

# Stevie Wonder gives band a break

By David Scott Farr  
For the Oregon Daily Emerald

After four years of selling Stevie Wonder albums, Ricardo Ojeda may have the favor returned.

Ojeda learned about the music industry from working behind a record store cash register while performing for a Portland funk band, Rubberneck.

The band, which performs a Latin and funk hybrid it has named "Lunk," has attracted attention from some industry veterans.

Wonder was impressed enough to produce and bankroll the band's debut album.

Ojeda and his younger brother Pablo created a primitive species of Rubberneck four years ago, after Ojeda convinced Pablo to trade his guitar for a bass and some lessons.

Rubberneck started booking paid performances two years ago, surviving canceled gigs and early lineup changes. The time the band served eventually paid off.

The Mount Tabor Theater, Key Largo and the X-Ray Cafe served as early territory for Rubberneck, gaining it a small following and the chance to improve its material.

The eight-member band desperately needed larger stages at bigger venues. With the addition of a percussionist and a four-piece horn section, Rubberneck crowded smaller stages. The band found needed space on its frequent trips to Seattle, usually performing at the Phoenix Underground. This year, Rubberneck landed at Portland's La Luna for the first time, opening for Eugene's The Daddies.

The band released a demo cassette, titled *Simple*, and appeared on the compilation *Northwest Ungrunged* last summer. Ojeda and the band decided they needed to record again soon after. He reserved dates at a Portland recording studio despite the band's lack of funds.

In early April, Ojeda invited a friend to a Rubberneck performance at Mark's Hawthorne Pub. Ojeda knew Lee Garrett, a veteran songwriter, from

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— Ricardo Ojeda,  
Rubberneck member

his regular visits to the record store where Ojeda works. Garrett told Wonder about Rubberneck after attending the concert.

"It's perfect, almost too perfect. All the music we grew up to, and it just happens that he wrote most of it," Ojeda said about Garrett, who wrote "Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm Yours" and a number of other songs with Wonder.

Rubberneck awaits Wonder's production of the 12 original songs it finished recording this week. Garrett planned on financing the band's recordings and having Wonder produce the album.

However, Wonder offered to produce and pay for the recordings after talking with Garrett, Ojeda said.

"It was really weird how easy it was to tell the studio, 'Bill it to Stevie,'" Ojeda said of a day of recording.

Ojeda and Pablo hope their date with Wonder next weekend will not be canceled. Production has been delayed twice but has been rescheduled for May 14.

Rubberneck departs for its European tour May 31, regardless of the production outcome. Members of the band are quitting their day jobs and planning to return in August. Rubberneck continues to perform three to four gigs a week, including a stop at the EMU Beer Gardens on Friday.

"We've spent our whole life dreaming about it, and here's the opportunity," Ojeda said. "We don't have to dream anymore because it's here. We're here. Now what do we do?"

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