

FRIDAY-SATURDAY

Island tunes

Go island style when the **Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar Festival** comes to the Washington Center for Performing Arts, 512 Washington St., SE, Olympia. Featured in this year's show is two-time Grammy Award nominee LT Smooth, plus Stephen Inglis, Danny Carvalho, Chris Lau, Keale, and Taimane. (Three-time Grammy Award-winner Dennis Kamakahi was scheduled to perform but was recently diagnosed with lung cancer and will not appear.) Dubbed one of 50 events to attend by Acoustic Guitar Magazine, the concert begins at 7 p.m. Friday. Tickets are \$27 for adults, \$22 for seniors and \$15 for students plus a \$3-per-ticket service fee. Call 360-753-8585 or go to washingtoncenter.org for tickets.

And if you didn't get enough Hawaiian music Friday, then head to Capitol Theater, 206 Fifth Ave. SE, on Saturday for an evening of music with **Keola Beamer and Moanalani Beamer**. The 8 p.m. show costs \$25 general admission and \$20 for Olympia Film Society members. Learn more at olympiafilmsociety.org.

Stephen Inglis >>>>

>> YOUR GUIDE TO FUN
IN THE SOUTH SOUND

PLANNER

THURSDAY

Swing, swing, swing

A fully staged tribute to Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman and all the big band greats of the 1940s, **In the Mood** pays homage with period costumes and choreography that swings with the rhythm and the jazzy, brassy, sentimental music. Enjoy the 7 p.m. show Thursday at the Washington Center for Performing Arts, 512 Washington St. SE, Olympia. Get your tickets - \$32-\$52 plus a \$3-per-ticket service fee - by phone or online; 253-753-8586, washingtoncenter.org.

SATURDAY

Get funky

Olympia funk/jazz/fusion band **The Brown Edition** is teaming up with the South Sound's young stars **DBST** for a night of dancing starting at 9 p.m. Saturday. The show kicks off the opening of Rhythm & Rye at 311 Capitol Way N., Olympia, formerly The Royal Lounge. Tickets are \$5 at the door.

SATURDAY

Young voices

With more than 130 young singers in five choirs, the **Olympia Youth Chorus** will perform its World Tour 2014 at 7 p.m. Saturday at the Washington Center for the Performing Arts, 512 Washington St. SE, Olympia. The concert includes music from Africa, Australia, Germany, India, Korea, and Ireland and it will feature Samba Olywa dancers as guest performers. Tickets are \$14-\$17 for adults, \$10-\$15 for seniors, \$10-\$15 for students and \$5-\$7 for youth 12 and younger, plus a \$3-per-ticket service fee. Call 253-753-8586 or go to washingtoncenter.org.

FRIDAY-MARCH 29

Southern melodrama

Harlequin Productions' "**Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**" is Tennessee Williams' classic tale of a family dynasty. It continues this weekend at the State Theater, 202 Fourth Ave. E. Showtimes are 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays. Tickets are \$31 for adults, \$28 for military and seniors, \$20 for students and those younger than 25. Discounted rush tickets are available a half-hour prior to curtain. For more information, call 360-786-0151.

BAND'S LAST BITE

The Piranha Brothers will cap their lengthy Irish Rose Saloon tenure with a send-off show

By John Berger
jberger@staradvertiser.com

It isn't as if he doesn't have enough to do. Michael Piranha, veteran partner in the Piranha Brothers, whose namesake band has long graced stages in Waikiki, is transitioning the Piranha Brothers into a new era, getting married and writing his own account of being a member of "the most employed band in the history of Waikiki clubs."

On Wednesday, the Piranha Brothers take the stage at Irish Rose Saloon for a last hurrah as rock 'n' roll regulars at the bar, one of several Irish pubs operated by Bill Comerford and Fred Remington in Honolulu.

To mark the occasion, Piranha penned his own appreciation of the owners (see sidebar) and took time to respond to a few questions about the experience of watching Waikiki change through the decades.

Here's our Q&A:

TGIF: What are the biggest changes — for better or worse — you've seen in the local entertainment scene in the decades you've been playing clubs here?

MP: Venues and sound systems have, for the most part, gotten more high-end and attractive to both patron and performer since way back when. On the downside, traditional Hawaiian music has taken a big hit

PIRANHA BROTHERS

Where: Irish Rose Saloon, 478 Ena Road, Waikiki

When: 9 p.m. Wednesday

Cost: Free

Info: 947-3414, irishpubhawaii.com

here since the '80s, for sure. These days, you have to seek that music style out, mostly in corporate hotel venues.

I can tell you what hasn't changed one bit since the '80s, and THAT is gig pay for bands and solo performers. ... Bands are undercutting each other when bidding for gigs, and it's more rampant now than before.

TGIF: Countless clubs that have presented live entertainment in Honolulu have come and gone since the Piranha Brothers debuted here. What is it about the Irish Rose Saloon and its affiliates that kept them going, even through the redevelopment of Lewers Street?

MP: Comerford and Remington are scions of a benevolent drinking society, and they approach their ownership of their four nightclubs with that thematic spirit. There are numerous fun activities at their clubs — Celtic movies, Sons of St. Patrick gatherings, Irish Rose 500 tricycle races, Not-



COURTESY PHOTO

The Piranha Brothers include Michael Piranha, left, and Tom Piranha, right, accompanied by Stephen Inglis, second from left, and Eric Petersen.

So-Special Olympics, the incredible St. Paddy's week celebrations. They exalt in what they do, and people get it.

TGIF: Have YouTube, Facebook and the myriad other social media platforms had any impact — positive or negative — on the Piranha Brothers?

MP: Self-promotion has been greatly helped by social media sites, for sure, and so has networking nationally without the agents

and labels being necessary.

On the negative side, the advent of personal Internet devices has blown the playing field up for live bar shows. It's harder to get and maintain attention from your audience when they are so self-magnified with their smartphone that they are not being in the "now" when they are out and about.

TGIF: What is something that people don't know about the Piranha Brothers

band that they probably should?

MP: Tom Piranha and I aren't brothers. In fact, we aren't even Piranhas — Tom Gierman and Michael McGraw, actually. We have been bandmates and best friends since forming Getcher Kicks in Chicago in 1975.

TGIF: If you were in your teens or early 20s and starting out as professional musicians now, how would you do it?

COMMENTARY

Regular gig at Waikiki pub has been a joy

By Michael Piranha
Special to the Star-Advertiser

I recently began collecting and playing LPs again, as I received a very fine turntable from my sweetheart on this past Valentine's Day. Having left all my record albums in Chicago when I relocated here in 1992, I found myself once again becoming a rabid devotee of the crackle and zzzzzip of the needle on vinyl. Even with an arsenal of CDs and an iPod at my disposal, I am nonetheless drawn inexorably back to the format that beckoned and seduced me into a lifetime, literally, of listening, learning, writing and performing that on which I base my life's calling: sweet, sweet music.

Vinyl just sounds so dang righteous. As does great live music in clubs. Nothing can fill you, the precious listener, with more joy than a fully realized musical experience inside the intimacy and energy of a small venue.

Please see page 9

MP: Maybe I'd sacrifice a goat and wear a Speedo on YouTube or something. I don't really know. It's really hard for young talent nowadays, I think, and I wish them all the luck in the world. Music used to be an art, not a competitive event.

Continued from 8

I saw Muddy Waters at Al-ice's Revisited on Lincoln Avenue in Chicago in 1972. I first saw Cheap Trick perform at Harlow's East India Company in Burbank, Ill., in 1977. Howlin' Wolf, Luther Allison, MC5, Edgar Winter's White Trash, The Buckinghams, Ides of March, John Prine, Steve Goodman, Aerosmith (at a jazz/folk club, no less!) ... the list goes on and on and on. ALL of those acts — blasting out sonic truth, lyrical justice and the American Music Way from a tiny, sometimes poorly lit stage, amidst the clamor of drink orders and bar braggadocio — filled my world with explosions of color and sound and invited me to never leave. I never did.

MY PARTNER Tom Piranha and I began working for Fred Remington and Bill Comerford in September of 1998, two months after they purchased the original Lewers Street Irish Rose Saloon from Jim and Elaine Fessenden. When Fred approached us about the job, we were already a well-established Honolulu rock act and had upward of 25 playing dates each month.

I was initially against the idea of becoming a house band and working multiple nights in a single club, as every musician's fears of a new company going down and closing while all your booking eggs are in one basket had proved itself to be par for the course.

Tom and I revisited the room to listen and watch, and we were both really impressed with the studioliike sound that the warm, low-ceilinged room provided. It was cozy, funky and had a built-in clientele from the Outrigger Reef Towers hotel, where it occupied the ground floor.

Comerford and Remington presented us with an offer in contracting that no other club owner, in Honolulu or Chicago (or Timbuktu, for that matter) had ever offered us — a consistent percentage of the nightly sales of the club during band hours. It was up to us to hold the audience in the club with quality music and performance. That was an incentive unequaled in bar-band biz to this day, and one they still offer in all four of their highly successful nightspots.

We took the gamble, and it paid off for both owners and band. We played anywhere from four to six nights each week at the Irish Rose Saloon on Lewers Street from 1998 until its closing day on Jan. 15, 2005. (My birthday — how weird is that?)

As we were getting an actual share of the profits from every drink sold, we developed what is now a common technique among bands in the Irish Rose/Kelley O'Neil's/O'Toole's/Anna O'Brien's bar family — “bop till you drop” set lengths. It started with the Piranha Brothers playing from 9 p.m. until midnight for a first set at the club, then following a 30-minute break with another 90-minute set. Arduous? Yes. Profitable? Yes, for all involved: owner, player and, most wonderfully, patron.

The gestation period between that closing and the opening of the new Irish Rose Saloon on Ena Road in March 2008 was filled with our two-year run at the now-demolished Bobby G's, where a large number of fine Irish Rose employees, including Denver Dicken, Dr. Bob and the world's greatest bartender, Pat McGrail (now GM of the “new” Irish Rose), marked their time while Comerford and Remington

wrestled with the truculent demands of our Liquor Commission to get up and running.

Now in its sixth year at Ena Road, the Irish Rose still offers the same plums that came with the original menu: affordable drinks, seven nights of rock 'n' roll, and a room full of rapacious conviviality at all times.

We, as a band, were proud to be a part of it. The Piranha Brothers Band has had terrific musicians and performers pass through our organization (and the hallowed doors of the Rose) over the past 16 years. We have jammed on the Rose stage with founding members of The Steve Miller Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Flying Burrito Brothers and a host of others. One of our alumni, showman par excellence Porter Miller, anchors the Irish Rose on Saturdays with his band Elephant. Others have moved on to the mainland, joined other bands or left a business that requires a robust commitment.

THE PIRANHA BROTHERS have been lucky enough to become the most employed band in the history of Honolulu clubs, I believe, due in no small part to our benefactors at the Rose.

Last May, we won the 2013 Na Hoku Hanohano Award for best rock album with our release of “The Blinding Speed of Trust” on Aumakua Records.

We are still alive and well and working upward of 30 dates a month. (Jeez, it never ends!)

Our final gig at the beloved Irish Rose Saloon is Wednesday. As we pass the torch to the bands whose members are in their 20s, we wish them luck — and a hearty set of kidneys, to handle what had better be some long and exciting sets.

We tip our hats to Comerford and Remington and salute their New England pugnaciousness in fighting the powers that be in the struggle to make small business soar to great heights. As Bill Comerford reminded

me in a discussion recently, “All great revolutions started as arguments in bars.”

In a nightlife rife with clubs belching ambient digital musical meanderings and background music, the Irish Rose and her sister clubs

are pure, 180-gram vinyl. Give 'em hell, boys.

Michael Piranha is co-founder and co-leader of the Piranha Brothers Band, with Tom Piranha, Stephen Inglis and Eric Petersen.

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