



# Rikters aim for straightforward Midwestern authenticity

By Ted Cox | Daily Herald Staff

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## The Rikters

7 p.m. Saturday at the Xtreme Wheels Roller Rink, 691 Virginia Rd., Crystal Lake, at a cost of \$8; at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at Chord on Blues, 106 S. First Ave., St. Charles, \$5; and at 8 p.m. Thursday at Subterranean, 2011 W. North Ave., Chicago, \$5.

It should come as no surprise to find the Rikters named themselves after a Midwestern figure as straightforward and no-nonsense as their music.

"I think we just originally thought it sounded good with 'Ditka,'" said drummer Riley Ryan.

That's right. Sorry to disappoint the Sonic Youth fans out there, but the Rikters are named not after painter Gerhard Richter, who contributed what turned out to be the cover of the classic

album "Daydream Nation," but more or less after Da Coach, Chicago's own Mike Ditka.

That's fitting, in that there's a plain, earnest, Grabowski-esque, yet distinctive quality to their songs, a tuneful, but rocking Midwest feel common to groups from Cheap Trick to the Insiders and beyond. It was something bassist Owen O'Malley immediately seized on when he joined the band a year and a half ago, shortly after transplanting from New York City because he "just got tired of it."

"I've been trying to define it," O'Malley said. "There's New York hipsters, and there's Chicago hipsters. Chicago hipsters are just truer, more ornery. They're completely broke. They're not just the kids of rich parents. And yet the Rikters feel like a Midwest band to me because there's no pretension to be part of the cool kids."

"That was the kind of music that I liked when I first started getting into music," O'Malley added, even though he grew up on Long Island. "I like something that rocks hard and isn't trying to be cool."

For Ryan and Doug Jenkins, the band's guitarist and lead singer, it came more naturally. They grew up in St. Charles and got to know one another in the St. Charles High School jazz band. When they got out of college and returned home, however, about four years ago, they discovered a mutual affinity for more basic rock 'n' roll.

"It just sort of happened," Ryan recalled. "We were hanging out in the same bar, the Scotland Yard. We actually ended up getting a residency there, where we would play two times a month, every other Thursday."

They started out heavy on covers, of course, but then Ryan started to get to know Jenkins' originals, and they began to write songs together, a process that continued with the addition of O'Malley after he replied to an audition post on Craigslist.

Now they've resettled in Chicago's Ukrainian Village neighborhood and are out with their first album of original material, "The Rikters," self-produced but available on Apple's iTunes. They'll be promoting it with a series of shows over the next week in Crystal Lake, St. Charles and Chicago. It finds the group mastering the soft-loud contemporary dynamics of a song like "Ava," but specializing in the more rousing "All My Life" and the anthemic chorus of "Give Me Tonight." Jenkins, who writes most of the lyrics, doesn't go in for the gritty and

overemotional, but tends to emphasize the melodic line of the songs in a way that almost croons, while the three-piece band displays a rare ability to play off each other rhythmically and set each other up for moments that deliver a punch.

The album also has a crisp, clear, live sound, thanks in large part to producer Brian Zieske, who made a point of recording it not digitally, but on analog tape at the Gallery of Carpet in Villa Park.

"With the limitations of recording on tape, you have to record it live," he said. "You can't manipulate the performance using a computer. We wanted to keep it sort of like how people did records in the '60s and '70s, playing it until it's right and then mixing it down - keeping it simple, keeping it raw, capturing it raw and primitive and keeping it authentic."

That's the Riktors' sound in a nutshell, combined with a distinct lack of attitude O'Malley, for one, finds refreshing after being in a series of other bands in New York City.

"To me, it's really nice to find a band where there's no egos," he said, "nobody telling everybody else what to do."

Not even Da Coach, although as their sort of namesake he'd certainly be welcomed at any one of their shows.