

COVER ALL How A cover band co

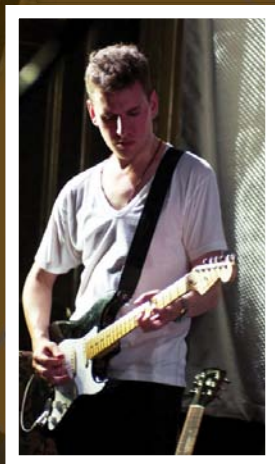
It's what you aspire to — playing original music to endearing fans while earning accolades, praise, and record deals to inspire, finance, and continue the development of your artistic vision and craft. You wouldn't be here trying to make a career in the music industry if this was not at least one of your goals.

Many musicians may discount the cover band as a legitimate means to achieve this, holding misguided criticisms along the lines of: "If you were that good, you wouldn't be playing other people's songs"— and they may be right, but only to a degree.

You likely won't have A&R reps and labels clamoring for a piece of your top 40 bar-circuit cover band, but that being said, the benefits that come with playing in a regularly-gigging cover group offer you the opportunity to hone your chops while earning some extra loot that will allow you to continue to pursue your true aspirations.



Tommy Youngsteen



Alan Snoddy

for everybody, too."

For Snoddy, who, in addition to his role with Tommy Youngsteen, is an

"It's really just about having fun and stretching out a bit musically," says Alan Snoddy, who fronts Tommy Youngsteen & The Million Dollar Band, a Toronto-based Tom Petty, Neil Young, and Bruce Springsteen cover band, while adding: "It's also a little bit of extra cash

alumnus of Canadian indie pop group Stars and currently working on a solo record with producer Roscoe Ambel, the idea to form Tommy Youngsteen was innocuous at first. "Josh Trager (Sam Roberts Band) and I are big Petty fans and I am a huge Springsteen fan. We just booked some shows and rounded up the guys and learned the tunes," explains Snoddy on the formation of the group, which, in addition to Trager on drums, is rounded out by Greg Paquet (The Stills) on guitar, Tim Fletcher (The Stills) playing bass, Graham Playford performing guitar, vocal, and percussion duties, Patty Townsend on keyboards and vocals, and Erik Hove (Stars), who plays saxophone.

While playing a variety of clubs, corporate gigs, and private functions, including a Toronto International Film Festival charity party for Adrian Grenier, star of HBO's hit show *Entourage*,

Snoddy explains that these humble beginnings have evolved into a platform for these career musicians to perform in capacities that they wouldn't normally. "I am fronting the whole thing, so that's more pressure and attention than I am used to," shares Snoddy, while adding that filling the role of front man is something that he is getting comfortable with to the point of enjoyment.

And this is how, in essence, playing in a cover band can help your career. "Personally, I am more interested in pursuing my own original music, and I think I speak for the rest of the guys with this as well," says Snoddy, but he notes: "That being said, a cover band is a great way to make some extra money."

It is not just the supplemental income earned from playing cover gigs; it's the opportunity to work on your skills as a musician in a live performance setting that is the true benefit. "What I've gotten

THE BASES ould Help your career

most out of it is that it's given me a lot more confidence in front of an audience, fronting a band," reveals Snoddy. "For a singer/songwriter or someone who is looking to come out of their shell as a sideman or woman, a good cover band can definitely help get you there in terms of practice and exposure." •

about five years ago. They spent nearly two years together playing along to live recordings of U2 before they began a search for a vocalist and bass player. Justin Faragher was an obvious choice for them as he had spent years playing in top 40 and various rock bands with them. The role of Bono was a tough spot to fill and Desire went through five vocalists before I auditioned and joined the outfit. From that point, we spent about nine months in rehearsal before performing our first live gig.

people – anywhere from 3,000 to 15,000 – and it showcases the band on a grand level with a large stage, massive PA, and lighting show. U2 is as much about presentation and theatre as it is music so festivals are our best vehicle. And it's always nice to have your own trailer and catering as well (laughs).

CM: Speaking to other musicians who are either in their own tribute band or considering starting one up, what are your key pieces of advice that you would offer to achieve success?

TS: What's very important is to consider the audience of the band you're interested in. There are some tributes out there whose appeal is so selective that the gigs will surely be few and far between. Do you really want to put all that work in and find yourself playing twice a year? Make sure there is a wide demographic that will want to see your act.

Secondly, you have to do a *lot* of work before even thinking about booking gigs. Put those hours in and use constructive criticism with each other – if you notice something isn't quite "right" with the band, it will surely be noticed by that artist's diehard fans.

Also, see if there are any other acts around doing the same thing. It might not be worth the effort if you're competing with two or three other tributes that are geographically close. It will also take a *lot* of work to get gigs. I would recommend searching out other tribute acts and taking note of where they play, then pursuing those leads. And finally, as anyone will say, you have to really like the band whose music you're going to learn; otherwise you just might get bored in a hurry. Thankfully, I've been a lifelong fan of U2 and their catalogue allows for endless setlist possibilities.

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(L-R) Tim Shaughnessy, Dave DellaValle, Gord Sobota & Justin Faragher of U2 tribute act Desire.

PAYING TRIBUTE

An alternative to a cover band, the tribute band requires you to not only be very familiar with the music, but also pay close attention to the wardrobe, stage presence, and mannerisms of the band you're emulating. For Tim Shaughnessy, who takes on the role of Bono in the Hamilton, ON-based U2 tribute band Desire, which has played festivals, clubs, and private functions throughout Ontario and eastern Canada, paying tribute to one of his favourite bands is proving to pay its own dividends in his musical career.

CM: How long did you work on the material before playing your first live show?

TS: The band was formed by Gord Sobota (drums) and Dave DellaValle (guitar)

of what you would experience while watching the actual band. We want everyone that comes to see us to have no choice but to feel our passion for the music we are performing and see that we have done countless hours of research and rehearsing. By watching every concert video available, over and over and over, we know we can "become" the band during a performance. It's an element of musical theatre that we bring to each and every one of our shows.

CM: What is the typical Desire gig?

TS: The majority of our gigs are either festivals or theatres; however, we do play select bars and have done many private and corporate shows as well. I think we all enjoy the festival gigs the most as they tend to bring the most