



## Gwenyambiras, At Large

Musekiwa Chingodza is an international phenomenon occurring every other year in the U.S. and Canada. Chingodza, a dancer, singer and mbira master from Murehwah, Zimbabwe, is known for his teaching and spirited performances all over the U.S., and particularly in Eugene, where his protégé Bud Cohen lives.

So, how does a white kid from Eugene, Ore., team up with a Zimbabwean gwenyambira (great mbira player) and create the world-music duo known as **Mhofela**? The story goes like this: In 1997 Cohen's parents, serious world-music lovers with a taste for adventure, traveled to Zimbabwe with the specific intent of finding gwenyambiras to help promote mbira music and build a scene back in the states. With them, they brought their 17-year-old son, who possessed the same passionate love of music. During this journey, Cohen met Chingodza, who took the teenager under his wing and schooled him in mbira playing.

Cohen lived with Chingodza in the rural village of Mwangara. "It was an eye-opening and life-shaping experience for me," Cohen says. "I was humbled by how people treated me and encouraged my playing [of mbira]."

Not necessarily a household name in the U.S., the mbira (also known as a thumb piano) is an instrument composed of a wooden soundboard and hard steel keys that is then placed into a "deze" (a round gourd) that acts as a resonator. Though usually promoted through the college and cultural-center tour circuits, mbira music has large fan bases in the urban communities of Colorado, New Mexico and California's Bay Area.

Since their initial meeting in '97, Chingodza and Cohen formed Mhofela, and they have toured both coasts and the Midwest, bringing mbira music to the masses. The duo recently released the 9-track album *Tomutenda Mambo* and continues to play live shows together when Chingodza is in country.

"This music is very spiritual and very authentic," says Cohen. "I always look forward to Musekiwa coming to town."

Mhofela's album release show is 6 pm Thursday, June 7, at Cozmic; \$5, free entry with CD purchase. — *Dante Zuñiga-West*

## Blooming and Booming

I feel old. Young bands are listing "mid-aughts indie" as their influences — groups like Pavement, Guided By Voices, etc. The stuff that was new and cool when I was in my twenties is now establishment. I suppose I should be glad that music is still inspiring new bands like Eugene's **Groundblooms** to pick up guitars. But to quote James Murphy of LCD Soundsystem: "I'm losing my edge, the kids are coming up from behind."

If I'm going to be the grey-haired dude at rock shows, Groundblooms are a band I'll be seeing. The group, featuring brothers Max and Michael Knackstedt, has just released its debut album *You're A Free Spirit*, and it's a solid piece of artistry.

Groundblooms want you to think they're not as good as they are. Tempos lag, guitars dip slightly out of tune, the production, plain and unassuming, at times captures the sound of "a band in a room" — and other times, is awash in messy guitar-skronk.

*You're A Free Spirit* is deceptively lo-fi, cloaking solid songwriting with a hook-filled "we-could-care-less" attitude. The songs often flirt precariously with mayhem, but they always pull out at the last second, seeking refuge in Michael Knackstedt's rich and melancholy baritone. Lead track "Pidgin English" recalls Weezer or Pavement at their best — jingle-jangle guitars meet layers of noise, cascading and calamitous drums and a tune that would fit nicely on Pavement's *Slanted and Enchanted* or Weezer's *Pinkerton*.

Someone who went to college in the '90s or mid-2000s might feel a little "heard this all before" about Groundblooms, but this is the sound of vintage college rock. Here's hoping it never goes out of style and we continue to hear good things from a young and vital band with tons of potential.

Groundblooms play with Royal Blue 10 pm Saturday, June 9, at Luckey's; \$3. — *William Kennedy*



## You're the Guy from the Hamburger Train, Right?

Writing about **Primus** is like trying to stuff a baboon into a sack — there's no right way to do it. What can be said about a band that so distinctly filters out any shades of gray? How many times can a writer sit down and type out how Les Claypool is the Zappa of the MTV generation? Few prominent bands have inspired such fervent devotion or dismissal. If you're not thinking (as the band would say) "Primus sucks!" you're probably thinking *Primus sucks*. Fence sitting is a relatively unknown phenomenon in the Primus universe.

After a career spanning three decades, these guys are as Primus as they've ever been. Claypool and Co. show no signs of shutting down the ride, as they prepare to come to town next week in support of the group's latest album, *Green Naugahyde*. For those of you already familiar with the band, nothing written here will change your mind — you already have your ticket or you're busy winding your cassette copy of *Kill 'Em All*. (Fun fact: Claypool tried out for Metallica after Cliff Burton died only to be told that he was "too good").

But for those of you with ears free of sonic beef and cheese, I say this: Primus is the soundtrack to a sixth-circle carnival designed by Tim Burton and the Swedish chef from the Muppets. This band is what would happen if a young Tom Waits listened to Black Sabbath and replaced his usual junk and whiskey with a steady diet of psychedelics and speed. If you want to see one of the most original bands of the last 30 years, led by one of the greatest bass players to ever walk the earth, go to this show.

Primus plays 7:30 pm Tuesday, June 12, at the Cuthbert Amphitheater; \$39.50 adv., \$45 door. — *Mark Sullivan*

## Head-banging and Heroines

When Portland folk move to Eugene, a common complaint is that there's not enough punk rock. **Jean Grey** provides something we don't get enough of here — loud, angry punk music that gives you a feeling in your gut that can only be quelled through moshing. Reminiscent of the authentic garage bands we all loved in high school, Jean Grey is a group formed in 2006 and named after a voluptuous super-heroine.

The band's new album comes with the ominous title *Abysmal*. After setting such a dark stage for their debut, the members of Jean Grey step up to the plate, creating a diverse set of songs with names like "Ovarian Cyst" and "Dissection of a Human Body." The band is impressive in its ability to pair fast drumbeats, heavy guitar parts and lyrics that sound as if Steven King got hold of a microphone.

Comparable to groups like The Black Dahlia Murder and Beneath the Massacre, Jean Grey has already achieved its own version of local fame right here, and the group has national tour chops. Formed by drummer Charlie Wilson, these guys have been playing up and down the West Coast for years. The band is currently at work on its first concept album, based on the *Cthulhu Mythos* by H.P. Lovecraft.

Priding itself on a professional approach to showmanship, with wild thrashing and synchronized head-banging, Jean Grey puts on a show that is not to be missed.

Jean Grey plays 8 pm Thursday, June 14, at WOW Hall; \$5 adv., \$8 door. — *Hailey Chamberlain*