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Musicians keeping it in the family

■ Denny Snyder and his children Lorrie and Philip carve out their own sound

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Photo provided

The Snyders

Philip (from left), Denny and Lorrie Snyder perform tonight at The Livery in Benton Harbor.

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By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO - H-P Features Writer | 0 comments

BENTON HARBOR — Southside Denny Snyder knows how it looks.

The guitarist and South Bend native who has played alongside such Chicago blues legends as Luther Allison, Sugar Blue and Pinetop Perkins has been performing lately with his new band, The Snyders, which features his 16-year-old daughter Lorrie on bass and vocals and his 12-year-old son Philip on drums.

"I hope people don't think that I've just lost my mind and that I'm just a proud dad doing this goofy thing," Snyder says by telephone from his parents home in South Bend. "I think there's probably some of that for people who haven't heard us or seen us. But everybody that hears us is just floored."

The Snyders, who have lived in Repentigny, Quebec, Canada, a suburb of Montréal, since 2007, perform tonight at The Livery in Benton Harbor and Saturday at the Firefighters' Blues Festival in South Bend as part of their semiannual pilgrimage to the region.



"I played five or six shows last summer where I brought them on stage for a few songs," Snyder says. "They went so well and we had so much fun with it that I asked them if they wanted to take it a step further. I let them know they didn't have to do it, but they were both into it, and it's turned into this full-blown electric thing really fast."

Lorrie had previously sung on two songs on Snyder's eighth album, "Full Circle" (2009), winner of blues album of the year in Quebec for 2010, but the March release of the CD, "The Snyders/Les Snyder" – with tracks such as "New Orleans," "Don't Look Back" and "Stone Soup" – clearly legitimizes both her and Philip's contributions as members of a full-fledged band with their dad at the helm.

"Philip started playing when he was 3," Snyder says. "He'd bang on toy cars and then he moved on to pots and pans. It didn't sound like a kid just banging on stuff. When he was 3 a former drummer of mine, David Clawson, gave him an old Japanese drum kit from the '60s, and he started playing right away. So he's been playing nine years now. He's kind of a veteran already at 12."

Lorrie may be a veteran vocalist, as well as a piano and flute player, but it's her current instrument of choice that surprised her father.

"She came up to me one day and said "I want to learn how to play the bass," Snyder says. "I didn't take her seriously at first because she's this skinny little girl. I said, 'Are you serious? You really want to play bass?' She said, 'Yeah, bass is cool.' So I told her I'd show her some bass riffs on my acoustic guitar and I thought that would be the end of that. But she came back in a few days playing these phrases and I said, 'OK, I guess we better go buy a bass.'"

Snyder says his children have already started to influence his music, which is evident on "The Snyders/Les Snyder."

"Some of the songs don't have that straight-ahead blues feel to it because they aren't blues musicians," Snyder says. "They have all kinds of different influences and it came out in there. There are songs we put in a lot more background vocals, and it almost has this pop feel to it that's pretty cool."

For tonight's set at The Livery, The Snyders will play several tracks off the new album as well as some of Denny Snyder's older material. There will be a couple acoustic tunes, including "Nature Boy," made popular by Nat King Cole, and a new tune, "You'll Never Change," written by Lorrie.

"One day she approached me with this song," Snyder says. "We sat down on the bass and made up a logical chord progression and it's become a really strong song. I said to her, 'I didn't even know you wrote lyrics.' She said, 'Dad, I've got volumes of them.'"

In fact, Snyder says they already have enough new material to record another album, which they will do after they sell enough copies of the current disc. For now, however, Snyder is just reveling in the moment.

"I look across the stage all the time and say, 'Yep, there's my kids,'" Snyder says. "It's always fun to come back home and play but now it's like double fun. It's like, 'Hey, check this out. You're not going to believe this.' I think it's the most fun I've ever had playing music."

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-- WHAT: The Snyders featuring Southside Denny

-- WHEN: 8 p.m. tonight

-- WHERE: The Livery, 190 Fifth St., Benton Harbor

-- HOW MUCH: \$8

-- CONTACT: 925-8760 or www.liverybrew.com

-- ARTIST INFO: www.the3snyders.com