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# RIVER JUNCTION'S LEGACY IS CONTINUED MUSICAL SUCCESS STORIES

*From solo acoustic acts,  
bands, Nashville sessions,  
and The Jack Fords*

By Andrea Razavi

You've heard of the six degrees separation of Kevin Bacon, right? Well, *River Junction* is a lot like that. Its founding members, Greg Campolieti, Gary Miller, Dave Miller and Joe Sumph continue to have thriving and successful songwriting, performing and recording careers and solo and duo acts, not to mention an award winning band, *The Jack Fords*. It's mind boggling how many great songs these four men have produced in the last several years, not letting even the miles split the inseparable bonds that still keep them close today. The players met once upon a time spending many a day at the Shanty in their "hey days". *River Junction* was a successful touring band with a huge local and regional following. The band would go on to light up the local Cleveland music scene with



extended concert performances to packed houses with a huge local fan base and gigs opening up for acts like the Derek Trucks Band, Jerry Garcia Band, Bruce Hornsby, and Ziggy Marley. They recorded a debut, self-titled release that sold like hotcakes and continued to tour nationally, and play locally, until 2001 when Dave and Gary Miller moved to Tennessee.

Greg and Joe continued to play together, locally as an acoustic duo. The pragmatic

successes collectively and singularly of these men may be attributed to the grounding they have with priorities in check at their day jobs and at night with beloved family members. Their true love of the music they make together with their talented songwriting, multiple instrumental and vocal abilities is magic. The boys are highly recognized musicians in the area, performing in bands like the Jack Fords, the Allies, and guest appearances with various other artists in Cleveland. Two of its members, seemingly inseparable brothers, braved unknown waters, making it to Nashville for a few years in the session scene.

Greg Campolieti, is currently drummer for the Jack Fords, who won Scene's Best Rock Band in 2007 and 2009. Big Brother Dave Miller and younger brother Gary Miller are now reunited in Cleveland with family and no doubt have some big plans in the studio. Dave's MySpace is proof that the brothers can jam and sing like nobody's business. Joe joined *River Junction* from the Sour Mash Band and tells me, "I played in the Sour Mash Band and Dave and Gary Miller used to come to all the gigs 'cause they were like 15 years old...and couldn't get into bars on their own. They would sit in on some blues tunes. I've known Greg since high school when we had our first real band, the Blood Sucking Rabid Penguins. Greg says they were a Black Sabbath cover band. Joe performs and records his own music on stage with his acoustic acts and with the Allies. Between the four members, Gary, Dave, Joe, and Greg, they have written hundreds of songs and produced scores of CDs. With friendships as thick as the smoke that used to fill the bars they played in, their loyalty, philanthropy, love of family and love of their music is what this band was and still is all

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about.

Greg Campolieti tells me that the *River Junction* players are all individual songwriters and everyone is great at their instruments individually as well; "We form this group that is so different from the typical band. We are not a "lead singer", not a "lead guitar player" type of band. Joe will sing, Gary will sing. Any one of us can lead the band through a song... and do. I am blown away when I see a band that has that level of ability. For a band to go from song to song, changing vocalists and instruments... that's what blows me away about being a part of River Junction. I have spent years playing music with these guys, there's a bond there that goes deeper than music but translates into the music. I believe that's what makes us special... and the fact we only seem to play once a year...haha!"

**I caught up with Dave Miller on his night shift:**

**AR:** What made River Junction so successful and unique?

**DM:** We all grew up in the same era together in Willoughby and started playing together at 17, we shared the same mindsets and with the Grace of God we made it into something legendary". Miller says he is the player he is today because he had, bass player and drummer, Gary and Greg, by his side and that long term rhythm section made him a better player.

**AR:** What is in store with you guys for the near future?

**DM:** We plan to pitch songs to Nashville. Sure it would be great to sell our music to Nashville, but what we create and produce musically together, that's reward enough.

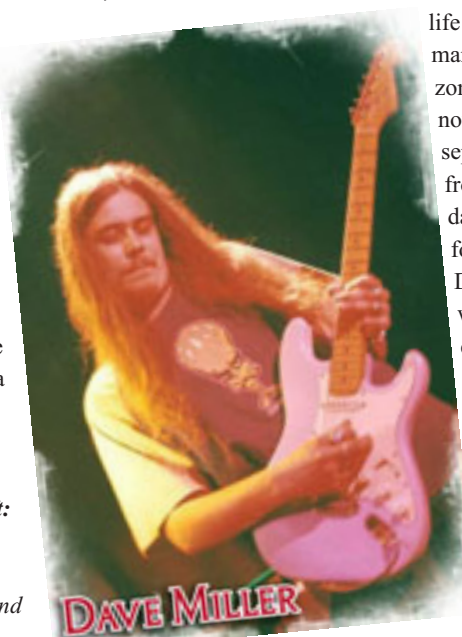
Miller tells me that despite the notable country players he has shared a stage and studio with in Nashville, it doesn't compare to how he feels about playing with Brother Gary, and buddies Joe Sumph and Greg Campolieti. Like the real McCoys, these talented singers, musicians and songwriters are true to their craft; their creations are food for the soul. "It must be the 18 years we have been playing together", Miller says. "... it isn't about a gold or platinum album on the wall that will make me feel a sense of accomplishment... whether Nashville buys it

or not, whether we get them there or not, it's the songs and CDs I recorded and wrote with my brother and Greg and Joe that will line the shelves at home which I can see and listen to." Guys like Greg, Dave, Gary and Joe believe in their music, continue to write, produce and record original works over the past eighteen years, and still remain close... that's the stuff legends are made of whether it's some name branded band or River Junction, it's about what keeps these guys together. Both Gary and Dave are

married with children and life as a Nashville session man outside of the family zone here in Cleveland is not ideal. Dave was separated for some time from his wife and daughter and I will never forget first meeting Dave over a year ago when he told me that he couldn't imagine his daughter growing up, or his wife going on, without all of them together. It is not the most normal of lifestyles out there in Music City and the life of a session man

is often "drop what your doing and get to the recording studio" any time day or night when the artist needs you. So often times it's those family values and longstanding musical friendships in Cleveland that brings one back. The glue, the magical music glue between Gary and Dave has reunited them back in Cleveland and Dave is ecstatic, looking forward to writing and recording music again with his brother and Campolieti. I think that's one of the most wonderful things about these musician friends, they realize the sanctity of family and often-times it comes first.

Campolieti, although not married, also has strong family ties. I had to juggle our interview between him helping watch his three year old niece, Alison, during the day to help out his sister. I hear a teeny tiny sweet voice in the background calling, "Uncle Greg". This guy is a rocking hot drummer who has a gentle enough heart to care for his niece and that is what this band and its members are about: love for family, love for music, and love for each other. I know Joe to be a real sweetheart too and no doubt keeps his family ties close. The kindness radiating from the clean-cut, yes, short hair, beach boy looks rocker, was apparent the first time we chatted. I finally caught up with Joe Sumph who has been out performing quite a bit.



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AR: What are you doing now and how has your music changed, grown, etc?

JS: I mostly play solo acoustic/original music. I write a lot of music. I also play in a hard rock cover band called The Allies.

AR: What are your future visions and goals musically or otherwise?

JS: Write more music.

AR: How come more "older" rockers don't cut their hair?

JS: Cause they think it's still 1989.

AR: Will River Junction ever get back together?

JS: Sure..when the sun the moon and the stars are all in alignment.

AR: Current challenges in the industry?

JS: I think it's gotten easier for bands to promote themselves with Facebook and Myspace and Twitter...etc.

AR: Anything else we should know Joe?

JS: In addition to being great musicians, Dave and Gary have a really deep connection to Star Trek...which influences everything they do musically...please print this.

Each one of their MySpace pages is loaded with one of a kind original songs that have you singing them even after you stop listening to them. They are that good. That shouldn't be surprising because *River Junction* played 90% original tunes when they performed out live and rarely had a less than packed house of fans. After recently judging the Colgate County Showdown contest, I can tell you, one critical scoring area to make it to the Nashville finals is the marketability of the music. For any of you songwriters and performers out there, you know when you have a hit song, you can see it in the crowd's response and that must be one fantastic feeling. Sure the applause after a well executed version of Mustang Sally or Sweet Home Alabama is nice, but to write original songs and see the crowd dancing and singing to it, is incomparable.

The three men grew up together in Willoughby and the bond they share in music and life is obviously a strong one. Greg has been responsible for taking care of organizing the bands/ music for the Kenny

Benny every year. He has assembled many bands in the previous years, specifically for this event,. "it has always been great musicians like Jesse Bryson- (son of Wally from the Raspberries), Chris McFadden, Jeff Kramer, Dave Wank...the list goes on. I would call up musician friends, explain the situation, and see if they would like to come and play for the benefit. It has always been a lot of fun getting to play with friends and entertain the people who are there for the cause, and of course to have a good time!" before last years benefit, in conversations between Greg and one of the events organizers-Dan Staebler, Dan came up with a great idea. "Instead of hodge podging

together another band for the Benny, let's see if we could get *River Junction* to do it." Well, fresh from recording his album with Dave, the fire was stoked. Greg made a call to Gary to explain the situation. Gary and Dave would both have to come up from Tenn. to be able to play the gig. Both of them, being fathers, this is no easy task. So, arrangements were made for them and there was one more call to make. Greg called Joe Sumph to see if he would be interested, and Joe said "of course", so there you have it...*the first River Junction gig in almost eight years.* Since then Dave and Gary have both relocated back to Ohio, making this year's gig a lot easier than the previous. This will be the second year for RJ to play the Kenny Benny. "I hope we can use this occasion to get together every year. It's a great cause."

**River Junction will host the reunion benefit "Kenny Benny" A One of a Kind Benefit In The Name Of a Loyal Fan Who Died Before His Time.**

The River Junction reunion/Kenny Benny this year is July 11th in Mentor, Ohio. For more information on the Kenny McNeill memorial benefit" visit [www.kennybenny.org](http://www.kennybenny.org). In its fifth year, the Kenny Benny is a party thrown every year, to commemorate the life of Kenny McNeill, a long time friend and fan of River Junction., a Lake county man from Mentor High. Kenny died tragically five years ago at 28. The event is coordinated by friends of his

who wanted to help raise money for local charities, in the McNeill family name. The day commences with a golf outing; everyone meets at the Benny HQ for food, drinks, and live entertainment. Also included are Chinese auctions, raffle tickets, and games held all day long. Several local businesses (anonymously) donate goods, services, etc. to help raise money for charity. All proceeds benefit local organizations. Charities donated to in the past were Autism Speaks, Camp Ho Mita Koda, the M.S. Society, Project Hope and United Leukodystrophy Fund. Greg said, "We are only a small part in a very large, coordinated effort. The people who stage this event are the ones who raise the money; the bands are just there to entertain. The McNeill family, and everyone else involved in this thing are the heart and soul...they make it happen, all coming from a simple idea...to throw a party in remembrance of a lost friend. Kenny was an avid music lover, and loved *River Junction*". This year, Greg's other band , The Jack Fords, will be making their second showing, as well.

**The Jack Fords**

The Jack Fords are a staple on the Cleveland music scene. This band consists of local Cleveland musicians, Greg Campolieti, drums/vocals, Brent Kirby- lead vocals /rhythm guitar, former Cowslingers guitarist- Bob Latina, Cobra Verde Alum—Bassist Ed Sotello, and everybody's friend- keyboardist Chris Hanna.

The Jack Fords formed in 2005 when guitarist Bobby Latina met songwriter Brent Kirby at the now legendary Town Fryer, where they hosted a live recording of their debut CD. After tracing their musical backgrounds and influences it was apparent this group of players was going to be something very unique. The Jack Fords personify a real genuineness in their live shows. The eclectic and appealing sounds of original tunes are a

mixture influenced by the likeness comparable to Dylan, Zeppelin, Stones, Black Crowes, and Otis Redding. They are most at home ripping though four-hour sets for fantastic crowds. This was the momentum behind the Cleveland band dubbed 2007's "Best Rock Band" by the Cleveland Free Times and their readers, not even a year of their debut live release, "Bent Outta Shape". Now that speaks volumes. They won again for 2009.

The Jack Fords have opened for Marah, Joe Bonamassa, James Gang, Leslie West, Ian McLagan, Will Hoge, Bottlerockets, The Yayhoos, The Trews, Heartless Bastards, The Brakes, Devon Allman, The Damnwells, Limbeck, Stacy Collins, and Red Wanting Blue to name a few. They just finished

recording tracks produced by veteran roots rock producer Eric "Roscoe" Ambel at Suma Recording Studios for the long awaited new CD due out soon. Catch the Jack Fords at Cabanas in Mentor on June 27 at 9pm and July 24 at 9:30pm at the Greenville Chagrin Falls.

AR: Memorable River Junction moments?

GC: "the most memorable moment with River Junction...ahh, wait,...what was the question?...no seriously. one of my most

memorable moments was getting a chance to play with Government Mule and sitting back stage on the couch chattin with "thee" Chuck Leavell.(Rolling Stones, Allman Brothers, etc.,etc.)

I have met and played with some famous people, but meeting Chuck was pretty cool.

AR: The Jack Fords most Memorable Moment?

GC: The Jack Fords memorable moment was being the first band to play the St. Pattys Day parade. We played on the "My 43 Float" we spent the day driving around the city and giving impromptu performances, even after the parade was over. We played outside of bars and restaurants for people walking down the street, ...it didn't matter. We played for four to five hours. That's what I call a good time"

