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HAPPY ABOUT THE BLUES

Blissful blues. Sounds like an oxymoron, but that phrase hits at the essence of **The California Honeydrops**, who take the catharsis of singing the blues to a devil-may-care, happy-go-lucky level. The New Orleans-inspired stylings of the five-piece band from Oakland overflow with unabashed, easygoing joy, or in the spirit of The Big Easy: *Laisser les bon temps rouler!*

Poland-born Lech Wierzynski — who studied with jazz, blues and country greats like Maria Muldaur, Marcus Belgrave, Dan Hicks and Jackie Payne — writes songs, sings, plays guitar and blows his trumpet triumphantly while leading the band with Johnny Bones on a buoyant sax, metered by Ben Malament on drums, Doug Stuart on bass and Charles Hickox on keys. The Honeydrops will be dropping their latest Kickstarter-funded album April 19.

"We traverse a lot of styles," Bones says. "The album starts with New Orleans influences, then we get into more country blues." Bones ticks off other inspirational ingredients in their musical melée: a dash of Mississippi John Hurt, a handful of dirty washboard, a dollop of zydeco and trombone, a scoop of gospel soul with blues accordion, a sprinklin' of fiddlin', washed down with some T-Bone Walker juice.

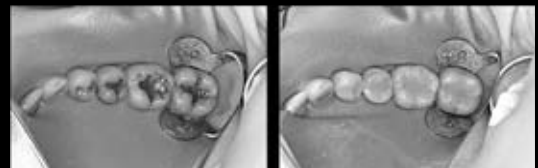
Bones points out that without the help of their fans on Kickstarter — they raised over \$26,000 — they would not have been able to do such a broad musical exploration. With a label, Bones says, "They have a lot of control over your product. Then you weren't like a pure artists; you were a product for the label." He adds, "We've been able to do the crazy music we wanna do ... And we know people have a good-ass time."

The Honeydrops will be joined by Portland's folk-rock band **Fruition** at Cozmic. The soulful strings outfit also raised over \$20,000 via Kickstarter for a follow-up to 2011's *It Won't Be Long*; the upcoming full-length LP will be recorded at William's Place in Casper, Calif., the producing grounds of Bill Bottrell (Michael Jackson, Sheryl Crow, Tom Petty). Bones said the bands became friends almost two years ago, playing festivals like the Northwest String Summit. Their paths will cross again during July's High Sierra Music Festival.

The California Honeydrops play with Fruition 9 pm Friday, March 29, at Cozmic; \$12. — Alex Notman

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