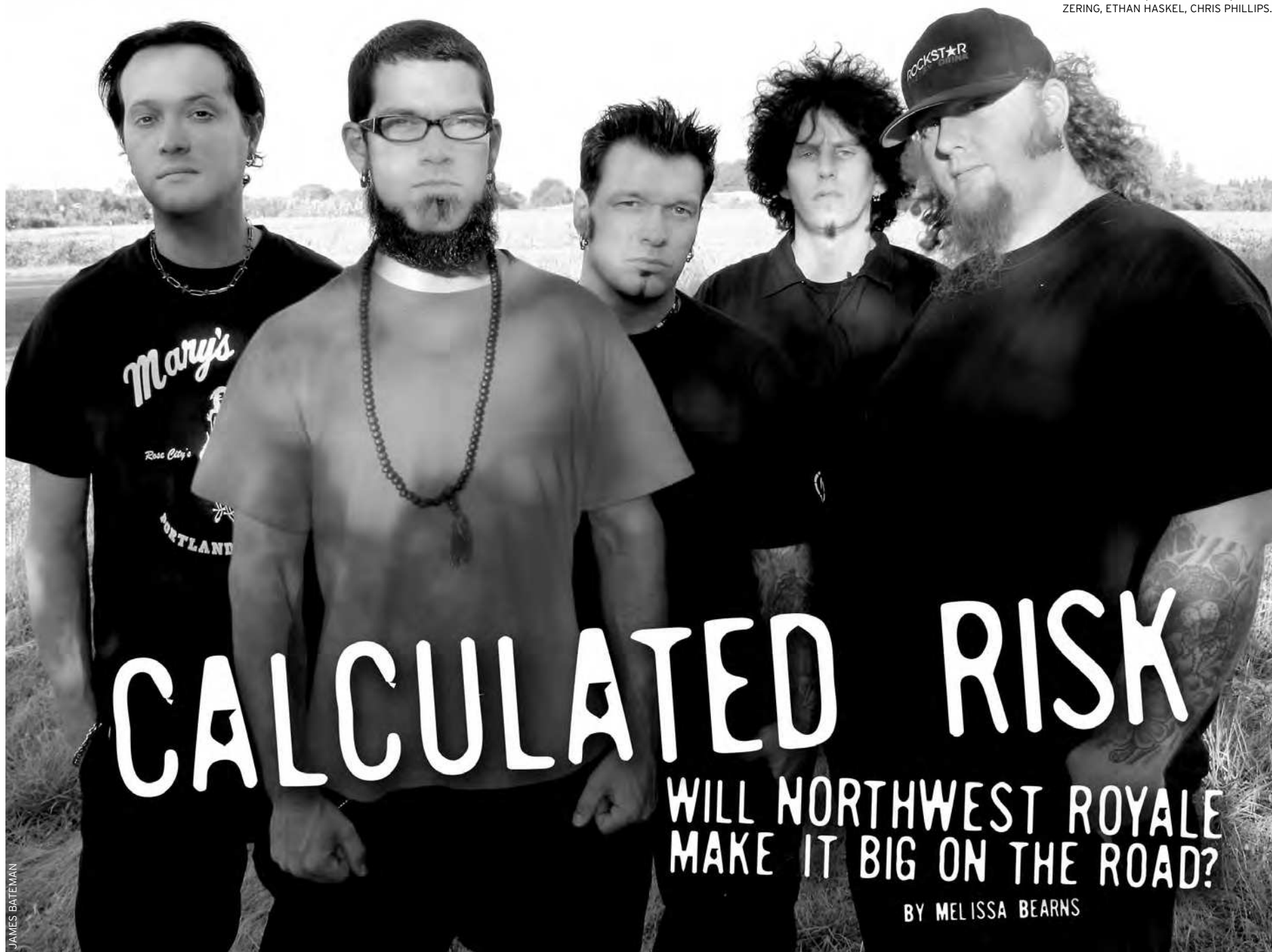




CALCULATED RISK

WILL NORTHWEST ROYALE MAKE IT BIG ON THE ROAD?

BY MELISSA BEARNS

S ometime after 2 am the party got interesting. Chris Phillips, the drummer for Northwest Royale, stood in the living room shifting nervously from foot to foot. After playing two hours of relentless metal for a roiling mosh pit of 20- to 30-somethings at the WOW Hall, the party had moved to his house. He'd changed out of his sweat-soaked T-shirt into a plain black one. Stray pieces of coppery red hair sprung out in all different directions and faint shadows the color of slate were visible on the pale, almost translucent skin beneath his eyes.

He was smiling shyly, standing in front of a small group of people. The couple snuggling on the overstuffed couch was watching him. The guy in the chair in the corner had woken up and was watching him. The group that had been engaged in a heated discussion had quieted down and was watching him. Left foot. Right foot. Left foot. At 6 feet, he towered over everyone. "Damn! I'm more nervous in front of eight people in my living room than I am in front of 500," he said. He laughed nervously. "OK, OK. This is the boy band song I just wrote. It's called 'Blue Balls.'"

He sang a cappella, in a high-pitched falsetto, mimicking 'N Sync or maybe Backstreet Boys. "Girl don't give me blue balls again/ An occasional fire is all I desire/ So please don't make me sleep with your friends." The song continued for a few more XXX-rated lines and when he finished, the living-room audience was laughing, hooting and clapping.

BYE-BYE DAY JOBS

Many people familiar with Northwest Royale refer to Phillips, lead singer and guitarist Colt Williams, bassist Kenny Nestor and backup boy Ethan Haskel as "Eugene's hardest working band." After five years playing more than 100 shows a year, touring as relentlessly as their day jobs would allow, networking with other bands and promoters in different cities, and building a steadily growing fan base, they're taking it to the next level.

They're quitting their jobs, hoping they've built a strong enough foundation and fan base over the last five years to make it as a full-time band. It's a gamble. But more than any other band in Eugene, they've actually got a shot.

"I guess what it really comes down to is that you have to be good enough to quit your day job," said local promoter Evin Marshall. "These guys have the best chance of making it of any of the bands in Eugene. They've got really good management. And their [chances] are better than most because of their work ethic. They regularly tour, promote themselves well and consistently play good shows with good bands."

When Abe Nielsen first started working as the program manager for the WOW Hall he remembers Brian Smith, Northwest Royale's manager, "calling every week looking for shows." And while he thinks making it in the competitive world of rock is "just a combination of hard work, luck and talent," he said, "Those guys are just so driven that

they're giving it every opportunity, every chance to happen."

PAYING FOR THE DREAM

For Phillips, that means quitting his job as the office manager of an auto shop. Nestor, a diabetic, is giving up his health insurance and his position as manager of the produce department at a Safeway store, a job he's had for 17 years. Colt, who's had two major surgeries in the last few years and still has a tube in his abdomen in case he needs emergency surgery, will also lose his medical coverage when he leaves the title and escrow company where he works. And Ethan won't be finishing school at LCC any time soon. They just added a new member, guitarist Travis Zering, who recently moved from Grants Pass.

Their decision to go on tour indefinitely also meant losing one of their band members, Blake Owens, who played percussion and keyboards. "The band is at a point where they're ready to drop everything and go, and I wasn't in a really good space where I could afford to do that," he said, explaining his decision to bow out. "I was going to be the person who would have held them back from that."

They've all downsized to the bare minimum. Kenny moved in with Brian. Chris said he and Ethan will be couch-surfing at his sister's house and at Brian's, and Colt is living with his parents.

"It's a really big deal for me," Chris said. "I've been working since I was 15. I've

never not had a job." And now he won't get to spend much time with his son, Laine. "I told him, 'I hope you understand that I want to spend time with you, but that I've got to do this,'" Chris said. "And he's so cute. He's only 6 and he says to me, 'That's OK Dad, I understand. I just miss you.'"

All four of them will be traveling in the van together, covering thousands of miles and spending hundreds of hours in its cramped quarters. "Oh my god, do you remember that one night," interjected Colt during a group interview in April at the Wetlands. "Me and Brian on the floor of the van spooning because there was no room? Don't write that! No seriously, I had to spoon with my fucking manager because there wasn't enough room."

As they prepare for their upcoming tours, two 3-1/2-week treks through the Northwest and Rocky Mountain states, Brian will be staying in Eugene. Even with the addition of Travis, that's one less person, so they'll have a little more space to play Xbox, watch DVDs and sleep. "Our band is addicted to *Breakin'* and *Electric Boogaloo Breakin' 2*," Colt said. "Dude, we love those movies. We watch them in the van more than we watch anything."

They've allowed themselves a food budget of \$3 per person per day. "See you put all the three dollars together and that makes \$12," Chris said. "You can get a lot of food for \$12."

"And that's coming from the biggest guy in the band," added Colt.

"North of Seattle we traded a CD and