



Music: Feature

Mixed blessing

The uncharismatic evolution of The Tom Collins

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While musicians are often faced with the tricky task of separating themselves from the pack, issues of style, perception, image and substance can overwhelm less prescient bands. The Tom Collins may have a grasp on the situation now, but headman Fran Capitanelli readily admits to being a bit lost at the beginning.

"I was by myself, looking for people to play with. I had an album's worth [of music], and no band to record it with."

But he knew what he wanted to get across. A longtime fan of all things '60s, Capitanelli set about finding some like-minded musicians. Attaching an intoxicating moniker (no, there is nobody named Tom Collins) and armed with "a bucket full of ideas," they set about making rock that rolls.



Frank Mullen

The Tom Collins

The Tom Collins also has benefited from Capitanelli's services as a store clerk at Criminal Records. The appearance of label marketing rep Walter James was especially fortuitous. Wandering into Criminal one day bearing pastries (as these types are prone to do), he is now The Tom Collins' manager.

"Little contacts I've made through there have helped us out in different ways," says Capitanelli.

The group's first self-titled release actually preceded the current lineup. It sold a respectable thousand-or-so copies ("right out my living room," says Capitanelli) and caused a rumble of appreciation. A full-band affair, The Tom Collins' new follow-up, *Deep Cuts*, is a fresh collection of solid tunes, co-produced by David Barbe.

"I like to think that all the people who are our age who didn't get to see The Who, Led Zeppelin, the Stones or Hendrix -- we're giving them a chance to get a little taste of it," says Capitanelli. "You know, do it like the masters did it: borrowing from their influences, starting out with covers, eventually evolving into their own entities."

Adds drummer Kyle Spence, "That's what we're trying to do. Evolve into our own entities. I don't think we're quite there yet."

Perhaps not, but TCC is gaining momentum and getting noticed. *Creative Loafing* handed them its Critics' Choice award last year, and Jez De Wolff of WRAS' "Georgia Music Show" insists that The Tom Collins could well save rock 'n' roll.

"We're just trying to do this as pure as we can," says Capitanelli. "It's like 30 years in a time warp. I see it as carrying the torch for a lot of our favorite bands."

Apart from the aforementioned influences, The Tom Collins reveres punk, George Harrison, NRBQ, the Band and Television ("Not the kind you sit and watch," offers Frank MacDonell, guitarist and resident wag).

But this magnanimous display of generosity toward the elder statesmen of rock 'n' roll isn't entirely selfless when it comes to the band's live shows.

"The best art is selfish," says MacDonell. "Doing exactly what you want to do. You put that much into it -- even unconsciously. You end up having something very ... polished. Focused."

Capitanelli disagrees somewhat: "Our favorite parts of the shows are the question marks, where we don't know what's going to happen -- not very polished at all. [We] see how it evolves from show to show, change from one night to the next."

That taste for improvisation on stage has served the Tom Collins well. At a recent Star Bar show, a large crowd gathered to see what all the fuss was about as the group played a loose, guitar-driven set that went down well. And fellow musicians are paying attention, attending shows and borrowing ideas in the time-honored fashion.

"There are actually bands now doing what we've been doing for the last two years," says Capitanelli.

But then there's the troubling issue of image -- or the lack of it. "We've got a problem in that we don't have a Steven Tyler, a charismatic type, up-with-people kind of [person] who's going to bring non-musicians into see our show," says MacDonell. "We're about playing. We're too insecure to have a pretension about us. We'd be too embarrassed."

The Tom Collins plays a CD release show Fri., Oct. 12, at the Echo Lounge, 551 Flat Shoals Ave. Doors open at 9 p.m. \$8. The Forty-Fives and Chinaski open. 404 681 3600. www.echostatic.com.