

"The proudest aspect of Hookahville, from the beginning, is that we've always done whatever it needs to make it the best event possible," says Lanese. "Even from the first one we've made sure there was food and bathrooms. We have never had to apologize to an artist for the sound quality, the production or the staging. We'll never have to apologize for conveniences or for the lineup." Even ekoostik hookah fans are happy to help Hookahville keep its communal feel; many do volunteer work and clean up after the festivals.



## HEY HEY NEIL

That ekoostik hookah hasn't made as many inroads in other states is indicative of the current music industry. It's often not how good you are but who promotes you, and who you know. The band recognizes that it's difficult to break into new markets but as Starbuck says, "We've seen it get better in various places. New England has been tough, but each time we play somewhere it gets better."

Ekoostik hookah is currently in the process of fleshing out a batch of fresh material. "We have plenty of songs to record. Soon as we pay off the last studio album, we'll work on the next one," says Sweney. "For the last one we brought in an engineer from Chicago and we also rented a studio that we really liked in Columbus. I think the next time we'll just use our office, where we're practicing, and we'll set that up."

Most of the band members keep busy with side projects. Katz has just released a solo album, *Another Day*; Sweney plays with a variety of people as does Polansky. Starbuck plays in a blues duo around Columbus, while Katz and McGee perform duo gigs. McGee also moonlights as a solo artist.

Ambitious ambassadors, ekoostik hookah will soon launch an un-sponsored tour of Europe. Building off the success of their past Jamaica shows, Hookah may offer package deal for dates beginning in Amsterdam in late March. The band is also working on having a European-only release album that will likely be a compilation of music from their last three studio albums, perhaps with an additional bonus disc of live material. The band's goals remain simple albeit lofty. As Starbuck puts it, "With each new song we like to bring in something new. Further diversify our sound and we'd like to keep touring. Eventually it would be nice to have nationwide distribution."

Polansky concurs. "Our band is trying hard every day to do what we set out to do—create music and play it well."

And of course, Hookahville will continue. Given the success that they've had, the band has its sights set on even bigger stars: "If you have enough money you can get anyone to come play," says Lanese, "but to have Neil Young play here would be great. It seems like he would be a good fit and he is one of my personal favorites. This is a personal plea to Neil Young to come to Hookahville. 'You can ride my motorcycle.' ★

## HOOKAHGRAPHY



*Under Full Sail* (1991). Hookah's first studio release, featuring staples such as "Utopia" and "Waik Real Slow," was bankrolled by a stranger who heard the fledgling band play at a party. Katz and original member John Mullins share singing and songwriting duties, resulting in a well-balanced disc that is still considered one of the band's finest.



*Dubbabuddah* (1994). Strong vocal harmonies, blistering guitar work, and influences from psychedelic rock, jazz and country reveal the band's depth in this sophomore release. By the time this album was recorded, the band's frequent touring had not only won them a grassroots following, but also helped them to explore and develop songs before putting them onto disc.



*Double Live* (1996). A successful attempt to capture the energy and quality of a live hookah performance, this two-disc set spans everything from funk ("Music") to honky-tonk ("Washboard Annie") to epic psychedelia ("Slipjig through the Poppy Fields"), all with one thing in common: the wail of Steve Sweney's lead guitar and a tight rhythm section.



*Where the Fields Grow Green* (1997). The first album recorded with singer/songwriter Ed McGee, who offers strong contributions such as "Through Hiker" and "Springtime Again," this album also highlights the talents of other members such as drummer Eric Lanese, who wrote and provides vocals for the mandolin-flavored "Caribou," and guitarist Sweney, who pitches in with an instrumental guitar piece titled, "It Fell Into the Ebb There."



*Sharp in the Flats* (1999). Arguably the best representation of the hookah experience, this well-produced, impressive live double album not only reminds listeners that old standards like "Loner" and "Utopia" can still pack a punch almost a decade after they were written, but that the newer material from McGee and Katz can take it to the next level.



*Seahorse* (2001). On this disc, longtime fans will be delighted to finally hear studio versions of songs like "Find Out" and "Ridgeway Sky." The album also features McGee standouts like the anger-fueled "Bone" and his ghost story "Alexander II." Lanese's "Highway Home" and Katz's "Silver Train" emphasize the band's country and folk roots.



*Ohio Grown* (2002). Regarded by many fans as hookah's best studio offering, this well-crafted, well-produced album bursts with up-tempo grooves like "Dragonfly" and "Deal With It," features bassist Cliff Starbuck singing a heartfelt version of "Sweet Lucy" by folk troubadour Michael Hurley, and serves as a great commentary on ekoostik hookah's current direction. ★ *Tim Ward*