

PASSING LEGACY



Nate Wagner/DN
Jeff Boehmer, Tim Boehmer and Pete Watters share a drink to toast becoming the new owners of the Zoo Bar. Larry Boehmer passed the torch on to his sons, Jeff and Tim, and bar manager Watters after the Zoo Bar celebrated its 27th anniversary this year. The Zoo Bar has been bringing Lincoln some of the best blues acts from around the country since it opened. When asked what he wanted to change about the place, Jeff said, "We want to keep it the same."

New owners promise to keep storied Zoo Bar atmosphere

BY EMILY PYEATT

There are many, many bars in Lincoln. They all serve booze, and many provide live music.

But how many of them offer different styles of music from bands all across the country seven nights a week?

How many have been doing this for 27 years and have gained national recognition because of it?

There's only one. It's a tiny, smoky bar at 136 N. 14th St. The front window is always filled with promotional posters for coming shows.

The posters hang under a red and bluish purple sign that reads, "The Zoo Bar."

This bar is Nebraska's only internationally known music venue, and it is packed with 27 years of tradition and history.

One family's history in particular lies within the Zoo Bar's walls.

And now, the family-owned bar is being passed from one generation to the next.

Larry Boehmer, owner for the past 27 years, is turning over the bar to his sons, Jeff and Tim, and manager of 14 years, Pete Watters.

Although a change in ownership is occurring, the three men promise the bar will stay the same for its customers.

The sounds of live blues, reggae, rock and soul will still pour out the door of the Zoo Bar seven nights a week.

"We are going to do our best to keep the bar how it has been for 27 years," Jeff Boehmer said. "The traditions of the bar, the music and great customers have kept this bar how it is."

Larry Boehmer, the man who made the Zoo Bar what it is today, graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1969 with a bachelor's degree of fine arts in education.

While pursuing his master's degree, Boehmer became a regular at the Zoo Bar.

He soon became a bartender and in 1973 became the bar manager.

With aspirations to take off to New York to paint after working a few years in the bar, Boehmer's plans soon changed.

He fell in love with the place and established the music scene that has set the Zoo Bar apart from other bars in Lincoln.

While college bars, clubs and pubs are popping up all around Lincoln, the Zoo Bar has stayed true to its roots.

"It won't be the same without him sitting at the end of the bar, but we don't plan on making any drastic changes," Tim Boehmer said.

Also, there is no need to worry about a drop off in the quality of music because Boehmer hasn't totally left the Zoo Bar behind.

He will still handle the booking of all the groups brought to the bar.

"People are going to be looking for changes, I'm sure, but we are only considering slight changes like beginning a merchandise market," Tim Boehmer said.

The trio is learning that running a bar is no small feat.

"It's a little scary because there is so much to do. I can't understand how he did it all by himself," Tim Boehmer said. "This is an old building, and something is always wrong or broken."

While maintenance and band bookings will keep the whole group occupied, Watters and Jeff Boehmer also have other obligations.

Watters is going to have to balance his book work with taxes and payroll, and Jeff Boehmer will be playing bass and touring with Lil' Slim and the Back-Alley Blues Band, who will play this Saturday night at the Zoo Bar.

There is a little irony in Jeff Boehmer's playing in a blues band.

Growing up, he wasn't a fan of the blues played in his dad's bar, but he said listening to music like Jimi Hendrix turned him on to the music that fuels the Zoo Bar today.

It is the soul and the energy of blues that Larry Boehmer captured in the Zoo Bar's early years, and it is that same soul and energy the three new owners say they plan to carry into the future.

"We are going to do our best to keep the bar how it has been for twenty-seven years."

Jeff Boehmer
new Zoo Bar co-owner

Theater melds with rock sound at Duffy's

Joe West and the Sinners showcase theatrical off-off Broadway sound tonight.

BY EMILY PYEATT

In decades past, the theater has taken rock music and transferred it to the theatrical stage.

Now, a former off-off Broadway music composer has taken the narrative, theatrical sound and transformed it into a pop rock sound.

Tonight at Duffy's Tavern, Joe West and the Sinners bring a quirky, theatrical sound to the stage.

"The band is kind of Hee Haw meets the X-Files," said Andy Sairbairn, who booked tonight's show.

Joe West is a singer/songwriter from Santa Fe, N.M.

In 1998, he moved to Austin, Texas, to start a band with a sound that he described as "psychedelic-folk music."

"It is a term I like that takes the folk roots of story telling and combines them with a real contemporary sound," he said.

"We have sort of an alternative-country vein that is really pretty quirky pop-rock," West said.

Similar to Lou Reed and the Violent Femmes, the band is proud of its contemporary vibe, yet personalizes its sound by theatrics.

The theatrical influences stem from West's years in New York.

He spent a few years writing and performing music for off-off Broadway theater productions while also performing at venues such as the infamous

CBGB's.

"We do goofy things and each tour we do something different," West said.

Fog machines, interpretative preacher performances and disco modes are a few examples of theatrics used in the past.

Perhaps the most vital element of Joe West and the Sinners' music is their storytelling.

"The songs are very narrative and are about characters in my life," West said.

"One song tells of Jamie, the girl from Sioux Falls, S.D., who has had a bad marriage and a serious need for the antidepressant, Prozac.

She wakes up one morning and finally gets the punch line to life's big joke.

She packs her bags, burns her trailer down and moves to St. Paul, Minn., where she becomes a folk singer. She drops her need for Prozac and lives happily ever after."

Another song, he said, tells of "Rehab Girl."

"She is the girl that works at the drug and alcohol recovery clinic that likes her men shady. It is a love song," West said.

Some of the songs are a bit tragic or funny about being down and out, but all have a good message to keep up the spirit and a sense of humor, West said.

Joe West and the Sinners are still a fairly new band.

The guitar player, Andy McWilliams, has been performing with the band for two years, while the drummer, Paul Schlicking has been with the band a month.

Bass player Nick Fontaine



Courtesy Photo
Joe West and the Sinners from Austin, Texas, is known for its theatrical music performances. The group performs with the Mezcal Brothers tonight at Duffy's Tavern.

"We have sort of an alternative-country vein that is really pretty quirky pop-rock."

Joe West
singer/songwriter

has been playing for about six months.

West pulls out some harmonica ditties and plays the guitar.

Lincoln's own Mezcal Brothers will open for Joe West and the Sinners.

"We offer authentic rockabilly," band member Gerardo Meza said.

The band's sound is close to early roots rock-n-roll, and the sound composed by the broth-

'East Autumn Grin' frowns on emotion

BY KEN MORTON

Matthew Ryan has the voice of a troubador and the potential to be an excellent songwriter.

Although powerful in spots, on "East Autumn Grin," Ryan fails to capture any sort of emotional momentum. The songs sound flat and tend to fall into the same melodic patterns.

Ryan's voice falls somewhere between Bruce Springsteen and Bob Dylan - gruff and sincere but conveying a world-weary soul. On songs such as "Me and My Lover" and "Time and Time Only," Ryan sounds as if life has chewed him up and spit him out but still he has the strength to go on.

Ryan has a kind of a "regular guy" sound, but he also can use his voice to convey power in his songs. Ryan, like many songwriters, can turn a good phrase, as well. On "I Hear a Symphony," Ryan's Dylanesque is perhaps at its best: "Every time I watch the news/I hear a symphony/Every time you cough up a noose/I hear a symphony."

Ryan's songs are mostly about his personal life, but he doesn't fall into familiar phrases and words.

Whatever accolades Ryan has received for his songwriting are well deserved. On the other hand, his producer's abilities have to be seriously questioned.

Ryan co-produced the album with Trina Shoemaker, and neither one of them are able to capture the potential many of these songs have.

Songs such as "3rd of October" and "The World Is On Fire" sound like generic, early U2. The closest



Music Review

Matthew Ryan

Title: East Autumn Grin

Label: A & M Records

★★ of 4 stars

the album comes to real feeling is on "Heartache Weather" and "Ballad of a Limping Man." On the latter, Ryan adds mandolin and horns to give the song the flavor the whole album needed.

A good songwriter knows how much control he needs to have and how much he can afford to give up.

Ryan's songs would probably have been better served by someone such as Daniel Lanois or Eric "Roscoe" Ambel, who are known for helping to breathe life and emotion into songs.

Ryan may have a knack for telling a tale, but that may be where his talent ends.

Performance Preview

Joe West and the Sinners, Mezcal Brothers

Where: Duffy's Tavern

When: Tonight, 8 p.m.

Cost: \$4

ers is reminiscent of early rock such as Buddy Holly, Meza said.

The brothers' debut CD "Hold on Tight" will be released Sept. 6.

In the meantime, The Mezcal Brothers will continue to play local shows "that are full of energy," Meza said.