

Freaks, Fire and Fun

You can't keep a tramp on a leash. Some dogs were meant to roam free. So were train hoppers, fire dancers and sword swallowers. **Eddy Joe Cotton** and his fourteen-strong troupe, **The Yard Dogs Road Show**, bring with them an insatiable lust for travel and classic vaudeville and burlesque that is definitely not your grandparents' road show. "A lot of us were raised by very eccentric families and artists and strange communities!" Cotton said, laughing.

Cotton is the author of 2003's *Hobo: A Young Man's Thoughts on Trains and Tramping in America*. The book is an autobiography of sorts, Cotton said. "I rode freight trains for about eight years off and on as a young man. It's really mostly a coming of age story revolving around the whole hobo culture and traveling culture in America."

Cotton traveled alone for years, then got two friends together who also had the traveling bug. The road show started eight years ago as a three-piece jug band.

"Me and a couple friends traveling around in my car playing music," Cotton said. "There wasn't too much intention behind it other than having a good time. Art and music seemed like a good way to share the experience. We're all travelers; it's as much a lifestyle as it is a show."

And that show, which some lucky folks might have caught at this past Oregon Country Fair, fills the stage with skits and music for a night of performance you can hardly believe unless you've seen it. Sexy girls in thigh high stockings, top hats and not much else cavort to stanzas of hobo poetry about happy endings and surreal beginnings while the band threads it all together with a seamless soundtrack. The band "takes as much of the stage and trades as much on the energy as the performers do," Cotton said. He described the band as taking from gypsy traditions, circus music and rock and roll, "but it's our

own sound." The Yard Dogs Road Show appears at 9 pm Friday, Aug. 18 at the WOW Hall. \$12 adv., \$15 dos. — *Vanessa Salvia*



Punky Politics from PDX

I'd heard that **Myshkin's** work was political, so when I reached her by phone I was expecting prepared speeches, the standard facts and figures. But her songs, like our conversation, defy easy categorization.

Her songs are political, true, but driving most of them is not so much anger as a sweet, mournful outrage. Even in her song "Lied," a scathing attack on the current administration, her writing exhibits a dry, ironic humor that makes her barbs sharper; she goes for the death of a thousand cuts rather than a quick

bludgeoning.

But in conversation she is shy and circumspect, wanting to make sure her exact meaning is understood. It's like that when I ask her to explain the title of her new EP *Sigh Semaphore*. Is the sigh one of resignation? "I wouldn't say resignation is the word. It's more like a realization that politics, the political, is — I can't really explain it," she says. It may sound like a non-answer, but hearing it from her it made perfect sense to me. Whether we like it or not, politics is unavoidable.

Myshkin is a self-described punk chanteuse, a singer and songwriter now liv-

ing in Portland via New Orleans where she launched her career in 1993. "Where I lived, we would have been at least 9 feet underwater," she says. She doesn't say much more, but her silence reveals floodwaters of emotion.

Myshkin's voice is lovely, but it is in her lyrics that she really shines. She excels in finding new angles of approach to old topics, and her words continually offer surprising and rather literary observations. Her band, Ruby Warblers, is adept at various styles, and the songs constantly dabble and borrow from many genres. Expect an evening of sly and surprising songcraft and politics.

Myshkin's Ruby Warblers play with Luna Tart at 9 pm Saturday, Aug. 19 at Luna. 21+ show. \$7. — *John Ginn*

Strangers No More

I imagine **Hello Stranger's** self-titled debut album will most often be filed in the pop music bin at your local record store, and this is probably the most fitting place for it. But somehow lumping this foursome in with a genre typically associated with the fluffier, less serious end of the music spectrum feels a little misleading. Yes, they're über-stylish and lean heavily on synthesized keyboards (Juliette Commagere is often pictured belting out her vocals from behind a massive "keytar" while wearing thigh high boots) and the

majority of the songs on the album have that jaunty, toe-tapping, melody-driven quality that places it just shy of straight-ahead rock 'n' roll. But rather than a bubbly collection of dance tunes or love songs, Hello Stranger has produced an artful album that utilizes an appealing pop medium to explore the depths of tenuous human relationships and uncomfortable moments in life. A first listen reveals 13 original songs catchy enough to be immediately hummable but lyrically diverse enough to require familiarity with the rewind button on your CD player. The album has an effortless, almost perfectly un-produced quality, not surprising considering the band's collaboration with genius producer Ry Cooder, who also happens to be the father of founding member Joachim Cooder.

Hello Stranger had the sense to extend their creative powers to their publicity photos, which feature band members Cooder, Commagere, Jared Smith and Ben Messelbeck posing as characters in bizarre and hilarious scenarios (see below). As a band, they present as a complete package; fun, hip, talented and likely to put on a visually interesting, provocative and musically enjoyable show. They even blow up a funky dance tune in Spanish for those who like a little international flair in their evening.

Hello Stranger plays at 9 pm Wednesday, Aug. 23 at Sam Bond's Garage. 21+ show. \$4. — *Adrienne van der Valk*



Yard Dogs Road Show

Hello Stranger





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