

Ash & the Endings casts aside ego and genre boundaries

By Eden Shamy

Ash and the Endings is better than a one-night stand.

Going on its fourth year, the Austin five-piece supersedes the ego that restrains partnership. Their dedication to creativity and performance forms a music machine that blends indie, psychedelia and even bluegrass into an ever expanding surprise. Within the bare brick walls of the Mohawk, the band showcased their alternative style and a few gems among their 35 unreleased works.

Bubbly frontwoman Ashton Irene Chase, 29, charted an unpredictable course on the local stage. She switched seamlessly between a peppy, breathy cadence and a visceral growl. Her dancing embodied the music from moment to moment: hip shaking, flourishing her hands, kicking her black boots, and kneeling to stare intensely into the crowd.

“This is the part of my life that makes me feel the most alive,” Chase said before the show.

She stood side-by-side with her husband William Kody Wahlert, 30, who appeared reserved and effortless on lead guitar. Josean Rodriguez, 32, jumped and headbanged, his scorching red bass bumping on recent single “Victor’s Trap.” Jamie Foster, 50, commanded the drum kit with precisely explosive energy, while Conor Kelch, 30, cast spacey keyboard magic.

Starting Over

A love for Julie Andrews and high school theater helped Chase discover her knack for singing. She met Kelch and Rodriguez at St. Edwards University in Austin where they studied theater. Halfway through college, she transitioned from acting into set design and got a part-time job at a flower shop.

“I never really thought I’d be onstage again,” Chase said.

Rodriguez spent much of his adolescence practicing guitar, drums and keys in his bedroom after watching Van Halen *Live Without a Net* for the first time. In school though, he focused on acting.

In 2015, he moved to New York City where he pursued acting and fronted the band Private Siren. Kelch joined him there a few years later.

By 2020, Chase decided to bring music back into her life. She met Wahlert during her first gig as a backup vocalist at One to One bar.

When the pandemic hit, Chase, Kelch and Rodriguez reckoned with their futures. Joining in the Great Resignation, Chase quit her job and launched her own flower shop called The Spotted Poppy. Then she began scouting for musicians to start a jazz band.

“It was scary,” Chase said, “but I’ll never look back. My life is flowers and music. Working for myself has given me the rest and freedom to pour into our band.”

Meanwhile in New York, Rodriguez quit singing for Private Siren. He and Kelch returned to Austin in 2021, and Chase deftly invited them into her band. At a gig, she recruited Jamie Foster’s articulate jazz drumming.

Twenty years older, Foster grew up on his mother’s Tahitian and Middle Eastern dance rhythms. His obsession for air-drumming to Led Zeppelin led him to a real drum kit at 19. Under the mentorship of George Edwards, who studied with renowned drummer Freddie Gruber, Foster learned every style.

Blending Sound

Ash and the Endings’ band practices rapidly transcended jazz covers as they sought to bring in original material. Rodriguez brings in 60s and 70s rock. Chase experiments with 80s new wave, while Kelch adds 2000s indie.

“This kind of band has been very few and far between,” Foster said. “I use every avenue that I’ve been down in this band.”

The band survived a first gig performing on the floor of the Carousel Lounge. Now performing nearly every week in Austin, stage anxiety dwells in the past. The group’s first tour last fall traveled through Arizona, Nevada and California, bringing the band even closer together.

At the Mohawk, Chase wore flared snakeskin pants, a fringe vest, teal eyeshadow and a rocking 70s hairstyle. She looked fit for an even larger stage, but her voice and her presence proved it.

“[Her voice] is enough to shut up any of the haters that are men, because it has enough balls to silence anybody,” said Phoenix Knight, a friend of the band and drummer for NSFWHO. “But also, she has the softness of some of the prettiest voices known to man.”

The band’s self-titled EP released in June 2022. Upbeat tracks “Rosa” and “Molly” interweave flickering lead and rhythm guitars beneath playful yet commanding vocals. Delicate cymbals punctuate fluid, reverberating tracks.

“George” undulates and intensifies into a psychedelic finale of reeling siren-like guitar and hypnotic keys that create a sense of catastrophe.

Each band member collaborates in the song-writing process, permitting the musicians to explore novel and weird ideas without saying ‘no.’ Lately, they’ve been tinkering with a song reminiscent of Crosby, Stills and Nash while also developing a cumbia song.

Chase, Kelch and Rodriguez attributed their collaborative efforts and empathy to their theater backgrounds.

“You learn that to put on a show, it takes all these people to make it happen,” Chase said. “And we appreciate each other's creativity because we would all be full time musicians if we could.”

Foster, who mostly works as a session drummer, boasts two decades of touring experience and worked with countless musical groups. He compared joining a band to being in a marriage-like relationship.

“I’ve been very freelance. I hate to put it this way, but with one-night stands you get the best of so many things,” Foster explained. “You get in a band with somebody... all of a sudden their personalities start coming out, and you realize this person is just not right for me.”

He rarely makes commitments like he has to Ash and the Endings, but he knows the shoe fits.

“I forget constantly that they haven't been doing this for like 30 years,” he said. “I’m constantly blown away.”

Rodriguez goes further, expressing that each member of the band wields the powerful ability to put listeners in a trance.

“There's been countless times where I'll be playing in this band, and I'm just so wrapped up in what they're doing,” Rodriguez said. “They've all put a spell on me.”