

# Mill City Rockers

## Local biker band earns spot among elite, for rugged blue-collar Rock 'n' Roll

**J**ohn Florio says he's a rich man, "but I ain't got money."

The National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences Committee has placed his Mill City Rockers on the Official Ballot for the 2006 Grammy Awards in six categories, including Record of the Year for their latest CD, *Big Cloud Thunder*, recorded at Joe Moody's Danger Multitrack Studio, and Song of the Year for the title track. But that's not why the 60-year-old lead guitarist says he's a rich man. His wealth stems from sharing the stage with the other Mill City guitarist, his son, Anthony, who joined the band less than two years ago.

"To me it's a gift. It's not something that happens to everybody," he says. "I'm sure there are others.

**By Jim Vickers**

But to get it to this level, to be acknowledged by the highest musical court in the world is unbelievable. It's unbelievable to experience this with my son."

It also appears, according to Florio, they are the first father-son rock 'n' roll guitarists ever nominated together. Florio says there was a father-son tandem in a polka band once, but obviously they weren't guitarists.

Along with the Florios in Mill City are drummer John Desaulniers, vocalist and

bass player Jim St. Pierre, as well as operationally-trained singer Kerry Cudmore.

But the father-son hook isn't what got Mill City passed the first hurdle in the Grammy process. Submitted by National Academy voting member Al Gomes of Big Noise Records, Mill City likely earned their second consecutive ballot based on a throw-back rock sound reminiscent of hard-hitting, blue-collar bands such as early Aerosmith (*Get Your Wings*), Black Sabbath, and a southern hint of Skynyrd.

St. Pierre handles much of the singing with deep vocals likened to a Glenn Danzig and, coupled with heavy bass-driven undercurrents, thundering guitar riffs and steady percussion, the Mill City Rockers have emerged during the last 15 years as a rough-hewn biker band. They regularly play Laconia Bike Week and local haunts such as Portsmouth's Steel Horse Saloon, Bristol's Common Pub, and The Blackstone Club in Cumberland.

The places Mill City play, and the sound they bring on the road, very much reflect who they are as individuals. John Florio has worked as a boiler operator since his Navy days during the Vietnam War, Jimmy St. Pierre earns as a pipefitter, and John Desaulniers works as a sheet metal fabricator.

The group also rides.



**OFFSPRING:** John & Anthony Florio first ever father-son guitar duo to make Grammy ballot.

John Florio and Jim St. Pierre own Harley Davidsons, Desaulniers has Yamaha, and Kerry Cudmore has the wind blow her long blond locks on an Italian-made Ducati.

"A lot of people in the biker world just love our music," Florio says. "It fits their train of thought. What I like about bikers is that they ain't playin' no games. They're being themselves and if you're phoney, they'll reject you in a heartbeat."

These are musicians with dirt under their fingernails, grit in their guts, and music with roots harkening back to Chuck Berry and the British Invasion, old school.

Yeah, old school. One wouldn't be wise to label them "Retro," with the pop connotation that moniker carries. But the musical underpinnings of the '60s, '70s, and early '80 are prevalent in today's Alt-rock environment. The sounds are merely diluted by contemporary emo-screamo gimmicks.

According to Florio: "Rock has gone so far away from where it came from, there's only one place for it to go....back."

And, *Big Cloud Thunder* does take you back.

Opening with "Fuck You," a song said to be about a love affair between a sea captain and mermaid, the sex-laced lyrics are packaged in metal sound, deep vocals, power bass and hard guitar riffs. The title track, "Big Cloud Thunder," a song about our home, the Earth, and rock 'n' roll, showcases what Mill City does best, hard-knocking, bass-heavy rock that stirs the blood.

When Cudmore takes lead on vocals, Mill City doesn't miss a beat, they simply roll from power to sultry. And, it's all good because Cudmore is no pussycat.

Instead, she amps up the vamp.

The Mill City Rockers have cleared the first hurdle toward a Grammy two years in a row now, the cut to five finalist is expected Dec. 8, and the field is large, tough and comprised of the world's finest musicians. One person remarked that getting on the ballot is like being a grain of sand on a beach. Maybe so. But Mill City Rockers are on the beach, and there's a whole lot of bands that would like to be basking along side them.

**Other Rhode Islanders making the 2006 ballot include:**

Multi-platinum country superstar Billy Gilman Dino Club (featuring Mark Cutler, Scott Duhamel and Bob Giusti) Legendary R&B / rock 'n' roll band Dave Howard & the Highrollers Big Noise (Al Gomes and Cynthia Roberge for Best Long Form Music Video for "Billy Gilman : The Making of Everything and More") Big Noise (Al Gomes, A. Michelle and Mardo Atoyán for Best Recording Package for Best Friend Solitude's 'Remains,' 1Enemy3's '1Enemy3,' Cecile Clement Grobe's 'Transformation,' and Liquid Harvest's 'Sleepin' In My Shoes') Classical pianist Cecile Clement Grobe Hard rock band Best Friend Solitude Record producers Tony Ricci, Joe Moody, George Dussault and Christine Lilli Video director Alec Asten (Best Long Form Music Video for 'Billy Gilman : The Making of Everything and More')



**THROWBACKS:** MCR flourishes with a brand of roots-based rock reminiscent of early Aerosmith and metal bands such as Black Sabbath.