

Music magic in Williams

BY GABRIELA EAGLESOME

In big cities, people enjoy music as consumers. In Williams, it is an integral part of life: impromptu jams in friends' homes, two pubs with live music throughout the week, a grassroots radio station (operated by Iwill, a musician and longtime resident), open mic nights, and concerts that draw visitors from far beyond Williams.

It seems that every third person in Williams plays an instrument, sings, or performs with a group. Williams' musicians travel with their instruments to play at every opportunity. They are frequently at the Applegate River Lodge, where people gather after the main act to jam until early morning.

Willy Warwick is a venerated musician in the area, whose mother, Martha, started the Old Time Fiddler's Camp in Williams many years ago. When Willy began playing fiddle, "there

were three to four musicians living in Williams," he says, "but now there may be three to four hundred," playing in genres ranging from classical guitar to bluegrass, reggae, jazz, folk, and rock.

Kim Mericle, a musician who closely follows the local music scene, likens the Williams' music phenomenon to the creativity and arts that thrive in Taos, New Mexico. Many musicians who live in Williams are good enough to do well in Los Angeles or New York, but they prefer to live here.

Dennis Dragon's "The Studio at Pacifica" offers world-class recording opportunities. Dennis won Grammys for his work before he moved to the Applegate Valley from the Los Angeles area. Disenchanted with the big-city scene, he came to visit a friend in Williams. When he saw the Steve Miller recording studio at Pacifica, he realized it was exactly the way he would have built

it, so he got his equipment out of storage and moved to Williams eight years ago. He is amazed at the talent here. He says, "This is such a small area, so it blew my mind that there is such a diverse range of quality musicians in Williams."

Windsong, a singer-songwriter and guitarist who has lived in the area since 1978, thinks there is a "strong musical spirit in the area." She says, "Amazing and fairly famous musicians come here to find quietness during their off-the-road time, and then they tour."

Many musicians feel that Williams' relaxed, laid-back, even spiritual ambiance and natural surroundings make it the perfect place to compose and escape the rat race. Kim Mericle says, "Musicians seek the lifestyle of Williams, where people want to live their own lives, but have a strong community at the same time."

Warren Wolfe, who moved to Oregon from Monterey, California, in 2009, says that making music in this rural community is better than the grind

and competition he experienced as a professional musician. "Elsewhere," he says, "it is cutthroat. There is no sense of the collaboration or community that you have here in Williams. Of course, musicians here don't have money, but it's fun to do what you love with your heart wide open."

Others believe that there is a high density of musicians all across the United States and that Williams is nothing noteworthy. Brian (Buzz) Sulgit hesitated to say that Williams deserves special recognition, saying, "I've heard people say that there is a lot of music happening here, but I just don't notice it, because I have been here for 22 years and it just seems normal." Warren Wolfe, on the other hand, insists, "I would chalk it up to emotional energy, spirit, and even magic." In spite of the threats and disasters happening in the world, Warren thinks that here in Williams "we are making our own paradise; we are living in the Shire."

Gabriela Eaglesome
gabrielas@aol.com

COLONEL MUSTARD

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Part of the fun is that they make people happy because it's so obvious they're having fun themselves. And part of our fun is that we're listening to familiar music we have loved for years. They are a cover band: they do other people's music—lots of Beatles, anything from Santana to Amy Winehouse, anything from the 1940s on through the decades. One of their audiences' favorites is their Beatles medley, but if you have a request for just about anything, they'll be able to do it.

Another part of the fun lies in the generous spirit of the band. Though they aren't averse to turning down a benefit gig if it seems too private or petty, they are quick to say yes to nonprofits they support or if it's a cause they feel strongly about or if it's a medical cause—"the important things people rally behind," B. says. They have played for Relay for Life, the Women's Crisis Center, individual cancer benefits, and, of course, for the *Applegater* fundraiser at Red Lily last summer, proving us an important cause people rally behind.

B. says the thing that sets their



Colonel Mustard Band playing at RoxyAnn Winery. Band members, from left to right, are Chris Graves, guitarist and vocalist; Sandy Ficca, drummer; B. Wishes, guitarist and vocalist; and Johnny Trujillo, bassist and vocalist. Photo: Renee Olmsted.

band apart is that they "play fun dance music with great vocals," but there's something more, too, something that has to do with the spirit of the band when they are playing music together. Johnny

talks about liking the camaraderie of the band, the way they respect each other and appreciate their professionalism. The secret to their good music might be no more than that they like playing together.

"It's effortless," Johnny says. "We always know where we're going. Just a hint, and we're there." B. echoes that spirit when she says that singing with the other two vocalists is like being with siblings.

The Colonel Mustard Band plays at weddings, wineries, and resorts, which, Johnny says, is more fun than being at a bar till midnight. Wherever they play, they like the moment best when they see people bopping their heads. There's no mystery about that—they're a dance band.

Diana Coogle
dicoog@gmail.com

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