

Moving forward with Stuck on Planet Earth

Alternative-rock trio on tour in US for much of March

BY ADAM MARTIN-ROBBINS
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After years grinding it out on the indie music scene, alternative-rock trio Stuck on Planet Earth have their feet firmly planted on the ground, but they're still reaching for the sky.

Bandmates Adam Bianchi (vocals, guitar), Al Capo (vocals, bass) and Andrew Testa (drums) quit their jobs last year and are committed to trying to make a living solely off their music.

"At the end of the day, we want to make a career out of this," said Bianchi over a meal of burgers, fries and Stuck sandwiches, a nod to their frequent patronage, at Cabano's Comfort Food on Keele Street in Concord.

"I don't think it matters, if we're playing stadiums or if we're the biggest band in the world. I think it's just more like; can we make a career of this? Can we do this for the rest of our lives?"

It's been a long road, filled with peaks and valleys, for the Vaughan-based band.

The guys marked their 10th anniversary playing together early last month.

Bianchi, who hails from King City, and Capo, a Woodbridge native, met as high school students at St. Michael's College in Toronto.

They formed a band, dubbed Expo, in their early teens.

In their senior year, the pair invited Testa, a North York native, to join the band as their new drummer.

Shortly afterwards, the band was rechristened Stuck On Planet Earth and embarked on what they dubbed the Backpack Tour.

They'd show up unannounced at high schools across southern Ontario, chosen at random, and videotape themselves performing with acoustic



Photo/Yoshi Cooper

Andrew Testa, Adam Bianchi and Al Capo of alternative-rock trio Stuck on Planet Earth have been playing together for a decade. The band is planning a major North American tour this summer.

guitars. Then they'd post the videos on YouTube, then in its infancy.

At first, they were being "kicked off" the property, but eventually it caught on and students began "demanding" performances at their schools, Capo said.

Six months later, they released an EP and it "snowballed from there," Capo said.

The band became a mainstay on the Toronto circuit and began getting airplay on 102.1 The Edge, thanks in part to then-host George Stroumboulopoulos.

And they kept on producing EPs. Their latest one, released in 2012, enjoyed a measure of success on iTunes' alternative charts. But they decided to shift focus and started putting out singles, on the advice of their long-time producer Fil Bucchino.

In 2013, the single 'Fast Forward' soared to the top of the charts on CBC Radio 3 and The Verge, on SiriusXM Canada and stayed there for eight weeks.

It was also the point at which they started making some money, Capo noted.

That same year, the trio entered

SiriusXM's Rock The Grey Cup contest and wound up performing during the half-time show of a Toronto Argonauts game at the Rogers Centre.

"It was kind of crazy, we played to like 20,000 people," Capo said. "At that point, that show was probably the craziest experience."

Little did they know, things would get even "crazier."

Last May, they opened for former Stone Temple Pilots frontman Scott Weiland during Canadian Music Week. He would die seven months later.

"That was kind of special," Bianchi said. "We were kind of honoured to have been able to play with one of our heroes before he went."

Then, in September, the band was tapped to perform during Riot Fest at Downsview Park, sharing a bill with the likes of Motorhead and Weezer.

"We were on the bill with some guys we grew up only ever dreaming about playing with. So even just being on the same show poster as some of those guys was a big deal for us," Capo said.

They followed that by opening for Finger 11 in Guelph.

But, they admit, the ride hasn't always been so heady.

"It's like a f***in' rollercoaster man. There's a lot of ups and downs," Capo said. "We're lucky that we've been able to sustain ourselves and make a good living, right now. But we've also learned you can never really get to comfortable in this industry because the moment you get comfortable, you get f***in' thrown off."

Through it all, their goal has remained unchanged — create songs that can stand the test of time.

The bandmates are optimistic about their new batch of songs and about what lies ahead.

SOPE is touring the eastern United States for much of March. They'll be back home in early May to perform during Canadian Music Week.

Then they plan to embark on a North American tour this summer.

PowerStream merger takes big step forward

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LOCAL FACTS

Vaughan holds 45 per cent share in PowerStream; share in new company to be 21 per cent

Cost to Vaughan of purchasing HydroOne Brampton \$56 to \$62 million, depending on closing costs

Projected annual savings for homeowners \$24 to \$35, but not realized in first five to six years

Vaughan council voted unanimously in favour of the merger

The at-times controversial merger and acquisition deal involving PowerStream and two other municipally controlled electricity distribution companies as well as Hydro One Brampton — that sparked friction in Markham and Hamilton, but flowed smoothly in Vaughan — is taking a big step forward.

Representatives from PowerStream (jointly owned by Vaughan, Markham and Barrie), Mississauga's Enersource Corporation, Horizon Utilities Corporation (jointly owned by Hamilton and St. Catharines) and provincially owned Hydro One Brampton were slated to meet Thursday to sign the legal agreements to create Ontario's second largest electrical distribution company, serving nearly a million customers.

"The merger gives us the scale to provide savings to consumers, increase shareholder value and allows us to make investments in technology and innovation, which is extremely important in a changing marketplace," Vaughan Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua, who serves as chair of PowerStream's board of directors, said in an interview Wednesday.

"It positions us as leaders in the province of Ontario and, from a vision point of view, it realizes the importance of consolidating the industry in a way that it can be more efficient, more flexible and provide better services to consumers."

The merger and acquisition deal will see the three municipally owned utility companies merge into one firm, then purchase Hydro One Brampton from the province for about \$607 million to create a new company, being referred to as MergeCo. until a new name is forged.

The projection is that "synergies" created by the merger will lead to savings for homeowners of \$24 to \$35 annually on distribution charges, which make up about 20 per cent of the hydro bill.

But those savings won't be seen in the first five to six years.

Whether or not customers' overall hydro bill will go down depends on what happens with electricity rates, set by the Ontario Energy Board, but lower distribution charges would help offset any rate hikes, which are expected for the next several years.

Merger discussions began in earnest early last year following an announcement by Queen's Park that it intended to privatize up to 60 per cent of Hydro One.

In order for the merger of the municipally owned utilities to go ahead, it required a favourable vote from all the municipal councils involved and, at one point late last year, it appeared the deal might get short-circuited.

While elected officials in Vaughan, Barrie, Mississauga and St. Catharines unanimously endorsed the deal, councils in Hamilton and Markham were divided — the final votes in those two cities were 10-4 and 7-6 respectively.

Before the merger and acquisition deal is finalized, it must get regulatory approval from the Ontario Energy Board (OEB).

That could take up to six months, according to Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti, who serves as vice-chair of the PowerStream board of directors.

When it's up and running, the new firm will have corporate headquarters in Mississauga, a utility head office in Hamilton and a so-called innovation head office in Vaughan as well as service centres in Markham and five other municipalities.

-With files by Amanda Persico

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