

PULSE

Thursday, July 10, 2003



Jan Tobias Montry
Unsatisfied customer

Conformist pop music lacks purity of grunge

Remember back in the '90s when things were simple?

We had a booming economy, a sexually satisfied commander in chief and, above all, the only thing that really mattered at the time: grunge music.

I was a giddy high-school sophomore during the height of the post-grunge movement. Memories of sneaking into the school band room at lunch to blast distorted Nirvana riffs on a Fender clone with my friends while rednecks ran in fear still brings a smile to my face. Yes, it certainly was a time to remember in our great musical history.

And then something wicked this way came. Multi-million dollar record executives sat around their bubbling cauldron like the evil witches of Shakespeare's Macbeth and brewed up a new evil never before seen by man. The resulting force — which I affectionately call "conformist crap" — hit the music scene and destroyed my beloved grunge era faster than a zombie eating brains in an old George Romero flick.

First you had Britney "I'm a virgin" Spears. Spears, a Southern bubblegum queen of Mickey Mouse Club fame, sounded like 10,000 screeching cats on a fence post, filtered through all sorts of ungodly effects and tossed against prefabricated pop vibes worth about as much as the wax in my inner ear. Her highly creative lyrical style, fresh with insightful metaphor and meaningful allegory of the human condition, could be clearly demonstrated with lyrical gems such as, "Oops, I did it again / I made you believe we're more than just friends / Oh baby, baby" and witty song titles such as "E-mail My Heart."

But as we all know from Milli Vanilli, all god-awful things come in pairs. With Britney came Justin Timberlake — the only member of McBoyzBand *NSYNC that anybody can actually name — who currently wants to be accepted as a real artist so badly that he frequently humps the legs of big-name stars at glitzy celebrity parties. Unfortunately for him, his style of "music" can be likened to the smell emanating from an old Taco Bell bag that got lost under my bed last December. Case in point, "Cry Me a River" — the song rumored to be about estranged girlfriend Spears — made my ears spontaneously gush blood. The only thing that brought me joy shortly before I passed out was a vision: Timberlake actually crying a river after he is unilaterally rejected by his entire fan base of 10 million screeching 14-year-old girls.

Finally you had Christina "Not a virgin and proud of it" Aguilera, a frightening example of what happens when you mix some semblance of talent with greed. Although she is leagues ahead of Britney in terms of that former musical prerequisite called "talent," Aguilera changes her image more than Michael Jackson changes

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A fair Oregon summer

One-of-a-kind festivals all around Oregon this summer offer people a multitude of opportunities for distraction or celebration

By Ryan Nyburg
Freelance Reporter

From Vikings to garlic, a variety of festivals are happening all over Oregon for those who want to fill the summer months with celebrating.

July 11 marks the start of the popular Oregon Country Fair, which will run through July 13 and will feature live music, food, dancing and education on a variety of subjects. The fair, now in its 34th year, began as a benefit for an alternative school in 1969, and has since grown astronomically. On a patch of wooded land just outside of Veneta, the fair becomes the fourth most populated area in Oregon during its three days of operation.

Tickets are available at TicketsWest outlets, but will not be sold at the festival site at any time. Tickets are \$12 for Friday, \$15 for Saturday and \$12 for Sunday. Tickets purchased the day of the event will cost an extra \$2 each. Children younger than ten are admitted for free. No pets, alcohol or video cameras are allowed at the festival.

For country music fans, the highlight of the summer could be the 11th Annual Oregon Jamboree in Sweet Home. The event will take place Aug. 1-3, and will feature by Alan Jackson, The Derailers, Mark Chesnutt, Gary Allan, Lonesome Road and T. Bubba Bechtol.

A major part of the festival is the wide availability of RV and tent camping sites. For a fee of \$25-\$60, campers can set up in any of the nine RV parks or two tent camp sites.

Ticket prices range from \$45 to \$85 for general admission and from \$85 to \$170 for VIP seating. Tickets are available through the Oregon Jamboree Ticket Office.

For those looking for a more European flavor, Junction City presents the Scandinavian Festival Aug. 7-10. The festival, which began in 1961, celebrates the cultures of Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland. The four-day festival is rife with food and entertainment, including songs, dance and a roving band of Vikings. Admission and almost all events are free.

One of the largest events in the Eugene area will be taking place Aug. 12-17. The Lane County Fair, which will feature 14 new rides and a new series of concerts this year, is expected to be as big as ever. Two free concerts, featuring Northwest bands, will take place on



Emerald

Oregon's summer fairs include Junction City's Scandinavian and North Plains' Elephant Garlic festivals.

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Today: A breakdown of summer festivals

Last Thursday: A look at Oregon Country Fair

the festival's closing day. There will also be a talent show, a battle of the bands, weightlifting demonstrations and other family-friendly activities throughout the festival.

Tickets are \$6 for six- to 15-year-olds and \$8 for those 16 and older. Children five and younger get in free.

Aug. 15 through Aug. 17 will also have the sixth annual Elephant Garlic Festival in North Plains. There will be blues and bluegrass performances, a car show, an arts and crafts mall and a beer and wine garden available for festivalgoers to enjoy. Admission and parking are free.

The Oregon State Fair will run in Salem Aug. 21-Sept. 1, featuring a wide range of entertainment and activities, including concerts by 3

Doors Down, 38 Special, the B-52's and Jars of Clay. The fair also features a statewide talent show, art, more than four dozen concession stands, and livestock and photography shows.

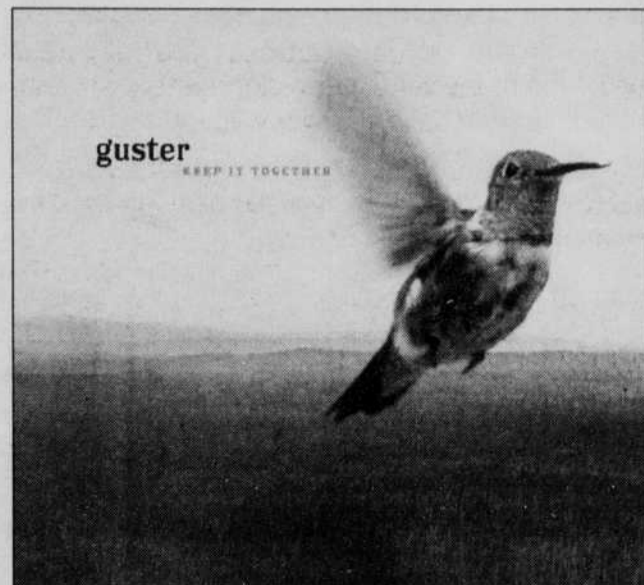
Tickets are available at TicketWest outlets. Prices are \$2-\$8, with special discount days available.

And to close of the summer festival season, there is the Eugene Celebration from Sept. 19 through Sept. 21. The theme this year is "Heart of the City," a change from the "Northwest of Normal" theme that has been used for the past three years. Despite the change of theme, little else is different this year, and the festival promises to have the usual array of local and national music performances, food, parades and slugs. Admission buttons will be available for \$8 in advance and \$10 at the gate. Day passes will be available at the gate for \$5.

Ryan Nyburg is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

Solid Guster record refreshing, enjoyable

By Travis Willse
Copy Chief



Courtesy

"Keep It Together" is Guster's fourth album, and its first since 1999.

The Boston-based pop-rock trio, Guster, has managed once again to write some of the most listenable music in recent memory. On "Keep It Together" — their first effort since 1999's "Lost and Gone Forever" — the band steps up their keenly tuned sense of harmony and refreshingly unusual instrumentation to put out an all-around solid fourth album you can kick back to with grandma as easily as with friends.

The light, optimistic opener "Diane" meshes a simple "Daydream Believer"-like melody and a simpler baseline with strings, clarinets and increasingly layered vocals for a pop morsel that would leave the Monkees proud. The fast-paced, rocking "Amsterdam" hints at what the

Strokes would write as a nice-boy pop band.

At its best, Guster delivers tracks like "Careful," an amiable, romping Travis-like lettering of a plea to recover lost love, highlighting the band's propensity for alternating driven-but-not-distracting drumming and carefully hooky choruses.

The album does no worse than occasionally waxing lyrically uninspired. "Backyard" and "Long Way Down" will disappoint music fans who listen first for words, but both melodies are passable, if not enjoyable. Likewise, the title track comes off like a Phantom Planet B-side with banjos — digestible, even unusual, but not memorable.

Still, little if anything on the 13-track album should be skipped. In fact, several of the tracks begin quietly and unremarkably, but build to a sonically sumptuous crescendo of catchy riffs, deservedly

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CD review