

A Style of their Own

The Thunderhorse Band

By Anne Groebner

About nine years ago, David Gaspar and Karen Montiero Gaspar packed up their belongings and moved from Rhode Island on the East coast cross-country to Show Low, Arizona. They left behind a world of music, bands and late-night gigs as long-time band members. They came here to build a home on some land they had purchased years ago and to live a quiet life out in the country... So they thought. It seems once a musician, always a musician. When David went to register their cars, the computers were down at ADOT and, to kill time, he wandered across the street to Lewis Music, sat down and started playing guitar. Who would have known that this was the beginning of the making of The Thunderhorse Band.

At the music store, they heard him playing the guitar and told him that they knew a guy that would love to play with him and that he was starting a band. David took his card and went home and told Karen about a potential gig with a band and she said, "No way!" But, the band was called Short Bus. "We had a bus that we drove to shows in New England and it was a short bus," David told me. "I thought, what a coincidence!" He finally convinced Karen to let him go see the guy in Pinedale and that is when he met Jim Hansen and Denny Odet. "They had this thing about music history; about playing songs from all the different eras." So, that's how it all started. The first band was called Short Bus and it was really successful. "We played gigs around the White Mountains for places like the Den and JD's Black Bull — We didn't have electricity in our house yet and we were playing gigs," says David. When that band disbanded, Karen and David kept going and eventually welcomed in new musicians including Robert Crane on bass and Jeremiah Beavers on drums — and they changed the name to The Thunderhorse Band (a name they got from Bill Freeland who plays for Clark County Express), and it was the beginning of a phenomenal cover band that draws in fans from around the state.

"We take popular songs you recognize but we pretty much put our own spin on them," explained David. They all were original players their whole lives (playing original music with, maybe, one hit song in the mix) so they developed their own style. David says Karen is the "frosting on the cake." He met Karen at a produce market in Rhode Island where she worked. She heard him talking about playing the night before and she turned around and said, "I want to sing in a band." David took her to a couple of the bands he worked with but they ended up doing their own thing. Karen didn't have a lot of experience singing with a band but she was winning singing contests and was focusing on finding one to perform with. Now, Karen is the lead singer for Thunderhorse, but Robert and David take on the lead as well.

David has played guitar since he was 15 years old. He got his first break playing in a night club when he was a sophomore in high school. His band was the opener for several notable bands of the time such as Peter Tork of the Monkeys, Joan Jett, Robin Trower, Sam Kennison and a band named Storm that was put together by two members of Journey. He loves the classics and country music but really, he loves every song they play.

Karen did musicals and sang in her school chorus. "Then they came out with Karaoke and, if you're a singer without a band, that's what you do!" she remembered. She started winning contests and then she met David and has been singing in a band ever since. They have been together for over 17 years. She is the mother of four and a grandmother of twins. "I am 53 years old and I want women to know that they should never give up! No matter what age you are, you don't have to sit at home. Get out there and do what you love!" Although she didn't bring it up herself, I found out that, at the age of 20, Karen was a professional NFL cheerleader. She loves Celine Dion, Tina Turner, Barbara Streisand and Electronic dance music. "I love any music I can dance to," she explained.

Robert Crane, bass player and vocals, grew up in Reserve, New Mexico but he moved to Los Angeles and ended up playing in an original band on the Sunset Strip, playing in places such as the Roxy and the

Whiskey A Go Go. “I was actually backstage putting hairspray in my hair with Warrant before they got signed,” says Crane. He recorded tunes with top-end musicians and, as a songwriter, he recorded two albums and had one of the songs hit the charts, making 33 on the triple A. They were also the number 14 band on the Sunset Strip. “I have always been inspired by Rush and have a love for classic 60-70s music but I also love classical music.

Jeremiah Beavers, drummer, was born in San Francisco where he started to play the drums at the age of five for his church. He moved to Show Low in 2006 and played in jazz bands all through high school. His expansive career has spanned all genres — from rock to jazz and he is inspired by Jimi Hendrix and Vince Guaraldi, known for his compositions for Charles Schultz’s “Peanuts.”

Sometimes they have to play songs over and over again and I wondered if they ever got tired of it. “Well you really don’t like to eat pizza seven days a week,” says Karen, “but when we play gigs, we play for a different crowd every night. I might be singing the same song but not to the same audience and I put everything I have into it, regardless.”

Some of the venues they have played are Mazatzal Casino in Payson, Hon-Dah Resort Conference Center in Pinetop, Cliff Castle Casino in Camp Verde and Oktoberfest in Tempe. If you would like information about booking the band, call Robert or Judy Crane at 928-243-6968 or email them at thndrhorse@gmail.com or go to their website at www.thethunderhorsebandaz.com.