


Hounds Tooth help shape lesson in local blues history



 Hounds Tooth's debut album is out now on Tweed Tone Records.



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Eighty years ago, Grafton was a hotbed for blues. The home of Paramount Records -- a recording studio founded by the Wisconsin Chair Company -- the small village was a launch pad for many Mississippi Delta blues pioneers who recorded there until Paramount closed its Grafton studio in 1932.

Recently, a newfound blues resurgence seems to be underway. And true to form, it is one that simultaneously pays tribute to the legends of the past while welcoming new artists and supporting the future of the musical tradition.

Thanks to the inception of organizations like the Grafton Blues Association, a group committed to keeping blues alive, the Milwaukee-area scene is really growing. And right

in the center of it all is Hounds Tooth, a five-piece whose take on the genre stands as a testament to community and to music history.

Hounds Tooth released its self-titled debut album (Tweed Tone Records) on Dec. 8 at Treats in Milwaukee and has one hell of a record release party planned for this Friday, Dec. 14 at Grafton's Paramount Restaurant, an upscale dining experience that celebrates the city's musical past and present.

"We've been a supporter of the Grafton Blues Association for a while," says J.D. Optekar, one of Hounds Tooth two guitarists. "We're really excited about what they're doing in terms of bringing national groups in and creating awareness of blues and blues history. I think they're really going to help the local scene."

This past summer marked the association's third Paramount Blues Festival and calendar listings for the new year reveal visits from the likes of Albert Cummings and Pinetop Perkins.

Honoring legend is integral to the members of Hounds Tooth, a factor that explains the decision to include three carefully selected cover songs on the new album. Complementing the band's seven original pieces are John Lee Hooker's "Boom Boom," Junior Wells' "Little By Little" and Susan Tedeschi's version of "Rock Me Right" -- a song done some powerful justice by lead vocalist Jamie Brace.

"I think part of playing the genre of the blues is paying tribute to those who have come before you," says Optekar. "People like John Lee Hooker and Junior Wells and Susan Tedeschi -- those are some of the people we respect and we love playing those songs, too."

Optekar says he became smitten with the blues while indulging his hearty appetite for rock and roll, and it shows. Rounded out by guitarist Michael Jon Kay, bass player Chris Peck and drummer Jeff Oscarson, Hound Tooth writes music that is punchy, commanding and rich with mood -- like taking the essence of a classic rock song and adding an ample amount of soul.

Live set lists include several renowned blues rockers, including The Allman Brothers Band's "Whipping Post," Howlin' Wolf's "Little Red Rooster," a little Clapton, a little Zeppelin -- even Elvis's "Ready Teddy." And it would be far from surprising to see Brace take on Janis Joplin if the feeling grabs her on stage.

"We're really excited about this," says Optekar. "We'd made some lineup changes with our singer to find the right chemistry and when Jamie came on board early last year we felt that we finally had all the pieces in place."

With the puzzle together, the band headed to the studio and hired seasoned blues veteran Steve Cohen to produce the record.

"It was great sitting in with Steve during our mixing sessions and hearing him tell stories of the older days -- what his experience was like and some of the people he's met and worked with," says Optekar. "I think that a big part about being in the blues is knowing who came before you and learning from the people who have been doing it for a while."

Curious about what Hounds Tooth has learned? Check Brace and crew out this Friday, Dec. 14 at Grafton's Paramount Restaurant. Show time is 9:30 p.m.

 MORE INFORMATION

[Paramount Restaurant](#)

1304 12th Ave.

Grafton, WI 53024

(262) 375-0555

<http://www.paramountrestaurant.com>

Event information:

[Houndstooth](#)

Friday, Dec. 14, 9 p.m. - 11:59 p.m.

Related links:

- houndstoothblues.com