

Music as Savior: Buffalo Clover, February 26 at the Redstone Room

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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Most bands dubbed “Americana” focus on a thin slice of roots music, but the Nashville-based outfit Buffalo Clover lays claim to a wide swath, all with a smart pop sensibility.

The band’s official biography says its styles range from “underdog gypsy punk to Motown boxcar blues, [and] vaudevillian acid rock to train-wreck folk,” and those labels are accurate both in terms of genre and vivid, mature execution. On any given night, Buffalo Clover might cover James Brown, Etta James, or Neil Young, and that also offers some sense of what appears to be a nearly boundless comfort zone.

The band – which performed at last year’s River Roots Live festival – will play the Redstone Room on February 26 and features two members from the Quad Cities area: singer/songwriter Margo Price (an Aledo, Illinois, native) and guitarist/banjoist Matt Gardner (who went to high school in Bettendorf).

That local connection is one reason to check out the emerging band, but Buffalo Clover has the goods, too. *Pick Your Poison*, the band’s 2010 release, demonstrates its expansive grasp in the span of three songs.

The stomper “Me & Clyde” features deft interplay between banjo and muted electric guitar, but it’s defined by Price’s casually true voice – confident, twangy, and a little unhinged. Gardner’s “20 Tons of Blues” is seemingly effortless roots pop, and while his voice can’t rival Price’s distinctiveness, it effectively conveys a narrator simultaneously down-on-his-luck and happy-go-lucky: “My head was spinning with 50-cent truths / About the way of the world and being born to lose.” And “Midnight Circus” is the perfect title for the band’s energetic, exotic bluegrass-carnival tune, with Price playing the siren barker and lending it an upbeat romanticism.

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Beyond those songs, there's ample of evidence of Buffalo Clover's songwriting chops. The narrator of "15 Reasons" has both the sincerity and the absurdity of the best country characters: "I know you'll be coming back to me / When you get tired of being gone." And "Say You Will" echoes with haunted blues, with stabs of guitar piercing Price's fatigued but fierce voice.

Price moved to Nashville roughly six years ago, she said in a recent interview, and she formed Buffalo Clover with Jeremy Ivey in 2008. (The pair married two years ago.) Gardner joined in 2009.

"I just answered an ad," Gardner said in an interview. "They wanted a bassist."

Price and Ivey soon discovered that Gardner also had Quad Cities roots, and that the bass wasn't his natural instrument. ("I kind of posed as a bassist," Gardner said.) Price heretically describes Gardner as a guitarist who's "almost ... Jimi Hendrix good," and his banjo has also become an integral part of Buffalo Clover's sound. That trio is now the band's songwriting and performing core, although it sometimes plays as a five-piece and occasionally adds a horn section.

Both Price and Gardner had come to Nashville to be part of its legendary music scene, but she said she is ambivalent about the city. "I really kind of got my musical chops here, as far as learning to play more by ear and really being pushed by musicians around here," she said. But "it's so refreshing to get out of town and play shows, because you're playing to an audience that actually listens, because they're not musicians themselves. When you're down here, it's so competitive, and usually you're playing to audience full of musicians. It can be intimidating."

Gardner called Nashville "a little more cliquish than I thought it would be" but said it will remain the band's home base for the foreseeable future.

Buffalo Clover is presently recording a new album, *Don't Lie to Yourself*, that it plans to release on vinyl and in digital stores, but no CD is planned, Price said.

That record is a comeback of sorts, as Price said she wasn't sure Buffalo Clover would continue

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after the death of her and Ivey's son last year. Price delivered twins, but one of the boys died after 11 days following surgery to treat a heart defect called "hypoplastic left heart syndrome."

"At first I thought I didn't even want to play anymore in the midst of everything that had happened," Price said. But "it seems like I'm coming back full-force now, as far as wanting to write and get out. And my son loves to sit and listen to us play.

"It's good for everybody, because he enjoys listening to it, and we really need it. ... Playing music has been our savior."

Gardner added that the band has always provided a respite: "The reason why we are playing music together in the first place is that we all love to do it and we always have, regardless of what else is going on."

Buffalo Clover will perform on Saturday, February 26, at the Redstone Room (129 Main Street in Davenport). Angela Meyer will open, and the show starts at 9 p.m. Tickets are \$7 and available from RedstoneRoom.com.

For more information on Buffalo Clover, visit BuffaloCloverBand.com.