

As I Go

Remembering acclaimed musician, producer and Cottage Grove resident Richard Swift

BY WILL KENNEDY

Richard Swift was arguably the most prolific and best-known musician in Oregon. He toured the world with acts like The Black Keys and The Shins, while collaborating with and producing some of indie rock's biggest names at National Freedom Studios, a recording facility Swift owned and operated in Cottage Grove. The full list of notable artists Swift touched includes Damien Jurado, Foxygen, Mynabirds and many more.

Swift died July 3 at the age of 41. The causes of death were hepatitis, as well as liver and kidney distress, according to a social media post from his family, record label and artist management.

Swift was also a successful solo artist and songwriter. Whether in his solo work, in collaboration or as a producer, Swift always looked forward. He had a crisp and clean, yet emotionally present style, which occasionally recalled classic Motown. On one of his solo tracks, "Songs of National Freedom," Swift mentions his desire to lead a low-key life in Oregon. "I made my way into the spotlight," he sings, "just to realize it's not what I want."

It seems like a little miracle that Swift managed to bring such quality artists to the small south Lane County city. Last year, when I spoke to Shins singer, primary songwriter and Portland resident James Mercer in advance of his show in Eugene, he mentioned frequently traveling to see Swift.

And Alyssa Gonzales, co-owner of Cottage Grove bar, restaurant and music venue The Axe & Fiddle, tells *Eugene Weekly* Swift was like family to her and her staff.

"Years ago, in our infancy, Swift would spin his favorite records Monday nights as DJ Donald Five Pennies," she says. And while Swift brought some of music's biggest names to Cottage Grove, he always prioritized his small-town lifestyle and tight-knit community.

"Swift brought musicians and big names from all over the world to our small-town public house, his favorite place to be outside of his home studio just a few blocks away," she explains. "We had the pleasure of hosting and befriending some of the most incredible people and talents because of Richard, including himself."

"Every farm party, baby shower, wedding, birthday party — Swift was sure to show up," she continues, "'Man alive, we have the greatest buds on the planet,' is something he would say often. We held each

other up and will continue to do so because Richard loved fiercely and we all learned from that. We have countless memories, inside jokes, silly photos and videos and of course his beautiful music."

Upon learning of Swift's death, Black Keys bandleader Dan Auerbach posted to Instagram: "Today the world lost one of the most talented musicians I know." In 2016, Swift played bass with the Keys and was also a one-time member of the Arcs, an Auerbach side project. "He's now with his Mom and Sister," Auerbach continues. "I will miss you my friend."

Dave Depper, guitarist with Bellingham, Wash., indie rock act Death Cab for Cutie, also paid tribute to Swift on Twitter. "For so long, he was a cult artist, a unique Oregon treasure," Depper writes, "but it's no wonder that his secret finally got out, resulting in just about everybody on Earth wanting just a thimbleful of his magic on their records over the past few years."

In June, Swift was admitted to a Tacoma-area hospital with a "life-threatening" condition, according to a GoFundMe page launched to help his family cover medical expenses. He is survived by his wife and three children. Swift was working on new material at the time of his death. ■

