13 years of psychobilly freakouts

The Deadcats
with Season of Nightmares and the Benders
Saturday, 15 September at 8pm
Velvet Underground

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It's been a long road for Vancouver's The Deadcats. They've been rocking one side of the country with their personal brand of psychobilly-meets-surfrock since 1994, and in those 13 years, they've seen their unique genre blossom into a full-blown, worldwide-spanning scene.

These days, you can find numerous psychobilly bands covering the Canadian landscape, and the fashion statements their members and fans alike have been made are instantly recognizable. Any of the hot-rod-driving, socko, single-fisted gays with their Beatle Davis looks-a-like gothérds that you see around every represent the growth of the psychobilly scene. To some, seeing a dandy dude driving a '50s hot rod or a chopper might be intimidating, but according to Deadcats frontman Michael Dennis, those gays aren't so bad.

"We get along well with the hot rod guys... we're friends with a lot of those guys," Dennis laughs. For those who are unfamiliar with the genre, psychobilly is an eclectic mixture of rockabilly issues with punk timbres and style. For many years, the genre has languished as a small, struggling underground scene, but in recent years, it has grown relatively popular, making the payroll for bands like the Deadcats and the Sweet ones.

"We were the very first band in Canada to start doing psychobilly, so they hadn't been exposed to this much," Dennis claims, about the genre's slow rise. "Now, it's grown to the point where guys like us or the Gutter Demons can go on cross-Canada tours."

Much of this rise can be attributed to psychobilly acts between Tiger Army and Deadcats. In the past, the band had been signed to the popular Helfix Records in 1999, acts like the Deadcats have seen career-defining sales. With their most recent release, Tiger Army has even managed to pull some heavy radio rotation for the genre.

"If Tiger Army hadn't been signed to Helfix... we wouldn't be playing right now," Dennis admits. "With the rise of psychobilly and MySpace, our crowds [have] doubled."

Still, it hasn't been an easy journey for the band. They've gone through many different members over the last decade, but have finally found just enough blood, sweat, and guitar strings to almost guarantee a good crowd wherever they go. And while critics point fingers at Tiger Army for taking their sound to appeal to the mass market, fans of The Deadcats need worry about the band selling out. Dennis doesn't appear to expect—or even any more success than the group has already achieved.

"We're just too madly, and we're too many styles of music to them, even for the psychobilly people," Dennis states. "It's also that we're psychobilly will become too popular... it's just too strong."

With their pinstripes, scissors and skulls, The Deadcats personify the defining image of the genre. But anyone who has yet to experience the psychobilly couldn't choose a better introduction—The Deadcats promise one hell of a show.