



Summer at Sam's

If you prefer your shirts plaid, your music twangy and your whiskey from a Mason jar, you're probably going to like what's going down at Sam Bond's Friday, June 22, when California natives **Gwyneth and Monko** roll through with their brand of real down-home country.

In 2009, Gwyneth Moreland and Michael Monko joined forces in Northern California. Moreland was seeking accompaniment for a solo tour, and Monko's skills on a variety of instruments – including the mandolin and fiddle – fit the bill. Shortly thereafter the two began writing together; they released their first EP, *Good Old Horse*. In 2011, Moreland and Monko released their self-titled album, chock full of hearty, old-timey country tunes, and rumor has it that this summer they'll be working on their third release.

Moreland's voice is raw and intriguing – full of character and imperfections that lend authenticity to her sound. You'd be hard-pressed to find an auto-tuned syllable anywhere near this album. Taking a hard right away from the robotic, Moreland's vocals highlight the emotion fueling the simple storylines of her lyrics. Influenced by an upbringing in small town Mendocino, Calif., devoid of television and junk food, Moreland's lyrics present snapshots of everyday country life.

Gwyneth and Monko are refreshing in an unpolished, retro kind of way. Simple and country to the core, this duo makes you feel like you should be lounging in an Adirondack chair on the wrap-around porch of some defunct ranch in the stifling heat of the deep South. And with song titles like "Summer Bliss" and "Get in the Sun," there couldn't be a better way to usher in this reluctant summer.

Gwyneth and Monko play 9:30 pm Friday, June 22, and Sam Bond's; \$5. – *Natalie Horner*

Wistfully Listless

There's an art to making elegies and sorrow-ridden songs appealing. Jeff Tweedy and Elliott Smith both come to mind as musicians who've planted seeds of sadness that take root, grow and express themselves with an undying creativity, texture and tone. Take Wilco's "Shot In the Arm," a tune that blissfully strands the listener amidst major keys, torrents of piano notes and cheery guitar work – all while Tweedy gives gravelly utterance to depression and drug addiction in a standalone show most listeners might miss offhand.

Brooklyn folk-rock trio **Widowspeak** sounds nothing like Wilco – there's perhaps a Western or Americana strain here or there, but overall, a different bag. But Widowspeak strings together songs of wistful listlessness with lulling guitar riffs and the angelic intonations of vocalist Molly Hamilton. Soaked in the pixelated nostalgia of the '90s, the band incites flashbacks of Reebok high-tops, fluffy perms and the heyday of Walmart consumerism. But there's more. Widowspeak embraces the lo-fi fuzz of daydream culture found in outfits like Woods, Real Estate, Ducktails, the post-punk of Vivian Girls and Grass Widow, all with a healthy dollop of Washington grunge (Hamilton and drummer Michael Stasiak originally hail from Tacoma).

Widowspeak's sound retains the cold, gray bite of Cascadia in the form of garage reverb and Hamilton's forlorn vocals. But it's also a pastel-layered, Western-beach grunge tight and compact enough to fit songs under three minutes, yet expansive enough to let lead guitarist Robert Earl Thomas tastefully pick and solo himself a center role. With material ranging from laments to songs like "In the Pines" and "Fir Coat," Widowspeak might be based in Brooklyn's urban jungle, but its inspiration seems to come from more bohemian, Northwestern alcoves.

Widowspeak plays 8:30 pm Sunday, June 24, at Sam Bond's; \$1-\$5. – *Andrew Hitz*



Bluhm Beyond The Van

All **Nicki Bluhm** wants to do is have some fun, and she's got a feeling she's not the only one. What I'm saying is she sounds quite a bit like Sheryl Crow – singing sunny and soulful country/folk/rock in a crystal clear girl-next-door voice, a truly California sound. "I love every part of California," the San Francisco native says. "And it oozes out."

Bluhm's latest album, *Driftwood*, originally released last year, is getting another shot in 2012, this time with management, a bigger publicity push and a vinyl LP edition. Bluhm herself collects records, drawing inspiration from "pre-1978" artists like Linda Ronstadt, Bonnie Raitt and Dusty Springfield. There is "an authenticity that is lost" in contemporary recording, Bluhm says.

Throughout *Driftwood* and her 2008 debut *Toby's Song*, Bluhm's vocals sit front and center. She moves easily from honky-tonk and ballsy rock, from sultry songstress to pure pop. Many fans know Bluhm from the internet sensation *Van Sessions*, featuring the singer and her band the Gramblers passing time on tour covering such guilty-pleasures as Hall and Oates' "I Can't Go For That" (complete with a kazoo solo) and "Islands in the Stream" by Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers – songs that perfectly fit Bluhm's timeless voice.

The Gramblers feature Bluhm's husband/producer Tim Bluhm of the Mother Hips and Steve Adams of ALO (Animal Liberation Orchestra) on bass.

Nicki Bluhm and the Gramblers play 8 pm Sunday, June 24, at Cozmic; \$8 adv., \$10 door. – *William Kennedy*



Joyful Jamming

If Eugene had a soundtrack, it would, without a doubt, include a song or two from the up-and-coming band **Blue Lotus**. This local jam group and its eclectic sound can be attributed to six diverse musicians, including 16-year-old guitarist Felix Blades. Blue Lotus is jazzy, bluesy and funky, but when asked how the band classifies its sound, the members are hesitant to respond. "We try not to pigeonhole ourselves into a genre because it's limiting to a whole bunch of people that would really enjoy our music," founding member Brandelyn Rose says.

With a combination of raw talent, a love of music and a desire to bring joy to all who listen, Blue Lotus is irrefutably festive.

"All the songs are positive, some people might say weird at times, but it's wholesome music," keyboardist Ron Puso says.

"By the end of the night if we have moved one person to feel a little better, then we've done our job," Blades says.

Showcasing the band's recording chops and containing some radio-friendly tracks, Blue Lotus' eponymous debut album contains both live and studio recorded material. "It includes all of our key elements," Blades says of the album.

Blue Lotus possesses a fiery chemistry, and its music is contagious. Be warned: There's a good chance that going to a Blue Lotus show will have you dancing barefoot, with beer.

Blue Lotus plays 6 pm Friday, June 29, at the Ninkasi Tasting Room; FREE. – *Ali Enright*