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Clogging and Grooving

Life after Liftoff creates new sounds.

Eugene campus venue Taylor's will host Portland band **Life After Liftoff** Saturday. The group's inception came more than two years ago as guitarist/vocalist Michael Herrman and saxophonist/vocalist Trevor Rasmussen jammed together. What began as a duo grew to encompass "a succession of revolving cast members" as the pair struggled to find musicians with the same mindset. The current lineup, including David Milne on the E.W.I. and percussionist Michael McQuilken, gelled 10 months ago, and the musicians "decided to change up the sound."

They've always thrown high energy into their rock, but now they're all about baiting the hook with some tasty grooves. "We're really into setting the groove, and building that groove, whereas before we just weren't sure what we were doing!" reveals Rasmussen. "At the time we didn't have the right set up of guys. All the guys we have playing right now are solid," he says.

One change the group has made since they performed here last March is highlighting Herrman's competence at clogging, an Appalachian/Celtic/Nordic form of traditional dance. "Michael grew up clogging and he was in a bunch of [clogging] groups. He's always wanted to add it to our stage show," Rasmussen explains. "It's a little like tap dancing, except to Appalachian music, or bluegrass music."

Rasmussen has taken clogging to a new level with LAL by customizing his own 2' by 3' clogging board, christened the "Launch Pad," which he throws on stage. "He and the drummer will trade off and just jam and kind of do a funk-clogging thing," he says. About the E.W.I. — that stands for Electronic Wind Instrument, which is "shaped and plays like a saxophone but accesses sounds from a Korg Trinity keyboard." It stands in for a traditional bass, and leaves audiences mystified.

The band has recently released a live CD,

recorded at two Portland nightspots, Bitter End Pub and Mt. Tabor Theater. *Paper Moon* is, in Rasmussen's words, "a really good representation of what you get at a Life After Liftoff gig. It's high energy and there're a lot of jams. A lot of extended stuff, which on a studio album you wouldn't get."

A newcomer on the Eugene scene, **Yeltsin** has only been together since February, though the members have performed locally several times and already recorded a five-song E.P. Guitarist Jake Pavlak and bassist Dana Axon are old friends, having played together in popular local act Buckhorn, a trio that specialized in jazzy instrumental rock.

Axon says, "Jake and I have been playing for a long, long time and we've been doing different things and had this realization that we wanted to write some songs with vocals and sing." Buckhorn was originally intended to have vocals, but no luck was had in finding a suitable singer. "We always wanted to have a band with lyrics. We were talking to ourselves and we said we could do this, we should try, and we did. In the beginning, we thought, maybe it won't be a band, it'll just be an excuse to learn how to sing and write songs."

The pair's vocal confidence grew and they began auditioning different drummers before signing on with veteran drummer Jiven Valpey. Valpey has played in numerous local bands, notably The Pass Out Kings. "He understood where we were coming from, and he's just a great drummer, period," says Axon. "Compared to all the punk rock stuff we've all done in the past, this is probably the least macho thing we've ever done."

Yeltsin performs rock and pop in the vein of The Pixies or Pavement, with catchy melodies and smart lyrics. Catch them Thursday at Samurai Duck opening for Jen Wood, who has performed with Black Heart Procession, or Friday at Tiny Tavern along with Ed Cole. **EW**



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