, he gave me the setlist,” Gilmer said. “I learned maybe 10 heavy metal songs, and I went in to play rhythm guitar, and literally after we started rehearsing, we finished rehearsing, our bass player quit, and they immediately asked me if I could play bass. And I’m like, ‘Yeah, sure. Rhythm guitar is just the root note of a bass.’ So, I ran after the bass player — he was a friend of mine — and I asked him if I could borrow his stuff.”

The next day, Gilmer continued, he went into rehearsal as the bass player and he loved it, so much so that he bought his first bass guitar after only his second day of rehearsal.

Gilmer said he’d go on to play music in bands on the Sunset Strip from about 1983 to 1996. But the singer from his first band, a guy named Billy Derian, would go on to become the manager of Twisted Gypsy. Derian wouldn’t forget Gilmer.

“He called me up after 32 years of not speaking to one another, for no particular reason. We just drifted apart,” Gilmer said. “He called me up and asked me if I was still playing bass.”

Derian brought Gilmer in for an audition and eventually swayed him, with the help of band members, into being a sub for the band’s permanent bass player.

“Three days after that, they fired their bass player, appointed me their No. 1 bass player, and I had to learn 34 songs in two weeks and get up on a sold-out stage in Ventura. And I was terrified. It was awesome,” Gilmer added with a laugh.

He said he began playing in Twisted Gypsy toward the beginning of 2018. During the pandemic, three band members moved on.

“And Billy looked at me again and he said, ‘I need you playing Lindsey,’ and I said, ‘I can’t do that.’ He said, ‘Yes, you can. I’ve heard you play guitar.’”

Gilmer hesitated because the Lindsey Buckingham character was a front man in the band, and Gilmer was used to just playing guitar in the background. But he took on the challenge. For the first time in his career, he said he felt stage fright. Once he got going, however, he had a blast.



Twisted Gypsy is, from left to right, Melia Scaletty, Erik Szabo, Niki Bente, Milo Todesco, Tim Gilmer and Aaron Kusterer. Photo courtesy of Twisted Gypsy
“Thank goodness to Niki because she’s really helped me along,” Gilmer added.

Bente, who grew up in the Santa Clarita Valley and who’s a 2004 Valencia High School graduate, said the feeling was mutual. She was coming into the band at the same time Gilmer was tasked to do something new in his career.

“I love that I came into my role new and you were in your role new,” Bente said to Gilmer. “Because I think it just helped us kind of connect.”

Bente said her overall experience with Twisted Gypsy has been quite a surprise. While she enjoyed acting when she was a kid — eventually joining the drama program and jazz choir — she really was unsure of what she wanted to try to do for a living.

“I didn’t even think about making this a profession,” she said, “even though I would write and kind of just play enough guitar to write my own songs. But it kind of just kept progressing.”

Bente said that Stevie Nicks of Fleetwood Mac had always been one of her favorite singers, and so when Twisted Gypsy asked if she could sing any Stevie Nicks songs, she was all about it.

“I just never imagined,” she continued, “that I would say, like, my career is playing, you know, my idol. So, it’s pretty much a dream.”



Niki Bente is Stevie Nicks in the Fleetwood Mac tribute band Twisted Gypsy.

Photo courtesy of Twisted Gypsy

Gilmer and Bente said that while they’re playing the parts of Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks in a band that’s supposed to be Fleetwood Mac, theirs is a more rocked-out version of the group, and they sometimes infuse their own personalities and musical styles into their characters.

“We’re basically trying to update what we think Fleetwood Mac would’ve been these days,” Gilmer added. “We also kind of throw in some tastes of, you know, these-days music.”

In another instance, they might play a Fleetwood Mac song like “Little Lies,” and then they’ll interject bits of Ozzy Osbourne’s “Crazy Train” into it.

“It kind of throws people into a spin,” Gilmer said, “and they’re like, ‘Wait a second.’”

Those who plan to see Twisted Gypsy in concert should expect a synergistic good time between band and audience.

“We like to include the audience rather than just have them sitting there watching a show,” Gilmer said. “We like to bring them into the show. You know, laugh with us, cry with us, sing with us, dance with us.”

Bente said fans of Stevie Nicks will often approach her as if she were really the music legend in the flesh or somehow perhaps a vessel to communicate with Nicks.

“People will come up to me after shows and share what she means to them,” Bente said. “And they’ll say how grateful they were for me for portraying her in that way. And to me that’s like the ultimate compliment because I never, never want to mock her.”

Gilmer brought up an instance when a young woman came up to him after a particular show and expressed her dislike for Lindsey Buckingham, but then acknowledged that she really liked how Gilmer played the part.

“So, she’s got like a love-hate relationship,” Gilmer continued. “She keeps looking at me going, ‘I don’t like you. I don’t like you. Can I have some (guitar) picks to make earrings?’”

Gilmer, Bente and the rest of Twisted Gypsy hope they create the same type of fun and interaction with their fellow Santa Claritans this summer.

For more information, go to the band’s website at TwistedGypsyBand.com.

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