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A&E

AN ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT SUPPLEMENT OF THE COLUMBIA CHRONICLE

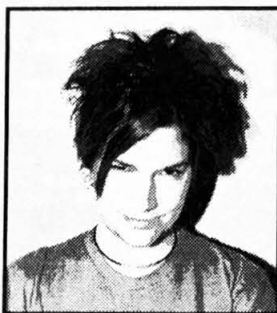
the land of misfit toys

page 6

RYAN DUGGAN



Wasting time not a complete waste



BY JAMIE MURNANE/ A&E EDITOR

One would think that three weeks off from school would warrant plenty of time to be productive; at least, when considering this is my final semester of college, that's what I thought. I should have taken advantage of the time off to update my résumé, get more business cards, re-do my outdated portfolio—any of those key things I'll need to have if I ever plan on getting a real job. I could have at least read a book. But I didn't do any of that. Instead, I pretty much just hung out. And I don't feel guilty about it.

At some point, I realized it was the last three-week break I'll ever have—in college, anyway. I can only dream of having a job that offers such a luxury. And right now I'm too busy dreaming about a job, period. So I decided to take the time to de-stress, not think (or agonize) too much about the future and just have some fun. Of course, I had to do some work (or pretend to) during the week, but for the most part, I was useless.

Every time I went to my

computer to update my résumé, I decided, instead, to download new music and catch up on my e-mail. After a couple hours passed, I realized I had wasted too much time on the computer and should at least clean my apartment. So, I would start on some laundry and read a magazine or three. Then I would decide to just go out for a while. It's not like I would have gotten anything accomplished anyway.

When I reflect back on my much-needed break, it saddens me that one of the highlights was getting my hair cut and dyed. But I did do a little traveling. Yes, I went all the way to Bloomington-Normal, Ill., to see a ridiculous concert by Chicago-based Too White Crew, a live hip-hop tribute band.

Watching the seven Caucasian performers drop beats and bust rhymes onstage was insanely entertaining. Perhaps the most entertaining aspect of the concert, though, was when a creepy drunk guy sporting a green Camel cigarette T-shirt tried to dance with me. Such an odd occurrence would only happen in a place like Bloomington.

If only I could have done more traveling—to somewhere that was at least out of state. It's not like I didn't have the time—since it was pretty much all I had. Traveling to any of the places I wanted to go over my very last semester break—New York City, London, Iceland, etc.—takes money. (And money I did not have.) If

I had a dollar for every time I had to scour my CD collection to pick out which to sell at the secondhand store, I'd, well, have a few more dollars than what the record store ended up giving me. But that was hardly enough to provide me with beer (I mean, groceries, Mom) or CDs (I mean text books to further my learning experience).

Toward the end of break, it was time to really get focused again—or at least go on with pretending to be focused. This fall saw the birth of the A&E supplement and I, along with my co-workers, decided the new semester was time for some minor adjustments—spring cleaning, if you will.

First, you'll notice the photo poll that was once located on this page is gone. It will soon be relocated to the campus section. We had nothing against the poll, but we needed more room for the wealth of entertainment information we provide. Out with the old and in with the new, as they say.

We also decided to nix the Jackass that we normally have on the comic page. You can only make fun of Paris Hilton so many times in one year. So, we decided to get sexy by launching The Chronicle's very first sex column: Below the Belt by Beatrix Dixon, our sassy, mysterious sex and relationship columnist who's not afraid to tell all.

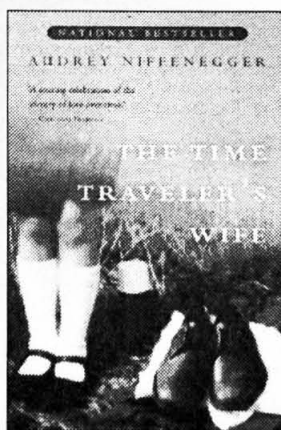
So the break wasn't a complete bust for productivity. Just the first two-and-a-half weeks. Now, about my résumé...

ODDS & ENDS

Ron Howard's immensely popular Fox television series "Arrested Development," may be headed for the trash, again, according to the Hollywood Reporter and numerous other sources. The show, starring Jason Bateman (below), is now in its second season, is likely to be replaced by a new cartoon, "American Dad," when Fox changes its Sunday night lineup.



It's official: Brad Pitt will star in the film adaptation of Columbia professor Audrey Niffenegger's novel *The Time Traveler's Wife*. Pitt, along with estranged wife Jennifer Aniston, owns Plan B Productions, which bought the rights for the film from Niffenegger with New Line Cinema last year. It was originally speculated that while Pitt would play the time traveler, Aniston would play his wife. Since the couple has split, that seems unlikely. A lead female role has not yet been confirmed, but according to the Chicago Sun-Times, Kate Winslet may be a possibility.



The Fireside Bowl, the infamous all-ages venue that closed its doors to music in 2004, is hosting bands again. Thursday nights are music nights at Fireside—but young punks will be dismayed as the shows are now 21-and-up.

THISWEEKINA&E

MONDAY

Big Jam/Slow Jam starring New Edition, Avant, Kindred, Teena Marie at Allstate Arena, 6920 N. Mannheim Road, Rosemont.

Verse Press Valentine's Party with poetry readings and live music from L'Altra, Charlemagne at Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia Ave., 8 p.m.

The Fight, Lord of the Yum Yum, The Groodies at Bottom Lounge, 3206 N. Wilton Ave. 6 p.m.

TUESDAY

Eve Ensler signs her new book, *Vagina Warriors*, at Women & Children First, 5233 N. Clark St. 5 p.m.

Jamie Blyth, former "Bachelorette," signs her book *Fear is No Longer My Reality* at Borders,

WEDNESDAY

Neo-Futurists Book Release Party for 200 More Neo-Futurist Plays, from Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind at The Neo-Futurarium, 5153 N. Ashland Ave. 7 p.m.

Nina Simone, *Love Sorceress* at Gene Siskel Film Center/School, 164 N. State St. 8:30 p.m.

THURSDAY

The Hidden Cameras at Subterranean, 2011 W. North Ave. 10 p.m.

Keane, The Redwalls, The Zutons at Riviera Theatre, 4746 N. Racine St. 6:30 p.m.

FRIDAY

Kill Bill Vol 1 (6:15 p.m.) & Kill Bill Vol 2 (8:30 p.m.) at Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 N. State St. 5:30 p.m.

The Comas, Vietnam at Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western Ave. 9:30 p.m.

The Dirty Things, Breaker! Breaker! at Open End Gallery, 2000 W. Fulton St. 9 p.m.

SATURDAY

I Love You But I've Chosen Darkness at Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western Ave. 10 p.m.

Tone Loc, Rob Base, and DJ EZ Rock with Too White Crew at Joe's, 940 W. Weed St. 7 p.m.

In-store with American Idol winner Fantasia at Virgin Megastore, 545 N. Michigan Ave. 2 p.m.

SUNDAY

Sun Ra & The Fugs documentary as part of the Music Movies program at Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 N. State St. 5:15 p.m.

OK Go and Chin Up Chin Up at Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western Ave. 9:30 p.m.

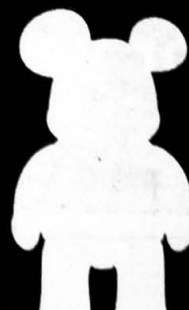
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Fantasy Continued from Front Page

this game. These are people that we hope to keep as audience members for orchestra concerts."

The *Final Fantasy* series, which debuted on the Nintendo Entertainment System in the late '80s has always been known for its haunting original score—even when it was limited by the capacity of an 8-bit gaming system. For years, the soundtracks have been best-sellers in Japan, where gaming is accepted as a mainstream form of entertainment for children as well as adults.

The mastermind behind the music is Nobuo Uematsu. Often called the John Williams of the videogame industry, Uematsu has worked for Square since 1986. *Time* Magazine recently highlighted Uematsu as an "innovator" in its "Time 100: The Next Wave—Music" feature.

Games that feature his music have sold more than 60 million units worldwide, making him more well-known overseas than

the average American pop star. *Final Fantasy* soundtracks frequently top the charts in Japan. With such immense popularity, a live performance of the music was inevitable.

The idea of bringing *Dear Friends* to Chicago was born between Roth and Jason Paul, co-producer of a similar show that accompanied the E3 gaming convention in Los Angeles last year.

"Jason and I have worked together many times independent of this, but he didn't realize that I was the music director of the Chicagoland Pops. In one of our phone conversations, he said, 'I just did this show in L.A. based on the *Final Fantasy* games,' and I told him I had read about it," Roth said.

Roth was surprised to find that other companies weren't showing interest in the concert series.

"Jason had been going around to a lot of orchestras, and none of them would take the risk," he said. "The L.A.

show had been performed alongside a videogame convention, and had been presented by Square-Enix. So I, as a crazy person, decided to take the risk on this, on behalf of the Chicagoland Pops."

Perhaps it's best that the concert is under Roth's care—his background is certainly broader than the average classical conductor.

"I do a big variety of concerts, from strictly classical to rock 'n' roll. Also, I've produced a lot of movies and CDs, so working with visuals and time-coding are all areas that I'm painfully familiar with," Roth said. "I have also been involved with a lot of live shows where the music is synched with other media or visuals. In this show, the conductor controls the music and video operators control the entry of the video scenes on the screen."

The concert is already proving to be popular. VIP tickets, which sell for \$125 and include a

meet-and-greet with Uematsu, are nearly sold out, as are the regular tickets, which range from \$33-\$65. Roth isn't surprised by the success and sees the series as an essential change in the way orchestras are perceived by the public.

"Orchestras are in pretty tough shape financially; it's been well publicized in the U.S. The St. Louis Symphony is currently on strike, and many orchestras have failed in the last 10 years, along with opera companies and ballet companies. It's just a tough time for the arts. So, I can't understand why people wouldn't want to do this show, which satisfies some very interesting parameters," Roth said.

"It's not a rock 'n' roll show where the orchestra is relegated to a back-up role. This really features the orchestra. They're the stars of the show. People are coming to hear the music of Nobuo Uematsu. Certainly, they'll love to see the visuals

synched with the music, but a traditional orchestra is featured, and we're bringing in a whole breed of audience members that would never, or very rarely, come to a concert like this," he said.

The concert will be repeated in San Francisco on March 7 and in Los Angeles on May 16, coinciding with the E3 videogame convention. The concert series will likely be followed by a CD release from one of the dates.

"It should be no surprise that we're discussing [a CD release]. There are still questions about whether or not it can be put together in time for the Chicago concert, but this kind of thing can happen, and will likely be a very big seller," Roth said.

Dear Friends: The Music of Final Fantasy will be performed by the Chicagoland Pops at the Rosemont Theater on Saturday, Feb. 19 at 8 p.m. Tickets range from \$33-\$125, and are available at www.ticketmaster.com.

'Liddle' too sexy

Author's 'Improper' debut surprises around every corner

By Jamie Murnane/A&E Editor

After a stint as editor for the BBC's "Today" show—from which he was forced to resign after allegations of biases in his column for the Guardian—current associate editor of The Spectator and British media's all-around bad boy Rod Liddle has finally put his seditious writing tactics to book form.

Liddle's debut, *Too Beautiful for You: Tales of Improper Behavior*, is a collection of 11 perverse short stories that tell what happens when people give into their urges without weighing the consequences—and there's nothing too beautiful about it.

The stories revolve primarily around an interwoven group of young British professionals—South London yuppies—who find themselves committing everything from adultery to suicide, and much more in between.

One story spins a shocking tale of just how close a son-in-law and mother-in-law should never be. Another paints a picture of an easily relatable office environment in which everyone is miserable about something: a secretary tired of waiting around and a washed-up jour-

nalist grappling with the fact that his co-worker girlfriend is putting an end to their affair.

While the stories are fiction, the bizarre turn of events in each story is closer to reality than one would like. After all, life is much stranger than fiction. However, there are a few exceptions where Liddle went too far.

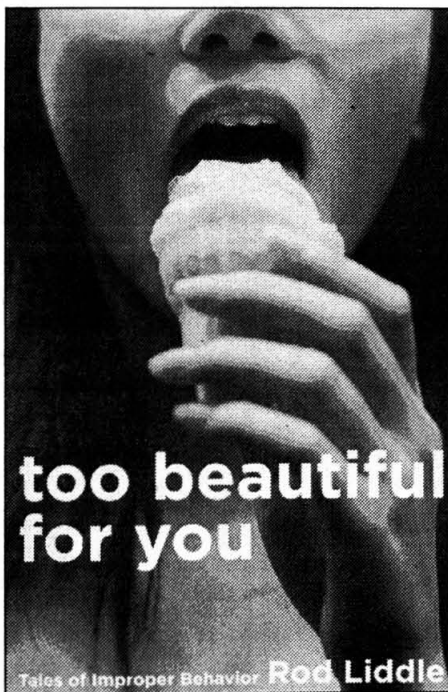
One story focuses on a cheating husband who loses his arm in a train wreck. He leaves the hospital—without his arm—just to cover up where he's been. If that's not ludicrous enough, another vignette has a man hitting on a nurse in a hospital stairway, missing the birth of his son, who he is then convinced can recite the names of all the Chelsea football teammates.

While the stories at times are a bit over-the-top, they are a darkly humorous, realistic take on taboo: the things people do think, yet never discuss. And, it's Liddle's writing that really pulls readers in. His simplistic—yet not simple—language (think Ernest Hemingway) and vulgar disregard for respectability makes one want to read on.

Reading *Too Beautiful for You* is like driving by the scene of a horrible traffic accident. You feel like less of a reader and more of a gawker. You can't turn away and you can't help but turn another erotically-charged, socially unacceptable page.

According to the book jacket description, *Too Beautiful for You* will "sweep readers into the lives of characters whose sexual frustrations and deviant desires lead them to the very edge of acceptable behavior," but there's not nearly as much sexual involved as one would expect—especially by the looks of the seductive cover art which shows a woman licking an ice cream cone.

But, nonetheless, there are enough innuendoes and witty, unapologetic humor laced throughout that it's a wonder why it took Liddle so long to get around to publishing a book. While the short story route is great for the short attention spans of today, it'd be interesting to see what kind of crazed web Liddle could weave in longer form—a novel might just be *too beautiful*.



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Chicago's hardcore homeboys rock

Rise Against find success on a major label but remain faithful to the fans

By Trish Bendix/Assistant A&E Editor

In late 1999, suburban Chicagoans Tim McIlrath and Joe Principe merged their love for punk rock with the budding popularity of hardcore music and formed a band. After six years, the band, called Rise Against, has had a revolving roster, but remained guided by McIlrath and Principe's dynamic songwriting.

Rise Against have been luckier than most bands in their genre. Their first two albums were released on Fat Wreck Chords, a punk rock landmark label owned by NOFX bassist Fat Mike. After constant touring and positive feedback from friends in successful bands, Rise Against signed with

DreamWorks in 2003, recording and releasing their latest album, *Siren Song of the Counter Culture*, in August 2004.

"Everything's been great so far," Principe said of the label switch. "There have been no hang-ups or anything. It was a nice transition. [Signing to a major label] definitely put our record out there — it's more readily available."

With *Siren Song* released, Rise Against produced a video to the single "Give It All," the most radio-friendly, up-tempo meltdown on the album. This month, the song reached number one on Q101's Top 9 at 9.

Nicole Claps, Q101's program manager, said that Rise Against has shown up in the Top 9 at 9 every night since January, with the exception of only two nights.

"In December, it was in the Top 9 at least 14 weeknights," Claps said. "I'm not sure how many times it showed up in November, but I know it [was] requested a lot even back then."

Rise Against are one of the original Chicago punk-hardcore bands to gain success, largely because of their in smart songs, which are angry and oftentimes political.

"I think it's a little unfair to dub us a political band," Principe said. "I always say we're a 'socially aware' band. We don't focus strictly on political issues. Tim writes from a personal perspective about day-to-day life, and the war plays into that because it's current and that's what's going on right now. And during the elections, obviously, we approached it. But [the lyrics] come from all facets of life."

Siren Song reflects a strong dislike for the current democracy with songs like "State of the Union" with the "State of the union address / reads war torn country still a mess / the words power, death and distorted truth / are read between the lines of the red, white and blue."

On "Swing Life Away," his vocalist McIlrath compares



scars with a loved one while pledging commitment—"if love is a labor / I'll slave 'till the end / I won't cross these streets until you hold my hand."

Rise Against will continue to tour in support of *Siren Song*. Having recently returned from touring in Australia and New Zealand the band is ending their West Coast tour with two sold-out dates at the Metro in Chicago.

"We basically have a week-and-a-half off before our Canadian tour," Principe said of the continuous touring. "Then we have another week off before we are going southeast. We're hitting every part of North America."

Although success has followed Rise Against from the midwest to the far east, Principe said that their fanbase has been relatively the same.

"It's a really good feeling. We have such a dedicated fan base. It's way more than we could ask for," Principe said. "We tour so much sometimes that we lose touch with what's going on in Chicago. We come back and ask 'where did this band come from?' It's good, though. There is a healthy scene going."

Rise Against play the Metro, 3730 N. Clark Ave. Feb. 19 and 20.



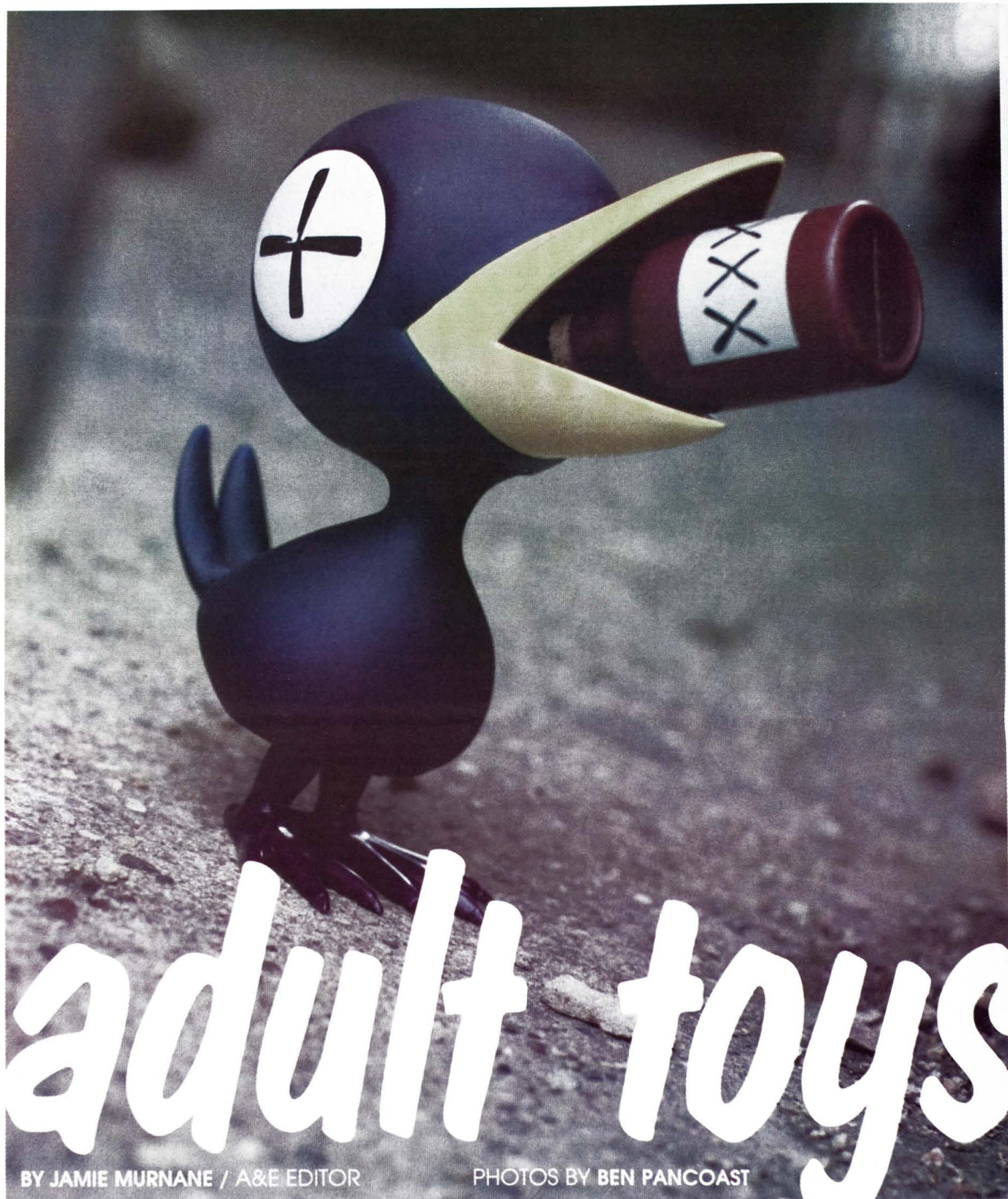
Punk band Rise Against continues to tour in support of their new album. From left: Chris Chasse, Tim McIlrath, Joe Principe, Brandon Barnes.

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BY JAMIE MURNANE / A&E EDITOR

PHOTOS BY BEN PANCOAST

An alcoholic crow sits prominently on a middle shelf at Rotofugi. Maakies Drinky Crow, the feathered wino, isn't feathered at all. He's vinyl. And he comes with his own bottle of (fake) booze and two pairs of interchangeable eyes: wide-eyed sober and completely inebriated Xs.

The 6-and-a-half inch tall bird is just one of many distinctive figures this offbeat toy store features. Don't bother trying to find typical toys such as

Barbies or Legos here.

Rotofugi is a designer toy store that sells urban vinyl toys specifically geared toward adult collectors who view toys as an art form. And it's the only shop of its kind in town.

Before Rotofugi was opened in July 2004 by husband and wife team Kirby and Whitney Kerr, there had been a void in the Chicago urban vinyl toy movement. As collectors themselves, the Kerrs realized it was hard to find the kind of toys they were looking for with-

out having to go online to order from companies such as Medicom Toy Corp. in Japan or the Giant Robot magazine stores in California, distributors of the plush Ugly Dolls.

The only places in Chicago to find vinyl toys were stores like Quimby's Bookstore and Chicago Comics, which tend to sell a few capsule (or smaller) toys, Whitney said. The selection at both places is small.

"They're great book and comic book stores, but we carry like two or three books

related to toys, so they do in toys what we do in books," she said. "There's a few places, but nothing as comprehensive as what we have."

The idea for the store came after the couple moved to Chicago from Arkansas. The Kerrs were originally planning on opening a dog food store that would sell more holistic, healthy dog food—a product not easily found in Arkansas.

"We looked into that and had done a lot of the legwork in knowing what we needed to

know to open a business," Whitney said. "We worked on that for about six months and it just came down to us not having the money to do it. Then we moved here in March of last year and we were like, 'All right, where's the toy store?'"

"I was kind of hoping when we moved to Chicago that there would be a store or stores that had that sort of thing," said co-owner Kirby, who's originally from Missouri. After a month, the couple realized there were no such stores

and decided there needed to be.

"While you could find a few things here and there, for the most part there wasn't really anyone focusing on that, and so we thought it'd be a good idea for us," Kirby said.

After the urban toy store epiphany, and their home in Arkansas was sold, Whitney followed her mantra of "if someone is going to do something, they should do it well and do it immediately." After just three months of planning, Rotofugi opened.

Though the urban toys are a growing trend that started primarily in Asia, the Rotofugi name is not derived from an Asian word, as one might assume. On deciding upon a name, Whitney said, they knew right away they wanted to use 'roto' from 'rotocasting'—the molding process that allows this artistic toy movement to be possible. Rotocasting, Whitney said, is a process that uses "really cheap" molds that allow toy producers to pump out runs of about 500 pieces that won't break the bank. Other molding techniques, such as injection molding, would cost thousands of dollars per toy.

The latter half of the store's moniker comes from the couple's dog, Fugi. Although the Arkansas dog food store concept was replaced, the Kerrs still managed to incorporate their love for canines into their business.

After explaining the store's name over the phone, Whitney set down the receiver to accept a mail delivery.

"Yey! Toys!" she said as she got back on the phone. "I just got a sample of a toy that's not released yet. Ha, ha," she said mockingly. "That's the real joy these days. I got the new B.B. Birdy toy that'll be out in March."

Rotofugi's stock comes from all over, but most come from Asia, Whitney said. However, there are an increasing number of American companies getting into the business, including a number of Chicago-based artists. Thanks to Rotofugi, local designers such as James Liu of Fizziefuzzie are gaining recognition.

When he couldn't find a white panda sticker for his Vespa scooter, Liu decided to create his own. He launched Fizziefuzzie, an independent character line of vinyl toys. Liu stopped in at Rotofugi right after it opened to see if the owners would be interested in carrying locally produced toys.

"I was really excited when they said 'yes,'" Liu said. "The Kerrs are really supportive of local artists."

"I'm really into design and the thing about the urban vinyl toys is it's not just a toy, it's also a piece of artwork," Liu said. "The people who are into it realize that, too. It's more than 'Oh that's a cute little panda,' or whatever, they see the artwork behind it."

The Kerrs see the artwork behind the toys as well, which is

why they introduced the urban vinyl toy craze to Chicago.

"It was something that was pretty new to us as well," Kirby said. "I was just utterly fascinated by the whole idea that there was this whole subculture of toys that are seen as artwork—it just amazed me and I immediately fell in love with it. It was just so cool that we couldn't avoid it."

When asked who his favorite vinyl toy producer is, Kirby could not decide.

"Oh God. That's like asking if someone has a favorite child," he said. However, he did highlight one company in Hong Kong, Brothersfree, that specializes in 12-inch, highly detailed figures such as the nearly \$200 international war correspondent named Money, complete with a laptop, cell phone and camera with interchangeable lenses. Only 800 were made and Rotofugi has just a few left in stock.

"They put so much into them," Kirby said. "It's an impressive

because, she said, those are the primary places similar stores exist.

"My theory in this is that they're people who don't necessarily live in San Francisco, L.A. or New York or close to Manhattan where the stores are, but they go there and see them and then they go online to look for them," she said. "I don't get any orders from Wyoming or Montana. I don't think it's because people there wouldn't like them. I think it's because they don't know about them."

Before Rotofugi came to town, many in Chicago weren't aware of the urban vinyl toys. Now, Whitney said, they're really into it.

"You don't know to search the Internet for designer toys if you don't know designer toys exist," she said. "And it's really only been in the states for two, two-and-a-half years, so it's a fairly new thing that's pretty much been relegated to the coasts until about the last six months to a year."

*"Quit thinking about it so much. It's fun.
It's fucking toys for Christ's sake!"*

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amount of artistry for a limited-run toy—where they make 500 or 600 of one. In the toy world, 500 or 600 doesn't sound that limited per se. But if you look at the mass market, we've seen things marked 'limited run' that are made by Mattel or somebody, like a Hot Wheels car or something. They'll call it limited and it'll be like 20,000 pieces, so it's just a whole different scale, a different kind of commodity. We've just really enjoyed getting to meet all these different artists and getting to work with all these small companies that are doing cool things."

One of the companies doing cool things is Toy2R, which makes the best-selling Qees figures.

"They are really popular because they put out a nice variety of toys where they're collaborating with artists with big names like Gary Baseman all the way down to unknown artists," Kirby said. "They just do a nice variety of smaller figures and bigger figures. Scary Girl by [Nathan Jurevicius] in Australia does really well, too."

Each vinyl toy company, while retaining its urban feel, has its own style. Which is what collectors find appealing—as does Whitney.

"There's two different kinds of collectors. There's people who fixate on one line and get everything from that line," she said. "I like a little bit of everything."

And a little bit of everything is what can be found, not only at Rotofugi's West Chicago Avenue location, but at their web store as well, where they receive most of their orders from New York and California. This surprises Whitney,

While vinyl toy enthusiasts can shop at Rotofugi online, they'll be missing out on one of the key elements the store boasts: an on-site gallery with constantly rotating exhibits. The exhibit currently up is "Three Inches from the Street," a traveling show that features 20 hand-painted skateboard decks from artists around the world. The skateboards will be on display through Feb. 19.

Rotofugi exhibits have typically been toy-centric, but the Kerrs felt skateboards fit right in with their toy culture. Skateboarding is another activity commonly associated with children, but Rotofugi is proving that you're never too old to appreciate toys.

"There's a lot of people who want to [say], 'Our generation is really into this stuff because we were obsessed with cartoons and video games in the '80s and blah blah blah,' but ... we haven't even given up our videogames," Whitney said. "I mean, 20 years ago, it wasn't a large group of people in their 20s and 30s playing video games. It was all kids and we've just never given that up. So why do we give up our toys? These are just elevated ... artistic toys, but if you want to get into all that, honestly, they're just toys and they're cool. Thinking about it beyond that really doesn't entertain me much. There's people who want to get into the whole 'aesthetic of cute' and why we like it. Just like it. Quit thinking about it so much. It's fun. It's fucking toys for Christ's sake. You don't need to do a sociological study on why they're fun."



From top to bottom: Rotofugi co-founders Kirby and Whitney Kerr, Kirby with a Gary Baseman toy and a customer browsing the store's colorful racks.

Zine queen goes bananas

Graduate student uses scholarship money to fund literary publication

By Trish Bendix/Assistant A&E Editor

Columbia graduate student Amber Drea used her Weisman Scholarship money to produce a literary zine The Banana King, named after a passage in Jack Kerouac's famous self-discovery novel *On the Road*. The book featured "the Banana King" as a symbol of simplistic importance, as Drea noted in the intro to The Banana King's first issue.

"I wanted to start a zine and have writing in it that I liked, that talked about essence and every little detail of life," said Drea, a student in Columbia's creative writing program.

"I wanted to pay attention to little things that most people wouldn't pay

attention to. When I came here, I took this fiction writers and publishing class, and I just started hearing about people who started their own publications; young people at Columbia and everywhere in the city starting publications and it inspired me more," Drea said.

The first issue of The Banana King, published in summer 2004, featured writing by Drea and a handful of others. The work ranged from a non-fiction story about Drea being egged while riding a bicycle in Wicker Park to poetry and an interview with British rap artist The Streets.

Drea will be one of several Weisman Scholarship recipients to have work on display in an exhibit at the Hokin Gallery beginning Feb. 14. The scholarship paid for half of first issue's 500 copies.

A freelance journalist and avid fiction writer, Drea graduated from the University of Florida Miami and moved to Chicago in 2002.

Drea said she looked for "cool cities" and chose Chicago for its music scene.

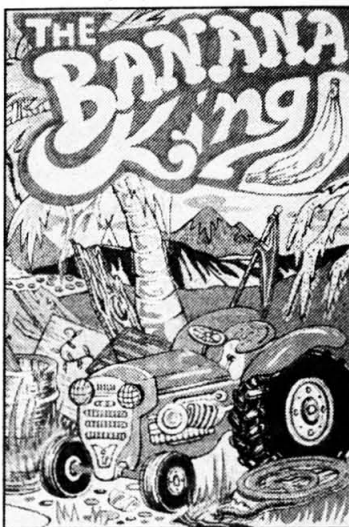
"I had no idea about the publishing aspect, just that the music was cool," Drea said. "Columbia is the best school and Chicago was the best choice for me."

Drea wrote for a newspaper in Miami but didn't start her extensive writing career until she moved. She has contributed to UR Chicago, Chicago Innuvew, and the Chicago Reader, as well as national magazines like Rockpile and XLR8R.

The second issue of The Banana King will be out by the end of February. It will feature pieces from local writers Jonathan Messinger, Taryn Rejholec

and Emerson Dameron as well as Columbia student Mary McKane and professors Joe Meno, Megan Stielstra and Brian Costello.

"Right now I'm getting a lot of submissions from people I know," Drea said.



"I've commissioned from people I admire, asking them to contribute to it. Then I have stories included from people I've never met. Some I just found very randomly."

The Banana King is published biannually with basic text on white paper layouts.

"I was trying to get some illustrators

and such," Drea said, "but I decided the words are more important."

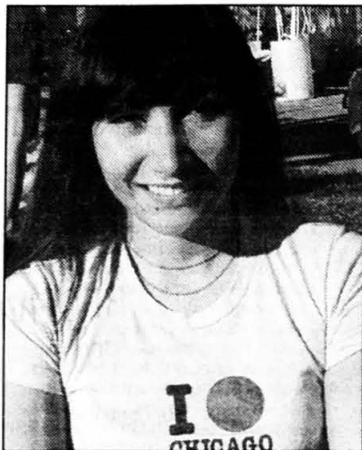
The Banana King will also be hosting its second "Rock 'N' Read" fund-raiser. The first was held Dec. 16 at the Beat Kitchen, 2100 W. Belmont Ave., and featured a lineup of readers and local bands such as Pal, Princess, Pearly Sweets and Black Giraffe. Most of the proceeds from the first "Rock 'N' Read" went into publishing the second issue, but Drea said she also shared the profits with the bands.

"I'm trying to work something out with the Viaduct Theater," Drea said of "Rock 'N' Read 2" plans. "At the last 'Rock 'N' Read,' I had all the bands I love in Chicago play. I want to have more readers this time. Bands and readers will go on at the same time in two different rooms."

Drea said she works on The Banana King between her day job as a receptionist and her part-time position as the Up Front editor for Venus Zine.

"It's strange because The Banana King and myself as a writer are a symbiotic entity," Drea said. "The Banana King is very much a part of me and I always tell people about it. I'm just trying to find people interested in contributing and I promote it when I can."

The Weisman Scholarship Exhibit runs at the Hokin Gallery from Feb. 14 to March 19. The opening reception will be held Feb. 16 at 6 p.m. Best in Show presentations will be made by Tony Weisman at 6:30 p.m. For more information on The Banana King, check out www.thebananaking.org.



Amber Drea is in the process of publishing the second issue of her zine, The Banana King.

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Sage against the machine

East Coast rapper and punk-rock label combine for volatile album and tour

By Todd Burbo/Assistant A&E Editor

Sage Francis' new album is a hand grenade. From the first track, the aptly titled *A Healthy Distrust* smacks the listener with intensity, anger, and a lot of loud, dirty noise. Very few albums in the past year have made such an immediate and powerful impression, both content and production-wise.

Track after track, *A Healthy Distrust* questions the motives

of everyone—politicians, fellow musicians and even fans. On the first track, "The Buzz Kill," Sage drops clever lines like "Color me confused when they paint issues black and white" and "I freedom-kiss the French for their political dissent" with distorted vocals over low-fi drums and crunchy bass.

Although Sage makes his thoughts on politics well known, don't expect an album capitalizing on the trendiness of Bush-bashing, à la Green Day or Eminem. He takes the matter very seriously, and—again—distrusts the political motivation of some. In an interview with *The Chronicle*, Sage clarified his stance on political music.

"Politics run our lives in many ways," he said, "and it's an inescapable subject, but the trendy 'fuck Bush' talk isn't what I consider to be political music. That isn't activism. That's a child's play."

This month, Sage looks to

educate his fans face to face with a national tour that stops at the Metro, 3730 N. Clark St., on Feb. 16, and fans should expect a rowdy time. The Rhode Island-based rapper seems more excited about the tour than his new album.

"We are performing the entire new album, and extending many of the songs," Sage said. "There are a couple Non-

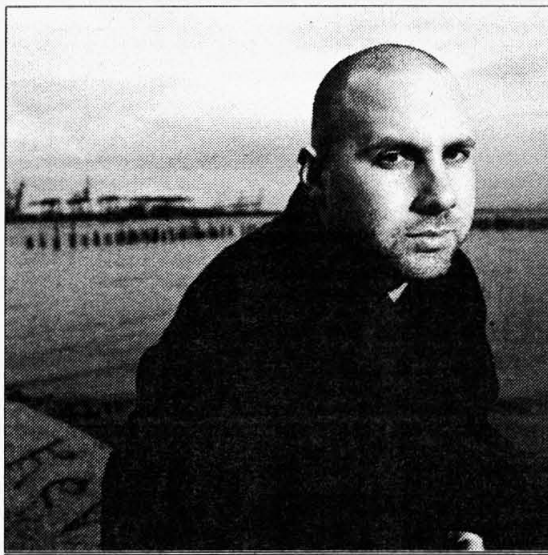
Prophets songs and Personal Journals songs and unreleased songs that I will do, but a bulk of the set is a steroid-induced version of the album. I wish people knew the album better because I really think there could be some interesting crowd interaction if they had the words memorized already."

Unlike some musicians, Sage is careful not to take all the credit. In fact, he went out of his way to emphasize the importance of catching his opening act.

"If you miss their set, you're not going to be able to enjoy my set as much, because they are backing me up," he said. "Their name is Sol.iLLaquists of Sound and if you only see my set you are going to wonder who the crazy mother-

fuckers are on stage, and you'll wish you had seen them do more of their own material."

If Sage presents himself differently than the average hip-hop act, it shouldn't surprise



Rapper Sage Francis puts Rhode Island on the hip-hop map.

anyone—he's signed to Epitaph, a record label famous for its punk rock. Although some might see it as a disadvantage to be on a label that's less than familiar with the hip-hop game, Sage sees parallels between punk and hip-hop that make Epitaph more, not less, able to represent him accurately.

"Hip-hop and punk rock have a lot of things in common, but don't tell the purists of each respective genre that," Sage said.

"As far as me signing to Epitaph, the hip-hop labels that are big enough to handle the demand of my music put out shitty rap records and I don't want anything to do with that. Epitaph showed a genuine interest in what I talk about and how I do my music, whereas

the state has been home to more talent than just himself.

"I believe Rhode Island was the bastion of hip-hop in 1998/1999 but we couldn't get enough attention, so a lot of people involved just faded away. It's sad," Sage said.

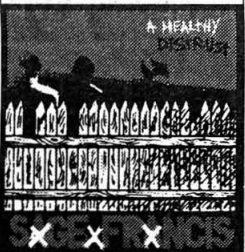
With his anger and intelligence, Sage stands out in the current crowd (and likes it that way), but he would happily sacrifice his success for the betterment of the masses.

"My art is crafted differently than anything else that's out there," he said. "It comes from a different person with different beliefs, different motivations and different passions. It took a long time for people to give it a chance because it takes a certain kind of ear to process it all in the right way. I will never have to worry about getting lost in the mix as long as the masses are complacent with mediocrity. Of course, if all music and all facets of society were raised to a higher degree of quality I would hardly complain about being lost in the mix. I might be happy enough to not care about getting special notice for my music. I'd be too busy enjoying common life."

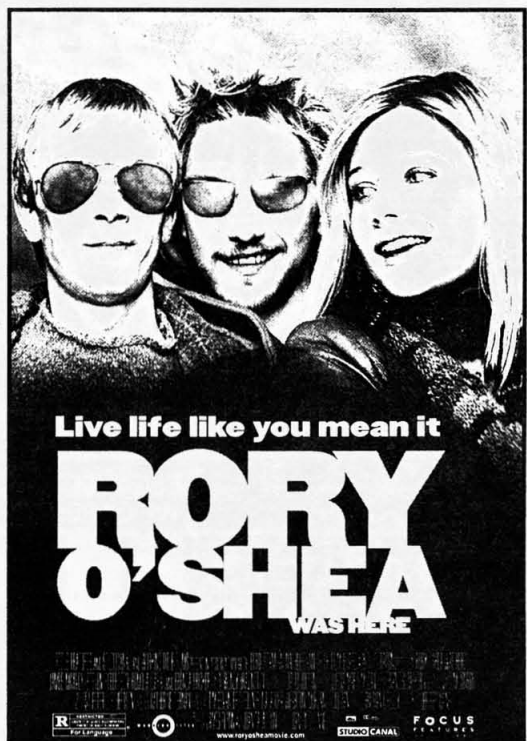
Sage Francis performs with the Sol.iLLaquists of Sound at the Metro, 3730 N. Clark St., on Feb. 16. Tickets are \$18, and available at www.ticketmaster.com, or service charge free at Hi-Fi Records, 3728 N. Clark St.



"It took a punk rock label to treat hip-hop with a little respect and dignity in the 2000s. Irony is not dead."



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Celebrating 50 years of Miles

Label reissues to celebrate historic anniversary

By Mark W. Anderson/Commentary Editor

On Oct. 26, 1955, the latest signing for powerhouse record label Columbia Records walked into a New York recording studio for the first time. The trumpeter, a young black man, was still under contract to another label, but was already a rising star in the jazz world. In fact, Columbia was so desperate to record him and his top-flight band that an unusual deal was struck: The company would make the recordings first, then wait to release them two years later when the prior contract ran out, knowing that no matter when it got to sell the records, fans would be ready to buy them.

The musician? None other than Miles Davis. The band? Davis' regular quintet at the time, made up of tenor saxophonist John Coltrane, alto saxophonist Julian "Cannonball" Adderley, pianist Bill Evans, bassist Paul Chambers and drummer Jimmy Cobb. The record they made that day was Davis'

acclaimed *'Round About Midnight*, named after a Thelonious Monk tune and often cited as one of the most important and beautiful jazz

to mention the history of jazz. To celebrate, Columbia Records and its parent company SONY BMG/Legacy has released a series of recordings documenting Davis' career, and has an ambitious series of further releases planned.

For example, last week, Columbia/Legacy released a "dual-disc" version of *Kind of Blue*, recognized by many as the greatest single jazz recording of all time. Made up of five tunes, the recording has sold more than 10 million copies since it was released in 1959 and has grown in stature in recent years as the jazz community and a wider audience have come to see its importance.

Davis' band at the time, often referred to as his first great quintet, consisted of five players who were either entering their greatest artistic period or already at the top of their game. By the time of the recording, legendary saxophonist Coltrane had started to mature his distinctive style into a more easily recognizable form, exploding previously held notions about how to play tenor sax before

some of his more experimental phases. Adderley, one of the greatest practitioners of "soul-jazz," had burst onto the scene and turned many heads with his earthy yet joyous sound. Evans was one of the most relaxed

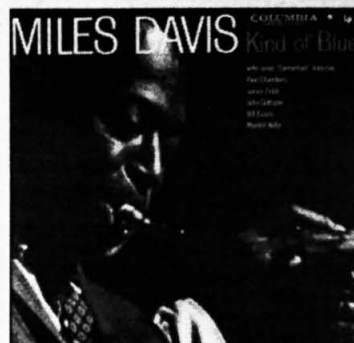
formats), pianist Herbie Hancock, who would later go on to star in another great Miles Davis quintet, is quoted saying Davis' playing was not only "a cornerstone of jazz, it's a cornerstone for music."

In addition to the re-release of *Kind of Blue*, Columbia/Legacy has scheduled a series of new versions of important Miles Davis recordings as part of the label's anniversary celebration. Upcoming releases include a two-disc "legacy" edition of the record that started it all for the label, *'Round About Midnight*, and a six-disc set of live recordings taped at the famous Cellar Door nightclub in Washington, D.C. in 1970, during the beginning of Davis' "electric" period.

It's difficult to imagine that an artist as important and well-known as Miles Davis could use a boost to remind audiences of his importance, not to mention the staggering number of historic and critically-acclaimed recordings he made throughout the years. But if there was ever a good time to re-examine the legacy of one of the greatest artists in the history of jazz, now just might be the time.



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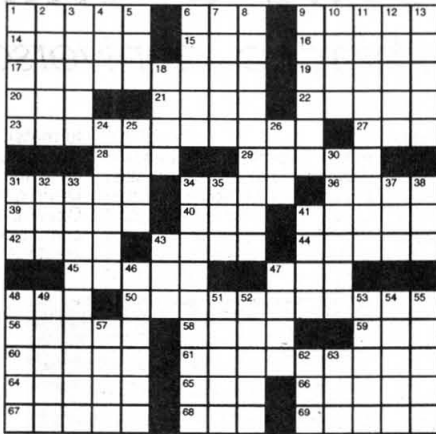
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- ACROSS**
- 1 Fully conscious
 - 6 Drench
 - 9 Salted meat
 - 14 Banker?
 - 15 As well
 - 16 Maine campus
 - 17 Recreational hangouts
 - 19 Shoestrings
 - 20 Wynn and Begley
 - 21 Interruptions of continuity
 - 22 Butcher's cut
 - 23 A bit daft
 - 27 Internet pop-ups
 - 28 Anonymous John
 - 29 Neighbor of Egypt
 - 31 Green tea
 - 34 Example
 - 36 Japanese wrestling
 - 39 Bizarre
 - 40 Pub brew
 - 41 Temple table
 - 42 Alternative to a saber
 - 43 Med. scans
 - 44 Costume jewelry
 - 45 Jacob's father
 - 47 Confine
 - 48 Scam
 - 50 Semiconductor devices
 - 56 Satellite's path
 - 58 Red and deep blue
 - 59 Floral ring
 - 60 Family member
 - 61 More ostentatious
 - 64 Al and Tipper
 - 65 Swallow
 - 66 Superior to
 - 67 Uneasy feeling
 - 68 Crafty
 - 69 Hebrew lawgiver
- DOWN**
- 1 Quaking tree
 - 2 Ralph Emerson
 - 3 Hold it, sailor!
 - 4 Code base
 - 5 Get it wrong
 - 6 Ermine in a light coat
 - 7 Spirited vigor
 - 8 Owns
 - 9 Shot like a lock
 - 10 United Emirates
 - 11 Marx Brothers movie, with "The"
 - 12 In an upright position
 - 13 Sensory organs
 - 18 Eye lewdly
 - 24 Idolizes
 - 25 Sole
 - 26 Regret bitterly
 - 30 Sloping
 - 31 Tiller's tool
 - 32 Slangy affirmative
 - 33 Comic David
 - 34 Dead animals
 - 35 Clay, today
 - 37 Wrestlers' pad
 - 38 Mine find
 - 41 Big galoots
 - 43 Disfigure
 - 46 Bear witness
 - 47 City on the Arno
 - 48 Line dance
 - 49 Celestial hunter
 - 51 Katmandu's kingdom
 - 52 Like sailor's stories
 - 53 Potpourris
 - 54 Superman portrayer
 - 55 Fathers
 - 57 Chills
 - 62 Actor Neill
 - 63 SHO rival



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02/14/05

Solutions**Valentine's Day makes me wanna...**

Thanks to a woman named Esther Howland, the pioneer of the modern day Valentine, American couples have had the dubious privilege of celebrating the most hallmark of Hallmark holidays.

Back in 1847, good ol' Esther thought it would be a bright idea to print up a bunch of sappy, romantic messages on frilly paper, to be exchanged with your beau or dame of choice.

In an era devoid of presidential sex scandals and marriages that weren't prefaced with pre-nups, promoting a day for romance must have been glorious. But I wonder what 'ol Esther would think of her special day in the 21st century?

If it went anything like my last Valentine's Day, Esther would trade her frilly bits of paper for a decent sex toy and stay her a** at home.

Not having sex for months is bad enough, but when you're in a relationship with someone, it's even worse. After a few years of being with Derek (you know the type, the twentysomething who rarely washes his hair and won't put down his skateboard), our sex life went from *Some Like It Hot* to *Cold Mountain*, and not a sex book in the world could help us.

Growing up in a world where women celebrated Valentine's Day as if it were the second coming of Christ, I figured if there was one holiday that could spice up our sex life, it was V-Day.

Unfortunately, my master plan of an all night romp with the boy I once loved ... many times a day ... was shattered early in the evening.

As I pulled up my thigh highs and strapped on my

stilettos, I hoped my newfound inner knockout would cause Derek to promptly pull my dress off and keep us from making it to the restaurant.

As he approached my house, my thoughts went from "Do me" to "Aww, can't he just take a shower ONE night ... for me!"

After I spent hours in front of a mirror getting ready, Derek showed up in dirty Chuck Taylors and a ripped pair of Dickies.

Appropriate for a skate park, not a classy restaurant, and not appropriate for my bedroom.

He handed me a red envelope and I quickly snatched it up, grabbed my purse and headed to the restaurant.

"Screw this card," I thought. "I want to get laid. That's all. I want to have good sex with a good guy who preferably has a good odor."

I hastily chewed my chicken parmesan and sat in silence with Derek. He chewed with his mouth open. I had never been more turned off in my life.

Esther had it all wrong: Cards were not going to solve my relationship woes. And a card definitely isn't going to get me off.

I decided that night I was done with Dull Derek, and I was ready for a new kind of Valentine's Day.

I want to trade my roses for KY and my cheesy cards for erotic literature, and if you're looking for me on V-Day, I'll be in bed. Partner or not, I am celebrating my Valentine's Day my way.

Whether Esther likes it or not.

—Beatrix@chroniclemail.com



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