



QUILLEN: LYRIC-DRIVEN

This year's Next Big Thing runner up **Paul Quillen** is a soft-spoken man with a lot of passion. He's extremely literate; he loves Japanese novels and collects literary magazines like *The Believer*. And despite the fact that he's been playing guitar since he was in the fifth grade and writing songs since he was 12, he says he still has a bit of stage fright.

Over beers at the Wandering Goat, Quillen admitted that once he stepped on stage at the Eugene Celebration, his hand "felt like a brick."

Indeed, the 31-year-old says his biggest motivator for entering the contest this year was to give himself a musical identity and get him playing in public. In his everyday life, Quillen is a secret musician. It's not that his close friends didn't know he was a musician, but to his colleagues at the Eugene Public Library, his musical abilities were kept hidden.

"Most people didn't know. I've kind of been a closeted musician for a long time," Quillen says.

Since moving to Eugene in 2004, Quillen has played a few venues, the Goat included. He plays classical guitar, a style that lends itself naturally to softer, lyric-driven tunes. It's a sound that, to him, is right at home in a dim-lit, quiet coffee house, the complete opposite of a loud and sunny Saturday afternoon during the Eugene Celebration.

Nerves aside, Quillen is a songwriter fulfilling his need for expression. He happened to have penned a song called "Until the Next Big Thing," a tune that had nothing to do with the contest but came at an auspicious time. He submitted that, along with "A Gentle Goading," both serving as a platform for Quillen's smart, conscious lyrics.

"Both of the songs I entered, I feel, almost have more of a punk influence in their content. I don't write like that a lot. I was actually thinking when I was writing them that I wanted to write an album's length worth of songs that were all rants. I wanted it to be tons of words, tons of opinions that I've wanted to express and haven't — because before I was always playing creative, expressive, emotional music."

What's next for this passionate wordsmith?

"In the end I just want to write more, play more. I like the idea of performing because the nerves and feeling anxiety beforehand is terrible, but after it feels really good."

Attention all Eugene's music venues: The ball's in your court.

— Jackie Varriano

VOLIFONIX PERFORMING AT NEXT BIG THING 2012 FINALS



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

Local and international audiences have learned Volifonix is definitely jammin', but don't call it a jam band. "The drummer of Dave Matthews Band is about the only thing I like about that band," Blake says.

"I think that we can be viewed sometimes as a jam band by people who don't know better," McClain adds. "We do jam at our shows because it's fun for us and the audience, but our goal is not to be a jam band." Since the early days, Volifonix has become tighter due to better audience response when playing to the point. "Our goal is to have a blast with our audience and not limit ourselves or the audience to any specific genre. We play rock 'n' roll, but there are influences from all over the place in our music and nothing is too out there when it comes to the writing process."

2012's Next Big Thing contest received 78 song entries. Web votes created a group of 40, and that list was further narrowed down to 16 by a panel of local judges. Most of the 16 then performed at the Lane County Fair, where judges chose two finalists, who moved on to the Eugene Celebration showcase.

As 2012's winners, Volifonix has won recording time, \$500, publicity and gigs, as well as a chance to perform at *EW*'s Best of Eugene Awards Show Oct. 26 at the McDonald Theatre.

For a band that places so much emphasis on its live show, and in an industry where recorded music has been devalued, these are still important prizes for a young band, even one as established as Volifonix. "I feel like it means more to us to win now that we are more established because it is a continued sense of justification for what we are doing," McClain says. He adds, "As we continue to grow and progress it is good to see recognition for what we have been working on for some time now."

"We absolutely love to play live and many of our fans prefer the live show over our studio recordings," Trevor continues, "but we also love the recording process."

Winning Next Big Thing is just the latest in the love/love relationship Eugene has had with the band — who carry on the fun and energetic tradition of other local favorites like the Cherry Poppin' Daddies and the Quick and Easy Boys, freeing minds so asses will follow. In fact, it isn't hard to imagine Volifonix as the heir apparent to the Daddies, one of Eugene's biggest musical exports.


"We're all happy people so our music naturally comes out that way," McClain says. He jokes, "If we were all really angry people then our music probably would sound much different. We do tend to stay on the positive uplifting side, but we never want to limit ourselves in the writing process. We plan on continuing to release music for a very long time, so who knows what we could be writing 10 years from now?"

The love Eugene has shown the band is wholeheartedly returned by Volifonix. "The scene is saturated with so many awesome musicians. It's a blessing and a curse. It's hard to get noticed," Trevor says.

"I love this town," Blake adds. "You can go see a live show every night of the week, and it's always something different."

Tsurumi interjects, "The best part is there are many music loving people, and it is easy to start. Eugene has less paid gigs but it's easy here to experience live performance."

"I have always wanted to be on the cover of *Eugene Weekly* since I moved here in 2005," Trevor says, and his brother adds, "Eugene has done a lot for us and we hope to return the favor one day." ew




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