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nightlife: Buckle up for 'Bee-Eater music'

Silandara Bartlett

It's not all rock and roll and spitting beer onstage.

Deciding to live the musical life takes commitment and conviction. That's something local band Bee-Eater has aplenty.

"As individuals, and as a band, committing yourself that this is what you're going to do" is the hardest part, says lead singer Meghan Taylor. For her, that means forgoing a mainstream life and 401(k) plan — but the benefits are worth it. "I'd rather wait tables and bartend just for those brief glimpses — I feel so incredible when I'm on stage."

Fronted by Taylor, 32, Bee-Eater plays original, loud, fun, fast, quality rock and roll. They like to describe it as "Bee-Eater music" — more accessible than punk, melodic and a little bit poppy with some screaming.

"Because of our divergent influences, we kind of defy description," says bass player Sid Baker, 36. He and drummer Todd Groemminger cite The Who as a major musical influence. Groemminger previously played in metal and hard-core bands — including Rochester's Uncle Sam — and Baker's background includes six years of rockabilly with the Frantic Flattops.

Taylor, formerly of White Cotton Panties, grew up as a John Denver-loving folkie, mixing in some New Wave in the form of Motels and Missing Persons.

"Take the punk and the metal and throw in a little girly New Wave, and they take our songs somewhere you think they wouldn't go," she says.

With a background in modern dance, it makes sense that Taylor likes life in the spotlight. And performing with Bee-Eater suits her better than dancing with some New York City company. "There was something about dance that wasn't quite rock enough," she says.

The rock version suits fans just fine. "Girls like her because she's not a bimbo and the guys like her because she's hot," says Groemminger, 39, known within the band as Grimey. "You can't not have fun in this band because Meghan's such a ball of energy."

A 3-year-old band — the official birthday is Oct. 31 — Bee-Eater's members have formed a tight-knit group. Their recent addition, guitarist Brian Dudley, 34, is already part of the family. "Fundamentally, what's important, aside from the band, is that we're a unit," says Baker. "Whether playing a show or hanging out drinking — there's something that transcends the whole band thing."

"Bee-Eater is a fantastic rock band," says fan Jason Nealon, 29, of Fairport. "I actually went down to see them play in New York City this past spring. Meghan's always good for a good show."

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Nealon's been a fan almost since the beginning. But even those who've seen the band only a few times have good things to say.



"I like them — they're energetic, they're fun to watch. They get the crowd interacting with them and have a very good stage presence," says Renee Diedrick, 23, of Pittsford.

On stage, they're known for having fun. And making a mess. While Taylor has a penchant for spitting beer at her band mates in an effort to make them smile, Groemminger's known for his love of silly string — at one show he set a record emptying six cans of the stuff, mostly over Taylor's head.

They look good, too — always dressed up, sometimes in full suits, or at least leather pants or a kilt. No T-shirts, no jeans. It looks like you can't be bothered "if you're up there wearing jeans, staring at your shoes," says the kilt-wearing Baker.

Frenetic onstage, Bee-Eater is also energetic about its future. "All of us are of the mindset that whatever we're doing now, we would drop in an instant and hop on a tour bus," Taylor says. The others agree.

"They're really passionate about what they do," says Rob Filardo, musical act booker for the Bug Jar — a popular Bee-Eater venue. "They believe in themselves — even when no one else does."

They're a band you want to root for, a likeable lot, garnering fans that stick around for their personalities as well as their music.

"I think they're an absolutely great band. They put on a great stage show and they're a great bunch of people, too," says Paul Keppeler, 34, of Webster. Keppeler, dubbed "Super Fan" by the band, describes their sound as a cross between Black Sabbath meets the Ramones and Joan Jett.

Others are similarly taken.

"I like the coolness of the bass player — he stands still — the wildness of the pink-haired singer and the attack of the drum player," says Joey Pitts, 27, of Rochester. "Their songs are catchy and danceable and they stay in my head days after I see them."



For more information:

www.BeeEaterBand.com



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