

Benefit CD Worthy for More than Its Cause

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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It was a great idea by the Blackthorn Pub & Eatery. Host local bands on four consecutive Sundays in late summer, record their sets, compile the best performances on CD, and sell it as a benefit for two charities, Gilda's Club of the Quad Cities and the Mississippi Valley Blues Society's BlueSKool program.

Noble goals and strong conception, to be sure, and those by themselves make it a worthy project. But nobody could have expected the exceptional *Strong Enough to Bend: Live at the Blackthorn*. The CD, which will be released at a party on Sunday at the Blackthorn, is simply a joy.

Strong Enough to Bend sets the standard for local-music compilations. It's generous – with 15 tracks and acts spread over 72 minutes – and diverse. It sounds great, too; you might be surprised at times that you're listening to live recordings. And while one might have anticipated a haphazard sampler, *Strong Enough to Bend* is smartly sequenced, with transitions and shifts that feel natural but aren't obvious. The rock and blues tracks are sturdy and enjoyable, but the acoustic tracks really jump out.

The record starts off bluesy, with Elixir's high-energy "Are You Ready," and then the tempo becomes more deliberate with the solid boogie of Shane Johnson's Blue Train's "Those Days." The Bonedaddies bring things to a crawl with the slow blues of "Hey Baby."

Larry Bo Boyd's raw, hushed, and spare performance of "Give Your Love Away" is haunting, followed by Krogman & Carlson's "I Wish I Was." The voices of Kevin Boyd and Susan Lortz soar and yearn on their beautifully arranged track, which is followed by Rodeo Butterfly's playful "All Good Things."

The AfterGlow then turns up the amps and the intensity with "Ma's Chile," a fiery track that crosses Carlos Santana guitars and Afghan Whigs-style vocals. The Whatever Blues Band contributes the leisurely blues of "Keep of to Yourself," giving listeners a break.

While the first half of *Strong Enough to Bend* doesn't have any weak tracks, the real highlights come in the second half. Especially potent is the trio of acoustic tracks kicked off by the

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plaintive, melancholy, and textured vocals of Sovern. Joey follows with the bitter intensity of “Miss Mary,” which is dispelled quickly with Jordan Danielson’s good-time song “Tearin’ Down Fences,” with its infectious lilt and vocal style.

A trio of rock songs closes the set out, with the Hendrix-like “Another Day” from Dead Roots, Wicked Liz & The Bellyswirls’ “How Did I Get So Strong,” and the funk-rock of “Daze of Wild” by Manny Lopez & Friends (including Shane Johnson).

What emerges on *Strong Enough to Bend* is a portrait – sharp, clear, and full of skill and promise – of a significant portion of the Quad Cities music scene in late 2001. The CD is a testament to (and a stunning document of) the talent in the Quad Cities.

But this should be just the first step. As much and as quickly as things change, and with so many musicians left out, *Strong Enough to Bend* begs to be an annual event.

Sunday’s release party at the Blackthorn will feature music by Shane Johnson’s Blue Train, AfterGlow, and Bonedaddies, as well as raffles for prizes valued at more than \$3,000. The event begins at 6:30 p.m., and organizers are asking for a \$5 donation at the door.

Copies of Strong Enough to Bend will be available at the Blackthorn, as well as Coöp Records, Borders Books & Music, and Griggs Music.