

Friday, April 18th, 2008

Orange Pop: Commonwealth supports the troops with passion

The O.C. band frequently plays shows for service personnel and will admit members of the military free to its April 24 show in San Clemente.

By ROBERT KINSLER



COMMONWEALTH: The O.C.-based band features (clockwise from top left) lead guitarist Kenny Vegas, singer Phoenix, guitarist Beau, bassist Topher and drummer Hazzard.

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The brief history of Commonwealth, as posted on the popular online music site CD Baby is short and to the point.

"No jobs, no girlfriends, no talent, no future, let's rock!"

There is, of course, more to the group's satire-tinged tale than that short bio reveals and fans of the hard rock outfit know well the power and emotion that is a vital part of Commonwealth's original rockers and live performances.

"We've been passionate as a band," lead singer Phoenix explained of the band's strong commitment to performing shows in support of America's troops, the most recent concert being staged at the San Diego Naval Medical Center on March 13.

"It eats at me; whatever we can do to help. I believe when these kids come home, they should get whatever they want," Phoenix said.

Commonwealth is set to open for Alien Ant Farm at the Pangea Music Festival in Hollywood on April 18. In addition, the Orange County-based quintet will headline at OC Tavern in San Clemente on April 24. Members of the military will be admitted free to that show.

In addition to a wealth of concert dates, the band has been spending time tracking new material in the studio with well-known producer Ronnie King (the Offspring, Tupac Shakur). Those songs are being mixed by Josh Newell at NRG Recording Studios in North Hollywood and a four-song EP is expected to be released sometime this summer. The troupe hopes to release a full-length album before the end of 2008.

"We're also planning to play at bases in Afghanistan and Iraq for up to a month," said Phoenix, who lives in Huntington Beach. The band is working with Armed Forces Entertainment to set up the tour.

Just as the music and mission of U2 has been, in part, shaped by the tragedy of poverty and AIDS in war-torn Africa, there is a power in the new recordings from Commonwealth that seems to draw depth from the band's admiration of members of the military who sacrifice so much for others.

One of the new songs, "So Long," is one that Phoenix dedicates to troops and anyone else who has lost a loved one.

"It just shows the human spirit that they (many of the troops) go back even when they are injured beyond belief."

Commonwealth's first CD was such a success, the band has had little time to spend much time in the studio completing a follow-up.

The group released the self-produced, 7-song "Commonwealth" five years ago and began passing the CD out for free. Suddenly, producers and directors from Fox Sports, X Games, Bite TV and other media outlets began approaching the band about using Commonwealth songs in a wide range of Xtreme sports productions.

"This is their art they're putting us into," Phoenix said of the directors who have asked to use Commonwealth tracks in their documentary films. "If they don't like it, they won't use it."

Phoenix would rather let others attach a specific moniker to the band's sound. He does admit the songs are catchy, have melodic choruses and people just seem to love the material and sound of the band.

"It takes so much work," Phoenix said of being in a band. "If you really believe in what you're doing – and I really believe you have to be driven – you can succeed. I was a pro surfer for awhile. Music is the same way. I think as a band, we're doing very well."

Commonwealth will perform at OC Tavern, 2369 S. El Camino Real, San Clemente, at 9 p.m. on April 24. This is a 21 & older-only show.

All members of the U.S. military will be admitted free with a Military I.D. and valid driver's license.

For more information, call OC Tavern at 949-542-8877. For more details about any of the band's upcoming shows, visit www.commonwealthband.com.

<http://www.oregister.com/articles/band-commonwealth-phoenix-2019916-april-military>