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Making Progress

Local Band Returns From European Tour, Plays At Cheers In Yankton Tonight

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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After a month of rocking around Europe, Independent Progress is ready to bring its anthems home to Yankton.

The band returned to the United States earlier this week after a 25-day tour. Today (Friday), Independent Progress will play a free show at 7 p.m. at Cheers Bar and Grill, located at 1208 Broadway, to cap off the run of shows. Barstool Prophets and T.C. Steckelburg will open.

According to vocalist/guitarist Kurt Livingston, the European tour was a bit of a dream come true for the band.

"(It) was something we've always talked about doing and wanted to do, but figured we'd never have a chance," he told the *Press & Dakotan* via email. "We tour every year in the U.S., but it gets harder to do while keeping our morale up, as our wounded music scene continues to cripple around us. Fortunately, Europe is thriving in our style of music, and people come to shows still and have a great time. So, alongside our good friends from New Jersey, the Hudson Falcons, we decided to make a run at Europe this year."

It marked the first time in 10 years of touring throughout the United States (while utilizing vacation time saved up from work) that the self-described "street rock 'n' roll" band has played internationally.

Livingston said the experience lived up to expectations.

"The most memorable part of the tour was probably in Chemnitz, Germany, where we played an anti-racist festival with a band called the Old Firm Casuals, who are fronted by Lars Frederiksen," he stated.

Frederiksen is perhaps best known as a member of punk band Rancid.

"In our music scene, he is about as big of a name as there is," Livingston said. "He was a super nice and sincere guy. Meeting him, period, was awesome enough, but we were able to sit at the dinner table and break bread with him and talk music and listen to his personal stories for hours! It was one of the greatest experiences of my life."

Independent Progress left Yankton in 2003 to establish its home base in Minneapolis. In addition to Livingston, the band consists of Justin Johnson on lead guitar and vocals, Phil Gorman on bass and vocals, and Lance Rosa on drums.

"We had an incredible scene in Yankton back in the early 2000s, but we felt we achieved all we could and there would be more opportunities for us

in a city like Minneapolis," Livingston said. "In hindsight, it really doesn't matter where your base is as a band for you to have success. A good band with good music can do it from anywhere. And in all actuality, it's a lot harder to break into a music scene in a city when everyone is clawing at the same prize. But I don't think anyone regrets the move to Minneapolis, because we were all tapped out personally in Yankton and ready to move on in life and see what else was out there."

Until recently, Independent Progress would return to Yankton a handful of times each year for shows. That isn't the case anymore.

"Lately, the scene has kind of dried up, and there's not a big calling for us anymore," Livingston said. "Up until about a year ago, Yankton had one of the best punk scenes in the country, and it was amazing. Small towns aren't spoiled like big cities with bands coming through all the time, so they appreciate it more. And in that aspect, we were spoiled by always having the hometown support at shows."

"But as kids get older, younger kids need to take their place and keep the scene alive," he continued. "Unfortunately, that didn't happen this time around. And it's a shame, because we brought bands from all over the country (to Yankton) in the last 10 years and the Yankton scene put itself on the map in the punk world. Everyone wanted to play Yankton!"

Livingston said it's difficult to say whether those musical heydays will ever return.

"Sometimes scenes lie dormant or in remission for a few years and then get kick-started back to life," he stated. "But sometimes they just become distant memories. We've seen it all over the years. But if there is any hope of a revival, there needs to be a young local band for the kids to rally behind and blow this thing up again. Either way, we'll still be around and playing shows here. While the scene of young kids is defunct, we still have many friends and family here, so if nothing else, it's a great excuse to get everyone together to hangout!"

"Anthems of Truth," the third full-length album from Independent Progress, was released in April 2010. Livingston said the next record will come out sometime next spring. Up until now, the band has operated without a label, but Livingston said that could change for the next release.

Throughout its career, Livingston said Independent Progress has stuck to its core values.

"Our songs are very direct and about doing things the right way," he said. "We're working-class guys from blue-collar families of modest means. We were brought up with strong working-class values and work for everything we have. So that's what we sing about and who we play to — the people who

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KURT LIVINGSTON

ABOVE

Independent Progress, just back from a European tour, comes home to Yankton to perform a free show at Cheers Bar and Grill at 7 p.m. tonight (Friday).

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