

Saloon Studios: Blasting & Broadcasting from the Past to the Present

By Mark Freed

Moutenot, a rock-n-roll drummer, producer, and veteran touring artist, serves as the Saloon Studios Entertainment Director, and he is helping bring to life the vision of owners Mike and Laura Jones.

The Joneses started vacationing in Ashe County about 20 years ago, falling in love with the mountains and surrounding communities. When a piece of property became available near their summer home, they decided to fulfill a dream, combining their love of old western movies and classic rock-n-roll.

Mike's vision was lofty. He wanted to build a music venue where people could hear top-notch artists in an intimate and relaxed environment—away from the long lines and crowds of amphitheaters and arenas. Mike also wanted to build a saloon, harking back to a love of old western movies and a growing collection of western paraphernalia. The vision grew.

Laura says, "Mike decided he needed an old west town."

They went about constructing a gorgeous western-style saloon with 100 seats and equipped with a stage and top-notch production gear. They also built an entire town with a working cantina, jail, post office, an undertaker, a bank, a blacksmith shop, stables, a general store, and a dress shop—Laura's favorite space in town, where she creates and displays embroidered wares.

The Joneses' Saloon Studios started opening its doors to the public in 2018, featuring a series of concerts with rock-n-roll legends. Some of the classic rockers who have graced the stage include Dave Mason of Traffic, Steve Cropper of STAX records, Foghat, and Rick Derringer. They also started a "Rising Stars" series

to highlight some of the up-and-coming local and regional talent, like the High Country's Cane Mill Road.

The Studios boast a VIP experience with shows limited to 100 people that includes meet-and-greet opportunities with the artists, snacks and drinks, and comfortable seating in an interesting arrangement that does not have a bad seat in the house.

It has certainly drawn the attention of performers who relish an opportunity to perform in such a small venue, like Kenn Moutenot, who first experienced it playing drums with Derringer.

Moutenot hit it off with the Joneses and shared their enthusiasm and vision.

Moutenot started working with Saloon Studios in the beginning of 2019, bringing in his decades of experience, numerous connections to the music industry, and a vision for making his first year a celebration of classic rock-n-roll. He spent more than four decades touring and working with greats like Buddy Miles and Rick Derringer. With 2019 being the 50th anniversary of Woodstock, Moutenot decided to create his own celebration of the famed festival.

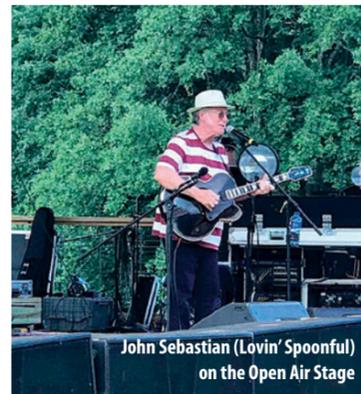
Utilizing his industry connections, Moutenot put together two weekends of performances featuring a host of musicians who played at the original Woodstock festival. The 50th anniversary celebration, dubbed the WE2019 Experience, brought members of Canned Heat, Jefferson Starship, Ten Years After, Iron Butterfly, Melanie, and many more to the Ashe County venue in August 2019.

"There was not a more authentic Woodstock line up," Moutenot says proudly.

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The Nelsons playing inside the Saloon



John Sebastian (Lovin' Spoonful) on the Open Air Stage

"We're all about the '60s," says Kenn Moutenot of Ashe County's Saloon Studios, one of the newest music venues in the Carolina Mountain Life region. "The 1860s and the 1960s."

Moutenot helped oversee the construction of a new outdoor stage and prepare the grounds for festival camping.

"This was only the beginning," Moutenot says. "We plan to continue growing and improving the site for a lot more events in the future."

The Woodstock scene exemplified what makes the Saloon Studios such a unique venue—the dichotomy of old and new: the old mountains and new stage; the old west and new equipment; the old rockers and the new pickers-and-grinders.

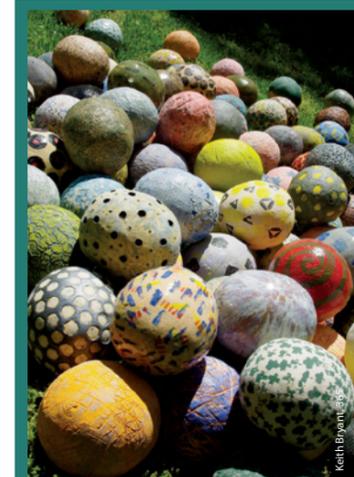
Back inside the saloon, these seeming contradictions make for a fascinating environment. Pictures of old gun slingers secretly serve as sound baffling devices; leather saddles are repurposed as bar stools; old-time western decor hides high-tech cameras and lighting.

From the secret upstairs control room, where students from Appalachian State University's audio production program intern, one gets a glance at the hidden production potential of Saloon Studios. With high-def cameras and audio production equipment, the saloon serves not only as a performance venue, but as a top-notch audio and video recording space.

This technology will allow Saloon Studios to reach a much broader audience. While attending a concert at the Studios is a VIP experience limited to 100, anyone with an Internet connection can jump on the website, which has links to live streams of concerts and footage of past events. Saloon Studios is planning to offer annual streaming subscriptions that will inflate one penny a year.

"To start, folks will pay \$20.19, to match the calendar year," Moutenot shares. "The following year, the price will be \$20.20, and so on."

Moutenot hopes the streaming service will broaden their audience, giving people from all over the world a chance to see into the CML region's newest boutique music venue. And, for those readers already in the region, go to saloonstudioslive.com to find out more and check out upcoming shows that you can attend.



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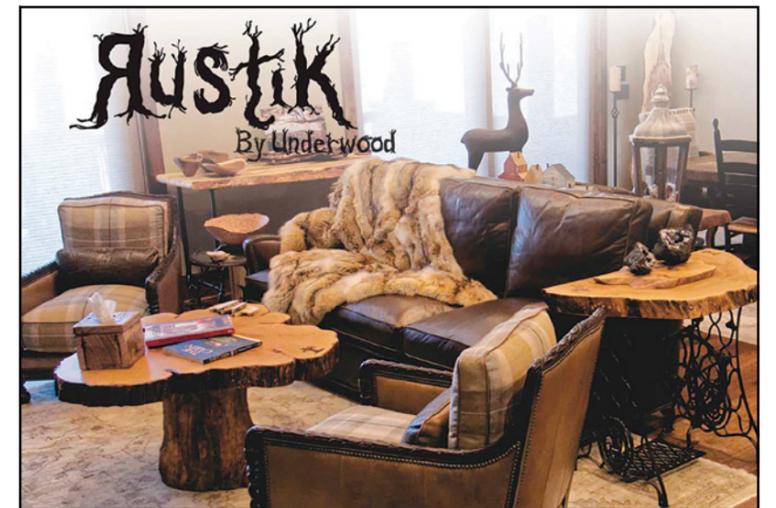
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