

Aerosmith

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their hometown, at TD Garden, that might just be the perfect farewell celebration. But Tyler's vocal cords didn't quite recover all the way, and the stress of those nightly shows was deemed too much for him to tackle at age 76.

Hingham's Neill Byrnes had to look at that news with decidedly mixed emotions. On one hand, he'd become long-distance friends with Tyler over the years, as he led what is widely acknowledged as the premier Aerosmith tribute band, Draw the Line. He felt bad for Tyler, who he has admired and studied as a musician and songwriter for years. Conversely, with the real rock legends sidelined, there would be increased demand for Draw the Line. It has been an interesting couple of months since the Aerosmith announcement that they'd have to hang up their touring boots.

Draw the Line headlines The C Note in Hull on Saturday night, an evening sure to be full of nostalgia and bitter-sweet feelings at Aerosmith's retirement. (The C Note is located at 159 Nantasket Ave. in Hull. The show begins at 9 p.m., and tickets are \$15 in advance, or \$25 at the door the night of the show. Check cnotehull.com or call the club at 781-925-4300 for more information.)

How Draw the Line got started

How did Byrnes become the leader of the Aerosmith tribute act? Back during the hoopla for the release of Aerosmith's "Pump" album, Byrnes entered and won a Steven Tyler lookalike contest. The young musician bore a striking resemblance to Tyler, but was more than two decades younger, and in much better health. By 1991, he had decided to turn that uncanny resemblance into an Aerosmith-themed band, and Draw the Line began getting dates almost immediately. Finding band members was a complicated process, because Byrnes sought people who not only had the musical ability to play the tunes, but also might be willing to tweak their appearance to resemble the other band members. An early "Joe Perry," for instance, dyed his hair black to better reflect the guitarist.

Draw the Line's success was boosted even more in 1998, when in an interview Tyler said that, in his view, they were the best Aerosmith tribute act anywhere. They are also the only tribute act featured on the real Aerosmith's website. As the years have gone on, many times Draw the Line will "shadow" a tour by the real band, booking dates in the same general area as Aerosmith tours, which gives fans who may not be able to afford the hefty ticket prices for the real Boston Bad Boys a chance to still revel in the music.

I caught up with Byrnes last weekend, as he was en route to a Draw the Line show in Millis and still admittedly dealing with the impact of Aerosmith's decision.

"It's kind of sad," said Byrnes. "And, since they've been around during my whole existence, since 1970, there is a real sense of loss. We all know this is not how they wanted it to end. They had their 50th Anniversary Tour, and COVID-19 kind of took that down. But they had come back out and had big plans. We knew they wanted to go out with a big bang, probably in Boston at the Garden. Knowing that's not going to happen now is really sad for all of their fans."

"The thing about Aerosmith is that



Hingham's Neill Byrnes, right, is shown with Aerosmith's Steven Tyler. JUSTIN HUNT/DISTRIBUTED BY NEILL BYRNES

they were always about their touring," Byrnes added. "They were always road dogs, so that announcement really did leave kind of a void. They are probably America's greatest rock band, and so much of that music is timeless, and people really want to hear it. I'm not sure, and it is still early, but there could be a movement of more fans over to us. Things have started to pick up as far as our own touring schedule goes, but I think Aerosmith fans are still kind of in shock."

Resemblance to Tyler gave band a boost

Since Byrnes began Draw the Line in 1991, tribute acts have blossomed everywhere. Practically any band that has had a couple hits probably has a tribute act performing their music somewhere. Quincy's John Anthony, for example, has made a nice career for himself in Las Vegas, performing the music of Rod Stewart. Like Byrnes, Anthony's musical chops are accompanied by an uncanny resemblance to the star himself. But as Byrnes cautioned, the key to a successful tribute is always getting the music right.

"You do see a lot more tribute bands these days, but you also see a lot of the original bands coming to an end," noted Byrnes. "The biggest number of tribute acts has to be for The Beatles, with Led Zeppelin, and Journey not far behind, and the unavoidable fact is you cannot go see the original bands any longer. The music that came after those bands just didn't cut it like their music did. You look at those bands and they are like the Beethoven and Mozart of their time, and people will always want to hear that music. Aerosmith started in 1970, and like those other bands I mentioned, they proved they have the staying power, the longevity, and I think that's a testament to the quality of the songs they wrote."

Band has played together for a long time

In his 34th year of leading Draw the Line, Byrnes has had to deal with the usual turnover of band members, but he extols this current lineup as one of the best and most experienced. Draw the Line 2024 includes guitarists Gino Calra (Joe Perry) from Haverhill and Jim Dennis (Brad Whitford) from Everett, with bassist Barry Johnson (Tom Hamilton) from Taunton, and drummer John Myslinski (Joey Kramer) from Chicopee.

"The guitarists have been with me for 15 years now, and Barry on bass has been with me more than 10 years," said Byrnes. "The drummer is the 'new guy' but he's been with us a few years too. It is inevitable you'll have changes in a

band like this. We are not making millions of dollars, and we are on the road a lot. We play all the way to California, do Caribbean swings, regular Atlantic City stops, and so on. If you have any family, it is hard because we're not home very much. But the band is as strong as ever, and we do our best to deliver the whole Aerosmith experience every night."

Draw the Line has always been popular in the Boston and New England areas, even a decade or more back, when members of the real band actually lived on the South Shore, with Tyler and Kramer in Marshfield and Perry in Duxbury. Original member Ray Tabano was even known to show up at the occasional Draw the Line gig. But there are some other hotspots for the band that might surprise.

Draw the Line's schedule sometimes mirrored Aerosmith's

"Whenever Aerosmith was touring, we would start get booking calls coming in from the Midwest," Byrnes said. "I don't know if fans out there found the Aerosmith tickets too expensive or what, but we'd get lots of gigs through that area whenever the real band came through. We'd also get certain rock festivals that would want to have us every summer, and that has continued."

Performing at The C Note is always a special treat, not just because it gives Byrnes a chance to connect with old friends and family, but also because fans on the South Shore are hardcore Aerosmith fans.

"The C Note was one of the first places we played when we started the band in '91," said Byrnes. "I think we also played another place on Nantasket Beach called Elaine's around that time, at the very beginning, so that area has always been good to us. The fans we see there, and the people at the club, are so loyal we will always go back, even if it is one of the tiniest venues we play. You could say The C Note is like our home base. But the other great things is that the fans there are so knowledgeable, and have been Aerosmith fans so long, we'll be able to play some really deep cuts, not the obvious stuff. This weekend I'm expecting we'll really delve deeply into Aerosmith's 1970s era music, which we love."

Thrive Music Festival still on hold

As we've noted before, the 17-band Thrive Music Festival, slated for last weekend in Bridgewater, was postponed due to EEE concerns. Promoters are still trying to settle on a new date or new venue, but essentially the benefit event is still in limbo. Stay tuned.

Rockabilly party was a blast

As far as blasts from the past, it would be hard to top last Saturday's rockabilly party at the Narrows Center in Fall River, where the Reverend Horton Heat's Rockabilly Revue delighted over 400 fans. (It has always been my perception that Providence, Rhode Island, had a real rockabilly community, with bands like The Royal Crowns, and Colonel Johnny Maguire's Lucky Charms, while Boston might have a couple bands but no real feeling of a rockabilly scene.) Rockabilly is that combination of country swing and bluegrass speeded up to rock 'n' roll tempos, and Heat (actually Texas guitar ace Jim Heath) delivers a brand he calls "psychobilly," and is often lumped in with "punkabilly," for the way it embraces punk rock aspects for shock and/or comedy value.

The night began with a lively half-hour set from Jittery Jack, a Boston-area quartet fronted by Jack (aka Kevin Patey) and stellar guitarist Amy Griffin, well known to area fans as part of the 1980-90s rockabilly band The Raging Teens. The Jittery Jack set was more classic rockabilly, and all infectious fun. But the night hit overdrive when Reverend Horton Heat took the stage.

The tempos were mostly at a break-neck pace, and only a few almost-balds from guest star Big Sandy gave the audience a chance to catch its breath. It was also a night when acoustic standup bass proved you don't need amplifiers to raise the roof. Heat — joined by Jimbo Wallace on bass and Jonathan Jeter on drums — tore through the instrumental "Big Sky" and "Baddest of the Bad" to start off their 85-minute set. They have a new record out, featuring covers from various genres, and Willie Nelson's "Three Days" is an inspired choice, although Saturday's version never seemed to coalesce. It was different from Willie's version for sure, just not especially rockabilly-themed or certain of what it wanted to be. Heat's own "Psychobilly Freakout" was more successful, a blitz of rhythms and spacey guitar sounds that took no prisoners. The ode to Heat's bassist of 45 years, "Jimbo" was terrific fun and the musician/straight man mugged happily throughout.

Big Sandy's own style blends more Western swing into his rockabilly, and he's acclaimed for his silky treatment of 1950s type ballads. Big Sandy noted the ballad "Kiss the Girl" has been recorded for Disney's Florida theme park, as the voice of a character. A tune he recorded with surf-rockers Los Straitjackets, "La Flaga," showed how he can handle up-tempo numbers without losing any nuance, and the semi-comic "Chalk It Up to the Booze" displayed the humor he's also known for. Another song from his days with Los Straitjackets, "Chica Alborotada" combined rockabilly, surf-rock and Mexican flavors for a dazzling effect. Later, Sandy told us that tune is his re-working of the classic surf-rock "Tallahassee Lassie." The Reverend and his trio brought it all home with a scorching hot homestretch of "400 Bucks," "Galaxie 500," and "Let Me Teach You How to Eat." Their regular set ended with one of their most unlikely covers, a pulverizing romp through Motorhead's "Ace of Spades." (It turns out the late Motorhead frontman Lemmy Kilmister was a big fan of rockabilly and the Reverend.) For an encore, The Heat trio plus Big Sandy did another cover, long-forgotten '50s Texas rockabilly man Gene Summers' "School of Rock 'n' Roll," and that made for a perfectly rowdy ending.

Music

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Music Room in Yarmouth. Wingspan — the sextet once headed by the late pianist Mulgrew Miller — performs a night of his music at Scullers in Boston. Songwriter Mat Kearney headlines Boston's Orpheum Theater. Australian rock duo Royel Otis at The House of Blues in Boston. NYC alt-popster Zolita at Brighton Music Hall.

SUNDAY, Sept. 29: Texas songwriter Ray Wylie Hubbard makes a rare Boston appearance

A 4 p.m. special start at the Spire Center in Plymouth, when beloved area comedian Loretta LaRoche brings her Still Alive at 85 show to town. Iconoclastic Texas songwriter Ray Wylie Hubbard, composer of such alt-country rockers as "Snake Farm," makes a rare Boston appearance at City Winery. City Winery also has an interesting noon matinee, with Wild Taxi, doing the mu-

sic of Cat Stevens and Harry Chapin. Toronto indie-rockers Valley turn up at The House of Blues in Boston. Pop singer Alec Benjamin at MGM Music Hall in Boston. Retro rockers The Heavy Heavy arrive at Brighton Music Hall.

Coming attractions

MONDAY: Alt-pop singer Upsahl at The Paradise Rock Club in Boston. DPR Live is a pop singer at MGM Music Hall in Boston.

TUESDAY: The big news for South Shore music fans is that Norwell's own guitar goddess, Susan Tedeschi, and her husband, the brilliant guitarist Derek Trucks, bring their Tedeschi Trucks Band to Boston for their annual fall series of shows; at MGM Music Hall in Boston tonight, and then at Boston's Boch Center on Oct. 4 and 5. The Fray rocks The Orpheum Theater in Boston.

WEDNESDAY: Playing Dead continues their residency at Soundcheck Studios in Pembroke. The Psychedelic Furs, with The Jesus and Mary Chain, rocks The Orpheum Theater in Boston. Lotus jams at The Paradise Rock Club.



Blues queen Shemekia Copeland is performing at the Spire Center in Plymouth on Saturday. VICTORIA SMITH