

**Planes, Trains and Clean Getaways**

Ah, I said to myself when I got this week's assignment to write about **Lauren Mulderrig**, here's a name I haven't heard before. Not that I profess to have heard of every musician out there, certainly. But it's always a special challenge to write about a musician I've never heard or even heard of before.

After checking out Lauren Mulderrig, I realized that the reason I'd never heard of her before is because she's just getting heard outside of her Orange County, Calif., hometown for the first time. She's 17 and a high school senior, which explains the youthful photo on her MySpace page and the bone-shaking sincerity in her lyrics. Mulderrig explains that she's in an independent study program that allows her to take time off from school to pursue her music career. This is her first major tour with her producer and bandmate Alex Barnett.

Mulderrig's first album highlighted her as an acoustic singer/songwriter and brought her popularity in the OC. Her follow up, *Planes, Trains, and Clean Getaways*, has more of an edge, and also the oomph of a band behind her. A remake of "Anymore," a song from her first recording, *Stability*, displays the raw emotion of heartbreak and a wistful edge to her voice. The song benefits greatly from drums and a punchier rhythm, and if it's representative of what the rest of the album is like, it shows great songwriting promise. Mulderrig cites the music of Jenny Lewis & The Watson Twins as her major influence, and while she is no Lewis copycat, it's clear she's living on the same side of the country/indie and folk tracks, and it's certainly worth five bucks to see this breakout performer live.

Lauren Mulderrig plays at 9 pm Thursday, Jan. 10, at Cozmic Pizza. \$5 - *Vanessa Salvia*



**Lauren Mulderrig**

**Smiling Made Easy**

In the same way that Elliott Smith's moody ambience reflected the gray, rainy days of the Northwest, **Smile Ease's** dreamy and hazy songs reflect the icy cold of Anchorage, Alaska.

The band formed in 2001 and has since functioned as a beam of light that melts away the bitter cold of a place known for its mountain ranges and thousands of glaciers. With influences including The Beatles, Radiohead, Built to Spill and The Decemberists, Smile Ease solidly plays danceable indie songs alongside the head-swaying ambience. The vocals are light, modest and sometimes unsure, but always perfectly situated above dreamy keyboards and guitars, dotted here and there with xylophone.

The Paris-based band Air created a beautifully moody and hazy soundtrack for the film *The Virgin Suicides*. The songs were dark, sexy and playful, and couldn't have been better suited to the film. But if another band could do the same, it would be Smile Ease. The band's debut album, released in December, flows seamlessly, with songs ranging from less than three to more than seven minutes long. The band's members fill the stage, each commanding attention, playing several different instruments, singing and contributing to the lush, romantic sound. While Smile Ease wants people to know that Anchorage is more than just icicles and igloos, the music suggests images of the landscape. Close your eyes, listen to the music and look for frozen lakes, white mountain peaks and fish emerging from holes in the ice. Smile Ease plays at 10 pm Wednesday, Jan. 9, at Luckey's. 21+ show. \$3-\$5. - *Amanda Burhop*

**Smile Ease**



**Jake Payne and Dixie Creek**

**Fare Thee Well**

Listening to country music can be sad, and listening to a talented band that is splitting up and moving on is very sad indeed. But, as many great songs tell us, things change, the open road calls and people have to follow their dreams, etc. etc. Besides, **Jake Payne and Dixie Creek** members Jake Payne, Kevin Van Walk and Scott Eastburn will carry on the roots-rock legacy they began in Corvallis when they make their way to Austin, Tex., later this month to explore the greenest pastures the U.S. has to offer in the world of alternative country. Eastburn sees the move as an exciting new beginning.

"It's pretty sad because we all get along pretty well [lead guitarist Xion Zoa and bassist Selena Goltra will remain in Oregon], but we are going to continue what we've been doing here. It's a bigger town, almost 1,500 venues. Every restaurant and coffee shop has live music. Our goal is to play professionally, and it's possible to do that here, but it requires a lot more traveling and more of a 'breaking in' period."

Payne has already scoped the Austin scene as a touring bass player for country singer Pauline Reese. It was a time in his life, says Eastburn, which helped him evaluate what he truly valued about his career and served as the inspiration for many of the tracks on their upcoming release, *What the Folk is Roots Music?*

"It is mostly songs that Jake wrote while touring. He moved back out here with the thought of wanting to do his own music. It's very folky with a touch of bluegrass. The mandolin, the stand up bass, the instrumentation adds a lot of different colors. We have enough material to record a second album, but that will be a lot more roots rock, Americana."

Although Payne and company are moving on, Eastburn hopes they will reunite to pick and strum at a few festivals this summer, and encourages fans new and old to come out and see their CD release and send off show with The Deep Woods Band at 10 pm Saturday, Jan. 5, at the Fox and Firkin in Corvallis. \$3.

- *Adrienne van der Valk*

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