THE ARTS

Double Barrell plays bluesy set at Rockpile

By Eric Oliver
ASSOCIATE SPORTS EDITOR

The recent upsurge of quality in the Boston music scene, partially fueled by an increase in playing venues, has led to increased visibility for many local bands. Medford-based Double Barrell, who appeared Friday Sept. 3 at the Rockpile, is sure to take advantage of this trend. Their playing style, which defies definition (seemingly intentionally) can only be described as party rock 'n' roll.

Formed by drummer Aaron Lewis and guitarist Chuck Sullivan in 1985, the band now includes guitarist Charlie Petricone, bassist Billy Schopp, and lead vocalist John McNeeley. Double Barrell first appeared on the scene in 1987 with a third place finish in the WBCN Battle of the Bands. In the past several years they have appeared at several local clubs (once opening for Charlie Farren). Recently, they produced a four-song demo tape, which attempts to summarize their various talents. Original songs, according to McNeeley, "make up nine out of every ten songs we play live." Covers songs you could expect to hear include "Ah, Lea" by Doreen Irving and "Since You Been Gone" by Rainbow, as well as various Aerosmith, Bad Company, and Spin Doctors cuts.

Variety is the key to Double Barrell's success. They have developed the ability to incorporate many different styles and musical genres into several original songs. One example of this is "Can You Dig It," a song with a garage rock sound, interrupted by a stretch of pure reggae in the middle. "Fough Talk" is a heavy grung/funk song reminiscent of Faith No More's "Epic." In this song, both guitarists contribute equally, and Schopp comes across strong on bass. Lewis's vocals show a strong James Brown influence, even starting the song with a Brown-style count off.

Sullivan describes his main influence as Carlos Santana, followed by Eddie Van Halen and Eric Johnson. "Carlos would play slow and tasteful and then cut to a speed riff," he said. "I want to learn speed and be able to use it like he did." Songs such as "Open Your Heart," "Hands are Tied," and "Scandalous Bribes" work because they're laid on a good foundation, which allows Sullivan to use different styles in his solos. The foundation is kept alive by Schopp and Petricone. Schopp has alternative influences and keeps the band fresh. Petricone, for the most part plays the rhythm guitar role, but occasionally takes over with a Matt "Guitar" Murphy riff or a Joe Perry-style solo. Both also supply background vocals.

McNeely describes the moment he knew he wanted to be a singer as "the first time I listened to Journey's Escape album." Although he lists his influences as Steve Perry, Lou Gramm, and Robert Plant, he comes across more as a bluesy Jon Bon Jovi, occasionally escalating to a Vince Neil type growl. This is most evident on "Quit," a tight blues song that appears on their demo tape.

Their recent show at the Rockpile was well received by an enthusiastic crowd of about sixty. Double Barrell will again be appearing at the Atlantic Club in Revere on Friday, Sept. 17. They're a can't miss for anyone into party rock 'n' roll.

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