

NEW LONDON COUNTY · WINDHAM · HARTFORD · MYSTIC · RHODE ISLAND

Sound Waves

Volume 19
Issue 7
April 2009

CLUB LISTINGS
RESTAURANTS
CONCERT INFO
BAND LISTINGS
REVIEWS
& MORE

An
Interview
With

JOHNNY
NICHOLAS

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Leading Entertainment & Dining Guide

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SATURDAY

3

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PHIL NEWLAND
ACOUSTIC
HAPPY HOUR

4

**FLOWERS
& KAIN**
THROW YOUR
"L'S UP!!

10

SIREN
HITS FROM THE
80'S & BEYOND

JAY DEMPSEY
NEW COUNTRY
HAPPY HOUR

11

HOPE ROAD
Bob Marley
Tribute Band
DVD Video Shoot!

17

**FROM JERSEY
WITH LOVE**
HIGH ENERGY
PARTY BAND

MELEANA
HAPPY HOUR

18

THE BUZZ
HI POWERED
PARTY ROCK

24

**STONE THE
HOSTESS**
SUNDAY GRAVY
CLASSIC ROCK
HAPPY HOUR

25

WICKED PEACH
ROCK GODS

1

**MILL CITY
SHOWCASE**
3
All Original Bands

**ANDRE &
FRIENDS**

2

**THE
1800
BAND**

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FRIDAY 10th

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FRIDAY 17th

MELAENA

FRIDAY 24th

**SUNDAY
GRAVY**

6-9pm

STASH' CAFE
WII Bowling League

SUNDAY NIGHTS

See Mark or Graham for Details!

Saturday April 11th

HOPE ROAD

Bob Marley Tribute
members of GREEN TEA
& SUNDAY GRAVY

Friday April 17th



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INSIDE THE WAVE

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Cover/Story Photo by
David L. Pottie

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Sound Waves

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8 STEVE CHRISTIAN	9 SUE MENHART	10 JAMES HARRIS	11 THE SHARKS
15 CHRISTOPHER JOHN	16 RON DRAGO	17 PHIL NEWLAND & CHUCK DAVIS	18 DAVE LAUDON DUO
22 SUE MENHART	23 GOPHER BROKE	24 JAMES HARRIS	25 STEVE CHRISTIAN
29 STEVE CHRISTIAN	30 RON DRAGO	Every Monday TOMMY G	HAPPY HOUR M-F 3-6 Free Wings & Discount Beers

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CONCERT DATES

Bruce Springsteen

24 - XL Center, Hartford, CT

Bryan Adams

6 - Shubert Theater, New Haven, CT

Buddy Guy

18 - Garde Arts Center, New London, CT

Chicago

18 - MGM Grand, Mashantucket, CT

The Dead

18,19 - DCU Center, Worcester, MA
26 - XL Center, Hartford, CT

Debbie Davies Band

18 - Black-Eyed Sally's, Hartford, CT

Fall Out Boy

29 - Mohegan Sun, Uncasville, CT

Guitar Shorty

18 - Bank St. Cafe, New London, CT

James Cotton Band

4 - Wolf Den, Uncasville, CT

Jeff Beck

11 - MGM Grand, Mashantucket, CT

Jennifer Hudson

9 - MGM Grand, Mashantucket, CT

Lucy Kaplansky

24 - Wilde Auditorium, Hartford, CT

Roomful of Blues

12 - Knickerbocker, Westerly, RI

Ryan Montbleau Band

4 - The Warehouse, Hartford, CT

Seal

10 - MGM Grand, Mashantucket, CT

Spyro Gyra

18 - Wolf Den, Uncasville, CT

Third Eye Blind

21 - Providence College, Providence, RI

Umphrey's McGee

5 - Toad's Place, New Haven, CT

7 - Lupo's, Providence, RI

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MUSIC NOTES

The Opinion of 'Judge Jack'

By Mark T. Gould



I had a sneaking suspicion that I was going to like 'Judge Jack' when I met him, but I had no idea just how much.

I first met 'Judge Jack' back in September, when the new judges rotated into the Superior Court where I sit. I knew the other two, and knew them to be great guys, but, even though I'd only been a judge for about 15 minutes at the time and thus probably had

no right to form any opinions about others on the bench, there was still that old trepidation about working with someone new.

So, I asked around, and, frankly, it got pretty boring, because I got the identical response from everyone about 'Judge Jack.' To a person, everyone said the same thing, "great guy, down to Earth and very smart."

That sure sounded good, but, of course, I had to see for myself. I mean, I was going to work with him for a year, so I had to find out.

Just after Labor Day, as the new term started, 'Judge Jack' knocked on my chambers door, and walked in. Now, you have to understand that, even though it's a somewhat formal judge's chambers, I still have my Poco shrine erected therein.

Poco. As in the band that's kept a smile on my face, joy in my heart and given me happiness through good times and not so good times for, my gosh, some 40 years.

Anyway, 'Judge Jack' stuck his head in my chambers, introduced himself, gave a hearty handshake, and sat to chat for a bit, two guys getting to know each other. Within just a few seconds, I knew that the scouting report was spot on. Great guy. No, make that a super great guy. Down to Earth in spades (he mentioned he used to drive a truck, which, since my Dad was a truck and bus driver, opened a soft spot with me right off the bat). And, yeah, damn smart, too, in that natural way that most certainly, in his hands, didn't have to be shown or proven to anybody.

So, 'Judge Jack' and I kicked back a bit, tossed around some common names and places, and just got to know each other. After a while, he had to get back to his chambers, but, as he was opening my chambers door to walk out, he glanced up at the wall, at a place where I have a radio promotions poster signed by the original five Poco members, just above a photo signed "to my favorite judge," by the amazing Richie Furay, a Poco founding member.

"Hey," said 'Judge Jack.' "I love Poco, they're my favorite group."

Now, I paused. You have to understand that great guy or not, 'Judge Jack' had said what many people say when they come into my chambers, overwhelmingly litigants who just might be trying to get on a Poco nut judge's good side.

Yet, I can quickly separate the real Poco nuts from the casual fans in a heartbeat. I just mention songs and albums that don't include "Crazy Love" or "Heart of the Night," which were their two biggest commercial hits. If they look at me a bit glassy eyed, well, they aren't really nuts.

But, I didn't need to do that with 'Judge Jack.' Before I could say a word, he got this big smile on his face, a Poco smile that I've only seen as wide and sincere on the face of real nuts. He then started tossing out things like 'Central Park,' and 'Deliverin',' and 'Good Feelin' To Know,' and a bunch of other references that only a true Poco fanatic would know.

Suffice it to say I liked 'Judge Jack' even more at that moment.

Fast forward a few months. Poco had announced a show in the dead of winter in Norfolk, Connecticut, about an hour from my home. Through the kindness of Rusty Young, his wife Mary and Poco's manager Rick Alter, I was given a pass to the show. I had also agreed to transport any band members from the Hartford airport to the show, something I frequently do when they are appearing

near me, as a small gesture of thanks for their great music over the years.

Mid-week before the show, 'Judge Jack,' who had admitted he hadn't seen the band live for probably 30 years, mentioned that he tried to get tickets for the show, but that it was sold out. He looked really unhappy.

I got an idea. I contacted Rusty, Mary and Rick, and asked if there was any way that I could get two more passes to the show, for 'Judge Jack' and his wife. Thanks again to their kindness, I was told that, while all the pass seats were taken, 'Judge Jack' and his wife could get two standing room passes, which, as you might guess, was fine with them.

I got to the show, with the band, for sound check at mid-afternoon. After we got the band's gear loaded in, I checked with the promoter's staff in the hopes that maybe, just maybe, I could get a couple of seats in the gorgeous theatre for 'Judge Jack' and his wife. The 'just a little magic' aspect of Poco came flying through, and the promoter got them seats about five rows from the stage, right in the middle of the theatre.

But, I had another special surprise for them. Before the show, I asked Rusty, Paul Cotton, Jack Sundrud and George Lawrence if they minded if I brought 'Judge Jack' and his wife backstage to meet them. Gracious to fans as always, they said sure.

When 'Judge Jack' and his wife got to the venue, I grabbed them and walked them backstage to meet the band. Tired as they may have been from traveling, the guys took a few

Continued Page 17

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SOUND WAVES 9



BAND DATES

ALTER EGO

18 - Cleats Pub, Westerly, RI
25 - Chrstopher's Café, Groton, CT

THE CARTELLS

2,9 - Steak Loft, Mystic, CT 7-10
13 - Wolf Den, Uncasville, CT 7-11
18 - Ballroom, Mashantucket, CT
25 - Jake's, Wallingford, CT

CHASING BAXTER

11 - Christopher's Cafe, Groton, CT
24 - Backstage Bar, Groton, CT

DAN STEVENS

3 - Penny Lane, Old Saybrook, CT 7:30
4 - Black Sheep, Niantic, CT
5 - Delta Grill, NYC, NY 12:30-3:30pm
9 - Dolphin Striker, Portsmouth, NH
10 - Black Bull Tavern, Rockland, ME
11 - Harbor Inn, York Harbor, ME
17 - Pier 27, Mystic, CT 10:30
19 - Tamarack, Voluntown, CT 1-4
23 - Mermaid Inn, Chestnut Hill, PA
26 - Bullfrog Brewery, Williamsport, PA
29 - Club 121, Oxford, CT 6-9
30 - Painted Pony, Bethlehem, CT 7:30

DARIN KEECH & BAND OF HUMANS

10,24 - Daniel Packer, Mystic, CT
25 - Black Sheep, Niantic, CT
26 - Pier 27, Mystic, CT 2pm
30 - Sneakers, Groton, CT

DOGIE & THE COWPIE POACHERS

8,15,22,29 - Billy Goodes, Newport, RI
9,16,23,30 - O'Brien's Pub, Newport, RI
10 - V.F.W., Taunton, MA

EIGHT TO THE BAR

18 - Community Cntr, E. Lyme, CT 7:30

10 SOUND WAVES

FACE FIRST

3 - Cherry St. Station, Wallingford, CT
10 - Bank St. Cafe, New London, CT
18 - PJ O'Connors, Jewitt City, CT
24 - Legends, Gales Ferry, CT

THE GOAT ROPERS

4 - Oak Hill Tavern, N. Kingstown, RI
11 - Ward 5 Club, Taunton, MA 7:30
17 - V.F.W., Taunton, MA
18 - V.F.W., Taunton, MA 7:30

GOPHERBROKE

4 - Cafe on Main, Colchester, CT
17 - Hub Bar & Grill, Canton, CT
18 - Fernwood, W. Hartford, CT
23 - Riverwalk, Mystic, CT 8-11
25 - Bidwell Tavern, Coventry, CT

GREEN TEA

25 - CC O'Brien's, Pawcatuck, CT

GUITAR SABBY

3 - Harp & Dragon, Norwich, CT

HOPE ROAD

11 - Stash's, New London, CT

JAMES HARRIS

3,25 - 84 High Street, Westerly, RI
4,8,15,18,22,29 - Daniel Packer, Mystic, CT
7,14,21,28 - Harp & Hound, Mystic, CT
10,24 - Riverwalk, Mystic, CT
30 - Steakloft, Mystic, CT 7-10

JAY DEMPSEY & HIGHWAY CALL

9 - Burkes Tavern, Niantic, CT
10 - Stash's Cafe, New London, CT 6-9
18 - McPhail's, Providence, RI

KEVIN CRANDALL BAND

3 - Ancient Mariner, Mystic, CT

kGb

22 - Steak Loft, Mystic, CT 7-10

MUNSELL BROTHERS BAND

3 - Legends, Gales Ferry, CT
4 - Ivory Pub, Deep River, CT
11 - Clydesdale, Westerly, RI
18 - June's Outback, Killingworth, CT
24 - Burke's Tavern, Niantic, CT
25 - Hanafin's, New London, CT

Ms. MARCI & THE LOVESICK HOUNDS

4 - Lake Tavern, Dayville, CT

RED LIGHT DISTRICT

11 - Music Lady, Central Village, CT
18 - Part II, Johnston, RI

SIREN

4 - Music Lady, Central Village, CT
10 - Stash's Cafe, New London, CT
25 - Brown Derby, Uncasville, CT

SUE MENHART BAND

9,22 - Riverwalk, Mystic, CT
10 - B&G Lounge, S. Windsor, CT
16 - Voodoo Grill, Mystic, CT

SUNDAY GRAVY

10 - Wood River Inn, Richmond, RI
17 - Black Water Tavern, Exeter, RI
24 - Stash's, New London, CT 5:30-8:30
30 - Perks & Corks, Westerly, RI

VERTIGO

2 - Harp & Dragon, Norwich, CT
3 - Hard Rock Cafe, Ledyard, CT
10 - Dogwatch, Stonington, CT
25 - Happy Jack's, Plainfield, CT

VINCE THOMPSON & FRIENDS

3 - Steak Loft, Mystic, CT 7-10pm
17 - Tamarack, Voluntown, CT 6-9:30pm

WILSON KANE

4 - Burke's Tavern, Niantic, CT
5 - Angie's Pizza, Mystic, CT
9,23 - Ancient Mariner, Mystic, CT
11 - Sobieski Club, Deep River, CT day
11 - Ivory Rest., Deep River, CT
16,30 - Seahorse, Noank, CT
17 - Voodoo Grill, Mystic, CT
18 - La Vita Gustosa, E. Haddam, CT
24 - Ivoryton Tavern, Ivoryton, CT

WORLD'S SMALLEST QUARTET

3 - McKinnon's, Hartford, CT
4 - Angelico's, E. Hampton, CT
10 - Gelston House, E. Haddam, CT
11 - Whitney Ave, Hamden, CT
17,24 - Chaser's, Norwich, CT
18 - Governor's Tavern, E. Hampton, CT
25 - 2 Doors Down, Moodus, CT

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Fri 6:30-9:30	Sat 6:30-9:30	Sun 1:00-4:00
3 Gail Wade	4 John Bucu	5 JC Hatfield
10 Ty Cool	11 Phil Newland & Chuck Davis	12 Easter
17 Vince Thompson & Friends	18 The Village Jammers	19 Dan Stevens
24 Ty Cool	25 Closed for Private Party	26 Sandy 'Sandman' Allen

~ WEDDINGS
~ BANQUETS
~ WEEKEND DINING
~ LIVE ENTERTAINMENT
~ SUNDAY BRUNCH



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5:30 - 9:00
Sunday Brunch
from 11 - 2
lite bar menu
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Sundays

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17 DAN STEVENS	18 ROB DARULA & BRANDON DAVIS	19 TBA
24 THE SHARKS	25 TBA	26 DARIN KEECH & BAND OF HUMANS



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April 2009 Entertainment Schedule

Fri., April 3 - **DJ Bobby M** 7-11

Sat., April 4 - **DD/JC Duo** 8-12
(Danny Dodge & Jordin Charles)

EASTER WEEKEND

Thurs., April 9 - **POST HOLE DIGGERS** 8-12

Fri., April 10 - **DD/JC Duo** 8-12
(Danny Dodge & Jordin Charles)

Sat., April 11 - **LEE & EDDIE** 8-12

Fri., April 17 - **DJ Bobby M** 7-11

Sat., April 18 - **BLOOMER** 8-12

Fri., April 24 - **DJ Bobby M** 7-11

Sat., April 25 - **FLIPSIDE** 8-12

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BAR FLY JOURNALS

By Stephanie Shawn



Hi sweet barflies....well, what a difference a month makes! Fabulous month, fabulous times everywhere I went....oooh, just so much better! We all had an absolutely fantastic time at the KNICKERBOCKER in downtown Westerly. As you will remember it was my husband's 50th birthday and boy, did I surprise him! It was awesome. The place is beautifully redone and is an absolute must see or I should

say "must reserve" for that future event you are planning.

We played a challenging game of Ricky Trivia, sang karaoke, drank some serious shots and ate some really fantastic food from good friends including Pam Rosetta's chocolate fountain, cake by Joanne Desarro and soupy from Patty and Steve Main and Larry Gavitt. Unfortunately, we ran out of time before we could play a mean game of "pin the boobs on the hottie", which I was seriously looking forward to. Oh well, maybe next time!

Almost everyone who's anyone was there...Bonnie and Joe Pizza, my new best friend Tammy and Larry Algieri (with their friend Patron), my family, Ricky's family, Spike and Katrina, Paula (Ricky's karaoke favorite) and her new beau, Brenda and Jim Ahern, Jamie Quattromani, Jean and Jimmy, Vinny and Lisa, Stiles with Stano and Kyle later joined by their wives, Carol and Erin, Carl and Beth, Heather St. Clair with the life of the party...Buddy, George (Andy)McGugan and future wife Deb Fiorillo, announcing their May '10 wedding! And also the ever illustrious Dave Pottie. Many, many more were there and I would like to thank everyone for their help and generosity. It was a truly fantastic evening!

I would also like to discuss two fantastic meals I had this month. One was at 84 HIGH STREET that was TO DIE FOR! Absolutely have not had such a good meal in awhile. We had the calamari with the peppers, done to perfection and then I had the Mesclun Salad with chicken and I asked for extra banana peppers, because it was my birthday! Well, I knew I'd love it when I saw a yellow cloud (yes, banana peppers) coming towards me!...Fabbbuulllous! Then I asked for the 5 layer chocolate cake and oh, yes I did ask them to put it in the micro for 15 seconds so it came out all soft and melty. Unbelievable!

The other meal was a lunch at BRUNA'S an Italian bistro on Canal St in Westerly. A new place, with a lovely look, and really good food. They had eggplant paninis, salads, some wonderful specials like shark and deserts that are just wonderful like the wonderful pistachio creme brulee that we all shared. Delicious...you must check it out.

O.K. now we get down to the nitty gritty....yes, I did

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make it on my Road Trip from THE HANDLEBAR CAFE to "PSYCHO MIDGET WRESTLING" at STASH'S, and no I did not stay. I love STASH'S and the crowd was great! A lot of really nice, pretty people including Steve Tefft my favorite tattooist, who's apparently opening his own place (yeah!)... and Allison and her boyfriend Rob who were sitting by the door when I arrived with Texas Todd and his girl, Cheryl. Rob was very helpful in seeing over the crowd to the stage, unfortunately I guess I really didn't wanna see what they were doing! I went to the ladies room (can't figure out why they are always stifling hot in there?) and when I came out, using my peripheral vision only, I saw a midget, attached by a staple gun, to a chair onstage. I will only say that I think his little midget testicles were very sore the next day. I left. Jackass was never my thing, I think you have to have that 25 year old, testosterone-laden mindset to truly enjoy such a show and I didn't wanna get in anyone's way of a good time!

I then made another evening of MARGARITA'S and VOODOO GRILL. As you all should know, my husband loves MARGARITA'S for their frozen margaritas and the steak fajitas. Always a good time! Then it was off to VOODOO GRILL for my favorite Stoli, Seven, splash of cran (spilt my first one) served by the ever beautiful Cassandra. My best buddy Wayne was also there. No 80's guy, but we did watch some American Idol wannabees who apparently saw it was Michael Jackson week and gave us an earsplittin' "Man in the Mirror". Ouch! But thumbs up to anyone who has the nerve to stand in front of a room full of people and sing, even if it's not American Idol level.

I would also like to add that apparently two perfectly fabulous paragraphs were apparently absent from last month's column. Sometimes I'm not so good with the computer. Like now, my space bar is sticking and only works if I click it with my left hand. Suuuecks! Anyways, Happy Birthday to my step-father John Mershon, my sister Christine and brother-in-law Buster Shawn and friend Sue Bliss.....HAPPY BIRTHDAY! Also, Congratulations to Montana and Melissa West on the birth of their son Montana Gray West....Beautiful! We will also be having a Baby Shower for my nephew and his fiancée Samantha Slocum at COCO'S SALON....can't wait to see my first great-niece! Yes, my sister Betsy is gonna be a Gramma!!!

Also..... since some months I fail you as a Traveling BarFly, I've asked for some assistance from some.. da da daaaaah..."secret spies with barfly eyes" to head out on the road for me!!!! OOOOohhhh, Exciting!!! You know, to go to the places I never seem to be able to drag my ass to. Like BROWN DERBY, CHRISTOPHERS, the BANK STREET CAFE or to see the SUE MENHART BAND. Although, as it gets warmer, I'm sure I'll be out more, but I would like the help and hopefully they'll come up with some good stories to share with you. If you feel you are a true BarFly and would like to send me some news feel free at BARFLY2U2@YAHOO.COMI can't wait to hear the buzz from my sweet barflies!!



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Johnny Nicholas Electric, Eclectic, and Always Souful

By Maureen Crowley and Mark T. Gould

Be it on stage in Chicago, the Bay Area, Europe, or even his native Rhode Island at the swinging Knickerbocker Cafe, and no matter if he's playing rhythm and blues, Chicago blues or even Texas swing, it's more than a safe bet to say that while legendary guitarist Johnny Nicholas has lived, traveled, and played the embodiment of a varied career, there's one place that's special to him and his style.

"Texas is the 'bestest,'" Nicholas said in a recent interview with Sound Waves. "(It's) friendly, soulful, hot, and the music is danceable, uninhibited, and eclectic."

The 60-year-old Nicholas certainly would know what's the "bestest," given his travels through a more than 40-year career chocked full of great, timeless music, starting in his home state of Rhode Island, where a brother tipped him off to rhythm and blues, which started him on a lifelong musical journey apart from the more popular aspects of rock and roll.

"My grandfather played the mandolin. My mother was a piano player and taught music at schools in Pawcatuck and Westerly. My folks always supported me. With that of kind of calling you don't have much choice," he said. "My first memories were of Rembetika, a Greek folk music. I remember my grandfather's 78's - the soulful moaning. Also, I have an older brother who was a big fan of the Carl Diggins Radio Hour. He was the "hip cat" in Providence. Then there was Murray the K Swingin' /Soiree in the late 50's and early 60's. They would kick the watts up at night."

"I was about 10 when I made my first guitar," Nicholas recalled. "My grandfather smoked cigars. I took a big wooden cigar box, glued a block of wood onto it for the neck, and used old mandolin strings that were my grandfather's. I messed up three or four of them. Later, the first guitar that I bought was a Stella that I got for \$15 at Shea's Newstand (in Pawcatuck) from money I got cutting grass."

A native of Westerly, Johnny's first band was The Vikings which featured Larry Peduzzi on bass, Howie Sebastian on drums and vocals (a great singer in the tradition of James Brown according to Johnny), Buzzy Goodwin on guitar and Johnny on guitar, harmonica, and vocals. He recalls his first electric guitar "A Guild Starfire 4 played through a Fender bandmaster piggy back amplifier".

A major highlight of those early years was the "Battle of the Bands" that took place at the Stonington Como around 1965 in which The Vikings defeated a group called The Variations - who featured legendary Westerly natives Duke Robillard and Greg Piccolo. According to Johnny, The Variations were a little slicker than us. We did more of the blues stuff at the time. We were all friends but whenever we played together we tried to kick their butt." Johnny has a poster from that show - done in the old theatre-like style.

Music formed good friendships back then that last till this day. "Duke always turned me on to new records" Johnny says, "and I would sneak down to New York to see Slim Harpo, Muddy Waters, and Howlin' Wolf. Or go check out Robert's Records in New London where all the sailors would frequent."

Whatever Nicholas learned from that combination of sailors and blues records at Robert's certainly rubbed off well, judging by both the breadth and depth of his career. In 1970, he formed the Black Cat Blues Band, one of the truly underrated bands in American blues history, with, among others, Robillard, Steve Nardella and Fran Christina (who went on to play drums with Roomful and the Fabulous Thunderbirds). After Black Cat broke up, Nicholas & Nardella hopped the fence on Rte. 98 and hitch hiked to Ann Arbor where they formed the Boogie Brothers. While Duke, Fran, Larry and Al Copley joined Greg and Rich Lataille and formed the 1st Roomful of Blues with horns.

After attending the Ann Arbor Blues Festival that year, he made the Michigan college town his home until 1972, when he left for San Francisco, where he joined the legendary Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen. After a relatively short stay there, Nicholas relocated to the blues mecca of Chicago, where he played with Big Walter Horton, Boogie Woogie Red and Robert Jr. Lockwood, and cut his first album, Too Many Bad Habits, for Blind Pig Records in 1974.

Returning to Boston, he formed the Rhythm Rockers, which included Ronnie Earl on guitar. In 1978, Nicholas moved to Austin to join his old Bay Area friends Asleep at the Wheel. When the western swing revivalists weren't working, he'd be over in Louisiana playing with Cajun great Nathan Abshire. After leaving the Wheel, he fronted

Johnny Nicholas and the Ethnic Lovers.

In 1981, Nicholas grew tired of touring and he moved out to the Hill Country of Texas, where he and his wife Brenda bought an abandoned gas station on the Mason Highway just north of Fredericksburg. They dubbed it the Hill Top Café, which was so successful that it grew into one of the Hill Country's finest and most popular restaurants & music venues. It was there that the couple raised their three sons.

"The Hill Top Café is inconveniently located 10 miles from nowhere, in the hill country near Fredericksburg, Texas," Nicholas said. "It's small, soulful, with a piano in the dining room, and full of all kinds of weird memorabilia, pictures of Bonnie Raitt, John Hannon, Lazy Lester, Augie Myers, Snooky Pryor, Johnny Shines, Pine Top Perkins, Steve Riley. The salsa that's served at the Knickerbocker (in Westerly) came from there. It's a recipe that my wife brought back with her.

"Brenda's a great cook, a great mom, and she's beautiful. And, she helped start Antone's in Austin. What more could you want?" Nicholas said, laughing. "I tease her that one of the reasons I married her was for her great record collection."

In that bucolic existence, Nicholas actually retired from touring for some time, from time to time, when the mood struck him, he would entertain customers solo at piano at the Hill Top. In 1991, he went public again, producing and playing guitar on "Back to the Country", with Shines (another of his mentors) and Pryor, and joining them for a two week European tour.

Since then, he's returned to Europe, where his popularity never tapered off, every two years, while playing selected dates in Texas and at blues festivals around the rest of the country. He and the Texas All-Stars play about 100 nights yearly, offering both long time and new fans the same kind of soulful, down home, rootsy music he's been playing since the days he first tied a block of wood to his grandfather's cigar box.

"It's really more like the things you have to do to survive," Nicholas said, in looking back at his long career. "I've worked plenty of day jobs, sometimes you might have to do something that's not you. From a deeper perspective, I've got to do what I believe in.

"I want to be remembered," he said, "as somebody who put everything he had into every song he sung."

Editor Note: You can check out Johnny Nicholas at either his Hill Top Cafe in Texas or his new venture at the fully restored Knickerbocker Cafe in Westerly RI. Or the many gigs he plays in between.



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Music Notes Continued

minutes to chat and make them feel special, as they always do with fans. During the show, Rusty even gave shout out to 'Judge Jack' from the stage.

Being able to do that for them was very special. Sharing Poco experiences with other nuts is what it's all about. But, this beauty of the night (believe me, Poco was on fire) was not captured by me, but by 'Judge Jack.'

A few days after the show, he knocked on my chambers door, and brought me a card and gift as a thank you. It was most certainly not expected, and by no means necessary, but his note on the card summed up what I've tried to tell people about this glorious band for a very long time.

"After all these years, there is still something special about Poco," he wrote. "Of course, the songs and musicianship were always superb (and still are) but there was more.

"To me, there was always a sense of camaraderie at a Poco show, between the band and the audience and amongst the audience itself," he continued.,," and there it was again in Norfolk, the kind of genuine good time that is unique to Poco shows."

"Wow! They still have it, and so do we."

That is, by far, the best opinion from a judge that I have ever read.



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HEARING AID

Kings of Leon

"Only by the Night"

2008 RCA

Panic and Frustration. These are both common reactions of many "Indie Band" fans when the object of their favor begins to see more mainstream success. Words like "sold out" and "commercial" get tossed around and Message Boards light up with cries of abandonment and CD smashing. Critics who felt they were one of the first to discover a band suddenly jettison their praise and label them "uncool". In all the years I have been a music fan I don't I have seen a bigger reaction to the release of a new CD, with the exception of Metallica's "Black" album, than I have with Kings of Leon's "Only by the Night", which has received much of the aforementioned treatment, rather unfairly.

Only by the Night, the fourth CD from the brothers (and cousin) Followill, unquestionably takes this rough and tumble, Southern-Rock flavored rock and roll band into the U2isphere, complete with effects-laden guitars and lavish production. Vocals sound more textured and soaring, and the harmonies are more dynamic, if not more intriguing, than on past recordings. So, does that mean Kings of Leon really have "sold out"? Well, if you include their recent gig at MSG and overwhelming positive fan reaction, especially to many of these new songs, well I suppose they have...

The CD opens with the haunting track "Closer", which centers around a hypnotic guitar effect that never feels like it's too intrusive or annoying, which can often be the case when songs are built around them. Caleb Followill, rhythm guitarist and lead vocalist, has always done an impeccable job of conveying honest emotion into so many of KOL's tunes, but with the cleaner and more substantive production value his vocals just take off. The next track, "Crawl", also relies on effects-driven guitars, and certainly borrows from the U2 playbook a bit, but it never feels spurious. The album's first single, "Sex on Fire" follows, and it's easy to see why this song has reached # 1 on the Hot Modern Rock chart in America, with it's chugging guitar riff and infectious chorus. "Use Somebody", the band's second single from OBTN, is where much of the U2 comparisons have originated, and while it's a compliment and not totally off base, I don't hear as

much U2 as I hear Kings of Leon expanding their horizons. The song is certainly a step in a more "radio friendly" direction for the band, but it feels like their own and not an attempt to venture into waters they'd be uncomfortable navigating. The vocal harmonies, especially the "Oh OH oh, oh OH oh", may not be groundbreaking in terms of songwriting, but it works in that it flavors the song and doesn't detract from it, as is often times the case with overdone harmonies. "Notion" and "Revelry" are two other standout tracks from OBTN, the former just dying for a spot on the airwaves with it's hooky "Don't knock it, Don't knock it" vocal. I should also mention that Justin, the band's bass player, has never sounded better in terms of technique and recorded sound, a credit to the wonderful production by longtime producer Angelo Petraglia and also Jacquire King, working on his second disk with the band.

For me, the magic of OBTN really lies within 3 tracks. The first, "Manhattan", which one may think is about the alcoholic beverage considering the boys penchant for imbibing but is actually about Native Americans, is a real sonic delight amidst a collection of great tunes. It's starts simple enough, with a little guitar lick drenched in reverb and delay, and elevates to a bouncy, almost jam band-esque vibe with it's sliding bass riff. It's one of those tunes that will stick with you and have you singing the words out loud, which people were doing at festivals all over Europe before the song had even been released on album (a credit to the YouTube generation). The next, "Be Somebody" is the album's biggest winner for me. Nathan soon-to-be-rock-drummer-God Followill just tears up this track from beginning to end, but it's the almost unexpected Chorus that really solidifies this as a favorite. Punched up with a great little bass groove, Caleb's vocals soar amongst hushed harmonies and take the song into an almost "power ballad" direction, minus the

cheesiness. Finally, it's "Cold Desert", the CD's closing track, that rounds out my top three from OBTN. I have read that Caleb wrote (and possibly recorded) this while he was on pain killers, and this Pink Floyd-inspired, soulful number is undoubtedly the child of some "influence", chemical or otherwise, which in this case only enhances the beauty of the track. It never moves off it's slow beat and trippy groove, but the vocals elevate the song with their authenticity and emotion. It's a brilliant ending to a stellar mix of a music by a band that has really risen to the top of their game.

Only by the Night will undoubtedly frustrate and confuse fans of the band that still want them to rewrite "Youth and Young Manhood" and "Aha Shake Heartbreak". There have been and will continue to be rantings about the band selling out and becoming "watered down". However an honest fan of the band, and music in general, can't deny that OBTN is a great album. It's a well written, well produced, multi-layered recording by a band that's begun a journey into the mainstream without sacrificing their soul. If this journey brings them new fans then it's well deserved. If it loses them fans of old, we not only pathetic but it's unjust. In terms of original American Rock and Roll bands from this decade, there just isn't anyone doing it better than Kings of Leon.

***1/2

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**The New
&
Improved**

BURKE'S TAVERN

www.Burkes-Tavern.com



FRIDAY HAPPY HOUR 4-6 with ENTERTAINMENT

Fri. 3rd - JAY DEMPSEY
& HIGHWAY CALL

Happy Hour (5-8) - SMOKE BUBBLES BAND

Sat. 4th - WILSON & KANE

Fri. 10th - FLIP SIDE

Happy Hour (5-8) - TBA

Sat. 11th - JUSTIN HARRIS

Fri. 17th - SMOKE BUBBLES
BAND

Sat. 18th - DJ TONY SUSI

Fri. 24th - MUNSELL BROTHERS
BAND

Happy Hour (5-8) - EXIT 72

Sat. 25th - TIME MACHINE

THURSDAY NIGHTS
KARAOKE with
RJ the DJ

EVERY SUNDAY
relax and listen to
**STU
ECKHARD**
from
7 ~ Midnight
Now Serving An
Awesome Breakfast
Every Sunday 11-2

Burke's serves a **\$2.99**
Roast Beef Dinner
w/Mashed Potatoes & Green Beans
\$1 ~ 10oz Domestic Draft Beer
\$2 ~ Well Drinks

**VOTED "BEST BAR MENU", "BEST BAR", "BEST HAPPY HOUR"
and "BEST ENTERTAINMENT" by E. Lyme Times Readers Poll**

FULL LUNCH & DINNER MENU - OPEN EVERYDAY
BEST BURGERS, STEAKS & SANDWICHES IN THE AREA!



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 Ribs, Rock-N-Roll & More

MONDAY NIGHT ~ Steak Night

\$12.99 6-9:00
 12oz NY Strip ~ Salad ~ Potato
 Free Beverage ~ Draft

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DJ DANCE PARTY \$\$ Drinks
 All Male Review
 April 22nd ~ 8pm

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w/ DJ RR
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 \$2.75 Bud Light Lime

Fridays

**Get Lei'd at
 Christophers**

HAPPY HOUR
 4-7

\$3 Margaritaville Margaritas
\$3 Land Sharks ~ \$2 Drafts
 ~ Free Taco Bar ~

Best Burgers ~ Wings ~ Ribs in Town!

Fri Live Bands Sat

3
**DOUBLE
 FISTED**

4
BRANDED
 Plus Guest

10
**ANDRE
 EDDIE
 & FRIENDS**

11
**CHASING
 BAXTER**

17
LoFi
 Plus GUEST

18
**LEFT
 OF
 CENTER**

24
**LOOSE
 CHANGE**

25
**ALTER
 EGO**

1
**FAT
 BETTY**

2
THE BUZZ

Route 1, Groton CT 445-6716