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It's up to you...Portland, Oregon

How 14 romantics might just put the local music scene back in business

It's 9 o'clock on a Tuesday night. Fourteen organizers are sitting in my dining room, debating. We're about to take our fourth vote of the night. I'm bleary-eyed.

After this, we still have to check off a laundry list of tasks: We need a second stage, bottled water, volunteers, microphones, more sponsors, six sound engineers and a voter registration partner. We need 44 musicians to return our calls.

Every one of us rearranged our lives to produce the first PDX-POP Now! music festival. Three days, two stages, 44 local bands, free admission. A double CD compilation.

We're voting. Three hours have passed since the meeting started. Why am I doing this?

I've been asking myself that question a lot lately. To be honest, I'm a bit of a lone wolf and not much of an activist.

I guess it makes some sense that I'm helping create this festival. If there's one thing I'm not apathetic about, it's music. I'm the obsessive record-collecting geek, always documenting and analyzing what I'm listening to. And in the past few years, I've been satisfied to listen from the sidelines. I've been the audience. An observer.

Well, not anymore.

In 2002, after 10 years of domestic bliss, my relationship with Portland hit the skids. Blame it on a couple of nasty winters, a love affair in New York City and a growing disenchantment with the local music scene. I did a lot of soul-searching about leaving.

First, New York. Six months after 9/11, I met and fell in love with a New Yorker. We flew often to see each other. At night as the subway rumbled through the walls of her apartment, I sifted through the emotional debris firsthand. New York still seemed shocked and nervous, like a trauma patient coming in for her first checkup.

I was falling in love with a New Yorker, but I was also falling in love with New York. For the first time since moving to Portland in 1992, my city didn't feel like home.

But soon my love affair unraveled and the constant blast of post-9/11 anxiety—Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, Palestine—fried my nervous system. On one particularly bad day, two old friends gave me the kind of advice only old friends can give. Go back to doing what you love; she's not coming back.

So I started over.

I screamed into microphones and thrashed my guitar. I discovered new bands, fell back in love with old ones—Explosions in the Sky, Postal Service, The Gossip, Imperial Teen. At my favorite venue, The Blackbird, I purged in the company of strangers who felt like friends.

Then Elliott Smith died. Cold rain arrived on cue, painful and predictable. The Blackbird closed.



Cori Taratoot writes a love letter to Portland. And puts music to it.

My mind still chattered. I needed to sort and re-sort the things changing around me. I began to write. I interviewed my favorite bands—talked for hours about music and about Portland.

While I struggled with my place here, a conversation about local music started up on the Internet mailing list www.indiepop.com/pdx-pop. People complained about cash-poor (and inattentive) local audiences, subpar venues, shows starting too late. Bands writing in from the road reported that the rest of the country seemed impressed with Portland music, a sentiment not felt strongly back at home.

The cynical idealists shouted loud, but the optimistic DIYers shouted louder. We met weekly for five months, figuring out how to produce a summer festival.

Margaret Mead wrote: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

PDX-POP Now! is my love letter to Portland, but I didn't write it alone. I'm just one of more than a dozen organizers and countless volunteers intensely determined to promote, celebrate and rattle the Portland music community. It's the most radical collaboration I've ever been a part of.

The festival is just days away. Our compilation CD is in record stores all over town. The Web site is up. Volunteers are posting fliers. The artists—including Mirah, Sunset Valley, Tara Jane O'Neil, The Joggers, The Divided, The Minders and Sarah Dougher—are booked. We're almost there.

Taking a day off to recharge, I grab a ticket to Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Seeing New York hurts, and I can't deny it—I still miss her. But almost as overwhelming is my sense of obligation to the city. Not New York City. PDX.

I think, I have to do something.

And then I realize, for the first time in a long time, I am doing something. **■**

The first-ever PDX-POP Now! music festival is July 9 to 11 at the Meow Meow, 320 S.E. Second Ave. Visit www.pdxpopnow.com for a complete schedule.

CORI TARATOOT is a Portland free-lance writer. She loves Sonic Youth, Wilco, Jay, Jon, Michael, Anne, Sum, Cary, Greg, Ross, Lexi, Martti, Josh, Darin and Matt.

PHOTO BY JAY CARLISLE