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Keepin' It Old School

Ben Rice sounds older than his years

If you're even remotely familiar with the phone sex profession, you understand how voices can be deceiving. Such is the case with the Ben Rice Blues Band, which sounds more like a bunch of scruffy middle-aged men than the clean-cut teenagers that they are.

Looking like he would much sooner be mowing my lawn than fronting a blues band, Ben Rice, 18, formed the band in the seventh grade. Over the years the lineup has changed, and the group has gone through multiple drummers, but with five Muddy Award nominations and three CDs in radio rotation, they seem to have finally found the winning combination.

The band currently consists of Ben Rice on guitar and lead vocals, 17-year-old Daniel Rice on sax and harmonica, 15-year-old Mac Potts on keys, Alex McEntee on bass and Alex Ankeny on percussion.

According to Ben Rice, the band's music is a mix of traditional and contemporary blues. Depending on the song, you might hear remnants of Creedence Clearwater Revival, Chuck Berry, B.B. King or Muddy Waters. "I don't really seek out to sound like John Mayer and Dave Matthews Band or any of them. I mostly try to make it different from what other blues bands are playing. I lean towards sounding 'old school' more than contemporary though," Rice says.

The members of the band have a maturity and professionalism rare among people

their age. In the sultry song "Rosey," Ben sings about a woman in a way that makes even the most experienced woman blush. Daniel Rice brings a whole lot of class to the song, playing the sax with a heartwrenching soulfulness. His sax could easily overpower Ben's voice, but instead he makes it croon as if it is a backup singer.

The upbeat "Hang Up the Phone" is a tribute to the rhythm and blues style of such greats as Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, who brought a rock and roll approach to the blues. Mac Potts, despite being blind since birth, plays the piano with the same frenetic energy as Jerry Lee Lewis in "Great Balls of Fire."

Their youthful spirit has attracted a much younger audience to their shows

than you would normally find at a blues concert. "Younger audiences have been appearing more. I don't think it is the music as much as it is the energy we put behind what we do," Ben explains. "Also, the blues has had such a large influence on rock that a lot of our songs have a similar feel to classic rock, which will always be popular among teenagers."

Clearly taking advantage of the rock star lifestyle, the guys traveled to Memphis, Tenn., in February where they competed in the International Blues Challenge and stayed up until 3 am every night jamming with other bands and locals. The guys will be playing a slew of festivals this summer in Oregon, California and Washington. **ew**

Ben Rice Blues Band
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