



AARON LAVINSKY | THE DAILY WORLD

Musician Peter Benjamin, who grew up in Montesano, is pictured outside of 7th St. Theatre, where he plays a show on March 1.

PETER BENJAMIN FELL IN LOVE WITH MUSIC WHILE GROWING UP ON THE HARBOR AND HOPES TO HELP INSPIRE A NEW GENERATION TO DO THE SAME

LOCAL ENTERTAINMENT

# He came from Montesano

BY ALEXANDRA KOCIK  
The Daily World

Small hometowns have a reputation for being the last place someone wants to end up. But, for Peter Benjamin, a musician originally from Montesano, the Grays Harbor area is where he has always dreamed of playing for a large crowd.

On March 1, Benjamin is headlining a show with locals The Butler and the Maid as well as this year's Miss Grays Harbor's Outstanding Teen at 7th St. Theatre at 7 p.m.

Benjamin's performance will be a mix of songs from a recent album, new ones yet to be recorded and, maybe, a couple covers. His folk-rock style is made up of lots of lyrical stories, rhythm, guitar and even a bit of whistling. Relationships that just didn't work out led him back to music and gave the inspiration for six of the nine songs on his newest album, "The Victorian."

THE LOST AND FOUND

A 1993 graduate of Montesano High School, Benjamin, who was known as Peter Schatz then, went away for college. He attended Pacific Lutheran University with a degree in film-making in mind.

His girlfriend at the time brought him back to Aberdeen during his sophomore year and he transferred to Grays Harbor College. The relationship ended, but he found music again after meeting Ian Dorsch and Jeff Moses in jazz choir. Although music had

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Peter Benjamin  
Musician

been a passion of his since elementary school, he hadn't returned to it since leaving high school. After a year at GHC, he returned to PLU for a degree in music.

"I went to college and got really geeky with music and then mellowed out after college and started playing more accessible music," he said.

He ended up in Seattle, playing for several bands including alternative rock band Edisyn. Eventually, Benjamin felt the need to break out on his own. His debut album, "For Your Enjoyment & Leisure" was written, recorded and released by Benjamin. For "The Victorian," he wrote it all but sent a demo to a rhythm section for a separate recording. When he stepped into the studio, he had no real idea what that portion would sound like.

"But now there's a band and we can work on things together instead of just walking into the studio and hoping that it works," he said.

WRITING STORIES

The newest release features stories of heartbreak and hometowns. The fourth track, entitled "We Came From Montesano," was inspired by memories of him and his friends playing music together.

He said it was written with returning to play it for the area in mind.

"So in many ways, when I'm in Montesano, it reminds me of being first inspired by music. Whether it was pop, or metal or just

playing Metallica songs in the garage with my friends," he said. "I hope in some way, this song expresses that feeling."

Although many of his songs stem from personal experiences, especially

the many songs on relationships, Benjamin's goal is to make it abstract enough to reach anyone. Lyrics, he said, were put on the back burner for some time after college, but he eventually figured out their importance.

"Ninety percent of people are listening to the words to see if they can relate the vibe of the lyrics and that emotional feeling is really important to me," he said.

Accessibility plays largely into why Benjamin has not turned his back on cover songs. His band has been asked to do three-hour sets before, which cannot be filled with their original work. Plus, it often gives people a chance to connect with a new band that original music may not always provide. This is especially true of clubs for dancing, as he sees a lot more people walking onto the floor to old

favorites than songs they've never heard before.

TRAVELING THERE AND BACK

Currently, Benjamin lives in Edgewood, a small town in Pierce County. He is generally on the road, taking what he likes to call the "Northwest circuit" to smaller venues around the region. These residents of resort towns and art communities are often more appreciative of original music than those in bigger cities who have access to many different bands all the time.

"At a lot of the cool historical places in Seattle, you're really just another one of the hundreds, if not thousands, that play there every month," he said. "In a smaller community, I feel like it's easier to get people interested, because it's not quite as every-day an experience."

Grays Harbor has yet to be added to this usual circuit. Benjamin has been working with childhood friend, Ben Winkelman, a lawyer, business owner and Hoquiam city council member, to make it happen. They went back and forth many times in finding a perfect venue, before realizing that the 7th St. Theatre provides the perfect space for this event. The venue allows them to invite people who wouldn't be allowed in a bar, including elementary students.

Both men remember hearing rap and metal bands play at school assemblies. These moments gave students an opportunity to hear music they may not pick up themselves, which left a lasting impression on Benjamin especially.

"That's a really cool opportu-

nity for kids to come in, eat some popcorn and listen to some rock music," he said. "I say rock music like it's going to be wild and crazy but my stuff is really tame, so everyone is welcome."

FINDING OLD FRIENDS

This show is also a chance for Benjamin to invite those who he hasn't seen in many years, including members of his first metal band, "Tyrrant," high school classmates and his family that still live here. His parents, Patricia and Leroy Schatz, now live in Pacific County but plan to make it up for the show.

This show is more than a chance to share his music with the area. Benjamin is hopeful more events like this will encourage other entertainers to visit Grays Harbor.

"I want to make it a place that people don't just associate with Kurt Cobain, Metal Church or the Melvins," he said. "I want people to think about the music happening now. The Harbor isn't

just about what happened 20 years ago, as important as those bands were, there's plenty of new talent here too."

He pointed to the opening band, The Butler and the Maid, who have been gaining attention on the Harbor, as a prime example of

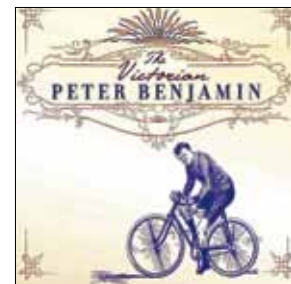
just that. Recently, another act has been scheduled for Saturday night. McKenzie Brooks, this year's Miss Grays Harbor's Outstanding Teen, will also perform her saxophone solo from the competition.

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THE SHOW

7th St. Theatre  
7 p.m.

Tickets are \$8 at peterbenjamin.brownpapertickets.com or \$10 at the door.



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