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Michael Stanley's annual trek to Tangier begins this weekend, alongside release of new album, 'The Ride'

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Not that materialism matters, but being able to say that something BELONGS to you and you alone has always resonated with people. Something about being able to say "MY house," "MY car," "MY beer" just makes us feel good.

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That may be why Northeast Ohio so resolutely lays claim to Michael Stanley. The heartland rocker and veteran afternoon drive jock on WNCX FM/98.5 BELONGS to the people of Cleveland, and has since the days of record sellouts at the old Richfield Coliseum, Blossom Music Center, the Agora and, most recently, Tangier. He carries on what's now a 20-year tradition with the first of two weeks of Friday and Saturday night gigs at Akron's Tangier with his band, the Resonators, at 9 tonight.

And that sense of ownership is why a lot of hearts have gone out to Stanley, whose wife, Denise Skinner, died in September 2011. Her death from cancer came on the heels of the deaths of his parents, his stepfather, his ex-wife, Mary McCrone, and two members of his road crew in 2010.

"I'm still here," said Stanley. "That's the big thing. The last couple of years have been pretty brutal. But a lot of people have had bad times. You just survive and advance."



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 (http://media.cleveland.com/popmusic_impact/photo/michael-stanley-joe-kleon.jpg-dcf0a52b1415e5d7.jpg)

Native son Michael Stanley knows he belongs to Cleveland because he hears it from his fans. "Ninety-nine percent of the time, everyone is great," he said. "Usually they want to share a thing, something at Coliseum, or Blossom or Front Row or the Agora. That was their growing up, and it was our growing up as well."

Joe Kleon

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Michael Stanley and the Resonators

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Music Features

One way to do that is with another new album, his lucky 13th, called "The Ride." Perhaps like a cleansing breath, it's nothing like the usual fare from Stanley, even if it does feature his distinctive, almost-Mellencamp voice. Stanley said he purposely took a different road with this CD.

"The Hang,' the last album, which I'm very proud of, was a dark album, but hopefully it ended up hopeful," he said. "I wanted to do something a lot lighter, something not as emotional and more fun."

That he's done. The 14 cuts on "The Ride" feature 12 originals and two covers. One came as a complete surprise -- and honestly may be better than the original, which happens to have been done by a band in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

"I'm not a *closet* Bee Gees fan," Stanley said. "I'm a *Bee Gees* fan!" Admittedly, while the Gibb brothers' disco era was profitable, Stanley said it would be a mistake to judge them by that.

"They wrote tremendous songs before that," he said, "and as a songwriter, I totally admire them."

Thus, "To Love Somebody" makes an appearance on "The Ride." Taking nothing away from the dozen Stanley-penned songs, it may be the best on the CD. It's not delivered with the warbling tenors and harmonies of Barry, Maurice and Robin Gibb; instead, Stanley does it almost in a raspy R&B flavor, which gives it a dimension which in many ways lifts it above the original.

The other cover is "A Fool in Love," by Scotland's Frankie Miller Band.

"I'm a huge Frankie Miller fan," Stanley said. "Most people aren't aware of [him] in the United States. This isn't his best song by any means, but it's a record I always enjoyed. I always said when the format was right, I'm gonna cover that tune."

Like the Bee Gees song, it's not a note-for-note copy of the original. There's a bluesy interpretation to it that adds to the appeal, and there's a bit of a country feel as well.

Country? Michael Stanley? The guy who is the epitome of classic rock in Cleveland?

Well, yeah.

"A lot of my stuff has gone that way and lent itself to that interpretation," the 65-year-old Stanley acknowledged, and tossed off a joke: "I'm just sorry that Nashville hasn't caught onto it yet so I can retire."

Like Cleveland would let *that* happen.

What: Cleveland's favorite son and his band, the Resonators, return to Akron's Tangier for the 20th year.

When: 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 9 p.m. Friday, April 19, and Saturday, April 20.

Where: Tangier, 532 W. Market St., Akron.

Tickets: Sold out.



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Taylor Swift, Justin Bieber, Bon Jovi among top stars headed our way this year

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There are plenty of A-Listers headed through Northeast Ohio in the next 12 months to keep any music lover happy. Taylor, Swift, Justin Bieber, Bon Jovi, Keith Urban and more. **Full story »**

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