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Rocking at the midnight hour

BY JOSEPH BLAKE
Times Colonist staff

If you want to get a dance party started, put on a rhythm and blues classic by Stevie Wonder, Sly Stone or Wilson Pickett. A love of Commitments-style soul music is the driving force for a local band that combines the talents of students, teachers and local professional musicians. They're called The Midnights, and they have a weekly showcase at Sopranos (1961 Douglass St.) every Thursday from 9 p.m. to midnight. If you like sweet soul music, you should catch their show.

Co-lead by drummer Eric Emde and bassist Steve Duben, the 11-piece band is an outgrowth of Emde's work with the Victoria High R&B Band. That student band has been rocking club and festival stages since its founding in 1992. The Midnights use the same repertoire of classic R&B, adding the experience of veteran professional musicians like Duben, saxophonist Paul Wainwright, guitarist David Augustin, stu-

dio wizard and jazz keyboardist Duncan Meiklejohn and Esquimalt jazz instructor and trumpeter David Fello, to student trombonist Johann McBee and the sassy vocal stylings of quartet of Vic High students and recent alumni. Using arrangements charted by Connie LeBeau, Caila Thompson Hannant, Carly Vieke, Ami Arsenault and Mallory Manley, they bring an inspiring, youthful passion and polish to their vocal renditions of the band's classic repertoire. They're wonderful.

Michelle Ray, Liz Reed, Carol Pudwell, Lucas Marchand and Sylvan Boisvert have also performed with The Midnights during the band's short history of private gigs and larger events at Sandown Raceway. For their weekly showcase, management at Sopranos have built a bigger stage for the band and tweaked the sound and lights to capture the choreographed excitement of The Midnights' repertoire of R&B classics.

"It's really exciting to play with them, because of their enthusiasm and energy," explained Wainwright, a veteran of the Big Band

Trio, the Timebenders, Swingin' Bachelors and a cast member of Radio City Music Hall's *Spectacular Days of Radio*. "It's a wonderful opportunity for both the kids and the seasoned pros. It provides mentoring and the opportunity to bring young players into the band where they can see that there really are opportunities to make a living as a musician. Duncan is even integrating some of the kids into his studio work.

"We've got several songs in the can for an upcoming CD release," Wainwright continued, "and this weekly gig at Sopranos is really polishing our work on these great old tunes. It's nice to cultivate young talent, but at the heart of this band is our love for the music. We just plain love this stuff."

There is a \$5 cover charge for The Midnights' show at Sopranos, but it buys your first drink. That and the band's expert cover versions of *Respect*, *Land of a 1000 Dances* and *Knock On Wood* should get you out on the dance floor for a night of shaking all over.