

Diapers and Driving

Even through the muffled sound of a cell phone on some desolate highway in the middle-of-nowhere Midwest, you can hear New Orleans in Mike West's voice. He and his wife, Katie Eullis, constitute the playful, hillbilly band, **Truckstop Honeymoon**. The group's upbeat, lighthearted and lively tunes contain laugh-out-loud lyrics and impressive high-quality banjo and bass skills.

The painted image of two artists strumming instruments in a quiet studio, free from the stresses of the world is far from reality for Truckstop Honeymoon. Married with children, West and Eullis are first and foremost, parents.

"We fit in our creative work in-between diapers and driving," West says. "It's the most creative time of my life."

Originally from "The Big Easy," the couple was forced to move after Hurricane Katrina destroyed their home. "We were in the Lower Ninth Ward, but luckily we were out of town when the hurricane hit," West says. Without a clue of where to go, the couple ended up in Kansas.

"There's a kind of strange alienation that comes with a forced move; you're out of sorts," West says. That move had a ripple effect on all aspects of the duo's life, especially their music. "There is a lot of that psychology in our music," West says. "There's a love-hate thing going on both for where we are and where we are from."

Between playgrounds and bedtimes, the band finds time to create great music. Truckstop Honeymoon may as well call itself "honeymoon with kids," given how fulfilled and prolific the two child-laden musicians are. "There's definitely an inspiration that comes from having a full life," West says. "There's not a lot of time for profound contemplation."

And that lack of deeply contemplative time is what seems to be keeping Truckstop Honeymoon's specific brand of humor alive. The band takes a witty approach to songwriting, discussing the oddities of life in a way that is universally relatable. "We write songs that try to capture those ordinary and yet bizarre experiences that everybody has," West says.

Eullis and West are laughing through the absurdity of life and making fine tunes in the process. Oh, and in addition to being a hysterically funny, incredibly talented musical force, Truckstop Honeymoon can put on a live show that makes the audience feel like a part of the family.

Truckstop Honeymoon plays 9:30 pm Saturday, July 21, at Sam Bond's; \$5. – *Ali Enright*



One Degree of Mayall

Like many serious music fans, my early favorites came from the albums and artists that my father introduced me to – the rock 'n' roll heroes of his era that raised a middle finger to conformists in the 1950s. The moping mops of '90s rock had nothing on the bad boys of my old man's record collection. But all things must pass, and the Woodstock set morphed from the bad boys into the good ol' boys – Peter and Gordon became Gordon and Gekko.

One doesn't typically relate long-haired icons of 1960s counterculture with kings of high finance. But in a world where aging rock stars behave more like investment bankers than they do Mick Jagger, the comparison seems apt. And while the moneygrubbers continue to tour and gouge the populace like a sub-prime mortgage, another titan of the era continues to quietly fortify his legacy.

I'm referring to **John Mayall**, the renowned godfather of British blues. A bandleader whose Bluesbreakers band featured a rotating cast of characters rivaled only by the star-studded groups

of Billy Eckstine or Art Blakey (or the incestuous Seattle grunge scene of the early '90s, for a more recent example). Mayall achieved his success all on his own – you certainly won't find him on many lists of all-time great guitarists or songwriters. But Mayall's place in the pantheon of rock is untouched. Consider the following: Eric Clapton, Mick Taylor, Peter Green, Jack Bruce and Mick Fleetwood are just a few of the giants who passed through the proving grounds of Mayall's Bluesbreakers before finding fame on their own. For those big timers, meeting Mayall was the rock 'n' roll equivalent to throwing your life savings into a little start-up like Apple, Microsoft, Google and well ... you get the point.

When it comes to the wilds of the 1960's music scene, Mayall is Kevin Bacon, and he only needs one degree.

John Mayall plays 7:30 pm Thursday, July 19, at The Shedd; Prices vary. – *Mark Sullivan*



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