



Talkdemonic - PDX BEST
NEW BAND 2005

COVER STORY

Willamette Week's BEST NEW BAND POLL

2005

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Portland might be the only city where it's easier to join a band than it is to get a job. It'd be hard to guess how many new bands start up in this town every day. But if this year's Best New Band Poll is any indication, it's a bunch.

We asked 59 local music know-it-alls-DJs, writers, bookers, club managers and label owners-to name the five best new musical artists to emerge in the past year, and our insiders voted for a grand total of 184 different bands (a few of our voters describe their favorites inside). A few band names popped up again and again, but we think it's pretty remarkable that at least 184 fresh-faced bands in Portland have attracted a following within the local industry. And we figure there must be hundreds more musicians out there who are still, shall we say, working out the kinks or writing the songs that might help them make it onto this list next year.

What makes this year's crop of top groups notable is their uniqueness. Like the Snuggle Ups, two guys who sing high-energy songs about friendship to a synthesized backing track. Or Climber, a crew of musicians who haul their own upright piano to shows. There's also the trumpeteers and vibraphonists who named their gang after a fictitious small Washington town. And then there's the Ready, an all-girl group with a killer 11-year-old lead guitarist. Topping them all is Talkdemonic, a duo that plays drums, viola and a laptop. Oh, yeah, and since, unlike every other band in the Top 10, Talkdemonic's songs have no vocals, it's safe to say it's not your usual rock band.

Of course, some bands on this year's list play what might be considered traditional rock. But in a town full of live music, where rent is still cheap enough that aspiring musicians can afford to buy an oddball instrument or two, there's this: If you wanna get noticed, you gotta sound different. And if you wanna make our annual Best New Bands list, you've gotta be great.

1. **Talkdemonic**

STRANGE BAND IN A STRANGE LAND

Lisa Molinaro's hands are clasped in front of her chin, her fingers interlocked, her grip pulsing. She's sitting at a table wedged into the corner of the Green Room on this Monday night, waiting to be called on stage. Kevin O'Connor,

her partner in music, sits across from her. With that placid stare under his tangled blond mop, O'Connor would make Gandhi look nervous. And sitting next to him, Molinaro looks simply terrified.

Together O'Connor and Molinaro make up Talkdemonic, an instrumental pop band whose bombastic drums and swooning viola have reverberated through the Portland music scene during the past six months. They've garnered praise from this paper and the *Portland Mercury*, drawing crowds of several hundred fans into clubs like Holocene, Berbat's Pan and the Doug Fir. But right now, that attention and their loyal following may as well be a thousand miles away. At Northwest Portland's Green Room, the ingredients for live music usually involve a white guy, an acoustic guitar and a story.

Tonight is open-mic night, hosted by a guy named Aaron, who's also the first performer. He finishes his first

song, a strumming lament. "Are we supposed to play now?" Molinaro asks, jumping the gun just three minutes or so into Aaron's 20-minute set. "Are you nervous?" O'Connor asks.

Unlike other waiting musicians, Talkdemonic isn't here to test out bedroom compositions. Instead, after running away with a landslide victory in *Willamette Week's* 2005 Best New Band poll, Talkdemonic agreed to spend a little time outside their comfort zone, which, for this band, seems unusually large.

As the local pop scene veers away from the traditional guitar-bass-drums-vocalist formula that ruled the '90s, unconventional arrangements are king. Talkdemonic-with a drummer, a violist and a laptop-is the most addictive musical currency available. Right now, though, the whole setup just seems a little weird. It's as if this peculiar band is visiting a foreign land.

After Aaron finishes a breathy folk song, he calls Talkdemonic to the stage. At the sound of the duo's name, a man in his 50s at the end of the bar looks up from his beer, expecting to see, maybe, a death-metal band. Instead, there's O'Connor and Molinaro, looking like a couple about to jump into the Model T for a Sunday drive, thanks to her gold blouse and long black skirt and his driver's cap.

Sound check: A preprogrammed synthetic hum pours out of the speakers, its pitch slowly climbing and then falling while the small crowd quiets down. The 50-something guy at the bar knits his eyebrows. Across the room, necks crane as patrons, reluctant to lift their asses from their barstools, try to figure out what's going on up in the front of the room. Then the sound check's over.

"Hopefully, we're not too loud," says Molinaro, her instrument nuzzled under her neck. "We're a little loud," O'Connor adds.

They are loud. A smattering of synthetic blips fill the room before O'Connor slams down his sticks. For tonight's show, he's stripped his kit down to just a snare, a kick drum and a high-hat, yet the muscular beat he creates reaches every dark corner of this small bar, tempered only by Molinaro's mournful strings.

By combining the hard-hitting beats inspired by O'Connor's love of hip-hop with the genteel sensibilities of a single viola, Talkdemonic's songs become tutorials in tension. Each instrument gives and then takes back again, pushing and pulling, while the orchestra O'Connor has created in his iBook holds the songs together.

Eight months ago, O'Connor and his drum set were a solo act. Molinaro's strings were always part of Talkdemonic's sound, but as just another prerecorded track stored on the laptop along with accordion, banjo, guitar and piano. While those solo gigs exhibited O'Connor's talents, the full-time addition of Molinaro turned the band's performance into a show.

Last year, local label Lucky Madison released the band's debut, *Mutiny Sunshine*, which featured Molinaro on only five tracks. Now Molinaro's contributions are part of every song on a just-recorded album, which will be released this fall by another local label, Arena Rock Recording Company, followed by the group's first national tour.

Back at the Green Room, Talkdemonic's music works its magic, and for the rest of the short set O'Connor and Molinaro play instrumental songs to enthusiastic applause and attentive silence. This is laptop rock for those who don't like the stuff. They finish, thank the crowd for having them-mentioning that they have CDs for sale-and sit down.

"That was great," the next musician says, leaning into the microphone as he straps on his acoustic guitar. "I just, I love that kind of stuff." -MB

talkdemonic (final russian)
www.wweek.com/music/talkdemonic-final_russian.mp3

Talkdemonic plays WW's Best New Band Showcase with Point Juncture, WA, and Wet Confetti Friday, April 8, at Berbat's Pan, 10 SW 3rd Ave., 248-4579. 9:30 pm. FREE 21+.

2. Viva Voce

LOVERS KEVIN AND ANITA ROBINSON LEAD THE WAY WITH MUSIC THAT WILL MELT YOUR BRAIN.

With voices so sweet they could melt your heart, and a driving beat that could snap your spine, the husband-and-wife team of Viva Voce appears to be all over the place-at the same time. Playing a variety of instruments, including drums, guitars, keyboards and kazoo, the two create a gentle everything-but-the-kitchen-sink sound that wraps around you and keeps you warm. Diverse without being unfocused, sweet without being too precious,

their live shows and recorded work are perfect examples of lovely atmospheric pop songs, sparkling tiny space rock and psychedelic lullabies, all based on a strong groove. -Mike King, designer, *Crash Design*

Viva Voce (Alive With Pleasure)

www.wweek.com/music/Viva_Voce-Alive-With-Pleasure.mp3

Viva Voce is currently touring across the United States and Europe.

3. **The Kingdom**

The kingdom come and its will be done in dance as it is in squiggly freakouts.

My first experience with the Kingdom was in the basement of a hipster-packed house party. While the band was playing its squirrely electropop, the crowd, entranced, was moving in isolated motion, following the lead of singer Chuck Westmoreland. Could this be the group sent to save Portland rock? Who knows? But the Kingdom explodes on stage with insane originality that will seem fresh to even the most jaded of palates. This indie group, which has released a four-song EP, seems formed out of lava-hot rock and moments of Guided by Voices-inspired greatness. You have to experience the live show: Sardonic, happy, jolty movements accompany the tunes and make you wanna spray beer and scream: "Ain't we having fun/ like a beating heart?" -Connie Wohn, artist relations, *Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls*

kingdom (diealloverme)

www.wweek.com/music/kingdom-diealloverme.mp3

The Kingdom plays with the Shins and the Minders Thursday, April 7, at the Crystal Ballroom, 1332 W Burnside St., 225-0047. 9 pm. SOLD OUT.

4. **Point Juncture, WA**

Not from Washington, these geographical fibbers find an audience with dramatic pop.

Last April, the members of Point Juncture, WA, played their first show in the basement of their house. They had a different name, one fewer band member, a few minor kinks to work out and an infectious enthusiasm for playing music together. I heard them during those embryonic stages, and when the trumpet and vibraphone meshed with those frenetic guitar and soaring vocal harmonies, I was hooked. Now almost a year later, the kinks are long gone, each live show offers new depth, and the EP *Juxtapony* has claimed a regular spot in my CD changer. Throw in the handmade album packaging, airbrushed show fliers and the fact that they're five of the nicest folks you could meet-well, it should be obvious that anyone who doesn't like this band must have a cold heart. -Jason Quigley, rock photographer, www.photojq.com

point juncture wa (the siesta movement)

www.wweek.com/music/point_juncture_wa-the-siesta-movement.m4a

Point Juncture, WA, plays WW's Best New Band Showcase with Talkdemonic and Wet Confetti Friday, April 8, at Berbat's Pan, 10 SW 3rd Ave., 248-4579. 9:30 pm. FREE 21+.

5. [3-way tie]**Climber**

Specializing in moving listeners with soothing electro-pop-and moving furniture.

My first hint that Climber might be something special was when members dragged their upright piano all the way from home for a show. Initially, I had been turned off by the band's CD art-from the look of the sterile stick figures pressed on the package, I figured they were some trendy techno band-but, on the recommendation of a pal, I asked them to play the Doug Fir. From the first notes, I was arrested by the strains of orchestral rock. Climber's blend of lush, rich melodies, delicate piano lines, extraordinarily well-thought-out arrangements, emotive vocals and an overall coating of fancily effected guitar made me lose track of myself. On occasion they do echo such commercial stalwarts as Radiohead and maybe even Coldplay. But given a little time in the creativity incubator, Climber will emerge triumphant, with both its sound, its CD art, and its vision refined, ready to turn on more than just Portland's ears. -Alicia Rose, booker, *Doug Fir Lounge*

climber (foxes)

www.wweek.com/music/climber-foxes.mp3

Climber plays with Crosstide and the Divorce Thursday, May 5, at Doug Fir Lounge, 830 E Burnside St., 231-

9663. 9 pm. \$10. 21+.

5. [3-way tie]**Derby**

ragtag quartet dials into the '70s pop their parents listened to, finding beauty in familiarity.

Derby is one of those rare groups with a sound that's instantly familiar and yet 100 percent original. Hummable melodies and thick, cascading harmonies conjure up remnants of a long-gone era, while clever lyrics and polished songwriting place Derby among today's great young bands. Daily, as I drive in my car, I look forward to hearing its self-produced, basement-born debut, *This Is the New You*. On the surface, the music sounds simple; yet on further listens, you'll hear that it's riddled with glowing layers of subtlety. Live, Derby nails it. And that's what it's all about—a band who comes out of the studio full of energy and throws down on any stage, electric, acoustic or whatever. -Trevor Rasmussen, owner, Big Wheel Productions

derby (qualities)

www.wweek.com/music/derby-qualities.mp3

Derby plays with Something Clever Friday, April 8, at Willamette University in Salem. 9:30 pm.

5. [3-way tie]**Paint by Numbers**

They're Aggro-pop and they're hot, but wait, ladies: they're in love with their instruments.

What I noticed the first time I saw Paint by Numbers was the crowd of mostly young women standing at the front of the stage. When this band hit the stage, a roar of excitement followed. It doesn't hurt that these young men are extremely sharp-looking, but they can also dominate a stage as if it's a plot of land they have bought and paid for. They launched into "Decorate Your Pavement," and the crowded room erupted into a chaotic frenzy, everyone singing along. These guys danced with their instruments as if they were caressing a long lost childhood sweetheart. That's when it hit me. People were actually smiling and having a good time. Isn't that what music should be about? -Martin Robbins, former owner, Club Satyricon

paint by numbers (pictures last longer unless they catch on fire)

www.wweek.com/music/paint_by_numbers-unless_they_catch_on_fire.mp3

Paint by Numbers plays with Clarity Process, Fall of Troy and others Wednesday, April 20, at Loveland, 320 SE 2nd Ave., 230-2111. 7 pm. Cover. All ages.

8. [it's a tie]**Wet Confetti**

divided, these three are simply people, but combined the trio takes on death disco.

The first time I saw Wet Confetti, it sucked. That's harsh, maybe, but at this house show, drummer Mike McKinnon was absent, while singer-guitarist Alberta Poon and guitarist-keyboardist Dan Grazzini did their best to make a semifunctional drum machine work. It didn't. The next time I saw them with McKinnon, the beats were slamming and complex, and the guitars and synths marched their noisy death disco around them in lock step. That's when the truth came out: Wet Confetti is a frickin' awesome live band, at once challenging, danceable and intense. -Matt Wright, freelance publicist

wet confetti (laughinggasping)

www.wweek.com/music/wet_confetti-laughinggasping.mp3

Wet Confetti plays WW's Best New Band Showcase with Talkdemonic and Point Juncture, WA Friday, April 8, at Berbaty's Pan, 10 SW 3rd Ave., 248-4579. 9:30 pm. FREE 21+.

8. [it's a tie]**The Snuggle Ups**

best friends forever share stories, hopes, dreams, dance breaks and electro beats.

Are the Snuggle Ups joking? Guys in their 20s singing upbeat, electro-pop songs about love and friendship? In 2005? What? As it turns out, Prineville natives Liam K. and Brett W. couldn't be more sincere. So go to a show, immerse yourself in the sweat-soaked masses, set down your drink and go dance with your friends. After all, that's what the Snuggle Ups are all about. -Sarah Dylan, co-host, *Alternative Mornings on 94.7 FM*

snuggle ups (Benefits)

www.wweek.com/music/snuggle_ups-Benefits.m4a

The Snuggle Ups play with Architecture in Helsinki Friday, May 27, at Holocene, 1001 SE Morrison St., 239-7639.

10. The Ready

TWEENS rock out of girls camp and into the scene with grown-up trad rock sound.

Once I saw Una Rose, the 11-year-old guitarist for the Ready, stop the universe with her music. It was a cover of "Rockin' in the Free World," and the way she played, I thought the axis of the earth would tilt. The depth of the Ready's original songwriting is astounding for kids this young. Quinsi Newell, 13, plays bass and Megan Armstrong, 12, plays drums, with keyboardist-vocalist Shannon Schober, 12, telling stories of ancient history and scaring you because they are SO GOOD. Hope is a muscle, and these girls are flexing. -*Shayla Hason, DJ Safi*

The Ready (British Invasion)
www.wweek.com/music/The_Ready_British-Invasion.mp3

The Ready plays a showcase concert on Saturday, April 16, at the Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls headquarters, 8900 'A' N Vancouver Way. Noon. FREE All ages.

ONE YEAR LATER...

when we were kings

Menomena recalls lessons learned after a year as Portland's Best New Band.

"If there's one thing I learned on that tour," says Menomena keyboardist Brent Knopf, "it's that when there's smoke, there's probably a fire somewhere."

My, how Menomena has grown. In 2004, the experimental pop trio earned top honors in *WW*'s first-ever Best New Band poll (see "A Cut Above," *WW*, April 14, 2004), for its keyboard-fueled pop songs with a hip-hop backbone courtesy of drummer Danny Seim. Since then, the group has completed its first two coast-to-coast tours and witnessed the national release of its first CD, *I Am the Fun Blame Monster*.

Knopf learned about fire on the band's first tour, an 18-concert trip across the country launched last November. The band traveled in a 1977 Dodge Sportsman, which had been rebuilt with a very flammable wooden frame. On the road, the Sportsman caught fire-twice.

During that tour, the RV also lost both side-view mirrors, had two sets of brake pads replaced, and guzzled plenty of gas. The band earned little press, and the tour was generally dismal-except to the strangely optimistic bassist/saxophonist Justin Harris, who claims great memories of the trip.

The second tour, which wrapped up last month, was smoother-thanks to a 1995 Dodge Cargo Van made of nonflammable steel and glowing mentions in numerous glossy mags and alt-weeklies in San Francisco and Salt Lake City.

Now, just over two years after Menomena started attracting a Portland following, the band seems headed for more attention. But it hasn't hit the big time yet. *Fun Blame Monster*, which the band released locally back in 2002, now has a new label (Portland's Film Guerrero) and national distribution, but sales, the band admits, have been sluggish.

That might change next month when Menomena joins famed Brit dance-punkers Gang of Four on a six-date West Coast tour. Later this spring, the group is booked to play the Sasquatch Festival at the Gorge Amphitheater on a bill that includes Wilco, the Pixies and Kanye West.

"All those songs on *I Am the Fun Blame Monster* are old to you and me," says Harris about the band's plan to record a new CD. "But they're still new to a lot of people out there. So we have to play them over and over...." -
MB

Menomena opens for Gang of Four at Radio 4 Thursday, May 5, at the Crystal Ballroom, 1332 W Burnside St., 225-0047. 9 pm. \$20 advance, \$23 day of show. All ages.

MUSIC

Viva Voce (Alive With Pleasure)
www.wweek.com/music/Viva_Voce-Alive-With-Pleasure.mp3

climber (foxes)
www.wweek.com/music/climber-foxes.mp3

derby (qualities)
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ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED [4/6/2005](#)

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