

COVER BANDS

These cover girls are a real drag

CENTERSTAGE SPOTLIGHT

CHICAGO'S TOP COVER BANDS



LOUNGE PUPPETS

MIKE & JOE

www.mikeandjoe.com

Who'd guess one of the most popular cover bands in Chicago started as a slap-dash acoustic duo playing at open mics in Bloomington? Since then Mike Notaro and Joe Valentino have expanded their vision and their playlist, adding two members and booking some of the hottest venues in the Midwest. While Mike & Joe is first and foremost a cover band, they've also cut a number of original CDs that have generated an enthusiastic response.

DARK STAR ORCHESTRA

www.darkstarorchestra.net

Don't come expecting to see a Jerry Garcia lookalike. While this Grateful Dead tribute band revives the sound of the legendary band, they go for the substance, not the flash. Re-creating setlists from specific concerts, DSO transforms to meet the needs of the music, which can mean changing instruments, equipment, staging and even band members. And since the setlist is kept secret, each show is a

guessing game for the audience, giving die-hard Deadheads a chance to display their expertise.

UNDERWATER PEOPLE

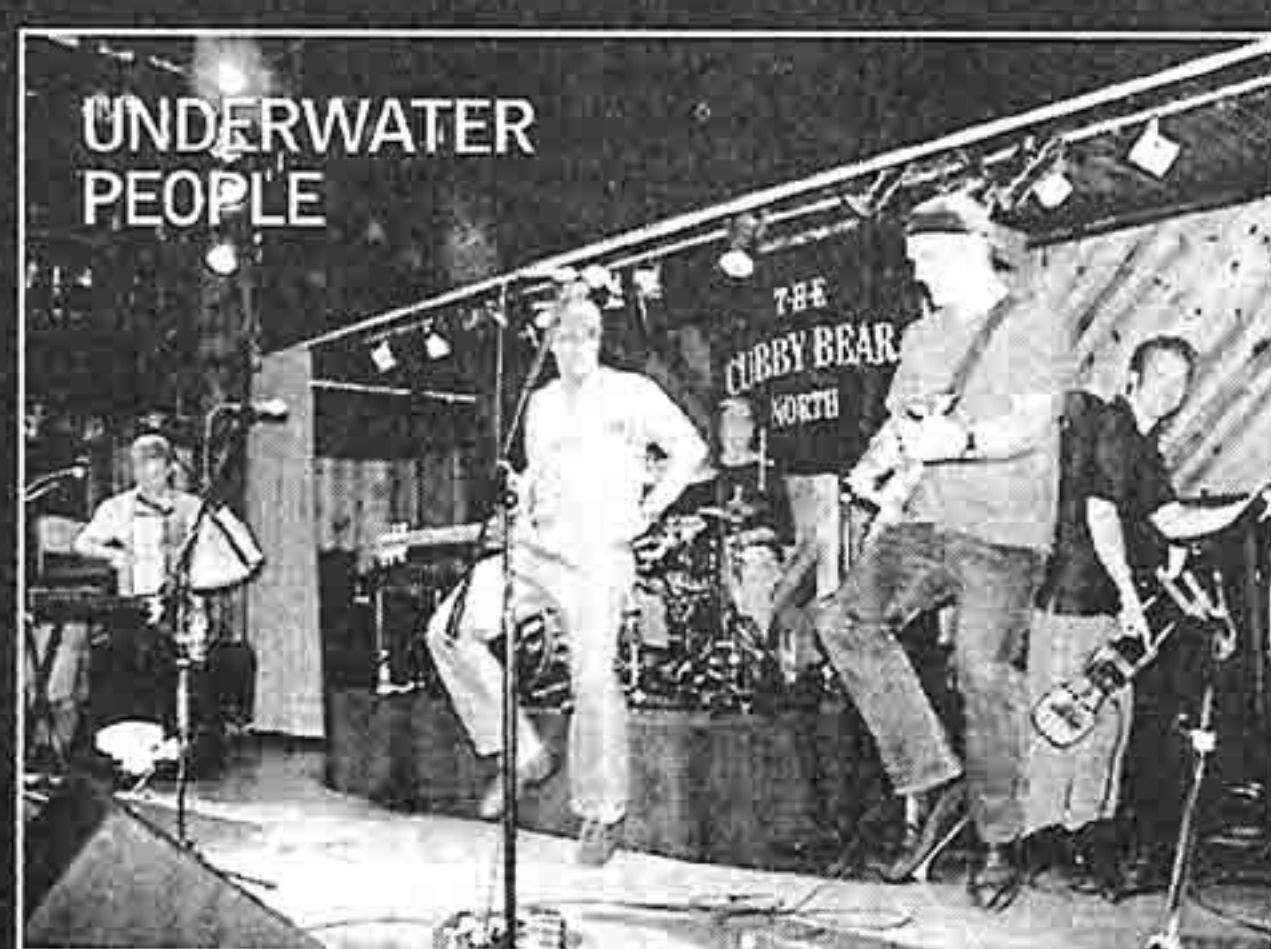
www.underwaterpeople.com

Underwater People has a special knack for pleasing a crowd. Want a little Marley with your Dave Matthews? Desiring a mix of Tom Petty and Barenaked Ladies? Underwater People cover it all, plus some Elvis, Beatles, and a polka or two. They also produce their own original progressive rock, available on CD.

TRIBUTOSAURUS

www.tributosaurus.com

It's one thing to cover songs from a wide range of musical styles. It's quite another to completely morph into a new band for each show, but that's what Tributosaurus does. A core of six musicians, the band adjusts for each gig, adding back-up singers, incorporating new instruments, and learning new songs to recreate the band du jour. Past appearances have imitated the likes



of The Who, The Police, Marvin Gaye, and Led Zeppelin.

LOUNGE PUPPETS

www.loungepuppets.com

Get out your Aquanet: With the Lounge Puppets, it's all about the hair. This bushy foursome makes their living covering the top hair bands of the '80s, including Poison, Journey, Def-Leppard, Van Halen, Whitesnake, and their personal favorite, Bon Jovi. While tumbling tresses are a big part of the act, the band

also prides itself on a high level of musicianship and tightly sung harmonies.

SLIP MICKEY

www.slipmickey.com

Just when you thought the only women in cover bands were men in drag, along comes Slip Mickey. Fronted by a female lead singer, the band specializes in girl-power pop and rock, ranging from the '80s hits of Pat Benatar and The Bangles to today's tunes from Avril Lavigne and Pink.

BY KAY DALY

CENTERSTAGECHICAGO.COM

"We walk into the bar, and it's this low cement-block building out in the middle of nowhere. Everyone has on black concert T-shirts, and they're listening to heavy metal and I think, 'Shit, they are going to kill us,'" says Andy Poland, drummer of Chicago-based cover band, The CoverGirls.

Poland's fears weren't mere hyperbole. While playing at the Second Annual Beaver-Eating Competition in January, The CoverGirls certainly could have found trouble. Set in a macho-man dive bar in Round Lake, the gig offered a rough audience by any standard. But for a quartet of cross-dressing rockers covering girl-band classics of the '80s and '90s, how the audience responds is always a touchy — and potentially dangerous — issue. Thankfully, the "girls" of the band tend to get more cheers than jeers.

Donning wigs, miniskirts, go-go boots and push-up bras, The CoverGirls offer girl-band standards in drag, sans phony falsetto or any pretense that they are "real" women. In this version of girl pop, a midriff top barely covers a pronounced beer belly, and a hint of blusher dusts a rugged 5 o'clock shadow. It's a kitschy blend of nostalgia, parody and hard-rocking musicianship that's built a small but steadily growing fan base.

Originally formed by employees of Jellyvision, the Chicago-based game maker of "You Don't Know Jack," The CoverGirls includes actor Phil Ridarelli, known to Chicago audiences for his work with the Neo-Futurists, Victory Gardens, Northlight and Live Bait; bandmate Brian Chard embodying Chastity, the "dark, ugly soul" of the band; John Whildin as the winsome Kiki Goodnight, on bass; and rounding out the fem four is drummer Andy Poland as Velvet Busche (pronounced *boo-shay*).

"Velvet started out as the Catholic school girl Britney Spears thing. She's changed to more of a Eurotrash Jennifer Garner type," Poland says. "She spends a little too much time worrying about her footwear when no one's going to see her feet behind the drum kit."

Despite the kitschy gimmick, music is the band's top priority, and they strive to create a fresh sound. But the costumes do help, and for that, the guys seek the assistance of specialists.

"All of us are married, and our significant others are definitely involved in creating our look," Ridarelli says. "I swear, every time before a show it's like, 'Is your wig clean?' 'What jewelry are you wearing?'"

Chard is particularly grateful to his wife Lina for her support. "She always helps me look my best."

So, why dress in drag? Poland says the inspiration was purely commercial.

"We wanted to maximize our money-earning potential." Chard and Poland had played in Something for Joey, a '70s cover band that made "ridiculous amounts of money." When the audience for '70s tunes petered out, he and Chard searched for another hook.

"It was very cold and calculated, very evil," he says. "We wanted to draw more women to our band. Where the women go, the men follow."

It's the men in the audience who often provide the most surprising response. "There tends to be this phenomenon when the show starts out," Ridarelli says. "There are the big guys with their baseball caps on backward at the back of the house with their arms across their chests, kind of wondering what the hell is going on. By the end of the night, they're at the front of the stage, screaming 'Material Girl! Material Girl!'"

Thankfully, that was exactly what happened at the Beaver-Eating Contest. "When we came out, I thought for sure they'd kill us," Poland recalls. "But it turned into this love fest. All these guys were way into it."