



The Fab 5 are: Joe Baiardi, Danny Kristensen, Rod Robert, Chuck Essick, and Paul Byron

Shawn Hamilton Photography/Courtesy of the Fab 5

Groovfest Brings the Sounds of the '60s to Tomball

BOB RUGGIERO | SEPTEMBER 13, 2018 | 4:00AM

The Inner Loopers of Houston often have their pick of different music festivals and events, and have for decades. But further up north outside of 610 – and actually, outside the Beltway – another series of shows with a different flavor have been growing in popularity almost under the radar. And that's thanks to...local government?

For the past near decade, the city of Tomball has hosted festivals on the grounds and greens of the old railroad depot in the center of the city, where locomotives still roll past the main stage with regularity. There's the Honkytonk Festival with classic country and bluegrass sounds, and the Rails 'n Tails Festival with oldies and zydeco. And entry is always free.



Picture Book is (clockwise from left): Bill Royal, Steve Candelari, Ryan Guidry, and David Blessingame.

Photo courtesy of Steve Candelari

Tomball's newest festival is actually a "rebranding" of the popular Beatles, Brews, and BBQ event. So September 15 will mark the debut of Groovfest, with a lineup of local cover and tribute bands including the Led Zeppelin-branded Von Hindenburg, the Kinks/British Rock practitioners Picture Book, and longtime favorite the Fab 5, with a focus on Beatles material and other '60s groups.

Mike Baxter, the city's Director of Marketing and Tourism, is pretty excited about the lineup. "When you use the tribute bands, especially if they're good, it's like reliving the experience of the actual groups," he says – adding that he saw the Beatles themselves once in 1965 at Atlanta Stadium.

"And our festivals are different from, say, the ones in downtown Houston. People who come to our festivals like to be able to sing along and dance," he adds. "And because it's a smaller environment and small town country Texas, there's more of a family atmosphere. Most of our festivals are wrapped up by 6:30 p.m."

Recent years have seen a sharp increase in interest and popularity of tribute and cover bands around the country, especially since the original performers they're paying tribute to are touring less or retiring.

Houston's the Fab 5 formed way back in 1990, making their period of activity three times longer than the actual Beatles, and they were a five-time winner in the Houston Press Music Awards for cover/tribute bands. Leader Joe Baiardi has felt the audience love, even as his own stage show evolves with costumes and visual elements. The Fab 5 also banter with each other onstage in character as the Beatles, complete with accents.

"Tribute bands bring the music to a new generation of people who could have never seen these bands in their heyday. While saying that, it also brings back these memories to our older generation," he says.



The Houston Northwest Volkswagen Club will have dozens of vintage and tricked-out VW cars and vans on display at Groovfest.

Photo courtesy of the City of Tomball

As for figuring out the seemingly never-ending popularity of the Lads from Liverpool, he's just as full of wonder as the 8-year-old who first hears "Yellow Submarine – though he says his own favorite tune to perform is "I Want to Hold Your Hand."

"It never ceases to amaze me just how many teenagers and college-aged people today are still interested in the Beatles. It was simply the music. It's what endures," he surmises. "After that, it's the four very distinct and engaging personalities. I think a lot of it too is marveling over just how much they accomplished in such a short time, and the growth and changes from year to year and album to album. And let us not also forget what they did to fashion and pop culture."

Steve Candelari, leader/drummer for the Kinks-centric Picture Book (though they also play other '60s hits including U.S.-based bands like Creedence Clearwater Revival) feels a bit differently. "I would agree that tribute bands are more popular today, but the tribute band craze seems to me to have lost a lot of its impact though," he says. "Ten years ago there was more of an interest, or I should say, it was more interesting. It was less saturated. Today, there is probably more interest in '80s & '90s tribute acts."

[Please read web version for embedded content]

Candelari says his favorite tune to play is – naturally – “Picture Book” off the Kinks record Village Green Preservation Society, which they plan to play in full at a show later this fall. Three-fourths of the lineup are also in the Jimi Hendrix-centered Thee Experience. This demonstrates the fluidity of local tribute band lineups (many centered on the Continental Club) where one player could be in several bands at once.

Back inside the 610 loop, there has been something of a backlash against the rising tide of tribute and covers bands as they take up precious performing slots that used to go to makers of original music, even as they prove financially lucrative for said clubs.

[Please read web version for embedded content]

“Let’s face it, most people who go out on the weekend want to hear music they already know. But I think there is room for both,” Baiardi says. Although Candelari says later music just can’t hold a candle to that of the era celebrated in Groovfest.

“The music is so original with the melody, harmony and clever use of chords. When the British bands broke out of the yoke of trying to sound American and did what came around 1965, that’s when the magic started to happen!” he says. “I think the quality of the music is the reason that later generations are into it as well. The songs that are popular today just don’t hold a candle, in my opinion, to the material of the 1960’s.”

In addition to the three bands, Groovfest will also feature a classic car show from members of the Northwest Houston Volkswagen club, a kid’s area, food, drink, and craft vendors, and a hula hoop contest. Ladies of all ages will also be given a daisy upon entry, and those dressed in period ‘60s or ‘70s clothing get free Groovfest sunglasses.

“Our festivals are definitely growing,” Baxter sums up. “But the attendance is still manageable!”

Groovfest begins at 11 a.m. on Saturday, September 15, at the Tomball Depot at 201 S. El. Band lineup is Von Hindenburg (Noon), Picture Book (2:15 p.m.), and the Fab 5 (4:30 p.m.). For more info, call 281-351-5484 or visit Ci.Tomball.Tx.Us. Free.

RELATED TOPICS:

MUSIC

CONCERTS

FESTIVALS

MUSIC

MUSIC FESTIVALS

THINGS TO DO

VINYL