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■ NIAGARA MUSIC AWARDS: Bands vie for top punk rock group



Re-energized

Two St. Catharines bands find success after splitting up and then getting back together

LORI LITTLETON
Standard Staff

St. Catharines-based bands The Screaming Beavers and Rumble Devils have more than one thing in common.

For starters, both are nominated for a Niagara Music Award in the Punk Rock Group of the Year category. The hardware will be handed out April 14 at the Niagara Centre for the Arts in Niagara Falls.

And, after being apart for several years, both groups recently reunited.

The Screaming Beavers — Dik Lee (Lid) on bass and vocals, Steve Levesque (MC) on guitar and vocals, Paul Labelle (Dayz)

“We formed the band without playing an instrument or a note.”

The Screaming Beavers' Dik Lee

on drums, and Joe Nero (Akak) on guitar — originally formed while Lee and Levesque were students at McMaster University. The two knew each other from their high school days in Niagara Falls.

“We formed the band without playing an instrument or a note,” said Lee, who now lives in St. Catharines.

At first, the pair just jammed with their guitar and bass, cranking up a drum kit to help them out. They met Labelle in 1996, and then began working on their debut CD, Awambabaluwompa-

wompbawhat? (1998).

The band played house parties and bars in Toronto, Hamilton and Niagara, including the former Gord's in downtown St. Catharines.

“The house parties were key to how we developed a following,” Lee said.

The Screaming Beavers continued to tour on the strength of their disc, sharing the bill with groups such as Sum 41, Rainbow Buttmonkeys (now Finger 11), Headstones, Big Sugar, Forgotten Rebels and DOA.

“We were doing what we wanted to do. We were having fun and playing with as many bands as we could,” Lee said.

However, in 2000, the group disbanded for several years as Lee dealt with some health issues.

“During that time, the bands we had played with had made it,” he said, laughing. “It was about 2007 when Steve and I decided to put the band back together, but we couldn't find Paul.”

Happenstance intervened, and one day, Levesque bumped into Labelle at the Home Depot. The trio reunited and released their second CD, Bite My @\$\$, in March 2008.

“I personally love music and should have been doing that since I was a kid. Steve loves music and we all like punking out,” Lee said of the band's reunification. “I think I enjoy the therapeutic release (I get) from everyday activities. We get people jumping up and down and sing about songs we want to sing.



Above are the Rumble Devils, while at the top of the page are The Screaming Beavers. The two St. Catharines bands are the nominees in the Punk Rock Group of the Year category in next week's Niagara Music Awards in Niagara Falls.

Lee, who operates Phylum MVM, which provides graphic design, video presentation, printing and other services for independent artists, said what makes the Screaming Beavers different from other punk bands is the “large joke rock aspect to our music.”

“We want to get laughs and get people to understand our vision of life and what we go through,” he said.

Lee said now that the group's members are older and wiser — all are in their 30s — they treat their venture like a business.

“We want to be serious about it. It becomes a job at certain times because it's a lot of work,” he said. “You have to get through that to get on stage and do a performance, which is what you love doing.”

The Screaming Beavers, whose influences range from Black Flag and Rollins to ska and

grunge, recently added a second guitarist, Nero, to enhance their sound and “focus on good live music.”

The band has been playing at Mikado's and the Merchant Ale House in St. Catharines, and Vintage in Niagara Falls, as well as the Opera House, Reverb and Cathedral in Toronto.

They will perform at the Walk of Hope for Schizophrenia on May 30 in Lakeside Park, and are planning to tour southwestern and eastern Ontario, and into Montreal later this year, when they release their third disc.

Lee said the group was thrilled to be nominated for a Niagara Music Award.

“It's all amazing because when it comes to luck, it's not usually on our side. Finally we are getting rewarded for what we do,” he said. “The Niagara Music Awards are only in their second year, but it's important for the re-

gion because there is a lot of talent here. There is a lot of good music in the area that needs to be rewarded.”

Rob “Knuckles” Passero is the bassist for the Rumble Devils, the other nominee in the punk rock group of the year category. The band formed in the early 1990s, when all three members were in different bands. Vocalist/guitarist Cash Wojtowicz (Cashmere) and drummer Brian Holtam (Bug) were members of Revenge of the Egg People, while Passero was a member of Supergarage.

“We were good friends and knew each other from different bands and one night we thought it would be fun to play together and do some rock and punk music,” Passero said. “It kind of snowballed from there.”

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And the nominees are ...

The following is a complete list of the nominees for the 2009 Niagara Music Awards. The trophies will be handed out at the Niagara Centre for the Arts, 4700 Epworth Circle, Niagara Falls, on April 14.

ROCK GROUP OF THE YEAR: The Black Flies, The Guv'nor Generals, Attic Noises

PUNK ROCK GROUP OF THE YEAR: Screaming Beavers, Rumble Devils

HEAVY METAL GROUP OF THE YEAR: Twisted Harmony, Attic Noises, MDM

BEST BAR BAND: Niagara Rhythm Section, Sukkapunch, Oracle

TRIBUTE GROUP OF THE YEAR: Pink Floyd Niagara — A Tribute to Pink Floyd; Redd Raven — A Tribute to Led Zeppelin; Oracle — A Tribute to Jethro Tull

COUNTRY GROUP OF THE YEAR: Angela Siracusa, Marty Allen, Mike Lynch

ORIGINAL SONG OF THE YEAR: They Crumble, Angela Siracusa; Gonna Get Through, Carly Manley; Life, Tina Calzonetti

ORIGINAL GROUP OF THE YEAR: The Waxbills, Attic Noises, Citizen

MUSIC VIDEO OF THE YEAR: Run, Tina Calzonetti; You Were Miles, The Black Flies; Welcome 2 Tha Street Pharmacy, Street Pharmacy

ALBUM OF THE YEAR: Road Ahead, The Black Flies; The Way it Goes, The Waxbills; Rose City Limits, The Guv'nor Generals

NIAGARA PROMOTER OF THE YEAR: Project Pain Productions, Lloyd McGuigan, Gonz Productions, Steve Stumble, Alex George (Carpediemnamaste)

FEMALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR: Michelle Bellerose, Loleana, Serena Pruyin (Townline)

MALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR: Jeffery Rossetto (Village to the South), Steve Fortin (Toasted Western Swing Band), Tim Hicks

SONGWRITER OF THE YEAR: Ariana Gillis, Street Pharmacy, Beth Moore

RIISING STAR AWARD: Chelsea Crites, Hailey Payne, Eric Hodgson

CHILDREN'S GROUP OF THE YEAR: The Smudge Fundaes, The Golden Hammers

THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE OF THE YEAR: The Mantini Sisters, Pink Floyd Niagara

BLUES GROUP OF THE YEAR: Niagara Rhythm Section, Epithet

JAZZ GROUP OF THE YEAR: Juliet Dunn Quintet, The Groove Associates

WORLD GROUP OF THE YEAR: Soundscape, MOON, Ohnia:kara Singers

INSTRUMENTAL OF THE YEAR: Rsonal the Beachche, Nathan Chamberland, Deathpod

RECORDING ENGINEER OF THE YEAR: Dean Malton, Steve Goldberger, Michael Saracino

HIP HOP GROUP OF THE YEAR: Definition Definitive, The KAC Himself, Femapco

Note: There are no nominees for the following categories: People's choice, venue of the year, group of the year, entertainer of the year and special achievement. The winners will be announced at the show.

■ NIAGARA MUSIC AWARDS

'Overwhelming' response to reunion gig

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The response to the band in its early days was really good, said Passero, adding at that time, the trio played at Gord's, The Mind Bomb and The Frat House, and released a self-titled CD.

Then, they split up.

"We were doing a lot of shows and really playing a lot and ... it started to lack in the fun department. When we started the band, it was all about having fun and it got to be tedious, dealing with promoters, and we split up for a good while," Passero said.

"A couple of years back, someone threw it as us, did we ever think about doing the band again?"

They decided to reunite in 2005 for the annual Hot Rod Hootenanny, which coincides with the classic car show in July in downtown St. Catharines.

"When we first reformed, we thought it would be a one-off gig," Passero said. "The response was overwhelming and ever since then things have been really good and are moving along."

The Rumble Devils, whose sound is 1950s rock meets punk meets rockabilly, have played New Year's Eve to a sold-out crowd at the Merchant Ale House, as well as the SCENE music festival in St. Catharines, and bars in Hamilton and Toronto, since reuniting.

"It's really fun music and everyone can relate to it at some point," Passero said of the band's sound. "It's really fun stuff to play and it translates well. People seem to like it. We always come across as the fun band."

The threesome of 30-year-olds

WHAT: The 2009 Niagara Music Awards

WHERE: Niagara Centre for the Arts, 4700 Epworth Circle, Niagara Falls

WHEN: April 14, red carpet ceremony begins 6 p.m., followed by awards at 7:30 p.m.

TICKETS: \$30, includes the after party

INFORMATION: www.niagaramusicawards.com

have also just recorded their second disc, *Diablos Guapos* (Handsome Devils), which should be out in a couple of months on the Stumble Records imprint.

Passero said he and his bandmates were surprised to get a Niagara Music Award nomination.

"We thought it was weird, but, thought, sure, let's go for it," he said, laughing. "The Rumble Devils have always been about that cheezy Vegas slimeball punk rock show so this is right up our alley."

"We will be there. It should be a lot of fun."

Nominees have been announced in 23 categories, including male and female vocalist. Awards will also be handed out for people's choice, venue of the year, group of the year, entertainer of the year and special achievement, though these categories have no nominees.

The evening's entertainment will feature 15 performances by 2008 winners, including Townline (group and female vocalist), the Guv'nor Generals (rock group), Sukkapunch (bar band), Vicky Vlassis-Radulovich (theatrical performance) and MDM (heavy metal group and dance recording).

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