

DOWNTOWN LIVE

FORGET EVERYTHING YOU'VE HEARD BEFORE - Ladies and Gentlemen, the Last Call Brawlers!

By Jamie Manser

Last Call Brawlers guitarist Justin Valdez attributes George Romero's zombie movies as a driving influence to the band's sound.

"Night of the Living Dead, Day of the Dead, Dawn of the Dead - they play an equal role to our musical influences.

"Zombies attacking is a daily thought in our minds," Valdez deadpanned.

"All zombie movies play a real role. It reflects who we are, the old school horror. We're kind of like zombies," Valdez continued in all seriousness. "Out at night and we're scary."

They may be out at night, but their live shows and their upcoming self-titled CD are anything but scary and they have more energy than any undead flesh-craving automaton could muster. Just watching them careen and really rock 'n' roll on stage can leave a coke-addled fiend feeling tired!

Valdez described their CD accurately when he said, "A lot of different influences are pulled together, but there is still a common feel - toe-tapping, good-time music. It has a wide range of styles. Surf, shit-kicking country, spaghetti western to Bo Diddley and psychobilly."

Last Call Brawlers was recorded in two days at beloved Wavelab Studios. Chango Malo's sax player David Clark contributes, as does bad ass harmonica player Tom Walbank. Walbank's artistic rendition of the four Brawlers is used for the album cover.

The current incarnation of the Brawlers was formed two years ago. Valdez and bassist Eric "Generic" had originally formed the band in October of 1999, with a "couple of other schmos."

Valdez, 26, played drums and then was singing for the Brawlers early on but said he hated the way he sounded. "We decided to get a singer and Eric said, 'What about Marty?'"

They explained that people had thought Marty was in the band anyway and that girls would go up to him and say, "Great show."

It makes sense. Marty "Muerto" (who, apparently, has officially changed his last name to Muerto. Don't forget that big zombie influence, muerto means dead person in español) and Valdez have similar features. They both have a rich brown skin tone, big dark chocolate brown eyes and dark brown hair fashioned in the style of a 50's greaser.

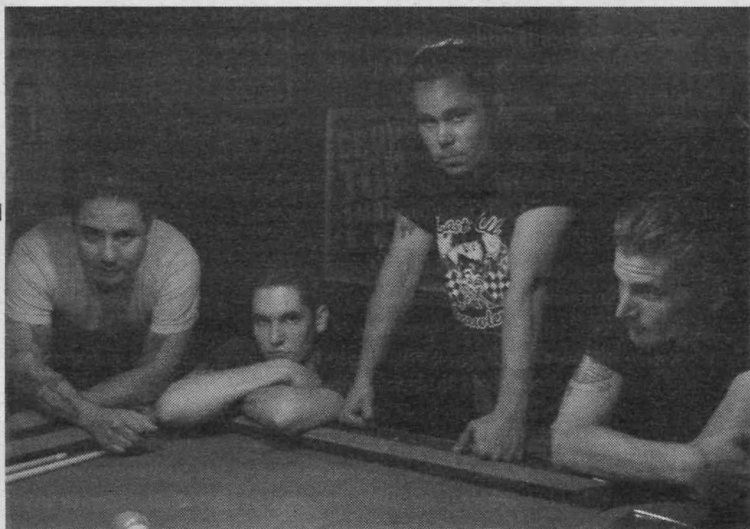
Muerto, 27, and drummer Stephen Howell joined the band in 2001. Eric not only suggested Muerto, but also brought in Howell. "We knew each other since we were 15 and played in punk rock bands together."

"All four of us come from punk rock bands," Valdez said. "For me, there was a time I got sick of it. I wanted something that was a bit more talented. So, I started looking at other music.

"I got into rockabilly, listening to it and having influences from the four of us creates the sound. I'm into instrumental guitar. Link Ray, Dick Dale, Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent. I like the old music, but we're living in 2003. We're definitely not traditional rockabilly. Bands like us get shit from rockabilly purists.

"It's hard to label because there is so many different energies and feels."

Eric said he is "into old rock 'n' roll and punk rock, like



The Last Call Brawlers

photo Jamie Manser

Johnny Thunders and The Ramones as well as The Rattled Roosters."

Muerto said he brings to the band "a lot of 50s influences - Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Carroll, The Amazing Crowns and Chan Romero."

When Muerto first joined, he struggled with his singing style. "It was difficult at first. I felt I had to fit certain stereotypes as a singer."

Valdez goaded Muerto by saying, "Marty used to sound like a chimpanzee singing."

Muerto explained that it "probably took a good year to a year and a half to get comfortable," with his singing style.

"But now I'm really comfortable with my sound and style."

Muerto wasn't the only one who had to adjust his style to the band. Twenty-two year-old Eric had been playing electric bass in bands since he was 14, but has only been playing upright bass for about three years.

Valdez says of playing guitar: "I always had a guitar laying around and played in a punk band in high school, but it's really since the Brawlers have been around," that he started really playing guitar.

Conversely, 21 year-old Howell has been playing drums since he was eleven years old. Howell says his musical influences are mostly inclusive of "old school punk. The Dead Kennedys, The Germs, Circle Jerks, Misfits and Black Flag."

Howell had joined the band in 2001, but went on a hiatus - a hiatus the other members refer to as "Stephen's disappearing act" - and come back last September. His reappearance came at a good time, two weeks before the band's east coast tour with The 440's.

Valdez said last fall's tour was the catalyst for the band forming their strong bond.

"A lot of it was that on the road experience, a lot of fighting and strangling. We played every night for 32 days."

When asked about the difficulties of that much traveling, Valdez explained that "you get in a mind set - this is what I do - drive, play, eat, sleep."

Someone else piped in, "What about poop?"

"Yeah," Valdez laughed, "and you spank it a little."


"Or a lot!" Muerto added.

Whatever it is they are spanking, it's working. Last year, the band garnered a TAMMIE (Tucson Area Music Award) for best Roots Rock band and came in third for best Rock 'n' Roll band.

This year, they are putting out their second self-released album, appearing on the live segment of Don Jennings' Locals Only KXCI (91.3 FM) show, and leaving at the end of the month for a three-week tour that will take them as far as North Carolina for a weekend festival.

"For the record," Valdez said, "we're not a punk band, but we have punk energy."

Muerto added, "Forget everything you've heard before when we come knocking on your door."

The Last Call Brawlers will be broadcasted on Locals Only, 91.3 FM, June 2, 9 p.m.-10 p.m. Their CD release party will be June 14th at Vaudeville Cabaret, 110 E. Congress St. Call 622-3535 for details. 

BAND POSTER OF THE MONTH

Critiqued by Matty "Goose" Baltimore

I wouldn't say this poster blows me away visually, but I like the concept. The "Freaky Friday" theme implies that perhaps something "freaky" will be going down. Will the bands swap lead singers for a few songs? Will the respective drummers play bass while the guitar players sulk behind the drums? Will Don Knotts make a guest appearance? It's hard to say exactly.

But let us get back to the design. The lightning bolt draws the viewer immediately to the center of the poster where we learn that the bands will be having some sort of "meeting". Below we see (most likely) copyrighted illustrations from a vintage movie poster --possibly taken from a Jodie Foster fan-site. It's difficult to see what's going on here, but it appears that a washing machine has been over-filled with laundry detergent and consequently spilling out an enormous amount of suds. What this fiasco has to do with the upcoming performance only adds to the mystery of the event.

I generously give it a B-



What: Freaky Friday
Who: The Deludes & Subspark
Where: Vaudeville Cabaret,
110 E. Congress
When: Friday, June 13th

Submit your band poster to
music@downtowntucson.org