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## **Ringoes band forges 'hot blues'**

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**By Christopher Ruvo**

It has the makings of a good movie.

The plot involves a natural-born blues singer unexpectedly discovered and a bunch of guys with serious day jobs who, never having lost that musical itch, come together to form a rockin' band.

The cool thing is, that's the real-life story behind the Bass Boards Blues Band of Ringoes.

"We play hot blues," says band co-founder and bassist John Caruana of East Amwell. "There's such an enormous amount of freedom in the blues. We can bring all kinds of styles into play."

Made up of musicians with fairly extensive experience performing, the Bass Boards 30-song set features everything from Bonnie Raitt to blues classics to jazz standards and a few originals. Their next gig is April 22 at the Foolish Fox Tavern on Route 22 in Whitehouse, where they plan to start jamming around 8 p.m.

"Our shows are like hot and cool at the same time," says Caruana, a business systems analyst and self-styled computer guru when his fingers aren't running up and down fret boards. "There's times when we're playing that everybody is up on the dance floor. And there're other times, like when Katie's singing Summertime (a voice-and-piano bit by Gershwin) that everybody's just chilling out and enjoying."

The Katie he's referring to is lead singer Kate Weber, who also happens to be his daughter and the surprise vocal talent. Back in the spring of 2002, Caruana got a call from his cousin Greg Lagana, a medical doctor and classically trained pianist, to come over and jam. Ms. Weber went along for the ride and asked if she could sing a song.

Figuring they'd humor her, the guys listened to the Deanna Carter song Ms. Weber wanted to sing and picked it up in a few minutes. Ready to go, they began playing the 12-bar intro to If This Is Love and then stopped for Ms. Weber to kick in with the opening a cappella verse.

They couldn't believe what they heard. Weber began belting out the tune with perfect pitch and power and "no music followed as Greg and I just looked at each other," says Caruana.

Since she had no formal training, Weber was asked where she learned to sing. "I don't know. I just sing along with songs at home and in the car," Caruana says she replied.

The three ended up recruiting a seven-piece band to play at Weber's wedding reception that fall. They performed six songs, including Billy Idol's White Wedding, with Weber performing in her wedding dress the whole time.

Despite the good times, the band stuttered, then stopped after the wedding as the members couldn't agree on what musical styles to play.

But Caruana and Lagana decided to give it another go in 2004 after coming back from the National Guitar Workshop where music enthusiasts went to learn, jam and play to audiences. The keyboardist (Lagana) and bass player provided the backbone of the tunes for many guitarists at the workshop. After getting invitations to join several bands, Caruana and Lagano decided to form their own.

The name would be "Bass Boards" as the band would be built around a bassist and keyboardist.

As the movie script might have had it, talented musicians fell into the band in little doses of serendipity. Acoustic guitarist Mark Weber had the easiest in: he's Katie's husband. Drummer Alan Conover, a sportswriter by day, happens to live near Caruana and soon joined, laying down steady blues beats with a Buddy Rich jazz influence.

Mike Machnik, electric guitar, saw an ad on craigslist.org about a guitar player opening and was soon playing his fast-paced solos for the Bass Boards. Saxophonist Mike Alferman was inspired to join the band after hearing them play, and harpist Jim Schultz was asked to join after jamming with the Bass Boards at an open mic session. He brought along a

friend, guitarist Jim Mitchell. Frank Stabler, another guitarist, joined after meeting Caruana and Lagana at the guitar workshop, eager to "play some down and dirty blues," says Caruana.

Bass Boards' gigs often include other musicians who show up to perform with the band, which has played at numerous venues in the area and did a Hurricane Katrina relief concert.

According to Caruana, the plan is to keep on playing and begin writing more original tunes. "We just love playing the blues," he says. "What else is there?"

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