



PHOTO BY JOE GLODE

"The entire history of Portland music has really been one of a lack of venues to play," says *The Woolen Men* drummer Rafael Spielman,

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Browning said. "It's a little bit harder maybe to pipe up if you're complaining about people moving here and displacing you if you yourself have moved here."

At some level, they still find it a little confounding that Portland became, well, *cool*.

"I feel like when we were in high school was really the beginning," Spielman said. "The late 1990s was the beginning of Portland as it's become."

"This was pre the lifestyle and in-flight magazine articles and the food coverage," Browning said. "My mother grew up here. She said in the '80s nobody cared. They would just live here and do their weird thing. Nobody bothered them. It was a city where you could do whatever you want."

That's the real Portland weird versus the bumper sticker "weird," which started out as a campaign by businesses – first in Austin, Texas, and then here – to get people to shop local. Then, like so much else, it turned into a brand. In their high school days, Browning and Spielman were into local and regional artists like *The Wipers*, *Quasi*, *Crackerbash* and *Sleater-Kinney*. But Spielman confesses he has mixed feelings about *Sleater-Kinney* today, because of band member Carrie Brownstein's involvement in you-know-what.

"My issue with 'Portlandia' is that the meaning of the whole show seems to be that it's OK to not really believe in anything," he said. "I have no problem with satire, but the

show doesn't really offer much other than pointing out that what's ridiculous in people's everyday lives. ... It doesn't really condemn or offer anything different; it just lets people keep doing what they're doing while giving them an out – 'I think you should always try to eat local food ... but I know it's kind of silly.' I don't think everything needs to be serious or political or anything like that, but something about it feels hollow to me."

The boom culture of both "Portlandia" and condominiums admittedly has its bright side. For one thing, *The Woolen Men* make more money than they did five or seven years ago, albeit not very much money: a hundred bucks for a night's work instead of 20.

And while rehearsal space and houses with basements to play in are harder to find than ever, music scenes and cool neighborhoods have always been a game of real estate whack-a-mole. It's just a more difficult game now.

"The entire history of Portland music has really been one of a lack of venues to play," Spielman said. Not long ago, he went to a gig at a "totally disgusting punk house" on Killingsworth and wondered how much longer the place could last.

"I'm sure that some punks have been renting it for years," he said. "It's great, but it's hard to imagine how the person who owns that house doesn't know the value of that property."

That people are still doing it is what matters. The "Secret City" release show

ended up happening at the American Legion Hall on Alberta. DIY can never die.

"As much as we're all worried about what's happening with this city, there's this really nice wave of optimism and community spirit that makes me feel very optimistic about the music scene," Spielman said. "Everybody has a lot of mutual respect, and a lot of people are really putting their all into doing really cool stuff."

"As long as people continue to be invested in making that community, those things will continue to happen," Browning said. "It's really complicated because there are definitely many remarkable things happening now in Portland that are only happening because the city has changed. So to lay it all on this negative side or to look to the past as if it was some ideal utopia is so ridiculous. How you negotiate the moment that we're in now, that's what matters."

As far as Browning is concerned, it should be possible for a city to create affordable housing for working families, get people off the streets *and* be a place where bands can thrive, and where a kid out of college can live and do art without being 20 miles out town?

"I think both those things should be totally possible," he said. "In a city as progressive as Portland, there should be so much more support. Like, I want to see Scandinavian style, 50 percent taxes and we all get free health care and free college, you know what I'm saying? I'm down for that. I'll give away my money to that cause."