

## New series accents tribute band trend

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HOUSE OF FLOYD, a tribute band that plays the music of Pink Floyd, includes, left to right, Angle Montgomery, Bill Coonley, Benicia's Mark Showalter, Lou Portela of Vallejo, Doug Canfield, Pat Potter and Sheri Showalter. (Courtesy photo)

Long ago, in a distant land, only Elvis impersonators lurked around every corner when the original died and left millions of fans yearning for The King's music.

In 2007, with faux-Elvis Presley's mostly relegated to Las Vegas and theme parties, "tribute bands" have sprouted like athlete's foot in a high school locker room.

Community Concerts, the talent agency that books "Summertime at the Maritime" in Vallejo every summer, has jumped on the band wagon train. A "Tribute Band Series" will grace the ornate El Campanil Theatre in Antioch, including "House of Floyd," which features several local musicians.

The Sun Kings, a Beatles tribute band, performs Feb. 9, followed by Hotel California (you got it - music of the Eagles) on March 23. Then comes House of Floyd on April 20, Aja Vu (Steely Dan-a-likes) on May 4 and, finally, James Clark is Elvis on June 2.

Unlike most of the original bands, there appears to be no animosity toward each tribute band. "I've seen the Sun Kings and Hotel California and put on great shows," said Mark Showalter, a Benicia resident and saxophonist for the House of Floyd.

Just a fluke trend in music? Not so, Showalter said. It may not be exactly Coke, but it's as close as you can get to the real thing, he hinted.

"The musicians that are recreating the music of these famous bands are just as good as the originals," Showalter said. "The only difference in the music is that we didn't write the material. Close your eyes and you can't tell."

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Vallejo's Lou Portela, the bassist for the House of Floyd, said there's a different perception of a "tribute band" since they emerged in the 1970s.

"Musicians are now being recognized for what they're trying to do," Portela said. "It's not looked down upon as much as it's now being taken seriously."

A tribute concert series "is great because it gives people options as to who they would like to see at one common venue," Showalter said. "It's great for the bands because of the overall exposure and advertisement. Everyone gets several months of press instead of two weeks. To be included along with these other tribute bands is a great honor since they are the best around."

"I'm pretty excited about it," added Portela of the series. "I never expected this to become so popular."

But would an Elvis impersonator have Elvis groupies? Or House of Floyd have teen girls backstage just like the real Pink Floyd?

"For the short time that we have been performing the music of Pink Floyd, sorry to say, I haven't seen any groupies," Showalter said. "I believe that over the years they have all blossomed into soccer moms or executives. Nowadays, it's just about reliving the music. You don't see the other craziness that used to go along with it."

Showalter, who's toured with the Gregg Allman Band (the real guy, not a fake) said the thing that separates House of Floyd from other tribute bands is the visual show.

"We have spent countless hours on our overall light, laser and video show as we have with the music," he said. "And we have a newly added liquid light show, so we really take the audience back to the '60s and '70s."

"We don't look at it as a tribute," Portela said. "We look at it as more of a Pink Floyd show."

House of Floyd uses the guy who does the lights for Allman, said Showalter.

As for the inter-tribute band relationships, it's all about respect, Showalter said. "It's amazing, the camaraderie," he said. "We all seem to be networking with each other and helping each other out with possible venues and gigs."

In the old days, Showalter continued, "there was this animosity and rivalry thing going on between bands. But it's different now. I think most everyone in this tribute genre is older, wiser and more willing to help each other out because we all realize how hard this business is."

Whatever ego there happens to be, it rarely extends to tribute band musicians thinking they're better than the players they're copying.

"I don't believe anyone thinks they can be better than the original," Showalter said. "We are all just playing the music we love and trying to do it the best we can."

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Kathy Dupler of Community Concerts said she and her partner, Jim Ocean, "have been watching the rise of the tribute band for the past several years." They promoted original music, then realized a series of tribute bands could succeed.

"However, we found that we could not quibble with the outstanding musicianship and dedication of many of these bands," Dupler said. "The Sun Kings and Hotel California are two that were instrumental in getting us to look at the whole emerging 'tribute' genre more seriously."

After booking 2006 "tribute band free," Community Concerts surrendered this time around and secured the series at the El Campanil.

"We think it's the boomer phenomenon," Dupler explained. "The boomers are a very powerful and vocal generation and one that passionately loves its music."

Performer Jesse Colin Young has done several Community Concerts and Ocean once joked with the performer, "Hey Jesse, maybe you should form a tribute band to yourself... you might make more money."

Young gave a wry laugh, Dupler said.

#### **If you go**

What: Tribute Band Series

When: Feb. 9 through June 2

Where: El Campanil Theatre, Antioch

Contact: [www.communityconcerts.com](http://www.communityconcerts.com)