

## S H O R E L I F E

## Jellyshirts: A rare model for an original music band

**H**ey there. Do you know Jellyshirts?

Last time around I wrote about The Alternate Routes, an Americana rock'n'roll band from Fairfield. They are signed to a great indie label, Vanguard records, and they tour the country by van. They have lassoed the internet and use it for a management tool. They play more gigs away than home. They've recorded two albums in Nashville. The Routes represent a model which is typical of many bands today.

Here's another, rarer, model for an original music band.

Start with a talented songwriter/guitarist with his own vision. Team him up with a virtuoso drummer of sympathetic bent. What both men want out of music, more than anything else, is to do it right; to make good sounds and alchemize them into good

music. And they're both looking to get off on it. Neither musician worries too much about "making it". It's more about making music.

Now add a changing string of talented band mates, a handful of home-recorded albums, a smattering of gigs in and around hometown New Haven, and a small but fiercely loyal group of fans, including some local media champions. Simmer and slow-cook for 20 years and you have – Jellyshirts.

Branford's Bret

Logan is the songwriter/guitarist, and Hamden's Scott McDonald is the drummer. They are currently joined by immigrant English rocker Nick Appleby on bass. Nick at times has played drums in the band while Scott was otherwise occupied. Former Yale

grad student Jess Brauner, and former Miracle Legion founder Mr. Ray Neal have also played guitar in the band, and there

have been a few bass players before Nick. That's not a whole lot of changes over the course of two decades. Especially for a band with no budget.

The motivating force behind Jellyshirts (known as The Bret Logan Band while Scott was absent) is excellent fun. This is the energy that

gets most high-school bands started. But of course most high-school bands don't last 20 weeks, never mind 20 years. And most high-school bands, in fact most bands, don't possess J'shirts' musical talents.

Here in Connecticut there are a wealth of talented, dedi-

cated musicians who have not "made it." Chalk it up to the music biz, chalk it up to the fact that there's huge gap between supply (humongous) and demand (slight) for bands. – Some musicians become disillusioned and leave it all behind, but some carve out their own little niche and prosper and grow creatively over time.

That's Jellyshirts. They have played some memorable and riveting live shows over the years, and they have released some cherished albums, always changing and developing new approaches. But they have never done anything as beautiful, excellent and fun as their recent CD release "Sail On Sally."

The band has been held in awe by its fans over the years for its sometimes soaring, sometimes droning sound, always played with intensity and skill. A good example

is the current lead tune on their MySpace page, a recent live recording of a song they first performed 15 years ago, "Disinclined". Ten minutes of dynamic live jamming. "Pick and Soar" is how their longtime champion Gary Vollono of IndepnDisc.com describes the sound. To which I would add, "...and feedback sometimes."

"Sail On Sally" is something different, and it's a true collaboration of talents. It's the band's "Rubber Soul." (There's even a little "ooh-la-la-la" rip-off/tribute background vocal on one track.) Scott and Nick use their considerable talents as harmony singers and engineer/producers to showcase Bret's gorgeous and unusual chords. Bret and Nick play keyboards extensively, rounding out the band's traditional guitar jangles and growls, and Bret writes long, short, funny, happy and sad tunes. It's 50 minutes of musical variety,

taking the distinctive elements of their trademark sounds and refashioning them into something new through creative production and arrangement.

J'shirts have always been determinately un-slick. They've had the same logo (looks like a kid drew it with a crayon) for their whole life, and the smallest bumper sticker ever made. Their records have always had a personal, proudly low-key look. They don't spend a lot of time on self-promotion. They have a sense of their own history and identity. The cover art for "Sally" is a computer re-configured image of an original painting Bret did for the cover of "Rays To The Sun," released in 1995.

Sometime next January I'll be thinking of local records for a beast of '09 list. The first one to come to mind will be "Sail On Sally" by Jellyshirts.



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