

6-string nirvana

Shawn Jones and friends shred into town for Music Week

By Chris Jay 06/05/2014



Now in its fourth year, Ventura Music Week has taken some twists and turns since its inception. Initially a city-sponsored event created by Eric Wallner, the event seemed to be on the chopping block after he left his position at City Hall to take a job on the East Coast.

Enter Kat Merrick, who took the reins and kept the event alive. Despite not having financial backing from the city, she and a group of local music lovers managed to pull it off and are back this year for another go. Notable events June 6-15 include Roadshow Revival: A Tribute to the Music of Johnny Cash and the SRO Benefit at the Museum of Ventura County. But one of the more unique live music performances will be the Global Guitar Greats at the W Gallery in the historic Erle Stanley Gardner Building. The event has a lot to live up to based on the grandiosity of its name, but with the players involved, there's a good chance it will do that and more.

The genesis for Global Guitar Greats started appropriately enough at the epicenter of guitar enthusiast culture: the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) trade show where companies, retailers and musicians from all over the world assemble to hawk and gawk at the latest in the industry. To bring attention to their booths and products, many companies have their endorsees make appearances. One such company, Lowden Guitars, brought out three of its endorsees to perform separately at this year's NAMM show, and despite playing in extremely different genres, the trio of guitarists had a lot in common, instantly forming a connection and friendship. They also hatched an idea for a collaboration that has now spiraled into a full-fledged tour: Global Guitar Greats.

Ventura's own Shawn Jones, the blues-meets-Americana local guitar hero who is well known in these parts, is the driving force behind the trio's music week performance. Joining him will be Hawaii's Stephen Inglis, who plays a truly original take on Hawaiian slack guitar, and Thomas Leeb, an Austrian native and current California resident whose unorthodox acoustic guitar style is an original mix of percussive style and finger picking that needs to be believed.

Besides being shredders in their respective genres, the three artists found that they shared something else in common: They are each the definition of a modern touring cult artist. While none is necessarily a household name, they still make their living performing and recording music, which is no easy feat in 2014.

"We realized we were all in an ironically similar place," explains Jones. "We have roughly the same amount of fans. We're all indie. We all have a solid viral campaign online. We're all constantly performing and often overseas. Our careers are really similar. We see this as a chance to cross-pollinate our fan bases."

The show will feature solo sets by each artist followed by a group performance. With all three players being experts in their respective genres, what will happen when they jam together should be nothing short of a religious experience for acoustic guitar heads.

"I'm so excited," says Jones, who just returned from a 23-date tour of Europe. "It's a challenge for me as a player to keep up with these guys. It takes me to another level musically. There's no phoning it in. You'll get to see three guitarists really working and feeding off each other in a pretty rare way. The energy should be tremendous."

If you still need a reason to experience the Global Guitar Greats live, how about the fact this will actually be one of their first live shows? They're embarking on a California tour before heading to Europe this fall. From there the sky's the limit. Depending on the response, there's already talk of making the collaboration a part-time to full-time gig for the three already hard-touring players.



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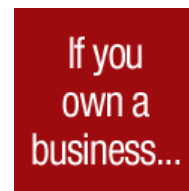
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As for the name, Jones sees how it could come off a little pompous, but he insists that's not the intention.

"We wanted to go with the 3 Gs to make it memorable. We were thinking about Global Guitar Guys, Global Guitar Geeks, but that all sounded a little cheesy, so Greats it was," he laughs. "But, honestly, as a guitar fan, Thomas and Stephen are two players that I truly feel are the definition of great. Not in an egotistical sense 'cause they're both incredibly humble people, but they're great at what they do. If I wasn't part of it and heard about it happening, as a fan of the guitar and live guitar playing, I would not miss it under any circumstances."

Global Guitar Greats, Saturday, June 7, at the W Gallery, corner of California and Main in downtown Ventura. For more information and tickets, visit www.globalguitargreats.com and www.sblentertainment.com. For a complete Ventura Music Week schedule, visit www.venturamusicweek.com.

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