

Genius and madness slam heads at the WOW Hall

Chicago native and cult icon Wesley Willis provides Eugeneans an unmatched musical experience

By Rory Carroll
Oregon Daily Emerald

Wesley Willis is a rare individual. At 6-foot-5 and 320 pounds, the man attracts attention.

It was easy to find Willis before he took to the WOW Hall stage Tuesday night. He was in the lobby, of course — chatting, laughing and head-butting his awestruck fans.

Willis began performing music and selling his urban drawings on the streets of Chicago. He was discovered there and has since recorded an astonishing 30 albums on many different labels, including Alternative Tentacles, which is owned and operated by former Dead Kennedy singer Jello Biafra.

Willis' bewildering and prolific songwriting skills and otherworldly approach to music have made him a cult icon. He is an artist and musician who was diagnosed with schizophrenia at an early age. His music is a combination of hilarious, foul-mouth lyrics tempered with new-age synthesizer hooks and a pounding two-beat bass line.

At the show, Willis was also a marketing machine, selling his t-shirts and pushing his new CD, "Greatest Hits, Volume II" to everyone that approached. He signed autographs and urged people to sponsor the non-profit agency Support Coalition which encourages alternatives to forced psychiatric procedures such as

“I am excited to play. I am excited to whip that llama's ass.”

Wesley Willis
musician

mandatory drugging.

When asked if he was excited to play, Willis responded as only he can.

"I am excited to play. I am excited to whip that llama's ass," Willis said.

Marvin Stockwell, frontman for the Memphis-based band Pezz, a rock/punk group that is opening for Willis on this tour, said that this tour is a totally unique experience. Stockwell describes playing on the road with Willis as being a "joyride."

"Wesley has a great heart and loves people and performing," Stockwell said.

On stage, Willis methodically pounds on his Technic KN 2000 keyboard, his eyes intensely fixed on the keys. He looks on his lyric sheets, typed in all caps, and reads/raps the words to the verses before the inevitable belting of the chorus/song title.

Many of Willis' songs culminate to his famous closing phrase, "Rock over London, rock on Chicago." On Tuesday, he replaced "Chicago" with "Eugene, Oregon" several times, and the crowd roared with approval.

Never has there been an artist with such accessible sing-along material. He announces the name of the song multiple times before



Photo courtesy Wesley Willis

At 6-foot-5, 320 pounds and more than 700 songs and 30 albums, Wesley Willis rocks over Eugene Tuesday night.

he plays it, and it is certain that the title will be the only line of the chorus. Every song is exactly the same length, but on Tuesday, he restarted his songs multiple times, taking pains to get just the right speed and instrument mix.

The attraction to Wesley Willis' music is a perplexing one. Stockwell said that people come for a variety of reasons, and not all are positive.

"At its worst, it's frat guys getting their jollies watching a disabled guy. But a lot of times the audience is made up of a lot of people who really love Wesley," Stockwell said. "Wes feeds off a crowd that loves him."

He said that Willis' straightforward personality and genuine friendliness make him a fan favorite.

Still, touring with a man who hears voices in his head can be challenging, said Stockwell. He said that on this tour, they have seen some very positive shows, in-

cluding an outstanding night in San Francisco. Other nights, including a recent show in Lake Tahoe, found Wesley being ridiculed by the audience.

Joey Mullinix, bass player for Pezz, said that Willis hears voices of two demons in his head — demons named Nerve Wrecker and Heart Breaker. It is these delusions that constitute his diagnosed schizophrenia. Stockwell said that Willis is conscious of when he is being a burden on those around him, and that he can sometimes be very critical of himself.

"There is nothing so sad as when I hear Wesley get down on himself," Mullinix said.

At the show on Tuesday night, the people there who were only interested in the spectacle were far out numbered by those who were driven by curiosity and interest in this one-of-a-kind performer.

It's hard to decide what the best songs of the night were. Willis'

songs all follow the exact same form and the music only varies slightly in tempo and key signature from one song to another. Still, his new song "Stop Driving Like an Asshole" and "Get Your Groove On" were big hits.

Both Stockwell and Mullinix said that few people realize that Willis is outstanding with math and directions. They said that he can remember the license plate numbers of cars he sees only once, and that he at any given time he knows exactly how many hours he has been alive.

Wesley Willis is a walking paradox. On the surface, his lyrics seem like improvised piffle. But his strict adherence to song form makes the listener think twice about the intention of the artist.

At the end of the night, Willis made a vow to return to "rock on Eugene," and the crowd responded enthusiastically to the promise.

"I will rock here again pretty soon," he said.

WOW HALL

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Cheap date

continued from page 1B

No matter who you are, male or female, that special someone will be yours forever once you show him or her a little kitchen proficiency. (Nobody has to know that all you did was follow this article step-for-step.) Being a good cook is especially valuable during your college years, when chicken strips at Carson Hall pass as a delicacy.

Trust me. Your talents will be rewarded.

This is a little recipe for a unique dish that anyone with half a brain can make for less than \$20. It looks good and tastes great, and with the right mood and setting, this homemade pasta will capture the heart and stomach of your date.

This is all you have to do:

You'll need the following ingredients, which can be purchased at Safeway at these prices. A bag of penne rigate (\$0.67), one pint of heavy whipping cream (\$1.69), one can of crushed tomatoes (\$1.29), olive oil (\$3.45), and a jar of Italian spices (\$1.69). This is all you'll need to make the pasta and the

sauce, at a cost of \$8.79. But the authentic Scrooges may leave out the olive oil (it just improves the consistency) to bring the cost down to \$5.34.

To make the sauce, combine crushed tomatoes, one-half teaspoon olive oil and two shakes of the Italian spices into a large saucepan. Stir frequently over medium heat until the mixture dissolves, then simmer on low.

“This is a little recipe for a unique dish that anyone with half a brain can make for less than \$20.”

In the meantime, boil the pasta. When the pasta is cooked, add the whipping cream to the sauce until it reaches the desired thickness. (Keep in mind the sauce will thicken further as it cools.) On your finest plates, — if you must use paper plates, at least go with the Chinnet — pour the cream sauce over the noodles and serve.

To complement the meal, I suggest a simple side salad and

bread. An Italian salad in a bag is easy (\$1.99), but a head of romaine lettuce (\$0.99) is cheaper and fresher. A plethora of mouth-watering Safeway-brand dressings, including Italian and creamy Italian, are available for just \$1.99.

For a real treat, buy a loaf of French or sourdough bread (\$1.99) and some Parmesan cheese (\$2.50). With these, you can make a simple but delectable cheese bread in a few easy steps.

First, turn your oven on broil. Placed buttered bread on a cookie sheet and generously sprinkle Parmesan over each slice. Broil for about two minutes or until golden brown.

Finally, if you're a real go-getter, buy a bottle of wine. This can really add to your costs, but a cheap bottle of Merlot can go for as low as \$3.50. For the under-21 crowd, a bottle of sparkling apple cider (\$1.50) will suffice.

For all this food — the pasta and sauce, salad, cheese bread and wine — you'll be spending under \$20. Cut a few corners (sparkling cider instead of wine, plain toast instead of cheese bread and no olive oil), and the damage will be closer to \$12.

Now — and this is the most important step — you must create "the mood."

Obviously, nothing says romance like a candle-lit dinner. So dim the lights, turn off the TV, unplug the phone and light a couple candles at the dinner table.

Put some soothing tunes in the background, but keep the volume low. I'll leave the selection up to you, but try not to cheapen the date with your Barry Manilow records. I guarantee your date will see right through that perverted little head of yours, so keep it sincere.

Now that you've got all the instructions you need, let me give you the low-down on this cheap date. At under \$20, you will be spending less than you would at any good restaurant. Plus, you'll be increasing the romance factor tenfold. But the benefits of this cheap date don't stop there.

With an entire bag of pasta, a pint of sauce, a loaf of bread and a head of lettuce, you'll have enough food for four or five dates. Heck, you'll be able to serve all your boyfriends or girlfriends with that much food. Just try not to double-book your dates.

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