

## Soul Vibrator: Eugene's favorite funkateers on the road to glory

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As far as album concepts go, it's hard to beat the one behind Eugene funk band Soul Vibrator's *Electric Stardust*. An alien lands on Earth from a planet that has lost the art of music and discovers vinyl and cassettes; enamored, he rockets back to his home planet and saves rock 'n' roll. It's as supremely goofy as the motley crew who made it.

"We wanted something spacey, cartoon-y, because that's who we are as people," said bassist Miles Alberts, face buried in a gargantuan bag of kettle chips as he and his fellow band members lounge on their friend Andy Hudson's back porch. The band is taking a well-deserved rest before packing up for three shows on the Oregon Coast as part of its ongoing *Electric Stardust* tour.

Indeed, hanging out with Soul Vibrator is a lot like being in a cartoon. The band members exchange words effortlessly, and almost everything they say is funny. They also have strikingly distinct personalities. Alberts talks with the pep and clarity of a football coach. Drummer Sam Hayward, with his impressive mustache and dry sense of humor, could be a TV cop. Saxophonist Ben Latimer and trombonist Charles DeMonnin are quiet but occasionally say something hilarious. Keyboardist Alvin Johnson is a jokester. Singer Zev Kamrat is at lunch with his girlfriend.

Then there's guitarist Braden Smith, who fills the "spacey" part of Alberts' description. He describes himself as "fractals" (no further explanation given), and he's the first to mention that everything is made up of dust from stars that exploded billions of years ago.

"With all the electricity in our bodies, we are all *Electric Stardust*," he said, describing the album's title: His eyes widen portentously, and the band members fall silent, as if on cue.

“We can take that to the bank!” another band member jokes. All of a sudden, all six members of Soul Vibrator present are falling over each other with laughter.

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Soul Vibrator started in 2011 at South Eugene High School, when Kamrat, Smith and Alberts started jamming and playing at Cozmic Pizza open mics every Wednesday. Initially doing covers, the band soon developed a democratic, round-table approach to songwriting, expanding its ranks all the while and blossoming into a seven-piece band.

“Every new member that came in, it was instant,” said Latimer. “Our ideas all really connected into something cohesive.”

In 2013, Soul Vibrator was voted third in *Eugene Weekly’s* [Best Band Of The Year poll](#). In 2014, armed with a single called “Flow” the band recorded at Telos Studios in west Eugene, the band entered into Eugene Weekly’s Next Big Thing contest. The band won a spot on the cover and enough studio time to record *Electric Stardust*.

Since then, Soul Vibrator has played bigger and bigger gigs, even scoring a headlining spot at Cozmic for its album release. Its *Electric Stardust* tour is its first ever and it’s been quite a ride. On the road, the band members have dealt with multiple cancellations, two busted bass strings, and — in one particularly cartoon-like incident — a cop.

“We realized one of our headlights was out,” says Hudson, who drove the band on a zigzagging journey from Beaverton down to Ashland and back up to Cottage Grove. “We see a cop, and sure enough she pulls us over and she said, ‘your headlights are out, we don’t usually ticket people for that.’ Then she saw our equipment and said, ‘are you guys in a band?’”

The band debated giving her a CD but agreed that would be tantamount to bribery. She ended up writing the band’s name on her hand and letting them off with a warning.

“She was probably pulling people over all night with the words *Soul Vibrator* on her hand,” Johnson laughs.

The tour was a mostly positive experience for Soul Vibrator. Yet they have sour recollections of the band’s show at the Dublin Pub in Beaverton.

“We slacked on some rehearsals, and it showed,” Alberts said. “We saw it as a wake-up call.”

In a never-ending quest to improve, Soul Vibrator are as self-critical as possible. Playing larger gigs has helped them determine what makes audience members dance and what makes them “just stand there.” The band members often engage directly with the audience members after shows to gauge what they’ve been doing right and wrong at their performances.

“Everyone gets done and talks to a few people, and there’s always some feedback,” Alberts said. “We come back together and say yo, I heard this and this and this and this, and we agree on one thing and improve it.”

Soul Vibrator doesn’t always heed audience input, but it uses even the most caustic comments to gauge its strengths and weaknesses.

“At one show, someone said, ‘everything about you is super great... but Zev should *never* rap,’” recalls Alberts. “Zev will go up and start freestyling a lot. (His freestyle) wasn’t great that night, but since then he’s busted killer freestyles.”

The thing Soul Vibrator gets the most criticism for is also the one thing it steadfastly refuses to change: its name.

“People remember it,” according to Alberts, so it stays. Yes, it’s a goofy name. But the band’s absurd space-opera album concept, impromptu freestyles and giant bags of kettle chips make one thing very clear: The band members sure don’t care about looking goofy. And if it sounds good, why should they?

