WEEKEND *STARS*

PROFILE // BY ELLA PIPER CLAFFY

Scott Patterson comes to New Haven

Scott Patterson — that's right, Luke Danes of "Gilmore Girls" — is coming to New Haven.

Specifically, he's performing with his band at Toad's Place on Wednesday, April 29, the third stop on his Midnight Highway Tour. And on April 13, I — that's right, the biggest "Gilmore Girls" fan out there — interviewed him about it.

This tour, according to Patterson, is "designed for people to celebrate and have fun." The band includes the keyboardist Zoux, who was also a part of the Patterson band SMITHRADIO, guitarist Miles Schon, son of Journey founder Neal Schon, and has Dylan Wilson on bass, Matt Hankle on drums and Spencer Geer playing guitar along with Schon. They have also recently added a back-up singer, Yale graduate Maiya Sykes.

Patterson seems genuinely excited about this bunch; he says that "they're encyclopedic in their knowledge of styles and rhythms and beats" and consistently push him to make the music more complex and grow as an artist. He's excited to give the band the chance to play a set with no prerecorded tracks.

"It's like going back into our garage and playing live, and being able to solo, and being able to create, and being able to play off each other and pay attention to one another while the song is going and while the show is going," he said. When he talks about that freedom of playing music as a kid, he speaks from experience.

Before SMITHRADIO, before "Gilmore Girls," before even Patterson's six-year stint in minor-league baseball, he was in a college band called The Wretched Ones at Rutgers University. He had his hair dyed green at the time, and when his sister came to visit she insisted on shaving his head, saying he lived up to his band's name. Although The Wretched Ones never took off, Patterson's love of music and songwriting has remained. The set for the upcoming tour is about 90 minutes, with 21 songs that are a mix of covers and his originals.

Let me pause for a moment to explain how surreal this newsgathering process was. I have been watching and rewatching "Gilmore Girls" with my mom every summer since I was ten years old, and my mom and I — like most other mothers and daughters — swear that the show was somehow modeled after us. We think we have a better claim to that comment since I am an only child and she is a single mom. All this to say, for the half hour that I chatted with Scott Patterson, I thanked my lucky stars that I happened to see his face on that flyer outside Toad's.

Patterson is performing at Toad's not because of the Yale and "Gilmore Girls" connection — he's actually never been to New Haven before — but because of the club's storied musical history. Toad's is the stop on tour he's most excited for. He's also excited to play for college students, a generation that he says is "discovering classic rock."

"They love it. And they want to hear more of it, and that's what we're gonna give them," he promised.

Patterson says all this from the perspective of someone who's seen many of his favorite artists live. Fifteen years old and spending the sumer in New York City with his sister — who was at the time a comparative literature professor in New York City, an "artsy fartsy type, as I have always been," he said — he would go watch Patti Smith play at CBGB. One night, having heard that she was looking for a new piano player, he approached her and offered to take on the job himself. She peered out at him over her sunglasses and told him he looked a little too young.

As an "artsy fartsy" type myself, it was wonderful to hear one of my favorite actors self-identify. It was also so strange, since the face I was looking at — Luke Danes' face — shouldn't have said any of that. On the show, Luke is curmudgeonly and, culturally, pretty tapped out. At one point in the show he rejects buying a David Bowie CD for his girlfriend, Lorelai, because he thought Bowie had dressed up as a pirate. So it was somewhat foreign to have this guy chat with me about Patti Smith and The Who and Bruce Springsteen.

I asked him what that was like, to be a person in his own right and yet constantly represent a beloved character for the rest of the world. He admitted that most fans were probably seeing his tour announcement and wondering if this would have been the band Luke would form. (As a fan myself, I can tell you it is decidedly not.)

"It's not like we tailored the show around that, but, you know, this tour is really to celebrate with the fans," he said. Patterson has no problem with embodying Luke, and on the contrary says he derives a lot of joy from it. Whatever city he's in, if he's at a restaurant or walking down the street, there's always a "Gilmore Girls" fan to say hello to. He doesn't think he deserves credit for the happiness the show brings fans, but he's happy to be on the receiving end of it. There was never a chance that he tried to move away from the character of Luke.

"I mean, in musical analogies and musical terms, I was in Led Zeppelin, and the band broke up after seven years. What am I going to do after that?"

He attributes the success of the show to the dedication the other actors felt, as well as their commitment to make something great. In all of his pursuits,



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Patterson feels he has always been "striving to be the best at something." That drive, he says, is at the end of the day all that matters.

"I didn't have a backup plan," he told me about the years in his late 30s and early 40s, before he was cast as Luke. "I was either going to make it or I was going to be, you know, at 80 years old put on a stretcher and led out of my studio apartment in West Hollywood."

After a successful acting run and fulfilling years in music, Patterson doesn't plan on slowing down. A self-described "grinder," he didn't strike me as the type to hang up his hat any time soon.

After Patterson left CBGB that one night, crestfallen that Patti Smith had rejected his offer of piano-playing, Smith chased him down. He and his sister were halfway down the Bowery when Smith called out after him: "Hey! Good luck, okay?"

A few days before his opening night, I have the same sentiment to offer him.

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COLUMN // BY CIELO GAZARD

Lend Me Your Ears: Rock 'n' Roll retirement plan

Old rock stars never die; they simply fade away. Or they go on an endless streak of farewell tours. Musicians seem to have a very hard time leaving the stage. Some announce their retirement but then return a few years later. Some swear that they will never retire even as they enter a seventh decade in the music business.

The farewell tour has become a music industry institution. It almost guarantees high ticket sales — and even higher prices — and major press coverage for bands and artists looking to perform for fans one last time. However, farewell tours also seem to guarantee an eventual return to the stage, with the number of major acts not keeping to their word. By buying into these farewell tours, are we supporting pathological liars, or are these artists simply uncertain of when their last performance will be?

When these older musicians were in their glory days, the idea of touring well into one's seventies and eighties was unheard of. In 1972, Dick Cavett '58 asked Mick Jagger, then 29, if he saw himself performing at age 60. Jagger said, "Easily." This elicited laughter from the audience. Rock music was still a young person's genre in 1972. The image we still associate with the term "rock star" tends to be someone who is in their twenties or thirties. And yet, some of the genre's heavyweights are still out there, including the Rolling Stones, and performing well past 60-years old. For some musicians, time is on their side.

We've grown accustomed to seeing old rock stars out on the road: the Rolling Stones routinely sell out stadiums. Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band are currently touring the United States. But the bulk of these artists' sets are made up of songs written when they were in their twenties about twenty-something experiences in the 1960s and '70s. Some songs age better than others, and the passage of time adds some gravitas to lyrics dealing with heavy subject matter. Other songs, however, don't. Although a classic of British rock from the mid-1960s, the potency and urgency of a song like "My Generation" by the Who is lessened when it's sung by someone in their eighties rather than someone in their twenties. The line "I hope I die before I get old" takes on a much more ironic — even somber — tone when sung by the two original members of the band who did not fulfill the lyric's aspiration.

Although band members may be sidelined by the side effects of age, their fourth farewell tour can still go on. If a guitarist isn't playing as well as they did in the past, a band can simply get another one to fill in.

Singers tend to get the most blame for bands sounding "too old to rock." With the passage of time, vocal cords become less elastic, meaning the fast vibrations needed to produce and project a note takes more effort. Particularly in the higher registers, age diminishes a singer's range. A key change can only do so much to hide the aging process. Many rock musicians never received proper musical training. Many sang while sick for too many nights in a row without proper rest. The larynx is a muscle that needs to be trained to use at a high level, especially in the professional world of live performance. A vocal injury for a singer is like an ACL tear for a professional athlete, and the voice is rarely the same after surgery.

We go to concerts to hear the classics like they sound on the record. But some artists can't sing the song the same way they once did. Is it time for those artists to pack it in and retire? It makes no sense to me that some older musicians who know they cannot perform at the same level as they did twenty years ago still demand high ticket prices, even for the nosebleeds. While there are some musicians who genuinely must tour to pay the bills, many of these "legends of rock and roll" are richer than God. Most don't know when to bow out until it is too late.

Thanks to the Internet, there's a treasure trove of concert bootlegs and official live recordings from when musicians were at their live performance peak. If we can easily find these videos and listen to the old records from the comfort of home, why then do we still shell out hundreds of dollars to see these old farts on stage now? We as music fans and concertgoers are sometimes too blinded by nostalgia to see the reality of the situation. There is no doubt that some older musicians can still put on an amazing show, well into their seventies and eighties, but some need a reality check for the sake of their fans.

There are plenty of older musicians going out on the road this year and next, potentially for the last time. If you happen to be one of those lucky fans who score a ticket to see these musicians of a bygone era, remember that it won't be like seeing them in 1976. There's something unique about that — something quite odd, too. Some great musicians never get to grow old, never get to see their music revered by millions. Some burn out, others fade away, and maybe, for some, the latter is much more lucrative.



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