"She's A Legend"

Ben Panko
It's a dreary Saturday afternoon, and Alex McDilda is sitting in an empty farmer's market in Shockoe Bottom. Hunched over an acoustic guitar, he alternates between belting out emotions and joking with his bandmates around him. "She's a Legend" is warming up for the biggest performance of its career thus far, opening for Aaron Carter, and when these four guys take the stage later that night, jokes and banter are replaced with kicks, jumps and sweat. It was over in a flash, but two burning conclusions were left: "She's a Legend" is a band going somewhere, and senior Alex McDilda is Richmond's own rockstar.

For a lead singer, McDilda is a remarkably soft-spoken man. Indeed, at first glance, McDilda seems an unlikely candidate for rockstardom. He is an international studies major, an Eagle Scout and a self-described "old-school hopeless romantic" with a penchant for wearing bowties and a wish to work for the U.S. State Department after graduation. But in conversation, McDilda is relaxed and funny, with a confident personality clearly suited for the stage. Even more importantly, he is passionate about his band and his songs. "It means a lot, because I write all the music," he said, "I've never been a 'Dear diary' kind of guy, so I like to get my songs out there. It's been such a good outlet for me and the other guys."

"She's a Legend" has been together for about two years, but Alex McDilda has been making music since he was 16. With his high school buddy Sean Flynn, now the lead guitarist in "She's a Legend," McDilda formed an acoustic band named Grace Kelly, after the actress he considers to be the "most beautiful woman to have ever lived." After years of casual gigging in the back of his dad's photography studio in Roanoke, Va., the two decided to become more serious about their music, and Flynn met bassist and drummer Joe Fecondo and Kramer Anderson at his school, Longwood University. They formed a band in late 2011 with a name inspired by a main topic of their songwriting - women. "Each girl that we've collectively written about is kind of a legend in her own way," McDilda said, and he chucked up his plethora of songs to being "easily smitten."

"We were begging to play anybody that would have us," McDilda said of the band's early months. Besides his father's studio, "She's a Legend" played at a hodge-podge of small bars and clubs before being taken on by the daughter of his dental hygienist who also happened to be a music management student as a project. "She's taken the bull by the horns and contacted all these places," McDilda said, "So we're playing around Richmond a lot." Besides opening for Aaron Carter, "She's a Legend" has played several times at Kingdom, the Canal Club and in Roanoke and Farmville, Va.

The dynamic of "She's a Legend" is a confluence of different genres and personalities that results in a unique sound. Fecondo and Anderson are fans of progressive metal, and they give each song a driving but layered foundation. Flynn loves Guns & Roses and other guitar-driven classic rock bands, and he infuses a bluesy, old-school feeling with his licks and solos. Finally, McDilda finishes off the band's sound with his fondness for upbeat pop-punk in the vein of Blink-182, and lyrics inspired by infatuation and heartbreak.

A lot of emotion is wrapped in McDilda's lyrics, with each song conveying the visceral memories of his experiences with love, loss and everything in between. In "Lakeside," he seeks to describe what it's like "falling for the girl you shouldn't." He croons, "I can see that look in your eye. Is this the reason you tell your parents lies? I can feel you thinking 'Shut up, and kiss me.'" Though the verses describe a turbid relationship between the subject and his lover, in the chorus McDilda admits, "In this stereo town, merry-go-round, things are just better when you're around."

"She's a Legend" closed their Oct. 19 show opening for Carter with, "All in All." The song starts with a mellow guitar riff from McDilda and a bluesy melody from Flynn before moving into a driving, but still low-key, beat. Through McDilda's tortured singing, we hear the story of a past girlfriend who cheated on him three times: "Got me stuck between the sheets, now I'm hung out to dry. It's killing me to think about the word goodbye." In the song's chorus, Alex pleads to her, "When I wake up tomorrow, I need all my memories and putting one foot about the future of..." She's a Legend closed its first album, and plans to have its second, "She's a Legend" keeps the energy high through its entire show, with McDilda exhorting a crowd of friends, girlfriends, parents and others to dance and move close to the stage, and even posing for pictures with them. It's hard not to see a band of good friends with a bright future, and a rockstar frontman.

-BEN PANKO