

ENTERTAINMENT

Drummer for Black Sabbath, Alice Cooper and others steps into the spotlight

Christina Fuoco-Karasinski Special to The Detroit News

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Tommy Clufetos never wanted to do “his own thing.”

Clufetos — raised in Rochester by way of Redford Township — worked as a hired gun, playing drums behind the likes of Ozzy Osbourne and Black Sabbath, Rob Zombie and fellow former Detroiters Ted Nugent and Alice Cooper.

The tide has turned, though, and now he is on a short tour of the Midwest with his band, Tommy’s RockTrip. The itinerary includes a stop at Westland’s Token Lounge on Thursday.

“I’m going on tour as a little experiment, to get out some pent-up rock ‘n’ roll energy,” said Clufetos, who now lives near Nashville with his wife and daughter.

The show will feature original tracks as well as songs by the artists with whom he’s performed. He’ll also sprinkle in unexpected tunes.

“It’s a melding of the styles I enjoy, updated with a youthful rock ‘n’ roll attitude,” he said. “It is pile-driving hard rock ‘n’ roll. My own tunes are hard rock with a little more blues than what’s going on with modern rock radio.”

Among the songs on the set list is “War Pigs” by the Osbourne-led Black Sabbath.

“I’m really proud that Tommy is going out and doing his own shows,” Osbourne told The Detroit News. “Not only is he one of the best drummers I’ve ever played with in my life, but I consider him a friend. I understand he’ll be playing ‘War Pigs’

in his set. Believe me, I would love to be up there singing it, with him playing drums.”

Clufetos began drumming at age 6, when he received his first pair of sticks. He balanced school and playing the drums in his dad’s act — Tommy C. and the Gamut Band — throughout his formative years, often attending class on only a few hours of sleep.

In his early teens, Clufetos was voted the best drummer younger than 16 in North America at the Music West Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Representatives of Pearl Drums, a manufacturer of percussion instruments, along with Charlie Quintana, drummer for Bob Dylan and Izzy Stradlin, and Gregg Bissonette, drummer for David Lee Roth, and Joe Satriani were judges.

Clufetos and 14-year-old Leo Coodin of Vancouver were chosen from 1,500 drummers who sent in performance tapes to the drum company to compete for the title. Clufetos’ prize was a \$1,200 Pearl Forum series drum kit.

Early in his career, Clufetos played with Mitch Ryder. However, he got his break, thanks to Bob Seger saxophonist Alto Reed, who asked him to play on a movie soundtrack. Nugent was performing on it, too.

“I was working on the soundtrack for Jeff Daniels’ ‘Escanaba In da Moonlight’ movie with Michael Lutz and the late, great Alto Reed at our Tazmania Studios in Ann Arbor, and word on the street was there was another killer young drummer in Detroit by the name of Tommy Clufetos,” Nugent told The Detroit News.

“We got him in the studio to record a few high-energy rockers and he came on like a Johnny Bee — gangbusters with power and Motorcity (sic) groove. I knew right away he could nail my powerhouse songs live, and hired him on the spot,” Nugent said.

Clufetos parlayed his talents into runs with a veritable who’s who of rock bands, performing with Cooper and Zombie before joining Osbourne in 2010. Black

Sabbath subsequently hired Clufetos to play on two world tours.

In May 2021, Tommy's Rocktrip released its debut collection "Beat Up by Rock 'n' Roll." Jellyfish's Eric Dover and Clufetos shared vocal duties.

Clufetos is enthusiastic when he talks about his music and he's confident ticketholders will dig it.

"It has that raw and real in-your-face feel," he said. "We're just four musicians playing together, which is a dying thing. We have guitars, bass, drums, vocals, no filters, no click tracks, no pre-recorded anything.

"We're just four guys, for better or for worse. It could be great, or it could be a train wreck. We'll see what happens."

At age 44, Clufetos calls himself middle-aged, but that hasn't tempered his drive. He's more intense; he works harder and says, "I like that about myself."

Clufetos enjoys the struggle, as it creates the required tension on stage.

"I like that edge," he said. "I'm bringing that to Detroit. That's really what sets Detroit apart from other cities. The music has an edge — at least it used to.

"I was listening to the Temptations the other day. It was just so good. They're so tight, so perfect and that means that the musicians cared about the music. They're invested in what they do. I'm invested in what I do."

Tommy's RockTrip w/Creeping Chaos

7:30 p.m. Thursday

The Token Lounge, 28949 Joy Road, Westland

Tickets start at \$15

Call 734-513-5030 or visit tokenlounge.com

