



Members of the Happy Trails in their practice space and makeshift recording studio. From left, Spencer Kilpatrick, Austin Krater, Arlis Meyer and Luke Fuller. PHOTO/MARK EARNEST

Keep smiling

The Happy Trails

Reno bands inevitably get around to writing a song about their home base. For local rockers the Happy Trails, they get that local flavor with a song called “Neva,” about a particularly wild time at the titular downtown casino.

“Neva” is a punky blast that concludes with some fun dual soloing from guitarists Luke Fuller and Spencer Kilpatrick, and it’s got a funny hook: “I got an itch, I got a fever, the only prescription is another night at the Neva.”

That sense of fun with a little edge to it is what the Happy Trails is all about. The band blends ’90s-vibed alternative music with the best early ’70s rock from the UK, such as Free and the Faces, adding some Southern rock such as the Allman Brothers or the more R&B-influenced moments of The Band. They also might remind you at times of contemporary bands like White Denim, the War on Drugs or Fidler.

The Happy Trails’ songs are tight and tuneful but still loaded with great guitar playing, especially when Fuller merges his influences into some head-turning solo work. Drummer Arlis Meyer and bassist Austin Krater keep it all grounded with rock-solid playing, including some great melodic runs from Krater.

The bassist is the newest member of the band. The group started with Fuller and Meyer in 2016. When their original bassist, Graham Dickinson, moved to San Diego last fall, longtime friend Krater was called upon.

“After trying out some other bassists, they finally cycled onto me,” Krater said, very deadpan and to laughs from his bandmates. “I guess I stuck to the wall like a wet noodle.”

Reno music fans may know Kilpatrick from the still-active Failure Machine, a band that played with the first-phase Trails a few years ago.

“They are both just really good,” said Meyer about his two newest bandmates. “When Grant was taking about leaving, me and Luke were thinking about who we should ask, and these two were at the top of the list, and we got ‘em.”

“I think probably the first or second time we saw [Failure Machine], it was like, ‘Oh, man, if we could get him in our band ...’ and then a year or two later it became a reality,” said Fuller.

Kilpatrick was happy to join another band as well: “I just liked their attitude toward playing music and playing shows, and their attitudes toward the scene in general. Just really positive and really refreshing. The atmosphere is great, and they are a really great band that write really fun songs.”

With this solidified lineup, it’s definitely a happy time for the Trails. They plan to release their first EP later this year. It will feature songs like “Ugly Drunk,” a backbeat-fueled tune that shows off the band’s use of cleaner verses and more rousing, distortion-drenched choruses; and “Spencer’s Jam,” which will have a real title once Kilpatrick finishes the words.

The record is a full-on DIY affair, recorded in the band’s basement practice space. Fuller’s the engineer on the record, too. “I kind of like being able to do that, because I have a little more control of what it’s going to sound like,” Fuller said. “I wouldn’t say that it’s difficult, just time consuming, and a little frustrating sometimes.”

Once it’s done, the Happy Trails are first going to see if some pals can help with getting it out over the internet and beyond. Kilpatrick said the band has “a bunch of friends in the Bay area that have little labels, so we’ll probably pester them to see if they want to put it out.” □

The Happy Trails play with touring bands Shotgun Sawyer and Howling Giant and locals Melk at 9 p.m. April 26 at Shea’s Tavern, 715 S. Virginia St. Learn more about the band at facebook.com/thehappytrails775

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