

Traveler arrives at the Mountain

By Sharon Brock
Daily News Entertainment Writer

STILL CHARGED from their Fourth of July concert at the Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Colorado, Blues Traveler will bring their rollicking performance to the Mountain Winery in Saratoga this Sunday, July 16. This New York City quintet is on tour for their eighth studio album, ¡Bastardos!

As their name suggests, Blues Traveler has taken their signature blues-rock on the road from city to city, coast to coast, for more than 15 years, and helped ignite a generation of jam music fans. The year 1996 was a pinnacle year for the band, with their Grammy award-winning hit, "Run-Around," their sold-out New Year's concert at Madison Square Garden and the raging popularity of the H.O.R.D.E. (Horizons of Rock Developing Everywhere) festival, which frontman John Popper co-founded four years previously.

Their latest album, with a mix of Latin, gospel and metal influences, proves that the musical journey of this veteran band is far from over. ¡Bastardos! delivers an innovative sound, where Popper's harmonica is no longer the highlighted instrument and there is a greater emphasis on a collective sound, allowing every band member to shine.

Along with Popper, guitarist Chan Kinchla, his brother Tad Kinchla on bass, drummer Brendan Hill and keyboardist Ben Wilson, took classic jam-rock rhythms and turned them inside out, experimenting with horns, syncopa-



Bandmates (left to right) Chan Kinchla, Tad Kinchla, Ben Wilson, John Popper and Brendan Hill of Blues Traveler.

Cambria Harkey / Photo

At a glance

What: Blues Traveler
When: July 16 at 7:30 p.m.
Where: Mountain Winery
Tickets: \$40-\$50

tion and time signatures. The band named the album ¡Bastardos! because of the bastard blend of music styles and, in making the record, they did not attempt to please anyone but themselves.

From cultish jam-band, to pop-radio darling, to daring and eclectic rockers, Blues Traveler has once again redefined itself.

"This is just us being completely ourselves, and not thinking about what we should be doing," said guitarist Kinchla in a press release. "Before we made this record, we decided, 'Let's just make records that we love and regardless of how they do commercially, at least we love 'em and they're all ours.'"

Tracks, such as "Nail," "Amber

Awaits" and "Rubber-neck" still have Popper's upbeat harp and Kinchla's catchy guitar melodies, but overall, the album has heavier layers atop their typical pop-blues jams. Every song, however, has Popper's impassioned vocals and storytelling lyrics that, in this album, take a more romantic twist. With ballads such as "She and I" and "She Isn't Mine," Popper sheds some light on his personal life.

"During the process of making this record I ended my engagement, fell in love and caroused a lot," said Popper in a press release.

The romantic undertones of the music will certainly be enhanced by the picturesque landscape of The Mountain Winery, one of the South Bay's most beautiful outdoor music venues. Founded in 1901, this historical landmark features a 1,750-person amphitheater among 600 acres of lavish gardens and redwood groves. The winery's antique portal and vine-covered facade serve as the backdrop to the stage that has been the venue for summertime concerts since 1958. With sweeping views from the winery's restaurant, many music lovers will make their visit to The Mountain Winery a full-evening event.

"The Mountain Winery is one of the gems of the Valley," said Brent Schwager, general manager of The Mountain Winery. "We are really excited for Blues Traveler on Sunday. This will be one of the best concerts of the summer."

BLOWFISH

we were writing 'Hold My Hand' and 'I Only Want To Be With You.' Maybe we had voted, but we didn't necessarily know what we were talking about. Whereas now, nearing 40, you've put some years on yourself and come up with some opinions and thoughts that maybe you didn't have when you were younger. That brings a fresh aspect into the band, for sure."

Bryan's rousing composition "State Your Peace" is sure to be among the highlights of the Fox set. "I wrote that a few years back, right before the last election. I started off writing it just sort of chastising myself for not being firm enough in my beliefs. Then it came to feel a bit anthemic, like why shouldn't everyone feel a little more confident to say how they feel?"

He believes music can inspire people to stand up and be counted. "It has for decades, if not centuries. It's an inspirational art form, for sure."

An engaging blend of rock, folk and

blues consistently uplifts Hootie & the Blowfish's audiences. "We've been playing a lot, since the beginning. So we're used to being in the situation where we're there to get the crowd going and to have fun. That comes through in our music and in our attitude towards what we do."

Bryan is working on a lot of different musical projects. He has a side band, Occasional Milkshake. He's putting together his second solo album (the first, "30 On The Rail" was released in 2000). On the band's Web site, www.hootie.com, he'll be previewing one song a month. He'll also be producing more outside acts in the future.

As for Hootie & the Blowfish, they've established a foundation that funds music and general curriculum programs for schools. In August, they'll release, "Live in Charleston," on DVD and CD. Their annual "Homegrown" concert benefits South Carolina children.

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In addition to firming a sense of community, music still provides Bryan and his Blowfish compatriots with adventure. "All four of us like to try new things, learn new things, bring new elements into our writing. I still play a lot of guitar, but I've been using more effects. I've tried new instruments. I started playing mandolin 10 years ago, but I've also brought some lap steel in, just trying new sounds. Also touring, trying to play places where people haven't seen us before, turning on new fans. That's so much fun. You can see it on their faces — they just got rocked ... and they love it!"

"We still love writing and creating and playing live, the whole run of the thing. It still feels fresh for us. Our goal all along was longevity in the music industry, to be able to have a music career of some kind, so we wouldn't need to get real jobs. To be 20 years in, I feel very fortunate. We're doing what we like to do, which to me, is success."

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