



Photo provided

The Little River Band, featuring (from left) Wayne Nelson, Ryan Ricks, Chris Marion, Rich Herring and Greg Hind, performs Saturday at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center.

LITTLE RIVER BAND KEEPS ON ROLLING

Group with hits including 'It's a Long Way There' and 'Lady' open Mendel Center season

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO
HP Features Writer

BENTON HARBOR — Wayne Nelson has good reason to believe in second chances.

In 1979, Nelson was the bass player for Jim Messina, who was opening for the Little River Band during a two-week stint up and down the West Coast. At the end of that run, someone from the Little River Band's camp tapped him on the shoulder.

"So I walk over and there's three guys from the band," Nelson says by telephone from his home in Florida. "They said, 'We've been watching you play and sing and we want you to tour with us and possibly be a band member.' And I said no. I turned them down."

Nelson wanted to stay with Messina's band, and while it must have seemed like a sound decision in the moment, it backfired within two months.

"Jim's record didn't do what he expected it to do and he

IF YOU GO

- ▶ **WHAT:** Little River Band
- ▶ **WHEN:** 8 p.m. Saturday
- ▶ **WHERE:** Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor
- ▶ **HOW MUCH:** \$35-\$45
- ▶ **CONTACT:** 927-1221 or www.lmcmainstage.org
- ▶ **ARTIST INFO:** littleriverband.com

disbanded the group," Nelson says. "I sheepishly called the Little River Band in Australia and asked if the job was still open. I got off the phone thinking they're never calling me back. Four months later the phone rings. They're going to Europe and they gave me the job. I really lucked out."

While various members have come and gone in the 34 years since the Kansas-born Nelson joined the Australian super

group, he has remained the lone constant. Originally recruited simply as a bass player, Nelson first lent his vocals to the 1981 tune "The Night Owls," which was a Top 10 hit, and since 2000, has taken over the rich vocal catalogue that include the hits "It's a Long Way There," "Reminiscing," "Lady," "Cool Change," "Lonesome Loser," "Take It Easy On Me" and "Man On Your Mind." All of those songs, along with a few new tracks from the August release "Cuts Like a Diamond," will be on the set list when Little River Band performs Saturday at Lake Michigan College to open the 2013-14 Mendel Center season.

"You never know which song people feel strongly about so all the hits are there," Nelson says. "The crux of the show is the history, the memories and the hit songs. We wouldn't be doing our job if we didn't know that and observe that."

Formed in Melbourne, Australia, in early 1975 by

Glenn Shorrock, Graham Goble, Beeb Birtles, Ric Formosa and Derek Pellicci, Little River Band sold more than 25 million records with 13 U.S. Top 40 hits. The current lineup does not include any of the band's original members. Birtles left in 1983, Goble in 1989, Shorrock in 1991 and Pellicci in 1997. Formosa was the first to leave after two albums in 1976. David Briggs, who left in 1981, replaced him.

Goble's song "Someone's Taken Our History" and Birtles' "Revolving Door" have each vented their displeasure over Nelson-led incarnations of Little River Band. But Nelson, along with current band mates Greg Hind, Chris Marion, Rich Herring and Ryan Ricks, have seemed to take the criticism in stride.

"The band's had a big turnover of people in 38 years," Nelson says. "The No. 1 thing is you have to respect the band. Why we are here is built on

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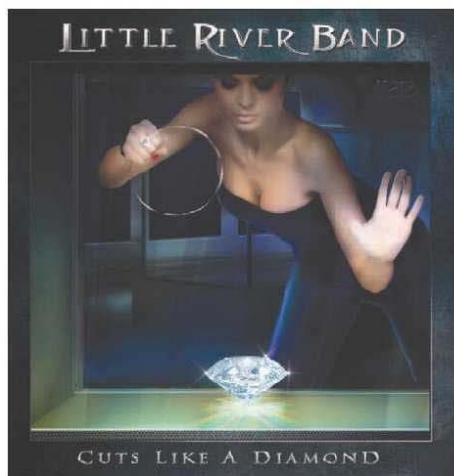


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"The Lost and Lonely," the lead single from Little River Band's "Cuts Like a Diamond," is dedicated to troops stationed worldwide.

LITTLE RIVER

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that foundation. The songs are important. If you don't like them or don't believe in them you don't fit here. There's also got to be some vitality on stage and that's the way this lineup has been put together."

Drama isn't exactly a new thing for a rock band, as Nelson can attest. In fact, tension and politics were part of the reason he was asked to join Little River Band in the first place.

"What I didn't know at the time is that one of the main songwriters was disappointed in how the lead singer was interpreting his songs," Nelson says. "I found out later I was the guy who was going to be singing lead for him."

That, Nelson says, is how "The Night Owls" came to him.

"(Glenn Shorrock) didn't come to rehearsals until the last day to be fresh and we weren't doing new material so there was no reason for him to be here," Nelson says. "But when we were in rehearsals (Graeham Goble) slipped in 'The Night Owls' and said, 'I have a new song and Glenn's not here; why don't you try it?' It morphed within a year to singing lead vocals."

Nelson's Little River

Band has also attracted more positive attention as well. The band was signed to Frontier Records – their first record label in more than a decade – and released "Cuts Like a Diamond." The first single, "The Lost and Lonely," dedicated to the troops all over the world fighting for freedom, has all the elements fans typically expect from a Little River Band song.

"When it came to us the template was there," Nelson says. "We're going to build songs with big vocal choruses and harmonized guitar lines and layers of music like we've done it all along. From there you want something that fits the band's age and perspective and you have to believe in them. This has all of that."

Little River Band will celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2015. Nelson is optimistic that a new studio album will be released that same year, coinciding with the anniversary. For now, however, he's focused on continuing to put on a good show.

"We're not just an old band showing up to play the songs and leave," Nelson says. "We're all about them. We are very conscious about honoring people's memories about those songs. From the neck up we're all still 29."

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