Written by Jill Walsh
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Sean Leary is sticking to basics. The author and producer of the innovative *Your Favorite Band* believes – despite the unique combinations of film, theatre, and music media used during the performances – that “a good story will always be the key to a successful show. ” We’ll see whether he followed this maxim and how local audiences respond to his part-live-theatre, part-film show when
Your Favorite Band
starts a two-week run August 5 at ComedySportz.

So far, Leary has caused quite a stir with the *Your Favorite Band* script, attracting many of the Quad Cities’ most versatile and recognizable performers. Guitarist Ellis Kell, comedian Rick Davis, stage regulars Melissa McBain and Jamie Em Johnson, and veteran director Melissa Coulter are all creatively involved with the show. Working in conjunction with the local Bluebox Limited Film Company, Leary has turned what was originally intended to be a screenplay into a theatre and music multimedia production.

When he first decided to produce the show, Leary wanted to do something exciting that included aspects of television sitcoms, movies, and theatre. He explains that his intention was to “get the visceral feel of live theater and the expansive, unlimited narrative capabilities of film, wrapped up into something unique. I wanted to create something new, exciting, and energetic, something I would really want to see as an audience member. I’m a huge movie fan, and TV, when it’s done right, *à la Seinfeld* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, can be really entertaining, so I thought: Why not take the strengths of those media and combine them, with live theater and music, into one show? If I was going to devote so much of my time and life over the last several months to doing this, I didn’t want to do it halfway. I wanted to go all out and create something everyone involved could be proud of.”

Your Favorite Band is a collaboration of Leary’s writing, Coulter’s directing, Denise Yoder’s choreography (for a bar fight), and the camera work of Bluebox filmmakers Scott Beck and Bryan Woods. The ComedySportz venue provides an intimate space, most of which is used during the performance, including the bar and a few tables. Scene transitions between film, stage, and floor space are cued by lights and songs, so audiences can tell which direction to turn their heads before each sequence begins. The film portions are projected onto a side wall near the stage.

One amusing part about *Your Favorite Band* is that actors don’t play instruments or sing in the show, yet many of the scenes are centered around musical action that just happened or will happen after the lights fade. During one long film sequence intended to be a kind of music video, actor Rick Davis lip-syncs while playing the air guitar. To me, this scene just emphasized that the band is just a bunch of actors.

Your Favorite Band is described as a combination of movies such as *Clerks*, *Caddyshack*, *Thi s Is Spinal Tap*
, and
High Fidelity

and has the tagline: “They were one of the biggest bands of 1997. Too bad it’s 2004.” It’s clear that Leary drew inspiration from these cult comedies, and at times I wondered whether he was attempting to write an original script or simply give props to the films that inspired him.

The story follows a band called The Miserable Failures, who were a one-hit-wonder alt-rock band of the late ’90s. After stardom collapses, the band members head back to their hometown to re-group before attempting to find fame again. But dysfunctional relationships linger at home and among bandmates, and musically all that remains are live shows in dive bars.

“The story features a lot of color I’ve picked up in interviews over the years with musicians both local and national,” Leary says. “Everything from horror stories about local bands playing clubs like the Yankee Clipper to gripes about touring and major-label woes from groups like the Gin Blossoms.”

Not everything has been seamless for *Your Favorite Band*. Leary says that in addition to problems ranging from finding filming locations and replacements for actors who’ve dropped out, there have also been difficulties unique to this production. “It’s difficult to merge all of these media into a type of show that’s never really been done before,” he explains. “There’s no template for it, no path to follow. That’s both a blessing and a curse. A lot of work goes into shooting a film, and a lot of work goes into putting on a theater show.”

Is *Your Favorite Band* worth the effort? Leary thinks so, with future plans ranging from publishing the show in novel form to producing it as an independent film to submitting the script to various Hollywood studios to releasing a soundtrack. (The CD will be released August 12 at a benefit performance, the proceeds of which will be given to the family of the late Tom Vance, a friend of Leary and a local musician.)

The *Your Favorite Band* book has already been released at Borders and on Amazon.com, containing the multimedia version of the script, possible sitcom episodes, character biographies (for the sitcom version), and the story of how the idea of the show was adapted into the current production.

And aside from selling CDs and books after *Your Favorite Band* starts its Quad Cities load-out, Leary plans to send the script to theaters in major cities, hoping to get them to either perform it themselves or bring the Quad Cities troupe in to take the stage. Leary will also be writing the script as a movie and sitcom, then submitting both to agents, producers, and writing contests in Hollywood. Finally, next year Leary plans to produce *Your Favorite Band* as an independent film.

With so many tie-ins in the works, *Your Favorite Band* sounds like it’s already been a hit at the box office and on the *New York Times* bestseller list, but first Leary’s multimedia comedy needs to attract groupies in the Quad Cities. After that, he can think of Hollywood.

Your Favorite Band *will be performed Thursdays through Sundays August 5 through 15 at ComedySportz in downtown Rock Island. Thursday showtime is 7:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday is 9:30 p.m., and Sunday is 4 p.m. Tickets are $10, available at the Circa '21 box office and by phone at (309)786-7733 extension 2.*