

# Shot Down Music still standing after 9 years

By Jan Engoren

**S**hot Down Music, a New Haven, Connecticut-based country party band, is flying high. The band recently returned home from South Florida, where they played at Johnny Brown's in Delray Beach and at Sharkey's Bar and Grill in Coral Springs over the winter months; they head up north for the summer season in New England.

Founded in 2016 by singer Jeff Iwanicki, 52, the band plays modern country songs as well as cutting-edge tunes and standard country favorites. In addition to Iwanicki, the band includes brothers Bruce Hanock on acoustic guitar and vocals ("the energizer of Shot Down") and Brian Hanock on bass and vocals, David Harmon on lead guitar and vocals, and drummer Kathleen Steahle.

"None of us are fighter pilots," Iwanicki jokes, referring to the name of the band. "We were brainstorming and liked the sound of the name."

Iwanicki has been singing in different groups since the 1990s, in a variety of genres, including traditional rock and rockin' country. Among his musical influences are Johnny Cash, Alabama,



John Denver, Hank Williams, and Willie Nelson as well as newer country singers Luke Combs, Zach Bryan, and Noah Kahan. He appreciates most genres of music, from blues and classic rock to rhythm & blues and hip hop.

Along with many of his bandmates, Iwanicki played at Toad's Place in New Haven, the Webster theater in Hartford, Connecticut, CBGBs in New York City, and other venues from Maine to Pennsylvania. They play often in the Connecticut casinos at Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun and at venues on Nantucket.

Although Iwanicki didn't grow up with country music or in the country (other than Kenny Rogers and the TV show "The Dukes of Hazzard"), he has grown to embrace it. "Country music is patriotic, celebratory, and meaningful," he says. "It has a positive vibe."

He also appreciates the subtlety of the musical arrangements and the harmonies. "I find a lot of joy in the music," he says. "It's pure Americana." Iwanicki, who has a day job as an

industrial technology teacher at a high school in Fairfield, Connecticut, believes in giving back to his community. The band plays at many charitable events and recently did a benefit at the Cadillac Ranch in Southington, Connecticut, to benefit Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates, an animal welfare advocacy group, and the Junior Woman's Club in Milford, Connecticut (part of the Rotary Club). They also helped raise \$60,000 over the past four years for the Norma Pfriem Breast Center at the Yale New Haven Health System.

"It's important to us to give back," says Iwanicki, whose mother and sister are both breast cancer survivors.

Another type of survivor is Shot Down's female drummer and percussionist, Steahle, making a name for herself among all the male rock drummers. Steahle joined Shot Down Music as a substitute drummer in 2020 and never left.

"We're so happy to have her," says Iwanicki. "She's a great drummer and we've developed a strong friendship."



In a sink-or-swim moment, Steahle, 59, learned 68 songs overnight to play with the band on short notice. She drummed her heart out and earned a permanent spot as their drummer, replacing the five other drummers who were on rotation.

Steahle has been drumming ever since she could crawl. As a kid, she asked her parents for a drum set, and she received it one piece at a time on her birthday or during holidays. At school, she showed such aptitude for the drums that the school hired a professional teacher for her outside of school and paid the tuition.

"I wanted to rock," she says. She admired the drumming of Stewart Copeland of the Police—"amazing."

Steahle played "Barracuda," with its predominant drum beat, from the 1977 Heart album over and over at the age of 12. "My mom thought I'd grow out of it," she says.

She credits her jazz teacher, Nick Tarantino, at Guilford High School in Guilford, Connecticut, for encouraging her to read music, to appreciate different styles of music, to take vocal and piano lessons, and to learn to become melodic on the drums.

With her "Kathy Steahle Swag," the drummer, who rides a Harley, has proven her mother wrong. She hasn't stopped drumming for the past 35 years, and she has opened twice for Joan Jett, auditioned for Cyndi Lauper, and played in Nashville with Rascal Flatts and Jason Aldean.

"Each drummer I've played with has taught me to become a better drummer," says Steahle, who now jams on Bucks County Drum Company drums.

Steahle hopes to encourage Iwanicki to work on original music. She's seen it done in Nashville and believes that Shot Down has a shot. "Jeff has a unique voice, not unlike that of Post Malone," she says. "It's a distinct vibrato, and he works very hard at his craft."



The group plans to be back in South Florida this winter and hopes to keep traveling and playing music. On their bucket list is to book a gig in Key West, St. John, or a ski resort or to even one day headline at Madison Square Garden.

Iwanicki would also love to play at the Tin Roof in Delray Beach. "I love the camaraderie of making music with my band," he says. "It's both joyful and

complicated and gives me a sense of accomplishment.

"When the audience is happy, we are happy," he says. "We still enjoy the music and each other. We have a joy and a passion for performing.

"We hope to do this for a long time," he says. "It's very rewarding."

Visit the band at "Shot Down—Country Party Fun," [Shotdownmusic.com](http://Shotdownmusic.com). 