

**Whitesidewalls together again**

**By Leticia Gonzales**
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— If you grew up in Mankato in the 1970s and 1980s and were regulars at the Kato Ballroom, you probably remember dancing to the doo-wop tunes of The Whitesidewalls Rock ’n’ Roll Revue.
While the band has been playing periodically at the Kato Ballroom over the last few decades, many of its original founding band members were not present. But now the group has come back together and has been performing across the Midwest — and once again in Mankato.
**1950s craze**
The Whitesidewalls date back to 1971 when Pat Brown, also known as “Hound Dog,” founded the group that March. The name, said Brown, is “ reminiscent of the big white sidewall tires on the cars in the ’50s.”
Even though Brown said he listened to the Beatles growing up, he wanted to play ’50s music after hearing the music of the rock oldies group Sha Na Na.
“Back to the ’50s became the craze, and everyone was doing it,” he said.
The band held their first rehearsals in Brown’s kitchen in Forest Lake and quickly found gigs in small bars, ballrooms and at high school dances.
By the summer of 1972, the band had a booking agent, Alpha Productions in Bloomington. Brown said that’s when the “nicer gigs started to come in.”
By 1978, they flew to their first big concert and dance in the Super Dome in New Orleans. In the late summer of 1979, they started a series of full summer shows at Valleyfair in Shakopee, which lasted about 10 years.
The Whitesidewalls started playing regularly at the Kato Ballroom in the 1980s. And in 1985, the Minnesota Ballroom Owner’s Association named the Whitesidewalls Ballroom Act of the Year.
But in 1987, Brown said one of the band’s members, Pat Kennedy, forced him out of the group, along with many of the remaining original members. Brown lost the rights to the band’s name, so although the Whitesidewalls were still performing, he was not a part of it and the band had all new members.
Brown spent the next 20 years working for Chrysler, and then for a traveling shoe company. But he never forgot the music or the band.
**Another go round**
Two years ago some of the original band members got together for a reunion concert in Medina.
Then, Brown said, “It all sort of happened at once.”
In February, Brown and the original band members were asked to perform at the “Winter Dance Party 50th Anniversary” Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake to remember the loss of three ’50s musicians, Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper, who died in a plane crash Feb. 3, 1959, after performing at the ballroom.
The Whitesidewalls used to play at the ballroom starting back in 1979 during what Brown said was the Buddy Holly tribute show.
“We had a band member who looked like him (Buddy Holly),” he said. “We went there year after year.”
As if luck wasn’t already on their side, Brown heard news that the rights to his former band’s name, The Whitesidewalls, was up for sale again. He was first in line for the chance to repurchase what he had lost more than 20 years ago.
While the band cycled through more than 40 members and musicians since its inception in 1971, three of its original members have returned to perform. Pat “Hound Dog” Brown plays guitar and is also the band’s musical director, Dave “Swanee” Swanson plays sax and guitar, and Mike “The Wizard” Timmer plays piano for the band.
Other band members include drummer Terry Ferguson, known as “Tony the Hit Man Gambuchi,” and bass player Brad Nelson, known as “Tony the Hit Man’s Younger Twin Brother Gino.”
This year they have been playing regularly at fairs, private parties, ballrooms and other events across Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and South Dakota. The band members, mostly in their late 50s, perform in vintage tuxedos and are accompanied by a sound and light crew.
“When we had an opportunity with this project, everyone said count me in,” said Brown, 59.
**Back to the ballroom**
Despite being separated from the band for so long, Brown stayed connected with Larry Bowers, general manager at the now-called Kato Entertainment Center in Mankato.
Bowers was there when Brown and the original band members from The Whitesidewalls came and went in the 1980s.
“They are good. They can harmonize good; they can play good together,” Bowers said. “And that is what people wanted back then.”
He said the group used to attract about 1,000 people who would come to swing dance to the music during their performances. But once the original band members left the group, the concert-goers dwindled to about 600 people.
Bowers happened to run into Brown shortly before they re-purchased the rights to band’s name and was excited to get the original Whitesidewalls back at the Kato Ballroom.
I knew what their talent was, so I hope they bring some of the old crowd to dance the night away with that special lady,” said Bowers.
Brown said The Whitesidewalls will be playing classic doo-wop songs coupled with the greatest memorable hits from 1954 to 1964, which include tunes from Elvis, Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis and The Righteous Brothers.

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Photos


The Whitesidewalls have gotten back together and will perform at the Kato Entertainment Center Friday.


The Whitesidewalls were popular in the 1970s and 1980s.