Written by Jeff Ignatius
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The Los Angeles-based quintet Spindrift has developed a reputation for its cinematic sound – something that started with a score for a film that was then only an idea in the head of bandleader Kirpatrick Thomas: *The Legend of God's Gun*, which later became a 2007 feature written and directed by Mike Bruce. One track for that film was used in 2008's *Hell Ride* – executive-produced by Quentin Tarantino – and Thomas now has three additional film-score-composer credits with Spindrift.

But this tack for the band – playing at Rozz-Tox on May 19 – is a relatively recent development. Spindrift was formed in the early 1990s in Delaware, and was at that point an experimental psychedelic-rock band. It was only in 2001, when Thomas heard Ennio Morricone's music for the Sergio Leone classic *Once Upon a Time in the West*, that his band changed course.

Thomas explained in a recent phone interview that the score, and other works by Morricone, served as the soundtrack to his 2002 relocation to Los Angeles, and coincided with his "experiencing the landscape for the first time ... and then becoming completely enamored with the myth of the West."

Listening to Spindrift's cheekily titled *Classic Soundtracks Volume 1* from last year, the psychedelic elements of the band are still evident – the group played Austin Psych Fest last month – but Morricone lords over it all. The album has 14 tracks evoking a variety of cinematic styles – Westerns, yes, and also other disreputable genres – but they carry the Italian composer's best-known motifs into a rock context.

Morricone, of course, has long been a major influence on many rock bands. In his Western work with Leone, he crafted dusty expanses through unusual instrumentation and sound effects. The famous theme for *The Good, the Bad, & the Ugly* is notable for its exchanges of flute, whistling, trumpets, percussion, and wordless vocals, with the melody carried by an electric guitar. "The Man with the Harmonica," from *Once Upon a*

Time in the West
, opens with a ghostly, mournful harmonica whose spell is broken by majestic distorted guitar.

In other words, the fusion of spaghetti-Western soundscapes and psychedelic rock is borderline natural. Like Morricone, Spindrift on *Classic Soundtracks Volume 1* shows a keen ear for odd but *right* instrumentation and arrangement. “Space Vixens Theme” plays as a Morricone homage, with its disparate elements – flute, electronics, ethereal singing, an Eastern passage – held together beautifully by driving, jagged rock. “Hellbound” – complete with train whistle – gallops and chugs infectiously. “Theme from Drifter’s Pass” also has a Western vibe, but it’s a straight song, too – albeit one that stretches its legs, building tension to a thunderous, primal riff and screaming at the six-minute mark and then a howling freak-out.

Thomas explained that the album is “basically a musical résumé for film work” and said future volumes are planned. But even though it includes two tracks of short, incidental music, it mostly features fully fleshed-out tunes that stand well on their own. That’s a function of Spindrift being both a film-scoring outfit and a touring band; the music has to work for the both the movies and a live audience.

That, Thomas said, hints at one of the benefits of hiring his band to write and perform a soundtrack. Most composers use session players for scores – “He doesn’t get to experiment; he doesn’t know his musicians that well” – while Spindrift has the intuitive bonds that come with familiarity.

Spindrift will perform on Saturday, May 19, at Rozz-Tox (2108 Third Avenue in Rock Island). The show starts at 9 p.m. and also features Strangers Family Band and Mondo Drag . Admission to the all-ages show is $8.

For more information on Spindrift, visit SpindriftWest.com .