

music

Balancing his beat

Ransom buys new life with sale of old one



Submitted photo

Local singer/songwriter Mark Ransom plays an acoustic set every other Wednesday evening at the Astro Lounge in Bend. Ransom is shown here during a 2003 performance.

IF YOU GO

What: Mark Ransom

When: 9 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Astro Lounge, 147 NW Minnesota Ave., Bend

Cost: Free

Contact: 388-0116

By Andrew Moore
The Bulletin

Local singer/songwriter Mark Ransom is on a quest. To grow his music career without leaving the mountains he loves.

A guitarist who half-jokingly refers to his music as "Ohio surf rock," Ransom, 34, has recently dedicated himself full time to the proposition.

A component in that effort is a new, biweekly solo, acoustic gig at the Astro Lounge in Bend (see "If You Go").

Another component is a sudden swell of free time. For the last several years, Ransom had been one half of the husband-and-wife team that owned and operated A Cup of Magic, the west-side Bend coffee house. Recently, however, Ransom and his wife sold the business. The sale has afforded Ransom an opportunity to concentrate on chords and lyrics rather than cappuccinos and lattes.

"A Cup of Magic was my wife's dream that I helped her fulfill," Ransom said. "I've always wanted to pursue music and the recent sale indicates that shift."

Ransom won't be starting from scratch, however. Since his arrival in Bend in 1992, he has released three albums and played in numerous local bands. Among these were a "brewgrass band," the Rhythm Beans, a Grateful Dead cover band called Rising Tide, the Magic Turtle Band, the Mark Ransom Trio and most recently, a collaborative effort with local folk guitarist David Bowers called Ramshackle.

For all his collaborations, Ransom said he still finds the intimacy of a solo acoustic gig irreplaceable.

"You get a true listening audience," Ransom said. "Even if people are there just to have a beer or dinner, it is a lot more intimate, and as a songwriter, that is essential."

According to Ransom, people tune in to his songwriting more when he plays solo. He contrasts that setting with a band format, where people generally are more interested in dancing and "having a good time."

Ransom said the challenge in songwriting is balancing the beat and the melody with lyrics that aren't overtly political. As an inspiration, Ransom cites the apolitical stage persona of Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia.

"Jerry never said much," Ransom said. "And I think that's a good thing, because we don't want to dwell on the negative."

At the opposite spectrum, Ransom said he also draws inspiration from Bob Dylan and the way Dylan musically comments on the world around him. "I report on what I see around me, as any artist would," Ransom said. "If anything, I've been criticized as writing music that's too happy."

Ransom first learned to play guitar growing up in Columbus, Ohio. He headed west for college and after a few years underneath the Rockies at Colorado State University, Ransom knew his future lay to the west. A fanatic skier, he threw a dart at a map of the West. It landed near Burns.

"Someone told me to check out Bend instead," Ransom said. So in 1992, Ransom moved to Bend sight unseen, drawn by the lure of the mountains, he said.

Now, after a marriage, the birth of a daughter and the sale of the family business, Ransom is ready to tackle his musical dream head-on. Besides performing gigs, Ransom is working hard to sell the music he has already written to publishers in hopes that other artists will record it. He is also discussing a new album for his band Ramshackle.

"I quit my day job and now my night job is my day job," Ransom said.

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