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Dry County making a splash; Local band looks to break into bigger markets

Posted By Elizabeth Yates

They've built up a bevy of loyal fans who lap up their high-octane country tuneage.

Now, Brantford band Dry County aims to break into bigger markets - maybe even reaching that sought-after mecca, Nashville. It's just a matter of time, says frontman Jeff Gallagher, who's enjoying every inch of the ride.

"I love what I do," he says. "It's great to see 1,000 people singing along to something I created. "People paying their money to come and see us and hear what we do: it's overwhelming, actually. It's humbling."

He's talking a few days before the five-piece heads into their favourite stomping ground, Jackhammers, to open a show for Aaron Pritchett. Expect a wild night, says the gruff-voiced Gallagher, adding that Dry County are sought-after regulars at the Lynden Road nightspot, often spurring lineups out the door.

The club is owned by Jerry Carroll and Cliff Evans, who have supported Dry County since the beginning, booking them to play their former bar in Cambridge. "They were the only ones who would take a chance on us at first."

Formed in 1998 when Gallagher joined up with longtime friend and musician Randy Solski, Dry County has changed its lineup a bit over the years. Now, Solski handles lead guitar, Don LaFramboise plays keyboards, Keith Silver is bassist and Ric Wilson (best known as Uncle Dik) is on drums.

Known for rowdy, in-your-face showmanship and memorable original music, the band has been racking up accolades - including two Ontario Country Music Awards in 2004 - and keeping busy on the bar and festival circuit.

Cranking out 100-plus shows per year, they've toured with and opened for some of Canada's biggest country acts, including The Road Hammers, Doc Walker, Emerson Drive, Blue Rodeo and Pritchett, playing mostly around southern Ontario.

Aiming to expand their market, the band is getting a boost from recent nominations for the Toronto Independent Music Awards. Dry County is up for best country album and best live band and will perform at The Phoenix in Toronto on Oct. 4, when the winners are announced. Interest from Nashville is also exciting, says Gallagher.

An entertainment company there contacted them and is sending out feelers to labels. "They already know us, which is great. We're hoping to set up a meeting to go down there."

Dry County is working on a third CD, a follow-up to 2005's self-produced album, *Waiting on Hank*, which sold a respectable 3,000 copies. On the first disc, released in 2002, "we tried to be country, and it didn't work. This time, we just tried to be us ... and people dug it." With a first single, *Cowboy Up*, already released, the coming record should be out by year's end: ideally on New Year's Eve.

The band's new manager, **Sam Cook**, says the disc could help Dry County break through to major radio airplay, a goal that's eluded them so far. "They've got great, great original music," says **Cook**, a popular host on Hamilton-based country radio station 95.3. **Cook** manages the group through her company, **Angel Wing Entertainment**.

A veteran of Canada's country music scene, she says Dry County are standouts. "I really like their spirit, their stage performance. They love the fans and the fans love their music. "Everything about them screams, 'This is a great band.' I really see them going places."

So does Gallagher, who remains cancer-free seven years after battling a malignant tumour that was expected to kill him. "We're the type of group that will either be huge - or nothing. It's go hard or go home for us." "The momentum is building for us," says the singer. "But you have to keep pushing. That's the hard part." In the meantime, the boys will do what they love best: play.

In October, you can catch them around here on the 13th at Branlyn Community Centre, for a benefit concert for mental disorders and suicide awareness; at Waterford's Pumpkifest on the 19th at Van-Go Adventure Farms; and on the 26th, they're back at Jackhammers for their annual Halloween bash.