

Pure Platinum pumps up the volume on New Year's

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Musician Jimmy Wells' grand piano is his pride and joy. While he facetiously jests that he'll be giving up moderation this New Year's Eve, he definitely won't be going without his daily piano practices. Seated at the ivory keys, he pulls out old sheet music to sight-read or plays tunes as they come into his mind — anything to keep his technique up. Sometimes his wife will even accompany him with a song or dance.

"There aren't many things I like better," says Wells of this precious time. "It just puts a good feeling over me when I'm playing. You get in the zone sometimes, not thinking about anything in particular, just playing away."

In 2002, Wells connected with guitarist Jimbo Smith after moving to Tallahassee from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Their duo gradually grew from a duet to a five-piece band. The former owner of the old Silver Slipper nightclub dubbed them Pure Platinum and the name stuck.

For the past 15 years, the band has been comprised of Wells and lead vocalist Lisa Watson, bassist and vocalist Mike Boukas and drummer and vocalist Bobby Jett. Wells says they're excited to be the selected headliners for the Monticello Opera House's New Years Eve Celebration this year.

"I always look forward to new venues," says Wells, who says the band has played all types of special events from wedding receptions to private parties.

Their music catalog spans decades. Wells says they strive to provide music for everyone and will tailor their set list depending upon their audience whether it's a night of jazz music or a blend of hits from Taylor Swift to Meghan Trainor.

Personally, Wells is a fan of older music though he learned from an early age how to play a variety of styles. He started on the piano at age five when his parents moved the instrument right into his room. After taking six years of lessons, he started picking up tunes by ear and later in life even taught his father to play a few notes.

He looked up to pianists like Floyd Cramer, whose claim to fame was a song called "Last Date." For Wells, this song epitomizes the country piano style that he attempts to duplicate in his own performances. He also relishes in a musical flourish called the mordent, which uses a lot of fingers in rapid succession to create a trilling sound.

Wells idolizes accomplished players like Chuck Leavell, who once performed with the Allman Brothers before the Rolling Stones. Wells incorporates a similar bluesy style in his own playing, similar to ragtime and very much influenced by his youth in Louisiana. Practicing hand exercises has helped him to attain and maintain his own skills, even when the piano doesn't want to cooperate.

"Sometimes the piano is not easy to get along with especially when you're trying to do something you don't know," says Wells. "It becomes tricky trying to figure it out [music] note for note when you're used to it all falling into place. Once you get something together though and it sounds the way it's supposed to sound it's a very rewarding



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Pure Platinum will perform New Year's Eve at the Monticello Opera House. JIMMY WELLS

feeling."

Wells was the keyboardist for numerous Tallahassee-based bands prior to Pure Platinum, as well as serving as the assistant music director and pianist at Unity of Tallahassee. Additionally, he has been a guest performer at the Soppchoppy Opry and the house pianist at the Glen Arven Country Club in Thomasville, Georgia. The chemistry he shares with Pure Platinum however is clear when even the most challenging song requests are thrown their way.

"We've been playing together for so long if someone hollers out a song and

any of us have heard it, normally we can wing it and do a fine job," says Wells.

Their most requested song is "Mustang Sally," but they've been known to play all kinds of music so long as its danceable. Some favorites include hits by Aretha Franklin, Jerry Lee Lewis, and the Doobie Brothers.

Wells believes the most important duty of as a band is to get the crowd moving. He remarks that while Steely Dan is one of his favorite bands and he can appreciate the ability it takes to play their music, "it just clears the dance floor and that doesn't work for us."

If you go

What: New Year's Eve Celebration with Pure Platinum

When: 8 p.m.-midnight, Monday, Dec. 31

Where: Monticello Opera House, 185 West Washington St, Monticello

Cost: \$65 Dinner and Drink Package, \$30 Dessert and Dancing Package

Contact: For more information, call 850-997-4242 or visit <http://monticellooperahouse.org/>.

"We're lively when we play," says Wells. "You've got to have some energy and enthusiasm. It's either engine shut down or full on."

For their New Year's Eve Celebration, Wells says Pure Platinum will hardly take a break as they pump up the crowd. Those who attend the event have the option of two packages, one beginning with a dinner at 8 p.m. and the other getting right to the dancing at 9 p.m.

A champagne toast will take place before Pure Platinum rings in the New Year with Auld Lang Syne. Wells says they'll most likely play a hit like "Shout" to liven everyone up right afterwards and start everyone dancing on the right foot for 2019.

"I think music is something that makes people happy," says Wells. "It brings out the best in them."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).