



You know that band's billboard you saw? Here's the whole story

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NEWS POP MUSIC CRITIC

Last week, heading into the city on the 33, I took a momentary break from losing myself in my usual high-volume "steeling myself for the workday" playlist when an image on a billboard caught my eye. A close-up shot of a hand playing a Gibson Les Paul, something about "new Buffalo music," and in huge letters, the imprimatur "The Marley Higgins Band" adorned the Lamar Advertising rental space. I passed it in a flash, and was left with a few after-images – prominent among them, naturally, the word "Marley," which made me think of reggae icon Bob.

I also found it surprising that a local band would be taking out ad space on a billboard, knowing full well that most local artists don't have that kind of cash to spend on promotion, and if they do have it, they probably didn't get it from gig-pay.

As it turns out, Marley Higgins is no more a specific individual person than is Jethro Tull or Pink Floyd. Marley Higgins is in fact a rootsy Americana-based band led by veteran area musicians John Brady and Paul Schimert, featuring a rotating cast of Buffalo musicians with deep roots in the local music community, among them Jim Iarocci, Jim Palys, Dement Ormond, Ann Phillipone, Leslie Gardner, Simone Appleby and Dee Adams.

Schimert and Brady helmed the recording of the Marley Higgins Band's debut, "Old Stone Wall," which is the very product the billboard on the 33 is promoting.

Band co-founder Paul

Schimert this week filled me in on the thinking behind the billboard, the making of the "Old Stone Wall" album, and what we can expect from the live rendition of the Marley Higgins Band when it plays Babeville on Nov. 23.

Q: What made you decide to pursue the billboard route?

A: I went the billboard route to maximize the exposure. I had seen other businesses using it. However, when I was told by Lamar Advertising that many local musicians have looked into using a billboard in the Buffalo market – billboards are used in other markets but not necessarily Buffalo – but nobody ever really pulls the trigger, I decided right then and there that the Marley Higgins Band would be the first.

Q: Have you seen positive results?

A: It's hard to really gauge it at this point. The reaction from my Facebook friends has been really positive and people in general who know about it or have seen the billboard are usually upbeat about what we tried to do. The activity (on the music site) CDbaby.com has increased, but it's hard to tell, because you rarely get feedback in real time. One thing I've learned in life is that when you go off the beaten path and try a different approach, there are rewards and pitfalls along the way that you never really thought of.

Q: Tell me about your musical relationship with John Brady. How long have you guys known each other? What are his strengths as a musician and co-producer?

A: I've known John Brady for over 30 years. He used to play a gig on a sailboat I worked on back in the '80s. I

started taking guitar lessons from him around 20 years ago, when I wanted to get serious about learning to play. I started to bring some songs to him that I'd written. After a few years, we began to record them at his Reel Art Music Studio on Elmwood Avenue. What started out as experimental recordings morphed into our 1st record entitled "The Elmwood Tracks," released in '07. I liked working with John and so when I began writing the songs for "Old Stone Wall," I naturally went to him.

John's strengths as a musician are varied. He's not only a guitar player – he can play the bass and drums as well. He is highly proficient at his art and he knows how to make a good song sound great. His recording/mixing and sound engineering abilities are outstanding and you can definitely hear that come through on both our CDs. However, one of John's greatest traits is that he is a no (expletive) guy with a strong work ethic who knows music and how it's supposed to be played. His musical knowledge is extensive and he doesn't take short cuts. He's diligent about making sure that the job gets done properly and if he doesn't like what he sees or hears, he tells you. That's a hell of a strength.

Q: What will the live version of the band look like?

A: Currently the line-up will be for Babeville and, going forward, will be a five-piece – John Brady on lead guitar/vocals, Jim Palys on drums/vocals, Jim Iarocci on bass, Mark Panfil on keys, and yours truly on guitar and vocals

Q: From your vantage point, what do you think



defines "Buffalo music"? Is there a common denominator among the various genres of music being made here that suggests a "Buffalo sound"?

A: I don't know if I can speak with any authority regarding a "Buffalo Sound," but what I will say is that Buffalo is filled with a lot of talented musicians. Buffalo is going through sort of a Renaissance with rebuilding of

the waterfront, Old First Ward, and other things. A lot has been happening, and music is just one part of that.

What's great about the music of the Marley Higgins Band is that it was created using musicians all from Buffalo. "Old Stone Wall" is truly a homegrown Buffalo recording project that tapped into Buffalo's deep musical diversity, musicians that came

from all walks of life. That's what makes it great. Each musician puts their own stamp on a piece of written music in a recording studio and the final recorded version becomes something extraordinary. It's music ... and it can take you anywhere you want to go.

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