

The subtle alchemy of Three for Silver

Bassist Lucas Warford discusses music and the Portland trio's latest trip to Russia

BY STEPHEN QUIRKE
STAFF WRITER

It is difficult to do justice to the band of eclectic misfits that make up Three for Silver.

A full-time trio (and sometime big band) of gypsy jazz mercenaries and multi-instrumentalists, Three For Silver has won the praise of audiences across the region since they formed in 2012.

The trio combines the distinct vocal styles of the sultry/sweet Willo Sertain and the abrupt shards of Lucas Warford. The two conceived the band while touring Europe with the Underscore Orchestra in 2012.

Together with violinist Greg Allison, the trio weave together an eclectic mix of sound that's difficult to fully describe. You could think of it as a kind of polychronic jazz or perhaps a folk futurism.

Some songs sound distinctly like they're being squeezed out of a small wooden box. Others seem to erupt from brawlers in an 18th-century pub.

A year after they formed, New York's Deli Magazine named the band artist of the month based on its album *Live in the Map Room*. Years later, they were playing resistance songs from *Three Penny Opera* at Portland's Vie De Boheme, with a full audience stomping and grunting in time to the Cannon Song.

Last year, Three for Silver was selected to travel to Russia as part of a U.S. State Department cultural exchange program. This May, the band visited the bustling port city of Vladivostok and the remote Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy.

"My favorite thing about the trip was definitely the show with the heavy metal Ghostbusters cover," Sertain said as others nodded in agreement. "That and all of the ponies."

"There are ponies everywhere in Russia," Warford said. "Just about any social gathering becomes an excuse to bring out their ponies and dress them up. They really love ponies."

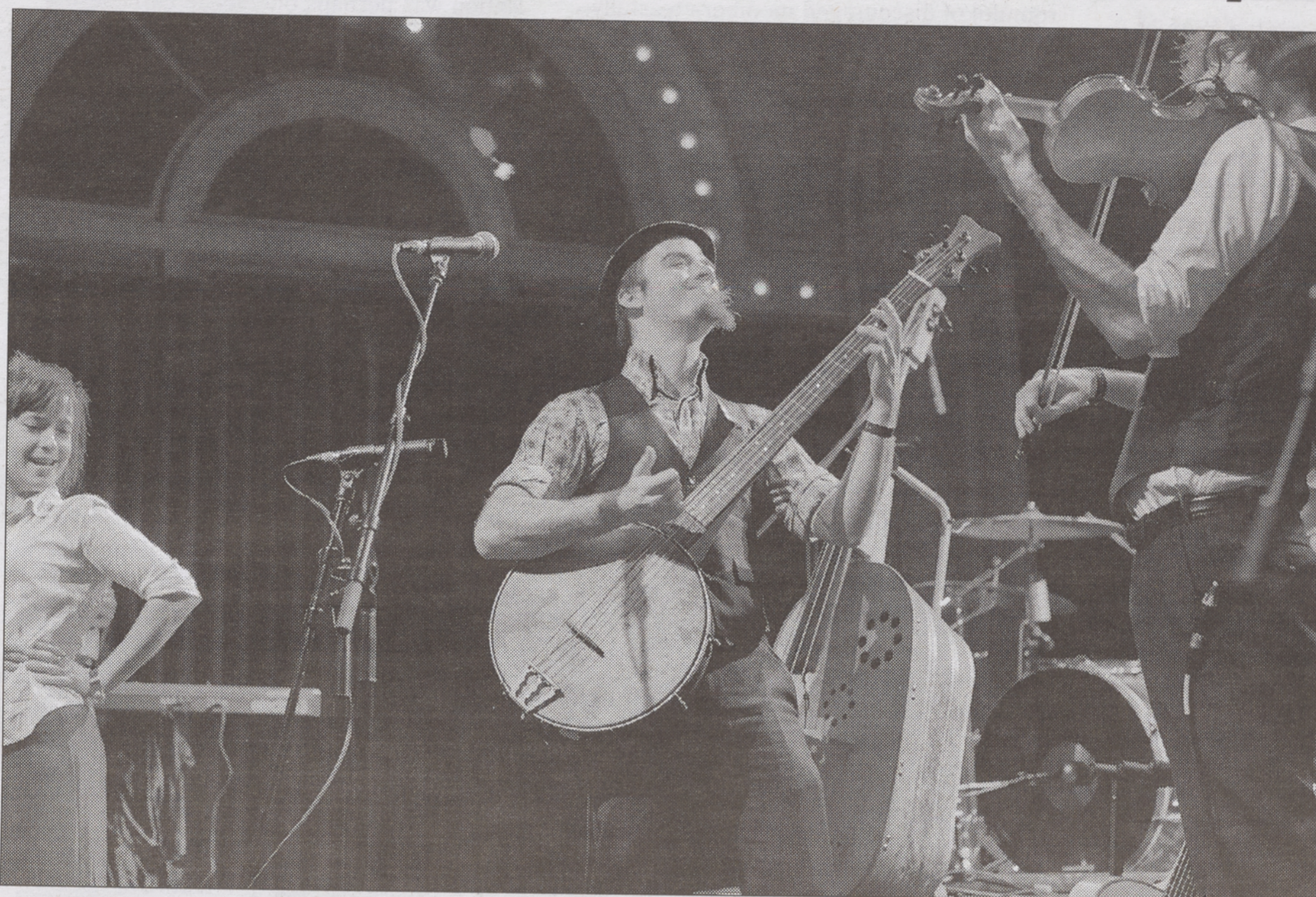
On Sept. 8, Three for Silver released its third full-length album, *"The Way We Burn,"* at The Old Church Concert Hall. With sound heavily layered with ethereal qualities, leaping from emotional ballads like "Coracius" (from 2015's *"Bury Me Standing"*) to the gently balanced "Devil on My Shoulder," *"The Way We Burn"* continues to expand the trio's experimental range.

Warford is a multi-instrumentalist who draws a striking range of percussive sound from a custom-built bass-banjo styled after Les Claypool and punctuate his verses with guttural snaps reminiscent of Tom Waits.

Street Roots caught up with Warford to hear highlights of the band's trip to Russia, get his thoughts on music today and unpeel the enigmas of alchemy.

Stephen Quirke: *"The Way We Burn" might be your most rock 'n' roll album to date. As a rock artist, what is the state of rock 'n' roll today?*

Lucas Warford: Rock 'n' roll – as I



Three for Silver – Willow Sertain (from left), Lucas Warford and Greg Allison – perform at the Crystal Ballroom in Portland.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THREE FOR SILVER

IF YOU GO

Three for Silver performances:

Nov. 17: Slim's in Portland, 9 p.m.

Nov. 18: Kelly's Olympian in Portland, with The Jack Maybe Project and Feral Folk; 9 p.m.

believe the kids refer to it – may have briefly been a codified style of music for a moment there in the mid-20th century, but it so quickly exploded in so many directions that feels ridiculous to talk about it in a unified manner. If anything, rock 'n' roll feels like an attitude, and that attitude will always be alive and well as long as someone is willing to get ridiculous and not give a fuck.

S.Q.: *What was your favorite part of being in Russia?*

L.W.: The hospitality, the food, the superior treatment of musicians. That last part isn't too particular to Russia, as almost every country I've been to knows how to treat musicians better than America, sad to say. Though there were many tense moments on a governmental level, the Russian people themselves were some of the greatest audiences and hosts I've ever encountered. Just incredible levels of excitement and love. Russian hospitality is famous for a reason.

S.Q.: *Did anyone with the Federal Security Service try to recruit you while you were there?*

L.W.: No?

S.Q.: *Would you tell us if they did?*

L.W.: Yes?

S.Q.: *I understand the band name is an obscure reference to Rosicrucianism. How long have you personally practiced alchemy? How*

did this influence your musical style?

L.W.: The hermetic tradition of alchemy has long guided us not just artistically but in all areas of life. It is embedded right in the name. Silver is dominated by Luna, in other words the moon, which is the ruling planet of Cancer, and is exalted in Taurus, upon whose horns we ride and you can hear mentioned in our song *Get Low* (a heavily coded anthem to Jungian self-actualization through the conscious excavating of unconscious archetypes acting in your life). The desire to serve this literally lunatic metal is triplicated, three for silver, obviously representing both the tripartite nature of the Judaeo-Christian god (Lucas the father, Willo the son, Greg the holy ghost), but also the tripod or pyramid as the most stable platonic solid.

S.Q.: *Favorite Spice Girl or boy band?*

L.W.: Posh Spice. Scary Spice is the obvious choice. Too obvious. Posh always looked like she had something devious planned, like the Spice Girls were just Phase One in something much more sinister.

S.Q.: *Who is a better guitar player: Lucas Warford or Yngwie Malmsteen?*

L.W.: Definitely Yngwie, but you'd rather listen to Lucas.

S.Q.: *Three for Silver has done a fair bit of busking. What's the deal with that?*

L.W.: You go out on the street and perform for people, and they give you money. It's a timeless and noble tradition practiced all over the world, and I don't trust any musician who can't do it. Period. It really cuts out all the bullshit, as it's just you being totally vulnerable in an environment that is not conducive to performing (if not outright hostile to it), and you've gotta summon enough presence that total strangers, who probably had no expectation

of encountering a performance, not only stop to listen, but actually give you something for it. It's a magical and important thing, while also being grinding, unromantic and occasionally dangerous.

S.Q.: *What's your favorite show you've ever played?*

L.W.: That's an impossible question. There've been some grand moments over the years: a giant outdoor festival on Komsomolskaya Square in Khabarovsk, Russia, performing as the sun set over the huge Orthodox cathedral; a wedding party in front of Schwerin Castle in Schwerin, Germany; a concert in the hull of a hollowed-out boat afloat in Deer Harbor on Orcas Island. Those are a few that immediately came to me.

S.Q.: *What's the weirdest show you've ever played?*

L.W.: In Australia at a big New Year's Eve festival, performing atop a converted double-decker bus, with the audience slowly getting more and more naked as we perform, as there was a Naked Disco following our set. By our last few songs, the crowd was just a big writhing mass of nudity. Maybe not too weird, but definitely very surreal, especially as we had just landed in Australia less than 12 hours before that.

S.Q.: *Any advice to young musicians?*

L.W.: Book shows, figure everything else out later. Don't quite have a band ready? Book a show, and you'll definitely find some people. Don't quite have enough songs? Book a show, and you'll certainly get something prepared. And if you don't figure it out in time, you'll fail miserably, and that is just as valuable as succeeding. Don't wait; book.

Stephen Quirke is a former housemate of members of Three for Silver