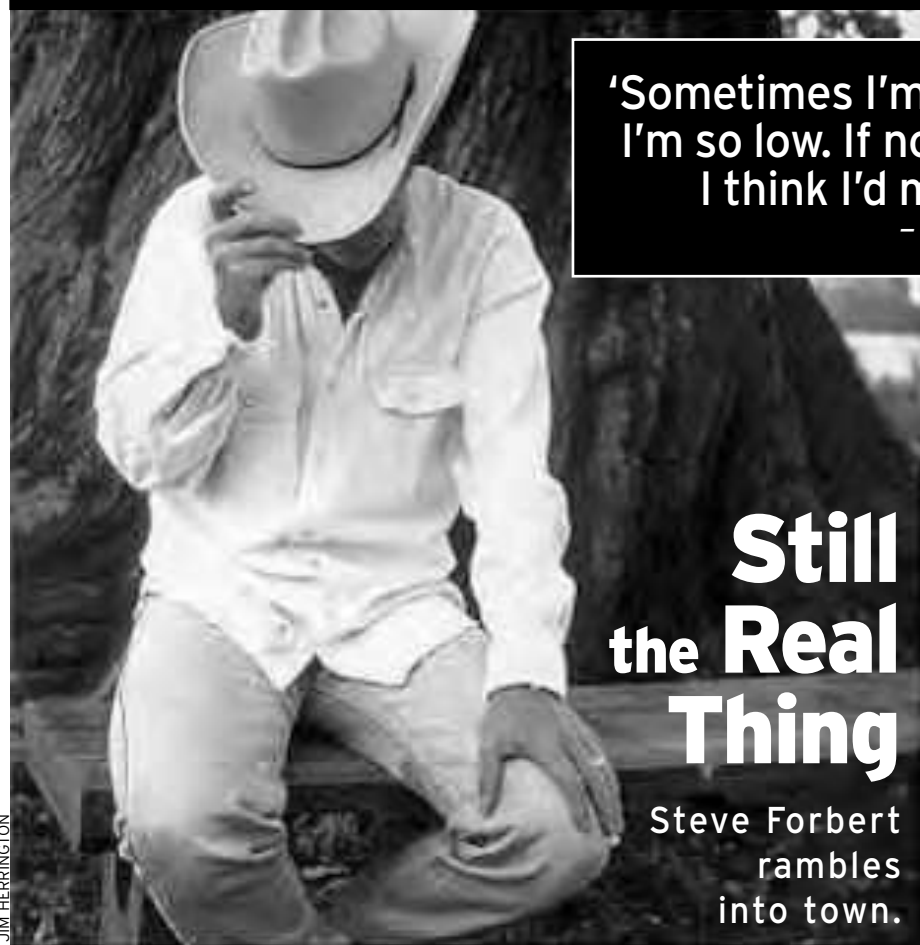




'Sometimes I'm so weary, sometimes I'm so low. If not for your sweet love I think I'd move to Mexico ...'

— Steve Forbert

Still the Real Thing

Steve Forbert rambles into town.

Every now and then, if you're lucky and pay attention to your gut, you get to see something truly rare. You get to see a real artist up close. A little while back, I saw Steve Forbert, who has got to be the greatest underrated songwriting performer in America.

It was just him, his guitar and harmonica, his nearly 30 years of writing, recording and performing, his talent and sincerity and some of the best lines in folk or rock or blues or whatever you want to call it. Just him and us — a genuine troubadour and a hundred nobodies putting in a couple hours at the WOW Hall.

His harmonica work was as natural as

breathing. A separate microphone pointed down where his truck-driver boots banged time. He played fast. He picked quiet and slow. He wailed. He whispered. He yodeled and talked a bit.

Steve Forbert came out of Mississippi in the late 1970s, hailed as the next "new Dylan." He even had a hit song, "Romeo's Tune," a sweet rolling ballad that audiences still call for today. He followed with a couple albums in the '80s that didn't sell much. Then he was gone.

But he kept playing. He played acoustic, solo, electric, anywhere and everywhere. He put out 20 recordings and built a fiercely loyal following who know that the size of a

crowd doesn't dictate the quality of the artist.

At the Eugene show, he knew we weren't going to rock 'til we dropped, but he didn't hold it against us. He called for requests and a guy shouted out, "Mexico! Mexico!"

"OK, OK," he said. He picked through the intro and stepped up to the mic. In his raspy whisper he sang, "Sometimes I'm so weary, sometimes I'm so low. If not for your sweet love I think I'd move to Mexico ..."

He sings lines like this all the time. Lines so simple that most of us wouldn't think of them, but they make perfect sense when we hear them. He sang old songs and news songs, then finished up and returned for his encore. "I'll be playing in Portland on Sunday night," he said. He peered through the lights at the half-empty room. "At the public library or something." People laughed. Forbert laughed. "I'll be reading some books."

Then he kicked into an old favorite, a show-stopper, a night-closer — "You Cannot Win If You Do Not Play." It's a full-blown electric version on his first album, and he strummed it hard and fast on the acoustic. He stomped his foot. He banged his guitar. He worked the harmonica. He does it for us, he does it for himself, he does it because that's what he does.

Every now and then, we get lucky. Steve Forbert's coming back to play old songs and new songs from his latest CD, *Just Like There's Nothin' To It*. Catch him at 8 pm Sunday, Feb. 20 at Café Paradiso. No library card required. **EW**

A State of Zen

Zen Tricksters deliver musical nirvana.

Looking for a night of marathon sets of Grateful Dead, Dylan, Neil Young and Merle Saunders tunes? Then the Zen Tricksters is the show for you. This four-piece is in their third decade of a career spent jamming out the classic tunes Deadheads know and love, along with inspired originals, of course. The guys roll out Phil Lesh's "Pride of Cucamonga," follow it up with "Shakedown Street," bust out a heavy "The Other One," then rip into "Tore Up Over You." You never know what the Tricksters will pull out of their hat, all you have to do is keep smiling and keep dancing.

During 2003, the band toured as an acoustic trio to support their third and most recent studio CD, *Shaking Off The Weirdness*. They're back to a foursome and their current lineup — Jeff Mattson (guitar/vocals), Klyph Black (bass/vocals), Tom Circosta (rhythm guitar/vocals) and Joe Ciarvella (drums) — may be their strongest yet. Mattson says what keeps him going is sharing his enthusiasm for music. In fact, he's never made his living any other way.

On stage, the group dedicate themselves completely to the music, delivering that sustained outpouring of energy jam fans want and need. The Tricksters display the familiar, good vibes of past decades and enhance it with the meaty jam hooks fans today expect. They bring in friends to help them celebrate, as on *Weirdness*, when members of Phil Lesh and Friends, The Dead, and New Riders of the Purple Sage dropped by to lend a voice or two. As jam bands go, their legacy is indisputable. The Tricksters played New York's venerable venue Wetlands Preserve (now closed) more times than any other band, and they've shared the stage with so many jam bands it would be easier to name bands they *haven't* played with.

The band is touring for tsunami relief, donating a percentage of profits to the Red Cross. Two nights before they leap onto Diablo's stage in downtown Eugene, they're playing an already-sold-out show in Zigzag, Ore. Locally-owned Siren Productions, who's putting on the Diablo's show, is donating their entire evening's profits to the Red Cross. Tsunami relief plus awesome dancing music equals clear-your-datebooks and become one with the Zen. Zen Tricksters play 8pm at Diablo's on Saturday.

— Vanessa Salvia

The Punk Accordionist

Jason Webley's one-man circus returns to Eugene.



Jason Webley with Andru Bemis

Sam Bond's Garage, 9 pm
Thursday, Feb. 17, \$6-\$8

It's not every week that you find a strange man standing on a tabletop — and a fairly small tabletop at that — at Sam Bond's, stomping his feet, pounding at his accordion and screaming a song at the people seated below him. The rest of the audience has risen to their feet, but one table would rather stay sitting. They didn't comply when Jason Webley hollered at them from the stage (in rather impolite terms) to get up or get out.

So he took the show to their table.

While other singer-songwriters might sit demurely on their stools and strum introspective ballads, Webley puts on puppet shows and stages his own death and resurrection yearly. Between tickle-fests and drinking sing-alongs, his audience rarely remains passive — sometimes with unexpected consequences. Webley got himself banned from Seattle's Bumbershoot festival when over-enthusiastic fans set him atop

the Seattle Center fountain. It's not all raucous madness, though: His last show at Sam Bond's included a reading from Carl Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories*.

All this could come off as a bit gimmicky in the wrong hands, but Webley's theatrical stage presence is more than justified by his talent. His songs, which range from boisterous drinking tunes to wrenching ballads, wouldn't seem out of place in a Jean-

Pierre Jeunet film. With his accordion, Tom Waits-esque growl and maudlin imagery, Webley brings to mind scenes from *The City of Lost Children*. But with guitar or an echoey piano, his voice gone smooth and sad, he could find a spot on the soundtrack to *Amelie*.

There's a timeless quality to Webley's songwriting, at its strongest when he's playing solo with a plastic vodka jug full of change at his feet for percussion. On his albums, the songs are filled out with horns, strings, bells and more; some are recorded with the hiss and scratch of vinyl, while others bring in a dozen voices for a rousing chorus. But just listening to Webley's records, good as they are, isn't going to give anyone the full experience. For that, you need the man himself on a small stage — or maybe on your table.