

Musical Marauders

Mad Maggies snatch bits and pieces from a world of sound

By GREG CAHILL
FOR THE ARGUS-COURIER

“There’s a lot that can go wrong on stage with an eight-piece band — you know, it’s like a mini orchestra,” says Maggie Martin, the driving force behind the madhouse musical mélange known as the Mad Maggies. “But there’s also a lot that can go right.

And when we hit that groove, it’s especially nice.”

One listen to “La Pachulera,” from the band’s self-produced CD “Crazed and Enthused,” is all you need to know just how eclectic this band can be. The song kicks off with a syncopated Tex-Mex rhythm before exploding into a rollicking Eastern

THE MAD MAGGIES

What: The Mad Maggies perform Friday, Oct. 14, at 9:30 p.m.

Where: Black Cat Bar, 10056

Main St., Penngrove. The Electric Boogie Dawgs and Matthew Herbert also appear.

Cost: There is no cover charge.

Information: 793-9480.

European dance groove before settling back into that laid-back South-of-the-border feel — like klezmer musicians stranded at a well-lubricated Tijuana wedding party.

Petaluma web designer, singer, songwriter and accordion player Martin pens and arranges these often fast-paced, complex tunes that comprise what she calls world-inspired, power folk and tweaked trad. But her sea-

soned cohorts — including veterans of such Bay Area acts as Polkacide, Those Darn Accordions and the Combustible Edisons — have plenty of chances to add improvisational flourishes of their own.

“Let’s put it this way,” the 54-year-old Martin says, taking a break from Photoshopping stickers of the band’s logo, a black Magpie bird known for pillaging shiny objects, “each arrangement is a large playpen and there are parameters but there’s also room inside to stretch out and express yourself.”

During the past three years, the band has played throughout Northern California and

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Petaluma web designer, singer, songwriter and accordion player Maggie Martin, left, and her band Mad Maggies will perform at the Black Cat Bar and Café in Penngrove at 9:30 p.m. Oct. 14. The band plays fast-paced, complex tunes that comprise what Martin calls world-inspired, power folk and tweaked trad.

Mad Maggies

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this past August made its Cotati Accordion Festival debut. Now local audiences are beginning to catch on to the Mad Maggies, who perform Oct. 14 at the Black Cat Bar in Penngrove.

“We’ve all been at it for a while — we all have lengthy pasts,” says Martin, who once had a Petaluma-based musical theater troupe called Mixed Company. “Let’s just say we’ve been around the block, but we can get people to rock.”

Martin developed her eclectic musical tastes at an early

age. As a nine year old, this San Francisco native used to listen to her father’s diverse record collection on an old Blaupunkt hi-fi. “I listened to everything: Dave Brubeck, the first synthesizer sampler album, Beethoven — it didn’t matter,” she recalls.

As a teen, during the late ’60s, she played in an all-girl rock band called the Anti . . .

“We once played at a large battle of the bands at the Cow Palace,” she says. “We even got our picture in the San Francisco Chronicle.”

She lost touch with pop

music in the 1970s and became absorbed in opera before enrolling at Sonoma State University, where she received an undergraduate degree in composition. True to her eclectic calling, she studied classical Indian singing and early medieval music, and she sang with a Cajun band.

Then she got bitten by the accordion bug.

“It was love at first sight, really,” she says, noting that a couple of friends gave her a pair of accordions about 15 years ago. “I went to the first

Cotati Accordion Festival and shortly after that I went to San Francisco and competed in the Ms. Accordion Pageant, which is now called the Main Squeeze.

“I took second place and won a gold crown.”

Eventually, she joined Polkacide, the San Francisco-based all-accordion band known for merging hardcore punk and polka. But her compositional talents left her craving more.

“I just had to get my own music out,” she says. “I wanted to do something a little dif-

ferent. I’m really fascinated with all kinds of music. The stuff that fascinates me most is the stuff that’s not too predictable. If it’s predictable, I lose interest.

“You might say I have musical attention deficit disorder,” she adds with a mischievous laugh.

“Fortunately there’s a whole world of music — Eastern European stuff and Celtic music — that uses old modes. It’s just really fun to play.”

Even when Martin merges these disparate influences into a single tune, as in “La

Pachulera,” she defies any sense of pretension. “It’s not done for contrivance,” she says, “I think of myself as a painter who is asking, ‘Instead of using just three colors, why can’t I use all of the colors?’ It’s the same with sound. And since we’re not bound by commercial restraints, we’re free to try whatever we want.

“The true critics are the audience,” she adds. “If they’re rockin’ then I figure we’re doing all right.”

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