

**Bringing It All Back To the Future**

Like Stellarondo, the **Wiyos** mix a lot of vintage sounds into their stewpot. On stage they bring to mind a group of Depression era down-and-outers huddled around a fire, blowing harp, thumping an upright bass and clacking on a washboard – both to lift their spirits and pass the time.

The Wiyos are named after one of the toughest gangs to roam the streets of New York in the late 19th century, and they draw much of their inspiration from the gin joints and jazz clubs of the '30s and '40s. "We're inspired by jugbands, Skip James, and 'Blind Willie' McTell," says vocalist and bandleader Michael Farkas, adding that the Wiyos have updated their sound as they move away from playing primarily vintage covers.

"We play all new material now, but we put our stamp on it," Farkas explains. "We started out as a street band, but we're much more modern now." In 2009, the Wiyos were handpicked by Bob Dylan to be his opening act. "It was a great honor to tour with Dylan," Farkas says. "He's a big influence as a songwriter. When he started to mash things up with *Blonde on Blonde*, that's when it got exciting. I'm impressed with artists who continue to surprise."

The Wiyos play at 9:30 pm Saturday, Feb. 19, at the Axe & Fiddle. 21+. \$10.  
– William Kennedy



**True Contradictions**

*True Devotion*, the first **Rocky Votolato** record in three years (it came out last February, following 2007's *The Brag and Cuss*), has a circular feel – and not just because the last song, "Where We Started," winds down with the same strings that open "Lucky Clover Coin" and the album. Introspective, impassioned, delicately intense and sometimes just a little bit distant, Votolato's newest record is a true solo effort on which the Seattle singer-songwriter plays nearly everything (he mostly recorded it alone as well).

Votolato's ability to shift from a gentle, almost tremulous vocal into something insistent and definitive has always added grit to his evocative melodies, and if nothing here burns like the title track from *Suicide Medicine or Makers*, there's a sense that the messier and more furious emotions of youth have been tempered and restructured. *True Devotion* is a grown-up album, a collection of searching narratives that never lets on exactly what it's about but never feels nebulous or purposefully vague. "Letting go is the best way to hold on," Votolato sings on "Sparklers," a gentle, pensive song about impermanence. But three songs later, on the dreamy, hopeful "Sun Devil," Votolato sings, "Some things are forever." *True Devotion's* lyrics are full of seeming contradictions that are all true, simple lines with surprising points and unexpected stories that resonate like a secret you have to listen closely to hear.

Rocky Votolato and Laura Gibson play at 9 pm Saturday, Feb. 19, at John Henry's. 21+. \$10 adv., \$12 door.  
– Molly Templeton



**Kitchen Sink Bluegrass, Missoula Style**

Banjo? Xylophone? Jumprope? Why not. Missoula, Mont. avant-bluegrass ensemble **Stellarondo** takes a "kitchen sink" approach to instrumentation, defining their folk music as broadly as Montana's big sky. Stellarondo is a "supergroup" of Missoula area musicians that includes Gibson Hartwell, who was in Tarkio with Colin Meloy of the Decemberists. The collective formed when primary vocalist and songwriter Caroline Keys participated in the 2010 RPM Challenge, an online project that declared musicians to write and record a minimum of 10 songs in the month of February.

And now, one year later, they're on the road supporting their latest, self-titled release, which was produced in Portland. Stellarondo knows exactly when to let the sweet harmonies and porch-stompin' rhythms of bluegrass take center-stage. Keys' voice creaks like an old rocking chair as she spins yarns about stalkers and haunted hotels. And the band accompanies her skeletal banjo playing with everything from cello to tympani, providing an atmospheric soundtrack that pushes the boundaries of what roots music can be.

Bass player Travis Yost told the *Missoula Independent* that Stellarondo "is the most collaborative group I've ever been in. If you bring a ukulele, you're gonna play it. No rules. No one to say, 'You can't do that.' What's it gonna sound like? Who gives a shit? Try it."

Stellarondo plays with Opal Creek at 9pm Sunday, Feb. 20, at Sam Bond's. 21+. \$3-5. – William Kennedy



**Ball of Molten Lead**

Despite only being February, and despite a plethora of metal bands promising new music this year (waiting on you, Pig Destroyer), it's not too early to say that **YOB's** upcoming album, the band's sixth and their second for Profound Lore (and with bassist Aaron Rieseberg), will likely be among the best releases of the year – and not just for fans in their home town of Eugene.

Mike Scheidt, the band's guitarist and vocalist, says in the past eight months the guys have done 10 flyouts to shows in other parts of the world, including the ATP fest in England, recent shows with Sleep and Neurosis, and the upcoming SXSW, where they will play the Nanotear Booking showcase and the Friday Night Thrasher Magazine showcase with Pentagram, surrounded by half-pipes and pro skaters. They also plan to tour the U.S. and Europe after releasing their new album, which should wrap up recording in May.

With YOB, Black Sabbath's doom and psychedelic sides bleed together. Songs are in celestial time – their last album featured four songs in 50 minutes – and their new music continues in that vein, but a bit different, says Scheidt. "The new YOB music is really exotic and full of a different vibe for us," he says. "Very heavy and psychedelic as usual, but our spiritual themes feel more mature to me as time goes on. This new music is very cathartic, digging deeper into the need to awaken and stay awake, to listen and actually hear, seeing with more than the eyes. But the music is also rooted in earth and dirt, growing out into the unknown rather than searching the stars to escape the mud and sweat of this earthly life. Or something like that." Sounds good to me.

YOB, Norska and H.C. Minds play at 9 pm Friday, Feb. 18, at Oak Street Speakeasy. 21+. – Vanessa Salvia

