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FEATURES

Womenspace benefit features Mister Sparkle as headliner

Organizers said the male rock band's performance may allow more men to help their cause

By Mason West
Oregon Daily Emerald

A musical benefit for the nonprofit organization Womenspace might bring out the likes of Ani DiFranco or Tori Amos as headliners.

But at 8 p.m. Feb. 2, experimental Eugene rock band Mister Sparkle will top a bill of male performers at WOW Hall for a Womenspace benefit — and DiFranco they are not.

"We're kind of a combination of Spacehog and the Foo Fighters," said lead singer and bassist Jerry Leach. "A lot of the songs we perform deal with abuse or being controlled, but they're not feminist."

Womenspace development director Jacqui Lomont said having a male rock band play a benefit "allows us to reach a different section of the population." Last year, another local band played a benefit at John Henry's and though the music was not to Lomont's taste, the reception of the crowd "shook some of my stereotypes."

The drive to put on this benefit concert all came from Leach; it's something he said he's wanted to do for five months. After Leach saw Mister Sparkle drummer Mike Baker and his wife take custody of their six-year-old niece, a victim of domestic abuse, Leach felt a fire ignite.

"Seeing something like that made me mad, and I wanted to do something about it," he said.

Leach targeted Womenspace as a place to divert his energy and have some impact. He enlisted the help of friend Sam Densmore's band, Sam Densmore's Silverhawk and Ennis Bee, to fill the bill.

"I think this show is great because it's coming from a sincere place in the hearts of the organizers," Densmore said. "It's a proactive event rather than just a rock show."



Courtesy Photo

Womenspace does not allow male volunteers in the emergency shelter. They provide for female victims of domestic abuse and their children, but Lomont said men are involved in the organization by serving on the board and volunteering to do outreach in schools around Eugene.

"This is another way for men to help," Leach said.

Leach also said he wanted to give some attention to a local charity when so many national causes have been spotlighted. Leach has always been an Oregon-boy, having grown up in Coos Bay with Mister Sparkle guitarist Dave Hiner and Sam Densmore.

"I dated (Leach's) sister in the eighth grade," said Densmore.

As kids, Leach and Hiner amused themselves in Coos Bay with pranks such as taking lawn ornaments from people's yards and placing them in front of other people's houses. Leach said there is no shortage of lawn ornaments in Coos Bay.

"Sometimes people wouldn't even notice the switch," he said.

The friendship between Leach and Hiner is where Mister

Sparkle's name originated. Leach said the two made a habit of quoting an episode of the Simpsons in which Homer bears a resemblance to the icon of a Japanese dishwashing soap called Mister Sparkle. While struggling to come up with a name, Leach said Mister Sparkle just came to mind.

The name for Densmore's band also has Coos Bay ties: His elementary school's mascots were "The Silverhawks."

"I thought it was a cool name when I was eight, but we always lost all of our games, cool name or not. So I figured I'd sort of reclaim the name," he said.

Densmore currently resides in Coos Bay, "right between Seattle and San Francisco." He returned home in 1999 after being hit by a car in Olympia, Wash., to nurse his wounds, and has enjoyed "being away from all the rock scene B.S."

"Events such as this benefit make the point that local and underground artists are still valid artists whose contributions to their communities count," Densmore said.

E-mail senior Pulse reporter Mason West at masonwest@dailyemerald.com.

Newest champ of synth music arises

With its album 'Dead Media,' British band Hefner has brought back the warm hum of synths



Hefner 'Dead Media'
Derriere le Garage
★★★★☆

By Mason West
Oregon Daily Emerald

There was a golden age of "synth" music that reached an apex with the 1982 release of the beautiful soundtrack to "Blade Runner." Since that age regrettably passed, only on rare occasions have bands re-introduced the warm electronic hum of the synthesizer to the current music scene.

A new champion has arisen: British rock band Hefner.

The band's latest album, "Dead Media," starts with a track by the same name that unapologetically fills the ears with a loud synthesizer picking out two chords note by note. The brash sound is a shock at first, but after the vocals and other

harmonizing synths kick in, the song achieves aural euphoria. On the band's Web site, www.hefnet.com, lead singer Darren Hayman states, "I'm sure heaven sounds like this."

Though the title "Dead Media" works well with the band's appropriation of forgotten musical technologies, the album's songs deal more with looking for connection and reminiscing about good times. "China Crisis" incorporates the desire for love and a nostalgia of past opportunity in the lines: "It's not the walk that I take through the park to her place / It's the breath she takes in between the words her mouth makes. / Oh curse my mind for not ceasing my mouth when the moment was perfect."

While the electronics have a prevailing influence through the album's 15 tracks, the second song, "Trouble Kid," returns to more comfortable roots with a basic marching rock beat — though the solo in the middle is all synth. This track is just stupid pop, but it's fun.

Actually, there's a good deal of silly, but delightful pop on "Dead Media." "The King of Summer" has

the dirty feel of a Rolling Stones' song — the kind of tune sung with a cockily curled lip. "Half a Life," a boyish lament, continues for more than four minutes repeating the main lyric "Life without my sweetheart is only half a life," over and over. But songs such as "The Nights Are Long" and "Waking Up To You" break through their simple pop sound and express real feelings of loss and hope — with head-bobbin' beats.

Hefner matches the visual presentation of their CD to the sounds contained on it. The back cover and liner notes of "Dead Media" boast drawings of various synthesizers from the Roland, Korg and Mogg companies. The text in the liner notes is not devoted to lyrics, which can be found on the Web site, but is instead occupied by a lengthy discussion of the various microphones and machines the band used during recording. What geeks. Hayman doesn't expect his new love affair with synthesizers to end. On the Web site, he states they will remain a part of the band's future projects. Hooray!

E-mail senior Pulse reporter Mason West at masonwest@dailyemerald.com.