

Indie rockers find a haven in youthful Portland

BY **TERRENCE PEITY**
The Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Colin Meloy, songwriter for The Decemberists, salts his tunes with antique words — palanquin, gadabout, folderol, coronal — more likely to be heard in a college lit class than leaping off the tongues of pop music fans.

"I'm not trying to stump anybody," says the 31-year-old with a mop of auburn hair and Buddy Holly-like glasses. "It's the beauty of the language that I'm interested in."

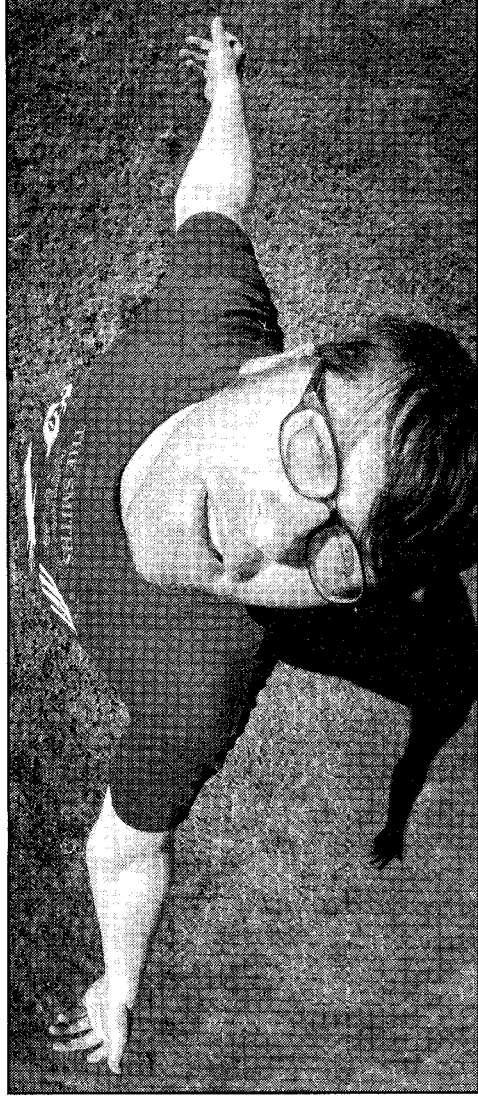
Meloy, who hails from Montana, is one of many musical transplants from across the nation who have turned this rainy, laid-back city into a hub for the indie rock scene.

The Decemberists' latest album, "Picaresque," has sold more than 70,000 copies since it was released by the Kill Rock Stars label this past March. The five-member band landed a gig in July on Conan O'Brien's late-night show and has drawn large audiences on tours.

Other big Portland-based bands include The Shins, a former New Mexico group that got a big boost from the movie "Garden State," and the all-female trio Sleater-Kinney, whose ferocious and critically acclaimed new CD, "The Woods," has sold about 56,000 copies since May.

Sleater-Kinney's Carrie Brownstein, whose onstage energy and driving riffs have made her a female guitar hero, has a theory on what draws indie musicians to this river town.

"Portland is a town entrenched in juvenelia," says the articulate 29-year-old, a place



RICK BOWMER / AP

Colin Meloy, songwriter for The Decemberists, is one of many musical transplants from across the nation who have helped turn laid-back Portland into a hub for the indie rock scene.

where you can have an "extended adolescence."

That's meant as a compliment. Portland's culture encourages young people to pursue their ideals, and musicians here feel little pressure to sound or look a certain way.

"The reason Portland is so special is people aren't making music for the sake of getting mainstream attention. They are making music because they think art is an important part of our culture," says Brownstein. Portland also is a cheaper place to live than big cities like Seattle and San Francisco. And since Portlanders embrace artists and experimentation, the city has a multitude of music clubs packed by young audiences.

At least 184 new bands were formed in Portland last year, says Mark Baumgarten, music editor for the Willamette Week alternative newspaper. He arrived at that number after the paper

tilayered sound that verges on the ethereal. Some say their debut CD, "I Am the Fun Blame Monster," is like no music they've ever heard.

Justin Harris, Menomena's saxman and bass guitarist, is originally from California but has lived here since he was a kid. The same goes for drummer Danny Seim, who is originally from Hawaii. Brent Knopf, who plays keyboards, guitars and the glockenspiel, is from Troutdale, a Portland suburb. Knopf is a graduate of Dartmouth College, where he developed a computer program the band uses while composing some of its songs.

Another rising Portland band is The Thermals, who, like The Shins and Sleater-Kinney, record for Seattle's Sub Pop label. Vocalist Hutch Harris and bassist Kathy Foster are from California;

drummer Jordan Hudson is from Florida.

In Portland, Foster said, "I've met some of the best people I've ever met. If they make it big, their personalities don't change."

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