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Tom Petty Tribute Band, Refugee, an instant hit

Ennis' own, Mike Self, stars with the Heartbreakers

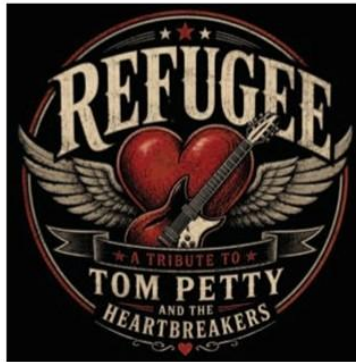
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Two weeks ago, the restored art-deco styled Texas Theatre in Waxahachie hosted the debut of Refugee, a tribute to Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, who was founded by Ennis residents Mike and Jackie Self.

The ninety-minute venue was exhilarating and played before a packed and adoring audience.

Unlike a cover band, who plays songs by many artists, a tribute band replicates just one group. It was evident from the outset the Southern Rock music and stage show aim of authenticity was spot-on. Refugee was well-versed and meticulous at recreating the sound and the appearance, leaving the



transition time between a list of 21 songs to improve upon. Dialogue was very minimal, keeping a swift pace free of drag time.

The popular tunes that fans recognize rocked the music hall, none

better than Refugee, a staple of Petty's live set. Trent LeDrew, 54, a native of New Foundland, Canada and presently from Peaster, Tx, played Petty very well. His blonde hair, outfit and nasally voice were unusually like the artist he was portraying. He captured the look and mannerisms of the iconic Petty.

The band with 10 number-one hits on Billboard's Mainstream Rock list, witnessed Refugee play most every one of them. They opened with hits - Mary Jane's Last Dance and I Won't Back Down and closed with jangle-rock anthem American Girl and 1989's Running Down a Dream. The crowd sang along and cheered the classics by the elite-tier band that ranks in the All-Time Top 25.

Mike Self has taught at Ennis H.S, owns Ennis Black Belt Academy where he and Jackie are martial arts instructors combined with their work as residential real estate providers. As a musician, he is a guitarist at Ennis Cowboy Church and has played lead guitar and sung vocals for two of the most popular tribute bands in the Metroplex.

Mike plays guitar and saxophone for the Seger System, a tribute band of Bob Seger & The Silver Bullet Band. He plays guitar and harmonica as Kix Brooks of the Brooks & Dunn country music duo, which shut down operations in January, which allowed time for Self to form Refugee.

During their premier launch, one thing unmistakably clear was the accurate impression of Petty and his lead guitarist Mike Campbell, whom Self personifies virtuoso. He played



Staff Photo/Mark Warde

Refugee Band, Mike Self (left) on night of debut at Texas Theatre.

See REFUGEE, page 10

REFUGEE continued from page 1

four or five guitars, one of them equipped with a whammy bar, as well as a mandolin and a smooth harmonica bit during both *Mary Jane* and *You Don't Know it Feels*.

The tandem outshined the other three members on drums, keyboard and bass, just as they did for three decades as original band cohorts, Tom and Mike, both Floridians.

Anthem "Free Fallin'" was almost too nostalgic, and the acoustic guitar in "Learning to Fly" allowed listeners to reminisce the lyrics about overcoming adversity.

Self and LeDrew as power performers, weren't complete without Matt Hunt (drums) of Frisco, Jim Rodgers (keys) from Conroe and Grand Prairie bassist, Joel Black, whose bottom, low-frequency connects the drums to the melody in songs. They meshed quite well, complimenting the high-skilled catalysts in Trent and Mike.

Asked why he chose Petty and the Heartbreakers to pattern a tribute band, Self said it came naturally. "I chose him because I had learned a Petty show to do a sub job in another DFW band this past



Courtesy Photos



Jackie and Mike Self

spring," he said. "A longer story, but the crux of it is that I found the Petty catalog to be huge, and enjoyed by almost everybody.

"Also, I didn't think that Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers were being well-represented in the area and thought I could do a better job." He was right.

As for Petty's two years with the Traveling Wilburys, the supergroup formed in 1988, he said he has learned a few of their hits. "I have learned a couple of those as well, but the Heartbreakers catalog of hits is so big, we should get them down first. We'll probably put one or two of their songs in the show later."

The British and American band, described by many as "perhaps the biggest supergroup of all time," consisted of Bob Dylan, George Harrison, Jeff Lynne, Roy Orbison, and Petty.

Refugee began to experience artistic fusion dur-

ing rehearsals at the Sound Lounge in Waxahachie, and they collectively knew they had something. That synergy and rapport was felt as they appeared to enjoy performing together.

Atmospheric elements in their show featured excellent lighting, occasional blasts of smoke and cold spark machines that Mike said "emit sparks kind of like a firework fountain."

In a day where Artificial Intelligence is trending and the results often look distant and impersonal, Refugee - a tribute to Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers depict the warmth, humility and the high-quality performance of the authentic with extreme realism.

Days after their show at the Texas Theatre, Ennis' Miriam Castillo, who took in the show, booked them for Saturday, Oct. 24, during the Autumn Daze Festival. Check them out yourself, and spread the word to Petty fans.