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a.k.a. DJ Buck Wilders

Between his day job, his soul nights, his WEVL gig, and more, the dude's everywhere

By **Bob Mehr**
Contact
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If you're a fan of Memphis music, it's becoming very hard to ignore Andrew McCalla. Better known as Buck Wilders, the 26 year-old club and radio deejay, record store clerk and live engineer has become an omnipresent figure in local music circles.

This Saturday, McCalla stages another of his quarterly soul night events at the Hi-Tone. Dubbed the "St. Patrick's Day Soul Shake," the event will feature McCalla spinning with his partner Eric Hermeyer (aka the Hook-Up) as well as sets from a trio of nationally respected soul and funk deejays, including Chad Weekly and Luke Sexton, the Memphis duo behind the Memphis Records label, and New Mexico turntablist Tony Janda.

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In addition to his day job at Shangri-La Records, McCalla has also been a fixture on the airwaves since last fall, hosting WEVL-89.9's

weekly Memphis Beat (Tuesdays at 1 p.m.) and infusing the show with both a collector's mentality and a record clerk's ear for the latest sounds.

McCalla -- who grew up in Raleigh -- is as surprised as anyone that his life has become a 24/7 music marathon. "There really wasn't any music or

musicians in my family growing up," he says. "I remember riding in the car with my mom, she'd have the oldies '60s station, but that's about it."

The real epiphany for McCalla came in the second grade when a neighbor's older brother broke out a box of old vinyl LPs. "It was all stuff like Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, Jethro Tull -- classic rock. I was seven or eight but I got really fascinated by Led Zeppelin at that age."

McCalla began playing drums as a teenager, but mostly focused on music by collecting classic rock LPs and cassettes. The turning point came when he met future Memphis Records founders Chad Weekly and Luke Sexton. "We were all skateboarders," recalls McCalla. "They were already serious record collectors; they actually kinda teased me for buying rock stuff. But they helped me out, informed me of what to look for with labels and how to find obscure singles, all the little tricks that collectors know."

McCalla's evolution from classic rock hound to old-school crate digger was a gradual one. "What I liked the most out of the rock stuff I found was '60s garage music like The Count Five's 'Psychotic Reaction,' -- that blew me away. I decided I wanted to buy more stuff like that," says McCalla. "The more garage rock stuff I bought, the more I realized half of it was R&B and soul covers. Which kind of led me backwards out of that and into collecting blues and gospel. By the time I was 20, I was spending every cent and every second I had buying records."

After high school, McCalla kicked around in a local band called the Alphabetical Order and worked at an art supply store, but he found a perfect marriage of vocation and avocation when he landed a job at Midtown's Shangri-La Records in 2001. There he would begin to amass a working knowledge of historic local labels, artists and titles. "I'd find a record, then another, and see a name as a producer, and trace the history of all that back and find out everything I could," says McCalla. "It just kinda led me around in a full circle to all the Memphis stuff."

His growing expertise in local music has made him a go-to resource in town. He's supplied musicians and pro wrestling icon Jimmy Hart with some rare garage band songs for TV and radio specials, and he recently deejayed his mother's high school reunion at Treadwell, spinning for a crowd of enthusiastic revelers that included members of the Gentrys.



Mike Brown/The Commercial Appeal

Andrew McCalla, a.k.a. DJ Buck Wilders, stands inside Shangri-La Records, where he works. He hosts WEVL's "Memphis Beat" radio show on Tuesdays.

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Having become fully tapped into the local collector's market, McCalla amassed a sufficiently rich selection of LPs to make the move to regular club deejaying.

He started at the Hi-Tone in 2001. Then, the following year, he began a three-year residency spinning at the Young Avenue Deli. In 2005, he partnered with Eric Hermeyer -- a Memphis native newly returned to town from Texas -- and the pair have spent the past year holding down a regular Thursday night slot at the Buccaneer, while throwing periodic soul parties at the Hi-Tone in between.

Last fall, WEVL approached McCalla about taking over for departing "Memphis Beat" host Hayden Jackson. Although he'd had no previous broadcast experience, McCalla has shined in his on-air role, handling interviews with roots vets including Harvey Scates and Bobby Rush and setting up in-studio performances by younger artists such as Jeffrey James and the Hall and Vending Machine. Mostly, though, McCalla has offered listeners a wide range of Memphis and Memphis-connected sounds. A typical playlist runs the chronological and stylistic gamut; a recent show started with some instrumental Stax sides, segued into a cut from contemporary folk-blues singer Ron Franklin, touched on a couple of obscure gospel tracks, branched off into some early Sun sides and then back into some '70s Ardent-studios style pop, with stops in between for regional country and blues.

Over the years, McCalla's been forced -- due to storage constraints or finances -- to shed some of his LP collection, but he's hung onto the more unique or valuable items, and continues to devote his time to poring through yard sales and thrift stores looking for buried treasures. "I'll hear about a record and I've just got to have it. And you'll look on eBay for three years and it'll never show up. Then you might find it in a thrift store for a quarter. That's the most satisfying kind of moment," says McCalla, who adds that he's never paid more than \$100 for an album (the LP in question being a odd Detroit psych-funk record by Robert Starks and the Geniuses).

But McCalla is hoping to do more than just collect records. For the past few years he's been doing research and cataloging the work of the late producer Style Wooten, an obscure local figure who recorded hundreds of sides for a variety of self-funded labels, including the gospel imprint Designer. McCalla is hoping to produce a couple of compilations of the Wooten material for CD.

McCalla's also planning on making a move to launch his own recording studio. He's slowly been amassing gear and has cut a handful of tracks and EPs for local bands. He's taken his digital recording setup to shows, capturing sterling sets from Jack Oblivian, the Royal Pendletons, and the recent Stax summit with Sir Mack Rice, Eddie Floyd and William Bell, among others.

"Recording shows, working at the store, doing the radio stuff, the deejaying -- it's all part of the same thing, really," says McCalla. "I'm just trying to find new stuff to listen to and discover. That's what keeps me going."

More info:

St. Patrick's Day Soul Shake

Featuring: Buck Wilders & the Hook-Up, Chad Weekly, Luke Sexton and Tony Janda

Saturday at the Hi-Tone, 1913 Poplar Ave.

Cover: \$3

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