

Daily Record

Summer in the Park show will relive Rockabilly

By Jeff Walker - Features Editor

Posted: Thursday, Jul 28, 2005 - 03:53:59 pm CDT

Hep Cat ties and roaring hot rods must still be stirring somewhere in Kevin Geil's soul. His band's newest name came from a song he wrote for his '56 Cadillac, and the former name was inspired by Buddy Holly's band.

Yes, Rockabilly has a place in his heart, for sure.

Front cat Geil and his band Two Tons of Steel have fine tuned an upright bass slappin,' thumping beat sound that would have Sam Phillips over at Sun Studios looking to sign. It's fun, it's quick, but it's what Two Tons takes from this sound and creates that makes it one of the fastest growing bands in Texas.

"I think we're outside the box. We incorporate an upright bass and steel guitar sound, we're kind of the more traditional sound and somehow it comes out sounding new and fresh," Geil said. "We're definitely different than the other Texas artists out there that we play with a lot."

Even so, Geil has said that he never wanted to be a 50s band. Most Rockabilly tunes or about girls, cars or even clothes, and Geil's lyrics go beyond that. The newest album, "Vegas," the band's debut on Palo Duro records, is being sound nation wide and currently sits at 19 on the National American Charts. The single "Vegas" is at number 9 - a big move for a band that's been circling the Central Texas circuit for almost 10 years.

"The album's in Virgin Records across the country, it's pretty crazy," Geil said. "I'm getting e-mails from old friends saying 'hey, remember us?' It's fun, you just kind of sit back because it's not like we just started this. It's definitely exciting, I'll tell you that."

The song "Vegas" was written as a fun song for his wife, who loves to drive and loves Las Vegas. The album also includes a cover of the Ramones' "I Wanna Be Sedated," an idea Geil stumbled upon while in his car.

"I heard that song on the way to a show," Geil said. "Towards the end of our set later I just played it, I didn't even know all the words. Something like that, the fans are either going to love it or hate it, and 99 percent of our fans seem to just love it."

Two Tons of Steel will be the act at tonight's Summer in The Park, a gig that Geil says he's enjoyed playing every year since the series began. He said they drew the biggest crowd last year, and he's hoping to do the same again. The free concert begins at 7:30

p.m. at the San Marcos Plaza stage.

Geil began playing the guitar when he was 13, always finding affection for groups like Buddy Holly and the Crickets material coming out of Sun Studios. He started the band the Dead Crickets in San Antonio, building steam off the fact that the band was the only Rockabilly act around. Playing St. Mary's Street regularly, it wasn't long before the band found itself on the cover of Billboard Magazine.

Singer Nancy Griffith happened to be in town, and read something about The Dead Crickets. A bit alarmed by the name, she contacted Jerry Allison, Buddy Holly's original drummer, about the band who then contacted Geil, so the story goes. Under a gentleman's agreement, Geil agreed to drop the name.

"We agreed that if the band got out of San Antonio, we would change the name," Geil said.

And they did. Soon afterwards, the band was asked to performed at the Grand Ol' Opry, and since they already had a song called "Two Tons of Steel," named after Geil's 56 Coup de Ville, that they liked a lot, the song became the band's name.

"It really worked out well in the end, all the name stuff," Geil said. "I don't know if the Dead Crickets would have ever been invited to play at the Grand Ol' Opry."

Two Tons also performs at "Two Ton Tuesdays" every Tuesday through the middle of August at Gruene Hall - a gig that started as once a summer and continued to grow.

"Two Ton Tuesdays and Two Tons of Steel are really something," Geil said. "They've really become kind of the same thing. I don't know which one is bigger, Two Ton Tuesdays or the band."

Judging by sales and momentum, probably best to go with the latter.