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Page 4

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Still Rockin' Like It's 1985

By Michele DeVinney

For some of us, the 1980s don't really seem that long ago. The vision of big hair, pastel T-shirts and multi-toned eye shadow seem a strange but recent memory. But if that's your thinking, don't look now, but it's been nearly two decades since the 80s ended – and over a quarter-century since they began. When Michael Jackson's *Thriller* is celebrating its silver anniversary, you quickly realize that time marches on.

Where the 1970s so recently saw a resurgence of popularity (and the recent success of the Eagles new studio release suggests that nostalgia isn't over yet), the 80s are also getting some respect. Although it's easy to lump the music of that era in with crazy-haired one-hit wonders (remember Flock of Seagulls?) or wild-haired glam metal bands (like Poison and Warrant), that decade provided as much musical diversity as any

before or since. For every Jackson or Prince hit, there was one by The Fixx or The Cure. You could pretty much hear it all.

It was also the decade that brought us MTV and, with it, the newly expanded visual aspect to pop music and rock n' roll. It isn't surprising that musicians who grew up in that era would be influenced by those sights and sounds and that audiences would still be clamoring for more of what the 1980s had to offer.

One band still carrying that flame is The Reaganomics, a Columbus, Ohio group formed 12 years ago in the hopes that they could connect fans of 1980s music to that bygone era. Currently comprised of Sully Caradonna, Keenan Blanke, Paul Shamell, Ron Morrison and Kas Streif, The Reaganomics chose a name that would conjure memories of the 1980s, telling fans right away what to expect.

The band was launched in the cold winter months of 1996, and from those initial efforts – which saw fruition with a first gig in September of that year – only Caradonna and Blanke remain. While others have moved on to other projects, Caradonna feels the current lineup is a winner.

"We've always made smooth transitions with new members," he says, "and I think this is the best lineup we've ever had. The band is tighter than ever, and the entertainment aspect, beyond just the musical aspect, is the best it's ever been."

It's taken the band awhile to hone their sound and develop a wide selection of covers to perform (as Caradonna points out the band has now lasted longer than the decade it salutes) so that audiences can expect a little of everything when they play, including fans who will see them perform at Columbia Street West on Saturday, March 8.

"We can play about 200 songs and have dwindled

that down to about 80 songs we do in rotation, the songs that seem to work the best," says Caradonna. "We started off doing a lot of alternative rock stuff – Duran Duran, The Fixx, Split Enz, Gary Numan, Simple Minds – but eventually we started getting more experience and more expertise, knowing what people wanted to hear, and we started playing more pop-oriented songs from the 80s. So now we do Rick Springfield and J. Geils, as well as some edgier stuff like Billy Idol and Bon Jovi."

Their home base makes it easy for them to play to college crowds, but The Reaganomics have found acceptance among audiences of all ages.

"Obviously, there are a lot of events during football season, since we're in the Ohio State University area," says Caradonna. "A lot of young fans want to hear classic stuff. We've played frat parties at Indiana University, too, and they went crazy.

But we get pretty diverse audiences at outdoor festivals. People of all age

groups, older people as well as toddlers up dancing around. The music is upbeat, danceable, and has great hooks, so it appeals to a lot of people."

The ability of The Reaganomics to capture the decade and its music has been heralded in several

publications in the Columbus area, providing them a dedicated hometown following.

"If VH1's retroopia was a religion, *The Singles 1980-1989* could be its hymnal," said Columbus Alive upon the 2000 release of *The Reaganomics*

first CD. "The disc, the first from Columbus' favorite throwbacks The Reaganomics, includes such cultural touchstones as 'Safety Dance,' 'You Spin Me Round,' 'Hungry Like the Wolf' and 'I Melt With You,' just to name a few. The covers here are dead-on, perfect performances and instrumentations down to the last cheesy keyboard trill. In fact, if you didn't know any better, you'd think these were the original artists and this was the K-Tel collection of the 80s synth-pop hits you can't get out of your head."

The Reaganomics travel within driving distance of Columbus on weekends, hitting many Midwest cities along the way. They provide both a perfect bar band and a family-friendly source of rock wherever they go.

"We have not had a hard time pleasing a variety of age groups," says Caradonna. "We're gaining fans every time we play in a new place. People come up to us all the time and say 'We love what you guys are doing.' It's all been great."

With over a dozen years of the 80s under their belts, Caradonna has no problem imagining them lasting into another decade, which is, shockingly, only a couple years away.

"We'll still keep going. We're going to do this until the wheels fall off."



The Reaganomics
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