

Blowing a New Tune

Brian McWhorter

had just taken a job on the music faculty at Louisiana State University when Hurricane Katrina struck. Within days, thousands of refugees from New Orleans were streaming into shelters not far from McWhorter's house in downtown Baton Rouge. The young trumpeter/composer volunteered to organize free concerts for the displaced people, who were overwhelmingly poor and African American. Yet they eagerly embraced the avant-garde improvised music the redheaded Portland native played. "They were way into it," McWhorter recalls. "It kept them from going stir crazy. I realized then that music was healing."

Those concerts taught McWhorter (who had been living



in New York on September 11, 2001) a lesson: Music was about people. "I don't want to just do music for music's sake," he says. "I'm not there anymore. It has to be applicable to something bigger."

When he attended the UO music school in the 1990s, McWhorter earned a national reputation as a trumpet prodigy and local notice for his innovative After Quartet (which performed original music accompanying silent films) and other new music ventures. After moving to New York City to attend the Juilliard School, McWhorter (who still plays with the NY-based Meridian Ensemble and other groups) quickly scored prime gigs in new music circles by virtue of his ability to play almost unperformable new sounds. Yet his own compositions have been quite accessible, often employing jazzy grooves and melodic hooks as well as quirky textures.

Since returning to the UO last fall to join the faculty as assistant professor of trumpet — he also teaches at the Manhattan School of Music — the 32-year-old McWhorter has strived to present vanguard music in places and ways that reach listeners who might never make it to a Beall Hall concert. His Sound-

Bytes series — brief, free concerts of new music at the UO's Collier House, always commencing at 11:54 am — has drawn SRO crowds, most of them students. And he's hoping to extend those principles beyond the UO to downtown Eugene, breaching the town-gown barrier that has too often insulated the city from the university's progressive art while depriving the students of feedback from outside the ivory tower.

"The relationship between performer and audience has broken down," McWhorter insists, and he wants to find ways to restore it. Lavishing praise on the skilled UO jazz students who are playing in gigs around town as well as in campus concerts, he's considering bringing students or faculty musicians downtown to accompany film or dance (he's already collaborating with new UO faculty choreographer CoCo Loupe) or political discussions. "How can I create something socially relevant and culturally viable?" he wonders. Maybe, he muses, Eugene needs a permanent, professional city new music ensemble. "The best thing about this town," he says of his old/new home, "is that it's receptive to new ideas." He's got plenty, and the energy to put them into action. — *Brett Campbell*

Doom Metal From the Land of Eternal Hippies

Mike Scheidt led his doom metal group YOB through several personnel changes over nearly 10 years. After releasing two albums independently, 2002's *Elaborations of Carbon* and 2003's *Catharsis*, the band signed to premier metal label Metal Blade. 2004's *The Illusion of Motion*, followed by *The Unreal Never Lived* in 2005, catapulted YOB to the forefront of the worldwide doom metal scene.

Touring posed an obstacle for the band, and Scheidt had to make the tough decision of whether to continue YOB "in an incredibly stilted format of no touring," he says, or find new members. "I felt really torn, because Isamu [Sato] and Travis [Foster] were old friends," says Scheidt, "and this was a band I'd been working on for almost 10 years."

Scheidt found new players, bassist Will Lindsay and drummer Scott Headrick, and formed **Middian** in the vein of YOB. Middian's first Metal Blade release, *Age Eternal*, was released March 20.

With new members and a new name, Scheidt found the freedom to have a different approach yet still be in the same style. "That would have happened with YOB anyway," says Scheidt, "because I really am adamant about not writing the same record again."

Scheidt purposefully picked players who weren't familiar with the doom genre. "I knew the danger would be to find people who knew the style really well, and that we would fall into something that wasn't pushing anything for me," says Scheidt. "It's not like Middian is this huge departure or anything, but it is different enough."

Middian is more mid-paced and less sludgy, more aggressive lyrically than YOB yet perhaps even more accessible. Lengthier, quieter interludes segue between the five songs. "Sink To The Center" is a crushing 16 minutes in length, and even the shortest song, "The Celebrant," at over six minutes, plumbs new depths of groove-heavy. Catch Middian at the Samurai Duck Saturday, April 14. — *Vanessa Salvia*



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