

Band plays rockabilly beat

By RANDY WALKER

Fifteen-year-old John Romweber coils over his guitar, tapping his boots to the rockabilly beat. As vocalist Hunter Landen leaps into the air, Romweber spins on his toes and strikes into the first notes of his solo.

The Kamikazees, a teenage time warp out of the '50s, are going in for the kill.

"First, they see us and say, 'You can't play, you're a bunch of babies,'" bass player Tony Mayer said. "But then they hear us play. It freaks them out."

The Kamikazees play a totally American form of music called rockabilly.

"It has the jump of hillbilly and the rock of rock 'n' roll," Romweber said.

As true rockabillyies the Kamikazees believe in cheap equipment, both as a concept and for the sound it gets.

"It's made in Japan, I got it for \$35," drummer Mike Krause said of his set. "I don't know who makes it. The main reason I use it is because it's so dinky."

As for the PA system, "It's kinda cheap but we can play at parties," Landen said.

Romweber's favorite guitar is a black and white 1959 Sears Silvertone with one pickup.

"I hate Gibson Les Pauls, just because of what they stand for," Romweber said. (The Les Paul is an expensive guitar favored by hard rockers and heavy metal guitarists.)

The band's affinity for cheapness extends to their wardrobe, which comes courtesy of the PTA Thrift Shop, Carrboro. On stage, Romweber and guitarist Erik Peterson wear fake leopard skin shirts from the thrift shop.

"It's where we buy all our clothes," Romweber said. A lick of hair droops into Romweber's eyes, and he tilts his head back to see when he speaks. Romweber's pointy-toed black boots, which seem two sizes too big, are PTA specials.

The group's appearance helps set them apart from their classmates in school.

"We're so much different from the other people at school, it's hard for them to accept us," Landen said. "Music influences how we act ... I'm not that good at school, but I'm not stupid."



The Kamikazees at a recent performance at The Station in Carrboro. From left to right, Hunter Landen, Mike Krause and Tony Mayer. Photo by Randy Walker.

"It has more to do with being preoccupied with different things," said Peterson, who goes to Carolina Friends school along with Krause.

"Maybe because we're so weird, we don't really have any girlfriends," Landen said.

"I go along with older girls better," fifteen-year-old Mayer said. "None of them our age are that cool."

As the band's elder at age 18, drummer Krause is in charge of beer. Although he is the oldest by two years, Krause was the last one to join the band.

The nucleus of the group came together about two and a half years ago when Romweber and Landen started playing together. Landen's mother suggested the original name, Crash Landen and the Kamikazees. They later dropped the Crash Landen part because it put too much emphasis on Landen.

"We don't have a leader in the band or nothin'," Mayer said. Later, as if trying out the idea, he said, "Hunter's the leader."

"No I'm not, man. We don't have a leader," emphasized Landen, who seemed to know all the responses for a textbook rock 'n' roll rebel.

Landen, who looks like a young Jim Morrison, said his influences were Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Mick Jagger.

Romweber said he was influenced by Elvis's guitarists.

The Kamikazees flew out of the '50s and crash-landed in the '80s, slightly warped by the trip:

*I never made it to the silver screen
I guess that's not my surfin' scene
I'd rather go shoot the curl
And kill that little surfer girl.*

—John Romweber and Hunter Landen, *I'm the Phantom Surfer*

Like a kamikaze plane without a pilot, this band without a leader flies into the teenage American night, guided only by the dim red light of a rockabilly dance hall.

Randy Walker is a staff writer for *The Daily Tar Heel*.

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