

# LOCAL SONGWRITER DECIDES TO TEST OUT HIS PORTLAND RESUMÉ IN MUSIC CITY

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[WESTERN WORDWORM] “Music is now the focus and the purpose of my days,” announces Tyler Stenson, who recently quit his day job selling wallets for DB Clay. But eking a living out of song isn’t always easy: It can translate into gigs at the Buffalo Gap or in private living rooms; playing weddings or in songwriting contests. Like every other artist toiling in this economy, Stenson plays where he’s asked to.

Lander, Wyo., was Stenson’s birthplace and the name of his first band (Lander). Raised a vocalist by his mom, he moved to Oregon in grade school and picked up his first guitar his senior year at West Linn High, eventually crafting a style he refers to as “three chords and the truth.” It’s straightforward but smart: While the acoustic guitar sits shotgun, navigating calmly, Stenson’s rich lyrics grip the wheel: white-knuckled with swollen, natural imagery and stark confessions.



Though he claims decidedly un-hip influences like Garth Brooks and Josh Ritter, Stenson draws equal strength from pen bearers like Edgar Allan Poe and Jon Krakauer. One hears the literary influence on “Nameless Beautiful,” in which Stenson sings: “You are above this serenade/ And these words I’m writing are cheating as we speak.” He’s twice been named the Portland Songwriters Association’s songwriter of the year.

Stenson is currently constructing his second solo album at 8 Ball Studio. “It’s stripped down with a stand-alone feel,” he says. “I don’t want instant gratification. Listeners have to be invested.”

Fearing no metaphor and drawn instinctively to the bright flame of the American West, Stenson is a fire builder. He pits soft Americana against tender, billowy pop until it sparks, fanning the flame with his gusty, crackling vocals for warmth. Tracks like “Nameless Beautiful” and “Gravity” may have come straight from the second, albeit imaginary, disc of the Counting Crows’ 1994 breakout *August and Everything After*.

Come October, Stenson will head to Nashville, Tenn. Lassoing a dream is rarely a simple, rational toss, but Stenson says he’s leaving to flourish in a songwriter’s mecca. The troubadour says farewell to Portland—the city that armed him with the courage to follow his dream—on Sept. 11 alongside a host of local singer-songwriters, but the move may not be for good. He’d prefer we call this his “wish me luck, we’ll see how this goes” show.



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