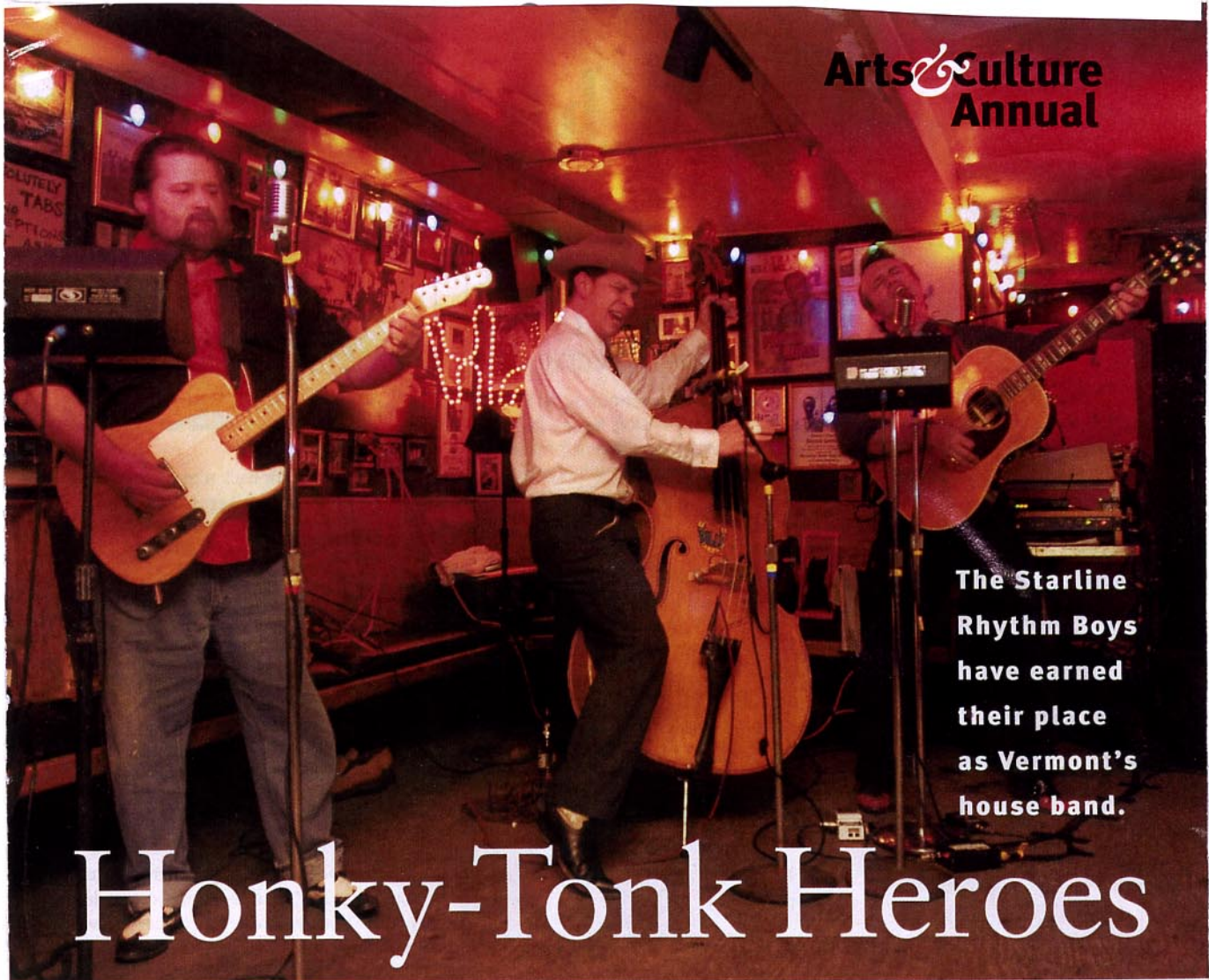


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The Starline
Rhythm Boys
have earned
their place
as Vermont's
house band.

Honky-Tonk Heroes

Story by Joseph Healy / Photos by Jack Rowell

CALL IT A COLLISION COURSE that ended in sonic fusion. We begin this story in the mid-1990s, when the members of the Vermont-based band Buck and the Black Cats reached an impasse and decided that their touring had reached its grueling end. At least some members decided that. For their part, bass-player Billy Bratcher and guitarist Big Al Lemery—they were brought together through an ad for a rock-a-billy guitarist that Billy and the other Black Cats had placed in the *Burlington Free Press* in 1995 and to which Al responded—knew they weren't done gigging. Billy grew up and

performed for years in the Bennington area; he and Al both played around Saratoga and Albany and Hoosic Falls, New York. "At the Brass Rail!" Billy remembers about the small-town Hoosic scene in those 1980s days. "You started at eleven, and played until four a.m. The beer was flying, as well as fists in the parking lot. It was a real honky-tonk down by the river." And though they never played together during those southern Vermont/eastern New York days, Billy and Al clicked as bandmates in the Black Cats.

After the band disbanded, Billy went on the road for a while with other acts, and →

(Above) The Boys mix it up at one of their favorite Vermont venues, Montpelier's Charley O's.

