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Diversions

Living and Playing The Local Band Scene

You can go to your favorite club in town to hear your favorite local band. And there they'll be, displaying their varying degrees of arrogance and showmanship, singing, strumming, picking, drumming.

Yet, behind whatever glamour may exist for these performers on stage, the economic situation for local musicians is no piece of cake. Whatever cake exists, in fact, is very small, not too sweet, and, no matter how you slice it, it comes up peanuts.

The players in most Eugene area bands supplement their "musical income" in a wide variety of ways. Gardening, landscaping and yardwork. Farming. Teaching. Art work and

graphics. Shoe repair. Support from wives, girlfriends and families. Renting equipment to other musicians.

Among the players in most bands in this area, the general feeling is that, while it surely would be nice to be paid better, income isn't really the issue.

"It's not something we do for money," says John Swan of Magic Swan and the Dukes. "We do it for fun. That gives us some leeway to screw up and take chances," he says. "We just like to play."

Peter Thorpe, a blues singer/guitarist, agrees. "It's a sad situation," he says. "We don't make much money at all. It's really hard to support a band

(in Eugene), I'll tell you." Thorpe says he makes his "entire living" off music, but that he is only able to make ends meet because his wife Betsy, who does booking for the Peter Thorpe Band, also has a full time job.

"Musicians never make enough," Thorpe says. "We're a pretty poor lot. It's not the best profession in the world," as far as income, he says.

"What I make doesn't even pay for what I break," Swan laughs.

"You can't even make enough money to cover the cost of fuses, strings and stolen equipment," says Bruno B. Brundoggie, who sang and played synthesizer for the now-defunct band, Moose Lodge. Brundoggie says that beyond these basic expenses are the added hassles of trying to find appropriate rehearsal space and transportation to move equipment to and from gigs. "I don't make a living from music," he says, "but I don't make a living by doing anything else, either. Thank God for rich uncles and gullible parents," he laughs.

Most bands claim an average of \$20-\$30 per night per player, with some, like jazz guitarist Don Latarski, paying his players as much as \$60-\$80 a night. To avoid audience "burn out," Latarski only plays in Eugene one weekend a month, and performs most other weekends out of town, usually in Portland.

Because of the stress involved in setting up shows and the audience burn out factor, Latarski says "the vast majority of players are doing other things." Latarski is a faculty member at the University's School of Music, and is trying to diversify into writing music for video, film, radio and television advertising, multi-image slide shows and working with computer generated music.

At the other end of the spectrum, local band members can make as little as "two bucks a person," says Darren Baker, bassist for the Priority Demons. "Maybe enough for a beer and some gum," he laughs. "In fact, we paid to do a show one time," he adds.

"You almost end up losing

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Photo by Bobbie Lo

Many musicians in Eugene depend on other means to support themselves besides the money they receive from playing in established clubs. Some hold full-time jobs during the day, while others, such as Willie Dee, play for quarters and nickels on the streets of the city.

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