

# IN TRIBUTE

## Great shows, great prices (and dinner)

By **MICHAEL COUSINEAU**  
*New Hampshire Sunday News*

**I**F A MEMBER of the tribute band Jovi forgets the words to any Bon Jovi songs, he simply can listen to the crowd.

"They know all of them," said guitarist Rich Antonelli, his band's equivalent to Richie Sambora in the mega-group Bon Jovi.

"There have been shows where the crowds have been louder than us, louder than the music," he said from his home last week in Greenville, R.I. "You can sing out of key and nobody would know. They're so loud."

Jovi is one of six tribute bands performing at Meadowbrook in Gilford this year. A Queen tribute group will play at the Capitol Center for the Arts in Concord on April 10.

Tribute bands are gaining popularity. Ric Waldman, the Capitol Center's marketing director, recently went to New York City to preview possible shows to book. He talked with agents for three different Led Zeppelin tribute shows.

"We're certainly looking at booking tribute shows as we move forward," said Waldman, hoping to repeat the success of last year's Pink Floyd Experience.

"Part of it is generational," he said. "The baby-boom generation makes up such a large segment" — about 60 percent — of the venue's audience, he said.

In addition, "What we're definitely seeing is there's a growing interest among surprisingly younger audiences in rock music from the '70s and '80s," he said.

So if your venue is too small to book the real thing, then offer a tribute band. The ticket price

is right for many people.

"It's a huge difference, the cost of a Billy Joel ticket and seeing 'The Strangers,'" said Chris Lockwood, Meadowbrook's director of marketing.

The cost of a Billy Joel concert ticket in Milwaukee ranges from \$39.50 to \$95 without fees, according to Ticketmaster. A \$40 ticket covers "The Strangers" concert and a catered dinner in a room for around 150 people.

"You're not packed in with 20,000 people," Lockwood said.

For Bon Jovi, top tickets ranged from \$99.50 in Omaha to \$210 in Las Vegas without fees, according to Ticketmaster. At Meadowbrook, Jovi tickets sell for \$45 with dinner.

"Most venues we play, they're charging \$5 to \$10 to get in," Antonelli said. Jovi also will play a gig at the Boston Billiard Club in Nashua on Feb. 21. A \$5 cover charge starts at 8 p.m. for the 9:30 p.m. performance.

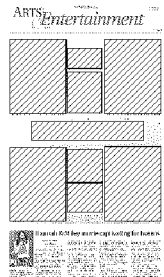
The band — with members from Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut — is starting to book shows outside New England.

Lead singer Joe Ventura has the near-dead-on looks of the real-life Jon Bon Jovi.

"He'll get double looks and stares and people think it might be him," said Antonelli, 37, now playing in his second Bon Jovi tribute band.

And forget about wigs. "Everybody's real," he said, adding that Ventura had to pull on his hair on stage to prove its authenticity.

And people don't believe the Richie



Sambora look-alike is named Rich, or called Richie by band mates on stage.

Antonelli has seen Bon Jovi at least five times live but has never met the band.

"You do a lot of watching live videos," said Antonelli, who started playing drums around age 12. "How do they set up their songs in their set lists? ... How they interact?"

He said there's hundreds of Bon Jovi tribute bands around the world and doesn't think the real band would mind. "You're basically promoting them," he said.

(A message left with Bon Jovi's record company wasn't returned.)

At **Meadowbrook**, a Jimmy Buffet tribute band was slated to play last night. Other bands over the next few months will belt out the music of The Eagles, Aerosmith and the Rolling Stones.

"The winter (concert) series itself is becoming more popular," Lockwood said, adding second shows could be added for some tribute acts.

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**RICH ANTONELLI**

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