

Hard driving rock is fueled by ambition

By **BRAD REAUME**
The Champion

Alabaster is defined as hard, polished rock. Alabaster, a local band, is hoping to hit hard with an independently produced CD, the culmination of their efforts since 1994. Their sound, while not to all tastes, is loud, aggressive and edgy with strong bass lines, which are used to drive the melody.

Transition seems to be the operative concept in the band, originally formed in 1991. After a few years of personnel and accompanying name changes, a new professionalism has driven the four-man group since they adopted their current name.

"We've all invested a lot into the concept and the name Alabaster. We are very, very committed to it," said bassist Tryg Smith. "Alabaster will be together for a very long time."

The band has had some successes. They get air play on various college radio stations, and emerged from among 30 groups to reach the finals of a 1996 McMaster University band contest.

"We are realistic. We want to be successful but understand that you have to be in the right place at the right time. Some very successful bands are not very talented," Mr. Smith said. "And some very talented musicians never make it."

In the end band members are doing what they enjoy. Learning the recording process opened some creative conduits in the band and Mr. Smith said the group is committed to producing another CD in the next few years, even if it has to be done independently.

The 23-year-old Milton resident said he has put most of his efforts into writing music and promoting the group. Live shows are taking a bit of a back seat right now unless the gig can be turned into an event with something outside the bounds of the standard rock show involved.

"We want to have something extra because that is the difference between a band that is going somewhere and one that is not," he said. "We have an annual trip to Wasaga Beach where all our fans are invited to come up and hear us play."

Promotion key for tour

Alabaster has put together an impressive promotional package including the CD, bios, a web site and their own fanzine.

According to Mr. Smith they are looking to move up to the next level in their musical direction and name recognition. They are in



Photo by TANYA SMITH

Alternative rock band Alabaster, with (from left) Derek Clark, Tryg Smith, Tim Reesor and Christoph Roy, will be part of the Moonlight Magic festivities tonight (Friday) in downtown Milton. They'll perform at 7:30 and 10 p.m.

the process of changing from a cover band to one that plays original material. That transition can be difficult Mr. Smith agreed, saying small venues want familiar music for patrons while the band wants to pursue its own direction. He said Alabaster's appearance at Milton's Moonlight Madness on June 20 will feature a combination of cover tunes and original work.

One of the band's advantages is its wide range of influences. That trait allows them to cover a huge variety of material and has gotten them gigs in a number of different places. They have played from Brampton through to Hamilton.

Mr. Smith said Alabaster's different influences help create a

hybrid and hopefully unique sound.

He is a longtime fan of KISS, a band that inspired a very devout following, and likes Canadian bands I Mother Earth and Tea Party. Guitarist Tim Reesor likes classic rock and vocalist Christoph Roy will listen to anything, according to Mr. Smith.

Sound still evolving

Alabaster's sound is still evolving, said Mr. Smith, but its name is "carved in stone, no pun intended." Formerly known as Functional Disparity, Killing Time, Creep and Mother May I,

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Hardball launches blues fest

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The Hardball Southside is hosting a four day blues/roots music festival June 26-29.

According to Joe Pinto, booking manager for the club, headlining performers at the festival often play much larger venues.

"We will have no trouble selling it out," he said. "The club has become a destination location for this type of music. People come from all over: Toronto, Buffalo, Kitchener, Guelph, Hamilton."

The festival will kick off Thursday and Friday nights with bands indoors at the club, located just north of Highway 401 on Highway 25.

Saturday afternoon the festival is trying to get families involved, with shuttle buses to Kelso Conservation Area for a picnic and beach party which starts at 11 a.m.

The last bus back will come at 4 p.m. with music

starting in the club's parking lot at about 3 p.m. Buses, Kelso admission and babysitting are included in the \$6 ticket price.

The Saturday evening show has a separate ticket which costs \$17.50 in advance and includes a New Orleans style buffet.

The indoor show features co-headliners Little Charlie and the Nightcats from California, and Louisiana's Nathan and the Zydeco Cha Chas.

Mr. Pinto said zydeco music has a Motown feel but uses accordion, and other odd instruments and rhythms. It comes from Cajun influences brought to the south by displaced French Canadians. He described it as "the happiest music alive. It just makes you want to dance fast."

"Some of these acts play much larger festivals like the Montreal Jazz Festival and the San Francisco Blues and Roots Festival," Mr. Pinto said.

The festival is an opportunity to promote the 350

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