

Meet Corndaddy

The Ann Arbor five-piece that's making roots rock mainstream

From basement jam sessions to the stage, Ann Arbor-based roots rockers Corndaddy carved a niche of their very own.

BY STEPHANIE A. CASOLA

Solidifying their line-up with Jud Branam on rhythm guitar, vocals; Kevin Brown on lead guitar, mandolin, harmonica, vocals; Jerry Hancock on bass; Alan Pagliere on pedal steel guitar, banjo and Will Stewart on drums, guitar and vocals, Corndaddy tossed out the Dylan and Stones covers for the truly original tones of home two years ago and haven't looked back.

When Brown joined the band in 1998, he brought with him the momentum of alt-country-tinged rock songs that would set the course for the Corndaddy to come. As the primary songwriter, he and Branam have taken the band in a fresh direction — one which seems almost neglected in a music scene known for its hip hop and power pop. With cohorts like Son Volt and Rooster, roots-oriented rock is working its way into metro area mainstream. Corndaddy can be heard on Tim Pulice's show 10 p.m. to midnight, on WDET-FM and the band has been covering a lot of ground between Ann Arbor and

Detroit on the local circuit.

Bill Keith of WSDP Radio in Plymouth has been known to spin a few Corndaddy tracks lately. "I like Corndaddy because you can hear influences of the Jayhawks and the Byrds," he said. "There's this idea that Detroit has to be 'rap/rock city' and it's nice to hear something unique and creative coming from the area."

In April 1999, Corndaddy entered 40 OZ. Sound in Ann Arbor and set its songs to CD. Working with sound engineer Drew Peters (Six Clips), the band completed a collection of 13 tracks that meld rock, country, folk and Americana into something digestible for any avid music listener. Whether Brown's Beatlesque harmonies draw attention or its Branam's quirky-yet-introspective view of the world that gets listeners hooked, Corndaddy's got accessible appeal to spare.

Branam, a Dearborn resident who works in Plymouth Township, said his inspiration to write music comes from the world around him.

Drawing from past experience and using a story-telling tone, he created songs like *Sleeping Outside Omaha*, which opens the debut album. "It's about hitchhiking to California when I was 18," he admitted. "It just talks about one episode of the trip...sleeping under a viaduct,

doing that whole Jack Kerouac hitchhiking (thing). It's kind of romantic and cool."

If Branam's writing is romantic, Branam's flows from a traditional rock ethic. He compares songwriting to keeping a journal — experiences begin in truth and can be twisted into obscurity. The urge to write can come to him from out of nowhere. Together, Brown and Branam collaborate on the words, music and voices that set the band apart. The music is made memorable by the signature twang and chime of Pagliere's pedal steel and the solid rhythm of Stewart and Hancock. And it's always progressing.

"I think the new material we're writing now has got a little harder edge to it," said Branam. "We learned an awful lot going into the studio...It's a little bit more evolved."

Whatever you classify it, Corndaddy's earned a following. "It's a type of music that everyone likes on some level," said Branam. "I think everyone has room for it. It crosses over so many lines."

To keep moving ahead, the band will be performing more often around the area, stretching their borders to outside the state and constantly writing new material. Look for them at a hotspot near you.

Corndaddy performs with *The Buzzrats*, Jeremy Porter, 10 p.m. Saturday, July 29, Club Bart, Ferndale. Cover charge. (248) 548-8746; 9 p.m. Friday, Aug. 18.



PHOTO BY PAUL BURCHMANN

Listen: Ann Arbor-based Corndaddy brings on the alt-country flavor.

Lowertown Grill, Plymouth. 21 and over. Cover charge. (734) 451-1213. For more check out www.corndaddy.com.

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Counting Crows and Live co-headline shows at Pine Knob

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
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Counting Crows burst onto radio and MTV with *Mr. Jones* more than six years ago. Since then the band has released a total of three studio albums — and one live to rave reviews. The band has earned more fans than it can, well count. On the heels of their second single *Mrs. Potter's Lullaby* on *This Desert Life*, the Counting Crows is gearing up for an extended U.S. tour co-headline with friends and fellow modern rock giants, Live. Counting Crows guitarist Dan Vickrey called on Thursday, July 20 to talk a little about the upcoming tour.

Observer & Eccentric: Hi Dan. Where are you calling from?

Dan Vickrey: "L.A. I'm home for a little while. We were in Europe doing some festivals and some of our own shows. It went well. We'd been in Europe for a while."

O&E: How did this show with Live come about?

DV: "We kinda knew (Live frontman) Ed (Kowaczynski) for a long time. When we were thinking about bands to take out, they came to mind."

O&E: What do Live and

Counting Crows have in common as far as their fans are concerned?

DV: "It's pretty emotional music. It's good for both of us."

O&E: What's in store for this tour?

DV: "Nothing that I know of yet. I've been so focused on Europe. Both bands will play for an hour and a half. Galactic will (open the show). They're friends of ours. All the bands on the tour are ones we both agreed on."

O&E: Will their be any crossover? Will we see some members of Live onstage with Counting Crows or vice versa?

DV: "Quite Possibly. It's in the works."

O&E: What do you do to prepare for the tour?

DV: "We're on break. It's the calm before the storm. I do absolutely nothing and I love it."

O&E: Do you miss anything about home when you're on tour?

DV: "Being home. Sleeping in the same place. And friends. You kinda lose touch on tour. Other people's lives go on and yours stays still, it seems."

O&E: What's going on with the band? Will we see another single off of *This Desert Life*?

DV: "Potter is out now. I don't know if there will be another single."



O&E: Are you looking forward to this tour?

DV: "It's gonna be fun. We ended up playing some shows with Live in Europe, festivals. We got a chance to meet the rest of the band and they're nice guys... I think it'll be a good show, good rock and roll for kids of all

ages." See *Counting Crows and Live*, with *Galactic*, 7:30 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday, Aug. 2-3, Pine Knob Music Theatre, Independence Township. Tickets are \$23.50-\$46, call (248) 645-6666 or (248) 377-0100.



One-two punch: Counting Crows (left) come back with friends in modern rock fame, Live (above) and opens *Galactic* for two spectacular nights at Pine Knob Music Theatre in Independence Township.

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