

CULTURE

Some Portlanders spend their spring break at home, renting movies and cleaning out their closets, watching bloated clouds spew rain.

That is my idea of personal hell. When I'm offered a week off at the end of March, I like to do what anyone sensible should do—get out of town.

So, for spring break this year, I decided to take my three-piece pop band on a tour of the great American West.

I play guitar and sing in Dear Nora, a quaint group of melodic musicians; my good friends from Lewis & Clark College, Marianna Ritchey and Ryan Wise, play drums and bass, respectively.

At the end of February, we put out a four-song 7" album on a local label, Magic Marker Records, and late March seemed like a great time to explore other cities' all-ages clubs while promoting our first official release.

The hardest part about going on a tour is actually planning it. I spent the first three months of the new millennium on the phone booking shows, contacting other bands, renting a car and finding tentative places to sleep (i.e., couches and floors).

As proof that modern-day miracles do occur, Dear Nora drove away from Portland on the overcast morning of March 23. Though we are all too young to rent a car legally in the United States, we zoomed down I-5 in a brand new, sporty-for-us Ford Taurus. (Don't ask.)

## Driving Dear Nora

Three young Portland musicians hit the road on a do-it-yourself adventure

BY KATY DAVIDSON

Evening was a reunion of sorts, because our band had played in the Lunchbox basement last December during a short tour of the Bay area. Later, we discovered that community was a recurring theme throughout our tour.

Interspersed between rows of records and CDs, about 20 people watched the show. We were a tad nervous, but we played solidly and nicely. We topped off the night at the Arcata bowling alley, which doubles as a pool hall and a karaoke bar. Around 11 p.m., we nestled into our sleeping bags on the floor of a small recording room in a elegantly run-down house near the beach and fell asleep thinking of the days ahead.

Early the next morning, we set out for San Francisco. Gradually, the mountains turned to meadows, and trees morphed into immeasurable rows of grapevines. We hit the city by early afternoon and were able to stretch out under the sun in Golden Gate Park for a few hours before reporting to the club.

That night we played an early show at San Francisco State University with a cute, sloppy band called the Cave-ins to a college crowd of about 50.

We played the next evening in San Francisco as well, at a bigger club called the Bottom of the Hill. We opened for lesbian

singer-songwriter Sarah Dougher, so a good percentage of the crowd was queer, and we played to the largest audience of the tour—120 people or so.

The funniest moment of the show occurred when I jokingly asked the crowd to be completely silent for the next song. From the depths of the quiet audience, a young woman offered an annoyed-sounding "Fuck you!" and everyone started laughing. When she realized



Dear Nora members (from left) Katy Davidson, Marianna Ritchey and Ryan Wise

what had happened, she explained to me (and everyone else) that she was talking to her sister. I offered: "Well, maybe you should be nicer to your sister next time." Then I asked if she wanted to come sit on the stage with us.

The next night we played in the demilitarized zone known as downtown Los Angeles, at a makeshift club aptly dubbed the Smell. It was Sunday, and the Academy Awards were being presented across town, so we pretty much figured our show was doomed. Up until the minute we started playing, the concrete-warehouse venue was completely empty. Suddenly, 40 people showed up out of nowhere. We played with a ton of energy, and the crowd danced like they were on *American Bandstand*.

The next morning, we drove across the desert to Phoenix and admired how drastically the landscape had changed in a mere four days. That night, we fell asleep in my comfortable hometown of Cave Creek, Ariz., listening to the crickets and coyotes singing to the moon.

Well-rested from our night off, we played a tight show in downtown Phoenix the following evening at a small all-ages club and art gallery called Modified. We opened for Dougher once again, so the show was another reunion of sorts.

The venue was packed and we played well, but the audience seemed to stare at us like stunned cows all through the set. At one point I asked, "Did you guys eat something bad for dinner?" After we played, I sat at a table to sell records and T-shirts to pay for our gas expenses, and people approached me one by one. "We were so quiet because we've honestly seen nothing like your band," they said. Though I'm sure this was meant as a compliment, I realized I could interpret the statement in a number of different ways.

After a night off in Telluride, Colo., we

pushed on to Denver. As we approached the city limits, clouds gathered above us like hanging clumps of dirty ice cream. We cautiously inched closer as heaping buckets of fresh snow fell onto the freeway.

Much to our surprise, we played at an enormous venue called the Bluebird Theater, similar in size to the Aladdin Theater in Portland. Illuminated on the grand marquee out front, our name stood like a soldier in the snow. The surprising part was that people actually trudged through the bad weather to see us.

Driving between Denver and Salt Lake City the next day was about as fun as drilling nails into our skulls. The freeway was snow-packed for the first three hours and traffic-filled for the final hour. We rolled into Salt Lake about an hour before the show was supposed to start, and that night we played to about 35 rebel Mormons in a shack called Kilby Court.

Our final show was in Richland, Wash., at a Chinese-American food restaurant called Lee's Tahitian. We played with a performance art duo named the Lamborghinis and a punk band called the Turn-Offs. We called our last performance the "Speeding Ticket Benefit Show" in honor of the cop who caught me cruising into the Tri-Cities at our usual 80 mph.

It was emotional to finish our tour, but we were ready to become reacquainted with our own beds. In a delirious state, we drove back to Portland after the show and arrived at my house at 3 a.m.

Many major label rock bands like to tour the United States in the comfort of tour buses and hotel rooms. For me, the best thing about the trip was the no-frills attitude. I would do it all again in a second.

■ KATY DAVIDSON is a Just Out staff writer. She can be reached at [katy@justout.com](mailto:katy@justout.com).



Our first destination was a record store called the Works, located in downtown Arcata, Calif.

Once through Grants Pass, Ore., we snaked out toward the ocean on a windy, gorgeous stretch of highway. When we rolled into Arcata, "it was all about the rock," as my punk housemate would say.

Lunchbox—a lounge-pop band from Oakland, Calif., that has also released music on the Magic Marker label—opened the show. The

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