

Victoria's slice of Motown

HIGH SCHOOL ENSEMBLE RECAPTURES THE MUSIC OF A PAST GENERATION

The 12-piece ensemble, dressed up in classic black cocktail dresses and suits, hit the stage with smiles, full of energy and anticipation of the coming show.

Or at least they would if they were at a show. It's practice night for The Midnights, a Motown musical group made up of Victoria High School students and alumni.

"The Midnights is a great time for everyone involved," says Hillary Beckett, one of the vocalists and recent Vic High graduate. "It is everything I find fun, performing is my life and this music is phenomenal."

The group's members range from late teens to mid 50s. Youthful exuberance and aged experience give the band a solid sound and high-energy performance.

"Being a part of The Midnights made my high school experience amazing," Beckett says. "It's just a pleasure to continue with it after graduation."

The band is well practised and it shows. Choreography was a big part of the original Motown sound and show; The Midnights are true to the style. In fact there is almost as much emphasis on choreography as there is on vocals. Musically the rest of The Midnights didn't miss a cue.

"We use The Midnights as a mentoring band," says Eric Emde, drummer and co-founder of band. "Duncan, Dave, and the rest of the guys love playing with the band and working with the kids."

When performing, The Midnights share their enthusiasm for their music with the crowd and give the show everything they've got. Motown



Sharon Tiffin/News staff

Singer Hillary Beckett lays down lyrics at a rehearsal for The Midnights.

hits like "Bye Bye Baby," "Dancin' in the Streets" and "Ain't Too Proud to Beg" get people dancing up on the tables and all over the dance floor.

Motown's musical style may not be for everyone, but even at practice, The Midnights com-

mand the stage with a sheer musical presence that gets people's toes tapping and would bring life to any establishment.

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Band offers blend of young and old

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"Putting a 12-piece band through rehearsal and then actually going to gigs together is almost impossible but we manage to pull together somehow," says Eric Hughes, who plays alto saxophone. "I really like standing up front, soloing, and having people react to how I play."

The Midnights were founded in 1992 by Eric Emde, Victoria High's music director and drummer for the band, as a side project for himself and to help his star students onto the stage. Fifteen years later, Emde, and two of his co-founders, Duncan Meiklejohn and David Augustin, remain with the band. Graduates and current students of Vic High make up the rest of the band with few exceptions.

"The music we play is Motown rhythm and blues, which allows me to use the most kids in the high school band," Emde says. "There are lots of vocals, horns, and a jazz rock rhythm section. It just fit and it works really well."

In 2005 on a trip to Detroit, the band met Motown legend Martha Reeves. A year later, she invited the band to join her on stage during



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her performance at Victoria's Royal Theatre.

"It's really good we have 12 to 14 people who can actually commit to being at the same place at the same time and working towards a professional sound," Hughes says. "It's like learning by osmosis standing beside people who are such strong educators."

The loss of their usual haunt, The Central Bar and Grill, which closed at the end of March, has left The Midnights looking for a new venue for regular gigs.

A list of upcoming shows will be published on the band's website in the near future.

For information about the band, check out <http://www.sd61.bc.ca/vichigh/band/>.



Sharon Tiffin/News staff

Founder/drummer of the Midnights and director of the Vic High School band program Eric Emde gets the music ready before the members of the Midnights arrive for rehearsal.