

STREET SCENE

Once in a 'blue moon' a rockabilly band proves it can rock



STEPHANIE A. CASOLA

Anyone who hasn't seen The Blue Moon Boys can grasp the next chance when they return to the metro area for Arts, Beats and Eats, in downtown Pontiac on Labor Day weekend. It may be the last chance to catch the boys before they hit the West Coast. Look for The Blue Moon Boys 7 p.m. Friday, Sept. 3 on the Dodge Americana Stage.

If Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley and John Lennon happened to peer down from Rock and Roll Heaven and see the Blue Moon Boys in action, they would surely be proud.

The Blue Moon Boys are a group of four wildly energetic rockabilly legends-in-the-making from Fort Wayne, Ind. The Boys

worked their way up from playing old Elvis cover songs in the legion halls of Midwest America to performing steamy rockabilly originals and sharing a stage with bands like The Brian Setzer Orchestra and Big Bad Voodoo Daddy. Fresh from a performance in Atlanta for "Elvis's Death Day Spectacular," bandmates Nic Roulette, Kenny Taylor, Flava P. Coltrane and Jumpin' Jerry Sparkman headed north to Fifth Avenue Billiards in Royal Oak, where they filled in on Aug. 22 for the Twistin' Tarantulas.

Fifth Avenue is the band's favorite spot in the metro area to perform, said Sparkman. And the staff seems to return that sentiment. Don Davenport, sound engineer in charge at the club, said whenever The Blue Moon Boys there, they get the crowd moving. All eyes focus on the stage. "They make the crowd part of the show," he said. "They capti-

vate that audience and get everyone's attention."

Showing off

From the first beat of the upright bass, pound of the drum, or strum of guitar, Roulette comes to life as if he were possessed by The King himself. One song ends and — without a chance for the audience to catch a breath — the band dives into another. All the while Roulette hasn't stopped dancing, jumping and popping about the stage as if the music's stuck inside him and just itching to get out. He even combs his hair in unison with that swinging beat.

Compared to other rockabilly bands that perform in the area, Davenport said the boys put on more of a show. "It's entertaining. It's something to see. We look forward to them coming in here all the time."

Steven Marjich looks forward

to Blue Moon Boys shows too. He comes specifically to catch the act. "They put a lot of excitement, a lot of fun into the music," he said. "It's good to dance to — rockabilly or swing."

When Marjich first experienced The Blue Moon Boys, it was almost accidental. He slips on his dancing shoes most Sundays and heads to the club to see the Twistin' Tarantulas. About one year ago, The Blue Moon Boys happened to be filling in for the local rockabilly band, Marjich bought a Blue Moon Boys CD that night and has been coming to see the band ever since.

Humble beginnings

When The Blue Moon Boys got together in 1997, they had a concept in mind. "If Elvis had a Taylor, guitarist for the band. But The Blue Moon Boys moved above and beyond that point, never confining themselves to

strict rockabilly.

"I like rockabilly. I like crazy, wild music...but I'm interested in letting something grow," said Roulette. He's willing to weave in and out of musical genres and expand the band's sound, rather than adopt a side project or pursue some other musical interests.

As one of the most energetic frontmen ever to hit the corner stage at Fifth Avenue, Roulette's background in ballet dancing and an interest in jazz is evident in every performance. After attending Interlochen Center for the Arts for ballet, Roulette danced with the Fort Wayne Ballet Company, from 1991 to 1993. Later, work singing karaoke to Elvis Presley tunes would spark an interest in becoming a singer himself. The Blue Moon Boys would give Roulette his first shot at doing just that. It's hard to believe he hasn't been singing professionally for much longer.

New release

With two albums completed and a new release titled "Sticks and Stones" on this week, The Blue Moon Boys are busy touring the country and getting ready for their first European tour next Spring. Sparkman, the band's bassist, described the new album as traditional rockabilly.

Taylor said it has a wide variety of styles on it, "kinda like an old Beatles album." He compared the songwriting to "a Marshall Crenshaw pop album."

Onstage, the music comes to life with vibrant color, style and attitude like only The Blue Moon Boys could achieve.

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Looking at the Boss from two generational perspectives

Don't see Springsteen's influence on contemporary pop music

Bruce Springsteen will perform with the E Street Band 7:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, Sept. 8-9 at The Palace of Auburn Hills. Tickets \$67.50 and \$37.50. Call (248) 645-6666 or (248) 370-0100.

BY STEPHANIE CASOLA
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At the mere mention of the name Bruce Springsteen, two images come to mind: A red bandana and the sight of a young Courtney Cox being pulled on-stage to "dance in the dark."

The bandanna was featured hanging from the Boss' back pocket on the album cover of 1984's "Born in the U.S.A." Cox was featured in the music video for the hit single from the album, "Dancing in the Dark."

Blame it on my age. Bruce Springsteen never made the impact on me as he did on so many others. At 22, I may have simply been too young to truly understand the purpose behind the lyrics and appreciate the sound.

I admit he's talented. His songs are well-written, catchy and easy to relate to. But I don't remember "Born in the U.S.A." playing at my Senior prom.

Springsteen's songs weren't belov-ing from CD players at the college parties I attended. And when I think back to those times when my friends and I would sit outside our college apartment, playing guitar and singing, I can't recall the E-Street Band finding its way into the mix. Dave Matthews Band, perhaps. Not Springsteen.

That doesn't mean that I don't appreciate his music. I just don't consider it to be part of my nation to pop music, though his songs continue to be relevant and — as demonstrated by the response to his tour — popular.

Some might call Springsteen's work distinctly American in nature. That raspy voice and East Coast attitude make it easily recognizable.

But what I don't hear is an influence on new music. That classic, hometown rock and roll sound is no where to be found within the confines of today's electronic and edgy hip-hop.

No doubt Springsteen's music evokes memories for those who grew up loving his music. Three decades ago, rock was different. Artists had more staying power.

Today, listeners are more fickle. Thanks to the MTV generation, attention spans are short-



The Boss: Like him or not, chances are you'll be able to hum more than a few Bruce Springsteen tunes when he hits the stage Sept. 8-9 at The Palace of Auburn Hills.

or. Musicians may still attain high levels of notoriety, but they're less likely to have the staying power that their predecessors enjoyed in the rock and roll limelight.

As for Springsteen, I'll still think of him as the ruggedly, handsome musician Courtney Cox was dying to dance with.

Springsteen's restless passion, a brilliant light

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
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Somewhere in the fog of the mid 1970s came a voice — raw and relentless. A voice that shook the souls and inflamed the ambitions of those who became enchanted with sound-alike pop music, vapid commercialism and a society that rewarded compromise and egotism rather than principle and character.

Those who recognized originality and passion heard the future of rock music in the voice of the Bruce Springsteen, the Boss. A grubby looking guy from Jersey, who never gave up, and never sold out.

Through the indifferent haze of the disco decade, and then in the self-absorbed 1980s, Springsteen composed anthems and hymns about common people with uncommon dreams.

The voice was authentic and rousing. The words weren't polished with saccharin, but with a howling agony and joyous rapture.

The middle-class kid from Freehold, N.J. became a minister professing the rich texture of

faith in the healing catharsis of rock and roll. And for those who couldn't let go of their dreams despite mounting odds, Springsteen was an apostle suggesting that song can indeed have the redemptive power of prayer.

"Born to Run" still can send chills up the spines of those who are unable to let go of their dreams, and unwilling to let niggling realities control their lives.

And few albums have captured the disillusionment of relationships like the gutsy, chillingly honest "Tunnel of Love."

From "Greetings From Asbury Park" to "Born to Run" to "Darkness on the Edge of Town" to "Born in the U.S.A." to "Human Touch," Springsteen's work has been often inspired, and seldom derivative. Try finding that trait in today's sound-alike, overly produced recording artists.

To anyone who grew up with the Boss, the allegiance to his 25-year musical odyssey is not-

ing less than a vicarious thrill-seeking ride. A reassurance that a passionate, let it fly attitude doesn't dissipate with youth.

When the driving sounds of the E Street Band didn't strike the proper aesthetic for the more gut-wrenching themes, Springsteen went solo in albums like "Nebraska" and "The Ghost of Tom Joad." In these albums, he asserted his right as inheritor of the "social-minded folk singer" mantle handed down from Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan.

Springsteen's genius doesn't lie in elevating himself above the people he sings about. Rather, he remains a compelling artist because he illuminates the everyday struggles and hopes of those of us who felt as if we were born to run in the direction of our dreams, but didn't have a clear path.

For many of us approaching middle age, those dreams haven't quite turned out as we imagined. But the Boss, ah, the Boss, has never let us down.

CLARIFICATION

The music schedule for Arts Beats and Eats in Pontiac has been altered. The changes are as follows:

Performing Friday, Sept. 2 on the K-Mart Stage:

Hemigod will perform at 6 p.m., rather than 6:30 p.m. Fresh from the R.E.M. tour, Wilco has been added to the line-up and

will take the stage at 8:30 p.m. Performing Sunday, Sept. 4 on the K-Mart Stage:

Both Hart will begin her show at 7:30 p.m. rather than 9 p.m. Edwin McCain will take the stage at 8:30 p.m., rather than the originally-scheduled 9:45 p.m. slot. And SpRiNg will hit the stage at 10 p.m.

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