

K-a-y Spells Hip Hop

Local hip hop promoter supports scene.

A person on the outside might think there is no hip hop scene in Eugene. And that's the attitude Michael Kay is trying to change. For five years the Eugene resident has been building a hip hop community in this town.

Kay operates his promotion machine, Northwest Beat, from his home office, booking shows and events that support the local and regional hip hop scene. Through his showcases of local talent, Kay urges people in the scene to come together with the positive goal of building community. "What we do is basically a hip hop cultural event," he said. "We combine all the elements of hip hop." That means breakdancers, rappers, singers, choreographed dance routines, beatboxers and artists from Eugene and around the Northwest.

Northwest Beat's first showcase in May at the Jungle was a big success. "Over 500 people came out," Kay said. "It was a great vibe. I was a little worried if people were gonna come support it. But I was totally satisfied." Each showcase is unique, in part because of the wealth and breadth of artists and dancers. "The whole concept is, 'you never know what you're going to see.' We want people to come because it's such a cultural event, not so much because they're coming to see a particular artist."

This time around a rapper from Salem named Deshaun, Trippatank from Spokane, Indo and Michael Kay himself will perform. CJ Mickens will sing, along with Big Reese and female R & B singer Zsa Zsa. Models from Portland and Eugene will show off fashions by Portland-based designer Afrodijio and local retail outlet Ipnosi. DJ Justin Higgins will spin and beatboxer Lafa Taylor will perform. Breakdancing by Edge Breakers completes the atmosphere.

Kay is starting to see rewards for his efforts. "We have had great support over the last six months from local media outlets which are finally starting to recognize what's going on in the culture," he said. Kay joined KDUK 104.7 FM as a DJ about six months ago, which gives him another outlet with which to support local music. "There's a lot of stuff on the table and I'm getting phone calls every day from people who want to be involved so I'd say that we're going to see some big changes over the next year."

But the successes come with frustrations. "Basically it's a long hard process because there is no music industry to speak of, not only in Eugene but in the Northwest in general," Kay said. "It's really scattered and really unorganized. It takes being up in people's faces and letting them know what's going on over and over and over again before they kind of figure it out."

But Kay's getting props from people who already know what's up. "He's a cool cat," said DJ Gene Chism who spins hip hop for KWVA. "He's somebody who's making a difference."

EW

Northwest Beat Showcase
9 pm, Thursday,
July 14, 18+
The Jungle,
\$5



I'm OK, You're OK

The sweet, soothing pop of Chris Tsefalas

Chris Tsefalas can't seem to decide if he wants to make sticky bubble gum pop, dark haunting indie or straight up rock 'n' roll. In the meantime, we get to hear his delightful forays into all of them.

His debut album, *I'm All Right?*, was produced by John Moen, who's also worked with The Decemberists and Elliott Smith, among others. It's a good match, since Tsefalas makes mellow, melody driven music.

The high quality of the recording allows you to hear the nuances, the sonic details that make *I'm All Right?* such a lovely piece of work. Take "It's a Wonderful Ride," a stripped down tune with just Tsefalas' sweet voice over the basics of bass, guitar and drums. In between the chorus and verses we hear a distorted, subtle guitar melody, adding a disturbing layer of darkness intertwined with what would otherwise be a nauseatingly feel-good tune.

Other songs, like "It's All Right I'm OK" and "Sam I Am" are gentle rock – the foot tapping, head nodding kind versus the get up and dance wildly kind. The problem with *I'm All Right?*, which might not be a problem for some people, is that it's too calm, too soothing. It makes good background music. Despite the fact that many of the songs take on some hard, gritty issues, the music sails along blithely and the lyrics aren't enough to ground it because Tsefalas has such a "nice" voice.

But live, it could be a whole different story. Which makes it worth getting to the show early enough to find out. Recorded, Tsefalas is just sweetly good. With an infusion of energy or passion, Tsefalas would be amazing.

Chris Tsefalas opens for Mood Area 52 and the Visible Men on July 16 at Sam Bond's. – Melissa Bears

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