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Catch classics from The Kootz at Caffrey's

By **MADDY WEBER**
Correspondent

The Kootz are a band of epic proportions. Just look at the numbers: They have 1,000 songs in their repertoire, they play 230 shows a year and their songs have received almost 10,000 online downloads. But perhaps the most boggling number associated with the Kootz is 16. That's how many members are in the band.

Other bands try all kinds of things to keep their performances fresh — they may add new songs to their setlists, don costumes or give away freebies. But for Kootz founder Glenn Taylor, all he has to do is shuffle together a new combination of four or five from the 16-man roster.

"There are a lot of mathematical combinations and I think most of them have occurred," Taylor jokes.

Joking aside, The Kootz's massive roster has a few extremely practical purposes. First of all, says Taylor, the constantly rotating line-up keeps shows from getting stale.

"I change the line-up every week so every time it will be fresh," says Taylor. "You don't want people seeing the same set twice, so that's where the multiple members come in. The genre never changes

— it's always classic rock — but one member may bring in some Beatles background and another might come with a Southern rock thing."

Generally the band performs live with two guitars, bass and drums with some members doubling on keyboards and harmonica.

And it's unlikely that you'd hear the same set twice, considering the band knows almost 1,000 songs. Having so many members allows the Kootz to have a combined collection of songs five or six times the size of a regular cover band.

Indeed, at times, the long roll of members has even allowed the Kootz to be in more than one place simultaneously.

"One of the good things when you have a field of players so deep is if we're playing a club but a very lucrative corporate event comes along on the same night, we can still take it without disappointing the club," Taylor explains.

He'd simply compile two different combinations of musicians for each



The Kootz perform Friday at Caffrey's in Forked River. The band, which boasts a 16-member roster and plays 230 shows a year, has 1,000 songs in their repertoire and a combined 700-plus years of rock and roll experience. (PHOTO COURTESY OF THE KOOTZ)

event.

With so much shuffling of members, what is the common thread that connects it all?

"I am pretty much the common denominator, but I would never call it Glenn & the Kootz because my ego's not that big about it," says Taylor. "Also, that person in the band name is usually the lead singer — but we have five vocalists."

Nonetheless, Taylor has been at the helm since he and three friends from Essex County started the band eight years ago. You could say he has the musical experience to lead the group — in addition to playing for and managing the band, Taylor has owned and operated a recording studio in Caldwell for 35 years where he has produced notable artists such as Tommy James & the Shondells, Tiny Tim and Ben E. King.

The Kootz live set runs the gamut of classic rock, from classics like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton to less-covered rockers like T. Rex and The Pretenders. With no member younger than 40, and some

into their 60s, Taylor says classics come natural to the band.

"We're veterans," he says. "I don't think this band would work if we were 20 years old. We've been hearing these songs for a lifetime, so they're in our blood."

In fact, for a promotional business card he hands out to clubs, Taylor calculated that the band's 16 members have a combined 700-plus years of rock and roll experience. It's doubtful that any other Jersey Shore cover band can claim as much.

Still, with such sensational numbers, Taylor tries to remain down-to-earth.

"We're not the next big thing and I don't think there's anything that sets us apart far and away," he says, "but we set out to do what we do well."

It must be working.

"People have come up to me and told me they've planned their family vacation around when we're playing, which is always such a compliment," Taylor says.

And there's something else

those 16 members are good for — writing songs. Despite their live act, the Kootz are not just a cover band. When they're not playing one of their 230 shows a year, they moonlight as an original band.

The band compiled 11 originals and five covers for their recent album, "Tales from the Endless Bus Tour of New Jersey." While the originals channel everything from Tom Petty to the Grateful Dead, the standout song for Taylor is actually one of the covers.

It's a song by Tommy James, who hit it big in the '60s with "I Think We're Alone Now" and "Crimson & Clover," called "Sweet Cherry Wine" and the veteran performer sang with the band on the track. In addition to collaborating with one of his heroes, Taylor says, "It's pretty special because it's the only place where all the Kootz are performing at once."

While you may not be able to see that live, you can catch a Kootz combo this Friday at Caffrey's in Forked River. ✱