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## **The Derailers back in Austin with new look, sound, energy**

*Group returns with mix of sounds, songs for new record deal and old gigs*

**By Justin Patch**

When superheroes unleash their secret powers, they don't just casually stroll into the street and announce themselves. They transform their appearance and enter the scene with a bang, a cloud of smoke and a heroic battle cry. Austin country/rockabilly band The Derailers seem to have taken the cue, and their musical return from Nashville to Austin finds the band transformed and more fiery than they have ever been.

For almost a decade, the Austin-based quartet of Brian Hofeldt, Ed Adkins, Scott Mathews and Tony Villanueva honed their mix of country, rockabilly and '60s pop, building a reputation one show at a time. They landed a deal with recording giant Sony Nashville, which seemed like a huge leap into the big leagues. After two albums in Nashville (Here come the Derailers in 2001 and Genuine in 2003), lead singer and co-founder Tony Villanueva decided to throw in the towel and head back to the West Coast to preach the Word.

"It was a lot like a divorce between me and Tony," said co-founder and now full-time frontman Hofeldt. "We spent more time with each other than with our wives." But he's quick to add, "This is a tough business. We're on the road all the time ... if you've got a family, or you don't like being around people who are drinking and partying every night, sometimes that's what you've got to do to keep your life."

For a moment it seemed as though Nashville's kryptonite - weakening the strong, independent spirit of the band and pushing them towards radio-friendly hits - would be the demise of The Derailers. Hofeldt said he did consider discontinuing the band altogether after the split, but decided against it. "This is what I love, and this is what I do. And when I made my decision, the guys were ready to go," Hofeldt said.

The band found their own salvation in Rockabilly Hall of Famer-turned-producer Buzz Cason and their fortress of solitude in his creative workshop studio. The new dynamic duo of Cason and Hofeldt worked together to pen seven new songs for the album and completed their masterwork in December.

They filled in the hole left by Villanueva's rhythm guitar by adding ivory-tinkler Sweet

Basil McJagger and steel guitar guru Chris Schlotzhauer. McJagger adds Jerry-Lewis-style rhythm and swing, and a lot of panache, while long-time friend and cohort Schlotzhauer wails away and frees up Holfeldt, who stepped up to take over all of the vocal duties along with lead guitar.

Their return was finally assured by a contract with Texas-based label Palo Duro, who also handle Dale Watson and Two Tons of Steel. Palo Duro gave The Derailers much deserved respect and made them a priority.

The album boasts 14 action-packed tunes that maneuver between honky-tonk country, surf-style instrumental, rockabilly, Ray Price shuffle and weepy steel guitar-drenched ballads. Like good old Texas country boys, they sing about lost love and the dancing, booze, and beautiful women who help them forget the pain.

Although Soldiers of Love is a great spin, “You’re Looking at the Man” and “It’s Never Too Late For a Party” stand out, along with a heartfelt tribute to the Man in Black, “An American Man.” And for that mandatory Texas-themed song, there’s “She’s a Lot Like Texas,” bound to steal any show in the Lone Star State.

After a decade of marauding through dance halls and taking no prisoners, this quintet knows how to fill the floor. From their opening number to the last applause, they play to win. No matter if it’s a Beatles or a Johnny Cash cover, a ballad or a two-step, The Derailers produce tried-and-true grooves.

In the typical story line, the superhero always returns at a crucial point of origin, and following suit, The Derailers returned to the Continental Club, the site of their first weekly gig almost a decade ago, for a headlining spot this past First Thursday.

The band took the stage at the Continental Club dressed to kill and ready to try their new super powers. Their musical mind control kept the dance floor packed with two-steppers and Texas-swing dancers, and the liquor flowing throughout the hour-and-a-half set. And for anyone who doubted their extraordinary abilities, check this out: Holfeldt changed a broken string on his sparkly Telecaster while singing ‘Every Time it Rains’ without missing a beat. There was no sign of the drama which unfolded after the release of their last album and almost caused the sun to set on these prodigal sons of Austin country music.

For a visit to The Derailers’ musical home, check them out at The Broken Spoke, where they usually play once a month when not jet-setting around the country. At The Broken Spoke, one can expect a Texas-sized, four-hour set of originals and country classics. Be sure to bring dancing shoes for the two-steps.

The Derailers will be playing a CD release Wednesday, June 7 at Waterloo Records at 5 p.m. and at Hill's Cafe at 8 p.m., which will be broadcasted on KVET FM 98.1. Their next Broken Spoke Show is June 17 at 9 p.m.

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