

Hip Hop Unplugged

Sunspot Jonz keeps it real with Eugene

Sunspot Jonz is a living legend, on stage and off. He is a foundational member of the Living Legends crew that took the country — and the world — by storm during the late '90s and early '00s. His song “Angels with Dirty Faces” was the title track of the most memorable Living Legends album ever — an anthem of sorts for its time.

Though Jonz continues to further the Living Legends, producing dope tracks and music videos, one would be hard-pressed to find the entire group gigging together anymore. Jonz finds his journey riddled with the same pitfalls and potholes that his peers from the larger conglomerate groups of the “conscious” hip hop era — Non Phixion, Arsonists, Visionaries, etc. — encountered.

From coast to coast, that scene exploded and died off just as the medium reached its prime. The lack of fiscal viability took its toll on booking agents and promoters, then the larger, more diverse hip hop groups were forced to break off and form smaller duos, or just fold. Think about it: When was the last time you saw Del the Funky Homosapien with the rest of Hieroglyphics? What happened?

Though it is common for those in the know to point the finger at audiences who stopped supporting the medium, Jonz has a different take on it. “What we created in that time was a sacred space,” he told me. “People were refreshed and excited to be a part of it, until the sacredness was diluted.”

Jonz says the advent of music technology created a massive inundation of voices. Though that would seem beneficial to a medium that began with such strong support, Jonz says it all backfired.

“The minute that anybody could loop a beat and put their own songs they recorded up on a Myspace page, the listeners started feeling like there wasn’t anything all that special,” says the accomplished MC. “The sacred space was no longer there. That’s what happened to hip hop. I’m still here, but that’s what happened.”

Any independent musician will tell you that not everyone can be a full-time musician. Jonz believes that while he and others of his ilk keep the flame of conscious hip hop alive, it will take tons of innovation to rekindle the spirit that once embodied that art form. He continues to push and innovate.

Jonz gigged John Henry’s on Saturday, Sept. 17, to an enthused but small crowd. He rocked the microphone nonetheless, like a true professional.



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

Maybe it was the Ducks game, keeping hard-drinking show goers at home. Perhaps it was the Andre Nickatina show booked the following night that thinned the crowd. Either way, the place wasn’t packed.

That aside, Jonz will return in the fall, and he says he’s looking forward to that performance. “This is still sacred to me and I want to be a part of it no matter what,” he says. “That show was still all good. I’ll catch you next time around, Eugene.” **EW**

Coming in for a Landing

Originally hailing from Astoria, **Blind Pilot** is a duo of indie-folkers that took a quick launch into the spotlight. It was all of three years before the band began garnering serious attention, touring successfully and playing to larger crowds like the one at 2009’s Sasquatch! Music Festival in George, Washington. Since forming in 2005, Blind Pilot worked hard to formulate a sound that uniquely fit, yet still maintained the familiar characteristics of an escalating Northwest indie-folk scene. There’s clear influence from pioneers of the genre here, too — the Shins, the Shaky Hands, etc. — but Blind Pilot safeguards originality with inimitable songwriting, so the lines of comparison blur.

In the past, Blind Pilot tours have found form on bicycles, with band members pedaling their hipster legs down the West Coast from Washington to California. Now Blind Pilot is touring again to back the release of its second full-length album, *We Are the Tide*. Although it’s kind of nice to imagine a group of plaid-riden Portlanders biking all the way down the coast, it’s a safe bet that the band won’t be repeating the experience. Blind Pilot has grown since the early days and now contains six members. The band has embraced the bright sound that comes out of a big group, so it’s a fair assumption when it comes to playing live, everything is primed and ready for action.

As local music expert Cody Dean puts it, “Blind Pilot aren’t just a band, they’re an idea, an idea that you should not be tied down with the limits of sound. They prove that when you put your emotions through the music, it comes out perfectly.”

Blind Pilot plays 8 pm Monday, Sept. 26, at WOW Hall; \$8 adv., \$13 door. — *Andy Valentine*



PHOTO BY BEN MOON

Metalheads For Peace

A lot of sappy music came out of the beginning of the Great Recession. Acoustic guitar ballads pleadin’ for love, techno that celebrated the complete ignorance of social problems — the public seemed to suppress feelings of hopelessness in soft, non-confrontational ditties.

We Came As Romans bucks this trend, forcing a turnaround and re-examination of the times. With a mixed sound so strange it works, the best way to imagine this band is as the synth-happy lovechild of Bruno Mars and Slipknot. Guttural growls and earnest tenors offset impressive guitar licks. These six gentlemen thrash like heathens and sing like angels.

Weirdest of all, the band’s messages are decidedly positive. The title song of their debut full-length album, *To Plant A Seed*, expresses a sincere desire to better the world. We Came As Romans occupies the same genre-borrowing, socially conscious clatch as My Chemical Romance. And like My Chemical Romance, they’re not afraid to sing pointedly.

“I Will Not Reap Destruction” alludes to the effects of PTSD with lyrics like “This mindless flesh/let us not be conceited/I will not reap destruction/but life instead.” The lines sound all too familiar to anyone who’s read news stories about American war vets.

We Came as Romans recently debunked a rumor on Noisecreep.com that it is a Christian band. Is America now so scared of hard-rockers who don’t want to pillage and wage war with their music that we move them to an altogether different category? We Came as Romans is here to keep it raw — nothing’s up its sleeves but kick-ass melodies.

We Came As Romans plays with Miss May I, Of Mice and Men, Texas in July and Close to Home 6:30 pm Tuesday, Sept. 27, at WOW Hall; \$13 adv., \$15 door. — *Brit McGinnis*

