



Mark Cleveland has aspirations of being the RNC "house" band.

PHOTO/JERI DAVIS

## Party line

The Republicats

A letter arrived at the Reno News & Review offices a few weeks ago. It was addressed from "the Republicats" and began as follows: "Did you know the Republican Party has a 'house' band this year traveling with their larger rallies [sic]? Crazy huh? Well it's so, and we're from Reno, NV. We're the Republicats."

The letter was an invite to watch the band play at the Musician Rehearsal Center—587 Dunn Circle, Sparks—on Jan. 10. A postscript noted, "I know we're not politically aligned, but we're still a 'local band makes good' story."

Intrigued, I called the number listed in the letter. A man named Mark Cleveland answered. I told him I'd see him at the show and speak with him afterward.

On the afternoon of Jan. 10, representatives from the Washoe County Republican Party gathered in the showroom attached to the rehearsal center. The show, I learned, was actually more of a try-out. Cleveland, on guitar, was preparing to play a few covers and a few originals with the help of a bass player and drummer. These guys, however, wouldn't be a part of the Republicats' aspiring touring outfit.

The band played a four-song set comprised of a cover of "Draggin' the Line," an instrumental original, a cover of "Long Live Rock," and another instrumental original. The covers were solid. The instrumental numbers, also worked, with a vibe a bit reminiscent of swamp rock *a la* Muscle Shoals. When they'd finished, the party reps—including John Carey, second vice chair and chief of staff for the Washoe Republicans—said they'd be in touch.

So, the RNC's "house" band definitely wasn't a done deal, right?

"The goal is to do their rallies and stuff around the nation," he said.

The idea came to him when he attended a Trump rally in Billings, Montana.

"They had this big, beautiful sound setup but with no band. And it was such a great crowd. I mean, that's probably not your thing, but it was a really super friendly crowd. The vibe was just really awesome—because everybody was on the same page, you know? ... I thought, 'Man, all they need is a band here.'"

He kept considering it after the rally.

"And I thought, well, a rapper would be disingenuous for the right, you know, someone of that ilk," he said. "And a heavy metal band—that's just going to alienate people. ... These are Led Zeppelin fans from the '70s, who grew up."

As a lifelong multi-instrumentalist and a Republican since he was first old enough to vote when Ronald Reagan ran for his second term, Cleveland said he conceived it as a way of remaining loyal to his life's two passions—and as a way to get his music out there, "in the record bin of life."

But if the RNC accepted his "house band" idea, Cleveland said he'd likely have to go to Los Angeles, Nashville or Branson, Missouri, to find the caliber of touring musicians he's looking for. And, even then, he figured it'd be difficult.

"On the right, it's tough because most of the artsy people, just about all of them, I've found—especially looking for musicians—they tend to gravitate to the left," he said.

Could it be that people on the Left tend to be advocates who happy to see tax dollars allocated to arts funding?

"That's true," he conceded, adding, that he also believes it's because "in the past the Left wasn't against free speech."

They seem to be now, he said.

We agreed to disagree. I told him to let me know what the party members said. On Tuesday, Jan. 16, Cleveland emailed and called to say things were moving forward and he'd soon be on his way to Nashville to recruit musicians. Perhaps, in the coming months, we'll begin to see the Republicats take to rally stages. □

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