

CANDY CORN

Rich Sellers, vocalist and bandleader with Eugene-based **Candy Apple Bleu**, remembers a time from the late '70s to early '90s when there was a difference between a cover band and a tribute act: when popular songs were recreated live onstage by capable musicians with real musical chops and very little sense of parody.

Watch Candy Apple Bleu play sets of what's sometimes called "yacht rock" — soft or smooth rock hits from the golden age of AM radio — and you understand what he means. Sellers got his start with another Eugene-based disco cover band, Satin Love Orchestra, and fans might be familiar with Sellers from the Pink Floyd cover act Floydian Slips.

What Candy Apple Bleu does is corny as hell, but this band can play and that's undeniable. I normally find a lot of this stuff pretty anemic — bands like Bread, America and Christopher Cross, musicians that had all the ingredients of meaningful expression in many of the right the proportions — but to me it just lacks guts, kick and soul. Sellers says I'm wrong.

"This was pop music when I was a child," Sellers says, and he appreciates the music's tough arrangements, most of which his band picks up by ear.

"It's difficult to play," he continues. "It's so smooth and soft. That's the thing."

In fact, Sellers says he's proud when someone challenges him by asking: *You really like this music?*

Sellers plays a character on stage: a soft rock icon in his own mind who never outgrew 1978, and he appreciates the musicianship of his band — playing everything from keyboards to trombone and saxophone.

He calls the band "seven guys that can nail it."

Even though he's played music since he was a child, Sellers has never been a songwriter, instead calling himself a musical technician. He admits Candy Apple Bleu is considering an all-Bread cover album, but for now Candy Apple Bleu is planning to expand their live show beyond Eugene to Portland and Seattle.

Overall, Candy Apple Bleu's take on yacht rock is almost brawny, danceable, focusing on the groove pockets it took to take these tunes to the top of the charts. In a word, they're fun, and the live shows have quickly become some of Eugene's hottest tickets.

Sellers says that Candy Apple Bleu tries to throw in a new cover, usually his choice, every other show. "I really like the deep cuts," he says.

Candy Apple Bleu plays KRVM benefit Adult Prom alongside **Soul Vibrator** 8 pm Saturday, May 12, at Hi-Fi Music Hall; \$18 advance, \$22 door, 21-plus. — Will Kennedy



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