



Blue Scholars sold out their last show at WOW Hall

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

Seattle's Scholars

Underground hip hop has always been a socially diverse medium. Everybody got in on the action and the multicultural landscape of the scene became a rainbow coalition of sorts – **Blue Scholars** are the embodiment of this, and more. Hailing from the rainy streets of Seattle, the Iranian DJ Sabzi and Filipino MC Geologic came together to create the most prominent hip hop group to emerge from their hometown. The name, Blue Scholars, has been synonymous with Seattle hip hop for the last decade. It's no real wonder why. They are the best sounding hip hop group to ever come out of the Pacific Northwest. The Blue Scholars make introspective, funky and racially conscious hip hop with a laid-back style. They are more likely to rap about couch crashing, backpacking, single parenting or how important a morning cup of coffee is than anything extravagant or disingenuous. Straddling the line between raw no-chorus style hip hop, like Phoenix Orion or Kool Keith, and more traditional chorus-verse-chorus style groups, like Jurassic 5, the Blue Scholars sound like A Tribe Called Quest crossbred with Dilated Peoples.

Musically, Blue Scholars sample from an eclectic pool that ranges from Spanish guitar to funk music to classical – you won't find any synthesizer licks or modified vocal effects in their sound. They don't have any pretensions, they don't have tough guy complexes, they don't battle-rap or glorify misogyny – and really, for the most part, no underground hip hop does – that's why they call it "conscious" hip hop. But the Blue Scholars have a style about them that is unique to Seattle. It sounds like what you'd listen to on rainy days, sitting on your stoop. Blue Scholars create music for the moments that aren't necessarily spectacular; their lyrics and style affirm everyday life while at the same time rejecting drudgery. Still going, with years and years of experience under their belt, having gigged with every notable hip hop group to come through Seattle over the last ten years (and that's a lot), the Blue Scholars continue their beats, rhymes and life. While they give shout outs to older influences such as the Dead Prez *Lets Get Free* album, and pave way for other Seattle hip hop artists like Macklemore, Blue Scholars always rock the mic and kick realness through the speakers. Blue Scholars play 9 pm Tuesday, Sept. 20, at WOW Hall; \$15 – *Dante Zuñiga-West*

One of a Kind

Invariably, when friends and fans talk about Eugene musician **JC Rico**, the first thing they mention is "that voice" – by turns deep and raspy or pure and smooth as single malt Scotch. Rico was a gifted vocalist whose range and delivery were unrivaled in the local blues and jazz scene. As fellow musician Brian Chevalier told KLCC radio's Jonathan Siegle, "He was an institution," adding that Rico's was always the first name to pop up when folks spoke of great singers in Eugene. Born Joseph Charles Moore in Hollandale, Miss., in 1947, JC Rico passed away Sept. 4 at his home in Junction City. He was 64. From the beginning of his life, Rico appeared destined to sing the blues. As a child, his family moved from the Deep South to the urban environs of Chicago; Rico played his first paying gig when he was only 6 years old. He eventually moved to Portland, where he played in a band with Lloyd Jones, before settling in Eugene. Guitarist Steve Ibach, who played with Rico in various bands over the past seven years, says he first met the vocalist sometime in 2002 at a Wednesday night blues jam at the old Vet's Club. "His singing just blew me away," Ibach recalls. "He had an incredible range and a lot of power in his voice. I've seen people well up in tears in front of the stage at some of our shows, just from being so moved by the feeling in his singing." Longtime Eugene musician (and *EW* director of sales and marketing) Bill Shreve calls Rico "a singer's singer," an honorific of the highest order for those in the know. "He had a power and beauty in his voice," Shreve says. "His falsetto would bring you to tears," which was certainly the case when Rico sang a rendition of "Amazing Grace" at the Nov. 29, 2009, memorial for Ted "Papa Soul" Lee at McDonald Theatre. "There was nobody else around here who could sing like that," Ibach says. "There's a big hole in the Oregon blues scene at the moment. His shoes will be hard to fill." A celebration of the life of JC Rico through music will take place 4 to 7 pm Sunday, Sept. 18, at Mac's at the Vet's Club, 1626 Willamette St.; memorial contributions can be made to "JC Rico Memorial Account" at any Pacific Continental Bank. – *Rick Levin*

