

UpstateLIVE Music Guide - Issue 2 NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2008

A Weekend with STEMM by Marisa Connelly



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Joe Cafarella of STEMM makes the best damn omelet I've ever eaten!! Egg whites with onions, red bell peppers, feta cheese, seasonings.... mmmm, deliciousness!! And he served them with waffles, sausage, fresh wheat bread from a local bakery, and good coffee too!

Hey, wait! This isn't a food review, it's a metal show review! So, let's rewind a few days and get to the good stuff. On October 17th, I ventured out to The Voodoo Lounge in Binghamton to check out the popular metal band from Buffalo (actually Niagara Falls), STEMM. They are most widely recognized as the band who wrote the theme/intro music for The Ultimate Fighting Championship. STEMM's music has been showcased during every television broadcast and pay-per-view event since August 2002 and is also heard on Spike TV commercials and UFC spin off shows such as "The Ultimate Fighter". You can also find their song "Face the Pain" on the UFC compilation CD 'UFC Ultimate Beatdowns Volume 1' alongside such bands as Fear Factory, Slayer, and Shadows Fall. So, I of course, was curious to see what all the buzz was about.

I unfortunately arrived late at the show and missed the opening band, so I can't tell you anything about Flood These Cities. Sorry... Are you over it? GOOD! Moving on! The second band to take the stage was Mobday. They are a heavy rock/metalcore band from Endicott, NY that puts on a very high energy stage performance. Although their songs incorporate the some

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predictable breakdowns that metalcore is overrun with, I definitely heard a few surprisingly sick guitar riffs! I was most impressed with their new song (which doesn't have a permanent title yet, they just called it "Train Wreck") for its better drumming and overall better writing. It's obvious that these guys have matured as musicians when you compare "Train Wreck" to some of their older material. My only gripe is that their new singer lacks experience. He's got talent, just not a lot of training with his voice. Overall, the crowd seemed a little quiet but definitely pleased, and the actual music was really good. I would like to see these guys again a few months down the road when their brand spankin' new singer is a little less wet behind the ears! And according to band members Jeordin and Jonny P., they have plans on touring to support their new record coming out in early 2009.

The next band to take the stage was Ruination from upstate NY. The music has a decent groove to it, obviously influenced by Pantera. There is also a very heavy Slipknot influence, but unlike Corey Taylor, their lead singer, Morguts, is disproportionately better at growling metal vocals than actual singing. Morguts also wears a ski mask on stage, yet another Slipknot trait. The songs were simple, straight forward, groove driven and peppered with a some good hooks. They will be performing at The Voodoo Lounge again on November 1st with Burning Human (featuring Jason Bittner of Shadows Fall), LedYard, Elevator Death Squad, ST Dredd, This City Needs a Hero, Satan Lives in my Birdkage, Mobday, A Call for Backup, and Betrayed by Fate.

Headlining the show that night was, of course, the Buffalo metal/hardcore band STEMM. As soon as they took the stage, it was obvious that they are seasoned performers and musicians. The professionalism and unity they display leaves something to be desired of the earlier acts. Besides the massive fury of sick dreads, rocked by both Joe and Steve, their energy and ability to connect with the crowd was impressive. And although they have definite hardcore influences, they show a lot more diversity in their playing than one might expect. It wasn't just one chuggy breakdown after another, and Dan is a talented and creative metal drummer. Their songs are largely riff driven, and Alex, Joe, and their bass player Steve definitely have it on lockdown in that department. The song writing also has a definite emphasis on meaningful lyrics. The best guitar riff I heard that night was during their song "The Memory Remains", which was absolutely one of their heaviest songs of the evening! I believe I was waiting for the lovely bartender, Colleen, when this siick guitar solo emerged from guitarist and lead singer, Joe. The song was actually written about the fallen God of Shredding, Dimebag Darrell Abbott. Delving into a little bit of STEMM's history, they actually had the honor of opening for Damageplan's "final" concert, as the next day, Dimebag Darrell would be murdered on stage. So in Dime's honor, every time STEMM performs "The Memory Remains", they make sure to toast the crowd! I, in turn, did a shot of Blacktooth grinnin' to commemorate the slain metal hero! Anyways, STEMM's new album, 'Blood Scent', featuring the song "Casualty for Prayer" will be available on November 11, 2008 on Catch 22 Records. And when STEMM comes to your town, as they plan on extensive touring in 2009, I definitely recommend going out to see them, and drinking a shot for Dime while you're there!

And now I can get back to the end, which is where I started. Joe makes the best damn omelet I've ever had in my life! You see, after the show I was talking to the guys from STEMM, getting info for this very article right here! We ended up hanging out until pretty late into the night, which commenced with a few good wrestling matches (I kicked Steve's ass!) and us singing 80's songs loudly and very, very poorly. I have a good portion of that recorded, if anyone's interested. (hehe!) Anyways, before parting ways with them, I was invited to come to their show in Ithaca the following evening. Since I rarely miss an opportunity to go to a metal show, I wound up in Ithaca the next night. Of course, STEMM put on another solid performance! I was then informed that they would be hosting a premiere of their new DVD for all of their streetteamers the following day. Well, I decided to go all the way out to Niagara Falls with them! Joe and his girlfriend Ruth Ann were kind enough to let me crash at their place. It was just a short drive from STEMM'S studio to Joe's house, in a peaceful and quiet neighborhood. Upon arriving at there, I noticed a small picture of Leatherface taped directly above the front doorknob, and knew I was staying with cool ass people! Once inside, I was greeted by two cats, who immediately figured out that I had no food for them, so they promptly had nothing to do with me. Nick, aka Thorr, (STEMM'S tech and bringer of thunder) hung out with me until I fell asleep, promising to return for me the next day so we could get some food together.

The following morning, I woke up feeling like a can of smashed assholes! I must not have eaten enough the day before, because my head was hurting! I didn't even move off the couch until Joe came downstairs and started the coffeemaker. Ahhhhh, sweet surrender to coffee bliss! Ruth Ann came downstairs shortly after, and I had a really good morning just sitting around, drinking coffee, sharing stories about shows and bands and whatever else came to mind. It's rare to find a cool metal chick who's smart, hilarious, and really down to earth, and Ruth is all three of those. There just aren't enough kick-ass females in the world today, and spending time with her was refreshing. So while all this chatter is going on, Joe is getting busy making some serious breakfast food! This is the last time I'm going to say this, Joe makes the best damn omelet I've ever eaten! Randy Blythe and his BBQing can shove it! I was seriously spoiled with hospitality during my stay in Niagara Falls! Not only were Joe and Ruth a blast to hang with, Nick returned for me and we chilled for the rest of the day. Later on, he took me to the Pearl Street Restaurant and Brewery in Buffalo where I had seriously Loaded Fries and decent Italian Wedding Soup. The building is huge, and brick, and was a real brewery back in the day. A lot of the decor is still very rustic, and I was impressed by the belt-driven ceiling fans! Hell, I was impressed by serious piece of machinery that I found in the ladies room! They have a new-fangled mother-of-all-hand dryers! Made by none other than the folks at Dyson! If you haven't encountered one of these yet, whoa! You don't know what you're missing! Anyways, after eating, we returned to STEMM's studio to find it filled with friends, family and streetteamers. The activity quieted down as soon as Steve prepared to unleash the new DVD on everyone in attendance. I can't say much about it, as it was a private screening, but it was thoroughly entertaining from beginning to end. There were plenty of live performances, and lots of hilarious road footage as well. You're just going to have to wait until it debuts publicly, but it is a must see

for any true STEMM fan!

And alas, the time had finally come for me to return home! What started off as just a simple assignment, a simple show review, had turned into so much more. I spent most of my weekend with these people, met some of their friends and family members. I was invited into their homes and their lives but for what? A story? I got that at the show. Truly, what I ultimately gained from this experience is friends. I met amazing people and had an awesome time in Niagara Falls. Bands come and go, shows always come and go, but friendships tend to be a bit more lasting.

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