

Flexing their muscles

Life in Elyria informs The Rails' sound

John Benson
The Chronicle-Telegram

When Elyria native Jeremy Willets returned home from college in 2001, he started writing music with his former guitar teacher Drew Doman. Soon thereafter, The Rails were formed, but it would be a few years before the band found its sound.

"I'd say we're probably in the alt-rock category for lack of a better term," said Willets, a 1999 Elyria High School graduate. "The references I've been using have been The Smiths, Weezer, R.E.M. and the Replacements, but I don't know if we totally resemble any of those bands. I think we're sort of all over the map."

One listen to the band's recently released debut album "Life's a Lonely Ride" will confirm its current diverse approach, which may be confusing newcomers regarding what the group is all about. Naturally bands have to live and learn, which is how Willets is chalking up the entire experience. Already the band is working on new material for its next release.

"I think our new songs are a little bit more focused into that alternative indie-rock category, but I don't think we'll be hampered when it comes to experimentation," Willets said.

The Rails may be honing in on its sound, but thematically the singer-guitarist feels the outfit is in the right headspace on "Life's a Lonely Ride." While the title track conveys feelings of solitude, other

ON STAGE

WHO: The Rails opening for Maritime

WHEN: 9 p.m. Monday

WHERE: Grog Shop, 2785 Euclid Heights Blvd., Cleveland Heights

TICKETS: \$8 at Ticketmaster

INFO: (216) 241-5555 or www.ticketmaster.com

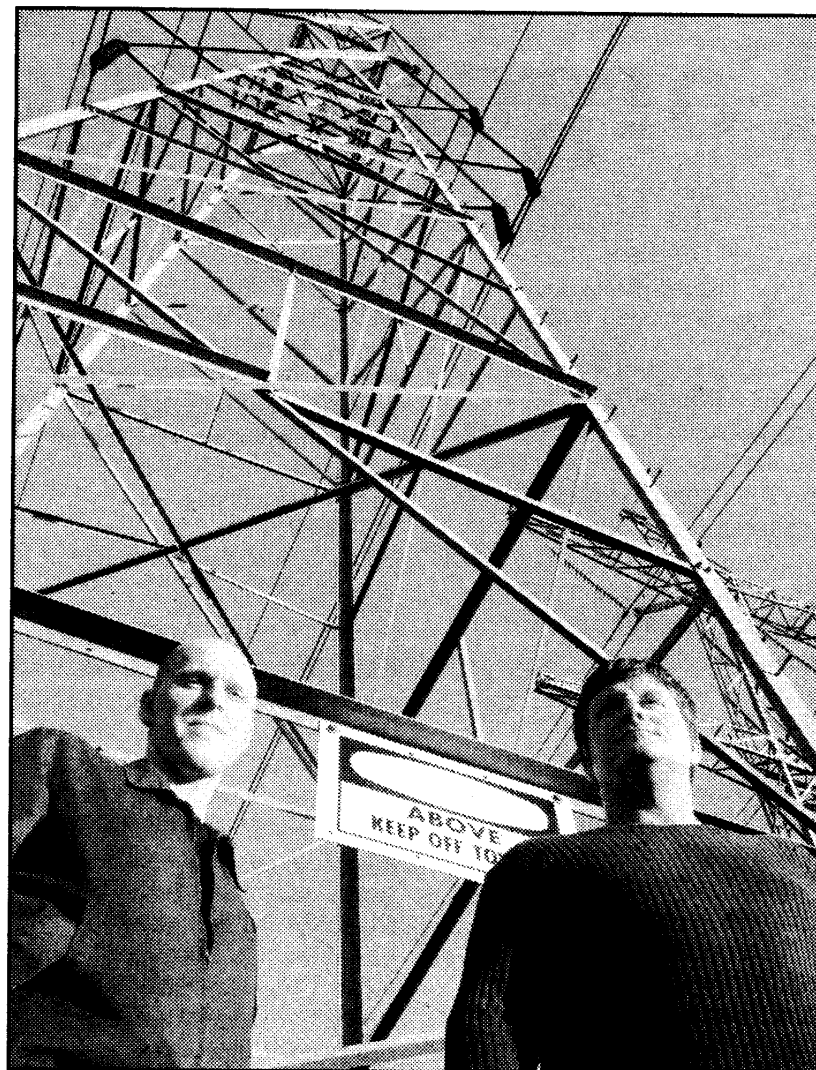
songs, such as "Mother, Games and School" and "I'm in Love with Misery," offer a sliver of optimism.

"I don't think we're ever depressed to the point where we can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, but I think as you go through life, there are ups and downs, peaks and valleys," Willets said. "And I guess this batch of songs just reflect more of the valleys than the peaks."

Willets said such reality in the music is a product of growing up in the Cleveland area, and specifically Elyria.

"I guess it's just maybe a working class town, and I think we're working class songwriters," Willets said. "Maybe the material doesn't necessarily reflect it, but we always like to be working."

It's the notion of working that Willets said he feels distances The Rails from other regional acts. In addition to playing out, including a Monday show at the Grog Shop, the band, as previously mentioned,



Jeremy Willets (left) and Drew Doman make up The Rails.

is already working hard on new songs.

"We're right back in the game," Willets said. "There's no real reason to take a break, I guess. I think writing is like a muscle, and if you don't flex it constantly, there will be atrophy. That's a predicament that a lot of bands I talk to fall into.

They write the album and then spend a year or two behind it. Then during that year they don't really write anything at all, and then they sort of have to go back to the drawing board and have to relearn how to write songs. We're definitely not going to fall into that mode."