

# Rebel Music

World music legend plays for the home crowd.

**W**ho's the most famous musician in Eugene? You might guess Mason Williams, or the Cherry Poppin' Daddies, but it's really no contest: **Thomas Mapfumo** is one of the world's most revered musicians. Beginning in the 1960s, the composer and guitarist from what was then called Rhodesia developed a powerful form of protest music called chimurenga, wedding lyrics protesting the oppression of the apartheid regime to danceable, pulsating sounds that featured his major musical innovation: translating the bubbling sound of the mbira, the thumb piano of the Shona people, to the electric guitar. The government recognized him as a threat, but Mapfumo persevered in writing his powerful protest music, performing for tens of thousands of his countrymen, and rejoicing in the 1980 demise of the apartheid regime.

Sadly, the advent of majority rule didn't end the need for protest songs, and Mapfumo soon began applying his social conscience — and his compelling music — to critiques of the increasingly corrupt regime of Robert Mugabe. Rather than turning a blind eye to Mugabe's corruption and oppression, he decided to leave his Zimbabwean homeland, but maintain the struggle from a safe base. After death threats and other intimidation tactics, Mapfumo entered a voluntary exile to Eugene. But though he still records mesmerizing albums and tours the world, bringing his message of liberation and justice to listeners throughout the world, Mapfumo seldom performs in this area, so his Aug. 30 concert at the WOW Hall is a must-see event for any fan of world music. With the sultry reggae of **Ichele & the Circle of Light** opening, this is easily one of the most recommended shows of the year.

The other big show coming up is **Wilco** at the McDonald Theater on Sept. 4. It's hard to believe anyone reading this doesn't know about what's easily one of the finest rock bands to emerge in the past decade (especially after the fine documentary *I Am Trying to Break Your Heart* played at the Bijou last spring), but briefly: Emerging from the ashes of the alt country pioneers Uncle Tupelo, Wilco has evolved into one of the most interesting and exploratory rock-oriented bands in the world, as songwriter Jeff Tweedy's musical vision has expanded and deepened. We're lucky to get them here at all, much less at a venue as ideal as the McDonald — another can't miss show.

The string of strong bluegrass shows streaming through town continues this weekend when Portland's **Foghorn String Band** returns to Sam Bond's Garage Friday, Aug. 29. I first encountered these stalwarts of Portland's re-

markable old-time music revival at OFAM last spring, and was startled to find that they more than held their own with some of the legends of bluegrass also appearing there. They've been playing square dances in Portland, but there's nothing square about these young ex-rockers, who mix the fire of rock and roll with the traditional mountain fiddle tunes and high-spirited Appalachian dance music of unadulterated bluegrass. If that's not enough twang for you, on Thursday, Aug. 28, the **Lo-Fi Breakdown**, another hot young bluegrass band (this one out of Utah) that mixes originals and traditionals, comes to Sam Bond's.

Some strong jazz comes to Luna this month. On Thursday, Aug. 28, one of the most exciting bands in town, **Eleven Eyes**, will blow the doors down. I caught this funk/electronic/jazz ensemble at the Wild Duck last month and was knocked out by their sound: '70s fusion licks and 21st century sounds over turntable zips and samples, then trumpet, tenor and (in this show) bass clarinet — 13 eyes? Sometimes languid (despite the propulsive rhythm section), sometimes soaring into outer space, always cooking, this is a band that doesn't hold back. Maybe not everything is quite in focus all the time, but they create an undeniable excitement. A few jazz purists may blanch, but for my money, Eleven Eyes represents a truly original and coherent new direction in improvised music. In fact, I'd recommend this band as much to rock and funk fans as jazz.

On Friday, Sept. 4, Luna hosts singer **Kari Gaffney** and pianist **Jeff Williams**. She's been winning acclaim across the country for her warm covers of jazz standards. And on Sept. 11, the club brings one of the real divas of jazz vocals, **Meredith d'Ambrosio**, back to town. For almost four decades, this cool alto (often compared to Blossom Dearie) has been winning accolades from the likes of Leonard Feather and performing with musicians as esteemed and diverse as Dave Frishberg, Fred Hersch, Dick Hyman, Hank Jones, Milt Hinton, Lee Konitz, Ken Peplowski, Phil Woods, and Kevin Eubanks. Luna's intimate setting is an ideal place to hear her. **EW**



**Thomas Mapfumo and the Blacks Unlimited perform at WOW Hall on Saturday.**

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**Hello Lobster**

When you want to make music and are too cheap to buy instruments, you go to Goodwill and buy cheap Casio keyboards. What started as a joke three years ago between Tony Altamirano and Ruben Markstrom quickly grew into an underground nerd-rock or Casio-rock band with a good local following and occasionally, with talented local musicians joining them on stage. Mix Devo with **They Might Be Giants** and throw in some **Styx** and you get **Hello Lobster**. Check out Eugene Weekly's Clubs section to see where and when they are playing this Sunday night!

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