



Rhyming Is Its Own Reward

The Reward System drops homegrown hip hop

The players in Eugene's small but thriving local hip hop scene put out work in this small town that could compete on a national scale. There must be something to this place that supports the production, and more importantly, retention of this kind of talent, from Marv Ellis to Lafa Taylor to Animal Farm. Or maybe it's the water. My latest case in point? The Reward System, a two-man operation

The Reward System, Endr 1, James B, 3 Blind Mics
9 pm Saturday, June 21
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beats, influencing not only the sound of the music, but how it's made.

"We don't sample," Shoop tells me. "I'm not trying to say, 'Oh, we're better, we don't do that.' I just prefer what we do because one beat doesn't sound like the next one."

Then we don't feel like we're always rapping the same way, or rapping the same beat." Pick up a copy of their second full-length album, *Gross Potential*, though,

'When [MCs] start preaching, it's just like, "Ugh. I want to have fun."'

made up of a couple of Springfield High School alums who specialize in party music better for shakin' moneymakers than the Ludacris song that actually uses the phrase.

But even though The Reward System's music swaggers like they're on Rhymesayers, that ego is completely absent from my conversation with beat maestro Dusty Locke and wordsmith Ryan Shoop. Instead, Shoop spends a good portion of our conversation talking about the people they work with: 3 Blind Mics, Big Blue, Mad Scientist, who used to be The Reward System's full-time DJ, and Jesse the Body, Locke's brother, all chipped in on the album. But it's DJ S, a longtime player behind the scenes in Eugene hip hop, who's had the greatest artistic influence. It was he, Shoop explains, who taught Locke how to make

and you'll understand TRS' approach: On one track, you'll hear a funk bass line and old-school drum beats. On the next, it gets a little Neptune-y, with space-age synth augmented by discordant piano and maracas.

As for the rhymes, Shoop tells me, their biggest goal with their second record is to focus on storytelling rhymes more, in contrast to the more abstract nature of their first record, 2006's *Wait Just A Minute*. But unlike other, overtly political rappers with a message to spread, this is party music that's more interested in the day-to-day, or tongue-in-cheek parodies of mainstream booty 'n bling raps, than hopping on an already crowded soapbox. "That's one thing that turns me off about MCs, when they start preaching," Locke says. "It's just like, 'Ugh. I want to have fun.'"

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