



Left: Doug Easterly and Guy Nelson are two musicians with Big Bam Boom, an Atlanta-based Hall and Oates tribute band.

BIG BAM BOOM

Let's Rock!

Georgia tribute bands keep the music alive *By Tara Duncan*

In the heart of Georgia's vibrant music scene, tribute bands pay homage to the legendary sounds of iconic artists, such as Hall and Oates and the Ramones. These bands capture the essence of beloved acts, transporting fans back to the heyday of rock and pop with their heartfelt renditions of the original artists' greatest hits.

But these bands are more than mere imitators; they are conduits of passion, ensuring that the magic of music lives on.

Rusty Duke, Big Bam Boom (Hall and Oates tribute)

With a decades-spanning career, Rusty Duke, one of the driving forces behind Big Bam Boom, is no stranger to the music scene. Duke and his bandmates embarked on a new venture during the COVID-19 pandemic, a Hall and Oates tribute with a seven-piece band and four-part harmony. The members are based in Atlanta and Chattanooga, Tenn.

"The idea of a Hall and Oates tribute band was born out of a desire to bring back the infectious energy of their hits," Duke says. "Sometimes tribute bands form because the original artists are no longer performing

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Heart of Atlanta, a tribute to the legendary band Heart, performs at 37 Main in Buford.

'It's about re-creating the concert experience for fans who may never get the chance to see the original band live.'

—Mike Wilson, Heart of Atlanta

or alive. In our case they are very much alive, and we work hard to pay tribute to the legacy they have created."

For Duke, authenticity is paramount.

"We're very much sticklers for re-creating the sound of the band," he says. "From the vocal harmonies to the instrumentation, we strive to emulate the essence of Hall and Oates."

This commitment to accuracy extends beyond the music itself. Duke and his bandmates aim to capture the look and feel of the iconic duo.

Duke says Big Bam Boom was lucky to stumble upon Hall and Oates look-alikes.

"Our guitar player, Guy Nelson—he's John [Oates]," Duke says. "He answered an ad on a musicians app, and luckily enough he has the looks and the voice. He was just looking to play guitar, and it was a serendipitous moment. And we're fortunate to have Doug Easterly, who sings and looks the part of Daryl [Hall]. He was a friend of a friend of a friend."

Despite the challenges of starting a band during a pandemic, Big Bam Boom has garnered a dedicated following.

"The fans are awesome," Duke says. "We're expanding our audience across the Southeast, and the response has been incredible."

Mike Wilson, Heart of Atlanta (Heart tribute)

As the guitarist for Heart of Atlanta, Mike Wilson knows the intricacies of paying tribute to a legendary band.

"With a tribute band, you focus on one artist and really tighten down to sound like that band," he says. "It's about re-creating the concert experience for fans who may never get the chance to see the original band live."

Wilson is one of the six members of the tribute band he formed with his wife, Heather, during the pandemic.

"It was a good time to put something together so we could come out blazing when COVID took a turn and we were able to start doing more live music," he says.

Heart of Atlanta delivers a high-energy performance that honors the legacy of Heart.

"We delve into the nuances of their music," he says.

By incorporating elements from multiple decades of Heart's long career, the band offers a comprehensive tribute that appeals to fans of all ages.

"Heather is an incredible singer, and she's one of the few people who can pull off [the sound of Heart singer] Ann Wilson. We formed Heart of Atlanta because we hadn't seen a tribute band for Heart and thought it would be a cool thing to put together," he says.

Bambi Lynn, Learning to Count (the Ramones tribute) and Cherry Bomb (Joan Jett tribute)

As the bassist for Roswell-based Learning to Count, Bambi Lynn channels the spirit of the Ramones.

"Starting a tribute band is all about passion," Lynn says. "If you love the music, chances are others will, too."

With her signature black wig and fierce stage presence, Lynn embodies the essence of Ramones founding member Dee Dee Ramone while infusing her own personality.

"Being in a tribute band allows me to pay homage to an artist I admire," Lynn says.

Learning to Count attracts audiences eager to relive the glory days of punk rock.

"For tribute bands, I've watched a bunch of footage of the original performers, which in my case [for Learning to Count] is Dee Dee Ramone," Lynn says. "I try to get a bunch of his mannerisms down, but at the same time, I play the role as myself. I am a girl playing a guy's part. I get the basics down, but then I'm just me, no matter what happens."

Andrew Adler, booking agent for The Mad Hatters (Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers tribute)

Andrew Adler, owner of Alpha Booking



The Mad Hatters, a tribute band honoring Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, formed in Atlanta in 2020.



Musicians (from left) Randy Lefler (back row), Amy Arnold, Ricky Zero and Bambi Lynn perform as Learning to Count, a Ramones tribute band.



Agency, is the booking agent for 30 acts, including The Mad Hatters. For him, the allure of tribute bands lies in their ability to unite audiences through shared musical experiences.

The Mad Hatters is a five-member Atlanta-based tribute to Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers that formed during the pandemic.

"Everybody was out of work and nobody was doing anything because all the clubs were closed," says Adler, who is a longtime friend of the band members. "They were like, 'Man, we should have a Tom Petty tribute band because we all love Tom Petty and he's incredibly popular.' So they started putting the band together.

"We're all fans of Tom Petty. That genuine love for the music translates into the band's performances, creating a sense of camaraderie between the band and the audience."

With an authentic sound and infectious energy, Mad Hatters band members capture the spirit of Petty's iconic live shows, drawing crowds eager to sing along to classic hits.

Adler says an essential element of a tribute band is to enjoy the music that it is emulating.

"Otherwise, you're not going to have that fun come across," he says. "It's just gonna be a job."

As a group of professional musicians, including two members from the Georgia Satellites, The Mad Hatters understands that crowd work is one of the most important aspects of putting on a good tribute-band show.

"The band and the audience, they're all [celebrating] Tom Petty. They're kind of doing the show together. It's as if the audience is as much a part of the band as the musicians [who] are playing," he says. "Tribute bands provide a service. They allow fans to relive the music of their favorite artists without breaking the bank or traveling long distances."

However, sometimes when bands are still in their prime, a tribute band may seem like an outright copy. Siamese Dream, an Atlanta-area Smashing Pumpkins tribute band that Adler represents, was so good that the original band's frontman, Billy Corgan, sent it a cease-and-desist

order. The bands eventually got to know each other, and now Siamese Dream is endorsed by Smashing Pumpkins.

Another area band that Adler represents, Weezer tribute band El Scorcho, became such a good friend of Weezer's that they performed on stage together. Now El Scorcho is doing a special tour to commemorate Weezer's 30th anniversary album.

"As long as you portray the act you're tributing in a positive light and you're not embarrassing, they're generally really flattered," Adler says. "Also consider [that] they're usually not really touring that much anymore. That's why the tributes are so popular." 🍷

Tara Duncan is an Atlanta-based freelance writer.

See them perform!

Ready to rock? Several tribute bands' shows are listed in this month's calendar, beginning on page 10. Check out these bands' pages for upcoming show dates and more details.

- **Big Bam Boom**, halloatetribute.com
- **Cherry Bomb**, fb.com/thecherrybombatlanta
- **El Scorcho**, fb.com/elscorchoweezertribute
- **Heart of Atlanta**, heartofatlantalive.com
- **Learning to Count**, learningtountband.com
- **The Mad Hatters**, themadhatters.band
- **Siamese Dream**, siamesedreamband.com