

An interview with Ilan Sabar of Metroboard

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Recently, I've had the chance to interview the owner of Metroboard, Ilan Sabar, about electric skateboards and the industry as a whole. Metroboard was one of the first companies to make and sell electric skateboards (eboards). Given this, I was interested to learn his perspective on the beginnings of eboarding.

When Sabar started Metroboard, there were only two other major competitors, E-glide and Exhate. Eboards were over-built and used simple and reliable components. It wasn't uncommon to find boards weighing over 50 pounds due in part to the use of sealed lead acid (SLA) batteries. This was a far cry from my 14-pound everyday ride which is nearly indistinguishable from a standard board at a glance.

Sabar immediately saw room for improvement, first moving from lead acids to nickel-metal hydride batteries and now to an exclusively lithium-ion product catalog. Today, Metroboard offers some of the most powerful, longest-lasting, and even shortest eboards on the market. Metroboard's premium offering boasts a reported 40-mile range and a

3,000-Watt outrunner motor. These improvements are those that come with advancements in battery and electric motor technology over the course of a decade. Metroboard has also added a bit of innovation of their own, adding to something beyond what a DIYer could by simply wiring their own board.

In his own words, "We haven't stopped there. Metroboard has modified these outrunner motors, which are typically used on R/C airplanes, to include external hall sensors to regulate power output for a smoother ride when starting from a resting position. Now, many companies that produce outrunner motors are responding to the burgeoning electric skateboard market and are finally beginning to include internal hall sensors into their motors."

Sabar and I share the view that electric skateboards can be more than just a hobby, but also excellent way to get through the city. Not having to wait for the bus and zipping through crowds is more fun than public transit will ever be. Sabar sees the future of eboarding in this light as well. Making the ride a smoother, more comfortable experience is a big leap forward to get more people into the hobby.

Sabar sees refining the style of eboards as the next big leap. Many current boards take after their DIY predecessors. The

individual components, the motor, the battery pack, the speed controller, are typically distinguishable and set eboards apart from their classic brethren. Sabar sees a future for eboards where hub motors and deck-integrated battery packs make eboards not only impressive but fashionable.

Throughout Sabar's responses a theme appeared. He sees eboards differently than those who scoff and think they're cheating. He said, "We don't see electric boards as replacements for regular skateboards, but rather very compact 'cars' that solve a basic transportation need in an environmentally friendly way." This vision for eboards is what drives Metroboard to make their premium boards. When asked for advice on how to start a technology hardware company, his only note was to look broadly at the market and see what elements can be borrowed to convince people to buy in and what elements cause them to stay away.

With regards to the number of startups that are quickly becoming fierce competition for him, Sabar says to respect DIY (it's how he got started after all), but be prepared to back your product up with years of customer service. Sabar recognizes something unique in every new competitor, but highlights

Metrboard's eight year track record of reliably quality and excellent service.

My final question for Sabar was regarding what we could look forward to from Metroboard. He teased that there is one request he's heard over and over again. He's going to make this request a reality and in his eyes it will change the electric skateboarding game. With so much room left for improvement and creativity, I'm excited to see what he comes up with.

At the end of the day, Metroboard sets a great example for the eboarding industry and respects its roots. Sabar sees eboards as a means of transportation to work that double downs for play. Their wide variety for offerings of deck sizes, range, and wheels lets the customer decide what's right for their eboarding needs. They even transform off-the-shelf decks into one-of-a-kind boards for anyone who requests it. Sabar seems like a guy who isn't interested in dominating the market, and instead appreciated the uniqueness and creativity each new board brings to the market. Metroboard is clearly interested in keeping up with the community and I'm sure will continue to add to the market with innovation.



Photo courtesy of metro-board.com

WIIT 88.9 FM

Reviews:

Live music: Beirut at Riviera Theatre

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Emerging from the Santa Fe bedroom of then-19-year-old Zach Condon nearly a decade ago, Beirut was a musical project that found immediate acclaim by virtue of its seeming absurdity at the time. Coming right on the cusp of the explosion of the baroque pop genre, Condon's first album, "Gulag Orkestar," combined Balkan folk roots with contemporary indie sensibilities in a way nobody expected. In fact, it's highly unlikely that anybody expected any combination of those two music styles to launch somebody's career, let alone that of a teenager from the American southwest with no Eastern European ancestry to his name. And so, thrust into the spotlight by the sheer improbability of his project, Condon embarked on the life of a professional musician before turning twenty, filling bars and small concert halls with people who had read early reviews of his work in Pitchfork or The Guardian.

Condon's earliest shows included just a few friends brought along to fill out his sound, before Beirut morphed into a full band, and the results were actually rather disappointing for initial fans of the group. Condon's music was carefully, lovingly constructed with

layer upon layer on his studio recordings, and that complexity didn't translate very well to a live setting with only three or four musicians present. Critics at the time became dismissive of Condon's ability to match in concert what he could do on an album, culminating in the cancellation of a European tour in 2008 that Condon implied was due to frustration about the lack of power in his own performances. He took a break from touring while going even bigger on studio recordings (including an EP with a full Mexican brass band), and regrouped following his third full-length, "The Rip Tide," with a permanent lineup of five other musicians behind him. This modern lineup brought with it a renewed interest in Beirut's live performances, and last week, with their newest album out two months ago, the band visited a sold-out Riviera Theatre in Uptown to prove their chops on material spanning the length of their career so far.

After a short opening set from Chicago's own Icy Demons (whose lead singer, Blue Hawaii, runs the Shape Shoppe recording studio in the South Loop where two Beirut releases were mixed), Condon and the band took to the stage with an immediate crowd-pleaser, "Scenic World," which is perhaps the best-regarded track from "Gulag Orkestar." It also gave an early indication of some of the ele-

ments of the group's sound that still limit them in a live environment, with the intro synth line taking on a different tone than on the album. That was soon forgotten, though, as Condon and the two musicians flanking him took up their horns, and the crowd cheered in anticipation of the coming crescendo. Though only three in number, Beirut's horn section was revelatory, and each moment that their instruments were readied was worthy of celebration on the part of the crowd. A marked improvement from previous tours, the arrangements this time around were specifically meant for a smaller number of performers than appeared on album, lending energy to the show with three-part recreations of the group's vibrant compositions. The band even had the ambition to try out some tracks from "March of the Zapotec," the aforementioned EP recorded with a full Mexican brass band, and the results were quite impressive.

The mix of songs in the show was actually rather diverse, considering that this was a tour spurred by a new album. Only six of the night's twenty-one pieces came from 2015's "No No No," with at least three from each of the other releases from the group (aside from 2006's "Lon Gisland" EP, a little-remembered release that only earned a single live performance of one of its pieces). While

certain tracks would certainly have been improved by a larger on-stage cast (for example, none of the violin parts from "The Flying Club Cup" were present), the six-piece band brought each of their tracks to life in a way that many would have doubted possible as late as just a couple years ago. Though some more casual attendees may have eventually been bored by the relatively stable structure of many of Condon's compositions (which often rely on musical flourishes rather than unique melodies), the majority of the crowd wasn't ready for the group to leave when they bowed out after a powerful performance of "So Allowed," the closing track on "No No No."

After a standing ovation lasting for minutes on end undiminished, most likely because the band hadn't yet played their traditional concert closer "The Penalty," Beirut returned to stage for four more tracks, including the title tracks from "Gulag Orkestar" and "The Flying Club Cup." While "The Penalty" wasn't included in the setlist this time around, the final set of tracks showcased the best of Beirut's talent, and capped off a night of focused, impressive music. Beirut may still be physically limited by a live format as Zach Condon's on-album ambition continues to grow, but that doesn't keep them from putting on an enthralling show.