

MUSIC NOTE

Kurt & Helen Band | *By Pamela Brown*



Helen and Kurt Cihl of the Kurt & Helen Band



Photos courtesy of the Kurt & Helen Band

From left to right: Tim DeHuff, Rafe Klein, Kurt & Helen Cihl, Joe Izzo, John DaCruz, and Ray Simonelli.

Writing love songs and performing together creates the perfect harmony for married couple Kurt and Helen Cihl.

"Being married makes it easy. We bounce ideas off each other. Every day I come home and I'm so happy," said Kurt, one part of the Kurt & Helen Band. Helen agrees. "We really get along. A lot of people say, 'I want what Kurt and Helen have' because we sing love songs and we write them," she said. "Most rewarding are the fans that come to see us, the blending of Kurt's and my voices as musicians, and people saying to us, 'Your love songs have touched us.' It's all about love. You can't go wrong with love and singing the notes beautifully to convey the message."

Married for 15 years after meeting in choir and forming a band in 2010, the couple, who call Redding home, is known as one of the leading American country rock bands on the Fairfield County music scene. "The recognition is awesome. We love it," said Kurt. Dynamic and high-energy, their music is hard-driving country rock and roll that incorporates folk and blues in their purest forms and powerful compositions centered on love that often incorporate the couple's story.

After meeting producer Michael Mugrage, guitarist from the American pop rock band Orleans, at High Ground Productions Sound Studio, based in Redding, Helen and Kurt performed for him and the rest is history. In 2019 they released "Snakeskin Boots" EP, recently releasing the title track's music video. They're currently working on a full-length album. "Our music fills the whole gamut. They're not sappy love songs that make you cry. They're optimistic songs that make you think," said Kurt.

One of their songs, "Hopin' Tomorrow", was inspired by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Kurt & Helen are backed by Tim DeHuff (guitar), John DaCruz (bass), Bill Nollman (rhythm guitar), and Barry Ulrich (drums). They are often joined by accomplished musicians with decades of professional credits who have shared the stage with icons such as Eric Clapton, the Rolling Stones, and Buddy Guy.

After living in the Fairfield area, the couple's musical life blossomed after moving to Redding in 2007. "We wanted a quiet place to work on our music," said Helen, an art teacher at Holland Hill Elementary School in Fairfield. "We wanted to get some new roots. We love coming home to our little sanctuary and being creative," said Kurt. "And then going out to sing," finished Helen.

A memorable place for them is the now-shuttered Georgetown Saloon where they enjoyed live music and performed. "We happened upon it. It looked like a nice place to go, so lo and behold we walk in and there's Open Mic," said Helen. "We collaborated with a lot of those musicians down there. We met our guitar player there who's been with us since then. That's really been the root of the music that we're singing now and how I became a classical singer turned into a country rocker."

Kurt added, "It was the kind of place where Keith Richards popped in. Jose Feliciano would always stop in. It gave Helen and me a really cool place to hang out. And that's where we got Helen rockin'."

Redding is also featured in their videos. Look carefully and you'll recognize John Read Road in "Snakeskin Boots" and Maple Hill Farm in "Who's That Girl." The cover image of

"Hopin' Tomorrow" was shot in town. "We found all these treasures right here," said Kurt.

Their musical backgrounds belie their rock vibe. Helen, who has fifteen years of classical training, was inspired by her mother who performed at the Metropolitan Opera. "I grew up with her singing opera. My family all sang and played instruments," said Helen who also plays guitar. Meeting Kurt was her opportunity to try singing rock. "I sing the folk end of this band so that's where my classical training comes in," she said. Kurt added, "She sings a lot of the ballads. I'm the one that comes in with the hard drive rock and soul."

Kurt's interest in music began in third grade, singing in the choir at his public elementary school. "Helen wanted to form a band, and I was always in a band in high school and college and a builder by trade, so I always had music playing." Both studied at the Neighborhood Music School in New Haven where they learned unique harmonies.

Kurt and Helen want to share love with audiences. "I want them to come away feeling better about themselves by watching another couple enjoy each other and perform their craft with joy. We get a lot of people who are smiling and clapping," said Kurt. "They're dancing and singing," interjected Helen. "Music makes us happy. We bring together people, and that fires us up. It's a lot of fun," added Kurt. ■

You can see Kurt & Helen Band in person on September 30 at the First Church of Christ Congregational Artisan Fair from 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. To learn more, visit kurtandhelenband.com