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Poker-hot blues in Upper Jay: Russell Bailey Trio to perform

By Robin Caudell, Press-Republican Email: rcaudell@pressrepublican.com Twitter@RobinCaudell Oct 30, 2014



PHOTO PROVIDED

Guitarist Russell Bailey will perform with bassist Franz Pope and drummer Scott Renderer at 8 p.m. Friday at the Recovery Lounge in Upper Jay.

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UPPER JAY — When Russell Bailey gets in the zone, there's not much difference whether he's forging iron or plucking his National.

If he executed a different blacksmith technique daily the rest of his life, he wouldn't scratch the surface of what's possible — and the same with the blues.

Though he fronted different musical permutations with the Bailey Brothers and Crow Party, Bailey was always soul deep in the blues.

Now with bassist Franz Pope and drummer Scott Renderer, Bailey has the outfit he always wanted.

The Russell Bailey Trio debuts at Friday's Halloween Party at the Recovery Lounge in Upper Jay. J. Weed opens.

'STYLISTIC BAND'

The trio was born in March, and its repertoire includes songs Bailey has written over the last 20 years.

“Some of them are reworked from stuff I wrote on the National,” he said. “It's a pretty specific guitar. The style I play is really staccato. It's all 10 fingers going. Franz and I were looking for a drummer that could be dynamic enough to play at all volumes in a single night or in a single set, and that's not easy to find here. Most drummers are not like that but Scott is. He's a great drummer, very organic, and he loves blues music.”

Bailey was looking for someone that dug the blues inside out and had a blues parameter greater than Stevie Ray Vaughn.

“There's plenty of them,” Bailey said. “But to take 30 songs that to some people sound the same just like to some people all jazz songs, all bluegrass songs, you know all heavy metal songs sound the same to some people. It's the same with this. They can sound the same to you.”

The Russell Bailey Trio strives to split the songs apart, forge deep inside the mental, the ideas of the songs, and play them all together.

“And then, they do sound different,” Bailey said. “It's a very stylistic band. We're splitting the hairs between blues shuffles you know, originals and old stuff from the late '40s and early '50s — Elmore James, Albert Collins. He is a real innovator on the electric guitar. He played his own thing, his own style. He was influenced by horn players not guitar players.”

'GOING BACK'

Pope, a veteran bassist, and Bailey grew up together in Essex.

“So, I've known him all my life,” Bailey said. “Franz is invaluable to me because he knows my playing inside and out. We don't have to interact on the stage at all. It's just the music. I don't ever look over at Franz, never, once in a while. It's just the way it's always been because I was with my brothers, and we got that way. It's odd to communicate onstage, to me, non-musically.”

When he was young, Bailey caught the Vaughn as well as the Jimi Hendrix bug.

“That was great but I knew I didn't want to be them and I didn't really copy too much of their style. I read their articles, and they were saying go back and listen to these guys, and that is what I did.”

He never really listened to Eric Clapton and the Allman Brothers.

“It was always going back and when you get back far enough the guitar players are not influenced by guitar players,” Bailey said. “They're influenced by horn players and piano players, Lionel Hampton on the vibes, and Benny Goodman.”

'TASTY LICKS'

Bailey gravitates to short songs.

“You get in. You get out. My worse thing is to bore an audience, you know, two, three-minute songs. I mean I think our longest song right now is five minutes and that to us is like a jam song.”

He not only goes to the Delta source of the blues, he goes beyond it. When he listens to Miles Davis, he listens to when he doesn't play.

“If you think of those as notes or equal to a note then all of a sudden you start to get air in your playing and air in the mix,” Bailey said. “And when you go to different rooms you can sound better, because if you're playing too much or you have too many musicians in the band it sounds great in one room, and you get to another room, you will empty it because it sounds horrible. A lot of it has to do with over-playing, people over-playing their instruments.”

Musician and guitarist are big words for Bailey.

"I'm just a guy that plays some tasty licks on a guitar in a small, little genre. I'm not a musician at all. I probably know less about music than almost any musician that I know. I don't want to know more. It's this thing where I've had it my whole life. I want to be the guy in the room with one toy and have to really work to entertain myself with it."

For him, the guitar is a huge instrument that can be played in endless ways.

"I've wanted this band for a long time. When my brother (Nick) and I got together in '86 with one of my older brothers (Stoney) on the drums, it was about blues and Gatemouth Brown. He's my hero still."

When Stoney left, the Bailey Brothers ventured into psychedelic rock 'n' roll.

"I went with it but inside I always wanted this band," Bailey said. "Then when I started Crow Party, I got Matt Rabideau, who is an unbelievable young drummer. He learned the shuffle playing but he just didn't want to stay there. He listened to Yes and Frank Zappa, so we were writing stuff like that and I went with it for awhile. But this, finding Scott, really has made it so I can play and it just feels great."

ALL ABOUT THE DRUMMER

Renderer and his brother, Byron, founded the Upper Jay Art Center, home of the Recovery Lounge, in 2005.

Bailey gigged there numerous times and watched Renderer play with Monster Buck.

"We always wanted to play together," Bailey said. "Once in awhile, we would get together. He's the type of guy when he says he'll do it, he will. He won't if he's not going to. We're the same like that. We prepare. We're a little OCD like that."

In a blues configuration, it's all about the drummer.

"You got to have a drummer that is playing tastefully because he can really screw the whole thing up," Bailey said. "I listened to so many drummers. I love listening to drummers on the old records that I have. I worked in Philly for my sister in '86 and bought all these original records. I'm reading the backs, and I'm relearning and learning so much more about it. It's just so fun to learn about the guys."

On YouTube, he likes to watch blues greats like Howlin' Wolf as well as the jazz cats, who will stop playing when a band member solos. They may walk over to each other, talk, smoke, while the soloist is doing his thing.

“That is the coolest thing to me ever,” Bailey said.

“I’ll probably never be able to do that in a blues band. With that said, that’s kind of where we’re at.”

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IF YOU GO

WHAT: Halloween Party featuring Russell Bailey Trio with opener J. Weed. Cash prizes for best costumes.

WHEN: 8 p.m. Friday.

WHERE: Recovery Lounge, Route 9N, Upper Jay.

PHONE: 946-8315.

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Robin Caudell was born and raised on Maryland's Eastern Shore. She holds a BS in Journalism from the University of Maryland, College Park and a MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College. She has worked at the Press-Republican since 1990

