

This Mob Wants to Stand Out From the Crowd



Dave Sgalambro

RED BANK ROCKERS The group Parlor Mob consists of, from left: Dave Rosen, Sam Bey, Mark Melicia, Paul Ritchie and Nick Villapiano.

EATONTOWN

WHEN you're not even halfway through your 20s and admittedly preoccupied with surfing and drinking beer, jump-starting a back-to-basics rock revolution seems a tall order.

Yet that's what Howard Willing, a Capitol Records producer, has in mind for Parlor Mob, the five-man retro-leaning rock band he signed this spring. The group, based in Red Bank, is scheduled to release its self-titled Capitol debut this month.

"To me this band harkens back to a time when the song was king and being able to play was paramount to your success more than what the media said about you," said Mr. Willing, who has also brought the YouTube sensation OK Go and Van Hunt to the Capitol fold. "I hope they help define their generation."

Judging by the rock 'n' roll charisma radiated by the band members at their live shows

— long-hair-tossing, instrument-abusing, generally reckless affairs, if a recent one was representative — they are up to the task, despite their predilection for hanging out at the Dublin House in Red Bank after a day spent riding waves.

“We’re a totally different band, with a totally different sound,” said Mark Melicia, 24, a frizzy-haired Red Bank native who channeled the trademark delivery of Rush’s Geddy Lee on the demo disc that won the band its contract. “For a while we felt like loners on the scene.”

Until this summer, Parlor Mob was known as What About Frank — the name that Sam Bey, the drummer, and Paul Ritchie, one of the group’s two guitarists, originally gave the band as Red Bank Regional High School students in 2000. The name “made a bad first impression,” according to Nick Villapiano, 23, the bassist, who is from Little Silver, but What About Frank still won Asbury Park Music Awards in 2004 and 2005 for best live act.

“We’re more rooted in traditional rock, like Sabbath and Led Zeppelin, and for a long time now, the scene around here was all emo,” said Mr. Melicia, glancing among his tattooed, ironing-board-skinny bandmates, who were crowded into the office of the group’s manager, Justin Rubinstein, the day after a recent Boston gig.

“That’s cool with us. We’ve played with those bands at halls and V.F.W.’s,” he said. “But if you look around, you see a lot of kids wearing rock ‘n’ roll T-shirts, not emo T-shirts. The biggest band to kids around here right now is Pink Floyd, not Hawthorne Heights.”

The group’s other guitarist, Dave Rosen, a native of Rumson, said: “Emo has been going on so long, and every song sounds the same: ‘Oh, my girlfriend broke up with me.’ When we do a show, it’s not about that. People from 12 to 40 get it. We get a lot of parents, even.”

Which may explain why, by baby rock-band standards, the group has hit upon near-instant success.

Parlor Mob sparked a bidding war among labels like Island and Capitol this spring on the merits of a recording the band itself released last year. No sales figures are available

for that CD, "What About Frank?" (Drugs Records), but it was the No. 1 seller at Jack's Music Shop in Red Bank for three weeks last fall and also did brisk business online, according to Mr. Rubinstein.

Mr. Bey, whose chest is scrawled with a large-lettered tattoo reading "Oh yeah," said the band had been "gigging nonstop since the inception."

"We'll still happily open up for any emo band out there," he said. "But now we're hitting the Lower East Side, doing Mercury Lounge."

They are also doing "the van thing," he said; last year, the members piled in for stints on the Warped Tour and the CMJ Music Marathon.

On the road, composing songs for the group's follow-up recording has been a priority.

"We can't go without writing," Mr. Melicia said. "Right now, we've got to continue touring and write."