



Staring at Sound

The key is in the name, partly: **Bad Mitten Orchestre** – not orchestra but *orchestre* – a moniker at once mysterious, seductively impenetrable and yet confidently cheeky, almost defiant, like that gorgeously unapproachable femme fatale holding down her end of the bar with a smirk and a double whiskey, straight, no chaser. Now fix that image, soak it in sepia-tone, crinkle it a bit at the edges and run it backward in time to the gritty, riotous town of Deadwood, North Dakota, circa the Gold Rush. Animate the image with a little music, *eine kleine nacht musik* so the image dances a jig in your mind's eye – a bit of three-fingered Gypsy Django, a Viennese waltz, Yankee Doodle banjos, porch-stompin' fiddle, harmonies so sublime they must share the same DNA. Finally, put that whole musical concoction through the hand-cranked meat grinder of Tom Waits' wonky cabaret, and then pretty it back up with the rugged, countrified folk of the Carter Family and Johnny Cash.

All of which is to say that Bad Mitten Orchestre's music is almost as visual as it is aural, a stereophonic texture and template of sound that evokes a kind of dog-eared nostalgia for some long-lost speakeasy that may or may not have existed. Not to imply these orchestres are imposters or derivative charlatans. Far from it. The lovely, lush, sophisticated music Bad Mitten cooks up is so unique, so original and audacious, it creates a fantasy world unto itself – a twilight dreamscape littered with castaway tiaras and rusting tricycles, populated by saints and demons and ne'er-do-wells, con men and their marks, all of it shot through with heavy vibes of Preston Sturges Americana, Michael Mann's Wild West, the Christianity of Flannery O'Connor, the fun side of Prohibition, Vaudeville, Coney Island, Tin Pan Alley.

Last year, Bad Mitten Orchestre's song "Saints of the Blue Avenue" was one of the top vote-getters in *Eugene Weekly's* "Next Big Thing" singles competition. At the time, *EW* wrote (okay, it was me): "Think of Kafka's Vienna, of monochrome portraits torn at the edges, of swordfish trombones and smoke in the eyes and gin on the breath, and just maybe you'll begin to understand the quirky, cartoony appeal of 'Saints of the Blue Avenue' ... The quintet's musicianship is sharp and sophisticated, but never off-putting; they sound like they're having a blast."

You, too, can have a blast this week when the Mittens bring their acoustic game to the stage. Be there or be Polaroid.

Bad Mitten Orchestre plays an acoustic benefit with Mood Area 52 and Whiskey Chasers at 9:30 pm Friday, June 10, at Sam Bond's; \$5-\$20. – *Rick Levin*

Genuine Pop

Anyone paying attention to the Eugene music scene this past year is likely familiar with **Anna Gilbert**. The singer/songwriter was named the "Next Big Thing" for 2010 by *EW* readers, and over the past eight months or so has been playing a steady dose of shows throughout Oregon. To put it mildly, there's a reason she won that title and you should check her out – it sure wasn't an accident. Her live performance is nothing short of pure pop-rock goodness. Gilbert and her bandmates play to the crowd and engage you with tight, lively tunes. Her vocals will make you smile because you just can't help yourself.

A lot of Gilbert's music is thoughtful and uplifting in a genuine way that catches your attention and holds it. Tracks like "Nobody Told You" are the sort of radio-ready pop-rock that TV shows and movie soundtracks gobble up like gravy, especially with their message of living fearlessly instead of being afraid of making mistakes or feeling pain. In contrast, the song "Room to Breathe" is more low-key, with Gilbert's vocals hitting quieter tones to match the contemplative mood of waiting for truth to reveal itself.

Gilbert's music is particularly noteworthy because it avoids the superficiality and clichés that can litter the pop landscape. An example is "Don't Say Goodnight," the sort of piano-led love song that could turn sleazy in the hands of a lesser artist. Yet her romantic, honest and subdued approach to the song gives it unexpected life and beauty. Gilbert puts on a good show; it would be a shame if you missed it.

Anna Gilbert plays at 8pm Saturday, June 11, at the Granary; \$5

– *Brian Palmer*



Soul Music

There is a certain type of musician that can change your life the minute you encounter his music. During that minute, you've walked into a bar with a mind full of bullshit, had a much-needed drink, then opened your ears to realize you are being taken elsewhere – away from your day, away from your thoughts and away from whatever beef you have with your world at that moment. This rare yet colloquial brand of musician most likely doesn't have a record deal or a well-polished album, maybe just a guitar, a voice and something simple but difficult to possess. Guitar player and vocalist **Jessiah Soul** is that type of musician. His smooth, charming music can save lives. Ironically, he just finished saving his own.

A local who has played music since he was 12, Soul was first schooled in guitar by his uncle, Jason Moss (guitarist of the Cherry Poppin' Daddies). Moss showed his nephew how to finger pick and play by ear, a talent that grew on Soul and became a saving grace for him as years unfolded.

If you happened to frequent Jo Federico's Restaurant & Jazz Club before it closed down a few years back, you'd have found Soul playing there weekly, as frontman and vocalist for the acclaimed funk band Natural Progression. When that band reached its end, Soul disappeared from the scene. He re-emerged in 2006 with members of the bands The Dead Americans and Cherry Poppin' Daddies, forming a group called Runaway Slave.

Soul and I sit across from each other at a local restaurant and I ask him why Runaway Slave also folded. He smiles, cracks his knuckles and looks away before meeting my eyes. "Bad decisions," he says. "The music industry comes along with a bunch of addictive things. And a lot of confusion can happen when you use substances to enhance your creativity."

After Runaway Slave folded, Soul retreated to Hawaii for purposes of "healing and surf." There he wrote more than 30 songs over the course of a month and returned to Eugene, ready to start over. A humble but powerful singer, Soul – a sober and rebuilt man – now picks up where he left off, guitar in hand.

Jessiah Soul plays with opener Levi Poasa at 9pm Thursday, June 9, at The Davis; n/c. – *Dante Zuñiga-West*



COWFISH







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