

NOW WE'RE TALKIN'

By Helen Marketti

Start Me Up - The Ultimate Rolling Stones Tribute

An interview with lead guitarist Joey Ortega

Start Me Up will be doing a show in Wooster, Ohio for Fiore's Summer Concert Series on Friday, July 24.

Joey Ortega better known as "Joey O" is the lead guitar player for Start Me Up - The Ultimate Rolling Stones Tribute. Joey shares the history of the band, fond memories of their friend and former lead singer, Scott Gast and his hopes for the band's future.

There are many tribute bands for various artists. They offer a way for fans to see as close to the "real deal" as possible. Some tribute bands are spot on in their portrayal of a band whereas others seem to wane in their efforts. "I think there are some tribute bands that look as though they are doing a skit for SNL (Saturday Night Live). When you try too hard, it doesn't work. For a tribute band, you need to play the music that the fans know. You have to focus on the essence of who the band is or was, that's what we try to capture in Start Me Up," explains Joey. "We try to do a big representation of the Stones from their early days when Brian Jones was with the band, then when Mick Taylor was a part of the group and up to and including Ronnie Wood. I think their glory days were the late 60s and early 70s. Another good thing about The Stones is that you have 50 years of material."

"I think some people look at tribute bands as an easy way to make money and that's not how it works. You need to be sincere with what you are doing. I thought there were many tribute bands out there for The Beatles but not many for the Rolling Stones so I thought there was a void where we could market ourselves. Tribute bands are a way to get yourself out there, doing things the way you want without management or anyone else telling you what to do," said Joey. "I had

played for another Rolling Stones tribute band in another state for two years. I kept thinking that if we took this more seriously, we could go anywhere. If we are willing to put this much work into being a great band then we also need to work on playing where the money is. We need to be willing to play wherever that is, whether it's in another state or another country. When I formed Start Me Up, our band members were based out of Indiana, Michigan and Ohio. I was literally 200 miles away from any other members of the group."

"I formed the group with Scott Gast and Paul Letherer. I have known Paul since we were kids. I had known Scott since he was a teenager," explains Joey. "Scott and I had a mutual friend in Sandusky, Randy Porter who had a recording studio. Randy had introduced me to Scott who was still in high school at the time. I went to see Scott when he got his band, The CoCoBeanOs going. I had encouraged him to go out there and play a million gigs, pay his dues. I saw something in him that was

special. He was a diamond in the rough. He had all of the passion, the genuine love and interest in music."



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In the early morning hours of November 2, 2014, Scott Gast passed away in a one-vehicle accident. While his loss is felt through everyone who knew and loved him, his ambition to do what he wanted for himself should serve as a positive influence to others. Music was a significant and meaningful focus in Scott's life. He always took himself to the next level of where he wanted to be in his career.

"The strangest thing is that Scott had heard we were thinking about starting a Rolling Stones tribute band and he wanted to audition for the lead singer role. He was afraid that we might say "no" so he asked our mutual friend, Randy to call me and see if he could audition," remembers Joey. "I was puzzled why Scott didn't call me himself since we already knew each other. I called him that same day and told him he was "in" and he said he would audition like everyone else."

"That is one of the great things about Scott; he was very humble and kind to everyone. He had the talent and the right personality. He was perfect for our band. He was a complete rock star on stage. I couldn't be more proud of him and what we accomplished," said Joey. "The rest of us in the band were at least 20 years older than Scott. We looked upon him as our friend and little brother."

The crowds grew louder and larger with each show that Start Me Up performed. Their first show in Alpena, Michigan drew 2,500 fans. Their last show in Honduras drew 100,000 fans with numbers continually growing.

"We started out rehearsing in Scott's basement in Castalia, Ohio six years ago to performing in front of thousands of people. Those kinds of crowds are what Scott was looking for and I'm glad our band provided an opportunity for him to get a taste of what that was like. I sometimes felt he thought he was never going to get in front of crowds that large. I remember him once telling me he would watch film footage of The Beatles. He loved how the hysteria followed the band everywhere they went. Scott said he had hoped to achieve that one day," recalls Joey. "He did so with Start Me Up which Scott would acknowledge over and over. He had the talent. He had the "it" factor. It's a big world out there and Scott had what it took to make it in that big world."

"I think we brought out the best in each other when we were together as a band. We had the right chemistry and climbed the ladder together. Everything is possible; you just need to figure out a way. Scott's father, George had told us that we as a band took Scott to the top of the mountain."

During the days, weeks and months that followed Scott's passing, Joey wasn't sure he could go on playing guitar. "I stayed home for days at a time after hearing the news and just wept. I couldn't function. It seemed so impossible to believe that he was gone," said Joey. "One day my wife, Donna told me that I had to get myself going again. Gradually, I came to realize that this was a band Scott had helped create and build. It would be a disappointment to him if we let it fold so we have kept going because it's the right thing to do and what he would have wanted. We continue on in Scott's honor."

The show scheduled in Wooster on July 24 has special significance, as it is one of the last two shows that Scott booked for the band. The other show is on August 29 at Jimmy Bukkett's in Fremont, Ohio.

The current lineup of Start Me Up includes Joey on lead guitar, Bob Wotherspoon (vocals), Paul Letherer (drums), Sean McKinney (rhythm guitar) and Jess Mann (bass). "Our current lineup is going well," said Joey. "After Scott passed our band mate, Jeff, who had played "Keith Richards" left the group. It was too difficult for him to go on without Scott in the band. It came as a shock because we were counting on everyone to support each other but we understood."

"Bob who plays "Mick Jagger" is someone we have known for a long time and he does look like Mick!" (laughs)

Wherever they may travel and play, Scott is in their hearts. "One big thing I have learned from knowing him is that you have to prioritize what is important in your life. There is a lesson for everyone here. Focus on what you want to do with your life. Everything else is a distraction. Scott tried hard to please everyone. When he focused on himself, he was absolutely awesome. We are looking forward to celebrating Scott's life and our love of music. I can't say enough great things about the guy. He was one in a billion."

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