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Feel The Beat

Everyone knows about the rock shows at the State Theatre—but Portland's full of live music of all sorts on any given night.

Live, loud music adds a jolt to spring.

BY OLIVIA GUNN

SUBTERRANEAN BLUEGRASS

After a week of overtime and not enough me-time, I'm breaking my own rules and going out on a weeknight. Jerks of Grass is playing at Bramhall, and it's just in time. All work, no play, and just the thought of snow in April makes anyone a dull Mainer.

It's Thursday night and the house is packed. While there's still a chill outside, everyone's ready to warm up here with some good pickin'. Jerks is a local bluegrass band comprised of Jason Phelps, Melissa Bragdon, Carter Logan, and Kris Day. They are a Portland favorite, obvious by tonight's crowd.

FROM TOP: THE STATE THEATRE; PHOTO BY JOSHUA FRANCES; MEAGHAN MAURICE



Portland native Rebecca Kingsley performs at One Longfellow Square with the Whitfield Family Band.

Out&About

PORTLAND AFTER DARK



Out&About Square dance with a live band every Tuesday at Acoustic Artisans on Congress Square upstairs from Starbucks.

Eventually our group orders drinks, and it's not long before friends are nudging me to dance, but all I want to do is sit back and listen. I grew up with bluegrass. My grandmother's entire family played regularly at mountain reunions and family holidays. I can remember my great aunt Ada's upright bass towering over

her as she and my uncles played old favorites. This night is another sweet reminder that Portland has more going on than just foodie tours.

Around midnight I've had my fill, even though the band is just getting hot. I work my way up to the bar and pay the tab. Heading up the stone steps into a warming spring night, I can still hear the fiddle and it follows me all the way home.

DON'T THINK

Every Wednesday, Empire hosts a Clash of the Titans, when local musicians have the opportunity to play the hits of famous artists and bands in a face-off between two icons per week. This is now a weekly celebration of pop culture and the talent of Portland that's covered everyone from Tom Petty vs. Creedence Clearwater to Etta James vs. Aretha Franklin, but it wasn't until recently that I was inspired to attend. I just couldn't resist Bob Dylan battling Neil

Young in a city that loves them both and at a time when their music rings too true.

It's 9:30. The dim venue is nearly packed with a crowd of all ages—from baby boomers who know *The Freewheelin'* by heart to fresh-faced college students who found their way to Dylan *after* discovering the Black Keys. They're all here and easily distinguished, but it doesn't matter at all.

First up is Neil Young played by Bob Ray, and he opens with "Powderfinger," a treat for the seasoned crowd. Ray's band comes naturally to Young's music and has me picturing these grown men playing Neil Young in a garage after school long ago, long-haired and just stoned enough.

They've got the crowd rolling, and when Cam Jones steps up as Dylan, harmonica around his neck and guitar in hand, we can hardly wait. He chooses "The Times They Are A Changing" and "Masters of War," and in seconds has the audience quiet. Regardless of your politics, Jones captures the spirit of Dylan with these timeless songs. Soon



Neil Young vs. Bob Dylan makes for a fun Clash of the Titans at Empire. On April 8 it's Talking Heads vs. Squeeze.



A busy Thursday night at Bramhall before the Jerks of Grass take the stage.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JONATHAN COOPER; MEAGHAN MAURICE; JOAQUIN MALLMANN; INSET: YOUTUBE; ALLABOUTJAZZ.COM



Shayfer James (left) sits in with the Dark Follies at Bull Feeney's.

we're all in a rhythmic hypnosis. Several generations, each all too familiar with the concept of war. Maybe it's not the average millennial's hump-day celebration, but I've got to say, pre-test songs need a comeback.

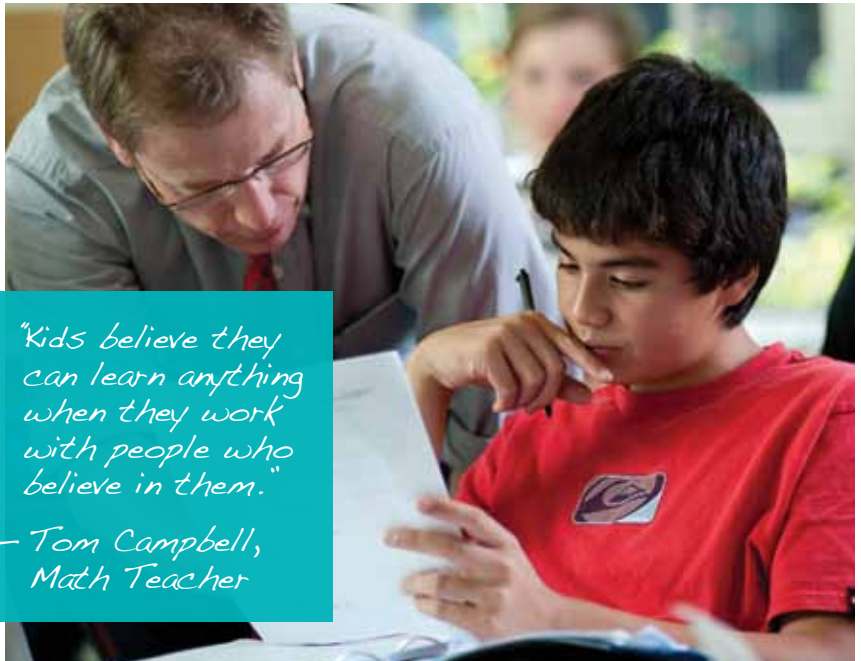
After two favorites—"Heart of Gold" and "Subterranean Homesick Blues"—I head home, back to 2015, where the songs from 40 years ago matter more than ever.

EDGY VARIETY

"Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves" plays in my head as I enter the second-floor back room at Bull Feeney's following a parade of jingling belly dancers. On stage sit three members of the vaudeville group who call themselves the Dark Follies—Lady Selcouth, Solange, and Stephen Carpenter, among others. Known for their street performances, the Dark Follies celebrate storytelling, music, side-show acts, and really anything else you can shape into a performance piece. Also on stage are special guests Shayfer James, a Harlem-based performer who happens to be passing through Portland, and local spoken-word artist Samuel Hunter Mercer.

All the performances intertwine. At times James plays along as Selcouth or another performer does a solo dance or the audience joins in a song praising beer led by Madame Sinclair. Each act feels strange, imperfect, but exciting. It's almost as if I'm at the Kit Kat Club awaiting Sally Bowles.

It's a treat to see a performer like James joining in on a local show for no other reason than to play, and I realize that this is what Portland's arts scene is about. It's inviting and accessible. If you have an idea or a vision, there are plenty of ways to pull it together, and Portland will applaud anyone brave enough to do it. ■



"Kids believe they can learn anything when they work with people who believe in them."
 —Tom Campbell,
 Math Teacher

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