



# THE BUZZ ON THE WHISKEY WASPS

By Sandra Schulman

There's nothing quite like the husband wife duo The Whiskey Wasps, who perform a hauntingly cool acoustic set of originals and wild card covers at local dives like Hullabaloo, the Kreepy Tiki in Fort Lauderdale, Wine Scene and Blue Front BBQ. I caught their set one night at Wine Scene, and was captivated by the edgy beauty of the songs and the funky cool of their look.

The Whiskey Wasps are Billy Schmidt and his wife, Rachel DuVall, who are also the creators of the indie-rock band Raggy Monster, a more rocking unit. Rachel is a clear voiced, ethereal blonde who was trained in opera and sang with the Orlanda Youth Opera as a child. With long mermaid worthy hair and flowing boho dresses she wafts through the scene like an apparition. Billy is classically trained, and has been playing piano, guitar and various instruments since he was a child. He has doeful eyes and doffs a serious fedora. Together they are a ridiculously beautiful couple.

They've gotten so popular that at Hullabaloo, they even have a cocktail named after them, called The Whiskey Wasp, made of bourbon, lemon, lime, a ginger-honey syrup, and a splash of soda.

Their clever covers run the musical gamut from Johnny Cash and Bob Dylan to kooky pop cuts like the recent pop hit "California Girls" by Katy Perry and retro cult classic "Bang Bang" by Nancy Sinatra. Many of the choices came from their audiences, who shout out requests and then the duo work them up in their own style. Popular covers make it into regular rotation in their sets.

They have a lot of music online, and for the cover songs they produced a project called "52 Weeks Under the Covers" as a New Years resolution from 2014 where they recorded and uploaded a cover song a week. Recent gigs have taken them out of South Florida to California and to country/Americana music mecca Nashville where they filmed an adorable video that shows the pair visiting the Country Music

**"Hailing from West Palm Beach, their new acoustic direction is rapidly catching onto the hearts and ears of South Florida"**

Hall of Fame, Music Row, and other storied haunts. A video set to scenes from their honeymoon is endearing and fun as the pair walk on sunny docks and frolic on the beach.

They give serious thought to presentation and perform with a black and white rabbit antenna eared TV on a stand that screens their band logo in staticky black and white in front of them, and they keep an open guitar case lined with crushed red velvet at their feet like all classic buskers do. It's beautiful mood music, easy on the ears and the eyes.

To get a handle on the Wasps, I asked them some questions about what colony they came from and where they hope to fly to.

**How did you two get together?**

We actually met in ceramics class in high school in Mount Dora, FL. We had a few conversations then about Modest Mouse, and a few other bands we mutually enjoyed, but nothing came of it until four years later when I invited her to come to an open mic I was playing. Afterwards we ended up driving to the top of a parking garage and playing music until the sun came up. I actually had no idea Rachel could sing until then. Little did I know, she had been singing opera since she was five. From then on we founded our full indie-rock band, Raggy Monster, and eventually started The Whiskey Wasps as a side project about two years ago.

**Tell me about the musical collaboration, what are your influences?**

The biggest reason we wanted to have a separate project from Raggy Monster was so we could pursue the kind of relaxed, melancholy, lyrically-driven music that we first bonded over. Bob Dylan would probably be at the top of the list as far as musicians that have influenced our style, but our musical taste is not limited to any specific genre. Radiohead, The Beatles, Bon Iver, Led Zeppelin, Elliott Smith, Cat Power, Lana Del Rey, Jefferson Airplane, Modest Mouse, St. Vincent, Pedro The Lion, The Mamas & the Papas, Menomena, The Black Keys, The White Stripes... just to name a few. Rachel began singing initially because of her passionate love for Celine Dion's music, ha ha. The takeaway though is that we collaborate very well together and are constantly being inspired by new and old musicians.

**How do you pick the cover songs you perform live and also for the 52 Weeks Under The Covers project?**

Usually they are songs that we love and want to make our own, but we also have covered a few songs that people have requested multiple times because they think we'd be able to transform them to our style without losing the original song's integrity. On occasion I believe we have greatly improved on the



originals. Our cover video for California Girlz by Katy Perry is a good example of that.

**What's coming up for the band?**

We are about to release a live album we recorded at Kismet Vintage in Delray. The walls lined with clothes and mannequins combined with the 30+ people in that tiny room made for an extremely intimate setting that complemented the music in a way that we didn't expect, but are so excited about. We also tracked the songs to analog tape, so it has a warm/vintage crackle to it that we fell in love with.

Whiskey Wasps plays every Monday night from 9-midnight at Hullabaloo on Clematis Street where they serve a Signature cocktail named "Whiskey Wasp". Every other Wednesday from 7-10 p.m. they play at E.R. Bradley's. Their primary focus right now is their other project, Raggy Monster. They have been tirelessly planning a new release to be their ticket to the level of national exposure.

