

Their smaller world; getting bigger

Mike & the Moonpies' new CD brings songs about life on life's terms
By Mary Jane Farmer, Scene In Town

LIKE YOUR COUNTRY MUSIC TO BE REAL? Well, check out Mike & The Moonpies, either live or on any of their many videos and CDs the last of which is *Steak Night at the Prairie Rose*, released just a couple of months ago. There's 2-step, ballads, jump — just about every kind of music one needs for a packed dance floor.

Mike Harmeier explained that he's been at it for about ten years now, starting as a 5-piece group. Now, there's six Moonpies, playing piano, steel, lead guitar, bass, drums, and Mike on lead vocals and acoustic guitar. "We've had good momentum for the past six years, and especially after having played the dance-hall circuit, and after having signed with a booking agency.

Recording

RECORDED AT YELLOW DOG Studios in Wimberley, *Steak Night* was produced by Adam Odor and features the stellar musicianship and artistry of frontman and guitarist Harmeier, guitarist Catlin Rutherford, drummer Kyle Ponder, bassist Preston Rhone, steel guitarist Zachary Moulton, piano, organ Wurlitzer player John Carbone and a special guest appearance by legendary harmonica player Mickey Raphael.

"We're basically defined as AustinCentric and TexasCentric. We love the Texas scene — it's our bread and butter. But there's a bigger world out there. With

this agency, (Red 11 Music, which has signed so many other regional giants.) we're going to be playing more of that bigger world." A look at their Website and its tour schedule, that's already in motion.

Mike & The Moonpies have a California tour in April, are going to France in July for a festival, are becoming a regular at the Palladium Club at WinStar Casino in Oklahoma, and are traveling into Montana, Georgia and all across the U.S.A.

Harmeier said his songwriting starts with notes he enters on his phone. "Clever little things, little sayings I hear. I go from there. I write a song all at one time, so the emotion I started with stays in the song."

One of the people who has continued to be a positive influence, in addition to Mike's dad, is Bryan Black, one of Clint Black's four brothers.

"He used to live in my dad's house. And then about 10 years ago, he opened a bar in Bandera and we've been playing there for five or six years. It's a full circle moment for me."

National tours

ABOUT THOSE TOURS, Harmeier said, "We do a lot of Midwest, Illinois, Kansas and Missouri. We've had two west coasty tours and two east coast tours." When asked about the crowds outside of Texas as compared to the local ones, he said,

"I think they are more attentive. They don't maybe get it like we do down here. A lot more of our kind of music in expanding. When we were in Winfield (Missouri) two months ago. I especially noticed here. Down here in Texas, I get a lot of dancing crowds. Those people are more interested in the music on a musical level."

He said there's a lot of Texas and Oklahoma bands that are "really exploding on national tours including shows in theaters. Turnpike Troubadours, Cody Johnson, Aaron Watson were just some who are paving the path for The Moonpies. "We've done a lot of tours with Turnpike, three or four years ago. We jump on shows with those guys, and then go back to those towns on our own, and they remember us and show up. It's what Charley Crockett is doing now.

"Me and Cody are both from

Tomball, but I didn't know him then. He's younger. His manager is married to a girl I went to school with." Mike talked about his family, too, with obvious pride. "She and I have a four and a half month old so. He's already playing air drum. Yeah, he'll be raised a musician. It was hard for me, I had a baby and a new record out at the same time." He said his mom and dad and brother still live in the Tomball area. He lives in the Georgetown area, where his wife owns a wedding venue. "It's where I come home to." The home and the family were the inspirations for "Wedding Band" and "Getting High At Home."

Goals

SO, WHAT ARE HARMEIER'S plans for the band? "We have more goals. We want to maintain a national tour, headlining it. We're working hard on radio. I've never had that before, but we're doing our own radio promotion. It's incredibly difficult. I paid radio promoters on other singles, and now I'm friends with those people in the radio stations. So I can call them up myself. The first time out, it was a lot of work, doing radio tours and there's no money in that. It's a tough racket."



He plays lead vocals and acoustic guitar: Mike Harmeier

"I never thought I could push a ballad, never thought I'd record a ballad. But my favorite on this record is 'Road Crew.' It came the fastest, written in under five minutes. The band took it to another level. I listened, and the dynamic of it is, well, different." There is a fun video on YouTube of this song. Check it out.

This writer's favorite song on the project is "The Worst Thing," a serious song questioning the values of the man's life. As it is in every song on this new, must-listen-to, 9-song CD, the production here is unique to what Mike & The Moonpies are so well known for, and what will take them further up the ladder of fame and achievement.

Mike & The Moonpies are playing at Magnolia Motor Lounge in Fort Worth on March 4 and at The Yard, also in Fort Worth on April 4. For their complete and full-to-the-brim tour schedule, go Online to TheMoonpies.com

The first release, "Beaches of Biloxi," is a song about the guilt, anger, and despair of losing it all in the gambling game. That went to radios on February 2, and almost immediately went into the 'bubbling under' status. Now, it's been on the chart for a few weeks and moving up. "We're tracking it, and getting a lot of good response in concerts."

Next up for release is the title song, a ballad, "Steak Night at the Prairie Rose," which is as much a tribute to his dad — "I'm gonna see you again..."

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—MIKE HARMEIER



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