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Bands keep ska music alive

■ Reel Big Fish and Goldfinger bring 'Crouching Fish, Hidden Finger' to WOW Hall

By Ryan Earley
for the Emerald

Just two or three years ago, the bouncy horn blasts and guitar riffs that characterize ska music abounded on alternative radio stations across the nation. Bands such as Sublime and No Doubt climbed the charts with their hybridized ska-pop sounds. However, as time passed, the fickle ear of the alternative audience turned away from ska music.

Aaron Barrett, lead singer and guitar player for Reel Big Fish, recently told fellow ska band Slow Children at Play that he wants to keep ska alive. Reel Big Fish is one of those ska bands experiencing a popular revival, and in the interview on Slow Children at Play's Web site, www.SCAPmusic.com, Barrett said he seems in an appropriate position to try to revive ska music.

No amount of adversity has stopped Reel Big Fish, or the band's latest tourmate, Goldfinger, from doing what it does best. On Saturday, the two bands will bring their "Crouching Fish, Hidden Finger" tour to WOW Hall, reviving the "So Cal" sound in the Pacific Northwest.

This latest tour marks the first time in four years that Reel Big Fish and fellow Orange County natives Goldfinger have toured together. After an initial tour through America this summer, the duo of bands added another national leg to the date list, this time with different opening acts.

According to sophomore business major Matt Dour, a fan of Reel Big Fish and Goldfinger, both bands are famous for their high-energy live performances.

"I've heard they have a really active show, and I want to go see it," Dour said.

Since hitting modern-rock success with their breakout hit "Sell-out," Reel Big Fish has continually toured, supporting two albums full of new material and a live compilation. The band also reached mainstream audiences with a cover of A-ha's "Take On Me," thanks to its movie and video tie-in with the campy "BASEketball." After that hit, the band recorded a string of covers, culminating in the release of a live album made up exclusively of its versions of older songs.



Courtesy photo

Reel Big Fish will come to Wow Hall on Saturday with fellow ska band Goldfinger as part of the second leg of the bands' "Crouching Fish, Hidden Finger" tour.

Similar to Reel Big Fish, Goldfinger rose from the Orange County underground in 1996 with its single "Here in Your Bedroom." The song garnered much radio play and inspired the band to play a remarkable 382 live shows that year.

Goldfinger followed its successful self-titled debut with "Hang-ups" the following year. The album featured another hit single, "This Lonely Place." Goldfinger consists of four core members who occasionally incorporate horn sections into their songs.

Neither Goldfinger nor Reel Big Fish has released any new material in more than a year. According to mtv.com, publicists for the tour insist that while both bands will incorporate fan favorites into their sets for the tour, the bands also have new material.

On past legs of the tour, well-known bands such as Zebrahead and Homegrown opened the shows, but for the Eugene concert, the bands chose Santa Barbara's up-and-comers Sugarcult to start the show.

Sugarcult boasts an impressive list of past membership in other bands. The band's guitar player, Marko 72, previously played with The Ataris, Nerf Herder and the Swingin' Utters. Sugarcult has also received enthusiastic response from critics.

The band's latest release, titled "Start Static," certainly wins them no awards for originality or power-pop innovation, but its music oozes vocal harmonies and hummable hooks. Comparisons to MxPx and Eve 6 are appropriate.

All three bands are notorious for their lively performances in concert. Part of that enthusiasm for playing live shows comes from the bands' love for their work.

Freshman Leif Karlstrom, a violin major, has followed both bands for years and has seen Reel Big Fish and Goldfinger in concert before.

"They put on a good show, but I saw them a long time ago," Karlstrom said. "I hope they play a lot of their old stuff at the show. I like their old stuff a lot better."

Though Karlstrom found Goldfinger and Reel Big Fish's latest work slightly lacking in comparison to their previous albums, he still definitely plans on attending the show.

"They're a bunch of fun guys, and they have a real original style as far as the whole ska-punk thing goes," Karlstrom said.

In the interview with Slow Children at Play, Reel Big Fish singer Barrett said that he truly enjoys going on the road because the band has fun playing together and visiting new places.

"There really isn't anything I don't like about being on tour all the time," Barrett said. "I get bored sitting at home. I love to be able to play for a new crowd in a new city every day."

Tickets for the show are \$20. Doors open at 7:30 p.m. and showtime is at 8 p.m. The WOW Hall is open to all ages.

Ryan Earley is a freelance reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald.

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