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BAND

FEATURE



MOLEHILL

DEFINITELY SOMETHING TO MAKE A MOUNTAIN OUT OF.

BY MICHELLE DUDLEY

Molehill is Peter Manhart (singer/guitar/songwriter), Drew Russell (drums), Trevor Jones (bass) and Mark Tomasino (keys/backup)

ClubLine: How would you describe your style?
PM: I think we try really hard to mix things up and play songs with varying feels and styles... one reviewer said we were a mix of bluesy rock, heartfelt ballads, and quirky left-field pop. I think that's a pretty decent description.

TJ: It is a combination of different genres, but at least when I hear it, it comes off to me as rock 'n roll. I think Peter's delivery can be reminiscent of Bradley Nowell from Sublime, with a bunch lyrics shoved into a small space, but he still does it in a style that is his own. But, like any music has ever been, Molehill draws from past music and then puts its own spin on it.

MT: Last week I suggested to the band members that we just call ourselves "All-American Rock" because I feel it is a unique sound that can only be created in the U.S. That idea got shot down pretty quickly for fear of sounding too Republican. Nevertheless, it really is a melting pot of styles and genres that I think has mixed nicely together to create a fresh and original sound.

DR: This is a question I am asked almost daily. I usually have a pretty difficult time explaining our sound in terms of musical genre. There are so many very specific genres that it is almost ridiculous to think that we do not fit into a single one. But I have yet to come across a genre which

encompasses the entire scope of our sound. Usually I answer with this question with a single word: Rock.

ClubLine: There is a lot of blues and rock influence in your songs. Who has influenced you the most?

PM: Well a lot of my favorite bands are from the '60s and '70s, like The Doors, The Who, and especially Jimi Hendrix. I think that's the kind of music that really lasts. Just straight-ahead rock 'n roll. Also, as a guitarist, I prefer the blues-style guitar soloing, as opposed to the more '80s-style ultra-virtuoso stuff. I guess I just got burned out by so many metal bands when I was a kid--it just seems like showing off.

TJ: Considering that Peter wrote these songs, I have to say that I just try to fit in the skin of his songs and try to put my own personal stamp on it while always being supportive to the song. Personally, I am a huge listener of music that is more towards the funk, rock, jazz, world music side of things.

ClubLine: Why the name Molehill?

PM: I know, it's a stupid band name. Our three-song demo before we released this album was actually called "Our Band Name Sucks." I guess I was thinking that we're such a small band right now, nobody knows

about us, and no one expects anything out of us. But maybe someday we can get really big. "Mountain out of a Molehill," if you will.

TJ: You got me on this one. I had no say... though I do have an old friend whose name was Joel Hill and he always wanted us to call him Molehill... I know, stupid tangent.

MT: I asked the same question when I joined the band! Whenever I tell people that our name is Molehill, they always repeat it back to me slowly and really accent the first syllable: "MOLE-hill?" It's like they can't believe that would actually be a band name.

DR: Peter and I met numerous times to brainstorm ideas for band names. Each meeting ended up deteriorating rather quickly, and became more of a session discussing band names we would never use rather than developing a name for our group. Making a mountain out of a molehill has two meanings to us. Literally, we are relatively unknown, and would like to develop a large fan base and play as much as possible. But, we are also four pretty relaxed people. We try not to make issues into more than they really are. If anyone is really good at coming up with band names, we are open to suggestions.

ClubLine: Do you have any issues with the Chicago music scene?

PM: Well, we're really newbies to the scene, but so far it seems like the place where you really need to know somebody to get quality gigs. That makes it tough when you're starting out, but I'm pretty sure that's how it works everywhere. You almost can't get a gig until you meet somebody who's willing to let you play with their band, or give you a chance at their club. Also, sometimes it can be tough if you don't sound indie or power-pop enough, but I think for the most part it's a really cultivating, music-loving city. On the bright side, we never have to buy out all the seats in the club and sell them ourselves. I've heard that's how they do it in LA.

TJ: I just moved to this city from the East Coast in August, so I am just getting into gigging around here. I do the majority of my work with classical music, studying with Rob Kassinger from the Chicago Symphony and freelancing around the area. As far as the rock scene goes, we are trying to make connections and use the tools that we can to build an audience and meet the other bands that play around town.

MT: As a band trying to get established on the local scene, we want to play as much as possible, and our fans would like us to play more often as well. Some venues won't book you, however, if you have another gig anywhere else in Chicago that same month for fear that you won't have a good draw to their venue. We've already had to turn down good gigs just to have the privilege of playing a larger venue. In the end the band plays less gigs, the fans enjoy fewer shows, and we certainly get paid less. While I understand the reasoning behind it all, I wish more venues would work harder to cultivate a mutual beneficial relationship with bands.

DR: In comparison to many other live-music hot spots, I would say that Chicago is a very good place to play music. Chicago offers many great venues that book live bands nightly, and there is equal interest on the part of the listeners. We have been able to play for large crowds at nearly all of our performances. In many other cities that would be rare. I am happy with the music scene. At times it gets a little more callous than you would like, but if you surround yourself with people that play music for the right reasons, this city can be great.

ClubLine: What are your biggest challenges?

PM: Tough question. Playing music is a big challenge in so many ways. I guess the hardest part is paying the bills--it's not really easy to depend on music for income. More specifically, it's almost impossible to get a lot of people to even listen to your music. Record companies get hundreds of demos every week, so unless you personally hand it to the guy listening, there's a good chance your music will get lost in the shuffle. People won't listen until you have a big enough buzz. So I guess the real challenge is how to get that buzz.

TJ: It is always a challenge to construct music that is soulful, appealing and original at the same time. Many times people get caught up in making that "hit" to get them onto the national scene. I believe that it is always paramount to maintain artistic integrity and continue to work at

your craft, whether it is songwriting, getting better at your instrument, producing, etc. But on the other side of artistic development you have to be your own promoter, manager and account manager at the same time. Balancing all of these responsibilities can be a huge pain, so it takes organization and patience to grow.

MT: I'd say finding the time to do everything. Song-write, practice, gig, booking, promoting, e-mailing, Web sites, etc., all while working a day job. At the heart of it, all we really want to do is play music and always be striving to get better at our instruments. Today's environment makes it very challenging to do that.

DR: It is hard to get people to believe in you. It seems like a black and white process. Either they want to book you every night, or they will not return your e-mails at all. There seems to be a very convoluted threshold that bands have to break through in order to gain "credibility." It is difficult to figure out the which components contribute to breaking into the scene. If we continue to play and genuinely enjoy the music-making process, I think it will come with time.

ClubLine: What are your favorite songs to play?

PM: My favorite is probably "Let's Not Get Sentimental." It's a fun, catchy song that people like to sing along to, and I especially like it because I get about a four-minute guitar solo when we play live, and that's always fun for me.

TJ: I like to play "See You Later" and "People Let You Down." "See You Later" is fun because it's really a minimal song, but there's tons of space in the groove, which makes people want to dance and have fun. "People Let You Down" is also a favorite because I really like how the lyrics flow along with the different grooves of the song. It's also a nice way to change the pace of the setup a bit during a show.

MT: I'm gonna go with "See You Later." While I don't do a whole lot on that song, it's my favorite one to listen to on the CD, and the fans



seem to really enjoy it. That groove just makes you want to get down and dirty on the dance floor.

DR: "On The Wall." I remember the evening that inspired this song, about a girl we all love to hate. And, I get to scream.

ClubLine: What happens next with Molehill?

PM: Right now we have a cartoon music video in the works, so that should be pretty cool. Other than that, we're just going to grind it out--play as many shows as possible in Chicago and the surrounding area, hit the Internet hard and hope for the best. Maybe someday we can quit our day jobs and make a living with all of this!

TJ: Play live and write. There is nothing better than playing live shows. Between all of my musical commitments, I probably have somewhere in between 50 to 100 performances a year, and nothing is better than communicating through music with people on and off the stage.

MT: Build a stronger Internet presence, start playing more shows and introduce new material at every gig. We have some pretty sweet T-shirts in the works, too.

DR: Every time we play, a new avenue seems to develop. I am as interested as you to see where the next few years will take us.