

Bands

Sansone's Blues Party jams through the South

By **RHYS WILLIAMS**
Staff Writer

Of all the local blues musicians who play Chapel Hill, Jumpin' Johnny Sansone and his Blues Party's reputation is perhaps the most awesome. Both Armand Lenchek of 5 Guys Named Moe and Danny Morris of Blue-Note Special said Sansone's recent gig at La Terraza shouldn't be missed, and lo and behold, they were right. It was almost intimidating.

Although he's presently based in Virginia, the New Jersey native takes his Blues Party all over the country, especially through the region between Virginia and Louisiana. "I love Louisiana," Sansone says, "and my drummer lives there still. I especially love New Orleans, so we play every place in between to get there!" He does, however, admit that he does not play Chapel Hill "as much as I'd like to."

When not on tour with his band, Sansone often appears at Pyewacket's Blue Monday, an event that he helped establish with Scott Sawyer. "I've played Blue Mondays all over the country," he says, "and we started that here (in Chapel Hill). We tried to start one with the Piedmont Blues

Society in Greensboro, but moved it over here."

But he is quick to point out the differences between the music he plays with Sawyer and the material his own band plays. "What I do at Pyewacket is more jazz-blues," he says. "What you see with my band is the rehearsed, strong, traditional-format blues and R'n'B."

Sansone's introduction to the blues came through his father, a big-band saxophone player who played with Dave Brubeck. By the time Sansone had reached college in Colorado, he had started playing professionally, and has been on the road for the last 10 years.

On April 15, his first LP under his own name — he has various sessions to his credit — will be issued on the Kingsnake label. It features a guest appearance by Ronnie Earl, the former Roomful Of Blues guitarist, who is regarded as one of the best of the younger generation of blues musicians.

"I met Ronnie seven years ago," says Sansone, "and we've been friends since then. He said that if I ever needed a favor, to give him a call. So I did." With influences such

as Guitar Junior and Lazy Lester, the music on the LP will have a distinctly Louisiana taste. Schoolkids Records on Franklin Street should have copies.

Despite the release of the album and the recent commercial success of bands such as the Fabulous Thunderbirds, Sansone remains cynical about talk of a resurgence of interest in the blues. "I can remember being on the road when the 'Blues Brothers' movie came out," he says, "and everybody wanted to wear dark suits and shades, and learn to play the harp (harmonica). It didn't last. I also knew Robert Cray when we were playing the same places. He was the greatest thing going, then, and got the success his talent deserved. But it doesn't help the regular Joe on the road. It just makes people ask if you can play a certain Robert Cray song, or a Stevie Ray Vaughan song."

Jumpin' Johnny and his Blues Party will continue to make a living, whatever the state of blues in the commercial market; their live performances attest to this. "People in Kansas are still talking about us, and we haven't been there in two years," says Sansone.



DTH/Julie Stovall

Johnny Sansone belts out the blues on his harmonica at La Terraza

The set that Sansone and his band play varies from night to night, in response to audience reaction, and, while the band can play authoritative cover versions such as Freddie King's "San-Ho-Zay," their original songs also stand up well. Sansone blows a mean

harp, and Ivan, his guitar player, is one of the most impressive musicians to play in Chapel Hill recently.

Buy the album, or at least go and see the band, but be sure to take your dancing shoes; you'll need them.

With classic rock 'n' roll, the Banned's on the run

By **KAREN ZIMMER**
Staff Writer

Mike Edwards and the Banned will gather at La Terraza Thursday for a long overdue gig.

"We haven't played for some time, and we're really looking forward to it," says lead singer and guitarist Edwards. For the four

members of the group, it's not only playing, but also getting together as friends that is important.

Edwards and Rick Lawson — who plays the keyboards — used to perform in Fayetteville until Edwards left for Greenville. "Rick

followed me because we got our act together as a duo," Edwards says. "Also, he's my friend." Kelly Biggers (drums) and Fred Mancino (bass) are also Edwards' long-time buddies. "We're tuned in to each other," Edwards says.

Lawson, who is from Wilmington, played with the bands Sandcastle, Tangent and Crossfire. Biggers was formerly with The Amateurs, a reggae band, and Mancino, who hails from Pittsboro, played with the bands Mechanism, the Alpacas and the Joe Sapp Band.

Edwards, who also performs as a soloist, started the Banned in 1987. The group used to be known as Rhythm Method until singer Kitty West left the band to move to Charlottesville, Va. Edwards says the band was billed as The Mike Edwards Band because his name was known in Greenville. "Then we came up with Mike Edwards and the Banned — it's just a temporary name, but it works for now."

The group specializes in classic rock and rhythm and blues, such

as cover tunes of the Beatles, Pink Floyd and the Moody Blues. Basically, it reproduces a "successful radio format" live. You can sing and swing to their easygoing favorites without losing the beat, because you know what the next note is going to be. You'll hear exactly what you expect to hear: the musicians loyally stick to the original orchestrations and vocal harmonies.

"About anything we do you'd recognize, but won't usually hear bands do in clubs," he says.

In the future, the Banned hopes to throw in some tunes of their own. Both Edwards and Mancino have quite a few of those up their sleeves.

But, until they've acquired some fame by procreation, they'll simply allow their public to enjoy the '60s and '70s hits for which it has a weakness.

To all who are dutifully absorbing knowledge during these hard times: it's time to let your sweat run for something else than finals, and let go of instruction by enjoying some tunes you already know.

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