



At Cousins on King, Backlash: (l-r), Mark Sly (bass guitar/backup vocals), Bruce McElroy (vocals and guitar), Steve Spearin (drums) & John Gamache (guitar/backup vocals)

BACKLASH

They've Got You Covered

By Lorraine Payette

Whether you want to dance, sing along or just sit back and listen to some old favourites, Backlash will cover you. Made up of Bruce McElroy (vocals and guitar), John Gamache (guitar/backup vocals), Mark Sly (bass guitar/backup vocals) and Steve Spearin (drums), the band enjoys having fun with their music and sharing good times with their audiences.

"We play previously enjoyed rock, blues and country songs – no originals, just fun covers," says Gamache.

"We kind of play to the crowd," says McElroy. "I get out and play because I love to see people up dancing and having a good time. I have been singing and playing guitar as long as I can remember, music is a part of my family's history. My Dad plays, his Dad plays, my uncles play, my brother plays, my mother plays, I think you get the point."

"My first gig was with a country band when I was about 16. I think I made

\$50 bucks for the night playing guitar and singing a couple of songs." McElroy reminisces.

Backlash enjoys getting out a couple of times a month to play at festivals, parties and occasional gigs in pubs.

"The band started as 'Bootleg' around 2000 or so," says Gamache. "I played with both Bruce and Steve from 2001-2004. I had played with Mark in other bands in the early to mid 90's and all the way up to 2007."

Backlash itself came into being after the tragic death of Bootleg's bass player, Rick Gilroy. Sly came in at that time, and has been with them ever since.

"We're older, we're in our forties," says Sly. "We all have day jobs, but we're still here. We're doing more festivals and anniversary parties, mostly summertime recreational. When someone calls looking for a band, if everybody's ready, we go. We all have a lot of experience, so we can mix and match. At a lot of the parties

and things, we get people coming up on stage to sing and have a good time. It's pretty fluid."

Each member has a different job in the local communities. Gamache is a guitar tech and builder who also runs Centre Stage Music in Kingston, while teaching guitar building at KCVI and giving guitar lessons on the side. McElroy is a carpenter, Sly works for Corrections Canada and Spearin is a full-time drummer and property manager.

Working as a band has brought them closer together, "almost but not quite family," according to Spearin. In September, McElroy will be marrying Spearin's step-daughter. Her children love the music and are happy to have musicians in the family.

Although Gamache grew up in Hamilton, the members come mostly from the local area – Lyndhurst, Elgin and Kingston. The closeness found only in small communities helps to give them their camaraderie and extraordinary sound. Currently, they spend their time playing in the Elgin/Gananoque/Brockville area.

"The music biz is getting harder, so disappointments are getting more common – there seems to be a North American culture of music as a commodity and less of an art form, so the musicians get less respect," says Gamache.

In Backlash, Gamache laughs, 'Bruce has this little game he plays of not following the set-list, and calling tunes on the fly, some of which we don't really know – kind of like the 'stump the chump' game. Because of my experience, I manage to keep up with it, and it leads to some interesting moments. Mark and I thrive on the chaos, so we really enjoy it."

The audience does, too, and you can feel it whenever the band gets up to play. Toes start tapping, hands clapping, and even the youngest members of the crowd don't mind getting up to dance to the music.

"I find that we've been playing all the classic rock and variations for so long that it's become our own," says Spearin. "Some of the original artists aren't even around any more, so we're paying tribute to the great music we grew up with." LH