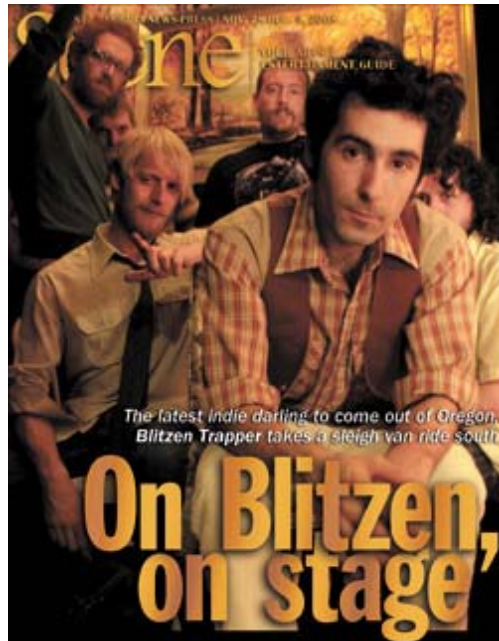


# SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



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**IN CONCERT : A rising, lurking, indie-folk-rock sensation  
: Portland-based Blitzen Trapper tours with acclaimed new  
album 'Furr' and makes Santa Barbara debut**

By Josef Woodard, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

November 28, 2008 11:59 AM

BLITZEN TRAPPER

When: 8 p.m. Monday

Where: Muddy Waters Cafe, 508 E. Haley St.

Cost: \$8 advance, \$10 door

Information: 966-9328, [www.myspace.com/muddycafesb](http://www.myspace.com/muddycafesb)

Eric Earley, the impressive and indisputably talented singer-songwriter in Blitzen Trapper, was on his cell phone last week from the endless road, submitting to some questions from a curious reporter. Asked for his whereabouts, he answered haltingly, seemingly confused. I don't know, he mumbled, then yelled to the van-bound band where are we at? Anybody? I don't know. Somewhere in the South, maybe.

It might be a sign of mounting success, or perhaps it's just a way of life that is concerned less with the specific wheres and whats of a musical life than forward momentum and creative vitality. The road takes this six-piece band to all manner of venues, large and humble. While the critically acclaimed, Salem, Ore.-formed and Portland, Ore.-based band makes its Santa Barbara debut Monday at Muddy Waters Cafe, it will be coming off recent high-profile stops at TV's Conan O'Brien show and at the historic Ryman Auditorium, in Nashville, Tenn.

Formed in 2000, the folk-rockish Blitzen Trapper is currently riding high and showing increasing promise, with the release of this year's dazzling Sub Pop album, *Furr*. That album, the band's first for Sub Pop, builds steadily on the buzz of last year's beloved *Wild Mountain Nation*. Rolling Stone magazine gave them a nice spread a few weeks ago, and the reviews tend to glow, even as, at ground level, word-of-mouth (and word-of-mouse) increases the heat of their fanbase.

Still, what to call its music? Folk and rock are liberally stirred into the band's stylistic stew, and there's a twangy, down home quality to Earley's songs and the band's production palette, but pop and punk sneak in, as well. Earley and his mates aren't overly eager to neatly define what they're up to though. On the band's MySpace page, it goes by the description Indie/Country/Electro and the sounds like section includes Nick Drake, Pavement, Cary Grant, Sergio Leone and Jorge Louis Borges. Fair enough. The mystery continues, happily.

**I love your new album, *Furr*. The first time I heard it, it got into my brain and now can't get it out.**

Yeah, well that's good, I guess, right? (laughs).

**That is good. How does this one compare to *Wild Mountain Nation*, from your perspective?**

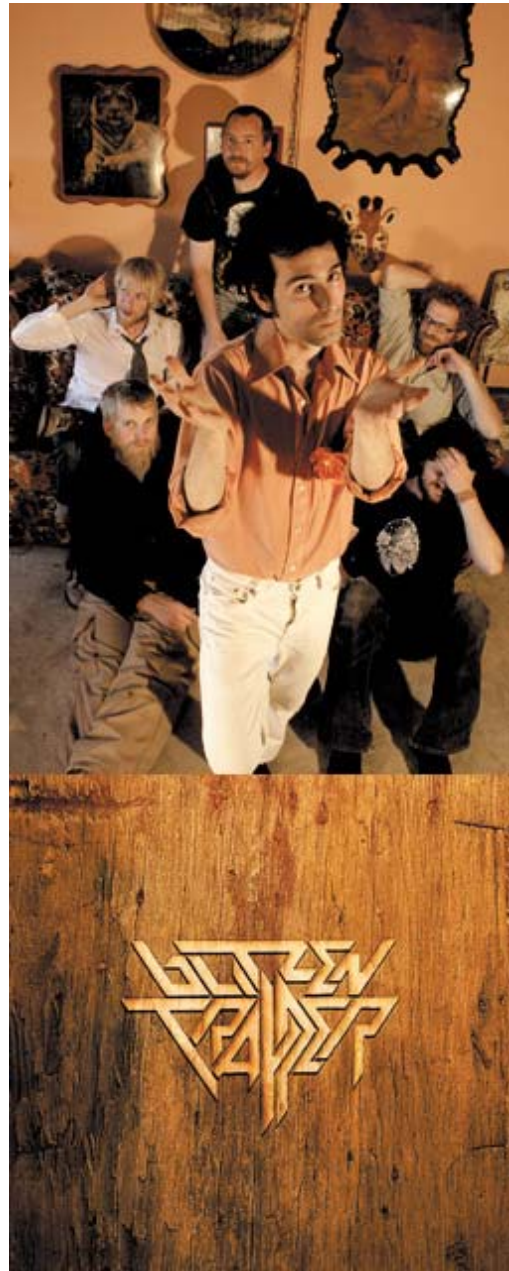
It's pretty different from the last one. It's hard to explain. I think the last record is more low-fi, definitely. It's a little more punk rock, probably, not quite as easy on the ears. I made it, so I don't know.

**Did you go into this new project with a particular idea or a gameplan?**

No, not really. This record just emerged out of a bunch of recordings that I made in between tours. I think that the record before was made all at the same time, so it was different in that way.

**What is it about Portland that produces so much good music?**

I don't know, man. I have no idea. I think a lot of it has to do with how cheap it is to live. I think the weather also makes it a good place to get stuff done. It's rainy a lot, it's cold during the



winter. There's not a lot of people there, either, not a lot of distraction. It's a good place to write music and books, or do whatever, and not worry about having a serious day job.

You don't have to scramble too much, especially if what you're doing is good and people are interested in what you're doing. Then they'll help you out.

**Do you feel like you're part of a scene there?**

I felt that way for a long time. Yeah, I guess I do, because now we're touring with Steve Malkmus and the Jicks. Those guys are all from Portland. Janet Weiss, from Sleater-Kinney, is with them and we're friends with them. Then we toured with Horsefeathers, also from Portland. They're a great band. They were opening up for us for about a week. They're a great folk act with strings.

There are just a lot of good bands there. When I think about it, I have a good time touring with bands from there, and from the Northwest, in general. We toured with Fleet Foxes, from Seattle. And there's kind of a similar thing going on there.

**The northwestern corner of the country has somehow generated so much impressive and creative rock music over the last decade or two. Is it partly because it is up there in the corner, detached from Los Angeles, New York and other music hubs in America?**

Yeah. I really don't know. I think so. Oregon has also been economically depressed for so long, growing up there, you weren't distracted by a lot of the shit going on in the '80s and '90s. At least it was that way for myself and my friends. We were so displaced, all we really had growing up was the whole grunge thing that happened, which was cool. But that's really all we had going on, in our whole growing-up years, that whole scene.

Aside from that, growing up in Oregon, all you do is go fishing and camping and ride your dirt bike. That's about it.

**Your music goes in different directions, but can't be neatly summed up with a catch phrase. Is that because I have no idea what to call it? That's always a pleasurable point of confusion.**

Yeah, it's hard to nail down. It just stems from all the different music that you get into growing up, and the people you tour with, as well.

**There's a strong folk and country-ish feeling to a lot of your music.**

Yeah, I think that stems from my father's influence. He was a bluegrass musician, and he loved folk music. That was probably the first music that I really listened to. I think I have a deeper connection to that kind of music than anything else.

**The name Neil Young gets thrown around a lot in connection with your music. He's another artist who is hard to pin down. Is that partly what draws you to his work?**

Yeah. There's a certain honesty about him that's appealing, and that comes through in his music. That's rare.

**Listening to your songs and their twists in melodies and chords, they seem to come from piano more than guitar. Do you write on piano much?**

On this record, I wrote on piano a lot. I probably wrote more than half the record on piano. Or maybe right around half. That was the first time I'd really done that. I liked it, too. I think it's great. And now it has changed to where I kind of write on both, together. It's just a different feel on piano. Sometimes, I write one on guitar and then move it to piano and change it, and it will be better. It will change the feel of it.

**Maybe that's one way you're moving past cliches and finding new sounds.**

Yeah, that's always a struggle to get past the stuff that has obviously been used into stuff that is familiar but also unique.

**You have been labeled as neo-hippies at times. How does that strike you?**

I don't know if that means anything, really.

**Well, in some ways, your music harkens back to the counter culture of the late '60s and early '70s. Is there a sense of your connecting with that era?**

That could be. I think that back then there was a utopian ideal going on, which I don't really have. I think my stuff is a lot darker in some ways. And I don't try to offer any kind of answers. I don't feel like I'm idealistic, as that label indicates.

**And that whole '60s-brand idealism kind of petered out. It went the way of communism.**

I don't know. I'm just being realistic or something. A lot of the artists back then were just capitalists, anyway, making money making records, using that scene that was created. I don't think you can necessarily say that music is completely neutral, but in certain ways, it transcends all these desires that people have to utilize it as a tool for change or something. I think it goes beyond that.

**Does it feel like things are moving along at a nice pace for the band now?**

Yeah, I think so. It seems really good. We're playing a lot of good shows. I don't know. Yeah, it feels pretty good. I'm looking forward to working on the next record, for sure. But yeah, it seems to be a good place right now.