

# Commercializing Culture

NorthWest Beat keeps hip hop pure.

The beat starts, it pounds and thumps into a groove. Two silhouettes face off in a heated MC battle with a hyped crowd and strong disses. For a second, life is good in hip hop. Then comes the logo: an image of a bright red and white target. It invades the space of the two figures, as if it had the entire hip hop culture in its sights, ready to fire away.

I turn the TV off and sigh. I am ashamed. Should I be happy that hip hop has finally found a place in the mainstream and is accepted as a viable marketing tool? Am I proud that the world is finally catching on?

On one hand it's huge and sends the message: "You too can make it in this industry if you try!" As encouraging as this may all seem, there's also a voice inside me screaming, "This is art! Not a commodity used to sell products to hipsters!"

So where does the happy medium between underground quality and the benefits of mainstream exposure lie?

I sat down with Eugene's Michael K and Chewey Elizondo of NorthWest Beat and Shamasound and talked about what it would take to find that happy medium and lift pure Northwest hip hop into the national limelight. "There's a certain level of organization that it takes to really make things happen, that's what we're lacking," K says. "Another important formula is the buzz factor. The reason why a lot of the garbage on the radio is popular is because it's up in people's faces all the time. It's on TV, in the magazines, and even in supermarkets. So the people get into this mode where they think that if it's not on the radio and all in their face, it's not OK to like it."

For underground movements, local support is a key to success. "I've lived all over the place and have seen some of the most talented people right here in the Northwest," says Elizondo. "But cats seem to think that you need to leave and go to California or New York to ever make it in this game ... If people who complain about how boring the scene is want to see it change, then they've got to support the cats that are going to make it genuinely exciting locally [by buying local CDs and going to shows]. We want people all over the world to notice what's going on

up here and be able to recognize the uniqueness of this Northwest sound."

The Northwest hip hop culture has enough diversity to make that happen, but it will take teamwork and unity within the scene to actually capitalize on that quality. K is trying to make that happen with his company NorthWest Beat, dedicated to building a network that Northwest hip hop artists can use as a promotional and informational tool.

"The people involved with hip hop here seem to be taking these little back streets, which are all going different directions," he says. "NorthWest Beat is like building I-5 for them, one road that goes straight from A to B. It's a place for *anyone* with a computer to find out what's going on

with the scene; where and when the shows are going to take place; where the recording studios are; and who to talk to about promotions in each Northwest town."

For a small one-time fee, artists can post press photos, a bio, album covers with track listings, a calendar of their upcoming events, audio clips, and more on NorthWest Beat's website. "It's harder for independents, but if you have your community getting your back then it greatly opens up possibilities," Elizondo says. "The underground is the test-

fans who log in to check out his stuff, then those fans are going to be exposed to a unique collection of other artists that they never would have known about.

It's a simple answer. A way to maintain musical quality and wide exposure at the same time. And as K says "It takes an army of people to make it successful."

NorthWest Beat offers internships and opportunities in the multimedia and recording industries. Contact them through [www.northwestbeat.com](http://www.northwestbeat.com)



## "This is art! Not a commodity used to sell products to hipsters!"

ing ground for all that mainstream hotness that's so popular right now."

It's a new idea for the Northwest's untapped hip hop market: one place to find *everybody's* material. The networking potential is phenomenal. If one artist has 200 solid

K and Elizondo also run a local recording studio, Shamasound, specializing in hip hop music. Shamasound and the NorthWest Beat headquarters are located at 245 Blair Blvd., Studio B. Book studio time at [www.shamasound.com](http://www.shamasound.com) **ew**

## For the Ladies

Ladyfriend Zine visits Eugene with indie press tour.

Einstein's Museum of Unfine Art hosts a tour of independent media as the **Perpetual Motion Roadshow** rumbles into town Tuesday, Jan. 4. Along with Toronto hip hopper **More or Les** and cartoonist Stephen Notley (creator of "Bob the Angry Flower"), artist Christa Donner will appear. The mind behind **Ladyfriend Zine**, 29-year-old Donner connects readers of all walks of life through shared essays and interviews with remarkable women. **Ladyfriend** tackles issues such as hair loss from chemo and voluntary head-shaving in the "Hair" issue. The "Driving" issue features an interview with a female mechanic. Donner told me more in a phone interview.

**What in your life prepared you or inspired you to do a zine?**

I found out about zines when I was a teenager. I grew up in Fort Wayne, Ind., and there wasn't much independent publishing going on there. But I went to see a local band play and there was this girl passing out her one-page zine and I thought that was such a great idea. At that time I didn't understand that there was a whole community of people [making zines] but it seemed like a great way to get your ideas out there. About three years ago I had this amazing group of women friends who were all moving to different cities. I wanted

to make a publication that would capture their skills and personalities; just something for us friends but that other people could enjoy as well, I hoped. I sent it out to magazines that did zine reviews and

started getting contributions for the next issue.

**What was the most interesting or challenging interview you've conducted?**

I would say one of the most moving for me was the "Age" issue. A friend of mine interviewed four generations of women in her family with the same questions. They had all raised each other but had really different outlooks on life. Also in that issue I found people in each decade of life and asked them to Xerox an image that said something to them about where they were in life and write something about why they chose that image. A woman who was 51 had Xeroxed all these images of her hand and this indentation of her wedding ring because she had just left her husband and her ring had left an imprint on her finger. Getting that from someone I really didn't know at all was amazing and it's really amazing to be able to share that with other people — *Vanessa Salvia*



**Perpetual Motion Roadshow**  
Museum of Unfine Art, 7 pm  
Jan. 4, donation 683-7357

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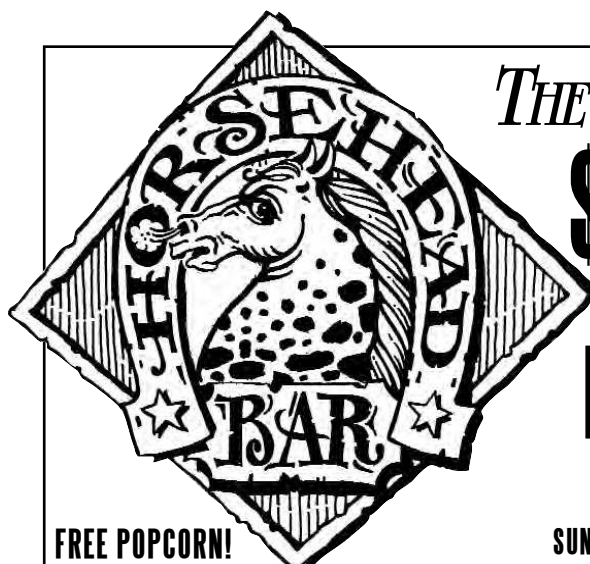
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