

## **THE CAT'S ASS: OTTAWA BAND A MUST SEE, HEAR**

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by Sylvie Hill

*With retro styles set currently by the likes of The Strokes or Sam Roberts it's a challenge to know if this rockstar look on anybody from Ottawa clothes an authentic music savant, or, a total poseur. So when you see a band on stage all dressed cool in green bowler shirts, except for the lead singer in signature black and wearing shades, at night, what are you supposed to think about this?*

In this popular culture of shag haircuts, 'worn-look' jeans, tight black leather jackets and tinted aviators, there are too few real fans carrying that 60's or 70's vibe who really know their Lou Reeds from their Nick Caves, and their Fleetwood Macs from their McDonald's hamburgers. The fast-food feel of bands these days who seemingly slap together an album and market their talents with tits and ass or a fancy haircut leaves a shit taste in my mouth. And, one would expect shit from a band naming itself "The Picklecatz" -- for all its connotative imagery, or, just because it's a local band with what I think is a bad name. Well, guess again.

There is a whole rock and roll history of bands with stupid names. Take "The Blow Monkeys" for example with whom The Picklecatz share more than just a goofy band name. The Picklecatz' 4-song cd, "Catz' Tales" could easily be mistaken for Dr. Robert's (ex-Blow Monkey lead singer) 4-song album, "The Coming of Grace." And if this reference is too dated or cryptic, maybe "The Jam" says something to you. Back in the day, Dr. Robert collaborated with ex-Jam front man, Paul Weller (Style Council), bringing together a catchy blend of style-swank that is hinted at with The Picklecatz. Intentional or not.

However, rather than the social and political themes of the swanked up suede heads of the early '80s, with The Picklecatz, you get tales of wild seductresses and questionable ladies that are more of the jazz/blues world. A refreshingly genuine band we've got here playing music that sounds like the soundtrack to some hip film where a stacked heroine in a slinky black dress glides across the floor of a mysterious bar, glancing askance with diva eyes at her next lay. This might have everything to do with their chart topper, "Horny": *"Yeah simple is the mind of wicked pleasures ...seducing you is how she gets her kicks / she don't want their money, she just wants to see that look upon their face when they get horny."* With a snake-tongued emphasis hissing out that "s" in 'kicks', and with no musician so much as ever packing a fraction of the class the 'Catz get into the word "horny", this band grabs your attention for all its lyrical ingenuity and skilled delivery.

This music is sexy. If you've ever wanted to be cruising the rockabilly digs of North London (UK) on a Saturday night in Ottawa, or better yet, lurk the streets of New Orleans in a mild drunken stupor, down to your last cigarette, well you can find that feel by listening to these guys. They're all about the music. They've got the vibe down. They make you feel attractive. They're such a good time.

On January 18, 2003, The Picklecatz played Ottawa's Café Dekcuf to as diverse a crowd as Toronto is as a Canadian city; with a 9 song set that got people dancing and praising the quality of the goods, loudly. You'd be at home if you were old enough to remember greats like The Stray Cats and comfortable enough if you had just left Coldplay playing in your kitchen. (Remember the days you'd sit there "air-tambourining" to a Stone Roses tune or to Primal Scream's "Get Your Rocks Off"? Well, time to break out the thighs again). One kid wearing a Lou Reed t-shirt got my nod of approval. Some drunken college kid yelled "Corey Hart!" bringing attention to the lead singer's choice of sunglasses that night. Hey, it wouldn't be the first time a musician got heckled in Ottawa. Enter Peter Gabriel's protégé, rockstar Joseph Arthur. He'll no longer play Mercury Lounge in this town for all the razzing he got from his audience about his John Lennon look. There's wanting to look cool, and then there's not giving a fuck about looking at your audience.

Don't expect too much action from these guys on stage – they're reserved in composure like cool cats. Not rude, just laid back. Modernizing a '50s look with the entire band in green bowler shirts (except the lead guitar/singer, Troy Jones, distinct in black), these 5 'Catz deliver their unique blend of jazz-blues/psychedelic rock/funk/soul music in modest style. In some songs, Jones' very low key and almost haunting vocals hint at the New Orleans mysterious death ballads of Nick Cave and at other times, you'd better call Colin James – he's got competition with this boy Jones' well-placed whine and jazzy voice. Aside from the spectacular range in vocals and melodies, fair to say he's a shoe-in for Lindsey Buckingham of Fleetwood Mac as well. A dash of Motown groove, some feelgood Jamiroquai nuances and a Hammond organ sound from the fine, fine keyboards timewarp an appreciative audience into a real catchy, dance-y space. The Picklecatz are: Troy Jones (lead guitar and vocals), Steve Meyer (keyboards, vocals, and percussion), Matt Scase (rhythm guitar), Rob Sample (bass) and Patrick Calnan, (drums, percussion).

While these guys sing about experienced women in songs like "Sugar": "*I know a woman who can get me high with a lick of her lips and a wink of her eye / MMMMmmmm, call me Sugar, cause I'm your Daddy,*" the boys themselves don't look all that experienced. Well kept, young and good looking, they are hardly the image of weathered rockstars; they're hardly rough around the edges. Compared to other Ottawa bands, they're not polished like a Starling frontman or garage rockers like The Setbacks. Their fingernails are clean and I doubt any of them have a serious drug problem. That said, sometimes the sexiest musicians are the most plastic and oftentimes the most weathered ones are too fucked up to get it on. This group of guys are the real deal. They'll give you music, not just attitude.

What you get with The Picklecatz's live performance and 4-song CD is an incredible assortment of addictive medleys crafted with a variety of grooves and values offered up in such a mature style you'd never think these boys were from Ottawa circa 2003. Someone in the band has got to have an impressive record collection and even if it's only in their heads – someone again seems to have done a lot of traveling and soul searching. They're a great night out. This is a band that weeds out the poseurs from music lovers.

These guys are main stage material for the Tulip Festival and would fit right in at the Blues festival.

But don't let these categories and comparisons to other bands stop you from checking them out yourself. As comfortable as I'd feel bringing my 50-something mother to a show, the Picklecatz would appeal to all styles and ages ranging from mod, rockabilly, and suede-heads to jazz and blues lovers, classic rockers, you name it.

Finally, it's exciting to go out again in Ottawa.