

THE MATT O'REE BAND

By Steven Le Vine



UPCOMING JULY LOCAL TOUR DATES

July 2 – 10 p.m. Leggett's Sand Bar, Manasquan, N. J.

July 4 – 10 p.m. The Mad Hatter, Sea Bright, N. J.

July 5 – Magee's Westside Tavern, Point Pleasant, N. J.

July 9 – 10 p.m. Leggett's Sand Bar, Manasquan, N. J.

July 16 – 10 p.m. Leggett's Sand Bar, Manasquan, N. J.

July 19 – Donovan's Reef – Dune's Day, Sea Bright, N. J.

July 23 – 10 p.m. Leggett's Sand Bar, Manasquan, N. J.

July 25 – The Mad Hatter, Sea Bright, N. J.

July 30 – 10 p.m. Leggett's Sand Bar, Manasquan, N. J.

New Jersey has always spawned major talent, both in music, film and just about any other category you can think of.

Focusing more on the music business, some of the industry's most riveting superstars have been birthed in the Garden State. Most people can recall its two most popular artists, Bruce Springsteen and Jon Bon Jovi.

One who is truly blazing his own trail to memorable stardom is musician Matt O'Ree, New Jersey's own blues-rock king, who hails from Holmdel.

O'Ree, who fronts his own band, The Matt O'Ree Band, which consists of three other bandmates -- drummer Lew Rosengrant, bassist Lance Taylor and keyboard king Eric Safka, first released his debut album *88 Miles* in 1998. Following this highly successful debut effort, the band released *Chalk It Up* (2001), *Shelf Life* (2006), and now their newest album, a live concert both in CD and DVD format, recorded and videotaped during a recent performance at Sayreville's Starland Ballroom.

"People are always saying, 'You're from New Jersey and you play blues?'" says O'Ree, who has been playing guitar since he was nine years of age. "There's blues everywhere. Look at the state of the country. Paying these gas prices, everybody's got the blues."

O'Ree jokes, but in all seriousness he is a blues rocker in its purest form.

"*88 Miles* was really the first CD for me where I had the chance to sing and write my own music. I had been on a couple of other records for other people before that. It was really my first attempt at doing the blues thing and the three-piece band. It's probably sold the best out of all my CDs."

Released shortly after the new millennium, *Chalk It Up* carries on what made *88 Miles* so well respected in the blues genre, while featuring improved songwriting and vocals, says O'Ree. "Every CD I put out I try to make it better than the last one. You're always trying to outdo yourself. The most fun thing about making a record is pushing to make it better."

He adds, "*Shelf Life* was more of a turn to rock-blues than the blues-rock that came before. I think the songwriting is even better on that one."

In addition to opening up for well-known recording acts as Kansas, Government Mule, Buddy Guy and Robby Krieger, among others, one of the more praiseworthy experiences for O'Ree came when he took home the award for "King of the Blues" at 2006's Guitarmageddon, presented to him by none other than the legendary blues king himself, BB King, and new phenom John Mayer.

"That was certainly one of the most amazing moments of my career up to that point," O'Ree exclaims. "I didn't even expect to win. Just to win something like that...it was an honor. Meeting BB and John was amazing."

Years of devotion to one's craft, plus God-given talent synergize for the very few like Matt O'Ree, and such recognition as the one bestowed upon him at Guitarmageddon is likely just the beginning. Yet O'Ree is so grounded, it's safe to say he will never let ego get in his way, but will continue to explore music for music's sake. "I just felt like after all of this hard work of practicing and practicing, I finally got something out of it," he says of his award.

With so much raw musical talent and creativity being presented to their fans over the past decade, one might question where the band will go from here. One must only look to Matt O'Ree himself for the answer.

"We're dipping into that jam band style of playing, while still having the blues songs. I have a few songs that I wrote during the course of Guitarmageddon. We're going to try to write as many songs as we possibly can, 20 to 25 songs. Then we're going to pick out the direction we want to go in."

"The date is still up in the air. We're shooting to have it out by the end of the year. I'm thinking it's going to be more of the 70's vibe. Think the Allman Brothers era."

If the Allman Brothers are any indication of where they're heading, the Matt O'Ree Band might eventually cap off the New Jersey talent triumvirate alongside Springsteen and Bon Jovi in the near future. There is no doubt that Matt O'Ree is destined to make an enduring contribution to music for decades to come.

For more information on The Matt O'Ree Band, visit *HYPERSHIFT* "http://www.mattoree.com" www.mattoree.com.

