

SCRATCHPAD

My writing first appeared in Coast Weekend on July 21, 2011, when I worked as The Daily Astorian's summer intern. It was a "Shanghaied in Astoria" preview — a centerspread I proudly laminated, framed and mounted on my bedroom wall as if it was a fresh kill.

Now, nearly six years and 750 to 1,000 stories later, I'm confronted with the task of writing my first editor's column for Coast Weekend.

Though struggling to shift into first-person, I am lucky to helm an arts-and-entertainment publication in a region that nurtures and champions painters, authors, songwriters, thespians — people who act on their creative impulses, and bravely share the output in a small community where it is almost impossible to disappear. It makes my job easy and interesting.

The moment I donned the editor hat, I found myself buried in an avalanche of press releases for local galleries, book readings, musical performances and theater productions. Certain words, unsurprisingly, crop up frequently: The artist "expresses," "communicates," "illustrates," "represents" something vital.

Oftentimes, the creative impulse is not simply an effort to please or to entertain. It is an attempt to be personally understood — to send a signal from the artists' inner world that, if received and accepted, validates their feelings and perceptions.

The chance that such a connection might be made is one reason we turn to art in the first place. The finest art touches us in the deepest parts of who we are. That's the way I felt when I first heard Cannon Beach musician Michael Corry's breakup ballad,

"Thom's Song," attended a pulverizing production of "night, Mother" at the Coaster Theatre Playhouse and watched a grizzled FisherPoet at Astoria's Columbian Theater slay the audience with an affectionately sardonic slant on the plights of his profession.

In the Columbia-Pacific region, where art is central to people's lives, you can run into artists everywhere and ask them: "What did you want to say with this piece?"

Or, in other words: "How can I, through this thing you made, better understand you?"

In highlighting our local artists and their work, Coast Weekend can provide answers to that question — answers that reflect on the nature of art itself, how art helps to form the connective tissue of our community, and what it means to act on that creative impulse.



DANNY MILLER/THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Features Editor Erick Bengel

coast weekend

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DANNY MILLER/THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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