

Not so 'Common' anymore

Mercer County band switches up its style

By **SCOTT FROST**
Staff Writer

TRENTON — There's not much common about The Commons these days.

Well at least one song, the opening number of their darling CD "Dirt Waffle," shows these guys don't just stuff themselves with simple pop-hooks and songs about relationships.

Yes, the June release proves frontman Keith Monacchio might just be the last hopeless romantic in hand, just likes to hold hands, and isn't afraid to share his feelings.

But the record's opener, "It'll Go Away," is a new-wave blast, carrying current modern rock ideals with retro elbow smacks.

"It'll Go Away," the traditional opener for the Mercer County band's live sets, is a darkly different approach to the band's usual whispery pop formula.

It's almost like the sweet-spoken Monacchio had some hidden angst stashed in his head that just needed some raucous fun to cling aid in its escape.

Also when you have a full-time keyboardist in tow, Nottingham High School grad Chris Bellis, experimenting the sound is expected to follow.

"I want people to know The Commons is going to do whatever it is that we feel we need to do," Monacchio said.

"The last record we did was pretty mellow. And we kind of wanted to make a bouncy pop record. ("It'll Go Away") is a little bit hard edged, but it's got the keyboards in it that brings out a new wavish feel."

The Commons haven't ditch its sugary alternative pop sound, but there was a point in recording "Dirt Waffle" where the Hamilton guys wanted to shift its emotional attitude.

"It'll Go Away" was "on the fence" for a while since it didn't mesh



Hamilton rockers The Commons released "Dirt Waffle" in June.

comfortably with Monacchio's cutely-calculated, lovey-dovey lyrics that encompass the rest of the record and almost didn't make the cut.

But it's addition gives off an impression The Commons are a thinking group who don't want to bore its fans with same old singer-song-writer recipe.

"It'll Go Away" is a one-of-a-kind track, as the rest of the record, while way more upbeat than the guys' 2003 sleepy-time CD "Come On Get Gone," is more simplistic and emotional.

Add some "aboots" to its repertoire and The Commons could be confused for the Barenaked Ladies, although there's plenty more guitar slices in the local guys' works and some dashes of global rhythms to pass around.

And if this was the early '90s, Monacchio's soft, passionate poetic approach and cuteboy voice could be confused for Evan Dando or Pete Dinklage.

"Our last record was sooo mellow and just kind of like a rainy Sunday afternoon record," said Monacchio, who is often heralded by local musicians as the best song writer in the area. "I didn't know how people were going to react to the first track being such a hard rocker."

But changing things up is part of the band's evolution anyway.

They gave up on being rock stars to concentrate on living their real lives while actively playing in a local band.

The Commons, five guys whose days jobs range from bass players Tom McDonald's PSE&G occupation to drummer Tom Kale's job

teaching seventh-graders math, have succeeded on the independent circuit.

They saved some loot recording "Dirt Waffle" at lead guitarist Sean Glonek's Hamilton-based SRG Studios and have particularly done well selling the record on

the internet without a distributor or music label calling the shots.

In the meantime the record was released to radio stations country wide in September.

It was quickly added to the rotations of 186 stations in eight weeks, the band says.

With its soft style, past records have gotten the guys air time on Philadelphia's high-powered public radio station WXPB.

Public radio also has given The Commons a home in Boston, where "Dirt Waffle" stayed at the No. 1 spot for three weeks on WERS, another public station.

Monacchio, a Mets fan, said half of The Commons records sold, go to Boston Red Sox fans.

Self-funded weekend tours to Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Toronto have exposed The Commons to a new group of listeners who dig the guys' explorative ideas for pop music.

But it's at home, as the center of Trenton's bar scene, where the band really earns the most love.

And its even fueled by a "new wavish" track far from where the band landed six years ago.

"I think people who are into our music know we are pretty diversified with the styles we go into," Monacchio said. "They know we're are going to change with each record."

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If you go...

- **Who:** The Commons
- **When:** Saturday
- **Why:** Hamilton pop rockers released "Dirt Waffle" in June with an up-tempo sound, different than prior records, adding a new wave anthem, "It'll Go Away" that compliments the group's lovey-dovey style.
- **Where:** Finnigan's, 529 Route 130 North, East Windsor (609) 448-2258
- **Cover:** \$5
- **Playing With:** Kybash, 23 to Sparta
- **For Fans Of:** Barenaked Ladies, Velvet Crush, Matthew Sweet