



Elixixers offer up tasty ska brew

musicpreview

The Elixixers
with the Level Six Elves
Friday, 14 September at 8pm
Velvet Underground

MIKE SMITH
Arts & Entertainment Staff

Remember ska? While many might consider the genre a thing of the past, an entire generation of musicians that grew up in its heyday are starting to come of age and work to effectively integrate ska into their own, modern styles. This doesn't just mean MuchMusic-approved ska typical of the mid to late '90s—performed by bands like Reel Big Fish and vintage No Doubt—but rather the original ska, born in reggae dance halls as far back as the '60s.

Vancouver's The Elixixers have taken this decades-old influence and morphed it into a bubbly, groovy dance sound. Lead vocalist/guitarist Bobbi-Jo Moore thinks the world is ripe for a revival of the ska scene.

"In the '90s we were into the third wave of ska ... a lot of punk ska," she explains. "Now, we're seeing a lot of

bands doing ska reggae, funk ska, ska rock ... it doesn't seem to be based as much on ska-punk as it was in the past few years."

This new brand of ska has opened the genre to a lot of new fans, assimilating them into the old batch of hardcore fans along the way.

Many music fans fondly remember The Wolfnote, a local Edmonton act that straddled the lines between multiple styles, yet managed to stitch them all together effectively; The Elixixers hope to do the same. Describing the group as a combination of ska, pop-rock, reggae, and rockabilly, Moore believes they can appeal to a large potential fanbase.

"Our music has many influences, so we appeal to a large amount of the listening population," she says. "We've played with bands in those genres, and it works really well."

Finishing off a western Canadian tour—including a show at Victoria's Ska Festival—the band has also done a cross-country tour, and this will be their third time playing in the City of Champions. While some might consider their music to be a niche genre, Moore's experience has shown her that as long as you play quality—and more importantly, fun—music,

people will come out to your gigs, even in the smaller towns that dot our prairie-stretched country.

"I find the shows in the smaller towns—in the mountains—a lot busier than the city shows," Moore notes. "It seems we get more people out to those shows. I find [with] the people in the smaller towns, everyone wants to go out to a show on a Saturday night."

However, while they are still building a fanbase in the larger centres, Moore thinks that will come with time—and more touring, of course.

"People in larger cities might not always want to go to those indie [shows] ... luckily for them, it may be ripe time for ska revival," she claims.

With the growing popularity of ska-and-reggae-tinged bands, many new fans are starting to trigger a resurgence in the genre's popularity. Moore, at least, sees a bright future for the genre, even though the world's initial infatuation with ska has passed.

"Lately, there's been a new wave of people interested in coming to see ska shows," Moore says. "Most of the time you go to ska shows, you see a lot of the same faces, but we've been seeing a lot new faces, and I hope it will continue to increase."

I got 99 problems, and gangstas are one

JAMES
BROTHERIDGE



The Carillon (CUP)

I can't pin down a moment for the shift, but suddenly mainstream rappers are wholly uninspiring. They be frontin', if you will.

From the 50 Cents to the Lil' Jons, there rarely comes a big-name and fresh-faced rap artist who seems to know just what the hell he or she is doing. And you know that it's a sorry state of affairs once a British, home-grown rap variant—grime—is creatively lapping MCs on both of coasts of North America.

Seemingly, things used to be better. Throughout the years, there have been standout hip-hop artists and groups like Run-DMC, NWA, and Public Enemy, who've been working to push the boundaries of the genre while making enjoyable music. These are all immensely creative acts who, while working in the freshest of genres, managed to top one another constantly with a never-ending array of studio and lyrical inventiveness. Now, the large majority of rap artists who get chart play have succumbed

to staid convention. The much-maligned and popular "bitches and bling" music video has even passed the point of self-parody. Now, it's just boring.

This might be mostly informed by some misguided sense of nostalgia. Of course, there have been sub-standard rap artists through the years, and looking back, it will always be the biggest and best of the genre who will stand out in the pantheon of artists.

But we can fix this, and here's how: before these guys get started, we throw them in a work placement program. For a period lasting about the same as a normal school year, they will be hounded by the likes of Reverend Run and Terminator X who will unrelentingly beat—physically or emotionally—any foolish ideas of fast cars and carefree lifestyles from their heads and force them to either step up their game or step down altogether.

The two most innovative major-label hip-hop artists are easily R Kelly and Kanye West. Kelly is an oddity, a man who managed to sustain a career by just talking about having sex with ladies in ridiculous ways with no concept of structure or reason, as evidenced by his declaration of being a "sexasaurus" on his latest album. He gets by mostly on nonsense.

West, on the other hand, proves my point perfectly. Though certainly a self-made and hard-working man, he had the benefit of Jay-Z's guidance in the early stages of his career before he exploded into the musical world. Even today, West still has an obvious reverence for the man who showed him the ropes.

Some rappers would say they wouldn't need teaching from the greats; that they were "schooled by the streets." If that's the case, then the streets are obviously a shitty teacher. Sit all these fools down in a room with Chuck D for a few hours, and he'll sort them out.

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