

# Mutagen: Straight out of the O.C.

Elizabeth Hitz

Clackamas Print

At first glance, Oregon City resident Nathan Birchfield looks like a quiet, ordinary guy. First impressions are deceiving. Birchfield, along with Ray Couryena and Louis Couryena form the three-piece rock band Mutagen. The band began about 10 years ago when Birchfield, dissatisfied with the five previous bands he had played with, came up with his own ideas for a band and created his own demo. Taylor listened to the demos, and asked to join the group. While the two started off using synthesizer tracks for their bass, eventually they taught Taylor's younger brother Couryena to play guitar thus creating the indelible sound of Mutagen. Although the group has a wide range of influences (including:



Contributed Photo

Local group Mutagen, from left: guitarist/lyricist/vocalist Nathan Birchfield, bassist Louis Couryena, and drummer Ray Taylor play heavy rock rooted in metal, punk, and industrial.

Nirvana, Megadeth, Nine Inch Nails, the Misfits, and In Flames) Mutagen has a sound and style all its own.

A style which Birchfield describes as "basic rock, punk,

and thrash metal with the melodies still intact ... with very powerful vocals." Even the lyrics, which are all written by Birchfield, add to the band's unique sound.

Mutagen enjoys a broad range

of exposure. They have played at park concerts, Rock N Roll Pizza, the New Paris Theatre in Portland and Oregon City High School, where they placed third in the Battle of the Bands two

years ago. The band usually side-steps bar gigs because Couryena is under 21.

The group also has a website where interested listeners can hear demos and get an up-to-date peek at the band's scheduled shows ([www.myspace.com/mutagen](http://www.myspace.com/mutagen)).

Scheduling can be tough since it has to be worked around the busy calendars and outside plans of all three members.

Taylor works at Albertsons, and is thinking about possibly going back to college to be a counselor for troubled teens or a psychologist. Couryena is finishing school at Oregon City High School, and Birchfield wants to professionally publish his comics.

Overall, the lasting impression Mutagen leaves is the unruly urge to bang the head in time with the music and a desire to turn up the bass so high that the entire block is shaking at its foundations.

# 'Serenity': Smart sci-fi cure for the 'Star Wars' blues

Nora Cameron

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Movie-goers, rejoice; they have the cure for the new "Star Wars" trilogy. "Serenity," the movie sequel to Whedon's short-lived TV series "Firefly," follows the crew of the Firefly-class transport ship Serenity — jaded, cynical captain "Mal" Reynolds (Nathan Phillips), tough-as-nails first mate Inara Torres; wacky, irrevocable pilot Wash (Alan Tudyk), the wise-bright tough guy Jayne (Bruce Baldwin), bubbly mechan-

ic Kaylee (Jewel Staite), brilliant doctor Simon (Sean Maher) and Simon's genius sister River (Summer Glau).

Mal and Zoë are hardened veterans who fought together on the losing side of an interplanetary civil war against the Alliance, a massive government that desires control over all the inhabited planets.

Now, eight years after the war, Mal and the crew of Serenity — named after the pivotal Battle of Serenity Valley — roam the outer fringes of the solar system pulling off small crimes, odd jobs, and anything else that will get

them paid while trying to avoid the Alliance.

This becomes more difficult after they take on Simon and River, since Simon has kidnapped River from an Alliance-run facility where they were attempting to make people into psychic assassins. The result is that they are both fugitives, and River, while still a genius, is highly unstable and unpredictable.

Keeping off the Alliance's radar becomes less of a struggle and more of an impossibility when the government sends a man known only as the Operative (Chiwetel Ejiofor) to track them down.

The Operative is an assassin,

and he is very good at what he does. He has only one goal: capture or kill River. As Mal and crew try to stay ahead of their relentless pursuer, two former members of Serenity's crew get caught up in the action: the preacher Shepherd Book (Ron Glass), and a Companion — a sort of futuristic geisha — named Inara (Morena Baccarin). The crew is forced to go to greater and greater lengths to escape the Operative long enough to discover why the Alliance is so desperate to get River back, while also avoiding run-ins with the Reavers — humans driven into cannibalistic madness at the edge of space.

"Serenity" is a gem of a movie. It is superbly written and directed, and features a cast full of blind talent. It is a dark, witty and energetic flight through an easily believable future where Earth has been abandoned and humanity is

spread across a hundred worlds. Whedon knows how to pull heartstrings. This movie can go from anxiety to euphoria to grief and back again in a matter of a minute or two. After two hours, the audience is left emotionally drained.

Fans of the TV show will appreciate the same snappy dialogue and full, complex characters that made "Firefly" a cult hit, and while watching the series first will help the movie make more sense, it's still easily accessible to the uninitiated.

Some of the lines will sound like they are in another language, and they are. Whedon's universe speaks both English and Chinese, adding another intriguing layer to his rich and colorful world.

"Serenity" is a thoroughly engrossing film, and it is difficult to find points to complain about. It will not disappoint.

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