

'We're selling Pink Floyd music' Tribute band makes Majestic debut

By RICH FREEDMAN, Times-Herald staff writer

Fame, fortune, girls. Rock 'n roll musicians' Big Three.

Mark Showalter had those visions at one point. No longer. Even if he did, at age 51, he would have to squint. And definitely no wild hedonistic lifestyle.

He, after all, has a wife, 9-year-old daughter and mortgage in Benicia.

"The 'rock star' thing is over with me," Showalter said.

This saxophonist is quite content performing a steady gig here and there with three or four Bay Area bands. Actually, with his latest project, he's more than just content. Showalter is ecstatic. He gets to pay homage to legendary "Pink Floyd," the English progressive rock band formed in 1985 and led by David Gilmour and Roger Waters.

And House of Floyd headlines the Majestic Theatre in Benicia on June 17.

"It's not like being in a Top 40 band. There's tons of them," Showalter said. "And there are tons of R&B bands. They all play the same stuff. This is just one genre. It's unique and in a class by itself. We're selling Pink Floyd music."

When a musician is in a tribute band, he or she pretty much better like it, Showalter said. "It's the music you're going to be playing. You have to love it," he said.



MARK SHOWALTER of Benicia tunes up on his saxophone as he prepares for a gig with House of Floyd at the Majestic Theatre in Benicia on June 17. Photo: J.L. Sousa/Times-Herald

It started with a want ad

The band's roots go back a little more than a year, when Showalter found a want ad on craigslist.com for musicians hoping to start a Pink Floyd tribute band.

After personnel was shuffled, the "House of Floyd" has stabilized with bass player Lou Portela of Vallejo, Oakland's Doug Canfield, guitarist Bill Coonley of San Francisco, guitarist Pat Potter of Alameda and vocalist Angie Montgomery of Redwood City.

The band recently added a familiar face as back-up vocalist: Showalter's wife, Sheri, who was never a big Pink Floyd fan. "She's definitely grown into the music," Showalter said. "She's enjoying it." Showalter laughed. "She loves pleasing her husband by being the background singer," he said.

Showalter said after "lots" of rehearsals. House of Floyd isn't just finding steady work. Festivals and

Times-Herald

VALLEJO • BENICIA • AMERICAN CANYON, CA

promoters are calling them. "It's snowballing. It's incredible," Showalter said. "I knew it would take some time, but I also knew there was an opening in Northern California for a Pink Floyd tribute band."

Though he's checked out some other tribute bands, "we pretty much learn from Pink Floyd shows," Showalter said. "We have all the CDs, all the DVDs."

Showalter alone has seen Pink Floyd live six times, he said. "It's a visual show," he said. "That's what sets them apart." House of Floyd doesn't just try and hit the Pink Floyd sound note-for-note, it puts on a stage show that includes a fog machine, laser light show, video and other special effects such as pink pillars originally used in a Nordstrom's underwear advertisement. "That doesn't matter. I thought it would be cool," Showalter said.

"The Pink Floyd thing is an opportunity for us to show off our visual capability," said Showalter, who grabbed his neighbor, Josh Russell, as technical director. Russell and Showalter stage an extravagant Halloween show every year in Showalter's garage.

"We're exactly like Pink Floyd only on a smaller scale," he said.

House of Floyd made its debut last year in a Hurricane Katrina benefit in Fremont. From "Another Brick on the Wall," the nation's No. 1 song for 19 weeks, to "Money" and other Pink Floyd tunes, the tribute band instantly saw it was on to something. "The crowd response was phenomenal," said Showalter. "Pink Floyd is still popular to this day."

Go to almost any county fair, Indian casino or other venue, and there's a tribute band, noted Showalter. "That's the rage right now. It's unbelievable," he said, pointing to the Contra Costa Fair in Antioch hosting tribute bands of the Rolling Stones, Eagles, and Led Zeppelin.

"I think people like to listen to the music they grew up on, and it's not always available to see live anymore," Showalter said. "A lot of these bands have quit touring, or it costs an arm and a leg. The tributes allow people to relive their early years of listening to this music. It's the same songs they love at a lower price."

Pink Floyd or no Pink Floyd, Showalter said he wouldn't do it if the band's quality wasn't there. "That's never an option for me," he said. "Whatever I do, I have to do the best I can. I can't do it half-way."

Though Showalter said the band's following is growing - it's not unusual to spot a "Dark Side of the Moon" T-shirt in the audience - he has lost one young fan: His daughter, who listens to dad and band mates rehearse every week. "She's tired of it," Showalter said.

If you go ...

What: House of Floyd, a tribute to Pink Floyd

When: Saturday, June 17, 8 p.m.

Where: Benicia's Majestic Theatre, 710 First St.

Times-Herald

VALLEJO • BENICIA • AMERICAN CANYON, CA

Tickets: \$17 advance, \$20 door

Contact: reddragonflyproductions.com or 747-6684