

Portland has a growing, yet still small music community. Musicians often have a few bands to work with. Some fans can be seen at most shows. There is one man in town, however, that exceeds the norm. Kevin Rankin has attended as many music-oriented events as I have (that is saying a mouthful), with one difference...he has attended those events from on stage.

I went to work with JAM in December of 1999. In the short period of time, from then until now, I have seen Kevin Rankin out about a hundred times. Well, maybe not. I have seen him enough that when I do, I smile and shake my head, often muttering under my breath, "of course." If I was enjoying a given gig, Kevin was sure to be somewhere in the room, often, playing drums. I didn't know who he was and when I finally asked about him, the reply was given with wide eyes and admiration, "why, that's Kevin Rankin." The delivery of that statement was given from the stance of amazement and some dismay. Apparently I was supposed to know who he was. Usually you ask, "Who's that?" and the reply is something like, "That's blah, from blah, used to be with blah blah." But this guy was just his name and that seemed to be enough. I smelled a story.

It's a good story too. Kevin has such a knack for gab and tells his own story very well. What's more fun is listening to him tell others' stories. He seems to know at least a little about everyone. It's no wonder either. When I interviewed him at The Lotus, he took a piece of paper to list some folks in town he has worked with and it took a considerable amount of time. Among the players listed are Nicole Campbell, Brian Cutler, Jeff Labansky, John Thayer, Robert Rude, Suzie Blue and this is a short glimpse into what that list said. He helped Slowrush as much as he could when they were still Generator, by promoting, booking and doing publicity for the band.

Kevin didn't start playing drums until he was 17 years old. He played in the mountains of Montana in a small town called Bozeman. He loved to hear the echo come back at him from the gorge. He found power and excitement in drums. In high school, playing drums became his obsession. He was able to drum his way through college and earned a B.A. in Sociology from Montana State University.

Kevin played drums in a band called Davididit when he decided to come to Portland. Lead vocalist Dave Rummans was the first of his Montana band mates to come out west. Dave loved it and encouraged Kevin to come along. Then Luke Duran, currently bass player for The Orange Collection, made the trek west. Luke was the last to come out and by the time he did, Dave and Kevin had gotten hooked up with other bands. The three haven't worked together since. All of them have found the Portland scene to be rich enough to keep them busy in their own projects. In our interview, Kevin and I had a great time naming folks who had transplanted to this community from Montana. How about Mike Krum, Rob Fagliano and Will Casey from Mobius, Tony Starlight and Dan Murray? There are more, of course. These are the members of the Montana-Portland scene, a very exclusive group indeed. Must be something in the water out there.

Kevin came to Portland in 1994, optimistic and excited about working in the same community as Dan Pred and Dan Reed. Kevin had been a big fan of Dan Reed Network. He was coming out west, sure to be a Rock Star. He and his wife came out to find that the real world rested right here in Portland, Oregon as well. Folks that had been achieving fairly clear musical success were working in video stores just to make ends meet, teaching music lessons to keep their craft and skills honed and alive. Kevin became very realistic about music as a career. He learned the



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hard way, just like the rest of the community, that want and talent does not a rock star make. The things Kevin learned about the music business could have made him bitter or could even have made him quit. Those experiences instead made him one of the greatest assets to the Portland music community.

Kevin's first project in his new home was with a band called On A Llama. Kevin was blown away by the band and was very pleased to be a part of it. Kevin spent countless hours learning about promotions by what Kevin calls, "hanging my own ass out on the line." Kevin was working at a local record store and by suggestion selling his own CD, On A Llama out sold Garth Brooks for the region. Doing the legwork and contacting folks in the 'biz was a trial by fire. Kevin met with success, however and, at the time, the band was a good thing for all involved. When it came time to sign the band with a major label, the trouble began. Lesson one, read between the lines. The promotion of lead singer Lea Krueger and not the band as a whole, was prioritized and Kevin decided, wisely, not to follow On A Llama into the contract.

Kevin found there were plenty of bands needing drummers and because he is "not a freak or a flake," he had no trouble finding work. In fact, Kevin found that he had trouble juggling all the invitations to play. He decided he would start a database so that he could refer bands and musicians to one another. He records contact information, talents and needs for loads of musicians. As he meets new people and has more requests, the database grows. Kevin asked me in our interview, "Do you know how many great musicians are in this town?" He talked about the problem we've all seen. Sometimes you can't quite put your finger on what's wrong. All the musicians are just grand at what they do. They are mismatched. They don't work as a team as well as other bands do. Some of the musicians in this town could be remixed with better-suited situations. Kevin has introduced people from all over the planet to one another and helped to create some very smooth sound in this town.

I saw Kevin out at the CD release party for 28if. There he was, sunny and smiling, behind his drum kit. This collaboration gives him a chance to play good, old-fashioned, hard rock n' roll. He loves this kind of workout, but recently, Kevin has been pulling back from his nights out to play his favorite role of husband and father.

Kevin told me it was something he just couldn't help. "I fell in love with my baby boy." When Kevin talks about his family, he glows. He refers to his wife of eight years, Jennifer, as the most supportive person possible. She has been patient with and understanding about his musician's lifestyle. It is very difficult for relationships to survive the late nights and travels away from home. Kevin told me he is the "luckiest man alive." He can't continue to gig out and travel and still spend enough time with his favorite people, his wife and baby boy, Kaleb. So, he has had to reorder his idea of success.

Kevin has decided to cut down the time he spends as a drumming instructor. He loves working with the students, introducing different styles of music, and taking them to see established musicians. He now dedicates only a short time to this satisfying activity. He will gig out much less. This is a difficult move, because it means having to tell people that have become his friends, "no." Kevin still shows up at gigs and supports, as much as he can, the Portland community.

Through facilitating solutions for musicians in this town, Kevin feels he's becoming not just a better musician, but a better person and teacher. Kevin has a common goal with all of my favorite musicians. He wants to uplift the whole community. He wants to make it easier for everyone to play music.