

Green Skies, Collective Walnuts

Over the next seven days, two of Eugene's hotspots will help ring in CD releases from a pair of solid acts. The first is **Greensky Bluegrass**, a decade-old bluegrass five-piece out of Kalamazoo, Mich., known for their use of bluegrass traditions in conjunction with unexpected exploration. Word is they'll jump old-time standards to rock 'n' roll fuck-arounds with seamless confidence and skill, all while keeping Sam Bond's jumping.

In the studio, Greensky sounds just as you would imagine – a tightly harmonized, virtuosic string band – but they add tangible flavor with their use of dobro, a steel-string lap guitar that gives the sound its completeness. Sticking to the road most traveled is always fun, and produces results more than worthy of an audience, but it's sharp left turns into the realms of eerie, rockin' fun that make Greensky one of the most daring and unique bluegrass outfits around.

Oh yeah, and bring a sound recorder, they encourage all-access recording of their shows so that the word may be spread!

Two days later, Eugene's own **Walnut Collective** will hit the Oak St. Speakeasy to throw down their latest garage-haze madness. When I sat down to take a listen, I said to myself: "So what does Walnut Collective have to offer?"

Well, the guitars were fuzzy, the vocals were outrageous and the only words I could find to describe it all were "non-stop-sloppy-pop-rock fun," which rhymed too many times to be dignified.

At times their new CD, *Sea Rose*, sounds like *Bends*-era Radiohead, other times it's "What's The Frequency Kenneth?" REM, and even after that there's the Sonic Youth noise jams, the sex-minded '80s lyrics and the fuzzy, modern alternative sound to look forward to.

So what does Walnut Collective have to offer? Fucking anything you want. Enough said.

Greensky Bluegrass celebrate their CD release at 9 pm, Thursday, March 10, at Sam Bond's; \$10. Walnut Collective's CD release is at 10 pm, Saturday, March 12, at Oak St. Speakeasy; FREE. – *Andy Valentine*



Billy Goats, No Bluff

Jonathan Warren's voice has that overt tremor and twang of any bluegrass vocalist. But Warren's still fresh, and you can hear it. The Tennessee-to-Idaho transplant brought his "progressive psychobilly folkgrass" to the Northwest four years ago and has since proved himself to be not just another string pickin' and whiskey drinkin' honky tonker.

To most, bluegrass conjures images of long summer evenings sitting on stoops, sipping whiskey sours to the strum of a guitar or a tambourine's jangle in the background. Other times it propels its listeners into an irresistible fox trot or jig. **Jonathan Warren and the Billy Goats** have those prototypical renditions down, but what's more striking is listening to Warren transition from genre staples into softer melodies – ones that interpret the sound of snowfall on Idaho's Lost River Range or salmon running up the Snake River. Such is evident on tracks like "Car Keys." where Warren laments: "The night is long here, I'm feeling dirty/So I'm keeping your picture right here in front of me/ The night is long here, I'm feeling lonely/So I grab my car keys and go where the girls should be." The roundabout manner of the song's circular guitar riff, backed by the chime of the harmonica and the quiet echo of a woman's voice seem to come from an isolated cabin rather than a rustic saloon, though really there's a bit of both; enough for the foot stompers and the candlelight readers.

Jonathan Warren and the Billy Goats play with Whiskey Chasers at 8:30 pm Friday, March 11, at Axe & Fiddle; 21+; \$5 door. – *Andrew Hitz*

Progressive Bluegrass for the Brokenhearted

In the world of music, "progressive rock" injects the epic scope and grandeur of classical music into rock 'n' roll arrangements. In jazz, "fusion" introduces the driving rhythms of rock and funk into the complex architecture of jazz arrangements. Does a similar hybrid exist in bluegrass? It does, and it's called the **Punch Brothers**.

Chris Thile, renowned solo-artist, mandolin virtuoso and member of bluegrass/pop-crossover group Nickel Creek, formed the Punch Brothers in 2006. The group broadens the scope of traditional bluegrass arrangements, allowing elements of rock, jazz, classical and even film scores into their sound. *The Times* of London wrote that the Punch Brothers introduce "bluegrass instrumentation and spontaneity in the structures of modern classical."

The music of the Punch Brothers is largely instrumental, with only occasional three-part close harmony and plaintive warbling from Thile. Live they have been known to put a bluegrass twist on Bach, Radiohead, the Beatles and the Strokes. In 2007, the ensemble debuted a 40-minute epic suite in four movements entitled "The Blind Leaving the Blind," written in part to deal with Thile's divorce at a young age.

This sense of loss and vulnerability is at the heart of the Punch Brothers, and it goes back to the group's very beginning. In 2006, Thile told the *Nashville City Paper*, "We got together one night just to drop a ton of money, drink too much wine, eat steaks and commiserate about our failed relationships."

The Punch Brothers play with Scott Law and Tatiana Hargreaves Duo at 7 pm Wednesday, March 16, at McDonald Theatre. \$18. – *William Kennedy*



Eugene Eire

The 8th annual **Eugene Irish Cultural Festival** dances its way into town this weekend, kicking off with a Friday evening concert at Beall Hall featuring fiddler Kevin Burke and guitarist Cal Scott playing traditional Irish music. Flutist Hanz Araki and fiddler Kathryn Claire (formerly of Circled By Hounds) are openers.

Sheldon High School hosts the bulk of the festivities on Saturday. Workshops on Irish language, singing, art, history and traditional instruments take place throughout the day. Other activities include Irish music sessions, performances and a Ceili – an Irish social dance similar to contra or square dancing. Hurling, the national sport of Ireland and the oldest and fastest team pasttime, takes over the Sheldon turf accompanied by an explanation of its history and rules.

Family activities abound with crafts for kids such as making a Bridget's cross, bookmaking and growing your own shamrocks, as well as the opportunity to take home a genuine piece of Irish peat if you correctly answer Irish history questions. Traditional food and novelty vendors will be on site for an opportunity to sample some Irish fare and take home a little piece of the Emerald Isle.

The Colleen Raney Band wraps up the weekend. Playing traditional music, her three-piece band includes mandolin, guitar, cittern and the haunting poetic melodies of Irish song. Raney is at the forefront of the Northwest Irish music scene and has a new album, *Lark*. Along with fellow musician Hanz Araki, Raney does her part to promote her heritage by producing the Yachats Coastal Celtic Festival, drawing top musicians from Ireland to our own green shores. During her performance at this year's festival, she stopped to dance a jig mid-set and entertained attendees with stories like any proper Irish-wo/man should. She is sure to set your toes a -tappin'.

For more information on the Irish Festival, visit www.eugeneirishfest.org – *Bronwynn Manaois*

