

Artist turns vinyls into works of art

By SAMANTHA SWINDLER
The Oregonian

The music might be gone from a scratched and worn vinyl record, but there's still art to be found within its grooves.

With surgical precision, Vancouver artist Ty Givens knows how to excise it.

Givens carves into vinyl records to produce stylish silhouettes of local landmarks, comics characters and more.

"I tend to focus on things more local — sports, the area that I'm in — but I also have a nerdy side so I like to make things of anime, comic books, video games, things that people enjoy that make them happy," Givens said.

He sells his work under his brand, 2025th Street, which is not an actual street, but a nod to his first name, comprised of the 20th and 25th letters in the alphabet. Givens' website includes a catalog of 50 designs, featuring everything from Dr. Who and Star Trek, logos of the Timbers and Trail Blazers, to dozens of Pokémon characters.



Ty Givens carves a vinyl record at his home in Vancouver.

It takes a steady hand to slice clean lines through vinyl, and Givens uses a variety of tools, including a Dremel and drill, a wood burner with a heated utility blade and a needle file to create his work.

Most of the records he uses have been donated by 1709 Records and Everybody's Music in Vancouver — and audiophiles, don't fear, they're all unplayable.

"I'm not going to destroy music that can be played

when there's plenty of older stuff out there," Givens said. "I was also a musician for years, so music and art are two big things for me."

Givens was a trombone player in high school and college and spent close to a decade singing bass in barbershop quartets.

"It's a weird one," Givens admits of his love of barbershop. "People are like, 'You did what?'"

Givens grew up in Florida and moved to the Pacific

Northwest on, essentially, a whim. He said he was working at a theme park and feeling in a rut.

"I got into that rhythm that I guess people get in their life where you wake up, you go to work, you go to bed, and you do that every single day," he said. "I just felt trapped. There were no other jobs to get, there was nothing else to do."

So about five years ago, he sold everything that didn't fit in his car and spent



Givens carves old, damaged vinyl records.

two months driving across the country, making stops in New Orleans, the Grand Canyon and the Redwood forests in California before visiting friends in Vancouver.

"They said, 'Stay with us, see how you like it,' and I just never left," Givens said.

Givens had been creating vinyl record art for years, but things took off after he started carving Pokémon characters. In 2019, he was hosting Pokémon Go tournaments at the former Vancouver restaurant Warehouse 23 and attracting crowds with his Pokémon carved record prizes.

Last year, he'd initially planned to set up sales booths at a few anime and

comic conventions, but when those were all canceled due to coronavirus pandemic, he launched 2025th.com.

In November, Givens teamed up with Portland artist Mike Bennett for a "Pokémon Govenber" scavenger hunt. Each artist made a daily Pokémon creation — Givens out of vinyl, Bennett out of plywood — and placed them at a local business that could use a boost of foot traffic. The pair posted clues about the locations online, hiding a new set of Pokémon each day for a shopper to find.

Aside from his Pokémon series, Givens' most popular seller is a silhouette of the St. Johns Bridge.

Collaboration explores the immigrant experience

By STEVEN TONTHAT
Oregon Public Broadcasting

In 2020, Portland was at the center of rallies for social justice.

Musician Joe Kye didn't attend any of them but wanted to channel his creativity to something positive for his community.

"I'm a father of two, and they can barely walk. So going to protests is not where I think I can have the most impact," he said. "It's through art, it's through music that I can build these emotional connections and coalitions."

The result is his latest collaborative project, "The Way Out."

"'The Way Out' is an audio art piece, part music, part beats, part protest collage; it comes from a collaboration with high school choreographer Diego Garita in New York City," he said. Kye was introduced to the project in the summer where he was paired with Garita, 16, as part of the Young Dancemakers Co., a nonprofit based out of New York that pairs musicians and dancers together to create works of art as part of its summer program.

The song Kye worked on is part of a dance performance piece called "Los Delores de la Raza" and was inspired by the migrant children who were separated from their families at the southern border of the United States.

The title's literal translation is "Pain of the Race," but Garita said there's more nuance to it.

"I can't really translate that to 'the race' because

it doesn't really have the meaning that I wanted to seem," he said. "'La Raza' was really big in the Chicano movement in the West Coast. And they would use it like 'This is my Raza, this is us, this is El Pueblo.' I guess it could be translated to 'El Pueblo,' like the town, the community. So 'Los Delores de la Raza' could be 'The pain of the race, the struggles of being an immigrant, the pain of going through that process of being a citizen, of coming to the land of the free.'"

Garita, who was born in the United States and whose parents immigrated to New York from Mexico, saw the struggles the people in his community were facing and wanted to use his creativity to do something positive.

He knew after speaking with Kye that they would work well together. The two connected through their experiences as artists and the sons of immigrant parents.

"He just told me a little bit about his stories and about how his parents were immigrants and how my parents are also immigrants It just came together beautifully," Garita said.

Different coast, same goal

Because they couldn't physically be in the same space, their collaboration took place entirely through Zoom. Through those meetings, they created a piece that reflected their thoughts about the immigrant experience in the United States.

"When we first met and chatted about what he might want to create, he started



Gary Chandler

Portland musician Joe Kye's latest single, 'The Way Out,' explores the issues of U.S. immigration at the southern border as well as the immigrant experience.

talking about family separation at the border and children who are being torn away from siblings and family members. And it's an issue that was really important for me," he said.

The piece combines video from Garita's recordings of the social justice protests he attended in 2020 with Kye's own musical recordings on his violin.

"Diego showed me some of those videos, and I was able to take some of that audio, which I found personally very inspiring and weave it through the piece itself," Kye said.

It begins with slow, melodic violin string picking. Sounds of a jail door closing juxtaposed with samples of school children playing slowly start to seep in. Then, the sounds of crowds gradually start to take over until eventually, cries of "No Justice, no peace!" are all that can be heard.

When the melody returns, it's underscored by audio of the protests, as if ensur-

ing that the listener will constantly be aware of it.

Kye and Garita also incorporated the sounds of heartbeats and breathing into the piece.

"He has different dancers holding their hands over their mouth ... there's obviously the reference to George Floyd and 'I can't breathe.' And then also the silencing that I think a lot of immigrants are constantly experiencing," Kye said. Despite the chaos, Kye said that the song ultimately ends on an uplifting note.

"By the end, after we've also heard monologues and speeches that Diego recorded of the different leaders of these protests, I think it becomes clear that what we're looking for is justice," he said. "And it is absolutely crucial that everyone joins in this protest."

The dance piece premiered in July 2020 via Zoom. And though creating a dance piece entirely online had its own advantages and disadvantages, overall, Gar-

ita was happy with the result and the public response.

"When I first put it out there, they were happy because artists are using their platforms and their talents to bring this problem up and spread awareness using our own creativity," he said. "And it just creates a whole thing of ... this is happening, but this is me telling the problem my way."

Even though the music was just one part of the overall performance, Kye felt that it was strong enough to work as a stand alone piece. So in March, he released it digitally, under the title "The Way Out," with the cover art done by Portland illustrator Molly Mendoza. The title, Kye said, is a metaphor for Black, Indigenous, people of color and immigrant communities coming together through coalitions and community organizing.

"We can't be in the cellar together fighting and picking over scraps. We have to get on a team, think about our different strengths and work together to find that way out," he said.

All proceeds were donated to Pinosos y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, Oregon's oldest advocacy group for Latinx farm workers and their families.

"I think if I made any money on this, it would feel wrong," he said. "It would feel like I was profiteering off of the suffering of another group of people. And that's not what this project is about."

Fighting for social change through music

The immigration issue is

one that is especially important to Kye.

Born in South Korea, Kye and his family immigrated to the United States when he was a child. Like many immigrant families, he and his parents endured many of the hardships when first settling into a new country.

"We were low income and so making ends meet was difficult as it was, but then also trying to acculturate and become part of a whole new country that was very quick to judge us because of what we looked like and what we spoke, what we sounded like," he said. "It was challenging."

His parents moved back to Korea in 2008 and, as he was producing the piece, he thought a lot about how difficult it was to be so far from them.

"I've been separated from them from age 20 on, which has been really difficult," he said. "I can only imagine if you're a 4-year-old or a 6-year-old, or sometimes even an infant, and you are separated from the most foundational piece of human relationship, your parents, I can only imagine how damaging that is."

Kye's passion for community organizing and social justice was amplified by the recent rise in anti-Asian violence.

"The rise in hate crimes against Asians and Asian-Americans has become impossible to ignore," he said. "This project has really filled me with a sense of purpose, as well as an outlet for all of the anger and fury that I feel as an immigrant."



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