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Supersuckers know their limits

Nathan Weinbender The Spokesman-Review

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Vocalist and bassist Eddie Spaghetti and the Supersuckers perform Thursday at The Hop. (Full-size photo)

If you go

The Supersuckers

With Laylah's Drink
 When: 8 p.m. Thursday
 Where: The Hop, 706 N. Monroe St.
 Cost: \$12; all ages; purchase tickets online at www.thehopevents.com

For most of their long career, Arizona rockers the Supersuckers have been called “the greatest rock ‘n’ roll band in the world.” It’s a lofty distinction, one that the band inadvertently gave itself: According to lead singer and bassist Eddie Spaghetti, it started as an off-hand joke years ago before a concert.

(Your first clue they’re a bit tongue-in-cheek: Their lead singer and bassist calls himself Eddie Spaghetti.)

“We were playing a show – I can’t remember where – but there was this dusty old trophy backstage,” Spaghetti said. “So we brought it out onstage, and said, ‘Yeah, we got this for being the greatest rock ‘n’ roll band in the world.’ And we carried that trophy around with us for a couple of tours.”

The moniker stuck, and although no one is *actually* arguing that the Supersuckers is the greatest rock band working today, it’s certainly one of the purest. They’re the kind of band you can envision selling their souls to the devil in exchange for success – raucous, rowdy, booze-fueled, foul-mouthed and unapologetically simpleminded in their pursuit to simply rock out.

“Our aesthetic is to remain as remedial as possible,” Spaghetti said. “We look up to bands like the Ramones and AC/DC, these bands that have basically put out the same record over and over again. ... We kind of go out of our way to not evolve, because I think a band is defined by its limitations as much as it’s defined by what it can do. What it can’t or won’t or is unwilling to do is just as important to the sound as what it’s capable of doing.”

After relocating to Seattle in the early ‘90s, the Supersuckers were signed by Sub Pop Records, the cocky rock revelers among the label’s primarily grunge output. The group, especially in its early days, still satisfies a punk ethos: Just look at the subversive titles of their midcareer releases – “The Songs All Sound the Same,” “50,000 Middle Fingers Can’t Be Wrong” and the compilation helpfully named “How the Supersuckers Became the Greatest Rock and Roll Band in the World.”

But the Supersuckers took a hard right turn in 1997, when they put out a collection of straight-faced country songs called “Must’ve Been High.”

“I guess I attribute it to having grown up in Tucson and being surrounded by country music, and trying to hate it forever as a kid but slowly realizing that there are great songs there,” Spaghetti said of that game-changer album. “The learning curve was kind of steep. We really had to learn to hold back and play more restrained. I think it was really good for the band to do that and go through that process.”

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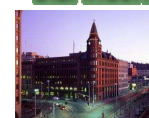
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Since then, the group's music has flirted with both hard rock and country styles. Their newest record, "Get the Hell," is closer in attitude to their earlier, snottier material – one song with an unprintable title packs 30 F-bombs into three minutes (yes, I counted) – although a handful of the tracks lay a rock riff over a country shuffle or a honky-tonk harmonica.

But it's not so unusual if you really think about it: After all, the sentiments behind Hank Williams' "Your Cheatin' Heart" and Buddy Holly's "That'll Be the Day" are more or less identical.

"Distilled down to their essence, good rock 'n' roll and good country are essentially the same things," he said, noting that the band's next album will be more Merle Haggard than Motörhead. "Lately we've been specifically writing with a country record in mind, so that process is a little bit different. But it's still the same: You're still trying to find those three magic chords."

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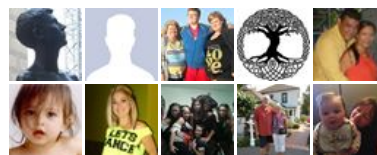
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