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WEEKEND MIX

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PETER BATTISTON/VANCOUVER SUN

Up-and-coming Vancouver artists gather to discuss what it takes to make it in the local music scene. Front, from left: John Bews, Paul Belen, Matt Chan, Trevor Chan and Ryder Havdale. Middle row, from left: Rob Johnson, Matt Bryant, Dustin Bentall, Arch, Jonas Shandel and Cory Price. Back: Ridley Bent and Mary Ancheta.

Tomorrow's stars in the house

Vancouver can boast a trend-setting scene, but local up-and-coming artists say you need to travel to make it big

BY CHANTAL EUSTACE
VANCOUVER SUN

Holding a banjo over his head in a faux air-guitar motion, indie rocker Ryder Havdale earns a chuckle from the mish-mash of musicians gathered around the wild western piano.

No one in this harmonious gang — 13 of Vancouver's next wave of musical innovators — will sit still for very long. In their industry, this frenetic energy works well.

They're playing clubs, producing their own albums, creating new record labels, competing for awards, touring and learning new chords.

Members of the indie rock collective Mohawk Lodge — Havdale, Cory Price, Arch (just Arch) and Rob Josephson — tangle up in a conversation with the experimental hip hoppers No Luck Club — Matt Chan, Trevor Chan and Paul Belen.

Bentall strikes a cowboy stance against a wall next to one of his roommates, hick-pop-folk singer Ridley Bent, who busies himself with a homemade pipe contraption on the kitchen table.

Talking to these creative birds about what it's like to make it, break it and shake it in Vancouver unearths a few

Talent on the Web

- www.noluckclub.com
- www.myspace.com/headwater
- www.allisoncrowe.com
- www.ridleybent.ca
- www.maryancheta.com
- www.myspace.com/johnbews
- whitewhale.ca
- www.myspace.com/birdapres
- www.dustinbentall.com
- www.leeroystagger.ca

juicy worms.

Each artist has their own spin (or riff) on the local scene. Opinions bounce around like any good melody.

Some think it's a tough place to be a musician, others don't. Some would like more venues to play. Others don't care. A couple of them mention that they'd like the audience to pay more attention to them when they're on-stage. (Ask for encores.)

They all agree it is key to travel for their art. Leaving the city seems to be a crucial part of making it on their home turf. And they all lovingly call this city home.

There's a lot of jaw-dropping young talent in Vancouver, says Lili Wexu, who has booked artists for the Media Club for the past three years.

"Vancouver is still in the identity game sometimes and it is very trend-setter-ish," Wexu says. "It's very avant-garde on many levels but, for some reason, it is so self-deprecating."

Wexu is most impressed by artists who aren't afraid to go against the grain and be true to themselves: "If they believe in what they're doing and they're selling it, I'll buy it."

This is the time for indie bands to get noticed, says Havdale, lead vocalist for indie band Mohawk Lodge and founder of White Whale Records. (He also plays in the poppier ensemble Kids These Days.)

The magnifying glass is on Vancouver for the bands coming out of here right now," he says. The success of local groups like the New Pornographers, Black Mountain and Hot Hot Heat is good for everyone, Havdale says. "A couple years ago it was really hard to get people out to shows."

But even though the city is most commonly associated with indie-rock successes, there is an emerging local "alt-country" scene. It's two-stepping right along the streets of Vancouver luring fans from all walks of life — including ones who don't think they like country, says Bentall.

"The [country scene] in Vancouver is getting better every day. It's a fast-growing genre, which is cool," says 23-year-old Bentall (son of Barney.) His just-released debut, *Streets With No Lights*, is country with a raw and folksy edge.

According to Bentall, being a cowboy in Vancouver comes naturally, even though he lives just off Commercial Drive.

His cowboy-hat-wearing roommate Bent, 36, agrees. This year Bent, who has a distinctly rootsy vibe, was nominated for songwriter of the year at the Western Canadian Music Awards for his

album *Blam*. He didn't win but says the accolade helped him get more recognition. He'll be touring with the category's winner, Corb Lund, next year.

Bent would like the genre to find a real home in Vancouver: "There really is no venue that embraces the scene."

Another up-and-comer in the local alt-country scene, Leeroy Stagger, says he's playing constantly. In September the 24-year-old released his second album, *Depression River*.

"I'm just starting to make a living doing it now," says Stagger. "It's tough but if you're willing to work — and you're good — it can work out."

Vancouver's live audiences are not easy to impress, says electro-soul crooner Mary Ancheta, 31.

"I feel like if you can 'wow' them here then you can bring your art to another market," she says. "I think it's not as responsive, I suppose, as another audience."

Rapper Dane Goulet left his Vancouver home to play in the hilly terrain of Winnipeg. He says Vancouver doesn't have enough venues for the hip hop scene.

"There's so many people there [in Vancouver] who are doing so many great things, it just seems to be a little not appreciated," says Goulet, who goes by the name Birdapres. This fall he released his "unofficial debut" album, *Get It Done*.

Breaking through cliques is a challenge too, says 24-year-old Shandel, of Headwater. They are set to release their debut album, *My Old Friend*, on Dec. 16.

"[The Vancouver scene] is sort of in separated pods and very hard to get

hold of. But once you find the niche and you're into the scene, it's not bad at all," Shandel says. "If you rely on the city to make it, you're missing the point."

Local bands have to travel to make it, says Trevor Chan, 34, of the No Luck Club. They've been touring to promote their second album, *Prosperity*.

"Pretty much the industry is out in Toronto — it's out east. It's kind of where the action is," Chan says. "Vancouver is a great place to work. It's a great place to live but when you're talking about the music business — or the arts and entertainment business — it's not exactly the place to be."

But in this digital age of Internet, podcasts, iChatting and Blackberries, things are changing. (Airplanes help too.) "We're kind of hoping with such a connected world you don't have to be limited by geography any more," says Chan.

Working in a smaller music scene is supportive for artists, according to 25-year-old folk singer Allison Crowe. (She couldn't make the photo session because she was touring Newfoundland to promote her newish album, *This Little Bird*.) Crowe's take on making it: "If you really, really want to do it, play it live."

Snap. Two blinding flashes go off. Done.

Group photo complete, the artists untangle and wiggle free, clomping over a table, dodging a collection of empty liquor bottles and a stack of vinyls.

One by one, the next-big-things depart. They set off to rock, twang, shimmy, pop, rap and hum all over the city. And it seems, all they want in return is a little more attention.

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