The Sun Company

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After checking out a hot ‘n’ lively show at the end of February, *The Sun Company* had us drooling for a chance to interview them. Music director Dessa Harvey and I were lucky enough to sit down with drummer Jon Peterson and key man Mike Givens to get the lowdown. What we found was a band that bottles musical passion and pours it onto the fans; complete with personalities as spicy as “Louisiana Hot Sauce,” said Peterson. The funk/jam band is a young one, forming just over a year ago. Members Mike McCarten, Pat Amdahl and Jon Peterson started jamming in Frederiksen Court with the unusual combo of two acoustic guitars and an electric drum set. Later the trio searched for keys and bass. Enter Mike Givens and Kyle Haubrich, through personal connections and Craigslist respectively. The name *The Sun Company* was born while brainstorming on the way home from a Phish concert in Cincinnati. Even though that’s their official name, you can hear them jokingly refer to themselves with different aliases, such as Meat Paper, the Flailing Documents and Vinegar Tree Revival. We might be partial to the last one.

-Tessia Rockey
The Sun Company has played at a few festivals including the Briar Patch Festival in Bevington, Iowa last summer. They love doing house parties for anyone who asks, and now people are starting to request them for shows. McCarten books the shows for the band in a spur-of-the-moment, “Hey wanna do a show this weekend?” “Ok!” kind of fashion.

Recently, the band has stepped out on the Ames bar scene. They don’t have a specific venue they prefer; whichever location has the most energy becomes their favorite choice. Energy plays a huge role in The Sun Company’s performances, whether it is from the band themselves or the crowd. To prepare for gigs, Peterson and McCarten listen to The Beatles. “We just like playing music, no, need to play music,” Givens said. “We love to play for the people—seeing people dancing, bobbing heads. It’s what we do it for. We love to see people jam. We are the medium the music goes through.”

You know the group is grooving hard when no one’s looking at each other. You’ll find them with their eyes closed, really feeling the music. Otherwise they can be seen making eye contact when they’ve messed up, at transitions from jam sections to melodies, and of course when something funny happens.

**Making the Music**

Their writing process is a collaborative one. Starting with a melody and designated sections for jamming, each member writes his own part but they arrange as a group. Transitions are added to merge songs, creating a non-stop show. They say they’ve been known to really nerd out when it comes to creating their pieces. Givens, who majors in music at Iowa State, is the music theory guru of the group and a self-proclaimed theory nerd. “It’s like learning to drive a stick shift,” Givens said. “It takes a while to learn, but once you do, it’s like second nature.” The Sun Company loves variety and they try and do something different all the time. Bluegrass? Sure. Death Doctors heavy metal reference? They did it. With influences like the Allman Brothers, The Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, and Yonder Mountain String Band, it’s not a mystery that their sound is a layering of upbeat and unpredictable styles. Peterson drives the beat on the drums while Givens slams the keys with a soulful touch and Kyle rocks the bass. Pat and McCarten top it off with swift and smooth fingers on the lead and rhythm guitars, rounding out the full-bodied sound. They wouldn’t have it any other way.

Throughout the whole interview, Peterson and Givens were drumming on the table and joking, feeding off of each other just like when they practice. The typical practice starts with a jam session to get the creative juices flowing and then song practice ensues. “If you look past the shenanigans at the regular practice you’ll see that we’re serious,” Peterson said. “We want to continue after school—to be full time musicians. Here comes a Grammy.”

They have two albums that are available to the public at shows, Shhh! and Steaming Pile of Sun. They recorded with Dennis Halsep, who works at Reiman Music and built the studio for his business, the Alexander Recording Company.
"WE JUST LIKE PLAYING MUSIC, NO, NEED TO PLAY MUSIC."