

VIBE

THE TWO RIVER TIMES™



RB3 between sets at the Downtown, from left, Alex D'Agnes, Kendall Scott, Paul Bracco, Lisa Coppola, John MacDonald and PJ Bracco.

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RB3 – Blues Done Right

IT CAN BE a rather daunting task these days to form a blues cover band, what with the various types of blues music developed over the past century.

The many different sounds of this genre of music present a definite challenge to the musicians who elect to perform it. A high level of talent and years of experience are the usual prerequisites to success and steady work in the clubs. There are many quality groups in the tristate area, and a trip into Manhattan on any given night will deliver great blues.

If one does not wish to travel that far, the Two River area itself boasts a superb ensemble in the form of The Red Bank Blues Band, affectionately known to the locals as "RB3." With a sound incorporating blues with a hint of jazz, RB3 conveys a somewhat smooth blues sound, in contrast to a raw, "down home" blues delivery, ala John Lee Hooker or Muddy Waters (although founding member Paul Bracco can growl with the best of them when the situation arises).

The band does indeed get rocking with their upbeat selections, and it is nearly impossible to sit still during one of their performances. To steal a motto from a local band back in the '80s, this is truly "music for the feet!"

It's no secret that Jamian's on Monmouth Street is the local hot spot for musicians, and that the Sunday night jams bring out the best talent in the area. In September 2010, a few of the jam regulars decided to collaborate on a project in hopes that they could some day put together a group capable enough to entertain the masses.

Guitarist Paul Bracco; his son, PJ Bracco on harp; drummer Alex D'Agnes; and keyboardist Kendall Scott began the journey back then (along with Susan Haugenes and Chris Herbst who have since moved on). With the assistance of current members John MacDonald on bass and Lisa Coppola on lead vocals, they have created an extraordinarily talented band.

Paul studied classical and jazz guitar in his early days, and has been a member of several groups over the years, including Wisdom's Child and the Joe Carroll Orchestra. With his supremely gifted touch on the snare drum, Alex is a true veteran of the local scene and now splits his time between RB3, and Poppa John & the Jam Band, another popular area group. Berklee-educated Kendall Scott is multitalented, excelling on keyboards necessary for the true blues sound, and also developing soundtracks for independent films in his spare time.

John began his career as a guitarist, but quickly switched to bass at a young age. After his time in the military, John founded the group Stronger Than Dirt in 1997, and joined RB3 in 2012. Truly talented, his work on the electric upright bass is very impressive, as is his work on the standard bass guitar ... and not a fret to be found! John's wife, Lisa Coppola, has a very extensive music background. Right after high school, she began her career with Jersey Shore staple The Party Dolls (yes, remember them?!), then formed the band Broad with much success, and even a brief tour in Europe. A solo album, entitled "A Rose By Any Other Name," was released in 2001, and a solo EP entitled "Wisdom From The Pain" came to being in 2008. Her backing vocals have graced the stage for Billy Joel, Marshall Crenshaw, Glen Burtnick, John Eddie and many others.

Paul's son, PJ Bracco is the "harpmeister general," filling the songs with his great harmonica sounds and backing vocals, really working the crowd into a frenzy during performances. A trained actor, he spends his days tending to his movie production company, Red Hook Films, based in Brooklyn, managing all things behind the screen, including producing and directing.

A recent visit to another local hot spot, The Downtown on West Front Street, Red Bank, during the band's fourth anniversary weekend, revealed what RB3 is all about. With a packed house and the dimly lit stage adding to the ambiance and creating a perfect mood for the blues, the group led off with an instrumental version of Van Morrison's "Moondance" and really set the tone for the evening. Paul sang a great version of the old Hoagy Carmichael song "Georgia" that would have made Ray Charles proud. Lisa's sultry vocals on "Fever" and "Chain of Fools" were truly marvelous, but her incredible rendition of the classic Otis Redding song "Respect," of course made famous by Aretha Franklin, simply brought the house down.

There was some serious energy expended by Lisa on that selection. I know she slept well that night. I also realized how very popular the song "Mustang Sally" is, shouted out as a request this night. When the dance floor capacity is 25 people, and there are 35 people shoulder to shoulder, it makes it a bit tough to get to the bar!

Another highlight of the evening were special guest vocal performances by the incomparable Alan Manzo, and the lovely and talented SondraH of VyntEdge. You never know who may show up onstage during an RB3 show, which is just another reason to catch them in action.

The Red Bank Blues Band has matured over the past four years into a very gifted and very popular sextet. Good people, making good music is always a recipe for success, and for this reason RB3 should continue to accomplish what they set out to do in the beginning: Bring quality blues music to the Jersey Shore, and keep people dancing.

The group works every weekend, so check the Facebook page for the time and date of a show near you. Their original song "Wonder If" will be on the annual CD to benefit the Red Bank All Stars organization. They will formally issue that single to the public at the CD release party for Poppa John & the Jam Band this Saturday, Oct. 4, at Jamian's. A who's who of local musicians should be attending, so get there early. You can also visit www.red-bankbluesband.com for more information.

Chris Spiewak is currently the bassist for rock/blues cover band VyntEdge.