

Blues fans may save trip to Chicago

by Jennifer Cooper
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Those who camp in Grant Park in downtown Chicago Blues Festival may not have to travel so far to hear decent blues music.

Hip Pocket, based out of Normal, grooves a blend of Chicago-style blues by emphasizing horns and vocals to create a sound reminiscent of blues bands from the early 1970s.

Since Hip Pocket's formation nearly ten years ago, the band has shared the stage with blues legends such as B.B. King, Buddy Guy and Etta James.

According to trombone player John Filkins, "We really love going out playing and entertaining."

As a result, Hip Pocket has developed a large and faithful cross-country following.

Hip Pocket's gigs include "The Peoria Jazz and Heritage Festival," as well as the "Springfield Summerfest" and "WGLT's Beerfest."

Most recently, the band played at Normal's Corn Fest Sunday. However, playing at the "1997 Illinois Inaugural Ball," in Washington, D.C. was the highlight of the band's recent appearances.

Hip Pocket's blend of original tunes like "Boon's Blues" and "Step into the Light," with covers from the late Stevie Ray Vaughn, Ray Charles and Muddy Waters, makes each set well rounded.

After "several years and 40 players later, I finally found the right mix of musicians," reflects lead vocalist and front man Marc Boon.

Finally, Hip Pocket has captured and maintained the youthful, energetic sound Boon had been searching for.

The release of Hip Pocket's first album in 1995, "This Ain't Normal," captures the true spirit of blues, with swift, jazz tunes like "Mr. Boogie's Back in Town" and "Good Rockin' Tonight".

While the band slows the speed with weepy, soul-filled songs like "Weary Man" and "The Last Meal," they never enter the realm of whiny blues.

In March of 1997, the band released their second album entitled, "Twice in a Blue Moon," which includes several covers, along with the original tunes which have defined the true style of Hip Pocket blues.

The band regularly appears at Bloomington-Normal's LaFayette Club, The Paragon Ballroom, The Fifty-Yard Line and even Peoria's Madison Theatre.