

## The Playing-Live Basket: Cowboy Mouth, September 10 at RIBCO

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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The blurb that accompanies any write-up of the New Orleans-based rock band Cowboy Mouth comes from *Cake* magazine: “On a bad night they’ll tear the roof off the joint, and on a good night, they’ll save your soul.”

For drummer, singer, and primary songwriter Fred LeBlanc, a great live show -- which will be on display at RIBCO on Friday -- is both natural and a necessity.

The band has been around for two decades now, with the constant core of LeBlanc and guitarist, singer, and songwriter John Thomas Griffith. By LeBlanc’s count, Cowboy Mouth has had 427 bassists and 1,628 guitar players.

“The crux of the band has always been me and John,” LeBlanc said in a recent interview. “John and I always had a chemistry, and we always built a band around that. We had all done stints in major labels before the band, and so it was: What do we have that they cannot steal from us? They can steal songs from us; they have. They can steal recordings from us; they have. But they can’t steal playing live. ... That’s how we built our reputation.”

Cowboy Mouth has itself been on major labels. But while LeBlanc said he loves recording and

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the band's albums -- the most recent was *Fearless* in 2008 -- the corporate music culture is more frustrating than rewarding. "It breaks your heart when you give your effort to some of these people who frankly just take the crystal that you've given them and drop it accidentally and watch it shatter all over the floor," he said. "I prefer putting a lot of my eggs in the playing-live basket. I enjoy it, it's visceral, and I can control it. ... The best advertisement for this band has always been us playing live."

Specializing in fun, catchy rock anthems, Cowboy Mouth's songs are also pretty good advertisements. There's *Fearless*' gleefully infatuated "Kelly Ripa," whose first chorus is impossible to dislodge: "Kelly Ripa, Kelly Ripa / A mommy with the body of a stripper / Kelly Ripa, Kelly Ripa / She's so fine I'd settle for her dad / Kelly Ripa, Kelly Ripa / If I had some chocolate, I would dip her ... ." (The words themselves don't do it justice; for the full effect, one needs to hear LeBlanc deliver them.)

It says a lot about the good humor of both the band and the song's subject that Cowboy Mouth has performed it twice on *Live with Regis & Kelly*.

LeBlanc said he'd had the melody for a while, and when watching TV on the tour bus one day, he noticed that the talk-show host's name fit the chorus. So he cut a demo and for fun sent it to a newscaster friend in New Orleans, who played it for a *Regis & Kelly* producer visiting to prep for a visit from the show. "I hadn't even played it for the band at that point," LeBlanc said, and then Cowboy Mouth was invited to perform on the show. "I guess we'd better learn it," LeBlanc recalled.

Another side of the band can be heard with "Drown," which isn't the least bit jokey but has another sparkling, tuneful pop-punk chorus.

And then there's "Maureen," a nakedly emotional song about LeBlanc's mother's stroke that closes *Fearless*. It's notable as a rare detour from the party-band template, but it doesn't get played live.

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That's because Cowboy Mouth doesn't believe in getting an audience down, so one shouldn't expect LeBlanc to bemoan the misfortunes of New Orleans over the past five years.

"I don't like trying to get into the political aspects of it with my band ... ," he said. "It's my job to be an entertainer and pull people away from their troubles, instead of dwelling on them. There's enough people bitching and complaining about it. They don't need any help from me."

*Cowboy Mouth will perform on Friday, September 10, at RIBCO (1815 Second Avenue in Rock Island). The bill also includes Bakelite Army, and the show starts at 9 p.m. Tickets (\$12 in advance, \$15 the day of the show) are available from [RIBCO.com](http://RIBCO.com) .*

*For more information on Cowboy Mouth, visit [CowboyMouth.com](http://CowboyMouth.com) .*