

Daytrotter's Barnstormer Tour Closes in Maquoketa on April 30

Written by Jeff Ignatius
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Daytrotter.com's latest Barnstormer tour – five nights of live music in Midwestern barns – closes Saturday at the Codfish Hollow barn in Makoqueta. The Reader published an interview with headliner Sondre Lerche in 2009 (

RCReader.com/y/lerche

), but we wanted to acquaint our readers with a couple of the other bands on this year's tour: Guards and the Romany Rye. (The bill also includes Keegan DeWitt, ARMS, Mike & the Moonpies, and Hands.)



Guards: A Series of Fortunate Events

Richie James Follin said that the ongoing joke of his current band is that as long as a song has a Omnichord – an electronic instrument that was meant to mimic an autoharp – and a 12-string electric guitar, it's a Guards song, regardless of genre or any other consideration.

So Guards' seven-inch of covers includes a startlingly sleepy and longing inversion of Metallica's "Motorbreath" alongside transformed tracks from M.I.A. and Vampire Weekend.

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There's a dreamy, retro haze over everything, but on that and the earlier collection of seven songs that Follin posted on Guards' Bandcamp site (Guards.Bandcamp.com), the vibe ranges from dark, propulsive pop to angular, doom-filled rock. (Both sets of recordings can be downloaded for free.)

If that sounds scattershot, it's fitting considering how much happenstance has shaped the story of Guards. A member of Willowz and until recently a touring member of Cults – which features his sister Madeline – Follin said his original Guards recordings were just one of a handful of projects he put up on Bandcamp for friends and family.

The unusual sound, he said in a phone interview last week, was the result of circumstance. Most of his musical equipment was still in a tour trailer, and all he had to work with was a 12-string and an Omnichord. The latter, he said, “made me write a lot different than I had ever written before, and do a lot of different chord changes that I would have never done on the guitar. We owe a lot to the Ominichord.”

The tracks, he said, were originally written for other people to sing. But between tours, he recorded and sang on them himself “while I was waiting to see if Cults were going to use them.” He then got his sister and Chairlift's Caroline Polachek to sing on a song apiece, and then he posted them to Bandcamp.

Those two singers wrote about the project at various online outlets, and Guards all of a sudden generated a lot of buzz – much like Cults had done previously. (The *Reader* wrote about Cults last year:

er.com/y/cults

[RCRead](#)

.) “I didn't really think it was going to turn into something serious until it did, I guess,” Follin said.

Crawdaddy.com spotlighted Guards last summer: “For something that came together seemingly by chance, or at the very least without grand intentions, Guards' music is undeniably catchy, refreshingly trend-defying, and remarkably polished as a singular vision, which is a testament to Follin's range and prolificacy.”

But Follin doesn't attribute Guards' emergence to anything except the push by his sister and Polachek: “People seem to really love anything those two girls sing on,” he said.

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And because he wants to focus on Guards – a single on the Kitsuné label is due May 10 – he'd prefer to keep his other projects under-the-radar: "I have like four other things up on Bandcamp right now that have been there for a while and nobody knows about it," Follin said. "Now I don't want anybody to know."



The Romany Rye: Non-Good Good

Luke MacMaster shouldn't be on the Barnstormer tour. He shouldn't have written, recorded, and released the Romany Rye's debut album (*Highway 1, Looking Back Carefully*) in 2009. And he sure as hell shouldn't be on the cover of *Rolling Stone* – a remote possibility, but a possibility nonetheless because of the magazine's current readers-put-a-band-on-the-cover contest.

"I never really expected to be the frontman, lead singer, or writer of a band," MacMaster said in a phone interview last week. "I was only supposed to play guitar in a band."

When he left his previous band – the rock group the Colour – four years ago, he thought he was done with music. He said that band had signed one of the last "pretty big deals" with a record label (the EMI subsidiary Re:think), but things didn't go well. The label had an old-school mentality – pushing radio instead of the Internet – and that caused a rift in the band. "When it became the most miserable place to even hang out, I was like, 'All right, I'm done,'" he said. He

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stored his guitar at his parents' house and moved to L.A.

But after a few months, the songs started coming. "I don't even remember doing it," he said. "I really don't. The next thing you know, I had written and I was singing that song 'All the Boys.'" It was about his experiences of being in the Colour, and he said it was the first song he'd written front-to-back.

Then more songs came, and then he had enough for an album, and then he recorded them with Delta Spirit's Kelly Winwich. The musical aesthetic, he said, "was a little vague until we actually recorded them." But what emerged on the Romany Rye's *Highway 1* is a confident, unforced roots/folk rock that's casually compelling in its songwriting and performance even though its creator is modest about his talents.

"I kind of feel like I fit in that non-good good thing," MacMaster said, name-dropping Tom Petty, Neil Young, and Leonard Cohen as models for his simple, somewhat artless style. "I'm not the best musician, I don't feel like I have a gift for melody or any of those things. So the only way that I can actually write and continue to write and play music is just let whatever falls out fall out. I can't force anything out, I can't be anything else besides me. ... I don't have a choice. I'm not good enough to go, 'I want to make a song that sounds like this.'"

MacMaster called his writing process "the diet": "When you have a chance, when you're not on tour, ... you go home and you're not drinking and you're not getting stoned, you're not doing anything but reading and writing." Then you "regurgitate that in your own way." For the upcoming *Quicksilver Sunbeam*, MacMaster said, his diet included Hemingway and poetry by Bukowski, and the songs reflect a dichotomy of the road – both the romance and realities. (The Romany Rye, *Paste* magazine wrote, "embodies a sound that recalls an America viewed through a road-trip car window.")

After he released *Highway 1*, MacMaster assembled a proper band. Kings of Leon's Matthew Followill has championed the Romany Rye, and he even put up half the money for its tour van. And *Quicksilver Sunbeam* is ready to go. (The *Rolling Stone* contest put label-shopping on hold; Atlantic has an option to sign participants.)

While *Highway 1* was essentially a solo record, the new one makes room for MacMaster's

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collaborators. There's "more of an overall focus on the interaction between the playing," he said. "We needed to really figure out a place a time and place for each individual member to shine, and really be a band."

MacMaster said that the Romany Rye initially chose not to participate in the *Rolling Stone* cover contest (

RollingStone.com/choosethecover), fearing a stigma of being a "contest band." ("They didn't make it there on their own.' ... Just that whole

American Idol

mindset," MacMaster said. "Maybe it was just pride on my end.")

But the band reconsidered and made it to the second round. "It's a lot of free press," MacMaster said. "And these days it doesn't really matter how you get in front of people."

Based on Tweets and Facebook "likes," it appeared unlikely early this week that the Romany Rye will advance beyond the round of eight. (Third-round participants will be announced April 27.) And MacMaster said that's fine with him, calling it "more of a win-win situation for us anyways. ... We don't really want to end up anywhere that they would want us to end up."

The Daytrotter Barnstormer tour comes to the Codfish Hollow Barn (3437 288th Avenue in Maquoketa, Iowa) on Saturday, April 30. Performers include Sondre Lerche, Guards, the Romany Rye, Keegan DeWitt, ARMS, Mike & the Moonpies, and Hands. The show starts at 6 p.m., and tickets are \$15 in advance and \$20 at the door. For tickets and more information, visit RCReader.com/y/barn

Video from last year's Barnstormer show at Codfish Hollow: