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BANANA SEAT BLOWOUT

Norman's big
band parties
down at
Riverwind

By Doug Hill
For The Transcript

Renee Hays is a goddess of rock 'n' roll surrounded by men. She's the lead vocalist and front person for dynamic nine-piece band Banana Seat. The horn-heavy Norman based combo will be playing a gala show at Riverwind Casino, 1544 OK-9, in the River Lounge, Tuesday evening.

The New Year's Eve performance starts at 9 p.m. and dances into the new decade. Vocalist Hays' fireball stage presence has been honed with Banana Seat over the past several years. It's a gig she relishes and one approached with gusto since starting with the band that's been in existence for over 20 years.

"I went to OU and was there when Banana Seat began," Hays said. "They played in Norman and Bricktown and I was a huge fan."

That was when the vivacious undergraduate voice major was studying opera with Dr. Dolores Leffingwell.

"Banana Seat always had two lead female vocalists back then and I coveted those roles," Hays said. "I wanted to be one of those girls forever."

After moving to Austin, Texas and back she finally had the opportunity.

"I told the guys that I wanted this job so long that I'm never going to quit, they will have to fire me and I will never give them a reason to fire me," she said. "I'm going to be so old up there doing all these songs it's probably going to verge on embarrassing. Now it's mine and this is my happy spot. I go to escape life and make music with my broth-



Banana Seat's vocalist Renee Hays giving her diva-grade pipes a workout at their Legacy Park show earlier this year.

Doug Hill / For The Transcript

ers. And get paid for it. It's so great."

Hays' day job is administrative liaison for Preferred Pediatric Home Health Care. She's married and has two young sons.

"My kids love Banana Seat," Hays said. "Whenever they come out to a show they think it's their band. At break they're the first on stage and think they own it, getting on the microphone and touching every single instrument."

Banana Seat is an atypical cover band. The personnel are university trained and adhere to high professional standards. They include the only remaining original member Jeff Stanley on trumpet and guitar, Grant Wells on keys and vocals, trumpeter/vocalist Nick Paynter, Dave Campbell on drums, lead guitarist Jeff Cole, Austin Speer on bass, saxophonist Eric Walschap and Daryl Nagode on trom-

bone/ misc. percussion.

"I think we have the best darn horn section in town," Hays said. "Our strength is that we do everything live. We don't rely on (pre-recorded) tracks which brings a certain energy to a show. We're all just really good musicians who happen to get along and have a deep appreciation for the music we play. It's really hard to find nine people who click and want to hang out with each other."

Hays' vocals are exceptionally powerful. It was no surprise to learn she'd had diva grade instruction.

"I'm a classically trained opera singer," Hays said. "I think that my degree is what has allowed me to be able to go out and perform four sets by myself and still maintain a healthy voice. I can do a gig the next day because of my training."

"Otherwise, I'd have messed-up vocal cords and

wouldn't know the proper breathing techniques. It has allowed me to sing super-heavy rock songs with a lower voice and still bust out some Mariah Carey in the top notes there. I have this range at my disposal because it's been caressed with that vocal performance degree at OU."

Hays' bandmates treat her like a precious rock goddess. She has no worries about boorish behavior by

them.

"Oh my gosh, they have to keep me in line," she said. "I'm probably the most crass person in the band and proud of it. Every single one of those guys is like a brother. They are all incredible gentlemen. Literally, I am the most disgusting member of the band."

Hays predicts an exciting New Year's Eve at Banana Seat's Riverwind show.

"It's our second time play-

ing there," she said. "Last year the dance floor was absolutely packed but everyone found a way to keep dancing. It will be energetic, fun, there will be new tunes and we're really excited."

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