

Yankton To Rock For 150th

Big Head Todd: From The Cosmos To Yankton

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
nathan.johnson@yankton.net

Big Head Todd and the Monsters have never played in Yankton, but it will likely feel familiar to the band when it performs here in June.

"I've enjoyed playing Vermillion, and I like that part of the country, so I'm looking forward to being there," lead singer and guitarist Todd Park Mohr said during a telephone interview with the *Press & Dakotan*. "Being from Colorado, it makes me feel at home somehow."

The band will play a free concert at Memorial Park June 3 beginning at 9 p.m. as part of Yankton's 150th anniversary celebration. They will be joined by Boring Daylights (with Sarah Benck) at 6 p.m., and The Nadas at 7:30 p.m.

According to Wikipedia, Big Head Todd and the Monsters is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. However, it's apparently not a subject that the band has broached.

"I'm not sure if that's true or not, but yeah, it's right around there," Mohr said. "I haven't been counting."

While many people remember Big Head Todd and the Monsters mostly for their 1993 breakthrough platinum album "Sister Sweetly" and the singles "Bittersweet," "Broken-Hearted Savior" and "Circle" — the band has never slowed down. They've put out more than a dozen albums consisting of original music and live recordings, including 2010's "Rocksteady."

In February, under the alias Big Head Blues Club featuring Big Head Todd and the Monsters, the band released "100 Years of Robert Johnson," a tribute to the legendary Delta blues singer who only recorded 29 songs before dying a mysterious death at age 27 in 1938. Johnson has since had a tremendous influence on modern rock 'n' roll, having been covered by the likes of the Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton.

Big Head Todd and the Monsters collaborated with blues legends such as B. B. King, Hubert Sumlin and David "Honeyboy" Edwards on the effort.

"It was a great opportunity for me and my band," Mohr said. "Obviously, I've been a blues fan my entire life. The biggest thing for me was to come to learn a whole new level of blues that I hadn't known very well, which was Robert Johnson and that earlier style of blues. That was a big deal for me musically, but also to be working with some of my heroes was awesome, as well."

On March 8, the band reached new heights — literally — becoming the first to perform a live wake-up call to astronauts from the Johnson Space Center. Big Head Todd and the Monster's "Blue Sky" was the most-requested song in a contest to wake up the crew on Space Shuttle Discovery. It collected 722,659, or 29.3 percent, of the total votes.

Mohr said it was a great honor for the band.

"It's pretty interesting to be the first to perform live to the astronauts in space. It was thrilling," he said. "When we went out (to Houston) to do it, we were given some really great private tours of the training center and the mission control rooms. It was a special treat."

While Big Head Todd and the Monsters have not had much chart success for many years, they still have a large and devoted fan base — affectionately referred to as "Monster Nation." Mohr said he is comfortable with how the band's career has evolved.

"It has been a nice mixture of success versus being able to do what we want to do and have the lifestyle we want to live," he said. "We've had a very fortunate career, and I couldn't be more



PHOTO: C. TAYLOR CROTHERS

Big Head Todd And The Monsters: June 3 at Memorial Park.

thrilled with where the band is at now.

"It's always a struggle to figure out how to keep relevant as a band and get music out to people when the landscape is changing so much," Mohr continued, speaking of the immense shift the music industry has gone through to adapt to a more digital world. "We just keep focusing on making good songs and putting on good shows. I think our audience has followed us."

He said the band plans to keep recording music and touring for the foreseeable future.

"I don't think I'm employable otherwise," Mohr said. "It would

be tough to work at the super-market."

When Big Head Todd and the Monsters comes to Yankton, he said the audience can expect to hear songs from throughout its catalogue.

"Our repertoire is a representation of our whole career, but it changes from night to night," Mohr said. "We've got a lot of songs to choose from."

"We're just looking forward to being with you and sharing your 150th anniversary," he added. "We'll share our 25th (anniversary), and we'll have a ball."

RED Riding Great Wave Into Yankton 150th Event

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
randy.dockendorf@yankton.net

The finale of Yankton's sesquicentennial concert weekend promises to have its audience seeing RED.

That's because the three-day event closes with RED, the two-time Grammy nominated Christian rock band from Nashville. The band takes to the stage at 9 p.m. Saturday, June 4, at Memorial Park.

The free, all-ages concert starts at 3 p.m. with Mrs. Begley and the Boys. The opening act is followed by the Austin Buescher Band at 4:30 p.m., Janitor Bob and the Armchair Cowboys at 6 p.m. and Kory and the Fireflies at 7:30 p.m.

RED rolls into Yankton on a wave of success. The band is in the midst of its national tour, coming off the release of its third album, "Until We Have Faces." The band has also shot a video



RED: June 4 at Memorial Park.

and has appeared with talk show hosts Jay Leno and Conan O'Brien.

Yankton was in the right place at the right time when it landed RED, according to City Manager Doug Russell.

"RED was booked in October 2010, prior to their latest recording release," he said. "We booked them far enough ahead, that I believe they filled in dates around the Yankton show."

The RED appearance in Yankton comes in the midst of a busy swing through the Midwest. The

band plays in Bismarck, N.D., on May 24 and at Council Bluffs, Iowa, on May 26.

After a break, the Yankton concert kicks off a string of appearances that includes Cedar Falls, Iowa, on June 5; St. Paul, Minn., on June 7; Madison, Wis., on June 8; and Fort Wayne, Ind., on June 10.

RED, established in 2004, considers itself a Christian rock band but also performs alternative rock and Nu metal. The name

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