

The Legal Matters



***If you have a fondness for melody, harmony and catchy pop songs,
The Legal Matters are singing your songs.***

The Legal Matters

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Artist Biography by Mark Deming

The **Legal Matters** isn't just a band, it's a meeting of the minds of three notable figures on the Midwest power pop scene –

- **Keith Klingensmith** was a member of **Hippodrome** and **the Phenomenal Cats** and runs the indie pop label Futureman Records,
- **Andy Reed** was the leader of the group **An American Underdog**, and
- **Chris Richards** was Klingensmith's bandmate in **Hippodrome** and **the Phenomenal Cats** as well as leading **Chris Richards & the Subtractions**.

The **Legal Matters** first came together in early 2013, when Richards & the Subtractions cut an EP of covers titled That Covers That 2: Electric Boogaloo.

Reed took part in the That Covers That sessions, and when Klingensmith and Richards began blocking out plans for a new Phenomenal Cats record, they invited Reed to join them in the studio. The three songwriters began exchanging demos, and since they all lived in different cities in Michigan, most of the collaborating and pre-production was done by phone or over the Web.

By the time Klingensmith, Reed, and Richards gathered at Reed's studio, Reed Recording Company, the three realized that with Reed's extensive input this was a different animal than the Phenomenal Cats, and with that in mind, the new trio adopted a new name, the Legal Matters, based on their shared love of the Who.

With help from their friends and fellow musicians Cody Marecek and Nick Piunti, the Legal Matters recorded their debut album in just six days during the coldest and snowiest winter in Michigan's history; the self-titled album was released by Klingensmith's Futureman label in June 2014.

Check out their website: TheLegalMattersBand.com

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Music Review Samples

[All Music Guide](#) (4 out of 5 stars)

The Legal Matters are a Michigan power pop supergroup, featuring Chris Richards of Chris Richards & the Subtractions, Keith Klingensmith of the Phenomenal Cats, and Andy Reed of An American Underdog, but if you think that tells you everything you need to know about the band, you could be wrong.

The Legal Matters' self-titled debut album is a tuneful delight with great melodies, hooks, and vocal harmonies, but it's a more contemplative and low-key set than one might imagine; tunes like "We Were Enemies" and "Mary Anne" recall the pensive Chris Bell tracks on Big Star's #1 Record, the gorgeous tune faced against a dour lyric of "Have You Changed Your Mind?" nearly matches the bummed-out beauty of the Pernice Brothers, and "The Legend of Walter Wright" tells the tale of a sweet loser who wouldn't be out of place in a Village Green Preservation Society-era Kinks tune.

There are plenty of tunes here that could be hit singles in a just world, especially the sunny opening track "Rite of Spring" and the playful, mildly cocky "Before We Get It Right," and the Legal Matters' three principals work beautifully together, bringing out the best in one another's abilities as songwriters, vocalists, and instrumentalists.

But if you're expecting cookie-cutter high-energy power pop, the Legal Matters have instead delivered something a bit more sophisticated and ambitious, and rather than each member simply tossing a few tunes into the pot, this album sounds like a collaboration that's creating something more than the sum of the parts. Pop fans who want a record that will please their ears but also spark their imaginations will find all manner of pleasant surprises in The Legal Matters.

Power Popaholic (9 out of 10)

The Legal Matters have a pretty impressive pedigree. Consisting of **Chris Richards** (of Chris Richards and the Subtractions), **Andy Reed** (An American Underdog) and **Keith Klingensmith** (The Phenomenal Cats), they have made an album that easily makes my top-ten year end list.

Starting with "Rites of Spring" it shimmers with perfect vocal harmonies and smooth melody similar to The Wondermints. It is the kind of song that guitars were invented for, and will be going around your head for hours after you hear it. There is a subtle soft rock undercurrent to many of the tunes that may put off rockers who prefer a harder edge, but it actually works great here. It doesn't let up with "Stubborn," another great song with perfect riffs, and touches all around. "Have You Changed Your Mind" is a softer, mid-tempo track, fans of The Eagles and The Agony Aunts will appreciate.

The hits keep coming, "The Legend Of Walter Wright" is a supremely hummable tune with a sweet balance of harmonies and guitar crunchiness. Even when the band gets stylistically mellow for "So Long Sunny Days" it plays like a lost Beach Boys/Poco track. And just in time for summer, it grabs you and doesn't let go.

Pop That Goes Crunch!

The Legal Matters Deliver Perfect Harmony...

Some albums grab you immediately and refuse to let go. You wake up, and one of its songs is in your mind. You're at work, and another one is seemingly in your ear. You're making dinner, and yet another one is bouncing around relentlessly in your head. And so on, and so on and so on.

The self-titled debut by **The Legal Matters** is one of those records. **The Legal Matters** is a "rockin' pop project containing equal parts **Chris Richards**, **Andy Reed** and **Keith Klingensmith**," each of whom has been discussed many times previously on these pages. Given that life's too short to write about bad music (or even mediocre music, for that matter), it is hardly surprising that I would at least "like" this "rocking' pop" effort. That, however, is quite an understatement. The whole of this combination is greater than the sum of its three "equal parts." *The Legal Matters* is the best long-player I have heard so far this year. It is hard to imagine anything coming out in the second-half of the year to eclipse it.

The opening track, "Rite Of Spring," sets the tone for the album in its first few seconds. A simple keyboard riff over strummed guitars bathes the revelry about the perfect girl in undeniable warmth and sweetness. You can feel the sunshine on your skin by the time the million-dollar three-part harmonies kick in at about the one-minute mark:

Gorgeous harmonies are all over this record. Richards, **Reed** and **Klingensmith** are superb singers on their own. This record makes the case, though, that they should be singing together until they can sing no more. Check out, in particular, how the harmonies sung during the chorus add a sense of hope to the longing that otherwise characterizes "Have You Changed Your Mind?"

Indeed, several songs on the album adroitly play the bitter against the sweet. "So Long Sunny Days" hides its own sense of longing and melancholy in three-minutes of absolutely perfect melodies. "Mary Anne" is probably the prettiest song about a life full of regret that you will hear this year.

None of this means that the **Legal Matters** can't "rock" when they want. But they do it without trying to beat you over the head. "The Legend Of Walter Wright" — a man who was "remarkably clean and mildly polite" — may be the best song in the collection. It will have you reflexively increasing the volume on the car stereo whenever it comes on as you drive around town: Delivering "only" ten songs over thirty-five minutes, *The Legal Matters* recalls a time when the space limitations of vinyl meant that truly great artists only waxed their best ideas. There is no fluff here, and not a moment of time is wasted from start to finish.

So, run, don't walk, to wherever you go to buy the finest music, and get *The Legal Matters* as soon as you can.

Discussions Magazine (Stephen Schnee)

Ever since I was a little kid in the mid '60s, I've been a fan of melodic guitar pop. How could I not be? I was raised on **The Beatles**, **The Monkees**, **Glen Campbell** and **Neil Diamond**. I discovered Punk, New Wave and Power Pop in '77 and I have spent the rest of my days searching for music that hits me in the head and heart and makes me literally say 'Holy shit!' whenever I hear a chord change or vocal melody that kicks me in the gut. It has happened many times, although a lot less frequently over the last 20 years. It's not because I haven't searched for great music because I have. I'm always looking for something that moves me, whether it is a brand new release or a reissue of something I have never heard before. I can get goosebumps hearing some rare Power Pop single from '79 or an obscure Doo Wop song from '58... My musical tastes are vast yet my real passion is rooted in the three minute melodic Pop gems that have given me so much happiness over the years....

There have been some bands that I've loved over the last 20 years - including **Splitsville**, **Cherry Twister**, **Holiday** and perhaps a dozen more - so my passion for the music hasn't dwindled. In fact, my search for great pop has intensified over the years. But the feeling of satisfaction just hasn't been as rewarding.

But then I heard **THE LEGAL MATTERS**...

Formed by **Keith Klingensmith** and **Chris Richards** (both of **The Phenomenal Cats** while Chris has also recorded as **Chris Richards & The Subtractions**) plus **Andy Reed**, The Legal Matters' debut album is filled with everything I have always loved about Pop: great melodic hooks, glorious harmonies, spine-tingling chord changes, more than one lead vocalist, a complete lack of pretentiousness and a total love of creating pop music. These gentlemen have been creating music in their other projects for years, so the fact that this sounds as fresh and exciting as it does is a testament to their talents.

Album opener "Rite Of Spring" is a stunner with those wonderful harmonies and lovely chord changes. Did I mention the fantabulous harmonies? Apart from Shoes, who else bothers with great harmonies like this these days? On first listen of the song, I was thinking that every band always puts their strongest song up front to lure you in and they never follow it up with anything quite as good. Well, that's not the case here because the album is filled with great tunes that are now going to be part of my Pop reference points - "Have You Changed Your Mind?" is beautiful, a real stunning slice of pop glory; "The Legend Of Walter Wright" features the sorely-missed 'oo-la-las' that should be featured at least once on every Power Pop album; "It's Not What I Say" doesn't sound like The Beatles, but it wouldn't be out of place on **Rubber Soul** (if that makes sense); the goose-bump inducing "Before We Get It Right" could be a lost **Jellyfish** single; "So Long Sunny Days" is dreamy Summer pop that could be the soundtrack to a romantic sunset; "Mary Anne" is a lovely piano-led ballad with some stunning harmonies and a heart-breaking melody; the powerful "We Were Enemies" closes the album in grand fashion (and reminds me of **The Rollers** "Hello And Welcome Home" for some reason).

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The band's only misstep on the album is the fact that it ends... but that can easily be rectified by hitting the repeat button!

The Legal Matters is an album that renews my faith in modern guitar pop and has re-awakened my desire to track down every worthwhile Power Pop album that I may have missed over the last 20 years. But will they be as good as this? I seriously doubt it.

*I feel like going to visit each of my friends and playing them this album.
Its too damn great not to share.*

Pure Pop Radio - Alan Haber

When master musical magicians Andy Reed, Chris Richards and Keith Klingensmith settled comfortably in the Reed Recording Company's studio in Bay City, Michigan, they connected like old hands of the art do and crafted 10 songs that sparkled before them—songs that would ultimately sparkle before listeners all around the world.

Supported by ace drummer Cody Marecek and guitarist extraordinaire Nick Piunti, who not long ago released his own melodic pop long player to great acclaim, the trio of friends picked up their guitars and applied a little lucky grease to the act of creating classic, harmony-rich tunes that will last a lifetime.

And so they have released their work, the kind of gift from above that comes along only when the time is right, and the time—this time— is most assuredly right. We have plucked the lot of these hall-of-fame-worthy songs for the Pure Pop Radio playlist, all of which are now spinning in rotation.

The songs? Listen for “Rite of Spring,” which could and should function as this group’s calling card: just listen to the harmonies that grace this wonderful, Teenage Fanclub kind of side; “It’s Not What I Say,” “Before We Get It Right,” “Outer Space,” “We Were Enemies,” “Stubborn,” “Have You Changed Your Mind?,” “The Legend of Walter Wright,” “Mary Anne,” and “So Long Sunny Days.”

Dig them all like the treasures they are.

Power Of Pop

*Consisting of Chris Richards, Andy Reed and Keith Klingensmith, **The Legal Matters**, a powerpop supergroup of sorts combine their distinctive talents, experience and songwriting chops to produce an eponymous debut album that lives up to the bands & artists that served as inspirations. It isn't difficult to detect the primary influences of The Beatles, Beach Boys, Big Star and The Byrds (the usual suspects) over the 10 songs presented here but what is remarkable is the quality of the music that is greater than the individual parts.*

To distill it further, one can savour the authentic 60s pop flavour in songs like “The Legend of Walter Wright” “It’s Not What I Say” and “Rite of Spring” that bring vocal harmonies to the fore coupled with melodic fervour and knowing references to 1st generation powerpop outfits like Badfinger and The Raspberries. However, like Big Star, there are also enough nods to other pop-rock sub-genres to keep things on an even keel. The country-folk touches of “Have You Changed Your Mind”, the chamber pop sensibility of “Mary Anne” and the dreamy Byrdsian pop-scapes of “Outer Space” fill up the gaps nicely and complete the picture somewhat.

It’s refreshing to listen to music that hearkens back faithfully to the 60s/70s without sounding derivative or dated, imbued with enough distinct personality to make it relevant for 2014. Highly recommended.

Pop Geek Heaven - 4 and 1/2 stars out of 5 (Michael Baron)

THE LEGAL MATTERS (Futureman Records) Detroit power pop trio consisting of Andy Reed, Chris Richards and Keith Klingensmith have produced a chiming, multi-part harmony celebration of the Everly Brothers, C,S&N, Hollies, Byrds and Beach Boys blended into a sing-along series of seriously sweet songs beginning with the "Rite of Spring," whose close-coupled A/B harmonies recall the dB's. The acapella passage puts the emphasis on the honeyed voices. You can almost hear the Hollies singing "Stubborn" or the Everly Brothers singing "Have You Changed Your Mind." "Mary Anne" is something Brian Wilson might have written ca. Pet Sounds while "So Long Sunny Days" is a languid surf and sun drenched slice of canyon rock with liquid guitar. There's a hint of Jeff Buckley in the gorgeous "Outer Space," but it's all gorgeous.

Detroit Metro Times - City Slang (Brett Callwood)

Legal Matters is a local power-pop trio, and its self-titled debut album from Futureman Records was recorded over six days in band member Andy Reed's studio. The influences are immediately apparent, from the '60s pop of the Beatles, the Monkees, etc, to the harder power-pop of Big Star and Cheap Trick. The hooks are huge and the harmonies and sweet. Great songs well played by excellent musicians.

Jordan Oakes

The Legal Matters raises the bar for the contemporary definition of power-pop. The first thing you notice are the harmonies -- seamless, lightly sweet and with the airy delight of musical marshmallows. Next you feel the gentle power of the melodies as they tap into the sweet spot in your consciousness. It's a style that evokes the Byrds, Shoes, and Windbreakers; but in a way that remembers the past while putting power pop's evolution toward the service of intelligent design. As in all the best examples of the form, it's an elusive magic you just can't put your finger on. Thankfully, Legal Matters has its own fingers on all the right chords. This is what gives this special band's music its ruling appeal.

JAM Records

THE LEGAL MATTERS are a power pop super group consisting of the great talents of CHRIS RICHARDS, ANDY REED, and KEITH KLINGENSMITH. The sound is decidedly classic power pop with strains of Beatles, Byrds, Tom Petty, Matthew Sweet, and Teenage Fanclub. What makes this an OUTSTANDING cd is the GREAT production and excellent song writing. These seasoned pop veterans know exactly how to make a lovely tune and deliver the goods here in full. The other thing worth mentioning are the superb layers of wonderful harmony vocals throughout the disc. THE LEGAL MATTERS is a grade A release and one of the best of the year! Don't miss out on this!

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