

MUSICAL 'INFLUENCERS'

Meet six people who are instruments of the Eugene sound **WORDS BY WILL KENNEDY • PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER**

Music scenes are like phantoms: Point them out, and they disappear; name them and they shift; call out a great house-show venue and watch it evaporate.

It's sometimes best to keep tabs on a scene from the corner of your eye, a silent interloper without much fanfare.

Historically Eugene has had good music: a university breeding massive entrenched institutions for classical music and jazz; a history of blues and acoustic string music; scrappy rock bands with varying degrees of success.

And let's not forget those Grateful Dead shows.

Eugene has more music than this town can handle and better music than it deserves. But these days especially — and not limited to underground punk, hardcore and garage rock — there are whispers on the wind of things being as good as ever: new venues, a proliferation of bands and a planting of flags. Chatter coming from larger metro areas says people are catching on. Our secret could soon be revealed.

There's more to a music scene than bands. They can't exist without networks of bookers, fans, labels and advocates, so *Eugene Weekly* talked to a handful of people who exert strong influence on Eugene's music scene of the future. They represent a cross section of Eugene's DIY ethos in indie music.

While thinking about this list, we considered words like "important," "powerful" or "best." But we landed on "influencer," because influencer says exactly what we mean.

We picked these six people because their spark, drive and ambition — whether in booking shows, performing on stage, producing records or running labels — is part of the "now" our little scene is experiencing, a momentum that could catapult us into tomorrow.

So let's not label what's going on. Let's just observe, and see where it's headed. And, in the meantime, let's get to know a few of the people who are helping us get there.



Joshua Isaac Finch

EDITOR, BOOKER, BASSIST,
NOISEMAKER

AGE: 35

When it comes to DIY music, Josh Finch does it all. Former editor of now-defunct Eugene music zine *Exiled In Eugene*, Finch books shows at Old Nick's Pub, operates a tape label called Flossless Audio, plays bass in Eugene doom-core band An Empty Room and is "primary noise-maker" with Entresol, a one-person, self-described "queer-folk-noise-act."

A background in a repressive "super-religious" household in Central Oregon led Finch to music, and music, ultimately, led to Eugene.

"I was an 'indoor kid' and was tormented at school," Finch recalls. "Music was the one place I could turn that always felt inviting, supportive and warm. I wouldn't be here without it."

You self-identify as "non-gender binary." How does that affect your art?

If you asked me two years ago I'd have said it has nothing to do with it. But it's becoming more and more a thing because these are dark fucking times, and music is one of the few positives in a lot of these artists and young people's lives.

Does Eugene music have a sound?

Eugene music sounds like experimentation, growth, and quite often the record or EP an act releases right before [bands] figure out what they really sound like. It is raw, fairly green and honest. And sometimes that can sound like utter garbage if you're looking for something slick. But the overhead speakers at Starbucks will always be there, if something safe is more your speed.

If you could change one thing about Eugene's music scene what would it be?

Better communication between venues. With more-careful planning, there could be less direct competition between bigger shows. The more often bigger name acts come through and have a positive experience, the more quality experiences the local acts will have as well.

A "next level" music scene requires a lot of support: volunteers to throw fliers for your friends' bands, volunteers to throw fliers for DIY spaces like The Boreal. Host a house show. Offer couch or floor space to touring bands, and maybe skip a guest-list spot and pay at the door when your friends level up and play at a bigger venue or with a bigger band. All of this stuff helps more than it seems in the moment.

I feel as if the scene here is noticeably cyclical. There's a boom of local talent, an upswing in all-ages and house shows, followed by a die-off, complaints of how things used to be better (they probably weren't) and then a lull before the process repeats.

But I see more rallying together and general scene support than I've seen in years. I think that if we aren't in an upswing, we are building to one.