What's Next?

Trevor Fisher

Iowa State University
What's Next?

DES MOINES BAND WHY MAKE CLOCKS RETURNS FROM THE ROAD.

story by | TREVOR FISHER   photography by | CYAN JAMES

Dan Hutchison was ready for it to be over before the band had even loaded its gear into the trailer. The singer/guitarist of the Des Moines alt-country band Why Make Clocks simply wanted the first tour to be under his belt.

"Basically before we even left I was like 'I can’t wait till I get back,' just so I could say that I had done it."

Pianist Brian Wiksell and bassist Boonie, who was about 12 credits away from an Iowa State journalism degree when he quit school to go on the road, couldn’t disagree more. In fact, neither of them was even ready to come home from the band’s three-week West Coast jaunt, which took Wiksell, Boonie, Hutchison, drummer Pat Curtis and guitarist Karl Siemers through Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Montana, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Arizona and Texas.

The band signed with New York-based indie label Rubric Records this summer, then hit the road in October in support of its first full-length album, Fifteen Feet and Twenty Degrees.

"I wish I was still out there on the road," Wiksell says. "I’ve come back and had a few days to come down and relax a little bit, but it’s addictive. You get out there on the road and you don’t want to stop; you just want to see a new town, meet new people and just play another set."

"It was the best trip I have ever been on. [I’ve been to] Europe, Russia, all across both coasts. Nothing compared to [the tour]," Boonie says. "It was very liberating to be out with the guys I like playing with and seeing places I have never seen before."

Boonie is noticeably restless about being back from the tour. He repeatedly mentions the fact that he is not at all happy to be back in Ames. He didn’t miss many people, he says smugly, and he sure didn’t miss his day-to-day routine of school and work. After only one tour, Boonie has been transformed into a road dog who won’t be happy unless he is on his way to
the next show in the next town.

Wiksell is uneasy as well, but not for the same reasons as Boonie. Like Hutchison and Siemers, he is now unemployed. In fact, Curtis is the only member of the group currently holding down a full-time job.

Wiksell had a good job working as an operations manager for a trucking company in Des Moines. His employer considered giving him a leave of absence for the tour, but decided against it and filled Wiksell’s position. He made good money and had just bought a brand new Jeep Cherokee that he must now sell. He lives in a nice apartment. But he’ll either have to sell some of his furniture or find a roommate to be able to afford rent.

Wiksell loves his music, and doesn’t regret the decisions he has made. But it’s not easy when your parents are paying your bills for the time being and you are spending an entire night fighting with your girlfriend about the downsizing of your life because of your passion for music.

“It’s like I am giving up being a good upstanding citizen and going out and working a job to be in a rock band and drive around and play in crappy clubs,” Wiksell explains. “So from a certain standpoint, I’m kind of thinking, ‘Oh my god, what am I doing?’ sometimes.”

Much like the proverbial devil and angel, Wiksell’s musician side soon prevails in the battle for his conscience.

“I just look at my CD collection and look at all the great music I’ve got, put on a great album and it’s just like, what am I even thinking? I’m 24 years old, and I’ve got the rest of my life to work at a crappy job.”

Boonie’s parents still want him to finish school, but he hesitates to commit. When asked whether quitting school for the band was a hard decision, the answer is out his mouth before the question is finished.

“Fuck no, it was easy. I can stay here and do the day-to-day shit I do all the time and be exhausted and bummed out, or I can go on the road and be exhausted there and enjoy it.”

Hutchison lost his job before the tour started as well, but not because of the looming trip. He is now in the process of selling his house and is currently living with a friend. He is considering trying to find a temporary job until the next tour but realizes not many employers are looking for that kind of help.

While Wiksell’s conscience about not working often haunts him, Hutchison has a 401K to cash in and isn’t in a hurry to find a job. His commitment lies solely to Rubric.

“I feel like we are obligated to the record label to promote our own record and obligated as a band to — you don’t just make a record and hope that somebody buys it. I plan to do more albums, and you can’t get somebody else to put out your album if you can’t show that you did all that you could to promote the one you put out.”

On the tour some shows were good, like the show in Olympia, Washington, where the band opened for legendary punk rocker John Doe. Some were bad. The other Olympia show was in a cement room that was roughly the size of the band’s small practice space. It was located off the side of a restaurant. If bands wanted to make any money, they were expected to charge people to get into the room, even though everyone in the restaurant could hear the music coming from it, and cameras telecast the performance into the restaurant. But two people did come in, and the band sold both a record.

Why Make Clocks hopes to get back on the road for an East Coast tour possibly in January. Beside his girlfriend, for whom he kept a journal every day on the road, Boonie has no tie-downs here. As for Wiksell, he states “if the van left tomorrow, I would be on it.”

Hutchison says the idea of another tour is enticing but time is needed. He believes it is definitely in the best interest of the band to take more time in planning the tour this time, and possibly try to line up some better venues.

For now, Why Make Clocks will do what it can until the next tour. The band is considering putting together an E.P., and Hutchison mentions a possible “hiring-for-the-holidays” job to stay afloat. Living the life of a struggling musician doesn’t bother him for now.

“That’s okay, it seems like it’s okay for now. It hasn’t gotten that difficult so far.”

Dan Hutchison, Brian Wiksell and Boonie, three of the five Clocks players, have each sacrificed either school or a job for the band.