

Marsupial music

Koo Koo Kanga Roo keeps it weird



Neil, left, and Bryan bring Koo Koo Kanga Roo to life onstage.

BY MAXFIELD MORRIS / maxfieldm@newsreview.com

played in a traditional five-piece band for a while before taking up the Koo Koo mantle. They've since opened for Yo Gabba Gabba! and Reel Big Fish and the Aquabats, and they're consistently producing straightforward songs. Some of the ones that recently got the music video treatment are "Hot Sauce," "Glitter" and "Salad."

"Anything can be a song. Anything," Bryan said. "I'm still trying to make 'Half Birthday,' a half-birthday song, work. I just haven't found what's funny about half birthdays, and what's a good hook."

There's a formula to the songwriting process, Bryan says, focusing on the initial funny concept, the musical hook, then filling in the blanks. Like so many artists who've found a niche, he receives unsolicited song suggestions from friends and family.

"Now people come to us [saying], 'Well, kids like this,'" Bryan said. "That's not really why we've written songs that kids like. We more just think about silly things. ... It could be about anything."

Bryan brainstorms, unprompted: "A microwave song. ... I don't know, traffic? Lately I've been trying to write songs that make people think, 'In no way would that be a topic you write for a kids' song.'"

And we make it. I've been trying to make a quilting song for a long time."

Another bizarre twist in the fabric of the band came when they told themselves, "Let's make a whole album about Panera Bread." So they did that. But why?

"Because you wouldn't expect this band to make a full concept album about this fast-casual food chain," Bryan said.

If you check out the album, *Fast Casual*, the song "Book Club" is a nice takeaway. It quickly paints the picture of a book club that meets at Panera Bread, and the high school required reading it discusses.

It's quirky, it's a bit bizarre, but the commitment to the bit is really something else. The band has been wearing the same black-and-gold outfits for years, and once the duo steps into their show booties and onto the stage, they're ready to get wacky—and to make people of all ages tune into their silly bone.

"People need to be silly more often," Bryan said. "We take being silly seriously." □

Catch Koo Koo Kanga Roo Jan. 26, 6 p.m. at Holy Diver, 1517 21st St. Tickets are \$15-\$40.

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co-founder, Koo Koo
Kanga Roo

The problem with most songs these days is they rarely include choreographed dances and dedicated sing-along portions.

Somewhere in the world of independent music, though, there's one band putting in that extra effort—producing poppy songs about pizza, unicorns and beyond, catering to children and adults alike with wacky lyrics and subjects. That band is Koo Koo Kanga Roo.

The Minneapolis band has been making dance-along party tunes for 12 years and is stopping in Sacramento Jan. 26 for an all-ages show with local opener Kepi Ghoulie at Holy Diver. The show aims to get everyone involved, according to Bryan, one of the band's two members, who go by just their first names.

"We're trying to get every single person included, yelling," Bryan said. "People are like, 'This is for my kid,' or, 'Hey, I don't want to yell over my kid,' and we're like, 'No.' Everyone is an equal slate here, everyone needs to be yelling and everyone needs to be doing it."

That's one of the founding principles of the band—to get everyone screaming along and dancing as though they've known the songs their entire life. That's taken the form of lyrics written on posters, sing-along sections and repetitive soundscapes.

"They all kind of sound the same—drum machines, synthesizer stuff—so it's a double-edged sword there," Bryan said. "We always make sure it stays in the lane of what Koo Koo Kanga Roo is, and then also tries to drive forward and push it to a new place or new level."

Bryan and Koo Koo Kanga Roo co-founder Neil met at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, and

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