

Motif Music Award Winners



On a rainy Tuesday night, an eclectic crowd of roughly 400 musicians and music lovers, from folk to hardcore, from hip-hop to EDM, gathered to swap stories, down drinks and receive awards. Thanks to all who came out, and thanks to the nearly 4,000 *Motif* readers who took the time to vote for their favorites.

It was awesome to see so much talent in one room - in this case, at The Met Café in Pawtucket. Different styles, genres, ages and instruments all mixed together, including stand-out performances by the amazing School of Rock teens, the almost-performance-art random rock of The Viennagram, the acoustic stylings of Amanda Salemi and hip-hop duo DirtyDurdie. There was something for everyone, in what was probably the most eclectic mix of styles to share a Rhode Island stage in a very, very long time. Big thanks to all, as well as to our many presenters, hosts John Fuzek and BettySioux Taylor, Rhodies Food Truck (rhodiesfoodtruck.tumblr.com), and of course, The Met Café.

Yes, there are winners (you picked 'em!), but *Motif* puts on this awards show to celebrate all the amazing music and musical talent that's fostered and we hope will thrive in our small-population, big-talent state. We don't so much care who won - we're just glad so many came out to play.

[AMERICANA] By: John Fuzek

BEST ACT: Consuelo's Revenge

Consuelo doesn't need revenge this time around. The band, whose self-termed musical label is "Genericana," showed they are tops in the Americana category this year. "Consuelo is the invisible cog in the machine, the water in the well, the last one left after the lights have gone out and the first one to see the sunrise. And these are her songs." Band members include Amanda Salemi on vocals; Ian Lacombe on vocals and bass; Becca Neveau on piano, guitar and vocals; Patrick Stewart on glockenspiel and percussion; Alicia Ruggiero on violin; John Ferreria on drums; Kirk Anderson on accordion and guitar; and Nicholas Smyth-vocals and guitar. For more, vindicate to consuelosrevenge.com

SINGER/SONGWRITER: Kris Hansen

Kris Hansen is the driving force behind the band Viking Jesus. He is also a formidable solo singer-songwriter and has been playing music around New England for the past 20 years. Viking Jesus is a past *Motif* Award winner, so it is no surprise that Kris took the top spot here. For more, longship to reverbNation.com/vikingjesus

FEMALE VOCALIST: Amanda Salemi

Amanda Salemi is the powerhouse vocalist who fronts the band Consuelo's Revenge. She is no stranger to winning *Motif* Awards. Her band is a past and current *Motif* winner and she is also involved with The

Spot in Providence, which also has taken home *Motif* Awards. For more, wake up to [facebook.com/wakeupyourface](https://www.facebook.com/wakeupyourface).

MALE VOCALIST: Elwood Donnelly

Elwood Donnelly is the Donnelly half of the husband/wife Atwood-Donnelly duo, which has been a fixture in the RI music scene for over 25 years. In addition to vocals, Elwood is a multi-instrumentalist and dancer and runs contra dances around the state. Elwood has written a songbook of The Carter Family for mountain dulcimer, a book of recipes and musings, and has created a songbook for "The Halfway Ground" and for "The Weaver's Bonny."

BLUEGRASS: Rank Strangers

The Rank Strangers had been the Susan Lucci of the *Motif* Awards. They were nominated just about every year and even performed at the awards show, but this is the first time that they have actually won! They are "Original Folk Fusion Country Rockers playing their very own unique brand of grass in the rank style." They have been playing around the area for the past 15 years. You can often hear them at the Wood River Inn on a Sunday night. These Strangers may be familiar to you: Malcolm McFarlane on guitar and vocal, Thomas Duksta on mandolin and vocal, and Pete Vendettuoli on banjo and vocal. Currently they have a revolving line-up of bassists for the band that includes: Dan Parker and Jack Hanlon. For more, pick on over to The Rank Strangers on Facebook.

BREAKTHROUGH ACT: The Quahogs

The Quahogs began their musical journey to *Motif* stardom in 2011. The line-up features Steve DelMonico as lead singer and guitar, Ryan Gould on bass, Chaz Weber/Steve Donovan on lead guitar and John Faraone playing drums. The Quahogs have a blend of sound ranging from Dylan to Nirvana, Ernest Tubb, Hank Willams, and Townes Van Zandt to whom they dedicate a song to on their debut album, *Traveler's Log*. They also cite Lightnin' Hopkins, Blaze Foley, John Prine, The Animals, Rolling Stones, The Beatles, and Elliott Smith as influences. For more, shuck to thequahogs.bandcamp.com

BLUES ACT: The Cannibal Ramblers

The Cannibal Ramblers have the blues and it has won them the top spot in this year's music awards. "The Cannibal Ramblers proudly play Abstract Ashcan Delta Swamp Backwater Stomp. They are a three (sometimes four) piece band from Boston/Providence. Their influences range from Mississippi Delta to surf music, punk, rock, jazz and deconstructive performance sound art. When they play you can smell the bear-shit and motor oil." You can hear Mark Molloff on slide guitar and vocal, Kyle Anderson on drums, Erik Jerominek on bass, and Bryan Christopher Minto on Atmospheric Harmonium. For more, nibble over to cannibalramblers.com

CHORAL ACT: Quahog Quire

No matter what, this band should have won for their name alone, but they won for their music. They sing hymns, sea shanties, work songs and children's songs mostly unaccompanied and "mostly in harmony." One ad for a Quire show states, "To quaint yourself with a quorum of quadlibetic quoristers questing a quantuplicity of tunes. We sing of quinks, quacks, quanting and quagmires. Bring a quoin to quoff and quaff a beer and be quoted. So quit your quischen and quire with us. Quoristers, Quakers and quirkish quieters welcome." No matter what, you are encouraged to sing along with them. This quire

seems to be mostly quiet about their doings, but if you really need to know more ask William S. Monroe. Question to [facebook.com/william.s.monroe](https://www.facebook.com/william.s.monroe)

FOLK ACT: The Sugar Honey Iced Tea

The Sugar Honey Iced Tea isn't a drink, it is a quartet of four music-making ladies from Providence: Ana Mallozzi on cello, banjo, drumasaur, and vocals; Emily Shaw on mandolin, vocals and kazoo; Kate Jones on banjolele and vocals; and Laila Aukee on ukulele and vocals. In 2010 the four joked that they should start a band. The first band practice consisted mostly of drinking red wine, munching on cupcakes, and deciding what they should write a song about. On this night the song "Giacomo" started forming and the name The Sugar Honey Iced Tea was stumbled upon, which encouraged them to have another practice. The next practice consisted mostly of creating an extensive back story for "Giacomo," but eventually, they played through the entire song and felt something in their hearts they had never felt before. Currently the four are all pursuing their own musical or work projects in PVD. For more, steep to thesugarhoneyicedteamusic.com.

JAZZ/R&B ACT: Brass Attack

This horn driven band is one of the hottest in New England. Brass Attack is a nine-piece band featuring four horns, a rhythm section, and a lead vocalist, performing the hits of Tower of Power, Chicago, Frank Sinatra, James Brown, Glen Miller, Van Morrison, and Blood Sweat and Tears, as well as classic hits from the 1930s up to today. The unique instrumentation and high degree of musicianship lend to the band's versatility and professionalism. Members of the band have performed with prominent national acts such as The Tonight Show Band, Tavares, Ray Charles, The Four Tops, The Temptations, NRBQ, Dizzy Gillespie and Aretha Franklin. The band has shared the stage with Earth Wind and Fire, Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, and NRBQ. Band members include Fritz Benz on trumpet; Kevin Johnson, lead vocalist, songwriter and guitarist; David Tanury on guitar; Steve L'Heureux on trombone and flute; Jeff Mortrude; Tom Petteruti on drums; Brass Attack's leader, Bill Smith, on trumpet; John Knasas on saxophone; and Steve Vallante on keys. For more, toot to brassattack.com

WORLD MUSIC: Atwater-Donnelly

Elwood Donnelly and Aubrey Atwater have toured the world, bringing their programs of traditional American and Celtic folk songs, a capella pieces, old-time gospel songs, dance tunes and original works to large audiences. Elwood and Aubrey blend harmonies and play guitar, Appalachian mountain dulcimer, mandolin, tin whistle, harmonica, banjo, bones, spoons and limberjacks, and they bring other surprises including Appalachian clog dancing, French Canadian footwork, and tap. Aubrey and Elwood met as volunteers at the Stone Soup Coffeehouse in PVD in early 1987 and within just a few months, these self-taught musicians formed a duo and were married two years later. For more, tap over to atwater-donnelly.com

BEST OPEN MIC: The Parlour

This venue, located on North Main St, was originally known as the Penalty Box when the old RI Auditorium was next door. Now that location is a parking lot and the Penalty Box was transformed into The Parlour, one of RI's hottest clubs. The open mic happens every Tues night at 7:30pm, so get your talent down there and take the stage! For more, check theparlourri.com.

BEST ALBUM: Haunt the House's *Jack Rabbit Jones*

This album was recorded and engineered by Ben Knox Miller and Jeffrey Prystowsky at the Columbus Theatre and mastered at Machines with Magnets by Seth Manchester and Keith Souza. It features contributions by Will Houlihan on guitar, harmonica and vocals; Bessie Bessin on accordion and vocals; Allysen Callery on vocals; Ryan Smith on vocals; Meg Bayley on vocals; David Henry Passafiume on percussion; Amato Zinno on upright bass; and Stephen Lloyd Law on mandolin. "Haunt the House, (Will Houlihan) falls somewhere between a bedroom whispered heart broken prayer and a brilliant repentant cry in the dark. He consistently writes songs that are simple and personal." HTH will be performing at this year's Newport Folk Festival. For more, moan over to hauntthehouse.bandcamp.com

[ALTERNATIVE] By: Marc Clarkin and Jake Bissaro

BEST BAND: The Silks

The Silks take top honors as Best Band Rock 'n' Roll. This past year was a big one for The Silks that included a US tour, multiple performances at the SXSW Festival in Austin, prestigious gigs like being direct support for The Replacements in Detroit, headlining the Harpoon Brewery Festival in Boston, and bringing the music from their excellent 2013 album *Last American Band* to thousands. Front man Tyler-James Kelly's guitar wizardry breathes new life into the blues on numbers like "Livin' in the World" and "Trouble." On the rockers like "Down at the Heel" and "Mountain Man," The Silks kick into gear with an early '70s Stones-type thump. The Silks have a boat load of ammo in their repertoire, which makes every show a unique and exciting testament to the power of rock 'n' roll.

LIVE ACT: The Viennagram

The Viennagram treat every performance like constructing a piece of art. Everyone describes something different with the common thread being that realms of a typical rock show were pushed till they broke. This past year The Viennagram released the first proper release, *Learn To Tame The Patterns*, that is both maddening and magical. The album spans 21 songs, and front man AV Vienna told me it was a six-year process to create the perfect sound. The Viennagram remind me of a combination of the dark side of the carnival where all the fun is mixed with a touch of Tom Waits and black magic. The Viennagram have been for years the band one is guaranteed to walk away from seeing with a story guaranteed to be told over and over.

REGGAE/SKA: The Copacetics

The Copacetics have been the go-to ska band in town for a while now. This award just confirmed something that music lovers already knew. The Copacetics mix in a combination of ska, rocksteady, reggae and soul that just swings. They recently released a self-titled album with 13 jams that will get any party started. The Copacetics are always money for a fun time out dancing the night away.

JAM BAND: Fungus Amungus

Fungus Amungus have had a dynasty over the Best Jam Band for the past decade, winning the award seven times over the last nine years. This, along with Best Band Award, stakes Fungus Amungus a claim to be arguably the most successful band locally over the last decade if you throw out bands that graduated from the local scene. More than a jam band, Fungus Amungus have earned their awards by belting out a mix of funk, reggae, soul and rock. They improvise and push their songs so each performance is unique. Fungus Amungus last winter endured the loss of one of their members, Chelsy Lau, but the band is soldiering on and keeping her memory alive through the music. More than just kings of the jam, Fungus Amungus is one of the best bands on the local scene now and for the past decade.

POP PUNK ACT: Trophy Wives

For the first time, Best Pop Punk Act is a category and Trophy Wives take home the inaugural honors. Trophy Wives are an appropriate choice for the category because they harness the energy of punk rock and sugarcoat it with the catchy hooks and dynamic songs. Trophy Wives have a couple of releases with 2013 *One Way to Mars* being the most recent. Last summer Trophy Wives were voted to perform on the Vans Warped Tour in Boston. Keep an eye out for Trophy Wives performing in town in the future!

PUNK ACT: Gymshorts

Gymshorts brings it with a three punch combo of surf, punk and garage rock 'n' roll. In the past year Gymshorts have put out their debut record, *No Backsies*, brought the music to the people by doing a full US tour, and attracted many new converts to their brand of rock 'n' roll. Gymshorts shows are chock full of rock 'n' roll mayhem. Compared to some of the other garage and punk bands in town, I think the surf guitar work is what really distinguishes Gymshorts. Check out their debut album, *No Backsies*, and keep a look out for them playing around town soon!

HARDCORE/METAL: Weak Teeth

By: Khrysta Ryan

Their newest album was released in November, and the guys in Weak Teeth have been working hard to spread the sound and message of *So You've Ruined Your Life*. With frantic, fast-paced guitar and self-proclaimed emo vocals, the not-so-cookie-cutter punk band has been redefining the limits of what exactly punk music is. Sewing hardcore punk and emo styles together, Weak Teeth creates politically charged and powerfully performed music.

FEMALE VOCALIST: Ruth Marie (SEXCoffee)

There's no shortage of badassery when it comes to female vocalists around here, and SexCoffee's rockin' frontwoman Ruth Marie is proof of that fact. On their latest album, *Nothing Personal* (see this year's best album winner), Ruth's voice goes from mellow to heavy and commits 100% to the song. It's also worth noting that Ruth's powerful lead vocals are bolstered by spot-on harmonies and oohs and ahhs, courtesy of bassist Sharlene DeNardo and guitarist Robert Dumont. And she isn't just the vocal talent; along with DeNardo, she also writes all the band's lyrics.

MALE VOCALIST: Mark Cutler (Mark Cutler and Men of Great Courage)

The winner in this category, yet again, is Mark Cutler, a man who needs no introduction. But what the hell: Mark has been a mainstay around these parts since the late '70s when he formed Schemers, the band everybody was sure would become the next big thing. In the mid-'80s, he took the helm of The Raindogs, a Boston-based folk-rock act. And now, decades later, he continues to produce great music via his solo material and The Men Of Great Courage. The Schemers' recent induction into the R.I. Music Hall of Fame further solidifies Cutler's place in the annals of music history.

BREAKTHROUGH ACT: Beta Motel

Providence has a lot of great rock bands, but if you're looking for something more danceable, get yourself to a Beta Motel show. Though they haven't been around long, the trio has been gaining momentum in the area with their catchy electro pop. Beta Motel mixes the upbeat synths of Devo and the artsy sensibilities of bands like Gang of Four and the Talking Heads. Do yourself a favor and check

them out at the Providence Public Library on May 22, and be sure to look for some recorded material from the band in the coming months.

ALBUM: SEXCoffee — *Nothing Personal*

SexCoffee has been at it since 2007, and it's apparent that the eight years of playing have paid off for the Providence quartet led by Ruth Marie. Their latest release, *Nothing Personal*, puts forward a healthy dose of hard rock with spot-on musical performances. The heavy riffs and catchy refrains make this album a great choice for '80s metal heads, '90s grunge enthusiasts and 2000s nu-metal fans alike. "Heart on a Shelf" is a rocker that kicks off the album with flair, and "Ready or Not" builds a slow, steady groove into an big chorus. If you want an injection of volume and intensity, *Nothing Personal* is a winner.

TRIBUTE BAND: Dirty Deeds (AC/DC)

Sometimes all you want is a night of yell-out-the-words, old-school rock 'n' roll. Enter Dirty Deeds, the area's pre-eminent AC/DC cover band. It's AC/DC without the high ticket price or any of the unpleasant murder allegations! It's probably quite a task to find musicians who can nail the opening "Thunderstruck" riff or perfect Brian Johnson's hoarse, screeching vocals, but these guys pull it off flawlessly. But it's about way more than fancy fretwork; their live shows are a raucous affair that capture the energy of AC/DC's stadium concerts (and occasionally make use of Angus Young's schoolboy outfit).

HIP-HOP ACT: Symmetry

By: Caitlin Ardito

Symmetry approaches hip-hop with a minimalistic and modern artistic flair. His animated spoken word style of rapping paired with his strong vocals over bare-bones melodic riffs and easy-riding beats piques listeners' interest and quickly turns them to fans. The North Providence native emerged onto the scene in 2009 with the release of his first self-titled full-length album alongside Ryan Lewis, producer and musician currently of the hip-hop duo, Macklemore and Ryan Lewis. After six years of writing and producing, Symmetry produced and released *Junky*. The solo project reached its Kickstarter funding goal in a mere six hours.

EDM DJ: DJ DubLN

By: Llewelyn Dior

A Providence Native, DJ DubLn (real name Rob Murphy) is a founding member of the Afrosonic collective, which describes its sound as "global soul music." He is curator and resident DJ of Soul Teknology, a soulful dance movement that takes flight at local venues such as hipster standby The Salon and The Parlour. In conjunction with his crew's mission to spread positivity to the dance floor, DubLn's mixes tend to feature uplifting, spirited afrobeat (a blend of African, jazz, soul and funk music) tunes as well as classic soul/r&b cuts — tracks range from Stevie Wonder to Fela Kuti.

CLUB DJ: Ty Jesso

It may surprise some readers that 2015's best local club DJ is responsible for sending everyone on the

dance floor back in time, to a place where Motown was king. Indeed, Ty Jesso's signature sound is that of a Johnny Rocket's music catalog on steroids. He's in the unique position of being the go-to guy for events ranging from retro nights at local hot spots all the way to father-daughter dances. Ty Jesso is currently a resident DJ at Dusk (his nights there are called Soul Power). There you can find him spinning ample danceable funk, soul and r&b oldies.