



Melting Elk onstage in Tahoe—from left, they are guitarist Tokyo (a.k.a. TJ Becker), rapper Father Baker (a.k.a. Collin Wright) and drummer Bobby K (a.k.a. Rob Kominsky).  
COURTESY/MELTING ELK

## Live wires

Melting Elk

**The roots of hip-hop include live instrumentation**, with the late '70s artists that pioneered it often using full bands on their records. It's a technique that continues today with artists such as Chance the Rapper and Childish Gambino.

For the Tahoe trio Melting Elk, guitar and drums have always been a part of the sound, but it's become the band's *modus operandi* for the past year, as well as for its forthcoming album, *Redbowl*.

"I think hip-hop is such a broad genre, but I also feel like a lot of people focus on avoiding instruments," said Father Baker, a.k.a. Collin Wright, the rapper in Melting Elk. "We were able to get our ducks in a row and have instruments all the time. It fits in well with the experimenting we want to do in the hip-hop genre, to work in more sounds that aren't traditional."

Melting Elk started in 2016. Father Baker had been performing his own raps since he was a 14 year old in Buffalo, New York. "I moved to Tahoe in 2009 to ski and whatnot, and ended up getting into the music scene a lot later," Father Baker said.

Father Baker was a fixture at the 2010s open mic at The Grid in Kings Beach. It was run by Rob Kominsky, a.k.a. Bobby K. Father Baker also was already friends with a fellow Buffalo transplant, guitarist and producer Tokyo, a.k.a. TJ Becker. All three were fans of rap music and decided to ditch the open mic forever to form Melting Elk, playing their first show at The Grid.

"It's still our favorite place to play," Father Baker said. "It's got that dive kind-of vibe to it."

Father Baker acknowledged that Tahoe is "a very weird place for" the group. "It's a pretty open music community, but we also feel like we are on an island, especially with the others doing hip-hop," he said.

To that end, Melting Elk tends to play more diverse bills with bands that feature rock, punk and even jazz at times.

Melting Elk thrives on live shows, especially compared to other hip-hop acts. They've played close to 50 shows since they started, including Reno and other parts of California. Within the last few years, though, there's been more of an emphasis on recording and making music videos. A new video and song called "UFO" was released in early December, with an album to follow sometime early next year.

"We decided earlier this year that we wanted to step back and take another step forward with the new stuff we were writing," Father Baker said. "We've been playing definitely more infrequently than we have been, but it's been a nice process for writing."

The new album will showcase the band's live strengths and attitude toward how they create hip-hop. "It's completely analogue," Father Baker said. "We played everything from scratch, so it will easier to do that when we do live shows. That's been the focus for us, reinventing what we do. It's been working well."

That opening single is a moodier take on hip-hop, somewhere between '00s trip hop and the spacier wing of modern hip-hop. Father Baker said it's a bit of an anomaly for their new music.

"We have two or three tracks that are more of a grimy, East Coast hip-hop style," he said. "There's another one that's not really like metal, but like alternative music, more high energy rock but still with rap in it. The album's very versatile. It's been interesting to take every corner of what you can do in hip-hop and try to push it." □

Melting Elk's next show is as part of the Keep Tahoe Punk Fest, starting at 6 p.m. Jan. 11 at American Legion Hall, 2748 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe, California. Learn more about the band at [meltingelk.com](http://meltingelk.com).

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