



Courtesy

New York City-based rock outfit stellastarr* will play in Portland at Berbat's Pan tomorrow night. The band released its self-titled debut album in September and has toured extensively since then.

stellastarr* stops to chat about chance at starr*dom

New York band stellastarr* plays Thursday in Portland

By Ryan Nyburg
Senior Pulse Reporter

New York City-based rock band stellastarr* joined the national music scene with the release of their debut album on RCA Records in September. Since then, the four-member band has toured extensively across the country. Recently, drummer Arthur Kremer found time while on the road to talk to the Emerald about the origins of the band, touring and audience reactions to the music.

Emerald: What sort of influences do you think the band has?

AK: Well, that's kind of a hard question to answer. I don't mean to be vague, but everybody comes from a different background. Me personally, I think everything is an influence to me — even stuff I don't like. You always learn something. It's never really a thing where I hear an artist and I want to sound like him or play drums like him. I'm more interested in the creative solutions that artists come up with. It's sort of inspirational. Say someone like Bjork, you know, someone doing something interesting and creative and expressing themselves in a way that people can connect to it. That's very inspirational.

Emerald: How did you guys get together?

AK: Me, Shawn (Christensen, lead

vocal/guitar) and Amanda (Tannen, bass) all went to school together. We started a band together, kind of a joke band. We were all novices, didn't know how to play our instruments. After school ended, we went our separate ways. I kept up with Shawn and kept nagging him to start a band again. We got in touch with Mandy again, just called her out of the blue and asked her. Mike (Jurin, guitar), we met after he moved into my old apartment in New York. I went back to get some mail and told my old roommate I was starting a band. He told me that the new guy living there was a guitarist. So we invited him along for rehearsal and he was fantastic.

Emerald: So it just kind of clicked?

AK: Yeah. We really just got together to have fun, you know? It was something to do on a Tuesday night. We were never thinking that we ought to go out and get a record deal and be this big band. We just wanted to get together, write some songs and have some fun.

Emerald: How does it feel to start out that way and to now come into something bigger?

AK: It's great. But it's hard to look at the big picture though, you know, because when you're inside of it, things move really slowly. We didn't just get a record deal after our second show; we've been doing this for four years. It was really building up gradually. Now it's kind of like a

job, but when you step back and look at it, you think, "This is incredible. We're touring the world and people are loving us and throwing money at us." It's really the opportunity of a lifetime.

Emerald: What would you say is the strangest concert experience you've had?

AK: One of the strangest was one where we played the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland. This was for a contest. Shawn and Mike broke both their guitars and their back-up and I really hurt my wrist playing drums. It was just a disaster. We lost the contest as well.

Emerald: Who did you lose to?

AK: Some band, I can't remember the name. That show was rigged or something. But I'll let bygones be bygones. Another show in Orlando was like that. I broke my kick pedal, Shawn lost his voice. I kept dropping sticks, breaking sticks and all. But the crowd was just going wild, they loved us. We couldn't get through a song and they were screaming their heads off. I think we played four or five songs and just had to leave because we couldn't perform. They loved us though. It was weird.

stellastarr* will be playing Friday at Berbat's Pan, located at 10 S.W. Third Ave. in Portland. Tickets are \$8 in advance and \$10 the day of the show.

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CLAPTON

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former Beatle George Harrison and his wife Pattie Boyd and the loss of his 4-year-old son, who fell to his death from a 53rd story window. On this album, he takes Johnson's original visions and meshes them with his new vocal and guitar innovations.

Songs come to life with a full band of drums, bass, Hammond organ, piano, harmonica and guitar. Two rollicking standouts are "They're Red Hot" and "32-20 Blues." The former is a jumping tune about hot tamales for sale, driven by piano and drums. Its hopping piano could get anyone bouncing. As a vocalist, Clapton hardly exudes the spirit of his 59 years — instead, he comes off as youthful and jovial.

Given the genre (and Johnson's circumstances), most songs are woeful.

"Me and the Devil Blues" is a declaration that "me and the devil are walkin' side by side," which is probably how Johnson and Clapton felt at their lowest moments. The unrequited love ballad "Kind Hearted Blues" is a generic lonesome brood declaring, "I love my baby, my baby don't love me." The album makes a declaration of sadness, as most track names end in the word "blues" — "Traveling Riverside Blues," "Stop Breakin' Down Blues" and "Milkcow's Calf Blues," plus the few others mentioned.

Clapton makes use of modern musical instruments and technology such as an electric bass and overdubbing to shed new light on Johnson's sound. But there are times when he overdoes it. In "Milkcow's Calf Blues," booming guitar and drums erase any blues essence, while a weak background piano tries to keep the old sound alive. "If I Had Possession Over Judgment

Day" is overpowered by a confusing, unbalanced mix of all the aforementioned instruments.

The collection's last track, "Hell Hound On My Trail," is a hopeful look to the future, and therefore a powerful finale. It shows both musicians' perseverance through hard times by way of Clapton's passionate interpretation of the lyrics, "I got to keep movin', I got to keep movin'/ blues fallin' down like hail, blues fallin' down like hail."

"Me and Mr. Johnson" is a respectable homage from one blues lover to another. Clapton leaves his mark on Johnson's compositions by adding a little of himself to the songs, though he does it not in a vain way but rather to express an emotional connection to Johnson's work.

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