

This Week *in the* Flathead

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT IN THE FLATHEAD VALLEY

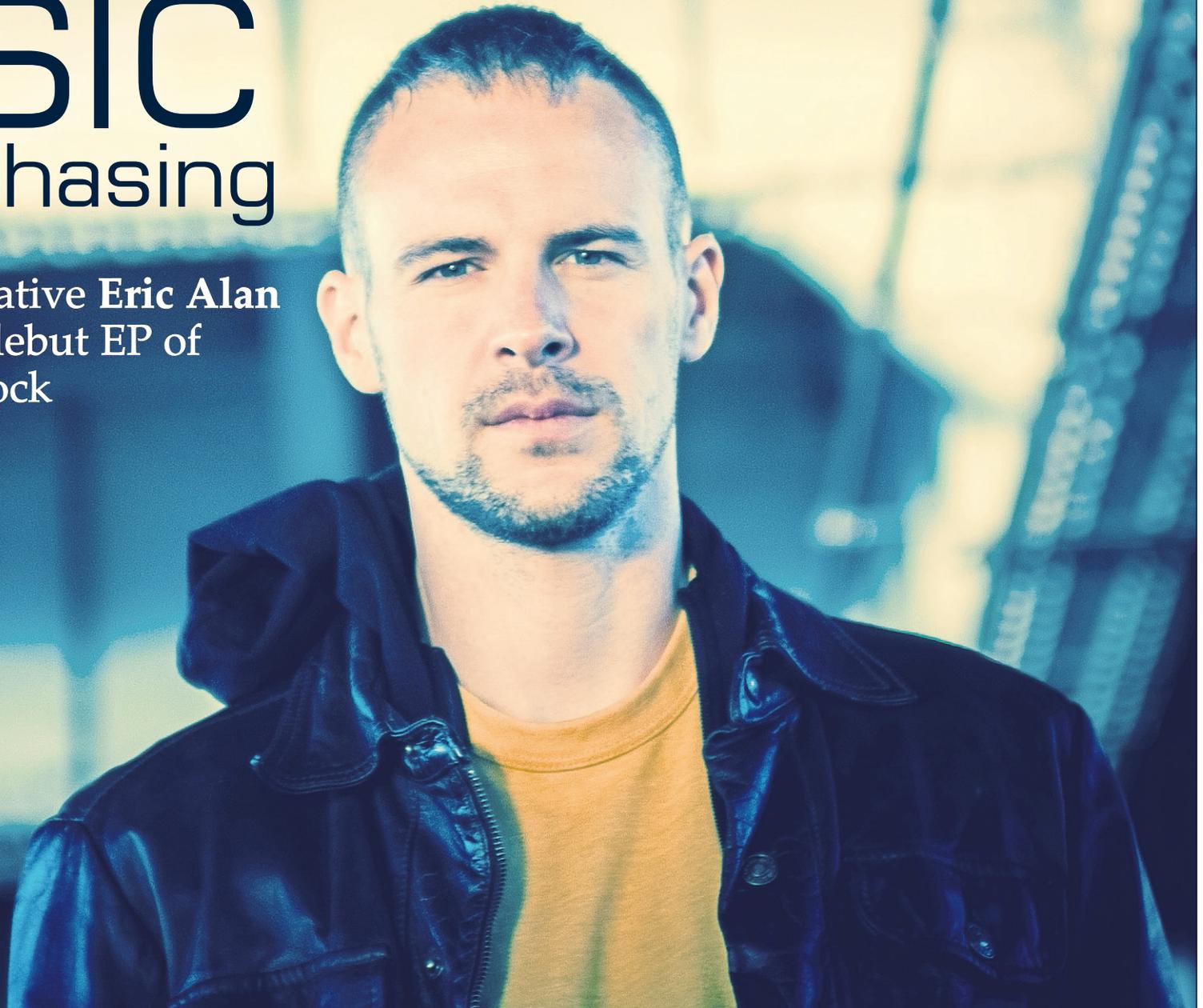
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2017

MUSIC

worth chasing

Flathead Valley native Eric Alan returns home to debut EP of alternative, soft rock

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HOT TIMES

RICK MARTINEZ, left, and Eric Alan perform at the Alpine Lighting ballroom in Kalispell Saturday night Dec. 2. (Casey Kreider photos/Daily Inter Lake)

LISTEN UP

Tune in to Eric Alan's EP "Hot Times" by visiting his website at www.music-byericalan.com. Alan is planning to tour the East Coast in February and show dates will be announced online.



By MARY CLOUD TAYLOR
Daily Inter Lake

From behind his keyboard, Eric Alan crooned, "Don't you wish that you could have it all again" to a crowd of family, friends and fans who had gathered for the release of the musician's first album, "Hot Times," following a decade of cross-country travels.

A native of the Flathead Valley, Alan left his home after high school to chase a career in music from San Diego to New York City to Nashville before finally returning home after 15 years.

He developed a style he describes as a melodic blend of soft rock and indie alternative inspired by both great songwriters of the past, including Neil Young,

Elton John and Paul Simon, and newer artists like Coldplay, The Killers and Arcade Fire.

"Melodic songs that if you strip them down and just play them acoustically they'd work," he said.

Alan spent the last several years writing music and rehearsing with a small band whenever he found time between the jobs he took in each city to stay afloat, but the passion behind the songs never wavered.

"For me, what makes music worth chasing is that it's intangible. When it comes to music, the thing that you like about it has absolutely nothing to do with monetary rewards or material gain or anything like that," Alan said. "It's a different type of product. It's a product that comes from inside you. It's not a product that you created from boards and nails. It's part of you."

Alan took an interest in music early in life, and after high school he decided to pursue it as more than a hobby.

After graduating in 2003, Alan headed for Seattle, then North Carolina, Chicago, San Diego, New York City and Nashville.

During his time in the big cities, Alan

said he grew and learned, breaking the mold of his upbringing to pursue his own ideas and beliefs.

"I've become worldlier in that less things surprise me, and I think I've become a little bit more open minded about a lot of things, having been in so many different places," Alan said.

His travels changed him for the better, according to Alan. The people and influence he met in each city largely helped mold his style and resulted in many of the songs contained in his album, but he fought for every musical moment.

Making a living proved to be quite a challenge — Alan said one of the toughest parts of city life was making rent.

Alan said he has struggled to remain consistent in his rehearsals and writing as a musician while working full-time to support himself.

His drummer and friend, Rick Martinez, who still lives in New York and flew out for the release, said he pays \$2,500 a month to live in a two-bedroom apartment that he shares with four other men.

The two met in New York and have



RICK MARTINEZ performs at the Alpine Lighting ballroom. ERIC ALAN sings songs off his new EP, "Hot Times" in Kalispell Saturday night.

"HOT TIMES SUMMER DAYS YOU GOT THE COASTLINE CRAZE AND YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT"

played together for about seven years.

According to Martinez, space to rehearse their music in the Big Apple was also scarce, expensive and, at times, inadequate.

Though both Alan and Martinez said there is much about the city's diversity, energy and opportunity that cannot be matched, the atmosphere can often prove distracting and stressful.

During his most recent stint in Nashville, Alan said he was working a stagnant job with the U.S. Department of State when he came to the realization that he could not continue fighting to live there and expect to get anywhere with his music.

At that point, he had most of the songs in his album written but had yet to do anything with them.

When he decided it was time to produce the album, Alan said he knew he needed to enter the process with a clear mind, without the distraction and stress of city living.

So he packed up his belongings and made the move back home to Kalispell this September for the peace and support he needed to finish.

"Coming back around to here, it's really quite refreshing," Alan said. "Because I've grown personally but you come back to a place like this and you go 'well, there's definitely not as much opportunity here, but it sure is a hell of a great place to get the headspace and the time and the support to do your bucket list of things that you were never able to do because life got in the way in the bigger cities.'"

Here, he found not only a support system from his family and community, but also a more manageable style of living in which he could focus on his goal of finishing his first product and building a reputation.

"I think small communities, it's easier to get them to band around and support you. They love supporting local. That's one thing that's cool and that's why I kind of came here because I wanted to get a little bit of a core that I could then take somewhere else," Alan said.

"I don't think it's any easier to make it or get noticed in New York than in Kalispell, or one's better, one's worse. I just know for songwriting, I feel freer

and more creative and more relaxed [in Kalispell]. I think a relaxed mind is a creative mind," he added.

Within the first two months of being back in the Flathead, Alan said he finished his five-song, self-produced album.

Alan will spend the winter season promoting his album here in Kalispell, giving away as many copies as he can.

Though he said he is grateful to be back in the place where he got his start, Alan said it won't be long before he begins to get restless again and gets to urge to move again.

His ultimate goal, he said, is to make his living doing music full time under a record label that believes in his work.

Despite his slow start, Alan said music is not something he ever plans to give up on or stop chasing.

"There's something rebellious about it because the world tells you that you're not supposed to chase dreams like this," he said. "When you're doing this you're saying I'm not just going to take what society tells me I should be or do. To break that makes you feel liberated, makes you feel like a man."

Alan's next venture will take him

and Martinez on a tour of the East Coast beginning in February.

The desire to travel and experience new things, may bring its fair share of trials, but Alan said he has no intention of giving up the inspiration and growth it brings.

"The intangibility of [music], the spirituality, the chills that you get when you listen to something you really like or when you're playing with somebody else and you get chills because it feels so good ... sometimes you only get glimpses of that," Alan said. "This is a lot of work."

Before ending his album release party Alan expressed his gratitude to the 50 to 60 people who had gathered in the Alpine Lighting Ballroom to support him.

He closed with the album's title track, "Hot Times," as several crowd members sang along and his little niece danced with her dad among the crowd.

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