

Seattle University

ScholarWorks @ SeattleU

The Spectator Online

Newspapers

11-8-2023

2023-11-08 Ben Kinney, On the Frontline of Funk

Hannah Mwangi
Seattle University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online>

Recommended Citation

Mwangi, Hannah, "2023-11-08 Ben Kinney, On the Frontline of Funk" (2023). *The Spectator Online*. 1099.
<https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/spectator-online/1099>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Newspapers at ScholarWorks @ SeattleU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Spectator Online by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ SeattleU.



The Spectator • November 8, 2023 • <https://seattlespectator.com/2023/11/08/ben-kinney-on-the-frontline-of-funk/>

Ben Kinney, On the Frontline of Funk

Hannah Mwangi, Volunteer Reporter

For 20 years it's been boring. And dead.

After the sour grunge scene deescalated, Seattle's been ravaging in some tasteless appetites.

Year after year, Nirvana reincarnates copycat the fusion punk rock heavy metal in an attempt to keep up the new sound and its aggressive attitude. The genesis of grunge, with its distorted instrumentals and angsty lyricisms, permeated Seattle decades ago like a virus—that contagious ill enveloping the filthy 90s.

Competition was nonexistent.

Tone? Predictable.

Conformity to the new sound made grunge all the more tiring. Ben Kinney, a rising musician on the frontline of funk, admits to me, "Everyone in Seattle, there's a pressure to fit into a certain type of music. People want angsty sounds. But what we need is some funky good vibe. It doesn't have to be depressing. Seattle doesn't need to be grungy."

He sits by my leg. Told me my Alessio tufted chaise made him feel awkward.

He's cool.

He's wearing, now, so much gray. The blue in his jeans are fading, the neutral in his crew neck makes its red stripe across his chest feel exotic. I'd asked him about his snapback, I'd forgotten what he said. Something about Paris. I wonder if he's ever been. He grew up here, in Seattle. Earlier, he told me how much he appreciated the rain, its coolness and drama.

BK: But there is a melancholic beauty about the gray in this city.

HM: No, yeah. The city is sagging and tired and crying all the time!

BK: [Laughs] Yeah. I like to look at Lake Union when it's cloudy. The water is really nice.

HM: Haven't been.

BK: Really? If you're in Cap Hill, it's right by you. The big lake in the middle of the city.

I offered him something to drink. Or eat.

"Nah. I'm good."

He kept looking around. My walls are plain. All nine of them, except for the large folding mirror that's too heavy to hang. He

comments on its size. I didn't know how else to put it. "I'm a narcissist," I tell him and he laughs at my seriousness.

He moves over to my dresser, picks up my blue wool hat, and tries it on. There's nothing playing but he begins to dance. I wanted to see how long he'd last, dancing alone like that—but it looked so natural, not at all displaced.

HM: You think Seattle's good for playing?

BK: I think Seattle has a lot to offer its musicians here, especially in terms of venues. I like that there's a lot of crossover happening right now between the house show underground scene and the established venues.

He sits back down, on the bench this time, across from me.

BK: Since I'm just starting out, I'm very thankful to be playing the venues and with the artists I've been able to play with because I can imagine being somewhere, just in the middle of nowhere, getting starved for gigs.

HM: Starved?

BK: There's just so much happening in Seattle. In New York or LA, there are hundreds of bars playing every single night. There are so many gig opportunities, but, at the same time, in those places, they have the most competitive music scenes, maybe, in the world. Everyone's fighting for those s—ty bar gigs, and some bars capitalize off that competition, which is f—ed up.

HM: Seattle doesn't do that?

BK: No! The band and I have just been playing gig after gig. I like that there's support for small musicians like that out here. It's cool.

Kinney's band, MidPak, is psychedelic run-off funk. Their all-instrumental bug-eyed single, "Evil Intention," reminds me so much of sweaty summer. The rock groove, which encapsulates its members, Sam Holman, Nik Jordan, and Ben Kinney, produces an X trip not yet mimicked.

BK: I spent a lot of time on my own in my childhood. My parents both worked a lot so I spent a lot of time just chilling, doing my own thing. Music, now, is my biggest expression of that. I do a lot of it on my own, just sitting there for hours, practicing stuff. I feel connected to myself, grounded when I'm playing music.

HM: What about you and the band? How does it feel on the rising?

BK: We're in a position where all the other local bands are like, "Oh, you guys are making it big!" Blah blah blah. But that's not what it feels like to me. I feel like we're just barely at the beginning of something. Hopefully, we can actually make it big. Like real big. Like, play with musicians who inspire us. Like playing at dream venues big.

The oddity of funk grows curiouser, curiouser. And the longer he sits here, the more I am sure.