

?Just party with us,? says Music Festival headliner MonkeyJunk



By Brock Weir

Admit it ? you probably have some preconceived notion of what it means to sing the ?blues? ? ranging anywhere from plaintive, to sad, to angsty ? but you're probably wrong.

In fact, musician Steve Marriner has one of his own: ?complaining.?

But the MonkeyJunk frontman, and indeed the band, have turned over a new leaf with their new album *Time To Roll*, which they are bringing to Aurora on August 5 as the headlining act for the Aurora Music Festival at Town Park.

?We wanted to make a more raw, urgent-sounding record with a live feel,? says Marriner of the latest offering from the popular Ottawa-area band. ?*Time To Roll*, in my mind, is supposed to be a little bit more uplifting and celebratory. I listened back to some of our other records and there was a lot of complaining ? and that is probably my fault because I write most of the lyrics! We just wanted to keep things positive.

?Some of our other records took a full year to make front to back and we didn't want to do that because we wanted to slam together a quick and dirty, more bluesy record inspired by where we came from.?

To find out where they came from, you have to tune your ear back to 2008.

The Juno-winning band, which describes themselves as a blues/rock and roll/swamp band, was formed when Marriner, Tony Diteodoro and Matt Sobb came together with a shared love of music at Irene's, a popular pub in the nation's capital.

United by common interests in blues funk, soul, rock and roll, they found their unique blend immediately struck a chord with the pub crowd and, working on their weekly gig, they were quickly packing the house on Sunday nights.

?There are some blues artists who really try to keep their music pure and traditional, and they have some [genre] boundaries and what is acceptable to bring into that realm, but I think what's different about MonkeyJunk and what makes Matt, Tony and I kind of on the same page; we love to push boundaries and incorporate different styles. Frankly, the band and our creative process has been one big experiment for the entire time that we have been a band, and that is exciting because you never know what you're going to come up with.?

From those early days at Irene's, they booked some studio time and put down a four song EP. Armed with their first record, they began booking summer music festival and their following went from strength to strength.

?After about a month, we knew people were paying attention in a way that was just different and there was something new going on,? says Marriner.

Marriner also sensed something new going on as a kid when he first sat down and watched *The Blues Brothers* movie on TV with his dad at the age of 10. By the time the credits rolled, he decided he wanted a harmonica, a wish that was fulfilled by the time Christmas rolled around.

With his new instrument in hand, his dad connected him with some harmonica players in the Ottawa area, which set him on a road to immersing himself in the harmonica-heavy Chicago-style blues.

?I went deep and the music always really spoke to me,? Marriner explains. ?It is music that whether you are happy or sad, it can be a

lament or a celebration and everything in between. It hit me hard and now here we are.?

Marriner had been playing professionally for about nine years before he converged with Matt and Tony, and as soon as that chemistry was in place, he says they found there was a lot less lament and a lot more celebration in what they had to offer ? and indeed what fans took away from their performances.

?People would dance right away from the get go,? he says. ?The thing is we play so many different styles. Even on our first record, there were some swampy songs, some Chicago stuff, but I think we just had a way of playing that really focused on the groove. When we make songs, it is with the intent of making people dance. That is really what we like to do. We pick grooves and different beats that make us move and ideally that would inspire others to move as well. I don't think you have to think too hard about our music. It just hits you.?

As long as you get up and move at Town Park next Saturday, August, 5, then it will be mission accomplished.

?Hopefully people can just shut their brains off for a few hours, have a nice time and maybe dance,? Marriner says. ?If you are with your partners, just dance, have a celebration, and just party with us. Hopefully the weather will be fair and then we can just have a beautiful night getting together and having some fun. That's what we bring ? let's just have some fun!?