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Music Art Culture Rebirth

March 2019

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Vol. 1, No. 2



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Music for Life

Performers join forces against suicide to honor young victim

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Art of Growth

Downtowns can benefit from creative development



THE 6TH ANNUAL
DUSTIN MELE
 MEMORIAL CONCERT
 3/9/19



**SOUL SKY
 SUPER 400
 EMERALD CITY**
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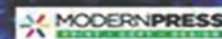
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SHE'S BACK!

After a five year break from the local music scene, Niki Chaos is making up for lost time.

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Photo provided

Joe Mele, center, poses for a picture with his wife, Patti, and their son, Dustin, prior to Dustin's death in 2013.

A DAY TO REMEMBER

Mele reflects on life in music on eve of very personal concert

By Ralph Renna

Troy is a blue-collar town whose residents' bragging rights stem from their pride in Uncle Sam.

Families from all over the world settled here hundreds of years ago to start new lives. As they made friends, special bonds were formed. Extended families grew bigger and bigger, and although bloodlines ran in different directions, loyalty to the Collar City remained true.

Over the past 40 years, Troy has remained a prime location for movie shoots, the arts and, of course, a wide spectrum of talented musicians. No matter the genre or sound, there is an immediate respect and bond formed among musicians from Troy.

If you were to ask around town, one name likely to be among the first to be mentioned would be Joe Mele. As you will learn, Joe has taken big steps and rubbed elbows, Strats and Les Pauls with some of the top names

in the industry, with a resume of accomplishments anyone would be proud of, especially being from Troy, of course.

What came next was completely unexpected, and the guitarist's life froze when his son, Dustin, suddenly committed suicide. Life would change forever for Joe and his family. As devastating as the tragedy remains six years later, out of it was born a new purpose for Joe's music. Along with his wife, Patti, and daughter, Lindsay, the three came together in Dustin's memory, and Joe's extended family of musicians were more than willing to help find some good in the soul-crushing pain.

Every year since then, The Dustin Mele Memorial Concert has used music to help a family – and a community - heal and remember, while also helping spare other families of the inescapable torment The Meles have faced since Dustin's death.

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British Invasion led Mele to music career

Continued from Page 3

RRX: Let's discuss your earliest memory of wanting to play guitar. Be vivid, paint a picture, tell your story. Where and when did your life as a musician begin?

Joe: I got my first guitar as a present from my parents when I was 10. I used to listen to WABY-AM radio on Sunday nights, R&B music. My pre-British invasion influences came from Duane Eddy, the Ventures and early blues stuff, such as Robert Johnson and BB King.

My younger brother, Dave, got drums a few years later. We formed a band when I was about 12 or 13, with childhood friend Denny Mofrey, called Grand Prix and started to play school dances and block parties. When I was 14, Denny and I saw the Beatles at Shea Stadium, my first concert, and it changed everything for me.

When the British Invasion hit in the mid-'60s, everything changed. In 1968, I moved to Brooklyn and played the Jersey shore. We were living and crashing at the bars we played in. That summer, I went to London for a few months, at the peak of the British invasion, experiencing it firsthand. It was there I met

and hung with Sly from Sly and the Family Stone.

When I returned home, I formed the band Merlin's Minstrels and started playing clubs. The drinking age was 18, and from that point on, I was playing five or six nights a week until disco hit in the mid-'70s and clubs started booking DJ's over live bands.

I moved to New Jersey and formed a band called Devon Kid. We got signed by Warner Brothers and were managed by Dee Anthony, who was also managing Joe Cocker and Humble Pie. We played showcases all over New York City and recorded two albums over the next year.

I wound up going to Los Angeles with part of the band. In 1976, I got a call from Doug Jacobs to help open a club, form a house band, and install my sound system. This club was the legendary J.B. Scott's (in Albany), and I stayed to be the house sound engineer and play shows for the next year and a half. During that time, I was working with up-and-coming acts such as Ramones, Annie Lennox, Tom Petty, Buddy Rich and many more.

I've toured extensively, playing shows across the U.S. and Canada, performing in bands at the prestigious New York, Boston and



Photo provided

Guitarist Joe Mele has played at many of North America's most prestigious venues over a career that began when he formed a band with his younger brother in the early 1960s.



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Chicago Blues Festivals; Buddy Guy's Legends nightclub in Chicago; House of Blues in L.A.; House of Blues in Boston; New York's Manny's Car Wash, Kenny's Castaways and The Bitter End.

Recording and studio work includes development work for producer Dee Anthony and many independent record labels. While performing with Janelle Donovan at the Blue Bird in Nashville, I recorded with Billy Cox (Jimi Hendrix's bass player) for Gene Golden, who was musical director for Kenny Rogers.

I've shared the stage with acclaimed artists such as B.B. King, Aretha Franklin, Derek Trucks, Alan Woody, Warren Haynes, Dickey Betts, Dan and Frankie Toller, James Cotton, Joey Molland of Badfinger, Terry Sylvester of the Hollies, Billy Kramer of The Dakotas, Savoy Brown, Joan Osborne, NRBQ, Orleans, Dr. John, Little Feat, Lonnie Mack, New Riders of the Purple Sage, Johnny Johnson, Dave Mason, Charlie Daniels, and Vince Gill. I also participated in clinics with drummer Carmine Appice.

A large part of my focus now is with my son's annual memorial concert. I am so fortunate to have the support of the local music community, family and friends.

RRX: Let's talk about Emerald City, other bands and current projects.

Joe: Emerald City, I've been playing with Gary Brooks and Dave Costa since 1970. To look over at the side of the stage and see these guys, they are family. Playing with Soul Sky with Mark Emanatian, I've been playing with Mark off and on for 25 years, going back to when Mark and I played with Ernie Williams. Mark has become one of my dearest friends. He offers me support, comfort and works diligently on the memorial concert.

I've had great runs with bands playing locally and touring the U.S. with great blues legend Ernie Williams and Mark, Burners UK



Photo provided

Members of Soul Sky, including Joe Mele, second from left, perform during the 5th Annual Dustin Mele Memorial Benefit Concert on March 11, 2018, at Brown's Revolution Hall in downtown Troy.

and reuniting Emerald City after a 30-year hiatus.

RRX: The annual memorial concert utilizes music to raise awareness and money for mental illness and suicide prevention. What organizations have you donated to over the first five years?

Joe: Proceeds from this year's Memorial Concert will support three organizations, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, National Alliance on Mental Illness and Rensselaer County mental health and emergency assistance programs through Catholic Charities' CONSERNS-U program, all in memory of Dustin.

Past annual concerts have raised over \$50,000 for Capital Region not-for-profits. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention credited the Dustin Mele Memorial Concert as the top fundraiser in upstate New York at AFSP's largest annual event this past September, the 2018 Walk for RITA, which raises money for suicide awareness, suicide prevention and family support programs.

Past memorial concerts have also raised funds for the Lansingburgh

Boys and Girls Club, the Companion Animal Placement Program, the Troy Music Academy Music Scholarship Program and the Rensselaer County Heroes at Home project.

RRX: We know that there is a big family of musicians here in upstate New York, but how are all the acts playing this year's memorial relevant?

Joe: Every year seems to get bigger. This year is extra special because Bobby Etoll, a childhood friend, will be joining us from L.A. for a one-time-only reunion of the Bob Etoll Group.

The band is led by Bobby, a longtime resident of Los Angeles, where he founded and built the successful and widely acclaimed Q-Factory Music Library. He is one of the world's leading composers and music producers for trailers, documentaries, TV theme songs and animated series.

Bobby grew up in Troy and is very excited to return after 25 years to reunite with his old bandmates, Peter Iselin (keyboards), Chris Garabedian (drums) and Joe Montarello (bass), as well as some notable special guests.

Soul Sky ... has participated in the past three memorial concerts and will be joined this year by guests including Tony Perrino, Johnny Rabb, Graham Tichy, Donna Tritico and Luke McNamee.

Super 400 is Troy's power trio, featuring Kenny Hohman, Lori Friday and Joe Daley. Joe is a family member, and Kenny and Lori are close family friends, and they have played and supported the event each year.

Emerald City has also played each year, with Ed Powers and Gary Tash expected to join them.

RRX: Do you have any advice both musically and personally, that may help someone?

Joe: I feel that music heals. It's a blessing to be able to play music and raise money to help people in need and not-for-profit organizations that help people - and sometimes animals - in the Capital Region. I just recently played a benefit for the Hudson-Mohawk Humane Society.

The 6th Annual Dustin Mele Memorial Concert is scheduled for 6 p.m. Saturday, March 9, at Brown's Revolution Hall, 417 River St. in downtown Troy.

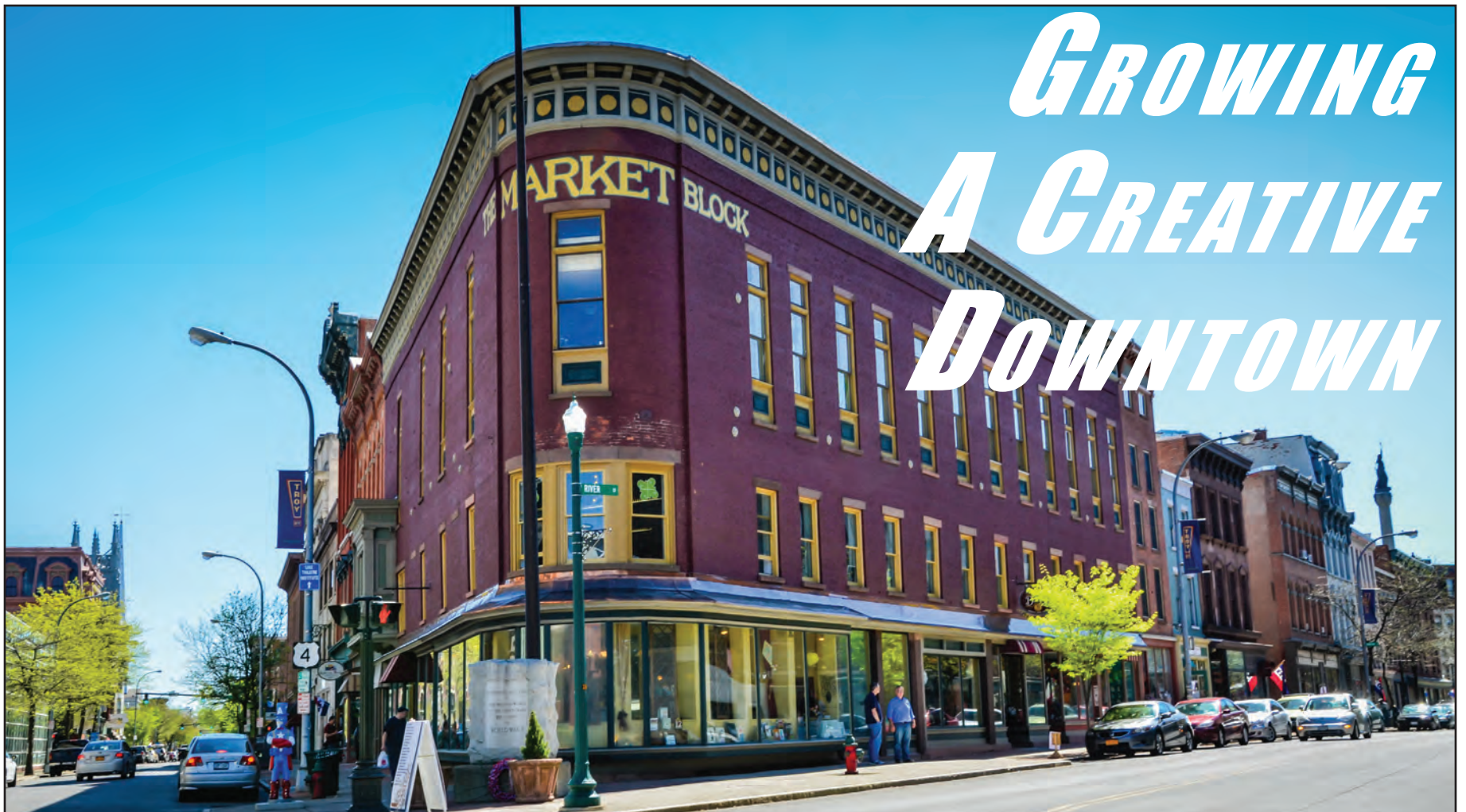


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Downtown Troy is one of several local examples of developing a vibrant arts community to foster sustained downtown growth.

By Robert Millis

Cities looking to build or sustain their economies can find several examples in their own backyard of how the arts can provide a huge boost ... or not

The trendy thing among local and regional planners across the nation is the development of arts-based economies within their individual jurisdictions.

We know the drill by now: Incubate and nurture local artsy types, along with their supporting nonprofits and, voila, communities become well-positioned to finally turn the corner in the long and painful transition to a thriving post-industrial future. The formula's simplicity is as appealing as its promised outcome.

Community developers seem to have become part-time arts developers ... and vice versa. There are probably a lot of dual degrees out there now with those majors listed on them.

The origin of this new age approach is known: Richard Florida's 2002 book, "The Rise of the Creative Class," sought to determine why some metros were booming while others still lagged. He concluded that the successful ones were those best able to attract a cer-

Opinion

tain breed of cat – which he dubbed creative economy workers. How? Not by the traditional carrot of firm-based incentives, but instead by the presence of a social, cultural and lifestyle climate that best mirrors and soothes this target group's desire for experience-based fulfillment in all aspects of life; not just work. After hearing this whistle, the hounds were unleashed.

Its subsequent critical and peer pushback notwithstanding, Mr. Florida's scholarship begat a new and loud chorus to be chanted by economic developers coast to coast: Make and keep the nerds and hipsters happy, and the jobs will follow them here. Easy, right? But, as always, proper execution becomes the key to the mint.

The typical local strategy for achieving this goal is to approach it as a version 2.0 sort of physical infrastructure challenge; after all, that's how these planning types have been trained. This new "If you build it, they will come" game plan no longer involves ball fields in-

parks, but instead funky downtowns with the requisite streetscapes, cafes, farmers markets, galleries and performance spaces. That's part of the reason there are now more brewpubs in this nation than Elks Clubs. Many have been funded with help from these new true believers drinking the Florida brand of pale ale.

There are several examples of this strategy in motion in our own 518 region of upstate New York: Hudson, Troy and Schenectady are commonly cited in this context. Each has no doubt improved its downtown look, feel and vibe with increased night-owl entertainment attractions and foot traffic. Music can be heard, graphic art can be seen, poetry can be read and chefs are the new rock stars. All is good; right?

Well, hold on. Or framed another way: Is this enough? Is successfully creating this particular type of landscape what the new report card should be based on? The case presented from this corner is concise: No.

Yes, the coffee shops, hibachis and brewpubs are (especially) important when done right. Thankfully, they usually are. But live music scenes are equally important; probably even more so. We fully subscribe to popular mantra of "Music is the gateway art" here at our modest advisory firm. Accordingly, we usually approach our projects with a music-first mindset. The execution problem we run into is an immediate show stopper: Too often, this crucial need is deemed as already being solved locally by native cover bands playing in bars and park festivals or even the occasional bigger-name acts visiting theaters.

It often goes like this: "What do you mean, we don't have a music scene here? Have you heard the noise coming from those bars down there?" We argue that this sort of complacency is a mistake – a very big mistake.

While those aforementioned settings are helpful and desirable, what's really needed in building a true music scene (or music town) economy is to start with one or more small or mid-sized venues that regularly host original acts, both touring and regional. There are literally hundreds of these type of performers skipping across the continent at any given moment, presenting a programming alternative to talent buyers that take the time to look for them, instead of lazily writing the "\$100 a head" check to the usual party band suspects or – even worse – the push button DJ heroes who wear them down for gigs. For the precious few that do make that effort, good things accrue to the larger community.

But why is this type of a scene so important to economic, community and arts development?



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Development of an all-inclusive arts community in Saratoga Springs is hampered by its dualing desire to attract summer tourists in town for thoroughbred racing at Saratoga Race Course, concerts at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center and other high-profile attractions.

And what exactly makes up said scene? Didn't we skip that part?

Yes, we did skip that part. It's complicated, but the summary goes like this: A scene (music or otherwise) hosts multiple parts of a so-called industry supply chain. In the music world, this includes not only the performers, but also technicians, agents, management, publicists, promoters, studios, publishers, songwriters and more. An

industry ecosystem, if you will, develops and is sustained. Participants attract other participants in what the economic development world calls clusters.

The best news? They tend to live, love and work within those same clusters, usually meaning downtown or at least in the greater urban boundary.

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Competing interests can hurt everyone without cooperation

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boundary. When it works, it scales. When it works, it scales and also attracts and crossbreeds with other arts segments, as well as other creative segments, such as tech and design. The result is people who live, work and play in the urban footprint, instead of just people who occasionally play there.

Again, a music scene is developed with the existence of live stages featuring original and touring acts. That makes the whole formula work, the first link in the supply chain. Without it, the math falls apart. That's different than having a couple bars with gray hair playing the classic rock of their youth or even a setting with 20 stages hosting 20 cover bands playing to seasonal visitors (yes; we're looking at you, Saratoga). The former is a bar scene, while the latter is a tourist scene, both with minimal contributions to that desired chain.

Neither is necessarily a bad thing, but not all towns want a large locals' bar zone and not all can become a tourist trap. All probably desire a creative economy, however.

Substitute other subsets under the greater arts scene umbrella, and similar exercises of differentiating real versus faux ecosystems can take place. Here's a relevant exercise for developers and planners, both public and private sector: If your efforts are attracting suburban office girls who listen to pop music on the radio into town for a Friday night karaoke fix or bringing

senior citizens down for a night of Broadway revivals, show them a good time and get some sales tax dollars out of them, but you'll never get either to live, work or create downtown – and that should be your best-case scenario.

Instead, work on getting that gal with the arts degree and big fashion dreams in her head that's into indie electro-shoegazer to come down. Let her mingle with those neighborhood types who are working, hanging, playing and showing in the nearby galleries and stages or are making a living supporting those who do. Provide her that sort of setting, and she'll be more likely to stay – or at least come back in the daylight hours. And you'll be glad she did, but you're not going to do it with horn bands on the patio playing "Mustang Sally" or the corner art shop offering Thomas Kinkadee prints.

In other words, while many communities are playing the arts card as a way to jump on the urban renaissance bandwagon, quite often they are playing a weak hand. What some claim to be a vibrant scene is actually a mirage. Hype can easily supplant actual success or even reality (hello again, Saratoga!). Those bluffs need to be called.

Robert Millis is the principal of Saratoga Springs-based The 398Group, which advises and assists venues, festivals, local governments and economic developers in the development of music-first, arts-based initiatives. Contact him at 398Group@gmail.com.



Photo provided

Niki Chaos, left, performs with her band, Bleak Little World.

Mother Niki returns with unique blend of Chaos

By Liam Sweeny

We've all heard music that was so unique, we knew after the first bar of that first song that we'd recognize them any time we might hear them in the future.

That can be good or bad, of course, but when I first heard the music of Niki Chaos and her band, Bleak Little World, I emptied the carafe of day-old coffee and burned my way through the whole discography, which is on the Internet, so you can, too.

Prog-Americana, as I get from hearing Bleak Little World describe themselves, is a two-lane, blacktop ribbon cutting through the desert scrub brush to a diner 10 miles up the road, with a dusty jukebox and a preacher at the door. It's that kind of music, and that jukebox is filled with Niki Chaos and Bleak Little World.

I sat down with Niki to talk about our personal lord and savior, Leo Fender.

RRX: Your vocal style reminds me of jazz, in the sense that you explore note progressions and, I guess, "curvatures" that bounce from the rhythm on a thin tether, only to come back into that perfect land. Let's spill some secrets: How do you work the balance between what you do as a songwriter and the improvisation that I'm hearing in the song?



Photo provided

Niki Chaos, right, and Bob Donald, who founded and leads their band, Bleak Little World, perform outside the River Street Beat Shop in downtown Troy.

Niki: So thoughtful of you to notice my love for jazz. For me, it's about listening and feeling. Listening to the notes, feeling the rhythm, feeling the mood and emotion of the song.

The rhythm is the dance of the song. Every song has a dance. The singing is the melody of the song. ... The melody commands attention, but also listens to everything else.

When writing, I try to tie the melody to the rhythm and bring all of those elements when I sing. After the melody is created, it gets "locked in," so that we can consistently hit the harmonies every time. I think that's maybe one of my secrets: a little bit of improv and a lot of memorization.

RRX: Bleak Little World is so multifaceted. I could put you on repeat in my car as I drive through some "Peak Oil Blues," and I don't need to switch CDs to hear something different. Question is, being versatile is tough; have you ever written a song and been tempted to just delve into its style and write 20 more of them?

Niki: BLW is VERY multifaceted. My songs are all created in my singer-songwriter style, but then the band – some of the best musicians I've ever

played with – sink their teeth into a song, and the creativity and dedication they bring to the songwriting and arranging process has been unparalleled.

One of my favorite parts about BLW is that Bob Donald, who created and fearlessly leads the band, always encourages all of us to contribute to the songwriting, because our focus has been original music. For instance, our former bass player, Kevin Carroll, contributed two songs and co-wrote a third.

RRX: My illustrious publisher and friend of the court, Art Fredette, informed me that you had taken a sabbatical from music to take on the role of mother. Now, I can only imagine the ups and downs of having to lug many pounds of new equipment around AND clean up spittle and vomit, so was the transition from that to becoming a mother a big one?

Niki: The transition to being a mother (or a father, for that matter) is a big one for EVERYONE. It's a lot of hard work, and often you have to put your personal passions aside to focus on your child. When my kid was young, it was too hard for me to keep up with work and being a mom AND trying to get out there and do the music thing.

I took a break for about five years, but the desire

to perform was too strong, and over time, I had to get back into it. That was how I met Bob and joined Bleak Little World. I was hanging out at a jam Deb Cavanaugh hosts, looking for new musicians to play with, and once we both realized how our bleak songwriting was perfectly aligned, the rest was history.

RRX: On your website, you heavily stress the desire to find new artists out there - in the area or elsewhere - that are pushing the envelope and exploring the space. There are some musicians who are great at this, and there are some who don't see the need if they've got a smokin' right hand, so to speak. How would you convince them to experiment?

Niki: Oh, this is a tricky question. ... In my view, I don't push people to do much of anything. They either want to do it, or they don't (not to be confused with my opinions, of which I have many). I look for people who are open-minded, and I try to hang out with those people. Those people restore my energy.

There is a great network of support in the Capital District if you're open and look for it. You just have to get out there.

RRX: This interview's been a lot about BLW, but your solo work is incredible, and these questions could easily apply to you as a solo artist, as well. Who do you love? What's on the calendar?

Niki: This is funny. I MUCH prefer playing with others. It really adds to the potential greatness of the sound. My solo work is really my songwriting, for which I can thank the universe for sending me the words and notes.

Otherwise, everything I do is a collaboration, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with so many talented people.

On that note, BLW is excited to be hosting the Best Damn Open Mic at McGeary's every other week (opposite Hard Luck), which has given me the chance to meet all sorts of new friends. And I can't wait to debut a very special Patti Smith cover at the RadioRadioX event with Let Go Daylight. For those fans who might be in New York City on March 16, we've got a very special night lined up at Freddy's in Brooklyn, so be sure to check out our website for details and come raise hell with us in the city that never sleeps.

We're REALLY excited for my newest project coming up: niki chaos and the random particles. It's indie-experimental rock that covers our usual buffet of styles, but allows Bob and I to switch up instruments and really stretch our legs. I've been enjoying the drums lately and Bob the keyboard, so expect to see some new sounds as we explore the sonic landscape.

Anything you can do ...

Woodstock's Kristen Capolino earning spot among guitar elites

By Ralph Renna

At a very young age, most musicians develop their desire and passion to play. They either excel fast or fade faster. When we see a young child play guitar, we are all impressed because of their innocence, but what when you're in a crowd of respectable, gifted musicians at a Kristen Capolino show? It's a different scene.

Kristen, 29, was born in Romania, but grew up in Woodstock. Beginning when she was 12, she has built an outstanding resume, already having shared the stage with Lady Antebellum, Gavin DeGraw, Bret Michaels, Wyclef Jean, Michael Schenker Group, Les Paul and Al DiMeola. Kristen's vocal coach is Don Lawrence, whose clients also include Mick Jagger, Bono, Christina Aguilera, Lady Gaga and Tony Bennett.

We had a chance to catch up with Kristen as she gears up for another monster slot, opening for Talas, which features bass player Billy Sheehan, formerly of Mr. Big and David Lee Roth's band on Wednesday, March 13, at Jupiter Hall, inside Lucky Strike Social at Crossgates Mall in Albany.

RRX: You have exceeded a lot of guitarists in talent and age? Being a young woman, is it intimidating?

KRISTEN: I'll be honest that being a young lady indeed was a challenge in the male-dominated music world. However, I have found that music does the talking and breaks through all barriers and differences.

When I was 13 years old, I started playing at open mic nights. For the most part, the musicians were actually very kind and supportive, but there were a few that were judgmental and disapproving, simply because I was a young lady.

In recent years, female guitarists have been rising up in the music industry, and I do think that has been difficult for some to accept. However, I have been lucky to have met and played with some very talented musicians and artists, and they have been nothing but kind and supportive.

RRX: How about your influences?

KRISTEN: I feel that I have a pretty wide range of musical influences, but I would say that I wouldn't have picked up the guitar if it wasn't for Gary Moore and Michael Schenker. I'll never forget the good old days of riding in the car with my father and blasting some of our favorite songs, such as "Lights Out" by UFO. I loved playing air guitar and rocking out.

Although my father introduced me to Al DiMeola, of Return to Forever, when I was very young, I didn't fully appreciate his incredible playing until my teen years. Soon I even started getting into some bluegrass, after sharing the stage with Albert Lee.

I love to take bits and pieces from all of my influences to create my own style. It's so important to explore all kinds of music because you never know what you can learn from them.

RRX: What does 2019 and beyond hold for you?

KRISTEN: We have some exciting



Photo provided

Guitarist Kristen Capolino is scheduled to open for Talas on Wednesday, March 13, at Jupiter Hall, inside Lucky Strike Social in Crossgates Mall in Albany. For tickets or more information, visit jupiterhallalbany.com.

things in the works for 2019. A little over a year ago, I started a new series of shows called Mondial, which are available on my website, Kristen-Capolino.com. Over the years, I have gained fans worldwide, and I wanted to be able to reach out and connect with them in a personal way.

Every show has a different guest to make them new and exciting. I've been fortunate to have worked with some amazing and kind artists, such as Bernie Marsden of Whitesnake and Gene Cornish of The Rascals.

At the same time, I have some other exciting shows planned. My good

friend, Gerardo Velez – a world-renowned percussionist who has worked with Jimi Hendrix and David Bowie, to name a few – recently invited me to perform at the 50th Anniversary of Woodstock (concert) this summer. I'm so honored, and am looking forward to being part of this incredible even.

In addition to playing more shows this year, I will also be back in the studio, working on new material, so I'm very excited.

For more of Ralph Renna's interview with Kristen Capolino, visit the Xperience blog at RadioRadioX.com.

Going to the dogs ... and cats

Photos by Art Fredette

Hangar on the Hudson in Troy was filled with pet lovers Feb. 9 for Rock 'N Rescue, a benefit for the Mohawk-Hudson Humane Society. The day featured live music, raffles, door prizes and more.



WTEN meteorologist Tim Drawbridge, center, hosted Rock'N Rescue on Feb. 9 at Hangar on the Hudson in Troy to benefit the Mohawk-Hudson Humane Society.



Rod Choppy, right, performs with Jim Trainor, above. Below, the Rod Choppy Reaction is joined on stage by Tommy Love.



RadioradioX.com was among those promoting and supporting the fundraiser.



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Photo provided

Kevin McKrell, center, performs with his band, the McKrells.

Telling stories in many ways

McKrell's heritage, travels reflected in his music, art

By Liam Sweeny

My father, if you don't know him, is an amateur musical historian. It can be delta blues or British invasion or southern rock or early proto-punk, if it came out before 1980, he can read you the liner notes of an album from memory.

Okay, I may exaggerate a little, but he's been going to shows ever since I was crawling around sticking forks in Lite-Brites. So when he follows Kevin McKrell through 40 years of music, it really means something.

It's hard to figure out what to write about someone who has been a part of your upbringing, but Kevin has been bringing everything from pop covers to Celtic folk and bluegrass originals to the region and the world for decades. He's someone who could easily hit any major city's art scene and start turning heads, if he has done so already.

I sat down with Kevin to geek out with questions my

father wanted to ask. Happy St. Patrick's Day, Pops!

RRX: I am fortunate here to be interviewing you; my parents first saw you at The Grinch, on Eagle Street in Albany, in the early '80s, and the last time they saw you was the Mountain Snow and Mistletoe at the Empire State Plaza. There's a real character arc in the venues, if you exclude the world tours. Is there nostalgia, or is there more shock?

Kevin: There are always memories of certain gigs; sometimes it is strictly about the venue itself - Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Caffe Lena, Falcon Ridge Folk Festival, The Milwaukee Irish Festival. Of course, there were always gigs that are best left to the memory scrap heap. Most of those were early days, the rough and tumble of the bar gigs, playing 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., 40 (minutes) on, 20 off, fighting off all those who were over-served enough to be sure they could do the song better.

RRX: Okay, the Newports. Fifties, '60s pop, again, going way back to that late '70s and early '80s. I'm

trying to see the transition musically in my head between that Top 40 set and Celtic folk, bluegrass, acoustic. They seem so far apart in musical style. Are they? Are there ties that bind?

Kevin: It was all about who I was playing with or hanging with at the time. In the Newports, I was hanging with Johnny Rabb and Bert Sommers, going to each others' gigs, doing guest spots, working out vocals as we went. The Newports was like a vacation: no pressure. The songs weren't mine, so no worries about how they were performed or received.

The McKrells was again the same, I have always loved bluegrass music, since the day my Uncle Bill gave me a Roy Clark Family CD. And I just happened to be hanging in Saratoga and met up with tre-

mendous players, so that band went very quickly from jamming in the garage to Carnegie Hall seemingly overnight.

RRX: My mom and dad almost died at Mountain Snow and Mistletoe ... well, died laughing. You, Brian Melick and "'Twas the Night Before Christmas." Let's give it the justice that YouTube never could. For one, how can you get through the tale standing next to Brian Melick?

Kevin: Brian and I kid each other about how we will be 90 and still dragging ourselves out to do that bit. When I conceived of that bit, it was all Brian - though a very serious artist, he has a natural flair for comedy and a very expressive way about him. Because of that bit, we have been compared to Martin and Lewis, Abbott and Costello. - I see us as

Stan (Laurel) and Ollie (Hardy).

RRX: St. Patrick's Day is coming up very soon, and the shows that you do are feats of endurance as much as musical prowess. The celebration of all things Irish is something I cherish, but I'm really a passive celebrant. Can you tell us what Kevin McKrell must do to prepare himself for an American St. Patrick's Day?

Kevin: Back many years ago, I did a marathon on that day, trying to fit as many gigs into a 24-hour period as humanly possible. Raising a family, paying the mortgage ... thank God these days I don't have to do that. I do one show and toddle safely off to bed.

RRX: Let's piggy back off that question. On March 17, everyone gets to be Irish if they wear green; if they're lucky, the real Irish get kisses; and every supermarket display case is verdant, rollinghills and four-

leaf clovers. You play in Ireland a lot. What is the actual St. Patrick's Day celebration like there? How do they see our oceans of green beer?

Kevin: Up until the '90s, St. Patrick's was simply a holy day of obligation, no different than the other raft of holy days that fill the Liturgical calendar. Then they caught on to the money to be made, so Dublin started doing a parade, with truckloads of American marching bands filling the Aer Lingus flights.

Now, it is no different than here. I think I recall them making the Liffey green for the day, or maybe that was just the slime. ... Now, they are better at it than us; they have the world's shortest parade going from a pub on the right across the street to the pub on the left.

RRX: You paint. Fantastically, I might add. You can paint 70 hard

Continued on Page 14



Photo provided

Musicians Kevin McKrell, left, and Brian Melick are notorious for a comedy bit based on the classic holiday poem "'Twas the Night Before Christmas."



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Storytellers are McKrell's muse

Continued from Page 13

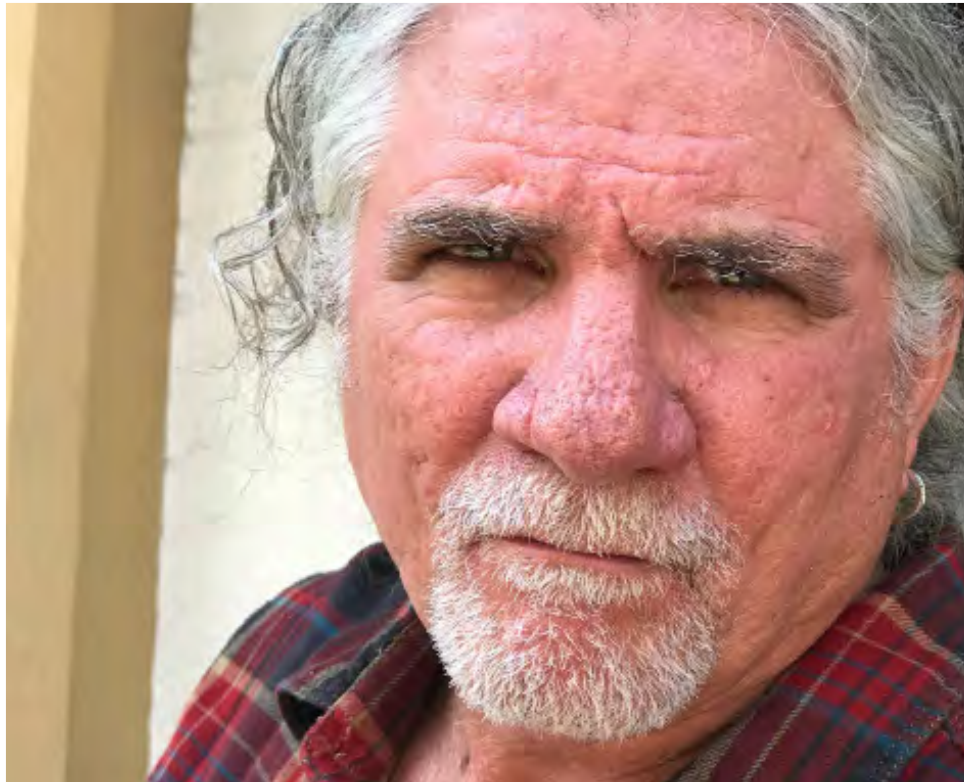
years into a face, and they want to talk. The people you paint - a lot of Irish people, naturally - do you look for people with expressive faces and ask them to sit, or do they ask you to paint them and you pull the expression out of them and paint it onto the canvas?

Kevin: When I travel, I take photos, bring them home and paint away.

RRX: I could go on, but I leave the floor open for you to answer any question I didn't ask: shoutouts, who you listen to, what projects you have coming up. The microphone is yours.

Kevin: My inspirations are folks like John Prine and Guy Clark, Pete St. John and Jimmy McCarthy, Michael Smith. Storytellers all.

I am currently writing tunes for a new solo bit. No idea when.



Local music icon Kevin McKrell says he has started writing songs for a new solo project, but has no timeframe for the work.

Photo provided



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REMEMBERING A FRIEND

Photos by Art Fredette

The local music and arts community was out in force Feb. 10 at Hangar on the Hudson in Troy for the annual Dick Quinn Memorial Jam and Art Show. The afternoon of art and music was organized by friends and family of the late local musician, including, left, his son and daughter-in-law, and hosted by The Hill Hollow Band, below.



WHERE THE PLAYERS MEET THE FANS

River Street Beat Shop continues to thrive as gathering place for musicians, fans of all ages, styles

By Liam Sweeney

Jimmy Barrett is a man of many talents – business owner, musician and radio host – and I’m sure there’s a few things I’m unaware of. I met him in the River Street Beat Shop, a magical place that is not just a stop on a musical destination, but a destination itself. It has launched several bands that have found love in the 518.

Jimmy also hosts “Kaleidoscope” – the iconic show that has been a staple of the local radio scene for more than three decades – from 8 to 10 p.m. Mondays on RadioRadioX. I sat down with Jimmy on a blustery cold day to ask, “How’s tricks?”

RRX: Jimmy, I love the Beat Shop, and I find it hard to believe that anyone wouldn’t love it. But it’s more than the offerings; it’s a conversation, between you and your cus-

tomers, and between the customers and each other. For you, is it purely the musical passion, or is it also the chance to connect with people generally?

Jimmy: Oh, it’s absolutely both. I mean music drove me; I’ve always been a music maniac since I was a kid. When I was 4 years old, I had a crystal radio set, so the music has always been big. But I also like people. I’m not a distant person. I don’t keep my distance, I enjoy engaging in conversation with customers, and particularly musicians who spend a lot of time in here. And they’re very hip to the kids, too, the younger music lovers. These guys and ladies talk to these kids and have a lot of fun, invite them to their shows and to “pick up my record.” ... It’s pretty intriguing; a lot has changed for the better.

RRX: A lot of bands have gotten their starts at the Beat Shop and have played in there, so the Beat Shop is really a spot on the scene. I’m all about hearing stories, and you’re all about telling them, so do you have a funny story about a band that got their start in the Beat Shop?

Jimmy: Well I’m not so sure “funny,” but we’ve

Continued on Page 18



Photo by Kate Larson

The River Street Beat Shop in downtown Troy, owner by Jimmy Barrett, left, is more than just an eclectic shop for music fans and collectors, but also a gathering place for local musicians of all ages and genres.

Vinyl revival 'not a fad,' joined by CDs

Continued from Page 17

Basically, for the longest time, we would let anybody come in that wanted a crack at playing. Anybody that put a CD out got the opportunity to play.

But then we had some that became really popular, like Big Frank and the Bargain Bingers just got so, they are so good now. And the Mysterios, who morphed into ... Johnny (Mystery)'s band now is called the Va Va Voodoos - Johnny changes his name quite often. And (I take) personal pride in Off The Record, who are more of a theatrical rock band than they are a rock band. They're a show; it's like a theater presentation.

So we've had so many wonderful people, (like) Sarah Pedadadie and Sean Rowe, and so many great people have played here. But to me, just as much fun are the ones who put a cassette or CD out and didn't do much, but they got to play live with their friends, they had fun and they still have fond memories. It doesn't matter to me who makes it or who's doing really well; it matters to me who's having fun and still getting the fact that playing music live is a real blast. So, a little of both.

RRX: And what interview would be complete without a question about vinyl? You carry a lot of it, and talk is there's a resurgence. Other talk is that it's a hipster fad, and it won't sustain a market. What do you think can sustain a resurgence in vinyl that wouldn't be true for, say, cassette tapes? What goes beyond the fad of it?

Jimmy: I don't think it's a fad at all. I think it's been going on for five or six years. It's at a recent all-time high. A large portion of our sales are vinyl, to be honest with you. And the kids are really hip to vinyl. But they're not faddists; these kids are all in. This isn't flavor of the month; I'm not getting that at all.

The older fans are coming in because they're replacing their favorite records of all time, and they're talking to these younger music fans. They're really interested; I think they're tired of America shoving this crap down their throats and convincing them they have to buy this or that, or they have to get MP3s or other sources.

And, by the way, there's a resurgence in CDs also because the stores pretty much decided no one wants CDs. Well, we know better,



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know people do want CDs. If you're someone in your 60s, and you've been collecting CDs for years, you're not going to stop, so if they don't want to sell them, there's another avenue open for sales.

We take pride in having a lot of rock and roll, blues, jazz, punk, reggae. We have all that stuff available here, and very cheaply on CD, so there's a whole new market. And they love coming in and going through.

They're surprised that we think this way, but it's common sense. I'm not a rocket scientist, (but) I have my ear to the ground. If you listen to your customers, it's not that hard to figure out that good things are happening in music.

That said, it's a lot of work; it's not for everybody. You have to be willing to sit here on a day like today with nobody out and hope somebody comes through the door. Other days, there's a deluge, so ... it's not for the timid. You've got to be a believer, and I'm a believer and my son's a believer, so we know that hard work always pays off.

Not to mention that the online service is really the way to go. We get a lot of great records here, but some of those we sell online to pay our bills. That opportunity is there.

And radio is basically no help at all, except, and I work for this place, places like RadioRadioX push the heck out of local bands. Every hour, those guys are playing local stuff, and the local bands love it. They get a chance to be heard.

So major radio is dead, and a large radio station (is) awful, they have no imagination, and even college radio has gone to hell, (That) used to be a hotbed for great new music, (but) college stations are playing the same tripe you can get on an FM station. They're following instead of leading. College radio are in big trouble.

Stations like this are the new cornerstone of music. These are the people, like RadioRadioX, that will matter if people will support them. It's not easy to convince people that is the way to go, but it is.



Photo by Ed Conway

Amongst his other claims to fame, Jimmy Barrett is also a member of the infamous local band The Lawn Sausages.

RRX: You're also in a band called The Lawn Sausages. What do you play, who are your fellow Sausages, and what's the Lawn Sausage flavor?

Jimmy: Well, I'm proud to be in The Lawn Sausages. It started out as a bet with Tina Ward and her band, The Matter Babies, who said there was no place to play, and no one would support local. And Artie (Fredette, owner of RadioRadioX and publisher of Xperience) and I, and our friend Paul and other like-spirited individuals, said we could fill a club in two weeks, even write and make a CD at the same time, and the bet was a case of beer.

So we made the bet, and we got a few friends in, and we bought keyboards and a couple microphones and a couple of speakers and we pretty much "makeshift" created a set of music, hilarious, and I thought it would be awful, but it was really crazy funny.

We played at this place called Billy's on Broadway, and we filled the place. It was a total three-ring circus, and people went nuts. We dressed in these outlandish outfits – we barely knew how to plug in, let alone play – and something was going on, some

zest. Something we were doing was right because people were screaming and dancing and laughing, and we came out swinging. We just hit it right away, and we really haven't changed that much through the years.

We tend not to play as often now. Being a novelty band, we like to play three or four times a year just to keep it fresh, but we do like to get together to practice a lot. We enjoy each other's company, all of us. We've got great musicians, like Rob Skayn and Mark Emanation, Charlie Clifford, who's a monster drummer, Paul playing rhythm guitar, Johnny Mystery on bass, and Artie and I on "dog howling" (I'm the cat, he's the dog.)

It is a change; it's fun. Our whole thing was to send up local music, because at the time, bands were taking themselves so seriously. We're not capable of taking ourselves that seriously. Our songs are raunchy and funny, and they're just profane, but people laugh. We love it when we go to shows and people are singing along; they know all the words. Sophisticated people love trashy songs once in a while.

We're having a blast. We're playing some shows, (and) we have

a CD coming out called Appetite for Dysfunction, I think it's going to set people on their heels. I'll say no more about it at this point. Artie's handling that, but it's quite remarkable. So yes, to answer your question, I am a Lawn Sausage. It will probably be on my tombstone.

RRX: Between the Beat Shop, The Lawn Sausages and "Kaleidoscope," you're all-in on music, which is different than even some of the bands and players that you like? Do you think that musicians that are "all-in" bring something different to the art than people who are drawn to it as an escape from the 9-to-5?

Jimmy: I don't agree with the question. I think if you're in a band, you're all-in anyway, cause you're gonna work towards a goal of playing out and having fun. I think you're talking about cover bands versus original bands, and in that particular scenario, I would always prefer the original band even if they fell flat on their face.

I personally have more respect for a band that will go out and play all their own songs rather than the same Top 40 songs that everybody's playing out there. I prefer original bands; I think it takes a lot of guts, and sometimes they're astounding. Sometimes these original bands are great.

I don't have a problem with an original band playing a few covers, that's just common sense, as long as a big portion of their set is original. I'm happy, as a patron, to go support that. So, I think everybody's all-in about playing.

When you're buying your gear and rehearsing and throwing it in a car, dragging it up a flight of stairs, play for 25 people on a Thursday night God-knows-where, then you're all-in, and if you're playing original, all the more power to you. So, I dig both, but I have a slight preference for original bands.

For more from Jimmy Barrett, read the complete interview under the Xperience tab at RadioRadioX.com.



Photo provided

Cast and crew do some nighttime filming in Waterford for the independent picture "The Black Sky Under Harper's Rock."

Waterford leaves lasting impression on film, cast and crew

By Liam Sweeny

Film creates a history that never happened. Combine it with a backdrop that reflects four centuries of real history, and there's a power greater than simply history and story combined.

Among the banks of the confluence of two rivers that have been vital for perhaps thousands of years, a film crew set up and set out to create a compelling tale of loss, searching and remembrance. We sat down to talk with actors Aaron Dalla Villa and Faith Kelly, writer/director Steve Cifarelli and producer/location manager Mike Camoin about the latest creative fingerprint on the Capital Region.

RRX: The name of the film is "The Black Sky Under Harper's Rock." It's a movie where the impact of a missing girl (Sarah) on the main character (John) as life piles up with the miles he drives looking for her. I'd love to hear more, but maybe

you're not into spoilers. So if you'd like to avoid spoilers, maybe you can take us through John's or Sarah's desks at home. Can we get to know them?

Aaron: John Finch is the local catch of the town. He's cool, attractive and doesn't have a problem with the ladies. He hangs out with the local "bro" types and is known as The Wolf. However, after falling in love with Sarah, John becomes unable to go back to his old way of life.

Sexual promiscuity and partying becomes a thing of the past because his emotional well has been filled by his and Sarah's love. His vulnerability becomes accentuated by Sarah's disappearance, and at first he tries to deny it, but, like a recently sober person, he cannot escape the truth: Sarah is in trouble and he may be at fault.

Faith: So Sarah's a pretty spacey, weird girl, mostly an introvert. Recently out of high school, she would consider herself in the miscellaneous, non-clique group before entering the realities of small-town life.



Photo provided

Actors Faith Kelly and Aaron Dalla Villa perform in a scene from "The Black Sky Under Harper's Rock"

Her desk is halfway perfectly organized and halfway littered with classic dark novels, some goth and prog CDs and sketching pads of nature from the small world surrounding her. And her favorite orange gloves.

Basically her desk is filled with whatever she can use to escape from the world in her head. A head that is haunted by a depression rooted in self-hate, loneliness and confusion, (but) masked by a smile, giggle and “Let’s look another way from this” humor.

RRX: I have heard over the time I’ve lived near Peebles Island about bodies being found, sometimes suicides, other times washed up from higher up the Mohawk. It underpins the natural beauty and quaint feel of the location. Was it something you knew about prior, or something you found out during production?

Steve: It was not. Things weren’t panning out with a different location that I was into financially, and Mike suggested we check out the area near Cohoes all the way up 787 – we were searching for a large rock or cliff hanging over water.

We really stumbled upon this cliffside along the Mohawk River with just plain spectacular views. Having done this a number of times before, Mike saw the potential immediately and cued me in on how easy it would be to coordinate an otherwise complex shoot schedule around the neatly compact town of Waterford, New York.

So you see, the history of the location was completely happenstantial and did not play a role in its selection. Finances and logistics were the deciding factors – as they always seem to be – though I will admit the incidental connections between the history of the place and the story we told were nothing short of spooky. As Mike himself said, it’s almost as if the location chose the story, and not vice-versa.

RRX: As far as shooting locally, was there a personal connection with someone in the crew?

Mike: We had no idea of the losses the region and town of Waterford has grieved along the Mohawk. As a location manager (on such Sundance indies as “We the Animals” and “As You Are), my job is to serve the director’s vision. It’s pure magic when it comes together.

I had recalled walking the Peebles Island trail a few years back with my wife, Linda. She and I met in Cohoes one summer (1991) working at ROI on Remsen Street. My hope was to offer director Steve Cifarelli an alternative rock and water setting that fit his script. He was creative to make the setting work, and with the help of the community, it surpassed our expectations.



Photo provided

The cast and crew of “The Black Sky Under Harper’s Rock” take a break from filming to pose for a photo on Peebles Island.

We had no awareness that Officer McGrievy and Waterford’s search and rescue would be playing roles they had performed for real. It gave Steve’s fictional story an unplanned sense of authenticity and purpose that I believe impacted the crew in an unexpected way that has yet to be fully unraveled.

Completing a movie is a miracle. Perhaps, in some unknown way, the story can help the community heal. That would be movie miracle No. 2 ... 3, 4 and 5.

RRX: You probably made many inroads with people in the village, not just for filming purposes, but personally. In what ways, do you think the filming change the village, even if momentarily? And did they change what you were doing in any way?

Faith: Driving into Waterford is a very similar

feeling to driving into Duncannon, my hometown in Pennsylvania, which is also a waterfront town 20 minutes away from our state capital. I felt the homeliness and acceptance immediately, and everyone I met felt like someone I know my whole life.

As an adult, I now appreciate this feeling, but I decided to go back to that teenage feeling of needing to escape to see if there was anything else out there. That’s what I did, and perhaps that’s what Sarah did. From growing up in a small town, they can be charming, yet haunting to the soul.

The filming probably changed the village the same way film changed me: Inspiration, creation, perhaps the mental wheels get turning. Then

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Technology both good, bad for filmmakers

'I think the new frontier is the same as the old one: People figuring out who they are and where they fit into the whole process of film-making, regardless of the cost of technology'

- **Steve Cifarelli**
 Writer/director
 'The Black Sky Under
 Harper's Rock'

Continued from Page 21

people realize it just takes FOREVER to shoot a scene that is one minute long. They begin to appreciate the crew behind the camera and the time it takes to make.

RRX: Ten years ago, only a few people could put a movie together that had all the bonafides, but the technology has come down in price, and it's democratized independent cinema. What's the new frontier in independent film?

Steve: I think we should be careful when discussing "democratization" and frontiers. The technology has come down in price, making it easier for serious practitioners to start making films and/or gain experience working in department head roles much earlier on in their careers, but

the deluge of affordable production equipment has also led to a deluge of material being produced that is not worth most people's time and attention.

Very few independent films come right out of the oven equipped with everything that makes a film good. Oftentimes when the writing is good, the production values are terrible, or it'll be vice-versa, but either way, you end up with something that's unwatchable.

If you're a great writer but you're not particularly handy, then you should develop scripts and avoid sets like the plague, and eventually hire a production crew to turn your abstract collection of thoughts into a real, physical thing.

Conversely, if you love working with a camera in your hand, but don't have a great touch for dialogue or

coherently stringing together a series of moments that explore a character's humanity, then your best bet is to learn cinematography, become a master at your craft, and then find a friend who writes scripts, and offer to make her collection of abstract thoughts into a reality for her.

Ultimately, when everyone is doing what they love to do – which is almost always the thing they do faster and better than anyone else – we all win, so I think the new frontier is the same as the old one: People figuring out who they are and where they fit into the whole process of film-making, regardless of the cost of the technology.

For more of Liam Sweeny's interview with the cast and crew of "The Black Sky Under Harper's Rock," visit RadioRadioX.com.

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Niskayuna native Jason Bittner is considered one of the top drummers in the metal world, having played for a quarter-century with top bands like Shadows Fall, Anthrax, Flotsam and Letsam and, currently, Overkill. He has also been frequently honored by Modern Dummer magazine, going back to 2004, when he was chosen as its Top Up and Coming Drummer.

Photo provided

Have sticks, will travel

Niskayuna native continues to build on world-class resumé as metal drummer

Jason Bittner has been turning heads around the metal world as a drummer for 25 years, and he has no plans to slow down anytime soon.

Since he was chosen as Top Up and Coming Drummer of 2004 by readers of Modern Dummer magazine, the Niskayuna native is universally considered among the top metal drummers. Though best known for his continued work with Shadows Fall, for which he earned that 2004 award, he has also lent his signature sound to several other top

the LOUD HOURS
Ralph Renna **update**

bands, including Anthrax, Flotsam and Jetsam, Toxik and, since 2017, Overkill.

I found a break in Jason's busy schedule recently to catch up.

RRX: Lets get right to it and talk about Shadows Fall, Stigmata, Flotsam & Jetsam, Anthrax, Overkill. Have sticks, will travel Rewind

the past five years and catch us up on what happened and how did you go there?

Jason: Literally in the last five years, it went like this: 2013, Jon Donais (Shadows Fall lead guitarist) joins Anthrax soon after I had just finished filling in for Charlie Benante of Anthrax for half of 2012, so I knew this was coming months before it happened.

Jon leaves, Brian Fair's wife gets pregnant (with their first of two children), Shadows Fall announce a "hiatus," I come home, make one

final record with Stigmata, spend some time playing in Toxik (an underground tech metal band from the '80s), and then I get a call by original drummer Kelly Smith to replace him on the throne and join Flotsam and Jetsam in the winter of 2014.

I tour worldwide with F&J and then make their "self-titled" album in 2016. It was a great record, and I'm very proud of it and very proud of my time in the band, I feel that I

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Bittner happy 'where I am'

Continued from Page 23

helped them regain some "status" they had lost over the years.

However, all good things must come to an end. We reached a point where I felt the band was not going to get any further than it already was, in terms of status and tour opportunities. Once again, it became a "part-time" job, and I needed a full-time job, so when Bobby Blitz and DD called in February 2016 and offered me the drum chair in Overkill, I gladly and easily accepted.

It was hard leaving my "Arizona family," but this was an opportunity I was not going to miss out on. Both of these bands have been favorites of mine since I was a teenager, but this was a way-better gig.

RRX: Current news? You just arrived home from a tour with Overkill? Stories to tell? How about the new record and plans for 2019?

Jason: The South American tour was great but exhausting, 11 days, eight countries. Overkill's new album, "The Wings of War" drop(ped) Feb. 22. We'll head to Europe for a month, starting March 8, and then right back out in the U.S. in April.

RRX: You have told us before you have done things every drummer dreams of. You've exceeded your goals, but is the bar now higher?

Jason: Not really. The plan now is to stay where I am and continue my career as long as this band permits me to. If Blitz and DD call it a day, then I'll think about "plan B", but this has been the first time in a long time where I'm not



Photo provided

Niskayuna native Jason Bittner, in background, currently splits time as drummer for Overkill, pictured, and Shadows Fall, a pair of iconic metal bands.

"looking for what's next."

RRX: What else is going on? Drum clinics, appearances?

Jason: Maybe some Canadian dates later this year. One side project – Dark Day Sunday with Frank Aresti from Fates Warning – an album will finally see the light of day this year. Lessons aside from skype and on-tour packages.

RRX: What are your top five artists? Favorite music of late? Anything goes.

Jason: Rush, The Police, Iron Maiden, Slayer, Overkill, Shadows Fall, Flotsam and Jetsam. Pretty much any band I've played in.

For more info on Jason and Overkill, check out www.jasonbittner.com or www.wreckingcrew.com.

Ralph Renna is the host of "The Loud Hours," which airs from 8 to 10 p.m. Thursdays on RadioRadioX at radiatorradiox.com.



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 UNCOVERED

Two of a kind

Dos Amigos unites veteran musicians, longtime friends

By Mike Shudt

Welcome to Uncovered, the cool new spot where, every month, we'll profile a different cover band from the area. First up in the spotlight is Dos Amigos, the littlest big band in the Capital Region.

What Dos Amigos lacks in the number of members, they make up for in experience and versatility. This little band features local legend Todd Hanhurst (The Refrigerators, Burners U.K.) on percussion and vocals, accompanied by area veteran Drew Costa (Soul Session, Groove Syndicate) on keys and vocals. Together, the longtime friends have managed to put together a musical catalog that spans all genres and, often times, has the sound of a full band.

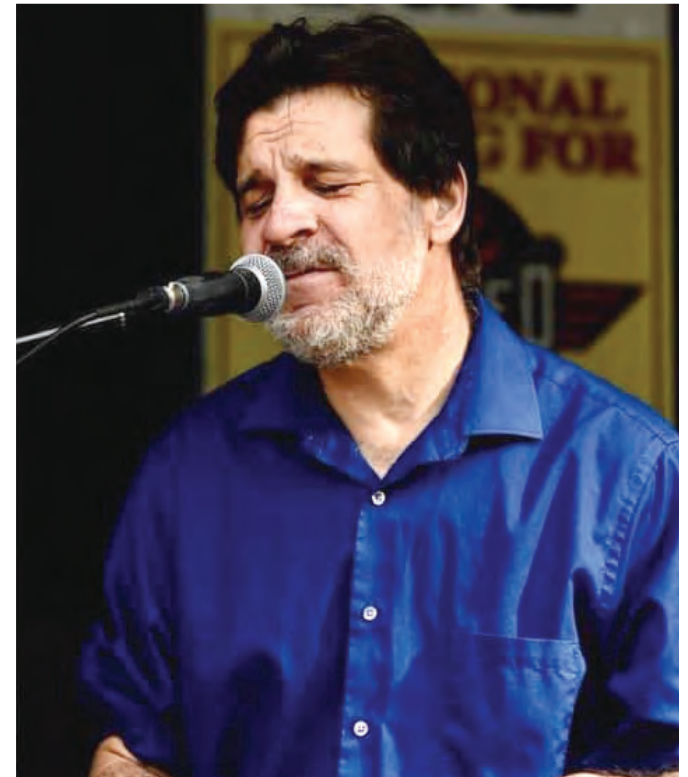
Dos Amigos has the ability to perform at the fanciest cocktail hours and also to rock the area's biggest clubs and loudest parties. Todd said he initially felt the duo would play mostly lower-key events at smaller venues and perform during earlier hours, but things have quickly evolved, and they now find themselves in larger venues.

He and Drew have allowed



Photos provided

Veteran area musicians Drew Costa, left, and Todd Hanhurst, below, comprise Dos Amigos.



the band's music to grow organically and just see where things go. Todd explained that he has learned the two have to listen to each other much more carefully and lock in perfectly, as opposed to a larger band, where individual

mistakes might not be as noticeable.

The plan, he said, is to continue to build Dos Amigos slowly and have fun while improving their performances from week to week.

Keep up with Dos Amigos by

checking them out on Facebook or their website, www.dosamigosmusic.com.

Mike Shudt is a veteran of the local music scene and currently plays bass for Wylder-518 and Bad Apple.

You're Doing Better Than You Think

By Sassy Autumn

Do you ever have a day when you've tried to take one step forward, only to realize you've taken two steps back?

You may feel the entire world is against you. You might even wonder if karma does exist. You'd be surprised to know you are actually doing better than you think.

You really can't gauge your success or happiness on the things you have in your "external environment."

Take a moment or two to ask yourself: "Is my life really as far off from where it should be?"

If you are looking for signs from the universe, read on. You may be surprised to find you aren't far off from where you want to be.

- You don't let your ego stand in the way of your happiness.

It's hard for many of us to wrap our heads around this, but it's a fact: We are part of a "whole," instead of separate individuals. We all need each other - whether we know them personally or not - to survive and thrive.

The bottom line? In order to be successful, we all need help; don't be afraid to ask for it. It's OK to not always be correct and in control. Asking for help is just a stepping stone as we learn and grow.

- You find pleasure in the little things in life.

Take the "I need" statement off the table. Objects are not needed to be happy. Money does not determine your good spirits. Have the attitude that no matter what you have, it's awesome. "I'm grateful for this tasty coffee." "I'm happy it's warm and sunny."



Finding pleasure in seeing others enjoying the small stuff can make you smile. It's all about balance, which is a beautiful thing.

- You've learned from disappointment.

There are so many motivational quotes that basically mean you have felt pain yesterday, which, in turn, has made you appreciate the delights of now. You essentially do that every single day. You may have gotten knocked down, but you're still standing today ... stronger than ever.

I have a great statement tattooed on my ankle: "Rock bottom became a solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life." Choices and lessons from the past actually make you wiser to the things you will face in the future.

- You have people in your life that you love and trust.

This is pretty simple, and yet we tend to overlook it. No matter how hard life may get, if you have a person you can rely on for a helping hand or a caring ear, you already have a huge gift. It doesn't even have to be a friend or personal acquaintance. Just someone.

And remember not to take them for granted.

- You know what is right for you. Remember someone telling you at some point to "trust your gut?" It's true. Create a clear vision of what you do - and don't - want in your life. If an opportunity crosses your path, you are under no obligation to

say yes, especially if it doesn't feel right.

If it isn't something that will benefit you or make you happy? It's okay to say no; saying no doesn't have to be permanent. A no can just mean "not today." That answer is completely OK.

- Be the best YOU that you can be. You may not be as close to the finish line as you'd like to be, but you're committed to growing, evolving, learning and bettering yourself. Use whatever means works for you to do just that.

Whether it be positive affirmations, quotes, goal posters or a dream board, you need to keep doing whatever creates progress in your

life. Find it, then keep it up.

- You are free in your life to do whatever you want.

It can be easy to use the excuse, "I could do that, but I can't because ..." It may be inconvenient to say yes - or no - but you have to realize that only you have the freedom to make the decision YOU want. That, in itself, is a precious gift.

Taking your own pathway in life takes a lot of bravery, tenacity, energy and grit. Be proud of yourself for every single step you take. Hold your head high, pat yourself on the back and keep on keeping on. Your life is rich ... and don't ever forget it.



Storytellers are the ultimate liars

By Liam Sweeny

I'm a liar.

I may tell you that I'm not sitting here right now in my underwear typing away with the same hand I use to scratch my bum. Is it true? Is it not? It doesn't matter, because the point is, I know you couldn't care less about that.

Most liars get caught because they lie about dumb, obvious stuff that they didn't have to lie about in the first place. Like "No, I really didn't care if you bought an extra doughnut for yourself," but if you're going to lie about that piddly-ass thing, what else are you lying about?

No, I'm a professional liar. And the first maxim of professional lying is that people WANT to be lied to. We want to believe the people who lie to us.

It's tough to call someone out as a liar, especially if it's just your gut. But it's more than that; we want to believe that all is well, that everything has a simple, logical explanation.

Lying throws that out the window. Well, most lying does.

See, I lie on a screen over an 8½-by-11-inch page mockup, which is in itself a lie because I can make it any size I want. I type on keys that make a clacking sound, but clack on nothing, and my "ink" is pixels with



unlimited fonts.

Not only do you want me to lie to you, you SPECIFICALLY want me to lie. In fact, you're likely to rate me on how well I was able to deceive you.

Of course, I'm not the only liar out there. Seriously, there are about a million 350-page lies that hit just the indie book scene every year. That's a lie, too, because nobody really knows.

And yes, I'm talking about the liars who write books and stories, but just think of the tree that grows off that root. You like Netflix? Grooving on Game of Thrones? Lies built Winterfell and Castle Black.

We need lies. Don't think I'm trying to pull the filters off your Snapchat pics. I love those big, beautiful eyes, even if they're not yours. We need lies because the world is damned depressing, and we need an escape.

Lies can be simple and comfortable. Lies can lead to truths further down the road - the lies of Dick Tracy became the Apple watch, and the bullcrap of the Star Trek tricorder

became ... well, the iPhone (sorry, Android people; mine isn't paid off yet, so I'm stuck with it, and, on this page at least, so are you.)

In writing books (and I guess the same is true in hiding your side piece from your main boo), the key to lying well is three-fold. The first part is to know what you need to lie about and what you don't. I need to lie to you about the dead body my detective character finds in a field; I don't need to describe every piece of litter in the grass (unless it's a bloody glove).

The second point of lying is this: Know who you're lying to. If my audience is cops, I can't guess at the forensics; I have to be pretty much spot on. If you're going to tell your boss you can't make it into work because you have the squirts, know that he may be on your Facebook page when you go sharing a pic that proves the

only squirts you had were the two of mustard on your hot dog at Fenway.

And the last point: The devil really is in the details. This goes right beside only lying about what you have to. EVERY detail counts. No, that's a lie; the ONE detail you get wrong is going to be honed in on like a mouse in the ever-vigilant eye of a snowy barn owl.

The first and foremost thing any reader tells me when I show them something I've just written is that I have some detail mixed up, like 'Street' becoming 'Avenue.' Never underestimate the joy people get in saying "You missed a spot."

So go forth and tell your lies ... but tell them well.



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3/15: JACK EMPIE & FRIENDS	3/29: THE REFRIGERATORS
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To have your band included in these monthly listings, email your schedule no later than the 21st of each month to XperienceAlbany@gmail.com.

Wednesday, March 6

The Deadbeats, 10 p.m., The Low Beat, 335 Central Ave., Albany

Thursday, March 7

Xperience Live, hosted by RadioRadioX, with Let Go Daylight and Bleak Little Duo, 6 p.m., RadioRadioX.com performance studio, 35D Saratoga Ave., Waterford

Storm Large and Le Bonheur, 7:30 p.m., Proctors, 432 State St., Schenectady,

Safety Meeting, Only Pulp and Delphino, 8 p.m., The Low Beat, 335 Central Ave., Albany

Shaed, 8 p.m. at The Hollow Bar + Kitchen, 79 N. Pearl St., Albany

Friday, March 8

John McCutcheon, 7:30 p.m., Proctors, 432 State St., Schenectady

The Lustre Kings, 8 p.m., The Rustic Barn, 150 Spiegletown Road, Troy

The Accents, 8 p.m., Vapor Nightclub, 342 Jefferson St., Saratoga Springs,

Erin Costelo, 8 p.m., Caffe Lena, 47 Phila St., Saratoga Springs

Morgan Wallen, 8 p.m., Upstate Concert Hall, 1208 Route 146, Clifton Park

Maria Schneider Orchestra, 8 p.m., Troy Savings Bank Music



Hall, 32 2nd St., Troy

Rev. Sekou, 8 p.m., The Linda, 339 Central Ave., Albany

Hartley's Encore, 9 p.m., Putnam Place, 63A Putnam St., Saratoga Springs

Skeeter Creek, 9 p.m., Nanola, 2639 Route 9, Malta

The Deadbeats, 10 p.m., Parish Public House, 388 Broadway, Albany

Saturday, March 9

6th Annual Dustin Mele Memorial Concert, featuring Emerald City, Soul Sky, Super 400, and a one-time-only reunion of the Bob Etoll Group, 6 p.m., Brown's Brewing Company's Revolution Hall, 425 River St., Troy

Marcia Ball and Sonny Landreth, 7:30 p.m., The Egg, Empire State Plaza, Albany
Knot Dead, 8 p.m., The Rustic Barn, 150 Spiegletown Road, Troy

Beadle Brothers, 8 p.m., Vapor Nightclub, 342 Jefferson St., Saratoga Springs

Mwenso, the Shakes and DJ Tall Matt, 8 p.m., The Linda, 339 Central Ave., Albany

Dead Horses and Honeysuckle, 8 p.m., Caffe Lena, 47 Phila St., Saratoga Springs

The Ruffians, 8 p.m., The Parting Glass, 40-42 Lake Ave., Saratoga Springs

Johnny Cab, Society High and The Savage Randys, 8:30 p.m., Pauly's Hotel, 337 Central Ave.,

Albany,

Sunday, March 10

Sierra Hull, 4 and 9 p.m., Caffe Lena, 47 Phila St., Saratoga Springs

The Brothers Flynn, 5:30 p.m., Patrick's Pub, 606 3rd Ave., Watervliet

Bluegrass Jam, 8 p.m., The Rustic Barn, 150 Spiegletown Road, Troy

Mother Mother, 8 p.m., The Hollow Kitchen + Bar, 79 N. Pearl St., Albany

Tuesday, March 12

Kevin McKrell and David McDonnell, 7 p.m., The Parting Glass Irish Pub and Restaurant, 40-42 Lake Ave., Saratoga

Springs

Wednesday, March 13

Porcupine, 6 p.m., The Low Beat, 335 Central Ave., Albany

The Deadbeats, 10 p.m., The Low Beat, 335 Central Ave., Albany

Thursday, March 14

The Popravinas, 7:30 p.m., Pauly's Hotel, 337 Central Ave., Albany

Donnybrook Fair, 7:30 p.m., The Egg, Empire State Plaza, Albany

Joe Nichols, 9 p.m. at Vapor Nightclub, 342 Jefferson St., Saratoga Springs

Continued on Page 29



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Continued on Page 29



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Continued from Pg. 28

Friday, March 15

The Gathering Crowd and Hasty Page, 7:30 p.m., The Low Beat, 335 Central Ave., Albany

Jack Empie & Friends, 8 p.m., The Rustic Barn, 150 Spieglestown Road, Troy

Cyrille Aimee, 8 p.m., The Egg, Empire State Plaza, Albany

Lunasa with Natalie Merchant, 8 p.m., Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, 30 2nd St., Troy

Hair Of The Dog, 8 p.m., The Parting Glass Irish Pub and Restaurant, 40-42 Lake Ave., Saratoga Springs

The Sisters of Slide, 8 p.m., Cohoes Music Hall, 58 Remsen St., Cohoes

Saturday, March 16

Smittix and Feral Meryl, noon, Pauly's Hotel, 337 Central Ave., Albany

Triskele, 2 p.m., Patrick's Pub, 606 3rd Ave., Watervliet

Irish Hooley and The Screaming Orphans, 2 p.m., Proctors, 432 State

St., Schenectady,

Shakespeare In The Alley and Kilashandra, 4 p.m., The Parting Glass Irish Pub and Restaurant, 40-42 Lake Ave., Saratoga Springs

Waterloo Clyde, 6 p.m., Corcoran's Towpath Tavern, 33 Saratoga Ave., Waterford

Blue Hand Luke and Paddy O'Sax, 8 p.m., The Rustic Barn, 150 Spieglestown Road, Troy

Ja Rule, 8 p.m., Upstate Concert Hall, 1208 Route 146, Clifton Park

The Yardbirds, 8 p.m., The Egg, Empire State Plaza, Albany

Sunday, March 17

Toss the Feathers, 2 p.m., Indian Ladder Farms Cidery and Brewery, 342 Altamont Road Altamont

Shadowland, 8 p.m., The Rustic Barn, 150 Spieglestown Road, Troy

Tuesday, March 19

Monterey Jazz Festival on Tour, 7:30 p.m., Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, 32 2nd St., Troy

Continued on Page 30



Photo provided

Let Go Daylight, pictured during a 2017 performance at the Strand Theatre in Hudson Falls, will perform with Bleak Little Trio at the first Xperience Live show,

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Continued from Page 29**Wednesday, March 20**

The Deadbeats, 10 p.m., The Low Beat, 335 Central Ave., Albany

Thursday, March 21

Science Man, Golden Slugs, Spell Runner and Sinkcharmer, 8:30 p.m., Pauly's Hotel, 337 Central Ave., Albany

Friday, March 22

Del & Dawg, 6 p.m., Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, 30 2nd St., Troy

Skeeter Creek, 8 p.m., The Rustic Barn, 150 Spieglestown Road, Troy

Kick, 8 p.m., Rivers Casino & Resort Schenectady, 1 Rush St.,

Schenectady, NY 12305

Saturday, March 23

Beau Sasser's Escape Plan, 8 p.m., The Rustic Barn, 150 Spieglestown Road, Troy

Sean Rowe, 8 p.m., Hangar on the Hudson, 675 River St., Troy

School Bus Yellow with The Rob Compa Trio, 8 p.m., The Hollow Kitchen + Bar, 79 N. Pearl St., Albany

John Kribs Band, 8 p.m., The Parting Glass Irish Pub and Restaurant, 40-42 Lake Ave., Saratoga Springs

Brian Kane, 8 p.m., Corcoran's Towpath Tavern, 33 Saratoga Ave., Waterford

Taco Night, 9 p.m., Parish Public House, 388 Broadway, Albany

Sunday, March 24

Entreband, 6 p.m., Jupiter Hall, Crossgates Mall, Albany

Maurizio Russomanno, 8 p.m., The Rustic Barn, 150 Spieglestown Road, Troy

Wednesday, March 27

K Camp, 6 p.m., Jupiter Hall, Crossgates Mall, Albany

Thursday, March 28

The McKrells, 7 p.m., The Parting Glass Irish Pub and Restaurant, 40-42 Lake Ave., Saratoga Springs

Jim Messina and Poco, 7:30 p.m., Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, 30 2nd St., Troy

Friday, March 29

The Refrigerators, 8 p.m., The Rustic Barn, 150 Spieglestown Road, Troy

Victory Soul Orchestra, Front Business and Jeff Gordon, 8 p.m., Hangar on the Hudson, 675 River St., Troy

Bad Luck, 6 p.m., The Low Beat, 335 Central Ave., Albany
Andy Iorio album release concert, 7 p.m., The Linda, 339 Central Ave., Albany

Cousin Earth and Teddy Midnight and the Purple Stuff, 8 p.m., The Hollow Kitchen + Bar, 79 N. Pearl St., Albany

Joshua Redman Quartet, 8 p.m., The Egg, Empire State Plaza



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3/16: TRISKELE
2:00 PM - 4:00 PM
PARADE DAY CELEBRATION

3/17: ST. PATRICK'S DAY CELEBRATION
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4/07: ERIN HARKES
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4/14: MIKE D'ANGELIS
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One tokes over the (state) line

By Mark Robarge

I smoked my first joint when I was 15 and my latest (it's actually a vape) about 30 seconds before I started writing this column. The intervening 40 years have been an on-and-off relationship with marijuana where I struggled more with its social acceptance than its "illicit" effects.

I smoked about as much as the typical teen, and later adult, except for the semester at UAlbany when I shared a suite with a pair of small-time dealers – but that's a story, to quote Cheech and Chong, that has long gone up in smoke. After that semester, though, I gave it up for nearly a decade and resumed on a very casual basis for a time here and there.

The reason I went back and forth had nothing at all to do with the "drug" itself – I use the quotation marks because it's hard to classify a leaf as a drug, especially one with its potential benefits. No, I never had any concern about addiction; the fact that I could start and stop as easily as I did was proof of that to me.

No, I never had any bad experiences while "under the influence" – other than the aggravated assault of untold bags of Dorito's (nacho cheese, of course) and Domino's pizzas. In fact, I was able to better focus my hyperactive mind, especially when it came to studying; it helped me to relax in the very stressful academic and social environment of a major university; and it made me more creative in my writing (another reason I smoked up right before sitting down to write this).

My personal "struggle" with weed was how I would be perceived as a "stoner." Even though friends and family know I never passed up an opportunity to have fun, no matter how outrageous, I tried to maintain the public image of a better person than I felt I really was. And I had seen how my father and his generation, as

Between The Lines

well as those I aspired to emulate, had demonized it and those who used it.

Thus, I became what Steve Miller would refer to as a "midnight toker," making my dirty little secret known only to those who also were, as we came to call each other, "friends of Johnny" (Johnny was one of our dealers). My father did not know, and my mother only knew because she found my stash in the suspended ceiling in my bedroom closet (she was fighting breast cancer at the time, so she asked me, half-seriously, if I could get her some). In fact, my father once told me that if he ever found the stuff under his roof, he'd take us to the cops himself.

My immoral dilemma was finally resolved nearly five years ago, when I had surgery to replace two discs in my neck that had been causing me pain for more than 20 years before finally destroying the nerves in my right arm to the point where I permanently lost the use of three fingers. Though the surgery did relieve much of the pain in my neck, the damaged nerves in my fingers and up my arm would cause persistent but not unbearable pain, like I was being poked with tiny needles.

After some research, I discovered marijuana was considered a highly effective remedy for nerve pain. And the relief was nearly instantaneous after I took my first hit in about a decade. I slept better and actually saw a bit of improvement in the mobility of the affected middle, ring and pinky fingers.

So I got over my self-esteem issues and began not only admitting to the world – my father included – that I smoked pot, but also to advocate for its legalization at every opportunity.

I find it hypocritical that a nation that allows tobacco and alcohol to be openly sold and used by adults won't do the same for a substance whose PROVEN short- and long-term damage pales in comparison to either of its legal "peers." Add in the PROVEN medical benefits, and it should be an outrage that it isn't openly available not only to adults, but also BY PRESCRIPTION ONLY for children with illnesses for which it has provided PROVEN relief.

I have personally applauded as state after state has legalized first medical marijuana and then recreational weed. In fact, I anxiously awaited the opening of the first dispensaries to open just over the Massachusetts state line, in Pittsfield and Great Barrington, and about a month after the first six shops had opened, I made my first trip over the state line since going to my last Red Sox game 15 years ago (the names have been changed to protect my co-defendants).

What I expected and what I found could not have been more diametrically opposed. First off, I expected to be what most of us know as "the creepy old guy at the bar." But as we stood in a short line to get into the Temescal Wellness dispensary in Pittsfield, I struck up a conversation with a pair of couples who appeared to be a couple ticks ahead of me on the life clock. I was surprised by their candor and wondered if maybe I was the one who was too uptight.

The selection is far from outstanding, but each shop is promising to expand its inventory as it grows. I was impressed, though, to find how many ways you could impart nature's wonder drug. There was plenty of bud, of course ... excuse me, it's now called "flower" ... in a variety of tasty strains featuring the flavors of everything from lemon and berry to mint and tree – yes, I said tree; look it up on Leafly.com.

But that was just the tip of the

iceberg. E-cigarette cartridges are my weapon of choice because vapes are relatively inconspicuous (and because rolling a joint with my bad hand is a real bitch), but there is also oil, lotion, wax, shatter, butter (for you home "bakers") and even drink mix. And if your baking experience is limited strictly to a bong, you can even pick up a literal dessert tray of marijuana-infused treats, including chocolate bars, cookies and, of course, brownies..

By the lines waiting to get into these shops, even more than two months after opening, I'm far from alone in asserting that it's about time we recognize the hypocrisy, as well as the opportunity to regulate the industry and recognize some much-needed revenue for a government overburdened by need and underwhelmed by the means to cover even the most critical needs.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has taken the first step in New York state, but some of the same old tired – and inaccurate – arguments are rearing their ugly and ignorant heads once again. The most ridiculous assertions I hear are ones that blame weed for the stupidity of its user. After all, do you blame the gun for the murder (unless you're a hardcore liberal)? Or the booze for the drunken-driving crash?

Here's hoping smarter heads prevail over those that seem to continue to be stuck in the sand. After all, is it smarter to allow millions of people to have the relief (either medically or recreationally) they so desperately seek, especially as an alternative to truly addictive – and often deadly – opioids, or to deny that simply out of a hypocritical desire to protect people from themselves?

I'm going to leave it at that ... I've got a bag of Dorito's with my name on it.

Mark Robarge is a retired journalist and editor of Xperience.

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