SWIG The first time I saw Vanilla Pop was at a wedding reception, where I overheard a tipsy grooms-man say, "I want these guys to play at my funeral." Maybe that NAME: Vanilla Pop FILE UNDER: A Touch of Class and a Touch of Trash GIG: Popsters can get a Vanilla fix every Thursday which to discard. You know how you have that one friend who can make killer mix at Swig. **RECORDING? No.** tapes, who just knows intuitively which songs

They are more than tight, loud polyester pants and martini chic. They are more than a wink-wink throwback to the days when a whiskey sour and a hint of amyl nitrate were the makings of a night out. They are Santa Fe's coolest, swingin'-est, heppest cover band around. But you know all that. What you

SWE man say, "I want these guys to

speaks to how VP makes every night an occasion. This duo is lots of fun, a good alternative if you're looking for something more than just sitting passively listening to a band. They play the lounge act to the hilt, turning songs like Gary Numan's "Cars" and The Cure's "Close to You" into something you're more likely to hear in a seedy Las Vegas bar than a seedy college-town record store. Of course, they also do up classics like "What's New, Pussycat?" and do them up well. 7:30 pm, \$5 probably don't know is that Greg Thum and Alen Vetter are really great musicians, as exemplified by two things: First, it takes a certain talent to know which songs to cover,

certain talent to rearrange those songs so that they translate properly from their original incarnation to a dancy-sweet lounge tune. What, you think it's easy to make Depeche Mode sound like Tom Jones? SFR SWID PICK The first time I saw Vanilla Pop was at a wedding reception where I overheard a tipsy grooms-

to put on there and in what order? Vanilla

Pop has that same touch—their repertoire is varied, but dead on. Second, it takes a

night an occasion. This duo is lots of fun, a good alternative if you're looking for something more than just sitting passively listening to a band-They play the lounge act to the hilt, turning songs like Gary Numan's "Cars" and The Cure's "Close to You" into something you're more likely to hear in a seedy Las Vegas bar than a seedy college-town record store. Of course, they also do up classics like "What's New, Pussycat?" and do them up well. 7:30 pm, \$5

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Amy Dalness

Pop tart?

"Yeah, honey, I'm still at the office," the mustachioed heckler continues between verses of "L-O-V-E" by Nat King Cole, the caller still chatting. "It's just the radio. I know, it's terribly loud." Rather then ending the conversation and aiming an angry fist at the singer's nose, the man puts his cell phone away and gives a nod of approval. Being heckled is just part of the experience that is Vanilla Pop. Take every stereotype of a lounge singer you've ever heard—now multiple it by two, add leopard-print pants, pink flamingos, a dash of satire and some major talent and you've got Vanilla Pop. Singer/keyboardist/heckler Al Dente and guitar player/singer Lester Moore tag their act as "Sinatra makes

out with the '80s." And, boy, if Madonna, Michael Jackson, Frank Sinatra and ABBA all made out, Vanilla Pop would be more than sloppy seconds.

The arsenal of cover songs these bejeweled hipsters can pull off is fantastic and nostalgia-inducing. Some of the best include "Mack the Knife," "Tainted Love," "Fame" and Prince's "Kiss." Vanilla Pop may lay on the queso pretty thick, but they back it up with real musical ability and performance

The dynamic duo from Taos has been playing the Martini Grille every

"It'll probably be the exact same show," plus a few Vanilla Pop-inspired

drink specials, Al says. "Maybe we'll have two bubble machines. That'd be

Their Wednesday night performance does draw a large and diverse crowd,

from barely-21 college students to party lovers who could have barely-21 children. Vanilla Pop does croon (when they want to) and tell bad jokes (they're bad-but that's what makes them funny), but there's one lounge

Catch Vanilla Pop on Wednesday, April 19, for their third anniversary show at Martini

Grille (4200 Central SE, 255-4111) starting at 9:30 p.m. \$2 cover. For more information, visit http://www.vanillapop.com/.

celebrate their third anniversary--in style.

stereotype they can't replicate: an empty dance floor.

Taos' Vanilla Pop is known as a fun, quirky band. (Courtesy of Vanilla Pop) Taos' duo Vanilla Pop has garnered quite a following in Albuquerque.

It later began playing gigs at QBar inside Hotel Albuquerque located in Old Town.

is big enough for us to play twice a month and not overplay and expand our fan base."

audiences can expect.

It all began 12 years ago at the now-closed Martini Grill in Nob Hill. The band became known for its set list that ranges from Frank Sinatra songs to Michael Jackson pop hits as well as its funky get-ups.

Now the quirky, fun party band wants to expand its horizons and bring its show to Ned's Bar & Grill. "It's a different vibe," Vanilla Pop vocalist and keyboard player Al Dente said. "We figure Albuquerque

Guitarist Lester Moore also makes up the duo, which creates its

set list by playing pop, lounge and rock favorites that are not regularly played by other area bands, and adding their own unique

touch. Adding a little electronica to a Lynard Skynard song and

even having fun with some old-school rap is just some of what

"We clown around a lot and we are definitely interesting to look

at," Dente said. "We are involving people. I walk into a crowd; I'll

Courtesy Vanilla Pop

Wednesday night to avid fans for nearly three years, and on April 19, they'll

Vanilla Pop is making Albuquerque a habit By Rozanna M. Martinez / Journal Staff Writer Friday, July 4th, 2014 at 12:05am Vanilla Pop

nailing down a more cohesive musical vision. "I thought, how many fucking bar bands can there be? And for the longest time, we just stuck to the '80s, and we still have an '80s core," says Al Dente. "But that doesn't really tell you a lot about what we're actually like, so on the road one time I came up with 'Frank Sinatra makes out with Michael Jackson.' So, technically, they are orchestrated versions and covers with strings and horns, but they're very tongue-in-cheek in the little things; the nuances like set design and costumes. It's not just throwing on a wig and a mustache—though we're interesting to look at, I think—it's an artistic and

This is how they pack dance floors at weddings, private events, corporate gigs and regional shows on the regular. Al Dente says they've become completely selfsufficient at this point, which is no small feat for any band, and especially huge for New Mexico, where countless musicians must hold down day jobs to indulge their

Al Dente can empathize. "We're all just trying to keep our wheels spinning ... paying our mortgage and keeping our phones on, and that doesn't always allow for us to reflect on what's happening in the world," he says. "But when I sometimes step outside myself and look at the whole [Vanilla Pop] production, I'm impressed. Would I come and see me if I wasn't in the band? I think the answer is definitely yes."

So this goes out to all you dance fans and all you fans of songs you already know. Just keep in mind that while Vanilla Pop is technically a cover band, they make the

interpretive vision."

passions.

jams their own.

Having grown tired of low-energy, corner-of-the-bar bands and blues-rock nonsense even then in the early aughts (let this be a lesson to all y'all), Vanilla Pop set to work

CATS

"We don't do 'Mustang lizards, part self-deprecating schmalz, Vanilla Pop raises and lowers the house pulse at will with spot-on musicality — as a great cover band should. But more than that, they are an Sally,' which everyone does, but we are doing Abba and Michael Jack From old TV show themes to Bobby Darren hits, Vanilla Pop turns its lounge scene into part homage, part satire. act, and it's worth sipping soda in the corne son and Frank Sinatra and booth to stay alert enough to catch the moving Bobby Darren. I mean boom to stay aiert enough to catch the movi target of their saftre.

Four years ago, when I interviewed the fledgling act for Tempo, Alan Vetter (aka Al Dente) was sporting a long, and rather fey, sparkly scarf. His turquoise tuxedo coat was astonishingly threadbare and clashed outra-Vanilla Pop's act was first cobbled together for an open mic at the Adobe Bar in the His-toric Taos Inn four years ago. Driving away from Omar Rane's music studio, they both everyone likes a Bobby Darren song," Vetter It would seem they do. The line down
Teresina Lane to get into Vanilla Pop's fiesta gig
at The Alley Cantina last Friday (July 21) rarely
dwindled to less than 20 people. Buzz Waterhouse, The Alley's owner, said this is the way it
is every time the duo hits the club just off Taos nented on the sight of a crumpled pop astonishingly threadbare and clashed outr geously with his maroon pants. But most alarming of all was the unabashed Oil Can can at the side of the road. Vetter, originally from New York, and Thurn, recently from Atlanta, Ga., both laughed over the fact tha the Midwest a drink like that can of vanilla Harry black pencil mustache drawn rakishly the Midwest a drink like that can of vanilla soda would be called a pop. And so, the die was struck. They did their first Vanilla Pop gig at the Taos Inn, complete with standards from the 1940s, disco hits, a couple '80s classics and retro TV themes, and the rest is pretty amazing. "People went nuts," Thum said. "They totally loved it and we said, Hey, maybe we really Harry back pencir mustacne drawn raxisniy across the blonde fuzz of his upper lip. Greg "Lester Moore" Thum was equally dis-turbing with a frize of permanently startled fuzz on his head that barely escaped definition as a disarrayed fur ball, and the same penciled 'Last March we opened at 10 p.m. and 1 "Last March we opened at 10 p.m. and I shut down the gate at 10:25 p.m. I've been here 25 years and I have never seen anything like it," Waterhouse said.

If all people need is permission to indulge in the passé and make it their own, familiarity with the music is key. Familiarity with the the party scene is the cash cow that breeds a unified response to the old romantic standards and hot classics that Vanilla Pop gooses and bends to appeal to the younger, more hip scene.

got something here."

Such serendipitous timing seems to be the hidden brilliance of the band's success. Not

count yours seems to ree them to play obtained the mainstream box and try out anything that comes up. Virtually any tune that turns them on can be turned thor a Vanilla Pop version that will sell to the house, and they work that asset with all the professional savvy they can

selves too seriously (I mean, ho could you?) seems to free them to play outside

Next, Vanilla Pop will be taking on '80s metal and adding female singer Mina Tank to the mix, taking the name Vanilla Rawk. Tank also performs with The Damn Band, also from Taos. Vanilla Rawk will make its debut in August, according to Dente. "We wanted to have a female lead singer and she is sort of like a gospel singer so it has become this soul metal which has not been done," Dante explained. "It will totally have a new take on heavy metal... It will be female-driven metal with gospel soul behind it."

> Snap, Crackle—Pop Nearly two decades later, Vanilla Pop keeps it going February 22, 2017, 12:00 am By Alex De Vore rop Capaos' Vanilla Pop is kind of mysterious. Yet, as far back as most everyone can remember, they've always been there: Al Dente and Lester Moore, creeper mustaches, emotionless faces, shiny outfits and all. But from whence did this lounge act-meets-cover band come, and how have they kept it going for 17 years? "We started off just as a side project," Al Dente, who was interviewed under the condition that his actual identity remain a secret. "Our girlfriends at the time were working together in a bookstore, and they had suggested we get together and see what would transpire." What followed was, according to Al Dente, "light and airy," and a new cover band was born. "But with a twist," he continues. "Just so it wasn't two guys doing the same old stuff-I truly believe that any creative endeavor needs Moore was a longtime musician, whereas Al Dente had always gravitated toward the theater. With these forces combined, and a mandate to never take the band too seriously, a concept evolved. "I remember the first time we said, 'Hey, let's put on mustaches," Al Dente recalls. "And then a few months later, we thought, 'How about a sign? What about a Las Vegas style-cruise ship vibe?" It was meant to be fun, above all else. With keyboards, sequencing and synths layered beneath live guitar and vocals, Vanilla Pop would tackle rock and R&B hits from various eras with a lively panache few local acts seem to have tuned into.

"We do songs we like, and we're never going to do songs because people request them," Al Dente says. "We're going to do songs that make me think, 'Oh my God! I totally forgot about that song!' And we're never fucking playing 'Mustang Sally,' not now-not ever." See, there's just something you've really gotta respect about that.

Vanilla Pop

The Palace, 142 W Palace Ave.,

herd of expected hits and how their skewed "retro" approach acts to unleash people's pent-up silliness

just dying to get out and play. But the licks are hot,

428-0690

10 pm Friday Feb. 24. \$10.

People are really digging this soda shtick. if a little bit strained by the middle of the second set, all which adds up to a Part lounge local sensation. lounge act

guys from Taos known as Vanilla Pop, just made a Powerball commer-cial for the New Mexi-co Lottery and now

their mugs are airing

lip-line, demarcating the duo's tongue-incheek brand of entertainment. None of it would hang together, of course, without their solid grasp of musicianship, showmanship ar a huge enjoyment of their audience.

artinge enjoyment or their audience. Two other New Mexico bands also won Powerball spots: Sol Fire, Santa Fe's Latin rock band with brothers Juan "Buddy" and Amado Abeyta; and the Hollis Wake rock quartet, comprised of Krysty Bosse on guitar and vocals and Sarah Meadows on bass and vocals. The male half of the band consists of drummer Micah Chappell and guitars accelling Maleon Ion.

Chappell and guitar-vocalist Malcom Joon.

Lester Moore

and Al Dente

take their

to the

big time.

Sort of.

By Virginia L. Clark

like "Somewhere Over the Rainand Queen's

JULY 27-AUG. 2, 2006

For most in-town gigs, Vanilla Pop's sound comes from Vetter's keyboard, Thum's electric guitar and bass, and sequenced material, all overshot with their live vocals (not to mention the chanted lyrics from the overflowing dance

floor). In bigger venues and for their various

V.15 No.15 | April 13 - 19, 2006 This Week's Music **Spotlight** It's Smooth ıilla Pop s at Martini Grille Vanilla Pop c By Amy Dalnes Here's a comi young man le the bar, maki call to, let's sa roommate. He minute, tells | come over for a drink and puts the phone away. A simple scene, causing no general hubbub or hilarity-unless it's at the Martini Grille on Wednesday night. "Maybe your hearing wouldn't be so bad if you weren't on the cell phone while I'm singing," a man with a pinstripe mustache tells the guy on the phone.

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gumption.

crazy."

\$5 at the door. Call 884-4680 banter with people and get a little edgy and get a little snarky and or visit vanillapop.com it's what piques their interest... Involving the audience on so many different levels enables us to keep our fan base and keep people coming back."

Vanilla Pop

9:30 p.m. Saturday, July 5

Ned's Bar & Grill, 2509 San

WHEN:

WHERE:

Mateo NE

HOW MUCH:

to have its own life and time to develop."

Vanilla Pop's ness we maintain," Vet said, pointing out how they don't run with the

Bohemian Rhap ody," they add live drums so "it's more organic, where focus more on the swings so much more with live considered doing to be able to make a liv ing off it while staying in Taos. Adding a drumn or a horn just costs too much, they said, given the average take the pair nets per gig But they are making it. They each POWERBALL ight a home within the p year, and anyone who lives knows what a near impossible fe When I first got he New York, in the '90s, I fell in love with the Rocky would never leave. But Taos is such a difficult place. It's amazing to be able to find a and make cally out of nothing," V A pianist since age 6, Vetter attended New York City's High School of Performing Arts where he studied music, voice and dance. In his junior year The boys do their promo thing for the New Mexico Lottery st as an extra in the

TEMPO MAGAZINE/THE TAOS NEWS