

Melendrez plans to keep on keeping the beat

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Maxwell Melendrez, 23, is a vocalist and percussionist with The Oscillators. He started with the drums as a child, following in the footsteps of his father, John, and is currently seeking a degree in music at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

You can see Melendrez and The Oscillators on Friday, Jan. 27, from 8 to 11 p.m. at Hatrix, 2425 60th St.

Melendrez at a glance

Social media/website: www.WeAreTheOscillators.com, www.facebook.com/wearetheoscillators

Talent/instruments: vocals/rapper, hand drums, tympani, mallet instruments, cajon

What is your background in music?

“My father was a drummer. He had a lot of influence when I was growing up. I started playing the drum set when I was five. I had to take piano lessons in order to take drum set lessons. Because my dad couldn’t read music, so he always wanted his son to read music. The piano was kind of like homework and the drum set was definitely more towards my interest,” said Melendrez.

“I played band in high school and grade school. I still play music in college. I play percussion at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. I’m about to graduate. My major is a general music degree with a concentration in percussion.”

What are your plans with your education in music?

“(While in college) I met The Oscillators. I have been thinking a lot, recently, how I’d like to put all of my time into that, at least for now. Musically, I met a lot of great people, but I’m talking instructor-wise as well. I felt like I’ve learned a lot about how music works and more of the ins and outs of what’s going on. I would like to take The Oscillators as far as the other members want to take it. This is definitely it for me. I would like to perform in different states and tour as well.”

How would you classify the music you play?

“I’d say The Oscillators are progressive folk music. It has newer elements, but at its core is folk based. We have the beat boxer and the horn; we have some elements that aren’t usually in folk music. I think the word ‘progressive’ is nice to describe something like that — especially with the rapping.”

How do you incorporate rap into ‘progressive folk?’

“Kimberley Hetelle (a bandmate) will come up with chords and she says, ‘I think you should rap over this.’ I’ll record it — just the guitar. I’ll listen to it over and over again. Whatever rhythm or message comes to me, I try to incorporate it. It’s nice because in that style there are no expectations. I like going into it where there is no idea of what should happen or should sound like. I think going about it that way keeps the sound fresh.”

Where did you learn to rap?

“I’ve always been a drummer. I’ve always loved rhythm. The idea that people were putting concepts and messages to rhythm — that’s what drove me to it. My dad is a rockhead as well, so I was raised on rock. I didn’t get into rap until almost high school — maybe seventh grade. I remember hearing rap and a light clicked on where I could do something similar. I felt I could contribute to something in that way. I was just doing it by myself. I would write in notebooks and fill them. At that point my entire identity as a rapper was constantly changing as I got older.”

When you write lyrics where do you find inspiration?

“It started out more as fun. I used to write about losing money and relationship. I think now it’s about change. That nobody’s alone is a concept I like to reiterate whether I’m rewording it multiple times in a verse. I want people to know that you’re not alone and that life is crazy. I like to talk about the news in a way I feel it needs to be edited. I feel like it’s phony in a lot of ways. I feel like you don’t always have to believe what you’re told, and not everyone knows that. Know your morals, definitely.”

What is your most notable childhood musical memory?

“When I started playing the drum set and I was taking lessons from my father. You use all your limbs when you play the drums and he was trying to teach me that basic rock drum groove. When you first go to do it your body is like, ‘Wait, what are you asking me to do?’ You want that arm to do something different than this arm and this foot. I remember getting that pattern down after working at it for a while. I didn’t stop doing it after that point. I just remember thinking, ‘This is what I want to do.’ I remember thinking that this is definitely a part of who I was. That was the first time I thought that music was going to be it.”

What is your favorite piece to perform?

“I would say any of our originals. ‘City Slacker’ is the first we had ever written. When we first wrote that song it didn’t have a rap in it. There is one now. It takes it to a new place with the rap. I feel like a lot of people know it. It’s the longest song we’ve been playing as a group.”