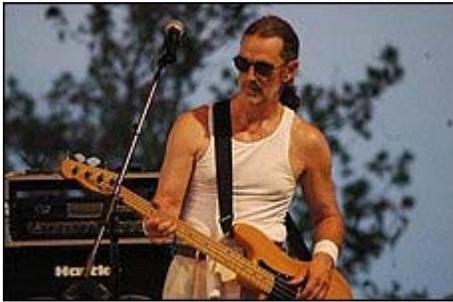


The Washington Post



Steve "Wolf" Crescenze, above, hosts the open blues jam at Bangkok Blues as leader of his new group, Hot Rods & Old Gas, below. (Photos By Connie Warner)

Live!

Who: Wolf's Blues Jam with Hot Rods & Old Gas When: 7 p.m. Sunday Where: Bangkok Blues, Falls Church

Thursday, August 27, 2009

Hosting a blues jam could be compared to herding cats, so why not put a wolf in charge to keep those cool musical cats under control?

Steve "Wolf" Crescenze got his nickname many years ago as a teacher whose rambunctious students thought he resembled Wolfman Jack from the movie "American Graffiti." And he has earned his stripes as a bass player and onstage MC over many years on the local scene.

And yet, it took a while for Crescenze to hit that groove. He played in local bands as a younger man but put his instrument aside to work in education for more than three decades. In 2002, he gave music another try and re-learned quickly. Playing with esteemed local act ACME Blues Company ("Industrial-strength blues") for three years, he earned a Wammie nomination.

About two years ago, as the days of ACME Blues Company waned, Crescenze pulled together a new band. The Idle Americans featured a stunning young guitarist-singer, Matt Kelley; another young guitar phenom, Zach Sweeney; and drummer Scott Rabino. Crescenze acted as the band's leader-manager-booking agent and bassist.

During that time, with the Idle Americans serving as support band, Crescenze hosted the popular open blues jam at Bangkok Blues, plus two other local jams in Chesapeake

Beach and Leonardtown, Md. He is still involved with yet another jam -- as a player, not a host -- at the Zoo Bar in D.C.

Although Crescenze recently left the Idle Americans, he continues to keep the music going in what is now called Wolf's Blues Jam, which takes place this weekend, as it does every Sunday night, at Bangkok Blues.

Crescenze hosts as leader of his new group, Hot Rods & Old Gas. Besides the 59-year-old bassist, the act features former Idle Americans band mate Sweeney (19), A+ student of the blues-rock school of Eric Clapton, Danny Gatton and Jimmy Page; plus additions Andy Poxon, singer-guitarist, age 15; Tom Maxwell, singer-guitarist, 19; and drummer Mike O'Donnell, 29.

As Crescenze tells it, "Mike and I are the Old Gas, and the three hotshot guitarists are the Hot Rods."

The combination is particularly potent in the figure of Poxon, whose big, mature voice is even more surprising coming from a gangly teenager with a wild head of red hair.

At a typical blues jam, you'll hear Hot Rods & Old Gas alone and in tandem with a variety of local players. As Crescenze describes the process: "The host band opens the night, playing for about 45 minutes, and then I use the signup sheet to make up 'bands' of local blues talent. We have a number of musicians who come out to play, usually around 25 or so, but we've had as many as 41." Each act plays a three-song set.

Although the audience reaps the benefit of an ever-changing lineup, the jams provide a service to the musicians as well, Crescenze said. "The blues jams are a great way for blues lovers to connect with each other and also a great way for musicians to network and meet prospective band mates. I've met almost all of my band mates through open blues jams. . . . Also, blues bands sometimes use the jam as a convenient way to audition for a club."

There are often surprises. "You never know who's going to show up," Crescenze said. "Sometimes traveling musicians and out-of-towners [play]. Recently, Grammy nominees Tab Benoit and Steve Riley stopped by to hang out and jam with me after their 'Swamp Romp' Wolf Trap performances, to the delight of the crowd!"

-- MARIANNE MEYER

Bangkok Blues is at 926 W. Broad St. (Route 7 West) in Falls Church. The restaurant serves Thai cuisine. There is no cover charge for the blues jam. For information, call 703-534-0095 or visit <http://www.bangkokblues.com>.