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ALL THINGS MUSIC

LIVE
MUSIC FOR
THE WEEK
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Black History Month from a musical perspective

Bend artists discuss Black Lives Matter, tokenism, more

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY • The Bulletin

Black history is American history, and nowhere is that more clear than in popular music. From early slave hymns, moving into gospel music in churches, to folk, ragtime, country, jazz, blues, R&B, rock 'n' roll and the explosion of subgenres that fall under the "rock" category, Black artists had a guiding hand in all of it.

As part of GO! Magazine's Black History Month issue, I chatted with local Black musicians about their thoughts and experiences surrounding the month, especially in light of a renewed focus last year on the Black Lives Matter movement. Throughout the interviews, tokenism kept popping up: the notion that I'm only talking to these artists because they're Black, and it's Black History month. The only way to address that was to lean into it, and present the artists' voices with as little editing as possible.

That said, these interviews have been cut for length. Most of them are paired with a key track from the artist, to create a short, Bend-centric Black History Month playlist.

"LOVE IS LIKE OXYGEN," MILO MATTHEWS

Bassist, singer and songwriter Milo Matthews has maintained ties to Bend for the past couple of years, even as he's continued to travel the country and world in his 1985 Ford bus. He's back on the road now (he

spoke from Olympia, Washington), but said he'll be in Bend sometime in the spring.

"Love is Like Oxygen," originally by the band Sweet, is from Matthews' latest project, a series of cover songs titled "The Last Goodbye." He plans to release a new cover every two weeks.

Q: What are your thoughts about Black History Month and everything that goes around it?

A: I used to celebrate Black History Month back in the day, where it's an honorary month because of Martin Luther King. It's just a recognition of history and people's achievements. But also, they would focus on TV specials and commentary. But then after a while, it dissipated for me personally because I didn't really respond too well because I just kind of considered myself a citizen of the world. I kind of lost the vibe and the support of doing Black History Month until just this last year. ... But in this past year, I'm just recognizing that.

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Bassist/singer/songwriter/loop artist Milo Matthews stands outside his bus in Sisters in early 2020.

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