

Axis of Blues

Mid-20th century America was a great time and place to be a kid, especially for the musically inclined. A time of unparalleled ferment and cross-pollenization in society, industry, politics and popular culture, for those coming of age at the time it was like all the signs were pointing to Something, and that Something was The Beatles. When they hit, it was like the meteor that wiped out the dinosaurs: nothing would ever be the same. Suddenly, ordinary people who had no business reaching for the stars were compelled to pick up guitars, basses and drums and get onstage! There was a new kind of music around, one that respected no fences, and flowed, amoeba-like, encompassing and digesting genres and styles. It ate the blues, country, international folk and hillbilly rock, then took a left turn and gobbled up cabaret songs, classical and Indian music. What it left in its wake was wonderful, weird, and unprecedentedly creative.

So what happened to the kids who took up instruments during that time? For four of them, the answer is: they're still playing, in **Axis of Blues**. Twining r&b, folk, and rock 'n' roll around an 'axis of blues', the quartet brings together a combined 200 years of musical experience and savvy. More than anything, there is a genuine quality to their music that is rare in younger players. "Blues, r&b, roots rock – they sound simple and easy to play, but they're not. To really do it right you've got to have some kind of weight of personal experience to anchor you down while at the same time you let your kite fly up there in the sky. There's also a kind of intangible core to this music that you either get or you don't. And if you do get it, after years of playing, the groove just gets incredibly deep." So says elder states-moose Mark Ungar (bass, guitar, vocals).

Axis of Blues is a case of "I'll take 3 of those, and one of those", the 3 being multi-instrumentalist-singers, and the one being a singing drummer. The 3 - Robert Hill, Mark Ungar, and Kristoph Klover - each play a mean electric guitar and bass and sing the hell out of a song. Not content with that, they also each play mandolin-family instruments, and write songs. Bass duties are shared around by a formula derived from an ancient forbidden form of runic divination...or, it's whomever can be bullied into it at the moment.

Axis of Blues' goals are simple. To groove you. To make your liver quiver, and your backbone slip. Excuse us, but we got the boogie in us, and it got to come out.

BIOS

Robert A. Hill (Papa Rah) – vocals, guitar, bass, fiddle, mandolin. Acquired by his family in trade from a group of wandering gypsies, Robert picked up his father's abandoned guitar at the age of six and taught himself to play and write songs, determined to follow in the footsteps of the Monkees, the Beatles and Willy Dixon. Later, during L.A.'s Big Hair wars, Robert fronted several hard rock bands as lead vocalist, including the Zeppelinesque Blackjack Tailor and power-pop quintet Tomorrow's Reign. After moving to Northern California in the 90s, Robert dove deeply into folk music, playing dance music for English country, Morris, Irish and Scottish dance troupes. In Axis of Blues, he seeks to combine the disparate sounds of his past into an irresistibly tasty, sizzlin' gumbo that'll make you wish you'd brought an extra pair of shorts.

Mark "More Moose" Ungar – vocals, bass, guitar, mandocello. Growing up in bluesy Chicago, Mark moved to San Francisco in 1967 just in time for the Summer of Love. Raised on folk, psychedelic rock, and the eclectic melange of free-form radio, Mark played acoustic and electric guitars until 1989 when he began to explore other instruments, including mandola, violin, bass, and mandocello. An inveterate composer and songwriter, two of Mark's songs are still (to his chagrin) sung after 30 years on a regular basis by a notorious cult – guess which one? The newest instrument in his menagerie is a 1952 Kay upright bass, which he assiduously thumps in hopes of catching a ride to Funky Town (ow, Good God y'all, huh!).

Scott "Irie" Irwin – vocals, drums, mandolin. Voted tallest person in the band, Scott more to the point sings and plays drums simultaneously, and when not onstage tortures anyone within earshot with any of a variety of mandolins and/or banjos. Want to know how it goes? Ask Scott, he knows. Scott spent his formative years in Napa, California and currently lives in San Rafael. In between, he played steadily in several bands including the Menno Merringa Quartet, U3, Random Men, RCB, and Uncle Bobb. He also continues to play with progressive Medieval/Celtic rockers Avalon Rising.

Kristoph "Noodles" Klover – vocals, bass, guitar, octave mandolin. What can be said about Kristoph that hasn't already been said a hundred times before, and much worse? When he plays guitar, angels fall from the sky. When he plays bass, buffaloes wonder if they maybe shouldn't have eaten that last weird clump of grass. An audio and recording engineer by day – what's left of it after he gets up – Kristoph has, by now, downloaded every note ever played by the Grateful Dead.