

# Embrace the Rhythm

The Jungle jams with Ozomatli; Vienna Teng returns.

There won't be any better way to get over the mid-week slump this week than to head over to The Jungle Tuesday, May 18 for **Ozomatli**. Some of the players in this amazing 10-piece band met each other on the scene of month-long protests against working conditions in Los Angeles in 1995. They amassed other musicians, played their first gig one month later, and woke people up to the idea that love could turn their city away from the self-destructive path of violence.

Ozomatli members' ethnic make-up is as diverse as the city they live in, and their Grammy-award winning sound is an energetic and energizing blend of hip-hop, ska, reggae, salsa, funk and jazz. The band sings in Spanish, raps in English and addresses political, social and cultural issues in a way that helps everyone feel they can make a positive change.

Ozomatli originally set out to play only political benefits, but word on the streets quickly spread and the band burst from its California confines and took the nation by storm, debuting in 1998 with *Almo Sounds*, a captivating CD that challenged everyone to stop accepting language as a barrier, find the love in life and unite on the dance floor. *Embrace the Chaos* followed in 2001.

There's something for everyone to love in Ozomatli's music; low-rider funk, beats, raps and turntablism for the hip-hoppers, and hard-hitting horn punctuations for the jazz fiend. There are Latin dance grooves and a permeating sense of good vibes. The band is set to release the first studio album in three years, *Street Signs*, June 22 on Concord Records. Ozomatli is an Aztec word for "God of Dance," and dance you will, my friends, guaranteed.

Cozmic Pizza hosts **Setting Sun** on the 16th. The band is the brainchild of Queens, NY native Gary Levitt, who migrated to San Francisco.

Setting Sun's first recording, *Holed Up*, was made after Levitt hid himself away for three months with nothing but microphones and sim-

ple recording equipment. With help from his friend, Eric Layer, as well as a rotating cast of musicians, Setting Sun's second full length, *Math and Magic*, was born. The title refers to the alchemy of songwriting, the "logic and mystery" that goes into the making of a record.

Levitt crafts songs with an intimate lyrical style but expansive music, embracing driving beats, soothing instrumental interludes and aggressive rhythms. The overall rock feel is softened by catchy melodies throughout and a pensive, somber lyrical view of life resembling Elliott Smith.

Levitt was a member of New York indie band The Kung-Fu Grip, who toured the country and then broke up. While in S.F., Levitt formed Heavy Pebble, who also broke up after just starting to establish themselves.

Levitt became disillusioned with band relationships and decided that Setting Sun would be solely his project, with a revolving cast of musicians. He now calls Los Angeles home.

Also on Sunday at John Henry's, **Fields of Gaffney** takes the stage, featuring Eric "I Was A Founding Member of Sebadoh" Gaffney on guitar and lead vocals, Jessica Cowley of Pillows and Run For Cover Lovers on bass and vocals, and drums by former Alice Donut's guitarist Richard Marshall.

The band began in Massachusetts in summer of 1998 then reformed in San Francisco in 2002 with this line-up. The new release, *Nature Walk*, showcases 12 original songs and five interesting covers.

Gaffney was loveable in Sebadoh because he actually wrote good, quirky, slacker-cool songs. He's a talented songwriter and Gaffney-penned "Broke Up" is a song you wish Sebadoh had recorded. It's not surprising that the originals are the best on this release, but the covers deserve listening time: among them The Troggs "Push It Up To Me," Devo's "Gates of Steel," Daniel Johnston's "I Did Acid With Caroline." *Nature Walk* feels like music for a mood swing; it's quiet and easy, loose and rocking, distorted and psy-



chedelic. Should be a great show.

**Vienna Teng** returns to Eugene on the 19th, once again at Café Paradiso. The one-time Silicon Valley software engineer turned touring musician has released a new CD, *Warm Strangers*, on Virt Records. Teng has embarked on a nationwide tour to support it, moving away from strictly solo performances and playing some shows as a trio, with accompaniment by cello and violin.

As soon as the opening track, "Feather Moon," begins, there's a feeling of contentment and familiarity. Teng croons, "breath in breath out, exhale and inhale" and it's immediately calming. She sails into "Harbor," and you feel you're listening in on a private conversation.

A classically trained pianist since age 5, Teng left her high-pressure job as a code writer to pursue her dreams of being a musician. She promoted herself, aided by word-of mouth from gigs she played during her college years at Stanford. She appeared on the "Late Show with

David Letterman" six months after leaving San Francisco.

One listen to Teng and it's clear she's not ordinary. The 11 songs on *Warm Strangers* are lush and melodic and show her growth as a songwriter. Her debut, *Waking Hour*, which was written during her high school and college years, was mostly autobiographical, while *Strangers* finds her more as a short-story fiction writer. She is able to find humanity in the people whose lives we touch unknowingly every day, those strangers we never talk to, particularly on the haunting "Passage," in which Teng vocalizes the thoughts of a car-crash victim.

"The Atheist Christmas Carol" features minimal percussion, cello and piano. Teng's beautiful, crystal-clear voice projects her vision of hope and salvation as she sings "it's the season of scars and of wounds in the heart/of feeling the full weight of our burdens/it's the season of bowing our heads in the wind/and knowing we are not alone in fear/not alone in the dark." **EW**


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