



# Erin O'Brien: Mover

## what goes on?

By David Morrison

I have a great affinity for anyone whose need to create could be termed compulsive. I also respect individuals who take it upon themselves to get things moving for the benefit of their communities. Keeping a whole dinner service of plates spinning, Nanaimo resident Erin O'Brien straddles both camps with ease. Actually, considering her many ongoing projects, it's a wonder she manages to find time to eat or sleep.

Born and raised in Delta, B.C., O'Brien relocated to the Harbour City in November 2004 following a year teaching English in South Korea. She has since developed into a key player within the local independent music and arts scene, her unbridled enthusiasm to make things happen not lost on her peers.

As a musician, artist, writer, promoter, record label founder and radio programmer, the ambitious O'Brien is all over town if you know where to look. If you've seen the band names Old Phoebe or Kill the Buddha on gig posters, that's her. Perhaps you've attended Fun of the Bands at The Chrome Horse or Shack Records acoustic nights at The Mermaid's Mug? Again, her

doing. Tune into CHLY on Tuesday nights and you'll hear her. Pick up a copy of Mal-U's newspaper *The Navigator* and it's likely you'll find an article bearing her name. All things considered, Erin O'Brien redefines 'ubiquitous' in a small city like ours.

Not too long after moving to Nanaimo, O'Brien found kindred spirits in a band called Apricot Rock, then moved on to impish pastures new with Jamie Anderson in the wonderful lo-fi folk-pop duo Old Phoebe. "Jamie was my first friend in Nanaimo," she informed me. "We ended up going to an Arcade Fire show together (at *Lucky Bar in Victoria*) and decided to start a radio show. That's what got me settled here." Up to that point, she had actually considered skipping town for Vancouver.

"I moved in with Jamie and was playing with Apricot Rock at the time. We just started trying stuff," she continued, in explanation of how Old Phoebe was born. "Jamie played a bit of piano and had written a few songs, but never performed, ever, and one time I was playing a song and Jamie said: 'What am I going to do with this?' and just started hitting things. She had this old bike she got at a second hand store because it was so cute, and started banging on it (with *drumsticks*) to make a lot of different noises." And so one of the music world's more original percussive devices came into being as an integral

visual and sonic element of the Old Phoebe live experience.

The duo is currently on a casual hiatus as O'Brien and Anderson pursue

# Shaker, music maker

other projects, sporadically reconvening for Old Phoebe performances if the occasion appeals. They have, however, left the brilliant *Apartment Rock* CD (Shack) in their wake for fans to cuddle up to when the longing for their return overwhelms.

It's now Kill the Buddha - a fully-fledged indie rock outfit - that occupies much of O'Brien's time. Musically, it's a radically different proposition. "It's definitely a tougher sound," she confirms. "I have a really strong vision and the longer I spend in music the more defined my aesthetics become.

Old Phoebe's a little 'cuter' than I want to be; I love it, but feel a little funny about that being how I'm known! I love the balance of gentle, feminine things with really harsh rocking."

It was O'Brien's brother that inspired the launch of Shack Records. "He lived in a shack in my parents' front yard and made this album that I loved so much I wanted to put it out.

I spoke to Jamie about it and said 'I'm going to start a record label and put this album out and get all our friends who're making really good music, record them and put out little records.'" And that's exactly what the two of them did, issuing quality material by local retro surf rockers Los Tycoons, grunge-blues duo The Paperboxes and others.

Shack seems merely the beginning. O'Brien's spinning plates include blueprints for another label in cahoots with likeminded local musicians determined to promote and issue their music with hitherto unforeseen professionalism. "A bunch of us have come together and said 'Let's get serious and take this to the next level,'" she revealed, the plan being to unveil the new label with a sampler CD. I can't wait for it to drop, but do hope this driven young woman stops for a snack and a nap at some point before its release. ■

Kill the Buddha: [www.myspace.com/killbuddha](http://www.myspace.com/killbuddha)

Old Phoebe: [www.myspace.com/weareoldphoebe](http://www.myspace.com/weareoldphoebe)

Shack Records: [www.myspace.com/shackrecords](http://www.myspace.com/shackrecords)

Erin O'Brien's *Indiecontextual* show is on CHLY every

Tuesday from 7:00pm - 9:00pm: 101.7FM or [www.chly.ca](http://www.chly.ca)

Shack Records' acoustic night takes place on the last

Thursday of the month at The Mermaid's Mug, 357

Wesley Street, Nanaimo.



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