



Burn it Up, Break it Down

If hip hop is to remain alive, or even in the strange zombie-Frankenstein form it seems to have taken, the genre's roots will have to be passed on to the youth – the real roots, meaning the five elements of hip hop: MCing, DJing, Graffiti, B-boying and Beat Boxing. Exposure to all of the above in legitimate form is what's needed.

Friday, July 15, Eugene's younger crowd can receive just such exposure to a few of the elements at WOW Hall when local b-boy crew the High Voltage Boys comes to wreck it at the “**Burn This City Down**” event.

Burn This City Down is a showcase geared toward the teenage crowd that aims to bring break dancers and DJs together in true form, with Mississippi's own DJ Sipp complimenting the b-boys of Eugene. A sketchbook competition will also be happening on site. All of this is intentionally set in the middle of the summer, a time when high school students begin to get antsy as a result of having a little too much free time on their hands.

“I wanted to create an event that would send kids back to school still talking about it,” says event organizer Librado Biasco, who hopes that a show like this will help to restructure the younger party scene as if it were “burned down” and needed to be rebuilt.

Though that is an ambitious desire, it is not far from the original function of hip hop's early years, when New York DJs like Afrika Bambaataa organized huge block parties with the intention of keeping young people out of trouble and in the art form. Artists, particularly break dancers, would perform in competitive battles along with their DJ and MC counterparts.

Whether Biasco's Burn This City Down event can accomplish the goal of changing the teenage party scene remains to be seen. But the intention is well placed, and hip hop is no stranger to such feats.

Librado Biasca, DJ Sipp, and High Voltage Boys play 9 pm Friday, June 15, at WOW Hall; \$8 adv., \$10 door.

– Dante Zuñiga-West



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Slim's Pickin'

He's a guy you can imagine grabbing a beer with, the boy down the block you know will make it big. And he has. In the seven years since the *Rolling Stone*-acclaimed *Electric Love Letter* was released, **Langhorne Slim** has played at Lollapalooza, the Newport Folk Festival and the Bristol Rhythm and Roots Festival, and opened for acts like the Avett Brothers and Cake.

Slim's music is energetic folk, plain and simple. His uncomplicated lyrics and straightforward style demand the label “troubadour,” and it fits like his fedora. Even his name, borrowed from his hometown in Pennsylvania, would suit a thriving minstrel from the Middle Ages.

His latest album, 2009's *Be Set Free*, slows down and dresses up compared to earlier releases. “Say Yes,” a pop-infused exhortation to love, lurches between verse and chorus with the precise, rickety uncertainty of a new love. “Cinderella” shouts and stomps with Slim and the band and should be a riot live.

“Leaving My Love” finds Slim in a sweet duet with Heartless Bastards' Erika Wennerstrom, which is a shame not to be able to see live in Eugene, but maybe next time?

Sometimes *Be Set Free* can sag under the weight of its simplicity, as in “Land of Dreams,” but that's just more reason to check out Slim and company live and tap into their energy. The album brims with infinite live-music potential – Slim's style is best served onstage.

Langhorne Slim plays 9 pm Wednesday, July 20, at Sam Bond's Garage; \$8. – Shannon Finnell

Refugees of Heavy Metal

Acrassicauda – the Iraqi metal band, whose name is Latin for a dangerous black scorpion that inhabits Middle Eastern deserts – is a must-see live show for anyone who likes metal and/or has any interest in what the “War on Terror” has done to Iraq. The title of the band's first official release on Vice Records, *Only the Dead See the End of the War*, says it all.

The story of Acrassicauda is like a Horatio Alger novel set in war-torn Iraq, where the musicians came together and met resistance from every quarter. Now living in the United States after years in Syria and Turkey as heavy metal refugees, Tony Aziz Yaquoo (guitar), Firas Al-Lateef (bass), Faisal Talal Mustafa (lead vocal) and Marwan Hussein Riyadh (drums) are free to grow their hair long, go on tour and connect with the community of metalheads to which they belong. Backstage after a Metallica show in New Jersey, James Hetfield himself presented the band with a guitar, signing it “Welcome to America.”

So how does a metal band form in Iraq? Under Saddam Hussein's regime they were able to get bootlegs of Slayer, Metallica and Slipknot, and began rehearsing in a commercial space in Baghdad. At one point, they performed live under the enforced condition that they compose a song in honor of Saddam.

As Acrassicauda matured as a band, it developed a unique version of thrash metal: Lead guitarist Yaquoo effortlessly incorporates Middle Eastern modes into crunching riffs and dazzling solos, while singer Mustafa's vocals bear “thrash” trademarks without venturing into the full-guttural timbre that garbles lyrics and sends everyone over 30 to the exits. As war erupted around them, the band's lyrics began to reflect frustrations with life in a combat zone. In the song “Massacre” we hear a very succinct message, “Years ago they created a new way to kill more innocents / Children. Elders. Women. / Bombs fall like rain from the sky filling the rivers with innocent blood.”

The band members reside somewhat between a love of American metal and their obvious feelings about the war. Their precious practice space was torn apart by a rocket, and they lost all their equipment in the explosion.

Drummer Riyadh grows dour after watching rough footage in his temporary home, and begins talking about the friends he's lost and what the war has done to his country. “These are things that you (Americans) lay your back on...that you turn off the TV whenever...or, like, change the channel when it's on, so for you fuckers down there, this is daily life in Iraq.”

Fortunately, the band's love of metal is winning out. Granted refugee status, the band members are planting roots in Michigan, New Jersey and Virginia. Acrassicauda completed a run of dates, and in May added a second leg that will bring them to Eugene.

Acrassicauda plays 9 pm Sunday, July 17, at The Black Forest; \$5. – Jason Moss

