

Young band meets its mentor

Planetary Blues Band to perform with Son Seals at Expo Center.

BY TOM LOUNGES
Times Correspondent

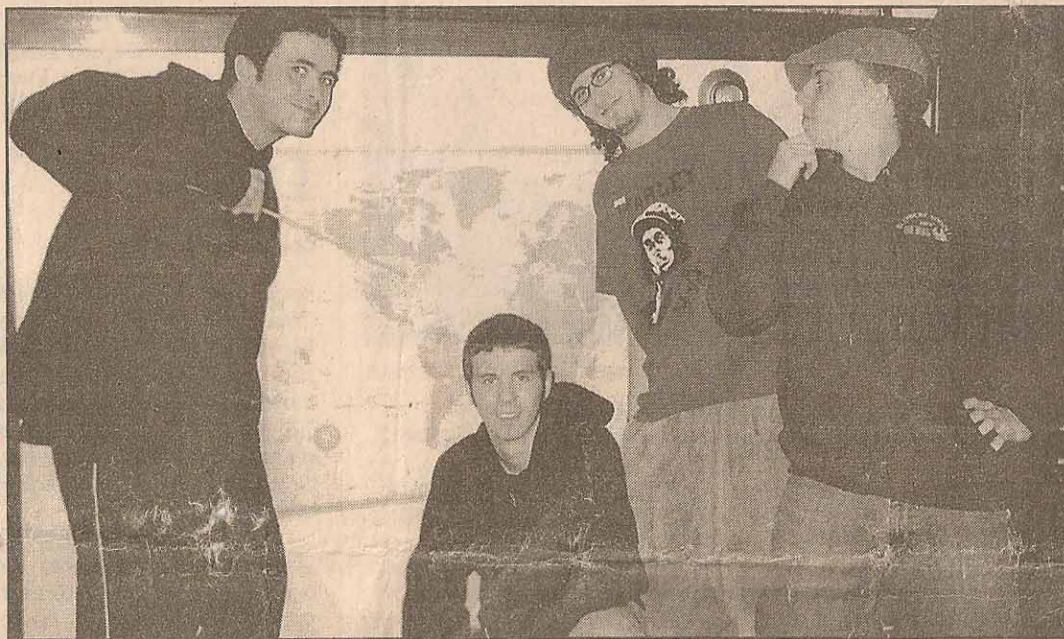
Imagine being a teenage musician and learning your chops by playing along to an artist's album that you admire.

Now imagine getting invited to share a concert bill with that same artist who, without even realizing it, was your mentor.

That is the situation a week from tonight, when Valparaiso's young Planetary Blues Band, opens for Chicago blues guitar icon Son Seals at the Porter County Expo Center. PBB's 21-year-old bassist Bobby Schaefer-Murray said the band has spent the last few nights jamming away in the basement of the house he shares with his guitar-slinging brothers and band mates - Martin and Michael Schaefer-Murray (ages 22 and 18, respectively) - and drummer Joe Hengstler.

At 22, Martin is the eldest of the Schaefer-Murray boys and the first to take up music. He began noodling around on guitar when he was 10 and, after moving to Homewood for a short time to live with his father, began to take music seriously in his teens.

A fellow student at Parker Junior High was Mike Guy, son of celebrated blues guitarist Buddy Guy. Because Guy's career was enjoying a resurgence at that time, with his mid-'90s award-winning Silvertone recordings, the school's music teacher added "the blues" to the curriculum. Seeing a clip of Guy perform-



Valparaiso's Planetary Blues Band members Martin, from left, Michael and Bobby Schaefer-Murray and Joe Hengstler are ready to rock alongside Chicago blues guitar icon Son Seals on March 27 at the Porter County Expo Center.

ing was all it took to ignite the fire in young Martin, who admittedly had gotten little satisfaction out of playing pop/rock fare up to that point.

Like Guy's 1960s counterparts - Keith Richards, Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck - Martin sought out old school bluesmen like B.B. King, T-Bone Walker, Elmore James and Muddy Waters. Along with those giants of the genre, he discovered the grossly underrated Son Seals.

Brother Michael had started playing guitar and Bobby, the bass, by this time. "Michael and I started listening to Martin's CDs and we really connected to them," Bobby recalled. The first music they learned to play as a fledgling band was Son Seal's "Live And Burning" album.

"Martin was at our dad's

house and a neighbor there was Mike Boyle, who actually played with Son Seals. Mike turned Martin on to Son's music."

Boyle is the conduit once again between the Planetary Blues Band and Son Seals, as it was he who extended the invitation for them to share the bill with his boss and Boyle's own group, Big Blue, which is Seals live backing band.

"We'll go on first," said Bobby about the upcoming show. "Then Big Blue will come up and play on their own, before Son comes up and joins them." The bassist is hopeful that some jamming happens and PBB will get the chance to sit in with their idol.

"I honestly don't know what will happen, but it'd be very cool if that would happen."

Planetary Blues Band's 2002



Son Seals

CD, "Blues For Our Grandfather," was a mix of blues standards and original compositions penned by Martin. It received favorable reviews and helped establish PBB on the regional music scene.

IF YOU GO

Son Seals, Planetary Blues Band performance

When: 8 p.m. March 27

Where: Porter County Expo Center, Valparaiso

Cost: Tickets are \$15 for all ages and are available at Front Porch Music, 505 E. Lincolnway, Valparaiso, and at the Expo Center gate. Call (219) 464-4700

Several new PBB songs have been written since that 11-song album debuted. "We're about to go in and record a new album of all our own stuff," said Bobby.

Though tremendously impacted by traditional blues, Planetary Blues Band members feel their own sound is an amalgamation of styles. "We're like Bob Marley meets Jimi Hendrix," said Bobby. "There's jazz and funk in there, too. And even a little hip-hop."

The band has been working throughout the Midwest, playing gigs at Little 500 and The Bluebird Club in Bloomington, and Chicago's Petrillo Band Shell in Grant Park. Its members anticipate a busy summer.

"We're playing every Thursday night at The Court Restaurant in Valparaiso," said Bobby, "and we've got a gig coming up May 4 at the Slippery Noodle in Indianapolis. We're also playing the post-prom dance for Valparaiso High School on May 14."

To keep up on PBB's progress or for a copy of its debut CD, log on at www.planetaryblues.com

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