

Supersuckers embody rock 'n' roll savvy

Scott Hudson, For the Argus Leader 10:14 a.m. CDT August 21, 2014



(Photo: <240>Courtesy photo)

There's a natural tendency for bands to crank out the same sounds from album to album. If you have a successful template, why break it? Fans love it. Record companies expect it.

For the most part, though, bands unwilling to break their own rules tend to fade away after a few records. Great bands at some point have to experiment, and hopefully expand the expectations of their fan base.

In 1997, this was the turning point for the Supersuckers. The self-proclaimed "Greatest Rock 'n' Roll Band in the World" had released four acclaimed high-octane records.

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What did they do next? They released a country record, "Must've Been High." Not only was that album not of the Motorhead/Dead Boys variety that had built them a fan base, it wasn't the Garth Brooks-ish urban country that was currently topping the charts. This was country of the old-school variety, with elements of Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Hank Williams and George Jones.

Needless to say, nobody at the time was pleased with this release. "To say it was poorly received is an understatement," says Supersuckers leader Eddie Spaghetti. "People were downright hostile about it."

Years later, Spaghetti says that "Must've Been High" has become the band's biggest seller, and he credits the album with the reason the band is still thriving. "I think having the country side of what we do keeps the expiration date off the band for a little bit longer." They're even currently working on a sequel, which will be recorded early next year.

In the meantime, though, the Supersuckers are still out there cranking out the big riffs that first made them famous in the '90s. "Get the Hell," released earlier this year, proves that even after 20 years of recording, the band still knows how kick out their patented "evil powers of rock 'n' roll," to quote the title of one of their best songs.

Question: It's been six years since the last studio album. What took so long?

Answer: We definitely didn't intend for it to take as long as it did. We folded up our own label, Mid-Fi Records, as it was no longer viable for us to maintain. We thought we'd just get somebody else to do it, and that process ended up taking a lot longer than we thought. Because of that, we had the benefit of a lot more songs to pick from, so I think this new record is stronger because of it.

Q: Explain the cover of Depeche Mode's "Never Let Me Down."

A: It sounds more like the Dead Boys in our hands than Depeche Mode, right? I don't know. It's a song that (guitarist) Dan Bolton has wanted to cover for quite a long time, and the planets finally aligned up for us to knock it out.

Q: The band has always been known for unexpected covers, dating back to Madonna's "Burnin' Up" on the first album (1992's "The Songs All Sound the Same").

A: That's something we've always enjoyed doing. It's fun to take people down a road they don't expect to go down.

Q: This is the first record without guitarist Rontrose Heathman. What happened with him?

A: He just kind of burned out on it, I guess. He had been unhappy with it for years before he decided to quit. He just decided that he had had enough, I guess, and wanted to go roast coffee. That's what he's doing.

Q: You've put out a few solo albums over the years. When you write a song, how do you know whether it's a band or solo song?

A: Usually, the stuff I keep for myself are the more country/acoustic sort of songs. This last solo record I did (2013's "The Value of Nothing") was the first one where I wrote all of the songs. Before that, it was largely just covers I was doing. I kind of decided that this solo thing was a viable thing I can do, so I should go ahead and put some effort into it. So I wrote a bunch of songs specifically for that record. I've just been writing a bunch of songs again lately, so I've got them to spare.

Q: You've had quite a few songs about the state of the music business, and also the state of rock 'n' roll. What are your current thoughts on the genre?

A: I feel like it's dying. It sucks. I just don't hear any new bands that really turn my crank in the way that the Dwarves or Zeke did. Even Nashville Pussy; they're kind of one of the last remaining rock 'n' roll bands out there. Danko Jones is another good one from Canada. All of these bands that I listen to are old bands, but they sound like new bands to me. I still like to listen to Zeke, but they've been around for almost as long as we have. All of a sudden, you

turn around and you've become a relic. You never feel like you've done that. I don't feel like a classic rock band, but that's basically what we've become.

Q: What kind of use or impact do you get from social media?

A: It helps quite a bit. It's kind of the way we get the word out. If we have to move a show or cancel it, we can actually inform a good chunk of people in a matter of seconds about the new situation. It's especially vital for a smaller band like us to embrace it as much as you can. I'm still kind of new to it, but I do Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and all of that sort of stuff. It's sort of irritating, as it's mostly people taking pictures of their food.

Q: You've played in Sioux Falls a number of times over the years. What do you like about this city?

A: I like it. It's a cool little sleepy town. It kind of reminds me of Tucson, Az.

What: Supersuckers

When: 9 p.m. Friday

Where: Bigs Sports Bar, 3110 W. 12th St.

Tickets: \$12 advance or \$15 door for the

18-and-older show

@argusleader.com: Read music writer Scott

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