



Ben Salmon / The Bulletin

Dozens of Moon Mountain Ramblers fans enjoy the band's concert last weekend at the Tower Theatre in Bend. On stage is, from left, Dan McClung, Matthew Hyman, Dale Largent, Joe Schulte and Jenny Harada.

# Happy feet

Moon Mountain Ramblers turn the Tower Theatre into one big dance floor

**S**tanding room only. That's what I thought as I looked around the Tower Theatre last Saturday night a couple songs into the Moon Mountain Ramblers' set.

I wasn't sure if the local eclectic-roots band had sold out the venerable downtown venue. (They had.) But I could tell there was standing room only.

Never have I seen standing room put to such good use.

Let's not even call it standing room. Dancing room's more like it.

The Ramblers, celebrating the release of their new album "Let It All Be Good," played a pitch-perfect 2.5-hour set for an enthu-

siastic and appreciative crowd that not only filled the seats in the Tower's lower level, but also lined both aisles and packed the space in front of the stage with a non-stop dance party.

It took a few songs for the throng to warm up, but once it did, 50 to 100 people shimmied the night away as the band worked its way through a well-paced selection of new and old tunes.

But enough about the crowd. Let's talk about the Ramblers. They were terrific. Their arsenal of stringed instruments rang out crisp and clean. The mix was perfect, with percussionist Dale Largent complementing the pickers nicely. Vocally,



**Feedback**  
by Ben Salmon

the harmonies were shipshape, and I was surprised by guitarist Matthew Hyman's strong voice. I didn't realize he's that good of a singer.

As for the set list, the band flitted back and forth between its favorite styles, from Hyman's twangy ballads to bassist Dan McClung's jazzgrass instrumentals to mandolinist Joe Schulte's more rock-influenced numbers.

One highlight was my co-worker Jenny Harada's song for her brother, Jason, who died last summer, called "Chasing The Sun." I'm sure there were dry eyes in the house, but they weren't mine. Another highlight was a new Schulte song built on a weird, ominous groove and featuring a wicked Largent drum solo, like old-time music meets heavy metal. A genre was born just then, I think: doomgrass.

We also got a raucous cover of the old Stealers Wheel hit "Stuck In The Middle," a perfectly plaintive version of "Restless," and what may be the Ramblers' new signature tune, "Let It All Be Good." In the latter, when Schulte

sang "You're dancing to our music till your toes start to bleed," I scanned the wiggly bunch up front to get a glimpse of life imitating art.

The two-song encore, with the whole band unplugged and gathered around one microphone, was a particularly fun way to end a wonderful show.

Indeed, the music was great. But the best part of the whole night, for me, was the overwhelming joy I felt in the Tower that night.

You could see it in the band's wide smiles. You could hear it in the cheer that went up when the Ramblers were introduced.

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## Ramblers

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You could feel it in a room full of folks happy to see a talented band of locals sell out Bend's most prominent indoor stage, in a room that has rarely hosted local bands. It was triumphant, if I may be so bold. It felt like a celebration not only of the Moon Mountain Ramblers and their new album, but also of the potential and possibility of our local music scene.

There's a lot of that here. There are a handful of bands in Bend that could make a Tower show work, but I got the sense that a trail needed blazing, and the right band had to do it.

It feels a bit like a new door has opened for local musicians. And I think only the Ramblers had the key.

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