

THE EMO REVIVAL

In 2016, the long-reviled genre found a new sheen in Eugene's music scene



JORDAN NICHOLSEN - GUITAR, WALKER CARROLL - DRUMS, ILEE WALKER - VOCALS, NATHAN ADAMS - GUITAR, BRENTON SMITH - KEYBOARD, DAVID RICHARDS - SAXOPHONE.
MEMBERS OF GIRLS PUNCH BEARS (NOT PICTURED: SEAN PERKINS - BASS)

PHOTO: TRASK BEDORTHA

In 2016, emo was the dominant sound on the Eugene music scene — and across the nation.

About 10 years ago, emo ruled the world. You probably remember it, even if you tried to forget: the punky guitars, the mokey lyrics, the swoopy hair, the eyeliner. Well, we're going to have to stop you right there.

As it turns out, emo is older and more diverse than mainstream fans may realize. The genre developed from hardcore punk in the '90s and spent years underground before bands like Jimmy Eat World, Fall Out Boy and My Chemical Romance broke through in the 2000s.

Emo vanished from the charts, but many people who liked it as adolescents haven't let go. In fact, they've dug in deeper, exploring its history and starting their own bands.

That's right: Emo is back. Not only that but, according to Ian Cohen of influential webzine *Pitchfork*, it is "the dominant sound of indie rock in the 2010s." If you've attended a house show in Eugene in the past year or so, you're probably already aware.

According to Cody McCloud, singer-guitarist in local band Floodlight, Eugene fosters the perfect environment for an emo scene.

"It's the right size and socioeconomic structure," McCloud says. "And there's a lot of young people here with the college, and they might be disillusioned."

Eugene also boasts a thriving house show scene, which tends to be where latter-day emo bands congregate. The emo revival eschews the commercialism of the aughts to return to the genre's DIY punk-rock roots. Many emo revivalists

distribute music through Bandcamp, a website that allows artists to independently release music free or for profit.

"The new emo music is kids who liked My Chemical Romance but started going to punk shows," says James Giles, bassist and vocalist in Eugene emo foursome Southtowne Lanes.

This, however, is hardly a back-to-basics movement. The lineup for a Eugene emo show might include a band that hews more closely to the better-known, poppier sound (Floodlight), a more punk-influenced act (Southtowne Lanes, Senza) or something jazzy and avant-garde (Spiller, Girls Punch Bears).

"There's so many different movements of emo, we get to the point where it's not useful to get hung up on the term," says Ferrin Barr, who shares guitar and vocal duties with McCloud in Floodlight.

Alas, it's pretty easy to get hung up on the term. In its heyday, emo was reviled by rock snobs who used it as a scapegoat for what was "wrong with music." Parents objected to its graphic, nery lyrics. Underground and mainstream emo bands were panned by publications like *Pitchfork*, which, Giles observes, now bestow praise on the genre's new stars.

"Five years ago if you told people you were emo, it was embarrassing," says Girls Punch Bears guitarist Nathan Adams. "Nowadays people are more likely to know what you're actually talking about and not assume it's some cringe-y commercial stuff."

The emo revival might be the maturation of that "cringe-y commercial stuff," resulting from listeners opening their

minds to less commercial music than what they might have enjoyed as adolescents.

"Your taste becomes more mature as you grow older and this is the more mature version of that emo," says Delaney Motter, who named her Portland label Match & Tinder after a song by emo revivalists You Blew It! "In their formative years, [emo revivalists] were participating in that Myspace long-hair emo and they've just grown up."

"Bands like My Chemical Romance are amazing and important to the genre," says Jason Hess, drummer in Floodlight. But, he adds, people have a negative "mentality towards the genre because of those bands. The better mentality people have towards it now is as a result of the revival scene."

As of the time of this writing, the emo revival is in full swing. Cohen writes "nearly all of its scene leaders [released] their best work in the past year," citing bands like Pinegrove, The Hotelier, Modern Baseball and The World Is A Beautiful Place & I Am No Longer Afraid To Die (the ever-earnest emo loves flamboyant band names).

None of these bands are from Eugene. But the Eugene emo scene has been prolific this year. Floodlight released its first demo in July. Girls Punch Bears and Southtowne Lanes both dropped their debuts this year. Senza and Spiller also released singles or EPs in 2016.

It's hard to say if Eugene will make a dent in the emo scene at-large, but if you're a fan of music that's not afraid to wallow, there are worse places to be. ■

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