

Bottle Rock Blues and Rhythm Band: 'Smokin' R & B!

Contributed by Wellman Moody
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LAKE COUNTY — Bottle Rock Blues and Rhythm Band formed in Lake County in August and describes its music as "Smokin' R & B!" It is not often that one finds a band that has roots as deep and a family tree as broad as this one.

The band coalesced around 1960s legend Mike Wilhelm, vocal and guitar; and Neon Napalm, vocal and percussion.

Wilhelm is known as a founding member of the Charlatans, San Francisco's first psychedelic group, as well as for his work with cult heroes Flamin' Groovies.

Napalm, a card-carrying member of the Cherokee Nation, is the popular lead singer formerly with Gary Farmer and the Troublemakers, a Native American band well known throughout the Southwest.

"I had a concept for a rhythm and blues band featuring harmony vocals and a rock style rhythm section," said Wilhelm. "I designed a logo with the letters 'Bottle Rock,' made from obsidian, common in Lake County and known locally as 'bottle rock.' I also had certain personnel in mind."

First on his list was Napalm, whom he had met in the Lake County Blues Allstars.

"Neon is not only one of the best female vocalists I've ever heard — and I have heard many over the years — but we had already been singing harmony together in the Blues Allstars," Wilhelm said.

Wilhelm and Napalm started playing with guitarist and vocalist Stephen Holland. He hails originally from Clarksdale, Miss, central to the Mississippi Delta, the ancestral home of Chicago blues.

Born in 1950, he has been playing for 44 years and has an original style all his own. He has played with the Bay Area band Cottonmouth and with members of Soundhole, Huey Lewis and the News and Tower of Power.

Holland introduced them to bassist Bill McMenemy, who had recently moved to Lake County after spending a number of years playing in the Portland, Ore., area.

McMenemy is originally from San Francisco. Back in the day, he played with the San Francisco rock trio Aum. He sings backup has a very powerful rock bass style, which is just what Wilhelm had in mind for the band.

Drummer Mark Phillips is probably best known as a member of the Grateful Dead cover band Street Dogs. He is an extremely well-seasoned player having played with P. T. and the Pleasers during the early 1980s in the Bay Area opening for acts such as Greg Kihn and Huey Lewis and the News.

In demand as a recording session musician, Phillips has divided his time between the Bay Area and his native England.

The resulting band has the much-sought-after quality of being more than the sum of its parts.

In addition to the R&B repertoire, they are also mixing in some classic rock from the 1960s and 1970s including songs associated with the Charlatans and Flamin' Groovies.

For performance dates, visit www.flyingsnail.com/Scrapbook/Mike_Wilhelm.html. For bookings email guit_blue@yahoo.com.

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