

# Getting to the Roots of Rythm *continued from front page*

on the rhythm of delivering lyrics, using some examples like some Woody Guthrie's 'talking blues' and all the different ways he phrases things and the different rhythms that he uses. And then the kids will have a chance to write their own verse to a Timberbound song.

The culminating event is at the Vernonia Grange in the evening and we'll be inviting the students that we teach to come at the beginning and perform the song they learned with us during the day in the workshops. The school portion is to show the students the music and then the concert in the evening is to demonstrate the community coming together and having music be a part of that event."

**VV:** *Your regular musical collaborator for these types of workshops is Ben Hunter, but this time you have a new partner, Tina Dietz. Who is Tina?*

**JS:** "This is one of Tina's first official gigs with us and she has a lot of experience with preschool and kindergarten aged students. Ben and I have only worked minimally with kids that young. Tina is kind of our expert for the younger set, so she'll take the lead and then she'll assist with the older kids. Her main instrument is her voice and she is also a fine ukulele player."

**VV:** *Why is teaching children about roots music so important to you personally?*

**JS:** "Well, it's mainly because our society has put music consistently in such a formal context and rarely do people experience music in a social context – the closest thing is probably riding in the car with your friends and singing along to something, which I'm totally in support of! But I also want people to understand that making music around the campfire or having a party and making songs be a part of the party and also, just making music to please yourself, is really important. For me, it's about bringing back and reviving music in a social setting, so that students understand that you don't have to be on a stage to make music. I'm very committed to social music making. In America a lot of that has been drowned out or faded away, and that is not healthy for our society."

**VV:** *Why do you think music is so important to our society?*

**JS:** "Beyond the crucial aspects that it's a way to express yourself and a way to have fun, it's also a way of bonding. There's a bond that is possible when you sing a song with somebody and there is a

unique kind of kinship that act inspires. So, while I think that our society is struggling so much being polarized and divided, music is a place that we can all come together, regardless of our background, our political leanings, or our unique cultural contexts."

**VV:** *You keep popping up here in Vernonia for concerts and performances. Why is Vernonia important to you as an artist?*

**JS:** "Well, it's for several reasons. Some of the music that drew me into becoming a musician was created there – that's definitely important to me. I grew up near Vernonia, in Rainier, but both places are very similar. I'm always striving to get back into those communities around the old home place where I feel like I can make a difference or I can make a contribution to the community, even though I don't live there anymore. Even though we're only doing two days of programming in Vernonia this time, my goal is to expand that to three or even five days next year. With the Rhapsody Project, we have a new initiative to deliver recurring programs because we want to help young students who get interested in the music have avenues to get deeper into it. There are a host of festivals and workshops around the Pacific Northwest who are looking for more young people and more diverse audiences. I know there has to be some young and promising musicians in Vernonia who could benefit from going to these events that have educational elements to them. I'm working to make this more strategic and create a pipeline of students in Vernonia to explore the wider world through the lens of music and get connected to more of American culture through the medium of folk, blues and roots music."

**VV:** *How does it feel to have finished the recording of Woody Guthrie's Columbia River songs and why was this such an important project for you?*

**JS:** "It's both a relief and encouraging to finally come out the other side of something that was really a slog at times – something that had a lot of moving parts and a lot of uncertainty around it, as far as just getting it completed and done right. There is also some pride in being part of a group of musicians that put together a wonderful set of recordings. This project was important because, quite honestly, it was just silly that all of those songs had never been recorded, because so many of them are such good songs. So it was important

from a folkloric background. I wanted those songs to be out there in a format other than just notated music, because songs are there to be sung. That Woody Guthrie could have made this unique and special contribution to northwest culture, and then not have all of them be available for people to listen to and learn from, was just absurd. And it was important to me personally, because again, it was some of the other music that drew me into becoming a musician and was the music for me that reflected the character and the nature of the northwest. I wanted all that music to be available to people."

**VV:** *What other projects are you working on now?*

**JS:** "Right now my big project is this Rhapsody Project initiative to build a coalition between community members, like Shannon Romtvedt at the Vernonia Library, and school administrators, festivals, and schools of music, that are working with us to draw more young people into the traditions of American roots music. That's my main focus – creating a pipeline of young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds and racial minorities, that can get a foot in the door and have the same opportunities that more privileged white folks, like myself, have had for a long time."

**VV:** *By the way, where does the name, "Rutabaga" come from?*

**JS:** "That goes back to 'Dog Salmon and Rutabagas' an album of music by local musicians Hobe Kytr and Dave Berge who were big musical influences

on me. I always struggled with rhythm as a musician and then Hobe taught me to play banjo and studying the banjo really improved my rhythm tremendously. I named it 'Rutabago Rhythm Workshop' because it felt right and because the rhythmic quality of any region's folk music helps define it. So it's a way I can get down in the weeds of the cool and nerdy parts of music that can also be fun for people once they open themselves up and let the rhythm of something be a vehicle for self-expression.

On the 'Dog Salmon and Rutabagas' album there was a song that included a group of locals singing along, and they were called the 'Rutabaga Chorus.' My mom was a member of that chorus when I was a baby and she was holding me in her arms while she was singing; you can hear me crying in the background of the recording."

*The "Rutabaga Rhythm Workshops" will take place at the Vernonia Schools for K-5 students on April 26 and at the Vernonia Library for homeschool students on April 27. Joe Seamons and Tina Dietz will also perform at the Vernonia Schools on April 27 at 2:00 pm.*

*On April 27 Seamons and Dietz will perform with Timberbound at the Vernonia Grange. Beginning at 6:00 pm, the event will include an open house and potluck dinner; a performance by local students with Timberbound, a slide show of photographs by Jeanelle Wiggins presented by Cory Colburn, and a concert and dance with Timberbound.*

## Vernonia Students of the Month

March 2017



**Marissa Naeve** Grade 3

Marissa's teacher says she is a conscientious, kind and responsible student who often thinks of other students. In her academic work, Marissa puts forth her best effort and embodies the expectation of being a learner. Marissa says her favorite subject is math. She likes to do Taekwondo and also volunteers to help community members with yard work.

**Clarissa Coburn** Grade 8

Clarissa is known by her teachers as a student that is on task, organized and puts forth 100% effort. In class she is polite, willing to volunteer, and does the right thing. Clarissa says her favorite subject is band where she plays the flute. In her free time she likes to draw.



**Kailia Jackson** Grade 11

Kailia is an engaged and involved student. She played volleyball and was a wrestling team captain and the District Champion at 106 pounds. She was on the Prom Committee and is running for Student Body President. Outside of school she is coaching softball for U10 girls this spring and is also an intern with Vernonia's Voice.

**Register Now  
for Early Childhood Screening Fair**

The Early Childhood Health and Education Screening Fair is being provided for all 2, 3, 4 and 5 year olds of Columbia County. This free screening fair will provide parents and guardians information about their child's development as it relates to current health and education guidelines.

**Friday, May 19th**  
Sunset Park Community Church  
174 Sunset Blvd, St. Helens  
Parents and guardians are requested to make appointments by May 12 so materials can be mailed and completed before attending the screening fair.

Please call the NW Early Learning Hub for an appointment  
(503) 614-1443 or (503) 366-4100