

"Willie and Me: Home for a Night" | Delta Democrat Times

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It's hard to imagine anyone considering One Block East their home. But for Willie and Me's frontmen, William Coppage and Ron Etheridge, it is -- musically.

Greenville natives Coppage and Etheridge's journey began just a block away from the levee almost a decade ago as teenagers in separate bands. In 2002, the duo moved to North Carolina in search of a better musical outlet and will make their first trip back to One Block East Saturday since May 23, 2003.

"I love Ron and William," said One Block East owner David Weiss. "I've watched them grow musically over the years, and it always makes me feel good when Greenville musicians go out and do well for themselves. That's one reason we support local bands."

The Greenville stop is just one one leg of a 13-city five-state tour which starts at the Georgia Theatre in Athens and ends in Raleigh, NC.

"It's a privilege to get to travel and play, but it's a treat to come home and play at the place we started," said William Coppage in a recent phone interview. "It means so much when our friends and family come out and have the opportunity to see the effort we've put into our music."

And the effort is there. With cover songs ranging from Bill Withers "Use Me" and the Ghetto Boyz "Damn, it feels good to be a Gangsta" to originals like "Little House" and "Broken Levee," which talk of Mississippi tradition, Willie and Me has dazzled audiences along the East Coast with their unique style of mixing rock, blues, R&B, hip-hop and funk."

"Growing up in the Delta has given us so much material to write about and express in our song writing," said Coppage, a 1997 Washington School graduate. "We always try and stop in here whenever we can."

Coppage and Etheridge's delta blues rock background fuses with Jason Moore's grooving bass riffs and Chris Payne's snappy drum beats.

Moore graduated in 2003 from the University of Wilmington with a degree in jazz performance, while Payne holds a bachelor's in classical drum performance from UNCW.

"There's an underlying groove that's present that's normally found in older R&B, Motown, and hip-hop," Coppage said. "As long as you can bob your head, you can dance, and that means that the groove is there."

The quartet began playing in September 2002. They took the name Willie and Me from Coppage (Willie) and Etheridge (Me) who had been playing around the Wilmington scene since May 16, 2002, as a guitar duo.

Since forming Willie and Me has gained tremendous popularity in the North Carolina region and has earned countless accolades.

They placed second in the Southeastern Battle of the Bands and won the Level 5 Battle of the Bands in 2003. Willie and Me earned a Whammy (Wilmington's Grammy) for the Third Best New Rock Band in 2004, and they have been named Band of the Month by Beat Magazine.

The foursome has been featured on UNCTVNC's public broadcasting channel and has also had the privilege of opening up or sharing the stage with bands such as Widespread Panic, M.o.e, Derrick Trucks, Les Claypool, Medeski Martin and Wood, Tishomingo and the Kudzu Kings.

The southeastern tour is an effort to promote and raise money to launch their Freshman album "Magic Show," which is scheduled to be released this summer. "Magic Show," which features an Aubrey Holman song, was produced by Geoff Hanson, who has produced Widespread Panic's DVDS "The Earth Will Swallow You" and the RIAA certified Gold release "Live at Oak Mountain."

To learn more about Willie and Me, go to www.willieandme.com - Delta Democrat Times