

LEGENDS START AT FUNKY FROG

BY JAMES ROBERTSON

THE LIFE OF A LOCAL MUSICIAN can be a tough one. Booking gigs can be a challenge. Spreading their name and material can often seem like an impossible task. The Funky Frog Studio, an Athens based music production company, is showing artists that the task is not impossible and is helping them rise to the challenges before them.

In June of 2010 Kim and Mikeal Wittig's dream began to take shape. They converted the old Lakeview Lodge into Eddy's Bar in Athens, and teaming up with Dr. Jim Ogburn, they constructed the 'Stage of Dreams.' The Barnyard Bandit, as they call Ogburn, bought what was then the best stage lighting for hundreds of miles.

Shortly after the stage was up and running Kim's son became in need of a new kidney. They ended their immediate involvement with the project so she could rest and go through six months of tests and evaluations before giving her son a second lease on life. After resting from the surgery she was ready to get back to the mission at hand.

Kim poured her heart and soul into the Funky Frog. On the back side of the front door is a painting of a tree. As a means of calming her nerves before the kidney surgery the tree has taken on a second

meaning. It stands as a symbol of new life, new creation, and new music. Even in its short life span the studio is keeper to hundreds of stories.

On a cool night in September, I sat inside the Funky Frog and looked around the room. As a musician and a writer myself I felt compelled to start writing about the place. The environment and vibe pulled me in and set the mood for creativity to flow. As I sat there typing out notes on my phone a band by the name of Audio Basic shuffled into the room and took a seat on the big comfortable couch in front of me. After introductions, they proceeded to blow my mind with some of the best talent I've ever experienced.

Around the room hung paintings of musical legends such as Stevie Ray Vaughn, Jimi Hendrix, and John Lennon, and while none of these musicians have played at the Funky Frog (obviously) legends such as Wes Jeans have graced the place.

Wes entered an international Jimi Hendrix competition in 1996. He placed second out of fifteen hundred other young guitar players. Al Hendrix, Jimi's father said of the young Jeans, "You won because you played straight from the heart like Jimi."

Throughout his career Wes Jeans has shared the stage with names such as BB King, Buddy Guy, Jimmie Vaughn, David Lee Roth, Lynryd Skynyrd, Lance Lopez and Kenny Wayne Shepherd.

Another legend in his own right is helping shape the future of local music in Athens. Derek Taylor, owner of Milo Studios based in Dallas, is doing mixing for the artists coming through the Funky Frog. Taylor has worked with bands such as Bush and Blue October, just to name a few.

“I’m always excited to hear the newest tunes coming out of Funky Frog” said Taylor. “The music is always unique and inventive.”

That was clear on this particular evening in the studio with AudioBasic. Covering songs from John Mayer, Sublime, and Jim Croce, along with original material mixed into the recipe, it became apparent quickly their sound is not limited or narrow. Kim Wittig never left the room, nor did a smile ever leave her face. It became apparent as well that the studio

have a vision to expand the size of the studio in the near future. The scenery is constantly changing as well, creating an oasis for song writing and musical creativity. Local painters and landscapers have been commissioned to paint murals and add to the beauty of the ranch.

There is a movement taking place in Athens to change the face of local music. Local creativity is a vital part of any community. Cities like Ben Wheeler and Marshall realize this and the time is now for our communities to support local art as well. Friedrich Nietzsche said, “Without music, life would be a mistake.” Kim Wittig agrees. Musicians, painters, writers, and every other form of local artists need our support. The Funky Frog is leading the way toward a more artistic tomorrow.

Anyone interested in recording at the Funk Frog should contact sound engineer Tyler Bachor at 903-804-2798.



owner was proud of these young musicians who were laying down just a piece of the roadway that is leading them into the future.

As with any living thing the Frog is evolving and out growing the space it needs to continue flourishing. What started as a stage made of wooden pallets is now a one stop destination for local artists looking for help to spread their wings. The Wittig’s

