

Charleston City Paper

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VISITING ACT | Rock Rock Rock! **Shack*Shaker mayhem**

BY SHAWNTÉ SALABERT



*These rock 'n' roll cats don't mess around: Th' legendary Shack*Shakers are (L to R) bassist Mark Robertson, singer J.D. Wilkes, and guitarist David Lee*

Th' Legendary Shack*Shakers

w/ Scott H. Biram

Wed. April 12

9 p.m.

\$8

Cumberland's

301 King St.

577-9469

www.cumberlands.net

There was once a time when David Lee was featured somehow, somewhere in the City Paper at least twice a month. Whether it was of his own doing (like the time he stopped by the offices with a bucket full of fried chicken in a thinly disguised marketing ploy) or by our own plain fascination with this lanky, tattooed guy who is so very of Charleston, yet not Charleston at all, it's hard to say.

But these days, his name is inked all over papers from S.C. to Stockholm,

and rightfully so — no fried poultry involved in any way, no sirree. The last few years have seen Lee and his twin Gretsch guitars (one in hand, one forever drawn on his chest) blazing onstage in Nashville's most boisterous offspring, Th' Legendary Shack*Shakers.

The first time I saw Lee strap on that guitar was years ago in a storage unit on James Island, practicing a few tunes with his old Charleston rockabilly outfit, Go Baby Go. Over a case of PBR some time later, Lee handed me a CD scrawled with the words "Tiger Army" and "Shack Shakers" and proclaimed the latter one of the most amazing bands on the planet. So I gave it a listen, intrigued by a slew of Southern Gothic songs about brains and lunacy, filled with guitar loops taken straight from a hoedown for the insane.

Moving forward a few more months, they came to Charleston and crowded the back corner of Mezzane. Lee was the nervous host, raving about the Shack*Shakers to anyone within shouting distance, dishing out superlatives in a never-ending supply. The Colonel, Mr. J.D. Wilkes, prepared to start the set, microphone in hand, and there was no mistaking the evil glint in his eye — he knew what was about to go down, and he seemed to secretly revel in the fact that we, the audience, might not be prepared.

And so it was that Wilkes began to twitch and convulse on stage, flicking his suspenders against his sweaty chest, thumping his boots in time to the most unusual mix of honky-tonk, hell-raisin' music to ever pass through the peninsula. The Shack*Shakers thundered their way through Mezzane that night, and to be sure, Lee's preshow exaggerations were not really exaggerations at all.

Almost three years later, Lee is now an official Shack*Shaker himself and sweats and thumps onstage right alongside Wilkes. He's recorded two discs with the band and has traveled the globe in a wide-reaching circuit. Charleston is still a home, a place to ride his bike and sleep, but Nashville and the far-flung corners of Europe have become home as well.

The Shack*Shakers are currently on leg 20,000 of their lengthy tour, this time promoting their newest release on Yep Roc, Pandelirium. Stifling yawns from a late night in New York the evening before, Lee still musters energy to describe the album, which he considers a true reflection of the Shack*Shakers' live sound, full and flush. The Dead Kennedys' Jello Biafra and The Reverend Horton Heat both make appearances on the album, which is a step forward in what Wilkes calls the band's "three-part Southern Gothic."

That's all good and great, but rest up, Mr. Lee. Charleston wants to see a spectacle when you roll into town, and they know the Shack*Shakers don't disappoint.

