

The New America's Team

The Toadies The Toadies release *Lower Side of Uptown* and hit the road running
By S.D. Henderson



They are scheduled to perform in Carrollton on November 4 at the Festival at the Switchyard: The Toadies

THREE QUESTIONS. WHEN DO YOU STOP talking about a band coming back from the brink of extinction and start talking about the fact that they're here? Is hard driving, edgy alternate-universe rock and roll the exclusive by-product of drug fueled youth and angst or can it be crafted by older souls with clear heads and refined chops? Have the Dallas Cowboys been replaced as America's team? The Toadies answered each of these universal questions with the September release of *The Lower Side of Uptown*, and now they're back on the road to remind you.

Seeing a band break up from the outside is kind of like losing a puppy when you're a kid, especially if you liked the puppy. So, when external label forces conspired to extinguish the Toadies in 2001, there was always hope that things would return to normal.

The puppy didn't leave because he hated you, you just left the gate open. Fast forward a few years and the dog magically comes home, but you ask yourself, "is that really my dog?" Yes, the Toadies are back and it's really the Toadies.

The Toadies as presently constituted have been "back" longer than most bands will ever exist. With Vaden Todd Lewis in front on vocals and rhythm guitar, Mark "Rez" Reznicek in the back on drums, and lead guitarist Clark Vogeler and Doni Blair on

bass; the Toadies have tightened, refined and redefined their time-signatured sound over the past ten years together.

When the time was right follow up the 2015 release of *Heretics*, Lewis explains, "we had no real pre-conceived notion of what we wanted to do. We assumed it would be a mix of *Heretics* and our sound. We were going to make our Led Zeppelin album. But the thing is you can't make a Led Zeppelin album."

Working with longtime collaborators; producer Chris "Frenchie" Smith and sound mixer Rob Schnapf on *The Lower Side of Uptown*, the Toadies have created a work that stands on its own creative and sonic merits. Without a hint of derivativeness, *The Lower Side of Uptown* reminds you of how the Toadies' landmark release of *Rubberneck* in

1994 changed the local landscape of rock and roll. Lewis added, "Rob has an ear that's insane. He's got a really full sound, without sounding padded or fake, and Frenchie is down for the creative side, which is really productive for writing. We were so fortunate to get both of them for this album."

Lower Side

THE CALCULUS OF THEIR combined efforts produced *The Lower Side of Uptown* which delivers the same hard edge and hard driving sound of the early Toadies work. Creatively, it's brand new and unique, but you know it's the Toadies.

It's almost discombobulating after *Heretics*, when they explored a lighter feel across the album, this one is a fresh gut punch back to their grungy roots. The years haven't watered down the sound, the result is the difference between moonshine and 25-year-old Scotch, each has its place but neither of them is for breakfast.

Of the twelve songs on the album, it's hard to pick two or three to fairly encapsulate the work. The first note of "When I Die" sets the tone for the rest of the album, which doesn't let up until the end of "Sentimental" to close it out. Everything else fits nicely in between. I've got four others in heavy rotation, includ-

ing "Take Me Alive," "Mama Take Me Home," "Amen" and the one I can currently get out of my head, "Human Cannonball."

Kirtland Records

ONE OF THE GREAT THINGS about working with a local independent label like Kirtland Records, as Lewis puts it, "It's way easier to do what you want. I'm not worried anymore, it's freeing." The by-product is an album with 12 pieces of exactly what they wanted to record instead of one or two songs for the airwaves and the rest to fill in the blanks.

In support of the release of *The Lower Side of Uptown*, The Toadies kicked off a tour in September as relentless as the album. I caught Lewis somewhere between Berkeley and Seattle and asked him about the effects of touring.

Lewis related, "It's what I chose to do for a living. It's fun hanging out and getting in the pocket and tightening up the shows." They're going to get lots of practice on a tour that pretty much covers the lower 48 states in two months.

It's pretty normal for a band to record music and tour, but here's where I start making my case for the Toadies supplanting the Dallas Cowboys as America's Team. Somewhere in the spaces between the studio and the tour,

the Toadies have poured some of their creative energies into a collaboration with the alchemists at Fort Worth's Martin House Brewery.

Over the past few years the partnership has resulted in the release of four unique Toadies influenced beers. Martin House isn't a gimmick craft brewery, this ain't the rock and roll version of Billy Beer, these are grown up legitimate brews with magical properties.

Starting with Rubberneck Red Ale on the 20th anniversary of *Rubberneck* and the first anniversary for Martin House, the collaboration has produced a total

of four brews including Bockslider, Hell Below and Heaven Above; with more on the horizon.

This year, the Toadies also recorded a version of the baseball standard "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" in partnership with the Texas Rangers to be played in the stadium during games. Add that to the fact that the Toadies made an X-Men comic and it's painfully obvious. I'm not sure if there are four more appropriate American benchmarks than rock and roll, beer, baseball and comic books.

So, if you're keeping score at home, here's where we sit. The Toadies have been creating mind blowing rock music for 25 years, the last song from the Cowboys was by the late coach Joe Avezano. Toadies one, Cowboys nothing. The Toadies have four Martin House brews to their credit, the Cowboys are sponsored by a swill factory. Toadies two, Cowboys zero. The Toadies' version of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" is played at Ranger games, the Dallas Cowboys don't even play baseball. Game over, it's official; the Toadies are officially America's Team.

To celebrate the victory, download or pick up your own analog copy of the Toadies' latest release *The Lower Side of Uptown* and make your fall plans early to come see them in their triumphant return as America's Team as they wrap up their tour amid the rustic beauty of I-35 construction in downtown Carrollton, Texas on November 4 at the Festival at the Switchyard. You can see the new America's team play for free, or pay about a thousand dollars the next day to watch the other team play in a the world's largest monument to mediocrity. I choose the Toadies. ■

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