

Opening the Gates to Rock Paper Soul

By James Peacock

Even as the crowd at Gates Restaurant and Bar roared in approval and support of local band Rock Paper Soul on Saturday night, their noise level pushing the group into the final round of the fourth annual “Battle of the Bands” competition, the group seemed unperturbed. It was as if they had completed just another rehearsal at a member’s home, rather than an hourlong set in front of a raucous, standing-room-only crowd.

That cool and calm attitude was not an act, but rather a microcosm of the general tenor of Rock Paper Soul, a group whose joy comes from playing the music that they love, with the people that they love. Being showered with love from an audience is certainly nice, but it is not why Dana Gordon and her bandmates formed their group in 2019.

“...Covering the best music from the 60s to today with people I deeply care about, really respect as musicians, have a blast with, and love, was why I wanted to form this band” says Dana, the founder, co-lead vocalist, keyboardist, and manager of Rock Paper Soul says.

Rock Paper Soul is a group that covers soul and classic rock, playing over 25 gigs in 2022 across Fairfield County, Connecticut and Westchester County, NY. They say that since first forming their group, they now have “60-plus” songs in their repertoire. On Saturday night alone they covered Queen, Guns ‘N’ Roses, Aerosmith, Stevie Wonder, and many more different groups.

“The timelessness of those genres, the beauty of the lyrics, the emotional impact of the unforgettable melodies are what underscore the love of covering songs from those eras,” Dana explains.

“Personally, I love so many types of music. Soul speaks to me specifically through melodies and harmonies; classic rock brings a great energy into the mix,” says fellow co-lead vocalist Caroline.

Their choice of music blend was received well enough to move them past Alter Ego Band into the final heat of the “Battle of the Bands” competition, next Saturday, February 4. The final heat will be the only one in which admission tickets are sold, with the proceeds going directly to New Canaan Meals on Wheels.

One may wonder what the level of competitiveness is like between Rock Paper Soul and the other bands competing in the contest. According to the band, who first met each other and consequently other local bands in the adult program at the New Canaan School of Rock, there's more to the "battle" than simple competition.

"We like seeing what everyone else is up to – it's competitive in one way but not in another; we each have our own niches and there are lots of opportunities for everyone," Caroline explains, "generally speaking, we tend to support each other, going to each other's shows."

It was at the New Canaan School of Rock that Dana first met Caroline and the band's drummer Rob. "I asked Rob, Caroline, and several other friends in the adult program if they wanted to form a band for the sole purpose of trying to get selected to be one of the local bands chosen to play the Town Stage at the Greenwich Town Party...although we didn't get selected that year, we had such a great time forming our own band that we wanted to continue with it."

The Greenwich Town Party, a yearly event held in Greenwich, Connecticut attracts world famous artists such as Eric Clapton, The Eagles, Steely Dan, James Taylor, Paul Simon, Dave Matthews and, most recently, Billy Joel. The event also chooses five local bands every year to play as openers for that year's heavy hitters. It was this opportunity that inspired Dana to put together her own band.

The love and passion that began to be forged for the purpose of playing that specific event has persisted ever since, as various other band members came and went, and the Covid pandemic forced the band to adapt in ways they had never imagined.

"Covid definitely didn't help. We had to be very creative with outdoor practices and very spread-out with open practices for people to come and listen to us," Dana recalls. "We practiced outside in my backyard for months. My house is perched on a hill so our sound really travelled. People had been craving live music since everything had been shut down for so long, so our neighbors would sit outside of their homes or sit in my backyard to listen to us. My phone would be buzzing during practices with neighbors requesting songs. Can't tell you how many times I would get a text that would just read, "Freebird!!!"

That persistence has paid off, as evidenced by the following that the band has accumulated in the area, which was out in full force on Saturday night. Throughout the performance, clearly devoted fans danced along to songs played by the band, and even took the time in between songs to scream out their affection for Dana and the band. Such treatment is usually reserved for bands of global fame and prestige,

but to know Rock Paper Soul, and to have witnessed their performance on Saturday night, adulation of this sort was more than warranted.