

VARIETY

Living covers

FREE
TIME

Former serious musicians
finding fun, success in imitation

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Chris Riemenschneider, Star Tribune
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John Ringer, 41, figured he hadn't been out to a club to see a live band in at least a year. So when he finally chose to hit Jersey's Bar in Inver Grove Heights with his girlfriend last month, he said, "I didn't want to go out and hear music I've never heard before. What fun is that?"

Fun and familiarity are the driving forces behind cover bands such as the one Ringer came to see, Brat Pack Radio. The '80s jukebox group sets itself apart from the crowd of cover bands by dressing up in wigs and costumes and using fake names, such as Holly Ringwald and Gilbert Downey Jr. (faux siblings to the so-called Brat Pack of actors).

"There's nothing worse than a cover band that takes itself too seriously," said Ryan Lance, who leads Brat Pack Radio along with his wife, Heidi Jo Langseth. "Our philosophy is to be as silly as possible."



Richard Tsong Taatari/Star Tribune

Brat Pack Radio's Ryan Lance gave a totally awesome rendition of a Hall & Oates tune.



Richard Tsong Taatari/Star Tribune

Heidi Jo Langseth and husband Ryan Lance of Brat Pack Radio belted out some '80s favorites. The band's philosophy "is to be as silly as possible," Lance said.

No strangers to the "serious" music business -- Ryan is a member of the holiday-flurry a cappella group the Blenders, and Heidi is an older sister of blues-rock star Jonny Lang -- the husband-and-wife team dreamed up the idea for Brat Pack Radio after a few nights out singing karaoke. Realizing the novelty appeal of the synth-laden '80s pop songs they grew up with, Ryan recalled, "We thought, 'Why don't we try to do this for real and get paid?'" They're getting paid, all right. Thanks to the demand in suburban bars, county fairs and small-town festivals, cover bands often can make more money per gig *and* play more gigs per month than an original band playing hipper venues. "we get to support our family this way", admitted Lance. Maybe it doesn't work with a book, but you certainly can judge a band by its covers -- even if the members are covered in hokey stage attire that looks stolen from a Party Warehouse.

Brat Pack Radio

Their songs: "Don't You (Forget About Me)," "Billie Jean," "Nasty Boys," "Whip It," "Sweet Dreams," "Rio," "Living on a Prayer."

Their costumes: Lots of pink, upturned collars, checkered material and other items you might have seen in "Fast Times at Ridgemont High" or "The Breakfast Club."

Their story: Two years ago, husband-and-wife team Ryan Lance and Heidi Jo Langseth saw the light, or at least the gazillion reruns of VH1's "I Love the '80s," and started this musical parody.

Their review:

The music is mostly by-the-book, but it's a surprisingly large book: seemingly every rock, R&B or pop hit that went top 40 during the Reagan administration.