

Primus to psych out Eugene

By Ming Rodrigues
Emerald Contributor

Les Claypool is serious when he describes Primus' sound as "progressive, freak-out music." Then just as quickly, he gets a better idea: "Let's call it psychedelic polka!"

Call it what you will. Primus defies both tradition and categorization, prompting descriptions from thrash-funk, fusion-contusion and twisted be-bop metal to looney tunes. Perhaps one critic best summed up the band when he said, "There's so much going on here, you can only throw your hands up and go along for the ride...a fun ride."

Comprising vocalist and bassist Claypool, guitarist Larry Lalonde and drummer Tim Alexander, the free-floating, improvisational Primus style has won it a cultish legion of fans.

When it opened the 1990 homecoming gig for Bay Area compadres Faith No More, one critic noted, "This night doesn't belong to FNM...the band's gonna have to share it."

Their audience, Lalonde said, is unlike other sweaty, slamming crowds. "There aren't too many boneheads getting drunk and not knowing what's going on," he said. "It's fun, cool and intelligent. We want to do something different."

So why do Primus fans chant at each concert, "Primus sucks"?

"People would come up to us and go, 'You're cool,'" Claypool said. "We'd answer, 'Nah, we suck.' Well, it just caught on. When we'd say, 'We're Primus,' they'd go



Courtesy Photo

Primus, featuring (l-r) Tim Alexander, Larry Lalonde and Les Claypool, will perform in Eugene on Thursday night.

"You suck." We didn't know if it was an insult or not.

"Now when they yell 'Primus sucks,' we go 'Hey great, thanks!'"

Primus began when Claypool picked up a bass guitar as a teenager. "I remember seeing this band at a junior high school talent show and the guitarist started playing the solo to 'Ramblin Man,'" Claypool said. "I was 14 before I had pulled enough weeds to buy a guitar. Then I irritated my relatives by playing while they were watching TV."

He later joined a local band, Blind Illusion, which at some point included Lalonde. Yet, while playing on-and-off with that now-dis-

banded unit, he was also entertaining notions of what is now Primus. Over the years and bearing another guitarist and drummer, his idea took root and the band Primus built a strong following.

With Lalonde's Zappa and Grateful Dead leanings, Alexander's eclecticism (Chinese music, reggae, jazz, classical—anything with wild drums), lyrically, visually and vocally, Primus' style has more in common with cartoons than anything else.

"We're cartoony," Claypool said. "Our songs are like tales from the weird—like cartoons with music."

"We're all pretty goofy."

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