

Date: July 29, 2005



Dave's True Story (above), with (from left) Dave Cantor, featuring Kelly Flint and Jeff Eyrich.

Sound of Dave's True Story is easy to swallow

Jazz/pop group has gig at Upstairs at World Cafe Live

By JONATHAN TAKIFF

takiffj@phillynews.com

In a world where Norah Jones and Diana Krall can be embraced by pop, jazz and folk fans alike, there's gotta be hope for **Dave's True Story** to score a similar, big-time crossover success.

Their cool, smart, jazz/pop sound goes down as easy as a mojito on a hot summer night. But unlike Jones and Krall, there's a reverberant kick to this music, secret ingredients that leave you with a serious hangover.

Front woman **Kelly Flint's** dry, understated, let-the-story-tell-itself delivery and the group's breezy, bossa-nova and blues-flavored tunes propelled by bassist/producer **Jeff Eyrich** and guitarist/composer **Dave Cantor** are the tasty bait that lure you in.

Then you get bopped upside the head by Cantor's steely lyrics, burnished to an especially fine patina on the group's current "Nature" album.

Drawn with perverse wit and a haikulike precision, songs like "World in Which We Live," "Dog's Life," "I Lost My Nature" and "Small Black Heart" are devilishly worded character sketches of urbane losers and weepers, posers and spoilers.

While the occasional soul gets lucky in love - if only for a "Kiss Me Quick" moment - more often these song subjects are psychologically and geographically adrift, "Chasing the White Line Down" and suffering the "Everlasting No." They've lost their sense of inquisitiveness, their sexual mojo, their innocence. They're hanging on by a thread, going through the motions, settling for something... anything.

Music critics have been raving about Dave's True Story for years. The group's first of four albums, "Sex Without Bodies," was made in 1998 for the audiophile Chesky label. But getting club owners and radio programmers to lose their own stylistic hang-ups and pay DTS some respect hasn't been easy, band members allowed in a chat prompted by their free show early tomorrow night Upstairs at World Cafe Live.

For starters, DTS are now "indie" artists, recording on their own Bebop Records label, thus vying for attention with much higher-profile, major-label "projects."

"There are so many bands, each with so much hype, clogging up the works," said Flint. "It's like trying to get your head above water, when you've got dead bodies floating on top of you."

Then there's the issue of niche marketing this decidedly niche-gapping group.

Only with the new album - and the help of a hired promotion team - has jazz radio started paying attention to them, noted Cantor. And some doors are finally opening to jazz club gigs.

How about "Triple A" (adult alternative album rock) radio? Shouldn't those music outlets also be going nuts for these guys? Cantor acknowledges Steely Dan's Donald Fagen as a major role model, a discernible kinship that should be a wedge into Dan-loving adult pop stations.

And Dave's True Story producer/bassist Eyrich has plenty of alt rock credibility. In an earlier career life he produced albums with the likes of the Plimsouls, Blasters, Rank and File and T-Bone Burnett, among others.

"I'm a latecomer to jazz," said Eyrich, who connected with Flint in an AOL chat room devoted to lounge music. He started working with Dave's True Story and threw himself into mastering the acoustic bass - having previously played only electric - to fit in better.

Along the way, he also found time to court and marry the lead singer. Today, Flint and Eyrich are on the road with 4-year-old son, Ben, in tow.

And look where they wind up playing in Philly - mostly at Tin Angel and the (recently closed) Point, occasionally at TLA and, this weekend, World Cafe Live. But never, ever, at jazz joint Zanzibar Blue.

"Lyrically, we may be closest to a folk act, and more often than not we wind up playing in folk clubs, even though we perform with a drummer, Rich Zukor," noted Flint.

Truth is, she's quite comfortable in this musical milieu.

"My dad owned a folk club in Michigan City, Ind., where people like Steve Goodman used to play. And I started playing guitar when I was really young, inspired by James Taylor, Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt and Joni Mitchell. Especially Joni Mitchell."

Who herself went through some fascinating folk-to-jazz changes, as Dave's True Story will continue to do. The band's next album, planned for a fall release, is a set of Bob Dylan covers done DTS style, reshaping the likes of "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," "Just Like a Woman" and "I Want You" with unexpected jazz chords and rhythms, including those enticing samba beats on "You're a Big Girl Now" and "Simple Twist of Fate."

"Just for a lark, we put this set together for a Dylan music festival at a winery in upstate New York," said Eyrich. "We weren't sure if we were going to get booed off the stage, for taking such liberties. But people loved it, were begging us afterwards to put it out on a disc.

"So the next week, we booked studio time and recorded the set. It's not a sharp right turn. It's still tell-the-truth music, consistent with Dave's True Story."

Dave's True Story, plus Jude Johnstone, Upstairs at World Cafe Live, 3025 Walnut St., 6 p.m., free, 215-222-1400, www.worldcafelive.com).