

In the Spotlight

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Standing up for the blues

Three veteran musicians are bringing classic blues back, one great song at a time

By John Chamblless
Staff Writer

Larry Spencer has been playing music long enough to have earned the right to sing the blues, and that's exactly what he's doing.

At 66, the longtime Chester County resident is reviving some of his favorite vintage blues tunes with a new trio, Revolution Heroes. After debuting at the Paradox Vineyard over the summer, the band played their second public gig on Dec. 10 in the decidedly un-blues-like barn at the Chenoa Farm animal sanctuary in Avondale.

With a knuckle-numbing wind, Spencer joined Prince White and Bucky Queppet as they got ready to bring the blues to a family crowd that was attending a holiday fundraiser craft show at the farm. Grinning and good-natured about the noontime show, and a temperature that was sending the guitar and bass out of tune, Spencer took a few minutes to explain how the new band came to be.

"Prince White and I have played together for 50 years, on and off," he said. "I played in his living room back in '66 in Avondale. We were playing Beatles and Stones and all that good stuff. We played Avon Grove

dances, the Rising Sun Fire Hall, North East Fire Hall, all kinds of places like that. Those were the only places to play."

Through the years, Spencer has been involved with plenty of musical outlets, including the almost-famous Blackthorn Dragon in the early 1980s that played a heavy brand of rock covers and originals throughout the region, and was set to record an album when personnel problems capsized the group.

"I fired the guitar player, but I couldn't play all the guitar work and sing. So families kind of took over, and I hung it up," Spencer said. "That was the end of that. I was disgusted with the whole thing. I didn't even listen to music for a long time."

As a self-employed carpenter for the past 40 years, he didn't have to punch a time clock, so music was a passion he could afford to pursue. It's taken a long time to arrive at Revolution Heroes, but Spencer and White fit the blues like a hand in a glove. Joining them on harmonica and vocals is Queppet, who is a few years younger, but whose voice has just the right rasp to be authentic.

Even when he was playing cover songs and wearing

spandex pants in the 1980s, Spencer was well aware that rock and roll grew out of the blues. "It's the bedrock of Led Zeppelin and the Yardbirds and the Stones and all of them," he said. "They all started off with the blues, and I started off with that, too. But we're even deeper into it now. We go back into Muddy Waters and Little Walter and all that stuff."

At the Paradox show where they debuted, "there was a guy who was in a band in Delaware, and he said, 'I loved all your originals.' But we only did one," Spencer said, smiling. "He'd never heard the blues songs we do." That's an advantage, because songs that have been kicking around since the 1930s or before sound new to a whole new generation.

The band's name was a group decision that evolved, Spencer said, from a list of 81 possible names written on slips of paper. The three band members picked their favorites, and out of them all, Revolution Heroes was the only one they all liked. While the name might be a bit epic for a trio that plays the blues, Spencer said he's fine with it.

With a set list that includes the standards "Boom Boom Boom," "Born in Chicago," and "Some Day Baby," the

band is ready to delve into a bottomless catalog of songs that can still grab an audience of any age.

"The actual idea for this band started about three years ago," Spencer said. "Prince White and I got together and then I ran into Bucky one day and asked if he'd like to do some blues with us, and he said, 'Sure.' He's a fantastic harmonica player. We all three sing," Spencer said. "We have a fan base now from back in 1982 and 1983 that came to see us then. I'll have my grandkids here today, and there's a 73-year-old woman who's going to come today who went to every place we played back then."

While the band is currently seeking a drummer who is sensitive to the blues, the trio format works just fine. At noon on Saturday, the three kicked into their first song, Lazy Lester's "Sugar Coated Love," with the kind of rootsy groove that overcame the wind chill. Picture the band in a dark club, and it would fit everyone's idea of what an authentic blues band should be.

The 90-minute set was sturdy and powerful, and Queppet's harmonica playing was commanding. The decades of musical experience between the



Photos by John Chamblless

The Revolution Heroes: Larry Spencer (seated), Prince White (left) and Bucky Queppet (right).

three members showed clearly, with a rock-steady assurance.

"I'm writing songs for us. We have aspirations to not be just a cover band," Spencer said. "We want to record and get some shows lined up for the coming year. We want to do festivals, like the Wilmington Blues Festival, if we can get in there. There's a Lancaster Roots and Blues Festival, too. We'd like to

get into the Hilltop Inn, too. We've been going on Saturday nights to check out the competition there," he added with a grin. "This is just the beginning for us."

For more information, visit www.revolutionheroes.org, or email queppet3@verizon.net.

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Larry Spencer



Prince White



Bucky Queppet



The band played its second public show on Dec. 10 at Chenoa Farm in Avondale.