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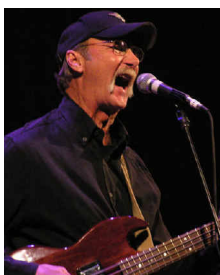
Their place in fame

Band reunites for state Hall of Fame show

By LING-MEI WONG
The Kansas City Star

"We rocked the house."

— *Forrest "Tree" Cloud, bass player from Olathe*



Photos courtesy of Shannon Cloud

Eric and the Norsemen reunited to perform at the Kansas Music Hall of Fame induction ceremonies Saturday at Liberty Hall in Lawrence. Band members are (from left) Forrest "Tree" Cloud, Roger "Eric" Johnson, Allen Blasco, Frank Berrier and Mike Willman. Cloud has a home in Olathe, where the band sometimes practiced to get ready for the show.

Most rockers don't expect to keep rocking until retirement age.

But that's just what happened for band Eric and the Norsemen.

The band found out last year that it would be inducted into the Kansas Music Hall of Fame, 37 years after the band members graduated from the University of Kansas. They played with other inductees on Saturday at Liberty Hall in Lawrence.

"We rocked the house," said Forrest "Tree" Cloud, 59, a bass player and retired chairman of IBT Inc. "We were so happy with our performance."

Cloud splits his time between Olathe and Hawaii, and other band members traveled from places such as St. Louis, Dallas, Wichita, Kan., Waterloo, Iowa, and Eugene, Ore.

Guitarist Mike Willman, 60, of Lone Jack, said putting the show together wasn't easy.

The band members found out about their induction in November and spent four months practicing for the concert.

"We were all kidding our fingers were starting to bleed," said Mike Willman, guitarist and manager of customer communications at Kansas City Power & Light Co. "Over time, everything started to come back."

Willman managed to nail guitar solos and surprise his 22-year-old son Bryan.

"At some point, Dad reaches the 'cool' status level," Willman said. "I think I got there last weekend."

Eric and the Norsemen was formed in 1964 by four Lambda Chi Alpha brothers, including Willman. One of them, Kenny Kramer, left the band later and was replaced by another fraternity brother, Cloud. The Norsemen's act was billed as the "Wildest Show in the West."

"They put on a good show the other night," said Bill Lee, president of the Kansas Music Hall of Fame. "They filled the dance floor and did what they used to do in the old days."

Lee first heard the band at his high school prom and has since "always enjoyed" them. Other fans include Gary Sebelius, husband of Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, who attended the concert with his wife.

"It was really fun to see the governor dance," Cloud said.

A group of fans donned plastic horned helmets, along with Norsemen T-shirts.

"It just blew us away," Willman said. "We'd never seen that before."

The band traveled extensively, going to seven states. They would go into small towns, rent the largest venue and advertise where they would be on an Oklahoma City radio station, KOMA. Along with advertising, the band's popularity grew with word of mouth recommendations.

"We were a self-managed, independent group," Willman said. "We had to build a friend network ... to help us put up posters. We had an enormous network of friends that became almost like an extended family."

Despite living and traveling together, the band got along well.

"It was very special to get back in touch," Willman said. "We never had any ill feelings or disagreements."

As the band members went on to hold "real" jobs, they didn't realize they missed being in a band until they played together again.

"I never considered getting back together again," Cloud said. "It was very expensive and time-consuming, but absolutely worth it."

He felt honored to play at the Norsemen's induction ceremony.

"It's a fabulous end to our journey," Cloud said.

Some band members don't want the journey to end.

"I've got to talk to the band, but I'm ready," Willman said. "I'm going to keep on playing."

Eric and the Norsemen

1964 *The band was formed by Lambda Chi brothers Mike Willman, Roger "Eric" Johnson, Kenny Kramer and Jimmy Kocher.*

1965 *Kenny Kramer is replaced by Forrest "Tree" Cloud.*

1967 *The band takes a break, as Roger and Jimmy go on military training.*

1967 *Roger and Jimmy return, while "Tree" leaves. Frank Berrier and Mitch Bible join the band*

1968 *Graduation brings the band to a close. They hold their final performance in August.*

2005 *The band is inducted into the Kansas Music Hall of Fame in December.*

2006 *An encore performance is given by Mike, Roger, Jimmy, "Tree" and Frank. Kenny and Mitch are not able to attend. Two honorary Norsemen, Allen Blasco and Dennis Frans, play with the band.*

For more information about the band, visit www.ericandthenorsemen.com/ .

Kansas Music Hall of Fame

According to the Hall of Fame Web site (ksmusichalloffame.org), the following performers were 2006 inductees:

- Gene Clark
- Eric and The Norsemen
- Kelley Hunt
- King Midas and the Mufers
- Jerry Hahn
- Melissa Etheridge
- The Jermis
- Spider and the Crabs

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