

This band plays its own brand of rockabilly

The LeRois launch annual Folk Festival on Friday

By Paul Sturtz
Of the Emerald

The LeRois Brothers in full swing is the sound of true believers kickin' out the jams once church is out. Although firmly rooted in the rockabilly tradition, this Texas band doesn't stop to kneel at the altar like the Blasters or Stray Cats. Instead, they storm the pulpit to let loose with their brand of lowdown guitar raveup. In the process, roots music gets unrooted.

This five-man rock'n'roll band made up of only two brothers and no Lerois will launch the Willamette Valley Folk Festival on Friday.

As lead singer J.D. Doerr tells it, the band is pretty laid back, with most members usually just tapping their feet. But every once in a while... well, things get a bit frantic. Like one night a while back at one of Austin's 5th Street clubs, when J.D. got caught up in the excitement and went flying, feet-first through a wall.

"I fell out backwards and took a big chunk onto the wood stage," he says. "The crowd went nuts — they thought it was the greatest thing they'd ever seen."

The club owners didn't share that sentiment — they banned the LeRois forever from playing there. (It turns out forever didn't last long — the club went out of business a month later.) Though 23-year-old J.D. says he hasn't broken anything lately, he does move around quite a bit especially "when the crowd starts reacting and getting into it."

The LeRois have been getting into it since 1981 when Missouri natives Steve Doerr and Don Leady finally settled down in Austin after 15 years of playing guitar together on the Midwest honky-tonks circuit. Joining with Fort Worth native, drummer Mike Buck, they started gigging sometimes as a bass-guitarless trio.

They quickly recorded an E.P. and album on independent



Courtesy photo

The LeRois Brothers from Texas will perform their punkish version of rockabilly on Friday, at the Willamette Valley Folk Festival. They will play Max's Tavern at 9 p.m. Saturday.

dancing in the studio like he was on the stage at Shea Stadium. Going great guns, kicking his feet out and hollering."

This Texas dance tradition goes back quite a few years, reaching back to legendary bands such as the 13th Floor Elevators to contemporaries such as the Big Boys, a hardcore unit.

"It's a great tradition to uphold. The thing is that you can hear a lot of rock'n'roll at a normal country dance hall and everybody dances," Steve Doerr says.

Because of this, the LeRois would not feel libeled if someone tagged them as a bar band. "We do music to dance to mostly. That term might have derogatory connotations, but in one way it's basically what we are," Doerr says. But modesty aside, the LeRois are no ordinary bar band stranded in a nowhere burg.

In fact they came mighty

close to cracking the big time, having cut an E.P. called "Forget about the Danger... Think of the Fun" for Columbia Records at the beginning of 1984. Rolling Stone then spotlighted them by honoring them as one of the 10 best new bands in March, 1984. But because the record never threatened to push Michael Jackson off the charts, CBS dropped them shortly thereafter.

Nevertheless, the LeRois plug on through personnel changes — the most recent change occurred last year as guitarist extraordinaire, Evan Johns replaced Leady, and J.D. Doerr became lead vocalist.

The band tours extensively, usually alternating three weeks in Texas with three-week forays into the Midwest or East Coast and sometimes going to Europe, where they have a loyal following.

Wherever they go, the LeRois Brothers bring a sound that con-

duces up visions of a steamroller bulling its way through Main Street — a steamroller operated by a crazy man who can't stop.

Instead of the kids being frightened away, they jump on top, exhilarated by the most exciting thing to hit town in years.

On songs like "Check This Action" and "Treat Her Right" the steamroller propulsion of Buck's flailing drumming and the guitars grinding away picks up the listeners right out of their seats and plants them right into a sweaty roadhouse.

With a new album entitled "Lucky, Lucky Me" to be released on Profile Records in two weeks, the LeRois are stretching their stylistic boundaries. Cajun, country, blues, garage music and their punkish version of rockabilly will all be found, Steve Doerr says. "As far as music, we do whatever we feel like anyway. We're just lucky quite a few people like it."

Wherever they go, the LeRois Brothers bring a sound that conjures up visions of a steamroller bulling its way through town — a steamroller operated by a crazy man who can't stop.

"During one song I ran towards a wall. I didn't know what I was going to do once I got there, maybe flip off the wall or something. It looked like it was going to be concrete or stucco," J.D. says. "But it turned out to be dry wall plastered over. I put both feet through it and broke through, hit the bricks on the other side and ended up hanging out of the wall up to my knees.

Texas-based labels with a detour to back up the Legendary Stardust Cowboy, a performer known for his bizarre vocal style.

The experience proved to be pretty inspiring, Steve Doerr says. "He came down from Las Vegas. He'd say 'this is a country song' and start singing and we'd start playing. During the instrumental sections of the song he would do this frantic

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