

Steepwater branches out from blues roots

By Tripp J Crouse

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>>>The members of The Steepwater Band, a three-piece Chicago rock group, keep pretty open minds with their approach to music.

Their musical influences and creative process all revolve around a free flow of ideas and tastes.

"You just got to allow yourself to do what you do and have that freedom. That's the best thing about playing music, I think," Steepwater drummer Joe Winters said in a telephone interview. "The freedom of it is definitely just the greatest thing in the world."

Steepwater will play next week at the Rock Island Brewing Company in The District.

The band — Winters, Tod Bowers on bass and Jeff Massey on guitar and lead vocals — has been together for about 12 years.

"The bass player (Bowers) and I have been playing together for pretty close to 18 years in a few different bands," Winters said. "We were looking for someone to go the direction we wanted to go and we found Jeff at a

if you go

What: The Steepwater Band

When: 10 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 16

Where: Rock Island Brewing Co., 1815 2nd Ave., Rock Island

How much: \$4

Information: (309) 793-1999 or RIBCO.com

On the Web: Steepwater.com

Black Crows concert in Chicago in 1996."

Bowers and Winters began playing in a blues band in which Massey was performing. Eventually, the trio broke off on its own and created The Steepwater Band.

"I'm 39. We started the band when I was 27," he said. "Twelve years nonstop. I haven't had a regular job, like a regular, full-time job, since I was 2000."

Winters warns of the difficulties involved in trying to break into the Chicago blues market. Even though blues was the group's early passion, they made the transi-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

With influences ranging from the classic blues songs to The Beatles, Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin, The Steepwater Band has begun to branch out from its blues roots.

tion from covering classic blues songs to creating music of their own.

"We realized two years ago that it was maybe more fun and more rewarding to

write our own songs. So we started writing a lot of songs," he said. "You get addicted to it. You write a couple of songs and then you write another group of

songs. Then you're too busy doing that to do anything else. It became the main concentration of the band." With influences ranging from the classic blues songs to The Beatles, Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin, Steepwater began to branch out from its blues roots.

"We just didn't want to limit our band to one genre," Winters said. "It just felt like it was very limiting to fit into that blues scene."

"We still play a lot of blues. You'll catch us playing a John Lee Hooker tune on occasion," he added. "But the main concentration is writing songs these days and making records."

In their travels, the bandmates worked with blues legends such as Taj Mahal and Pinetop Perkins, as well as contemporary favorites Warren Haynes, who played with the Allman Brothers Band and Gov't Mule, and Marc Ford, a former Black Crows guitarist.

Steepwater last played in the Quad-Cities while opening for Gov't Mule in February at the Capitol Theatre. The short touring schedule gave Steepwater a chance

to learn from his mentor.

"We opened for (Haynes) in Barcelona, Spain. We kept in contact for a couple of years," Winters said. "He called us late last year and asked us to go do a couple weeks of touring as a support act."

"Every night, we were on the side of the stage really studying what was going on."

"Just being around him (Haynes), you learn how to be, how to be to people, how to treat people and how to carry yourself as a musician," Winters said. "He's just a true class guy who's been nothing but great to us."

The band's downtime often is filled with other gigs. Winters continues to work on his own or with other bands. "For us, downtime is the worst... We didn't play all week, so it's like 'I'm jonesin' to play."

The heavy touring schedule doesn't faze the Steepwater drummer.

"You try to keep it all straight, but at this point you just go. Where's the van going this week?" Winters said with a laugh.

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