

Mp3 Mark Legrand And The Lovesick Bandits - Cold New England Town



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While many Western-styled acts trade in up-tempo foot-stompers, these guys favor moodier material. There's a Southern Gothic vibe throughout the disc, with reverbed guitar and minor-key melodies trailing like smoke from an abandoned campfire. 10 MP3 Songs COUNTRY: Traditional Country, COUNTRY: Country Folk Details: "While many Western-styled acts trade in up-tempo foot-stompers, the Lovesick Bandits favor moodier material. There's a Southern Gothic vibe throughout the disc, with reverbed guitar and minor-key melodies trailing like smoke from an abandoned campfire. This kind of twang wouldn't sound out of place in a David Lynch flick." -Casey Rea, Seven Days VT With Hank Williams as a model, he thrives in the world of honky-tonk It's Friday, 6 p.m. and show time. Honky Tonk Happy Hour is off and running, and the Pabst Blue Ribbon begins to flow freely at Montpelier's Langdon Street Cafe. Bathed in the glow of red floodlights, lean and lanky, Mark LeGrand, 53, smiles at the crowd: "Good evening 'tonkheads," he says as his Lovesick Bandits ease into "Lost Highway" by Hank Williams: I'm a rollin' stone, all alone and lost. For a life of sin, I have paid the cost. When I pass by, all the people say: Just another guy, on the lost highway. LeGrand delivers the song Williams-style, nasal warbling and all. With two CDs under his belt and a third in the works featuring his new band, The Lovesick Bandits he is a seasoned performer, a musician's musician, a skilled songwriter. From a technical standpoint, LeGrand could have penned "Lost Highway." Lyrically, the song could be about him. Though LeGrand outlived Williams (who died on New Year's Day 1953 at 29) by 24 years, their lives are similar. Williams had a reputation as a hard drinker and substance abuser. LeGrand says that from ages 16 to 36 he, too, was an alcoholic and substance abuser. "I started to emulate the bad habits of my heroes." The former beer-and-pot guy says he's been sober for the past 17 years. LeGrand has been a fixture in the Vermont

music scene as far back as 1966, the year his family moved from the New York City suburb of Norwalk, Conn., where he was born and raised, to West Arlington. "I went from living in suburbia to living in a Norman Rockwell painting," he says of rural West Arlington. "It was a culture shock to me. We lived five miles from town. My feet didn't touch an escalator for years after moving there," he says with a laugh. It was during those early days in West Arlington that LeGrand began his lifelong relationship with music and performing. He says he'd always loved music; his father, a disabled World War II Army veteran who, sadly, turned to drink, listened to the crooners Bing Crosby and Nat King Cole back in Norwalk, while the younger LeGrand was partial to '50s rock and roll. He says he loved the golden era of pop music, songwriters like Goffin and King, the music from James Bond movies, West Side Story, and the British Invasion groups. So, then, how did a 14-year-old evolve into a honky tonk musician? It started when his mother bought him a bass guitar, which he did not know how to play or how to tune. "It was a \$99 'Avalon' electric bass. Sunburst finish. A piece of crap," he says. Armed with his Avalon, LeGrand's first band, The Herd, played the Arlington Grange Hall ("hillbilly central," he calls it) churning out covers of "Gloria," "Louie, Louie," and "Satisfaction." "We had a girl singer who could sing 'To Sir with Love.'" During 1967's Summer of Love, LeGrand teamed up with a drummer and guitarist to form Wood, a power trio in the Cream vein. "We had huge amps and played mostly original material." After graduating from high school in 1971, the 18-year-old bass-player discovered southern rock and the Memphis sound by way of Delaney Bonnie, the Allman Brothers, Aretha Franklin and Joe Cocker's classic LP, "Mad Dogs Englishmen." LeGrand's future (and much of his stock repertoire for the next 35 years!) was cinched, however, when he discovered the music of Merle Haggard, Buck Owens His Buckaroos, Gram Parsons and The Flying Burrito Brothers. "This was the dawn of the roots music movement," he says, of those days. In 1976 he moved to Montpelier ("back in the days when drinking and driving was legal," he says half-jokingly) where he met singer Gail Slayton, who would become the first Mrs. LeGrand. The LeGrands (as the group Nightingale) recorded a 45-rpm single of Hank Williams' "Hey, Good Lookin'" backed with Johnny Rivers' "Poor Side of Town." They stayed an act and a married couple for seven years. "This was a rough period: alcoholism, break-up and depression." His life changed, slowly, when he met fellow musician and artist Sarah Munro. He and Sarah lived together for four years and had a daughter, Ivy LeGrand. LeGrand also got sober and started writing songs. "I knew I had songs in me. When I got sober, they started coming out. All hell broke loose. I'd run home and sing into the tape recorder." But not all was

idyllic on the home front with Sarah. LeGrand met, then married, another woman, Lorita Adkins, with whom he had a daughter, Elana Adkins-LeGrand. ("Ivy and Elana love each other very much and they get along fine," LeGrand says of his two beloved daughters.) LeGrand and Sarah got back together in 1995, performed together as a duo, recorded the CD "Mischievous Angel" together, and, in 1999, were married. Sarah is also a member of the Mark LeGrand His Lovesick Band, another one of his musical ventures. LeGrand admits the Honky Tonk lifestyle can be challenging for a former substance abuser but that he is happiest when playing and performing before an audience. It's nearly 8 p.m., but there's time for one more song. "Thanks for coming to Hillbilly Honky Tonk Happy Hour," he says to a beer-fortified full house. The Bandits end their two-hour gig with a new song, a LeGrand original, "Shadow Of A Jukebox:" In the shadow of the jukebox; that's where I want to be. Play the one about walking the floor and burning memories. Where a country song spelled out the pain and the anguish of the heart. In the shadow of the jukebox where a man could fall apart. Hell, Hank Williams could have penned this one. Patrick Timothy Mullikin is a correspondent for The Times Argus and Rutland Herald. He lives in East Montpelier. [This article appeared in the April 30, 2006 issue of Vermont Today magazine. Reprinted here with permission.]

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