

Plain White T's perform at the Thunderbird in Lawrenceville

By Patrick Swain, Culture Editor

As fans filed into the Thunderbird Café and Music Hall on bustling Butler Street in Lawrenceville, Tom Higgenson recounted writing “Hey There Delilah.” He said once the song rocketed his band the Plain White T's to stardom in 2006, they played it every chance they could.

“Ever since that song really blew up, you kinda got to play it every night. But, you know, we love playing it, because it's a moment that people really get into and everyone sings along, and it's a really special moment every night,” Higgenson said. “Some bands hate playing their hits, but we love playing that one.”

The Plain White T's packed the venue for a sold-out show on Friday night. The Illinois band, which rose to popular prominence thanks to hits like “Hey There Delilah,” became a fixture in the radio pop-rock sphere of the 2000s.

The crowd was mainly millennials, adorned in graphic band T-shirts — along with plain white ones. Music from the 1990s and 2000s like Third Eye Blind and Fall Out Boy emanated from the speakers before and between the sets, including the entirety of Weezer's “Blue Album.”

Scott Riley has been a fan of the Plain White T's since they released their first album in 2000. Holding a signed vinyl record of their latest self-titled LP before the show, Riley said seeing the band in person was a dream come true.

“I was just talking to my brother and telling him how I wanted to see them, and I was looking on Ticketmaster because I always just check the list, and they popped up, and I was like, ‘You're kidding me,’” Riley said after meeting the band. “Amazing. Absolutely amazing.”



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Lead singer Tom Higgenson of Plain White T's performs at the Thunderbird Café on Friday evening.



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Minutes before taking the stage, Higgenson instructed the audience to pull out their phones and visit a website to vote on a special song for the night's set list. The Plain White T's began the show with "Our Time Now," a song from their hit 2007 album "Every Second Counts." They played about 20 songs, a blend of their older tracks and cuts from their new self-titled album from November.

Longtime listeners in the audience sang every word to soft ballads like "1, 2, 3, 4." Guitarist Tim Lopez took over vocals for "The Giving Tree," while bassist Mike Retondo held down the low end and drummer De'Mar Hamilton sat behind the kit dressed in white from head to toe. Singer Jill Beckett joined the band on stage for "Would You Even," a heavier single from last year.

Beckett's band Pollyanna is touring with the Plain White T's, opening for them across the country. Pollyanna, led by Beckett on vocals and guitar, played a half-hour-long set evoking the electricity of energetic rock acts like Paramore. Beckett said the opportunity to accompany the Plain White T's on their tour has changed their lives.



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"We've been on tour with them for the best two weeks, three weeks," Beckett said. "It's been awesome. It's definitely been a life-changing tour. It's been really, really cool. Honestly, definitely a game-changing tour for us."

The Plain White T's led the crowd along until an encore, after the earlier audience poll yielded their 2007 song "Friends Don't Let Friends Dial Drunk." Following its final notes, Higgenson donned an acoustic guitar and spoke into the microphone.

"I think this is the longest set we've ever done on a tour," Higgenson said as the Thunderbird fell silent and he finally strummed the opening chords of "Hey There Delilah."

The tune turned into a tender singalong with the audience across three levels of the venue, reaching the furthest corners of the room. After Higgenson swapped out the last "Delilah" for "Pittsburgh" and led the crowd through a final, cathartic chorus, the Thunderbird felt a little smaller.