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# Revisiting an Era

## Baron Von Swagger pays homage to history and brings grit back to local rock scene

BY G.K. HIZER

While much has been said about our city's indie and pop-rock acts throughout the past couple of years, not much attention has been given to straight-forward rock bands who are dedicated solely to rocking out and bringing a swagger back to the local scene. As of late, however, we've seen a minor renaissance of bands of that nature in our region.

Perhaps the latest to emerge from Tulsa is, appropriately enough, Baron Von Swagger. Much like Stillwater act Taddy Porter and regional acts such as Jonathan Tyler and the Northern Lights and Odis, Baron Von Swagger dives into a tradition of Southern rock while infusing it with a modern sensibility. This band molds things a bit differently, however.

Instead of reaching into soul for inspiration as Tyler does or heavily tapping a blues rock vein like Taddy Porter, Baron Von Swagger's brand of southern rock kicks you in the gut and below the belt by mining a hard rock vein, drawing as much inspiration from bands like Clutch, Zeppelin and early Soundgarden as contemporary Southern rock maestros like Drive By Truckers and Jason Isbell.

The band's new disc, Our Home Will Be our Own, (which drops Saturday night at Flytrap Music Hall) is a raucous and at times angry romp across Oklahoma, interweaving contemporary issues and dust bowl imagery with

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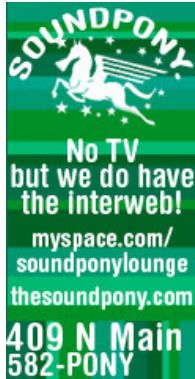
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Hidden Treasure. The members originally set out to simply play the type of music they enjoyed, then discovered they might actually be





impressive results. It's hard not to feel a visceral impact when front man Bradley Thomas Jones delivers his stories with a touch of gothic venom alongside the band's full-throttle intensity.

While the band's founding dates back less than two years, its personal history reaches back much further. The group's core is composed of friends that have known each other since the 8th grade. The mechanics of the band coming together aren't the story heard as much as the musical chemistry. The members originally set out to simply play the type of music they enjoyed, then discovered they might actually be onto something.

That camaraderie is essential to the band's chemistry and current success, but as the group developed, it also gained a sharper vision and sense of purpose. While a good-time vibe remained key, the group also became acutely aware of and connected to its roots and history. References to the land rush, the Dust Bowl and Oklahoma's history abound can be heard throughout the album, but they are interwoven with current scenarios as well.

According to Jones, the opening cut on the album "Dust Bowl Sons" emerged out of his research on Dust Bowl history and the people who stuck it out to found Oklahoma. That imagery appears to run throughout the record. Once the songs started to develop, however, they all began to tie together around the concept of the challenges faced when anyone is breaking new ground.

"There are some literal references to the hardships they (our founding fathers) endured," guitarist Jay Hunt explained, "but I also think there are a lot of metaphors referring to the shit we put up with to make this record -- from both family and friends - while still trying to maintain some sort of normalcy."

Those themes continued with songs like "Deep Pockets" and "Recidivus," which Jones said is the most direct song he's ever written. "I even made up a word: 'killanthropist,' for that song -- it's the person who loves to tell you all they've done for you, then wants to know what you're going to do in return. It's the idea of I'll give you something, but there will be an emotional cost involved."

While the creation of any CD can be trying, the recording sessions for this disc were particularly trying for the band and that comes through in the lyrics. The process became a true labor of love for the band and particularly for guitarist Jay Hunt.

After an unspecified incident and falling out with the engineer that the group began recording with, Hunt took over engineering and producer duties part way into the sessions.

Eventually, he became an official employee of Flying Pig Records, the fledgling label that is making its own debut with Swagger as its flagship artist. Part of the emotional cost for him included putting in 18-20 hour days for nearly six months while continuing to work a day job and with the band. It's just that kind of dedication and never-say-die spirit that drives the band.

Thematically, the group's debut disc taps into exactly that sense of purpose throughout the course of its song cycle. "Historically, this was an outlaw town for a while," Jones explained, "and there's some real history here." According to Hunt, it's just that outlaw mentality that the band is trying to channel in its music and back into the local music scene.

"Some bands are more concerned with image than anything else," Hunt said, "but we want to keep it as rowdy and nasty as the town we came from. My Pops has plenty of stories of guys raising hell and the vibrant scene we used to have in Tulsa. Maybe you can't recreate that and that's why it's considered the heyday, but we'd like to recapture a little of that."

Jones agreed, adding, "All of us are Oklahoma boys and we love the history of the town we came from. We lost something along the way, though, and we'd like to get it back."

So far, the band is doing its part to help reestablish Tulsa as a breeding ground for gut-bucket, rowdy rock and roll. You can judge for yourself as the band holds its CD release party at Flytrap Music Hall this Friday night, Nov. 13. Dallas-based Southern rockers Odis opens the show and the first 250 to arrive will receive a free copy of Our Home will Be Our Own. Tickets are available for \$12 in advance at Starship and HYPERLINK ["http://www.ticketstorm.com"](http://www.ticketstorm.com); [www.ticketstorm.com](http://www.ticketstorm.com) or for \$14 at the door.

#### Weekly Roundup

It's hard to believe we've almost reached the holiday season. Even as the weather cools, however, the local concert calendar continues to heat up with everything from local gigs to touring shows in venues of every size. If you're wondering what you've got to choose from, you've come to the right place, so read on...

Thursday night is relatively quiet this week, but you can still ease into your weekend. If Dustin & Jesse's Higher Education isn't your bag, you might want to check out Ben & Billy, holding down a weekly gig starting at 10pm at Bruhouse in Brookside.

Friday night's local highlight is obvious with the aforementioned Baron Von Swagger show, but that's not all. T-Town is busy with touring acts of every style for those looking for variety. Hard rock and metal fans will want to check out Wednesday 13's Gunfire 76 at The Marquee with Bullets & Octane and The Becoming, while country and pop fans alike should find it worth the trip out to Osage Events Center for Darius Rucker's ongoing tour in support of his debut solo disc, Learn To Live.

Meanwhile, Tulsa's favorite indie-dance rock act Ghostland Observatory returns to Cain's Ballroom yet again for a Friday the 13th show with DJ Moody opening the evening.

Saturday, Nov. 14 proves to be just as eclectic as speedgrass band Split Lip Rayfield takes over Mercury Lounge, GoGo Plumbay rocks Soundpony and Marquee hosts the Assimilation Dance Party with this month's focus on the

*onto something.*

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music of Depeche Mode.

Meanwhile, metal fans won't want to miss Dethklok and Mastodon at The Brady with Converge and High on Fire. Just around the corner, however, Ian Moore continues his love affair with Tulsa as he plays Bob's with The Lassy Coils and The Televised open the show.

Sunday night is an evening for benefits, with a couple of events worth your time. First up is the Bob Wiles Benefit at Cain's Ballroom with Red Dirt Rangers, Tom Skinner's Science Project, The Saltines, Neverly Hillbillies and more. There will be live and silent auctions and all proceeds go to defer costs for Wiles' cancer treatment.

Finally, Southern rock fans have to check out Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit with Ha Ha Tonka at Bob's on Monday, Nov. 16. If you're a Drive By truckers fan, you can't miss its former guitarist's new band. Tickets are \$18 at the door and worth every penny!

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