

Creating music a magical experience for local band

By David Lias
david.lias@plaintalk.net

What began as a hobby has turned into a passion for Mrs. Begley.

And her boys.

The band, Mrs. Begley and the Boys has been around since the late 1980s, and it's had a bit of a turnover in members in that time.

In recent years, however, the group has become more than just four musicians who gather once in awhile to jam.

They have begun to appear at more and more gigs. And they've caught the public's attention.

"We just kind of had a hobby, playing in our basement, having fun," Mary Begley said. "We didn't really play out in public at all, and then we started playing a little more seriously."

Today, the band consists of Mary and her husband, Brian, who live in Vermillion, drummer Kevin Patten, who lives south of Yankton but commutes to Vermillion each day for work, and guitarist and vocalist Monte Gulick, Yankton.

"It just evolved. We played at a couple community things that our friends were involved with, and we played for the local arts council, and church things," Brian said, describing how the band got its start.

"Our first gig was probably a church function. Church people will put up with all sorts of bad music," Mary said, laughing. "They're kind to you."

"And then you start playing around, and it's fun, and so you start looking for other places that will have you, and that job never ends," Brian said.

"After people would hear us at some place, they would come up to us and say 'we want to hire you for something else.' It sort of snowballs a little bit – one thing leads to the other," Mary said.

Brian and Mary have called Vermillion home for many years, but didn't

always have the time to devote to music, while raising a family and each being active in careers involving theatre.

Brian dabbled a bit with a rock and roll band while in high school. He never lost the desire to perform.

"I always wanted to have a band, but I went into theatre, and when that started to slow down a bit, then I had time for music again," he said.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, he and other local musicians finally got a band together. Mary wasn't part of it – at least not at first.

"I took piano lessons and played saxophone in high school, but I never played guitar," she said

"She wasn't in the band at all ... we needed somebody to play piano, so she came down and played part of a piano song," Brian said, "and then we needed harmonica, and Mary finally said, 'Geez, I hope you guys don't need bagpipes at some point, because I'm not going to play them.'"

"I was the fill-in person when they needed some instrument they didn't have," she said.

When the band's bass player left, Mary was called upon once again. By this time, the group had moved from just playing for their enjoyment and had started to make more and more public appearances.

The band needed a bass player, and Mary was tapped for the job, even though she didn't know how to play the instrument.

"Brian said, 'I'm going to teach you to play bass, Mary,' and I said, 'Ok.' And, I really liked it," Mary said. "It was awesome. It was way better than piano, which I had been playing for years. We played with a college friend of ours, and we played for 15 years with him. We got out once in a while ... kind of typical band stuff, you have people come and go, but Brian and I have been stuck with other the



Mrs. Begley and the Boys rehearse in the Begleys' basement. Members are Brian and Mary Begley, Kevin Patten, and Monte Gulick.

(Photo by David Lias)

whole time."

She also contributes strong, accomplished vocals to the group.

The band was originally known as Scratch That. It was changed to Mrs. Begley and the Boys when Monte joined the band five years ago.

Three years ago, the band's drummer completed his studies at USD and moved from Vermillion, putting the musicians on the hunt for a replacement.

"A friend of ours said, 'hey, I know a guy I work with who plays drums. He might be interested.' And that's how we connected with Kevin," Mary said.

The four musicians not only make great music together – they discovered they all share a passion for excellence, while maintaining a bit of restraint, too.

"We practice generally once a week, regardless of whether we have performances coming up," Mary said. "We were glad to find other people (as band members) who don't want to play every weekend, because I think we'd burn out on it. And, we have other things that we need to do."

"We're all about the same age, about 50 years old ... we like to play a couple times a month; that's sort of our goal," Brian said. "Sometimes

we're busier than that, and sometimes we aren't."

The four musicians describe themselves as a rock and roll band; and on their Facebook page, they define themselves a bit more – Mrs. Begley and the Boys is "a four-piece rock and roll band playing the songs that you wish the radio station would play more often."

"We play rock and roll and folk rock. We're certainly not heavy metal, or acid rock. We're not stadium rock," Mary said. "We basically have the philosophy that we play songs we like. We all make suggestions for songs – what songs we're going to learn or do. If the person who is going to sing doesn't like the song, we don't do it. The singer has to have a passion for it."

"We have about 100 songs and I think we pretty much like them all," Brian said.

"And they range from the 1960s, all the way through to some really current songs, because they fit into that rock/folk rock genre," Mary said.

The works of such contemporary artists as KT Tunstall, The Decemberists, and The Lumineers are on the band's playlist.

"We do a lot of '60s and '70s, '90s and 2000 songs, and a smattering of '80s songs, which is funny, because that's sort

of our era, based on our ages, but we're smart enough to know that some pretty bad music came out of the '80s and we don't do a lot of that."

You won't hear the band perform Devo, or Huey Lewis songs, but their playlist includes songs by The Pretenders, Cheap Trick, Edie Brickell, and Tom Petty.

"We also do a lot of Melissa Etheridge and other songs by female artists – we call them 'Girl Power' songs," Mary said.

Much of that playlist is made up of Bob Dylan songs. All four members recognize his singular influence on their performances.

"We do a batch of (Bob) Dylan songs, and no two of them sound alike. Isn't that interesting?" Brian said. "I was just thinking about that – one is a 'folk Dylan,' one is kind of hard rock and blues, and then we've got the 'Birds Dylan,' and we've got the 'social righteousness power ballad of the freedom movement Dylan.'"

"When I was in high school, I couldn't stand Dylan. I thought he sounded like somebody who got his tonsils caught in a vacuum cleaner or something," Mary said, laughing. "But as I got older, I started listening to the lyrics and to other

people, and I'd ask, 'who wrote that?' And I'd learn it was a Bob Dylan song.

"A friend of ours was a huge Dylan fan, and he began feeding us Dylan songs and buying us anthologies of Dylan," she said.

"When I joined the band, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the band does so many Neil Young songs," Kevin said.

Mary noted that when Kevin became part of the group, he brought with him several good song suggestions.

The musicians admit that, most of the time, they are able to strike a chord with their audiences. And, sometimes, not so much.

"I have some songs that I just absolutely love, and there's just no way the song is going to go over with anyone but me," Brian said.

"It depends on the venue, and the age of the people who are there. We have plenty of songs so we can pick and choose the ones that we think are going to fit that crowd the best," Mary said.

One of their promotional posters sums it well. It includes the phrase, "We play the songs that tickle our fancy."

"We don't want to become that band that has just given in to playing old time rock and roll for the 89th time, and we don't want to simply play what other people want us to, because we have enjoy it," she said.

"We have to have fun with it. We'll become mechanical, unplugged musicians otherwise."

Mrs. Begley and the Boys strive to keep adding songs to its playlists. During a rehearsal held in early October in the basement of the Begley's home, the four musicians worked on three new tunes, including a song by Brandi Carlile.

"We really like her, and her songs are really good for Mary," Kevin said. "She can belt those out."

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