

HIPPO NITE

Nite Roundup

Local music & nightlife news

By Michael Witthaus
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• **Barking man:** On Monday, radio and television personality Scorch moves into a dog cage for the week to raise money for the Animal Rescue League of New Hampshire. To get things started, Craving Lucy, Soundtrack to Monday, Snake Bite and Seven States Away play an afternoon benefit, emceed by Chris Kilgore (Lords of Audio). Attend the Paws for the Cause Kickoff Show on Sunday, June 5, at 2:30 p.m. at Mad Bob's Saloon, 342 Lincoln St. in Manchester. Tickets are \$10; for more, go to www.facebook.com/rock101fm.

• **Gonzo squared:** Protean punk twang from The Caught Flies is paired with Yankee Cockfight, a duo one scenester described as “punk and metal make a baby.” Given their deep blues influences, the new family likely settled into a house near the crossroads where Robert Johnson sold his soul to the Devil. Two other bands round out the free (18+) show. See The Caught Flies, Yankee Cockfight, The Old Edison and Blake Patria on Friday, June 3, at 9 p.m. at the Green Martini, 6 Pleasant St. Ext. in Concord (www.greenmartini.com).

• **Metal and mirth:** In Manchester's Mill District, comedy stars Super Secret Project (“Granite State of Mind”) leaven a hard rock lineup led by Age of End, an accessible Massachusetts quartet balancing aggressive metal with melodic elements. The show, a fundraiser for cancer charity Relay for Life, is an all-day affair featuring a total of six bands. Attend Rock for Cancer on Saturday, June 4, at 5 p.m. at Jillian's, 50 Phillippe Cote St. in Manchester. Tickets are \$20; for more, call 978-476-4205.

• **Heavenly Harley:** A barbecue feast and a live performance by Christian rockers We Are the Nine follows a morning bike rally, silent auction and a raffle for a 2011 Harley Super Glide, with proceeds going to Manchester Teen Challenge, a faith-based drug recovery program. Attend the Teen Challenge Bike Rally with We Are the Nine on Saturday, June 5, at Manchester Harley Davidson, 115 John E. Devine Drive in Manchester. Registration at 10 a.m., ride begins at 11 a.m. For more information, call 647-7770.

• **Local color:** The Londonderry High School Jazz Ensemble performs in the first of a free concert series that over the summer will feature indie darlings Tripping Lily, folkie Liz Longley, sax player David Milazzo and Jimmy Buffett cover band The Coconut Monkeys. The kickoff show also includes a performance by the new LHS Rock Orchestra. See the Londonderry High Music Showcase on Monday, July 6, at the Town Common in Londonderry. For information on this and future shows, go to www.londonderryculture.org.

Phil Vassar for the Cause

Annual fundraiser series begins with country star

By Michael Witthaus
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Child and Family Services of New Hampshire's annual *Concerts for the Cause* kick off with a June 3 show at Manchester's Palace Theatre followed by another at the Lebanon Opera House on June 4, both starring country rocker Phil Vassar and Boston duo Farren-Butcher, Inc. The June 22 finale at Capitol Center for the Arts in Concord is a “Blues Summit” with the Robert Cray Band and opener Ronnie Earl & the Broadcasters.

Phil Vassar is a take-charge guy. Before selling his first song, he bought his own restaurant just to have a place to gig.

“I was playing a bunch of clubs in Nashville and developed this big following,” he said during a recent telephone interview. “Then I had the opportunity — this building came up for sale, and one thing led to another and after about a year or two of negotiating, they just about gave it to me. So I started out there and stayed until I sold it and put out my first single.”

That song, 1999's “Carlene,” reached the top five, and the follow-up, “Just Another Day in Paradise,” became Vassar's first number-one record. As a songwriter, he's also penned chart-topping hits for Alan Jackson, Tim McGraw and Jo Dee Messina. But after five albums in 10 years, Vassar grew weary of working for the music industry, and decided to start his own label, called Rodeowave.

“A lot of people made a lot of money and now there's a shell of a business,” he says. “They didn't change when they had the chance, and in business there's the quick and the dead.”

Though Vassar is Rodeowave's only artist at the moment, he has plans to recruit talent in the future.

“There are a lot of guys I know who aren't on a record label anywhere,” he says. “Which is good for them — if they're on a major label they're looking at three to four years before they even get a shot at a single.”

A recent call Vassar received from movie director Don Handfield helped the decision to go it alone. Handfield needed a song for the

closing credits of *Touchback*, due for release later this year. The film stars Kurt Russell as a former high school jock recalling the injury that ended a promising football career.

Vassar wrote, recorded and mixed the song in one day, and delivered it to Handfield that night. “Just having the ability to do something like that,” he says with amazement. “At a major label I'd have to run it up the flagpole and get 50 different people to sign off on it. It would have never happened, because they needed it right away. It's stuff that can get done right now; I don't have to ask anybody, and that's a refreshing thing.”

Vassar released the label's first single on May 23. “Let's Get Together” is a party-ready record, with images of iced-down beer, revelers playing air guitar to classic rock and a driveway lined with the new country staple, tiki torches. “There ain't no curfew here tonight,” Vassar sings. “We'll worry about tomorrow tomorrow.”

He co-wrote the tune late last year with Tony Mullins (Rascal Flatts, Montgomery Gentry and Kenny Chesney) after one too many snowy days in Nashville. “It was winter, cold and nasty, and we were just thinking about good weather,” he says. “That's where the song came from, a longing for ... when it wasn't 20 degrees outside.”

As the summer approaches, Vassar is back in his element, his schedule filled with outdoor shows and festivals like the recent Suwannee River Jam in Florida.

“We just played at the Preakness last weekend, it was tens of thousands of people, nuts and crazy, people drinking at 10 a.m. and all,” he says. “I get to do a lot of different venues and it makes for different kinds of shows.”

A loose mood will likely prevail for Vassar's New Hampshire appearances. “It's always fun — we go out there without a set list and everyone gets involved,” he says enthusiastically. “We play songs we don't know and anything from requests, album cuts, deep tracks.” Charity events are a regular part of Vassar's work. This is his first effort for CFSNH, an organization that works on behalf of families, with a particular focus on at-risk children. All the money raised will be spent locally on



Phil Vassar. Courtesy photo.

services for victims of abuse and neglect, troubled youth, children in foster care, babies at risk and impoverished families.

“I hope we raise a lot of money. I do a lot of benefits for kids,” says Vassar, who has two daughters aged 7 and 12. “Kids are growing up faster and they're getting into things, there's more availability of drugs, it's very scary. So I'm proud to be part of it.”

Concerts for the Cause

Phil Vassar and special guests Farren-Butcher, Inc. with Charlie Farren & Jon Butcher

Friday, June 3, at 8 p.m. at the Palace Theatre, 80 Hanover St., Manchester
Saturday, June 4, at 7:30 p.m. at the Lebanon Opera House, 51 North Park St., Lebanon
Tickets: \$39.50

Robert Cray Band and special guests

Ronnie Earl & the Broadcasters
Wednesday, June 22, at 7 p.m. at Capitol Center for the Arts, 44 S. Main St., Concord
Tickets: \$40 and \$27.

\$150/person VIP packages are available for both shows. Visit www.cfsnh.org for more information.

Stack 'em up

Shana Stack Band making all the pieces fit

By Michael Witthaus
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Unlike many musical genres, a good country song leads with melody and lets the beat follow. With the Shana Stack Band, it begins with a crisp lead guitar, the kind perfected by Vince Gill and Brad Paisley, coupled with the sultry sway of pedal steel. Then the rhythm kicks in, guided by gentle acoustic strumming.

That's Shana Stack's moment, as she steps up to the microphone and begins to sing.

Ultimately, though, a memorable tune is all about emotion, as any crooner from Patsy to Reba will attest, and it's Ed Leavitt who

provides the band's songwriting power. A Nashville veteran who grew up on George Jones and Merle Haggard, Leavitt knows his subjects. A ballad, “Pleasure and Pain,” explores the forbidden affair of a “soccer mom” and her former college flame, while the upbeat “Perfect Pair” (a co-write with frequent collaborator Pat Kelley) celebrates a quirky love that's likened to “Bonnie and Clyde, Sonny and Cher.”

The songs are part of a CD the band hopes to release by July or August in support of a busy summer schedule filled with several outdoor shows in places like Sunapee, Antrim and Hanover. The season ends with the band on the bill for Reba McIntire's Meadowbrook U.S.

Cellular Pavilion show on Sept. 24.

“Reba's not bringing an opening act; she has such a huge stage that it literally takes an entire day to set up,” said Leavitt recently during a break from rehearsals in their drummer's Newport garage. “So we're playing on the side stage, but we're technically the opener.”

The group includes Stack and Leavitt (who also plays rhythm guitar) sharing lead vocals. Drummer Rick Leavitt (Ed's brother) and veteran bass player Kevin Miller form the rhythm section, with Ed Sanchez on lead guitar and backing vocals. The many varying influences make the group greater than the sum of its parts. Miller comes from a rock and roll

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Shana Stack Band. Courtesy photo by Kendal Bush

dance floor and kept everyone drinking,” Stack recalls. “At the end of the night, we were booked for four more gigs — and we got extra money, which never ever happens.”

The band earned the Meadowbrook gig through tenacity and hard work, sending videos and song samples to venue management and engaging in a lengthy negotiation. Fans wishing to get up close and personal with the headliner, whether to gush about a favorite song or ask to have a cherished piece of memorabilia signed, are advised to buy tickets using the special promotional code SSTSSB, which will automatically enter them for a chance to win a meet and greet with McIntire at the show.

The band members themselves are fans and are eagerly anticipating the early fall show. Stack’s husband celebrated by picking up a Reba Signature Barbie doll at Wal-Mart, hoping the star will autograph it. “He loves Reba,” says Stack.

Shana Stack Band

Friday, June 3, at 9 p.m. at the Chop Shop Pub and Grub, 920 Lafayette Road in Seabrook (760-7706)

Saturday, June 4, at 11 a.m. at the 27th Annual WOKQ Chowder Festival in Prescott Park, Portsmouth (rain date Sunday, June 5)

Saturday, June 11, at 9 p.m. at Midnight Rodeo Bar (Yard Restaurant), 1211 South Mammoth Road in Manchester (703-8444)

background, having opened for the Who and Steppenwolf.

Sanchez studied classical guitar in college, but he’s a full covert now: “It’s all about the Telecaster,” he says with a laugh.

Eibner, on the other hand, claims to have hated country music until he heard nascent Americana bands like New Riders of the Purple Sage, Poco and Gram Parsons in the early 1970s.

The Leavitt brothers represent the old-school contingent, having formed their first country band as teenagers.

From her vantage point as afternoon DJ on country station WINK-FM in Keene, Stack keeps an eye on emerging hits for the band to cover. The latest addition to the set list is Jason Aldean’s “My Kinda Party.”

Playing out, they’re able to mix a larger number of originals than a lot of other bands. McCue’s Billiards in Keene is a regular stop, but their first time through they were warned to stick to covers — which they did for the most part. “But our stuff got people on the

CONCERTS

Venues

Capitol Center for the Performing Arts 44 S. Main St., Concord, 225-1111, ccanh.com

The Colonial Theatre 95 Main St., Keene, 352-2033, thecolonial.org

Dana Humanities Center at Saint Anselm College 100 Saint Anselm Drive, Manchester, 641-7700, anselm.edu/dana

Hampton Beach Casino Ballroom 169 Ocean Blvd., Hampton Beach, 929-4100, casinoballroom.com

Leddy Center 38c Ladd’s Lane, Epping, 679-2781, leddycenter.org

Lowell Memorial Auditorium

East Merrimack Street, Lowell, Mass., 978-454-2299, lowellauditorium.com

Meadowbrook U.S. Cellular Pavillion 72 Meadowbrook Lane, Gilford, 293-4700, meadowbrook.net

The Middle Arts & Entertainment Center 316 Central St., Franklin, 934-1901, themiddlenh.org

The Music Hall 28 Chestnut St., Portsmouth, 436-2400, themusic-hall.org

The Old Meeting House, 1 New Boston Rd., Franconstown
Palace Theatre, 80 Hanover St., Manchester, 668-5588, palacethe-

atre.org

Rochester Opera House 31 Wakefield St., Rochester 335-1992, rochesteroperahouse.com

Stockbridge Theatre Pinkerton Academy, Route 28, Derry, 437-5210, stockbridgetheatre.com

Tupelo Music Hall 2 Young Road, Londonderry, 437-5100, tupelohall.com

Verizon Wireless Arena 555 Elm St., Manchester, 644-5000, www.verizonwirelessarena.com

Whittemore Center Arena UNH 128 Main St., Durham, 862-4000, www.whittcenter.com

• **Peter Frampton** Thurs., July 2, at 6 p.m., Meadowbrook

• **Trace Adkins and Uncle Kracker** Fri., June 3, at 6 p.m., Meadowbrook

• **Phil Vassar** Fri., June 3, at 8 p.m., Palace

• **NH Philharmonic** Sat., June 4, at 8 p.m. Cap Center

• **Antigone Rising** Sat., June 4, at 8 p.m., Tupelo

• **Dueling pianos** Sat., June 4, at 8 p.m., Boynton’s

• **38 Special** Thurs., June 9, at 8 p.m., Casino Ballroom

• **James McMurtry** Thurs., June 9, at 8 p.m., Tupelo

• **Styx and Yes** Thurs., June 9, at 5 p.m., Meadowbrook

• **Todd Snider** Fri., June 10, at 8 p.m., Tupelo

• **David Mallett** Fri., June 10, at 10 p.m., Boynton’s

• **Stayin’ Alive, One night of The Bee Gees** Fri., June 10, at 7:30 p.m., Palace

• **Farren Butcher Inc.** Sat., June 11, at 8 p.m., Tupelo

• **Eddy “The Chief” Clearwater** Fri., June 15, at 8 p.m., Tupelo

• **Carrie Rodriguez** Fri., June 15, at 8 p.m., Tupelo

• **The Monkees** Wed., June 15, at 8 p.m., Lowell Auditorium

• **The Tedeschi Trucks Band** Sat., June 16, at 8 p.m., Casino Ballroom

• **Black Country Communion** Fri., June 17, at 8 p.m., Casino Ballroom

• **Justin Lantrip** Fri., June 17, at 10 p.m., Boynton’s

• **Michael Buble** Fri., June 17, at 8 p.m., Verizon Wireless Arena

• **Black Country Communion** Fri., June 17, at 8 p.m., Casino Ballroom

• **Jimmy Vaughn** Fri., June 17, at 8 p.m., Tupelo

• **Granite State Blues Society Challenge** Sat., June 18, at 8 p.m., Tupelo

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