

LIVE IN THE CLUBS



Grainbelt, from left, Roger Noyes, Jimmy Kaufman, Howard Glassman, Chris Blackwell and Jason Hughes, play a rare Albany gig for its CD release party at Valentine's Friday night.

Grainbelt's CD release show marks rare Albany appearance

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY
Gazette Reporter

Local audiences don't get many chances to catch Albany country rockers Grainbelt live.

The band has its reasons. All five members have family obligations and day jobs — most notably, in the music world anyway, lead vocalist and guitarist Howard Glassman owns Valentine's in downtown Albany. Even with this venue at the band's disposal, they've played, at most, four shows there every year since forming in 2008.

Perhaps more telling is the band members' long history on the local scene. Glassman and lead guitarist Jason Hughes are veterans of The Coal Palace Kings, slide guitarist Roger Noyes is known for his jazz guitar work in various bands, and drummer Jimmy Kaufman and bassist Chris Blackwell keep busy with other groups as well.

QUALITY VS QUANTITY

Thanks to this experience, they know that when it comes to shows on the Albany scene and even beyond, quality is more important than quantity.

"We don't tour just for the sake of touring," Glassman said recently while having lunch with Noyes in an Albany restaurant. "It costs a lot

Grainbelt CD release show

WHEN: 6 p.m. Friday
WHERE: Valentine's, 17 New Scotland Ave., Albany
HOW MUCH: \$5
MORE INFO: 432-6572, www.valentinesalbany.com

of money, and it can leave a bad taste in everyone's mouth when everyone's credit cards are maxed out and the van's broken down."

When Grainbelt does play a show, it's usually based around a bigger event, such as the band's appearance in the inaugural Restoration Festival at St. Joseph's Church in Albany in 2010, and an opening slot with The Silos at Valentine's last year. The band's next show, at Valentine's during happy hour Friday night, will celebrate the release of their second full-length album, "A Distant Sound."

Those who have managed to catch one of Grainbelt's more recent shows will recognize many of the album's eight songs, from anthemic opener "In For a Penny" to Blackwell's loping country blues "Kansas." The album has been a long time coming — the band initially began working with producer Troy Pohl in the summer of 2009.

"It was a process — one that we'd rather not do again," Glassman said. "Thank God for Jason's voice of reason. We had to take a song away from the album, so we're short a song on that."

Glassman prefers the rawer, live-in-the-studio approach to recording, which explains his discomfort with how long the album actually took to record. "[A raw recording] reflects the band's sound," he said. "All the classic albums that we like sound like that, stuff by the [Rolling] Stones, or Wilco's 'Being There,' Neil Young's 'Zuma.'"

That classic roots rock sound has been an underlying thread in all of Glassman's musical work over the years, from his '80s and '90s country punk group with fellow singer-songwriter Rob Skane known as The Dugans, to Grainbelt's direct predecessor The Coal Palace Kings in the late '90s. Both of those bands' songs still show up in Grainbelt set lists to this day.

After The Coal Palace Kings ended their 10-year run with a tour of Belgium and the Netherlands, Glassman and Hughes decided to keep playing together in a new project. Kaufman and Blackwell eventually formed the core of the group, but the partnership between Glassman and Hughes has been the

band's focal point.

"Jason is quite possibly the best musician I've ever played with," Glassman said. "He was actually in Coal Palace Kings twice — he jammed with us for a couple months, we went out to San Diego. My wife, who was my girlfriend at the time — I was looking for a guitar player, and she said, 'You'd be crazy not to get Jason.'"

LAST ADDITION

Noyes was the last addition to the group, coming on board during recording sessions for "A Distant Sound." As Coal Palace Kings had already experimented with a pedal steel player, Glassman was originally hesitant, but Noyes quickly fit in with the band's gritty sound.

"I'm the Garth Hudson role in the band, the sweetener, whereas these guys are the core members," Noyes said.

Glassman writes the majority of the band's songs, drawing inspiration from his "best friends, wife and ex-girlfriends." Hughes takes on a big role during the arranging process.

"We've got that married couple way that we work," Glassman said. "I'll write a song, and I'll come in, and the first couple times he's making the face. I think I've argued with him maybe once about changing a song, but otherwise it's total deference; I have to give it up to him."

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