



Singer/songwriter Josh Wardlow

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One Hot Open Mic

For nine years the Monroe Street Café hosted an open mic night that brought the west Eugene neighborhoods together as a community. When that joint closed down, the musicians, poets and performers who frequented the open mic each Wednesday night went searching for a new place to gather.

"Monroe Street (Café) had a family; when it shut down it felt like we were homeless," says Emily Erickson, Monroe Street Café Open Mic night patron. The 20-something sits with her friends at the completely packed, recently opened Hot Mama's Wings on 13th Avenue. It is Monday night, and Hot Mama's Wings is hosting their fairly new weekly open mic; all of the old Monroe Street crowd is there. It is their new home.

I never had the pleasure of attending the Monroe Street open mic, but walking into its new incarnation feels a lot like being at a wedding where you don't know anyone but it doesn't matter because everyone is drinking and happy and friendly. You wouldn't catch this vibe seeing your favorite band at a club. This is something else – something very homey and very Eugene.

The atmosphere is straight bumpin'. It was as if I suddenly stumbled into a party that only the cool kids knew about. I am not cool, so that wasn't a new feeling for me. But it isn't sheer popularity that makes this open mic as exceptional as it is; it's the soul. Before members of the Monroe Street crowd immigrated to Hot Mama's Wings, they held their own little open mic sessions in their homes. These were potluck-type gatherings, however they were so massive that the group of refugees/neighbors had to look elsewhere. Now that these open mic enthusiasts have a new venue to gig at, their mentality is "the more the merrier."

Guitar cases line the back wall of Hot Mama's Wings. Rowdy laughter peppers the air between songs. A birthday is celebrated, honored on the microphone in a lively and traditional manner. Pint glasses clink. The sign-up sheet is full and musicians wait eagerly not only for their turn to play, but to hear the songs their peers have come to play (some of which the musicians have personally dedicated to each other).

Musician Josh Wardlow takes to the stage with his guitar and compels the crowd to sing along to his song entitled "Play to Play." The lyrics embody the spirit of these open mic musicians, revealing the true intent behind their gathering – "I just play to play, that's why they call it, 'play.'"

They jam all night, as the hot wings burn and the beer is poured.

Various local singers, songwriters, poets, comedians and storytellers play 8 pm every Monday at Hot Mama's Wings; n/c. – Dante Zuñiga-West



Eastman Standing

Battling it out with other bands to take the title of Last Band Standing is no small feat in a town full of starving musicians, many who are in the Eugene area for the exact purpose of living cheaply and catching their big break. **The Eastman Band** has just achieved this, capturing KNRQ's Last Band Standing title on Friday, June 10 at WOW Hall.

The Springfield-based trio of John Eastman, Jim Cuelar and Terry Brewer is a uniquely blended musical cocktail of rock/metal influence. Listen to the band's songs, and you can hear bits and pieces of Alice in Chains, Metallica, even some of Pearl Jam's more aggressive songs. Though the eclectic influences permeate its work, the Eastman Band has what all bands who strive to "make it" need, which is a touch of their own high-powered style alongside such thick throwback roots. If you love rock, there is simply no way around loving what these guys do.

Songs like "Facebook Friend" and "Blood Suckin' Bastards" reveal another important piece of the trio's talent, which is humor. While there is no formula for success in the music industry, there are some givens. Musicians who can master timing and showmanship and create music that is witty in content and instrumentally exceptional can take their career as far as the fans (and booking agents) will permit – and this band just picked up a hell of a lot more fans. The Eastman Band is one to watch out for, as its rising trajectory may take it up, up and possibly away from the little town that it started in. – Dante Zuñiga-West



Swing Kids

It could be said that **Buster Blue** is a quintessential Sam Bond's – no, I'll go one step further and say a quintessential Eugene band. You Whiteaker folks are going to eat up their homespun blend of diverse instrumentation with harmonica, banjo and clarinet. It doesn't hurt that they're a band chock full of hip rosy-cheeked young'uns that perform with all kinds of enthusiasm for their update on classic Americana. Look out, someone just pulled out a trombone, then someone's singing through a bullhorn in a fedora, and the crowd is grooving and swing dancing to the pounding tom-toms like it's the '40s or – well, at least the mid-1990s.

Hailing from Reno, Nev., (who knew there are young people in Reno?) Buster Blue recorded their first full-length album *When the Silver's Gone* at Piper's Opera House in the Nevada ghost town of Virginia City. Performers like John Barrymore, Harry Houdini and Al Jolson once graced the stage of this opera house. And the ghosts of these great entertainers are apparent in the music of Buster Blue – music that revels in a melting pot of pre-rock and roll sounds and styles played with such intensity that those who've been around Eugene for awhile might be reminded of that infamous local band – let's say it all together now, the Cherry Poppin' Daddies.

Buster Blue plays at 9 pm Sunday, June 26 at Sam Bond's Garage; \$1-\$5. – William Kennedy