

Retro cowboys swing with a Pacific Northwest flare

MUSIC

The Oregon Valley Boys will be playing multiple shows in the near future by Michelle Andujar

The popular culture of the Willamette Valley is being recorded by one Salem band in a genre a little unusual for the area.

The Oregon Valley Boys, who feature Western swing, have been hosting dance parties to their Southwest-style tunes for a little over two years.

A big fish in a small pond, Texan Randy Hill is a longtime musician. He toured Europe in the 1970s and resided in Austin known as the live music capital of the world until finally setting in Salem.

"Austin is so saturated musically. There are tons of clubs to play at but you're really making little money or paying to play at the clubs," said Hill. "But it's harder to get a band started here. There are very few music publications."

Hill has background in blues and country, but he



Oregon Valley Boys will be playing multiple locations in September and October.

Upcoming Shows:

September

25 - Salem Saturday Market,
10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

29 - Eagles Hall, 8 - 11 p.m.

October

2 - Eagles Hall, 8 p.m. - 12 p.m., Salem

7 - Dixie Creek Saloon,
7 p.m. - 9 p.m., Tangent

16 - Eagles Hall,
8 p.m. - 12 p.m., Salem

For booking and to contact the Oregon Valley Boys, contact Randy Hill 503.507.1228 or e-mail oregonvalleyboys@gmail.com. Their website is oregonvalleyboys.com.

chose to start a Western swing band.

"It was a smaller niche. There were no Western swing bands up here at the time and I love Western swing," said Hill, who began by placing an ad on Craigslist.

"I found good musicians in the Salem area, but a lot of the guys didn't know what Western swing was, so we spent the first year learning about Western swing, its history and how to play it."

Singing the band's three-part harmonies are bandleader Hill, who is also the drummer; Loren "The Man of Steel" Depping, in charge of the steel guitars, and Vicky Bakanoff, also a guitar player.

They're joined by Chuck "Doc Z" Zendner on bass and guitar players Paz Reingans, Paul "Hank" Saunders and Oscar Quijano, sometimes adding a saxophone or a fiddle player.

They named the band The Oregon Valley Boys to have a statewide appeal. Their music features public domain songs from the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s (Patsy Cline, Lefty Frizzell), as well as originals, mostly about the Willamette Valley.

Their first CD, released at the end of July, is titled "All Roads Lead to Howell Prairie," a street where Hill got lost upon first moving to Salem.

They also have a song titled "Molalla Waltz," about an Oregon cowboy and his Native American wife, one called "Willamette, dammit," emphasizing the right pronunciation of the word, and one about watching the stars with your loved one in the Valley.

"I wanted to translate some of that history. There are not a lot of songs about Oregon," said Hill.

Bob Wills (of The Texas Playboys) is considered the father of Western swing, which has country, jazz, blues, Texas swing and big band influences.

"It's different. It has a retro feel to it," said Hill. "You could compare us a lot to 'Asleep at the Wheel.'" That 1970s Western Swing, Austin-based band has won nine Grammy Awards.

"But we're not trying to be like a museum piece. We are adding our own little touch to it," he said, mentioning The Beatles as a musical influence.

The Oregon Valley Boys' live show lasts anywhere between two to four hours.

They match their outfits to the music, featuring retro cowboy clothes.

"We dress the part. We try to get the crowd to have fun, try to get them dancing," said Hill.

Loren Depping said the band generally receives very good feedback from audiences of all ages.

"It's pretty cool to have people in their 70s come up and say, 'This is music I grew up with and it's cool to hear it again,' and see their grand kids dancing to it," he said. "People come up and ask where we're playing next."

The Oregon Valley Boys are starting to get national and international radio play. "Germany, Sweden, Austria ... It's so different from anything they've experienced in Europe," said Hill, who hopes to tour Europe with the Oregon Valley Boys.

One of the Oregon Valley Boys is in the National Guard and he's being deployed to Afghanistan, said Depping. "We found out that one of our songs had been accepted to be played on Armed Forces Radio."

The song is called "One Foot," and it sounds like "old honky-tonk, West Coast dance music, with very twangy guitars, almost rock'n'roll," he said.

The band had a busy summer. They have been featured at farmers' markets, the Cherry City Music Festival, and county fairs all over the state. They also performed at the Salem Art Fair, the Oregon Garden and many other events and dances.

The Oregon Valley Boys' "All Roads Lead to Howell Prairie" CD is available locally at Ranch Records, on cdbaby.com and at their gigs. **S**