

Classic Albums Live's name says it all

A DIFFERENT TRIBUTE ACT: Band plays album track for track, note for note

In Concert

Classic Albums Live

Where: Tomorrow at 9:30 p.m.

When: Commodore Ballroom

Tickets: \$17.50 at Ticketmaster

BY TOM HARRISON
MUSIC REPORTER

Here's something else to blame on The Rolling Stones.

Craig Martin was in a van on his way to a gig. He was in a Rolling Stones tribute band but aping the Stones wasn't getting them anywhere.

"It was terrible," Martin recalls. "We didn't look like The Stones but we could play. We never made any money but we had fun."

Somebody played the Stones' *Exile On Main St.* on the van's stereo. Martin became keen to perform a song from the album.

Before long, he wanted to do a side of the album. By the time the van arrived at the gig, there was a bright light shining in his eyes.

Classic Albums Live was born.

It's a simple idea. Tribute bands aren't new but Martin isn't parading a tribute band. He's replicating an album, track for track, sound for sound, note for note.

Martin's various bands have presented 30 albums, The Eagles' *Hotel California*, Wings' *Band on the Run*, The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club*

Band, Queen's *Night at the Opera*, Bob Marley's *Legend*.

He started with Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*, the same album he'll be presenting at the Commodore.

"We do whatever it takes to present the shows to the audience."

If this means bringing along alarm clocks, as the Floyd album demands, Martin takes alarm clocks. No backing tapes for him.

"You have to know the album like it's part of your DNA," he insists. Learning an album requires six weeks of careful study. "We crawl inside the record."

Then Martin goes out to find the proper musicians. He's gone through 200 and knows within five minutes if a musician can cut it. Thus his Pink Floyd band is radically different from his Marley band.

"My real art is finding the right person for the job," he says.

Although he's presented 200 shows since the series began, not everything has worked.

"We try to take a few chances. It might not result in big sales but it adds to our credibility."

"We've never had a record we can't do, but there have been ones that nearly broke us — Queen's *Night at the Opera*."

What constitutes a classic is a decision Martin characterizes as a "no-brainer." They will have timeless appeal.

"The fact that they were made at a time when the music came first," is the key.

"That time was magical and won't happen again."

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Classic Albums Live bands have performed 30 albums, from *Hotel California* to *Night at the Opera*.