

# MUSIC

## Thunder Over Portland

Saturday, April 23  
Portland Festival and Performing  
Arts Building  
www.thunderoverportland.com  
\$7; All Ages; 8 p.m.

## Bonnie "Prince" Billy & Matt Sweeney

Wednesday, April 27  
Portland Festival and Performing  
Arts Building  
Cost and Time TBD



Bonnie "Prince" Billy, Louisville's warbling alt-country ninja.

## Thunder Over Portland: dueling stages, jousting Thunder

Back in September 2004, Aron Conaway, his girlfriend Hallie Jones and the rest of the LAVA (Louisville Assembly of Vanguard Art) folks were looking for a new venue to hold

**preview** their annual Halloween cover band bash. With the cops bearing down on their Germantown warehouse, Conaway and company looked north and west, forming a partnership with Portland neighborhood historian and activist John Owen to use what has now become the Portland Festival and Performing Arts Building.

A gutted church built in the late 1860s, with high vaulted ceilings and a character that confirms its gritty past, the spot has drawn considerable numbers of normally West End-averse showgoers with its appealing array of indie and experimental rock shows, the latest of which happens this weekend in conjunction with the neighborhood council's annual "Thunder Over Portland" bash.

The show is a frenetic augment to an already crazy day. Eight bands on two stages break down like this: the lower stage (first floor) is all local, with The Photographic opening at 9 p.m. Dreamy popsters The Merediths at 10, Second Story Man at 11, and dub funk purveyors The Children at 12:30 a.m.

Bands upstairs play on the half hour, with Stooges-esque rockers L&N at 9:30 p.m., NYC jamprov group Development at 10:30, Jennifer Gentle at 11:30, and the sludgy psychedelic stoner rockers Dead Meadow headlining at 1 a.m.

The show is part of Portland's larger Thunder festivities. The area between 14<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> streets will be closed all day for Riverwalk, offering cheaper-than-the-Chow Wagon festival fare and a different view of the fireworks (try Northwestern Parkway for parking).

"Believe it or not, it's a pretty good view," Owen says of the trappings. "And you don't have nearly the parking hassle that you do downtown. You're not paying \$20 to park. It's a different atmosphere."

The alternate take on Louisville's most



The Children play in Portland on Saturday.

famous multimillion-dollar explosion is part of an attempt by Owen and the neighborhood council to change Louisville's perception of Portland, once the ritzy hub of the city's booming river culture.

"It's a rediscovery process for folks," he says. "Certainly for Portland, it's not traditionally what people think of when they think of the West End."

The opening of the Portland Festival and Performing Arts Building was a huge step in reinvigorating the neighborhood, which has long been crippled by poverty and, according to Owen, overlooked by city government. The opening of a viable rock venue that can accommodate hundreds of people — something this city sorely lacks with a few exceptions — is a giant leap in the diversification of the area.

"We had some folks from the neighborhood come to the last show we had down there," Owen says. "It's because they wanted to hear the music."

Ah, the music. After the rousing success of the Halloween throwdown — something like 500 people paid to get in — the strangely congruent partnership of east and west Louisville was solidified, and local promoters started filing in to fill the space with their shows. After all, it's not a bar.

"With a lot of shows coming through town, people were looking for an alternative venue," Conaway says.

This weekend's show makes an impressively scrupulous mix of the musical palette. Touring on the steam of a striking new record, DC natives Dead Meadow bring a swirling psychedelia mangled by a very obvious Black Sabbath adoration, which has brought upon some of the finest head bobbing around here since jamming to Tony Iommi's profoundly simple guitar solos on tunes like "War Pigs." There's also a concurrent Northwestern grunge vibe, like Unwound does it.

Sub Pop Records' Jennifer Gentle is part party rock, with some British pop sense peppered in the verses. And NYC's Development could be, well, just about anything. Last weekend at Uncle Pleasant's, the group jammed with some locals on mellow song tangents with some jazz vibrations flying off the drums. Very cool.

Native son and bearded warbler Will Oldham, aka Bonnie "Prince" Billy, plays the old Portland church next Wednesday, April 27, with his latest partner in crime, Matt Sweeney. The pair have a new collaboration out on Drag City called *Supewolf*.

Their collaboration was atypical, with Oldham writing only lyrics and Sweeney taking care of the guitar work. The two function magnificently together and have added yet another in a long line of Oldham projects that have come to typify Louisville's contribution to the new world of non-Wal Mart country music.

Former Sun City Girls guitarist Rick Bishop opens, along with Nashville's finest Cherry Blossoms.

BY STEPHEN GEORGE  
sgeorge@leoweekly.com

Win a monthly pass to

## HEADLINERS

Enjoy FREE cover at  
Headliners Music Hall  
for the month of May

REGISTER TO WIN

HEADLINERS MAY PASS

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DAYTIME PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

CELL PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

MAIL TO:

LEO 640 S. Fourth St.  
Louisville, KY 40202  
Attn: LEO Music Pass

Entries must be received by April 27th.  
All entrants & winners must be 21 years of age.