



FRUITION



SHOOK TWINS

PHOTO BY JOSH LATHAM

Music in the Dust

BUSKERS GO OFF THE BEATEN PATH AT THE FAIR BY ANDREW HITZ

Real Oregon Country Fair-goers remember “Field Trips” with the Dead: the magical times when Kesey and his Merry Pranksters pranced around the grounds, ensuring every last face was stolen off Owsley’s freshest batch, coaxing you to slip into the oblivion of one of Jerry’s jams. Sounds molten just thinking about it.

OK, so maybe the memories are a little fuzzy for Fair family, but regardless, those times created the enchantment, funk and mystical energy that the Oregon Country Fair holds to this day.

This year’s music stage lineup features offerings in the genres of folk, vaudeville, string band, jam band, jug band and rock from around the Northwest and the rest of the country. Names familiar to Eugeneans (**Shook Twins, March Fourth Marching Band, Elephant Revival, Fruition, JGB**) as well as newer faces (**Brokedown in Bakersfield, Bear Feet, BrownChicken BrownCow, Hot Milk**) are set to take the stage.

However, the many brilliant performers not acknowledged on formal stage lineups remain a Country Fair staple.

“We’ll always have buskers and what ends up happening is, say, I get over 200 applications for Ambiance, so I can’t hire everyone,” Fair Ambiance coordinator Ruth Pomplin says.

“I like to bring folks in that I like every two or three years,” Pomplin continues, “so what they’ll tend to do is if they can get a ticket to the Fair, they’ll come in and they’ll busk anyway.”

A beloved Fair band that wasn’t in rotation for a slot this year is Eugene and Portland’s own **Bad Mitten Orchestre**. This folksy vaudeville quintet — whose new record, *Baby Gone Broke On Through*, gets its CD release show July 21 at WOW Hall — has had quite the success at Fairs past, whether on stage, busking or otherwise.

“A lot of our true-blue fans, the number one thing they say is, ‘We saw you guys at Country Fair years ago and we just love the band and we’ve been following you guys around ever since,’” drummer Ian Haight says.

This year Bad Mitten will be sticking to the path, hard cases open and waiting for your rapt attention. You’ll have to seek out their mobile hoedown on your own, but word is they’ll be starting out at Darling.

Longtime busking and street-performance advocate and Seattle-based folk legend **Jim Page** will be, as usual, both taking the stage and roaming the path this year.

“The magic that happens when you’re [street singing] is that people who have no intention of seeing you, see you,”

Page says. “If you’re lucky and play your cards right, if you know your trade, if everything is right, then they like what they see and they’re delighted by what they see.”

Page’s ability to captivate an audience with his songs of empowerment and revolution is well established, yet at times it’s his connection to an audience of one that proves just as, perhaps even more, powerful.

Recalling busking at Fairs past, Page tells the story of the time he was singing a song called “Oregon Landslide,” about the 1996 Roseburg landslide caused by a clearcut. Four people were killed.

“While I was playing,” Page says, “I noticed this guy 20 feet away or so, just standing there listening. And when I was done, he walked up to me and he said, ‘I knew those people. They were my neighbors, and I had not been able to cry until now.’”

“He had no idea who I was,” Page recalls. “He would not have come to see me perform. He would never have known. But he simply stumbled across it.”

It is exactly these sorts of serendipitous encounters that reaffirm the magic that makes the Oregon Country Fair what it is.

“It’s a very important thing for people to do, to find their mode of expression and how to hone it, to flesh it out,” Page says. “And you can’t do that without practice. You can’t read it. There are no college courses. You have to do it. The Country Fair is great in that respect. It’s very accepting; it can be whatever you want.” **BW**



BROKEDOWN IN BAKERSFIELD

PHOTO BY ANDREW QUIST