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Commander Cody Band's Orlando show to benefit autism awareness

March 18, 2013 | By Jim Abbott, Orlando Sentinel

Like many businesses, the touring operation of iconic rocker Commander Cody has been downsized since the Commander (real name: George Frayne) launched his career about 45 years ago.

"The exact same amount of money that used to get you eight hippies, a giant bus, four roadies, two secretaries, one sleazy manager and a lawyer on retainer now gets you four old guys in a minivan," Frayne said by phone from his New York home. "The good news is that the four old guys are really good."



Commander Cody, aka George Frayne, will headline a benefit... (Courtesy Commander Cody)

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On March 21, the band will unleash its combination of vintage country, Texas swing and old-school rock 'n' roll at a benefit show for the Owen Clarke Foundation for autism awareness at McWells Restaurant in Orlando. Expect the dance floor to be crowded for signature hits that include "Hot Rod Lincoln," "Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette)" and "Beat Me Daddy, Eight to the Bar."

The approach hasn't varied much since 1967, when Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen formed in Ann Arbor, Mich. The name was inspired by 1950s film serials featuring a character of the same name, a notion that appealed to Frayne, who had finished a master's degree in art at the University of Michigan and started a college teaching career.

By the summer of 1968, Frayne and band members had moved to San Francisco, where they became a fixture in the psychedelic scene anchored by the Grateful Dead.

"Jerry Garcia was starting to learn pedal steel guitar and all of a sudden people were interested in old country-western music and Western swing," Frayne said. "I was teaching at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh and it was 20 below zero, so I thought I'd go out for the summer. If it didn't work, I'd go back to Wisconsin."

Frayne never returned to the classroom and the band endured under an assortment of names (The Commander Cody Band, Commander Cody and his Modern Day Airmen), offering a platform for Frayne to record additional solo projects. "Hot Rod Lincoln" was named a Legendary Michigan Song in 2008

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and the Lost Planet Airmen are members of the Michigan Rock and Roll Legends Hall of Fame.

In 2009 the band released the studio album "Dopers, Drunks and Everyday Losers" on San Francisco's Blind Pig Records and this month followed it with a concert recording, "Live From the Island." On the artistic side, Frayne mixed his road stories and paintings in a 2009 book, "Art, Music and Life."

"It's a lot of fun, that's all there is to it," Frayne said. "I get to make some cash and I get out of the house. I'm happy to still be able to do it, because not everybody peaks in their 20s. I do better all the time."

jcabbott@tribune.com or 407-420-6213

Commander Cody Band

What: With opening act Buster Cousins, in a benefit for Owen Clarke Foundation for autism awareness

When: 8 p.m. Thursday, March 21

Where: McWells Restaurant, 4757 S. Orange Ave., Orlando

Cost: \$15

Call: 407-855-4006

Online: mcwellsrestaurant.com

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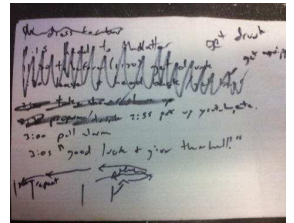
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