

24 Hours in Toledo

HARD ROCK BAND [4 TO 5 P.M.]

Local band rocks the basement

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Steve Davis rocks. Just not right now.

Right now, he's sitting quietly in the dim basement of an ordinary-looking house on Angola Road. It has blue siding, two dogs in the back named Charlie and Layla, and a bunch of young head bangers downstairs.

It's 4 p.m. on a Saturday and Steve's been here for hours. He's the drummer in the hard rock band Still Life, which is in the middle of a recording session for its first album.

Except: Steve's tracks are done and there's little left for him to do but bob his head in time with the beat as Tony Salazar, Jr., 20, rips on the guitar.

"It's boring for me," Steve, 17, says as he relaxes next to two "roadies," one of whom is sporting a mohawk. But, he adds, "I get to watch. I hear the songs progress."

The narrow room is cramped, with just enough space for everyone. A drum set is curtained off in the middle. Guitars and basses hang from one wall. On the other side, signs for Still Life mingle with a crucifix and coupons for Rally's.

This is Tony's parents' place, and the basement studio is a hodgepodge of equipment cobbled together by the band members. It's separated from the rest of the house by a drape and a table turned on its side to keep the dogs out.

At the center of all this is Tony.

Standing calm and cool in the middle of the room, he plays the guitar with a controlled vigor, coaxing roaring sounds from the instrument while remaining focused on his careful fingerwork. Forget about over-the-top stage antics; Tony stares down at his guitar with full concentration as the sounds of the other instruments are piped in by a nearby speaker.

MULTIMEDIA

[See and hear more about Still Life between 4 and 5 p.m.](#)

things up and Tony starts again. And again.

"This is the part where we get mad at each other," jokes Sam, a senior at Start High School.

Still Life, named after a video game, has been together for more than 1½ years. (They considered calling themselves Stillborn, after seeing the phrase on a pack of cigarettes, but decided against it.)

Each of the guys took a different musical path here. Tony learned a bit from his dad, who was in bands when he was younger. Steve, a sophomore at Toledo School for the Arts, initially picked up the basics by copying what he heard on CDs. Sam got lessons from an upperclassman at high school.



Steve Davis, the band's drummer, listens as Tony Salazar, Jr. tune up. (THE BLADE/ERIC SUMBERG)

Until mid-song, when he suddenly looks up.

"Stop it," he says. "I messed up."

Sam Maran, 17, the third member of the band who is wearing headphones and working the recorder and mixers, queues

They've been through their share of trials and tribulations: a van that broke down a few times, equipment problems, the time a roadie broke the neck of Sam's bass. They've made it through because they share a common vision.

"We try to make everything rock," says Tony, who has been in bands since he was 11 and who works for the Toledo Mud Hens. He wears a bandana and has several piercings. "I just want it to rock. That's all I really shoot for."

And they know when it rocks — when the music makes you want to bob your head, when you can imagine a crowd getting worked up into a frenzy over the beat, when you can really feel it.

During the recording session, the roadies sitting along the wall — friends Andrew Wettle and Bob Cantua — are like a test audience, a rock-o-meter of sorts. They bang on their knees to the music and let you know when they like what they hear.

"That was sweet, dude," one says after a particular song.

"Awesome," says the other.

That's their job. (Well, that and getting some Taco Bell for lunch.)

Tony, who also sings, said most of their lyrics are about things that make people mad, things like ex-girlfriends and crowds that just stand around doing nothing. A dry erase board hanging on the wall lists their songs, with titles like "Runt" and "Last Straw."

They're just doing musical tracks now — vocals come later — but every once in a while the instrumental track is punctuated with a deep, human growl.

"We like to call it manly screams," Sam explains.

Upstairs, things rock a little less. There are no manly screams or power riffs. All is still and sedate in the realm of Tony's parents — except for the TV, which is blaring to drown out the music downstairs.

And that shows no signs of stopping soon.

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The band records in the basement of guitarist Tony Salazar, Jr. (THE BLADE/ERIC SUMBERG)

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