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## music BY VANESSA SALVIA

The Decemberists play WOW Hall on Monday.



## Archetypes & Attitude

Decemberists, Stars light up the night.

**C**astaways and Cutouts, the Decemberists' debut CD, aptly describes the characters that populate the world of songwriter Colin Meloy. I learned more about one of Portland's hottest up and coming bands after speaking recently with vocalist, guitarist and percussionist Meloy, who moved to Portland from Montana in 1999.

Meloy "started playing around town, mostly playing solo and meeting people in the music community" and "cobbled" together the Decemberists from those networks in fall of 2000. The band, featuring former Eugene resident and guitarist Chris Funk, percussionist Rachel Blumberg (who currently plays in Norfolk & Western and formerly played in punk band Sissyface) and Jenny Conlee on piano, organ and accordion, debuted with *Castaways* on Hush Records, then switched to Kill Rock Stars to record their follow up, *Her Majesty the Decemberists*.

Kill Rock Stars has re-released *Castaways*, which features percussion and singing from former Eugene musician Ezra Holbrook and bass by Nate Query. Majesty's bassist Jesse Emerson left the band shortly after completing recording and Query rejoined the band. Every one of Meloy's songs create a setting and mood, giving life to pirates, infant ghosts, deceased brides, chimney sweeps and other ragamuffin outcasts, along with creating full-bodied indie pop and folk akin to a sanctified marriage between The Mountain Goats and Robyn Hitchcock.

Meloy says, "I was a short-story writer in college with designs to continue doing that after college and I sort of fell into this music thing. I don't know where I get the information. Some of them are archetypes, figures from fairy tales that have been in and out of narratives and novels from centuries past. I'm playing with them."

Meloy says he typically writes the lyrics and a musical skeleton, then the band collectively fleshes it out, with no set method to the inspired madness. Meloy was tapped by a fan of the Decemberists, who happens to be an editor, to pen a 100-page book about the Replacement's seminal album *Let It Be*. The book is for Continuum Publishing's

series entitled 33 1/3, "a series of short books about specific records written by mostly rock critics, musicians, academics and other folks writing about their favorite records," he says.

Being a short-story writer, Meloy feels "challenged" by the task of writing 100 pages about one record and finds the medium "not quite to my liking, given my current song-writing trends."

No changes are in store for the Decemberists' line-up: "I think the current line-up is what it's going to be for a while. Everybody seems to be really happy and we're being productive and touring more and more. Things are going really well," says Meloy.

There are plans for an E.P. to be released in February on Spanish label Acquarela, which approached the band last Spring about an exclusive recording.

"We're doing a European tour in May and then we'll probably hunker down in mid-summer and start recording again," says Meloy. We look forward to more from this talented band, who will be performing Jan 19th at WOW Hall along with **Corinna Repp** and locals **Mine Thirtyseven**.

Another exciting Portland band, **Stars of Track and Field**, will appear the next night at John Henry's. This four-piece bursts at the seams with edgy guitars, indie rock attitude and catchy pop hooks. Singer Kevin Calaba, guitarist Jason Bell, bassist Moxley Stratton and drummer Daniel Orvik are touring behind their self-titled, self-released debut recording and are embarking on their first West Coast tour.

Together they produce well-crafted songs that contain a sense of the dramatic in the vein of Built to Spill and sweetness akin to retro-popsters the Long Winters.

Eugene songwriter **Ed Cole** will debut songs from his newest release, *Forgotten Hits*, at a Jan. 16th Sam Bond's show with **The Shudders**. Cole recorded these songs between 1999 and 2003 and says they are "much more hard-rocking" than his past release, *Rainy Day Manifesto*. Cole's band backs him up on only one cut. He has plans to begin recording this year on a full length CD for Leisure King. **EW**

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