



Musical exports: Two local bands win Jammies

Lansing mainstays find acclaim, if not fortune, 65 miles away in G.R.

By Anne Erickson
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The votes are in for best local blues CD in Grand Rapids.

And the winner? That would be Lansing's own Those Delta Rhythm Kings.

Yes, that's correct: A Lansing outfit is best blues band in G.R.

But wait, there's more. The best local jazz album in the West Michigan city? It's the latest release from Lansing's Organissimo.

Clearly, mid-Michigan is having an impact with its musical exports.

"It's one thing for your mom to tell you that you're good," said Ray Aleshire, frontman for Those Delta Rhythm Kings. "It's something completely different to hear it from an organization that you're not a part of."

The Lansing bands picked up what are known as the Grand Rapids Jammie Awards. They are WYCE-FM's (88.1) annual show honoring the best in local

and national music. Each year, WYCE accepts CDs from nearby musicians for airplay. The staff picks the best of the year.

Aleshire said the band was flattered, even thrilled, when it got word it was nominated for best local blues CD. It meant the Kings would perform at the annual Jammie ceremony.

But "we didn't expect to win, because the judges weren't as familiar with us as they were the Grand Rapids bands," Aleshire said.

Despite their doubts, they earned best local blues CD for the release "Just The Way We Like It ..." The award carries no cash but lots of prestige.

How surprising was the victory? Let's just say that as Aleshire strutted onstage to accept the award, he was missing a few band members who had already left to go home.

"I was a little less shocked than some of the other guys, because I knew it was a good CD," Aleshire said. "But it's gratifying to know that your hard work and your talent is recognized by somebody with some distance from you."

Those Delta Rhythm Kings have a lengthy history. The group started as a three-piece, playing shows in the early 1980s. It grew over the years, and today, as many as nine members jam onstage at shows.

But they weren't the only mid-Michigan group to earn accolades.

Lansing acoustic duo Brian Westrin and Pete Mowry were nominated for best local album and also performed at the show.

And local jazz trio Organissimo won two awards: best jazz album and best local album of the year. Both were for the band's latest disc, "This Is the Place."

It was a pinnacle moment for Organissimo organ player Jim Alfredson.

"We picked up the best jazz album award in 2003, but not the main award," he said. "I was surprised, but it really affirms that the local scene is supportive of what we're doing."

Organissimo has been together since 2000 and has seen a lot of success lately. Since last year's release of "This Is the Place," the group's tunes have been played on jazz and college radio stations across the country. The band's Web site (www.organissimo.org) hosts one of the top three online jazz discussion forums in the country, with almost 450,000 posts.

Alfredson also just picked up an endorsement from Hammond Suzuki, the organ manufacturer. That means Alfredson plays a free Hammond B3 on gigs.

WYCE music director Pete Bruinsma said both Organissimo and Those Delta Rhythm Kings play often in Grand Rapids, which helped their chances of winning Jammies. (In fact, one Organissimo member is from G.R., while the other two hail from Lansing.)

Bruinsma added that all bands that performed at the Jammie event will be featured on an upcoming compilation CD, available through the radio station.

Meegan Holland, concert presenter for the Creole Gallery in Lansing, let out a shout when she heard about both bands' victories.

Holland calls Organissimo and Those Delta Rhythm Kings "two of the most under appreciated-bands in mid-Michigan."

"We've hosted Organissimo twice at Creole Gallery, and both times, the house should have been packed, because these guys are touring all over the place," Holland said. "The Lansing crowd really should be supporting this band much better than they are."

"As for Those Delta Rhythm Kings, they've been around a long time; people just love them. I feel so strongly that if Grand Rapids appreciates these bands, then that's great. I love it."

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