

Shakedown Street: Music's not dead

Contributed by Glenn BurnSilver
Thursday, 15 March 2007

Something's still shaking on Shakedown Street. In fact, it's been shaking for 20 years now. That's when the popular Colorado-based Grateful Dead cover band first tugged on their tie-dyes and began picking apart the Grateful Dead's catalogue, much to the delight of local fans who just couldn't hit the road every time the Dead toured.

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Shakedown Street honed their skills laboring through ski towns, making the long trips to the Western Slope, and in smoky dive bars along the Front Range. In time, like the band they were more or less pretending to be, they had their own following of fans that would show up night after night. This following gradually increased through the years, especially following Jerry Garcia's 1995 death and the subsequent breakup of Grateful Dead.

"It's not like they're following us in straight line down the highway," drummer Jake Wolf laughed during a recent interview. "They're not following in their cars waving flags or anything. But it is like one big family. If you downsize Planet Earth to Planet Colorado, then yeah, on a smaller scale people are gathering from all over the place."

Of course, as a cover band there have to be enough similarities to the real thing to bring fans in. Lead guitarist and vocalist Ted Galloway wears a big Garcia-like beard; Shakedown never follows a set list and instead prefers to play spontaneously off the crowd, the group never repeats a show and never plays a song the same way twice.

Yet, as much as Shakedown Street is a nice substitute, it isn't the Grateful Dead. But Wolf makes it clear that, even though Shakedown "at times transcend into what the Dead do," they are simply filling a need, not trying to replace an irreplaceable band.

"This is our Dead experienced," he stated. "Combine that with the fact that we are up in the Rocky Mountains and it has that Colorado flavor to it. It always has been it's own thing. We don't try to match instruments or match sets or play this guitar riff or that drum riff exactly. We play the Dead, but in our own way."

That includes a wide variety of non-Dead material like Old and In The Way, New Riders of the Purple Sage, Bob Dylan (a Grateful Dead cover favorite), The Band, the Allman Brothers, The Doors, and lots of Beatles material.

"We definitely mix it up," Wolf said. "We try to keep it fresh."

So will Shakedown Street eventually outlive the original? They are already two-thirds of the way to equaling the original.

"Wow, that would be weird," Wolf said. "I see this band sticking around for a long time. It's a legacy in Colorado. The core and the love are still in the band. The leader is still there. I see this band logging many more miles in the years to come."

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TO GO TO THE SHOW

Shakedown Street, featuring Melvin Seals

Doors 8 p.m.; show 9 p.m.

Saturday, March 17

Aggie Theatre

204 S. College Ave., Fort Collins

\$12; 482.8300

with Wasabi

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PLAYING WITH THE DEAD

Shakedown Street has performed with past members of the Grateful Dead and side-project associates, like keyboardist Melvin Seals. Seals performed in the Jerry Garcia Band and joins Shakedown Street for the concert in Fort Collins.

Other former Dead members who have sat in include keyboardists Vince Welnick and Tom Constanten.

“We feel validated that we’re more than just another cover band,” drummer Jake Wolf said.

BEATS A DAY JOB

The big question for a cover band is always, “If you can play other people’s music, why not write your own?” It’s too much work, Wolf said.

“I’ve done the original music thing, but man that is serious serious labor for little pay, playing out in the middle of nowhere for nothing,” he said with a laugh. “Your songs could be masterpieces, but if nobody is there to hear them it means nothing. (Shakedown Street) forges a way for me to play bills and so I can work with other projects. It’s not original, but I get to pay a lot of bills.”

Glenn BurnSilver