

Band aims beat at feet

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WESTERLY, R.I. —The sound is from a different era and so are the band members, but Roomful of Blues plays on, still looking to "aim the beat at their feet."

The nine-member band of 40- and 50-something musicians includes four horn players, a rarity now that has made its sound a favorite of music legends, including the late Count Basie, who attended many shows.

Trombonist Porky Cohen, 72, played with Roomful for several years after spending his youth on the road in bands with Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw and others from the Swing Era.

"The people from my generation like the big bands, the Glenn Millers, the Dorseys. Roomful gives people that Big Band feeling, but still they can dance to it," Cohen says. "It's a small big band, a high-energy band. There's nothing around like it. When I say it's the best rhythm-and-blues band in the world — I could say in the country — but what else is there?"

Depending on who's talking, Roomful plays "jump blues," "jazzed-up jump blues" or "Big Band blues."

"It's a real powerful, loud, aggressive horn section," says Phil Green, the sound engineer who recorded the band's 11th album, "Under One Roof." "These guys are probably the



best white blues band in the world."

Green, president of Normandy Sound in Warren, has worked with pop acts such as New Kids on the Block and Paula Abdul, "but it's not something I want to tell my friends about." Recording with Roomful is different, he says.

"It's an engineer's dream because there's nothing you have to sweep under the rug," Green says.

Roomful, celebrating its 30th anniversary, draws its inspira-

tion from old-time barnstorming blues and swing bands, but at a price.

"To be a touring band of our size is quite an accomplishment, but we have to work all the time. That's not out of wanting to be on the road so much, it's out necessity," says "Sugar" Ray Norcia, the band's lead singer and harmonica player.

"To me, success would be not having to spend so much time touring," says Norcia, who longs for more time on his Hopkinton farm with his wife, goats and chickens.

Despite that desire, Roomful expects to play up to 250 dates this year. And, after years of piling up accolades but relatively little money, the band hopes 1997 brings some financial rewards.

In addition to recently releasing "Under One Roof," the band is in the studio recording holiday classics to be released next Christmas.

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