



Deb & The Dynamics

SINGIN' THE BLUES AT BERT'S

by Cindy-jo Dietz

Bert's, located on the 'downtown' Matlacha, along Pine Island Rd. near the Matlacha bridge, is a pub and grill welcoming visitors from around the country to savor a bit of 'island time.' As I lounge in the main dining hall, a small painted blue Florida room, I can feel the wood floor moving underneath the table where I sit. Before me people of varied backgrounds and ages dance and sing along to the well played sweet jams of one the area's favorite bands, Deb and The Dynamics. With six players – Michael Baer (keyboard), Don Hulgus (tenor and baritone sax), Newt Cole (tenor, alto and baritone sax), Cory McClure (drums), Dan Kadey (guitar) – and Deb Salyer, playing a bass guitar almost too big for such a small woman to hold onto, the band brings the house down.

The story here isn't just about a band or a restaurant; it's about kismet, if you will. Bert's Bar & Grill was once, as legend has it, a brothel, where I'm sure a good time was had by all. It still is such a place. It feels like it would almost be impossible for you to enter Bert's and not walk out feeling like you got your money's worth. The people who come here seem to know what to expect. The atmosphere pulls you in and in no time at all Deb and The



PHOTOGRAPH BY GREGORY WILKERSON

Dynamics have you out on the dance floor until you feel like you just might drop. The energy is contagious. The venue lends itself well to the music and the music lends itself well to the venue. Together they make for the complete rock & roll experience.

The Dynamics are all true professionals with a long history of performing live. Music enthusiasts may remember Newt Cole from the Average White Band or The Jellyroll Blues Band. Don Hulgass comes from a long line of horn players. Both his grandfathers and father played sax. It runs through his blood. The drummer, Cory, is the newest addition to the group. Deb tells me that for a long time she kept blowing him off when he had expressed interest in joining the group. She thought that he would be too young, but Cory insisted and persisted. She says that when they finally heard him play, not only were they interested, but they immediately hired him.

Deb has played and starred in groups such as Moxxie, Mis' Behaven and The R&B All-stars, opening for acts like Emerson Lake and Palmer, Delbert McClinton, Koko Taylor, and Huey Lewis and the News, to name a few. She is an amazing performer.

I asked the group what continues to make them pursue music together. "Chemistry," answers Deb. But Michael Bear, laughing, explained how they went out on the road, had to live together and found they didn't want to kill each other. They continue to appreciate each

other and the time and effort that goes into each performance.

When describing the music they typically perform, everyone agreed they are a blues band through and through, with a focus on rhythm & blues, 60's soul and doo wop. The set seems to work well with the crowd at Bert's. I have seen Deb and The Dynamics play several times at Bert's and can confirm that over half the room at any given time is up and shaking what they've got.

Although playing their regular gigs keeps the band busy (Thursday nights at Bert's Bar & Grill in Matlacha, Friday nights at Pincher's Holiday Inn in South Fort Myers and Sunday afternoon at Doc Fords in Fort Myers Beach), they have somehow found the time to record an all original album working with Sonic Studios in Andalusia, Florida. The exact release date is still up in the air, but they are hoping for sometime before spring.

Deb and The Dynamics have been playing at Bert's for more than 10 years, keeping it fresh by changing up the set lists and musicians. Bert's manager, Bernard Johnson, has seen Deb and The Dynamics grow and change over the years, insisting they are consistent entertainers above all. "Whether it is the voice, the horn section, the keyboard or the guitars, there's a twist every time. They work hard at their trade," he says, adding, "Deb will shock you with her range. The band

knows when to kick it up a bit and when to slow it down. They read the crowd. Deb knows what she is doing. She constantly rehearses the band and works them hard. She is always taking it up a notch."

The Deb and the band have an intimate relationship with Bert's. The band actually got their start at the bar. Bernard explains, "Years ago we had a duo called the Palm Tones. They played Thursday nights – two guys from Michigan. Deb walked in one night and asked if she could sit in and they let her. The energy started and continued. Over time it became Deb and The Dynamics." He adds, "Originally, they played in the front bar, but Deb started bringing in more and more sound equipment and we were busy. It was a big decision for us, but we eventually had to move them to the back room due to the number of customers coming in." I guess, as they say, the rest is history.

You can catch Deb and The Dynamics to this day still working their Thursday night gig at Bert's. Bert's also features live music throughout the week. "We mix it up and have a lot of different genres from blues to old time rock to songs from the 40s & 50s," he says, adding "You can have a really tough day and a hard week, but come in, have a cold beer, look at the water and the moon, listen to the music... It is great for your Soul." •