



A new Tom Petty in town

Twin Cities-based Free Fallin brings the music of Tom Petty south of the river with a March 22 performance in Savage
Posted: 3/14/08

by **Brooke Walsh**
Thisweek Newspapers

Musician Mark Larsen, who has played in many cover bands over the years, says the most difficult thing most bands face is deciding on what songs to play.

Free Fallin solved that problem quickly when its lead singer, Brian Evans, was approached by someone last year.

“A guy came up to him and said , ‘Guy, you know you look a lot like Tom Petty,’ ” Larsen said.

Inspired – and in agreement – Larsen went online and purchased all the Tom Petty music he could find, and the two, along with keyboardist Dale Peterson, guitarist Carl Swartz, bass player Russ Lund and keyboarding back-up singer R. T. Moore formed their Tom Petty cover band.

While Evans’ looks may have inspired the band to cover Tom Petty, it’s the music that’s kept it playing.

“From a musician’s stand point, you hear it on the radio and you listen to it. It seems like it’s rather simple, pop-y stuff, but when you start working on it and breaking down the chord patterns, it’s deep material,” Larsen said.

“It’s a lot of fun for us to play.”

Larsen said the band has gone to great lengths to try to mimic Petty’s sound and performances. Everything from the way they use their instruments to Evans’ \$100 top hats have been carefully chosen.

“I used to call these things ‘stupid cover bands,’ but this is not a stupid cover band,” Evans said.

“The people I’m with are pros.”

Evans performs as Petty in his 30s, utilizing his similar-sounding voice to sing some of the songs Petty himself doesn’t belt out live anymore.

“He doesn’t do certain songs anymore because his voice has, maybe, matured. I find the earlier stuff is in the higher register,” said Evans, who wasn’t a big Petty fan until he started studying the music six months ago.

Now he said he’s enjoying it.

“I think it’s great to choose an artist that has a career for 30 years. That’s worth a lot in this industry with disposable heros,” Evans said.

Both Larsen and Evans also said the variety of sounds in Petty’s long career has appealed to a wide range of age groups. This caught Larsen’s attention when he went to see Petty a year ago.

“Looking around the room there were just as many 16-year-olds there as there were 60-year-olds,” he said.

“That really amazed me, that Tom Petty has got the interest of such a young market.”

Evans agreed, saying, “It’s (the) cross generational appeal of the Petty-miester’s music that I like.”

For Evans, playing in the band is about more than the music. He said the band’s success has helped him with other artistic pursuits.

“One part of every week I get paid for something that I absolutely love to do. For that I am grateful,” he said. “It’s not work when I’m enjoying it. I look forward to a long career with this band.”

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