

High-Yield CD

Former banker, trio looks to cash in with new recording

Nate Donniss Trio debut album released this week

Review by John Raifsnider

One measure of just how good a music CD is, might be long it takes to go from purchase point to iPod. In the case of the newly released "All Directions" CD by the Nate Donniss Trio, the disc set a new record in our household by going from jeweled case to personal player in less than three minutes -- a speedy new mark that is sure to stand.

Not bad for an established group. Even better for a debut CD.

The trio's first recording is terrific. With 14 tracks of original music written, produced and recorded in-house, the trio maintained control over the final product and the effort paid off.

From the opening cut, "Nothing Better Than Your Love" to the finale, "Carry On," the trio has created a mix that appeals to listeners from 16 to 60 -- as evidenced by the roaring approval its audiences heap on the group at local pubs and coffee shops -- which helps the group avoid being pigeonholed as folk, rock, or pop.

The trio's founder, acoustic guitarist and lead singer, Nate Donniss, blends smooth, soulful vocals, like that of Jack Johnson with a grit akin to Dave Matthews. The comparisons are commonplace and welcomed by Donniss, a 29-year-old New York native.

"That's something I've heard many times before," says Donniss, whose looks have also been said to be similar to both artists.

"It's quite a compliment to be compared with either of those guys, even better to be told you sound like both of them."

Donniss moved west in 2003 and spent three years working with a nationally-known bank as a risk assessment manager. Now he's risking it all on the success of the trio's acoustic rock blend, banking on a sellout of the CD's first production run.

Joining Donniss on-stage and on the CD, are percussionist and co-producer Phil Woodring and stand-up electric bass player Denis Sluka.

As founder, lead singer and songwriter of the 14 original tracks on the 'All Directions' CD, Donniss knows the pressure is on to make the trio's initial offering a success. To make sure the CD is a hit, he's playing at local clubs nearly every night of the week to promote the album's release and gather new fans. cont.

The trio members say playing the smaller venues has its rewards.

“It’s more intimate and you can better connect with the people there,” Donniss says.

“After the show, you can hang out one-one with the people, where at the bigger venues you kind of get lost in the crowd.”

Sluka says playing the more confined circuit has helped the band meld.

“The more we play, whether it is for one person or a hundred people, the more we play and not just rehearse, the better we are as a group.

“It’s just better for us to be out there playing. The songs grow and we get tighter.” he says.

On the heels of their first CD, Woodring says the trio is beyond making many mistakes and has gelled to the point that they are ready to take their music to larger audiences.

“We’ve gotten pretty tight right now. We really don’t need to use the smaller venues to workshop our music, not like we used to. We’re ready to move up.”

More dates, and bigger venues can wear on an up-and-coming band, but Donniss says the trio is ready for the challenge.

“I don’t foresee any problems with more success -- there’s nothing really that we won’t be able to work through. The kind of work can take its toll, but we’re all easy-going guys. We’re all committed to the music and committed to making this work.” he says.

Might a heavier schedule force the group to expand in the future?

“We’re not opposed to adding a fourth person, but we’re really comfortable and happy with the three of us, but we’ve talked about expanding to a fourth person if it comes to that,” Donniss says.

“The key is trying to find someone who fits the songs.”

Donniss also says he would like to expand the group’s venue area.

“Along the natural progression of our development, I’d like to get out beyond San Diego area and tour more along the west coast,” he says.

Woodring’s hopes for trio’s future include staying with its own music.

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“I’d like to get away from the cover music (standards) gigs that we play, and do more of our original music. It would be nice to be able to do all of our own but you have to (make a living) and right now that means we’re doing more cover music.

“Hopefully, with the new CD out, people will embrace our music and we’ll be doing all of our own original music. That would be a welcome change,” says Woodring.

The trio will host a CD Bash, celebrating the release of their debut album “All Directions” on Feb. 11 at the Belly Up Tavern in Solana Beach, with special guest performances by local favorites David Lally and Not Your Mom. The doors open at 1 p.m. and the show will start at 1:45.

Tickets are available at the Belly Up box office, and at the band’s prior live shows.

Advanced tickets are only \$8, and tickets on the day of the show will be \$10.

Prior to the CD bash, Donniss Trio will play Jan. 29 at Dublin’s Irish Pub in San Diego and Feb. 9 at the E Street Cafe in Encinitas.

On Feb. 7 the group will perform live on San Diego television station KUSI.

The CD “All Directions” can be purchased on-line from the trio’s website www.donnistrio.com or at their live performances.