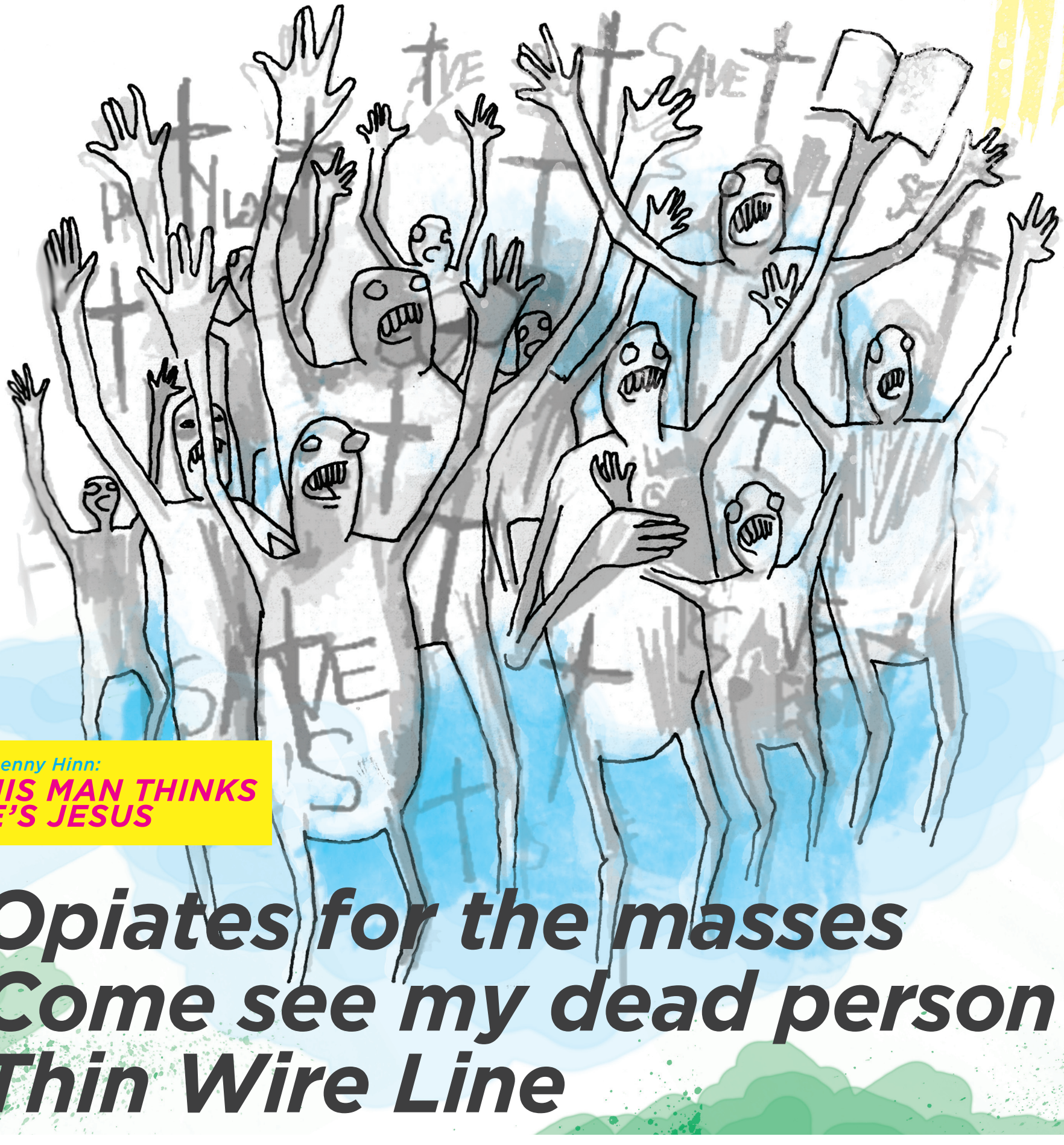
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FREE PRESS **HOUSTON**

AUGUST 2008 | ISSUE 94
this is what hell feels like
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* *Benny Hinn:*
THIS MAN THINKS HE'S JESUS

Opiates for the masses
Come see my dead person
Thin Wire Line





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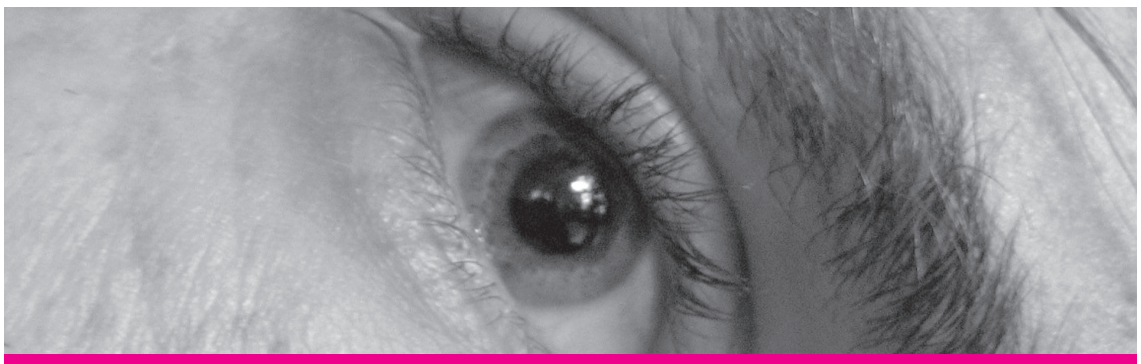
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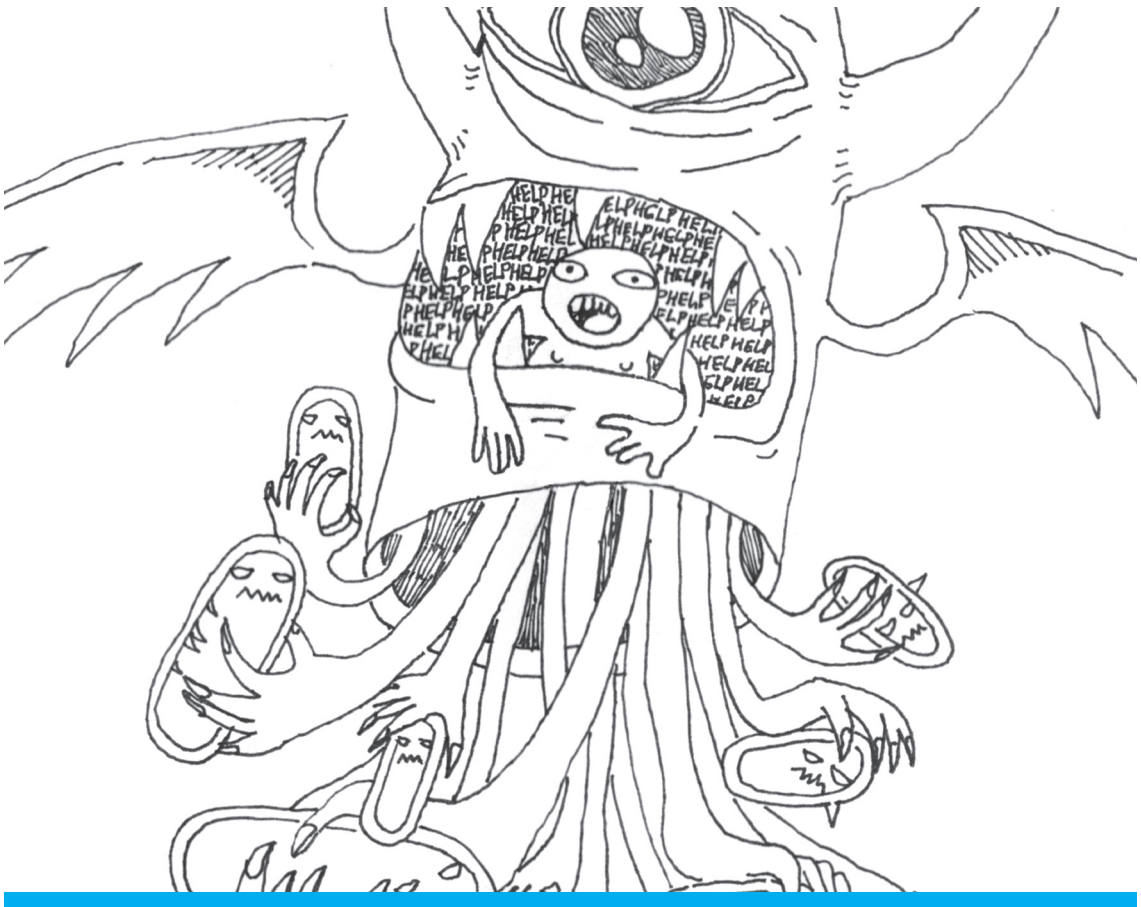
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FEEL FREE TO TAKE US SERIOUSLY



ALMOST A TRUE STORY.

HER SATANIC MAJESTY, CAROLYN FARB, who is our 2007 Worst of Houston 'Worst Philanthropist' and so called 'First Lady of Philanthropy', took FPH illustrator Tim Dorsey and I out for a night of debaucherous worship of the malevolent demigod Sabeoth. After a chance meeting at one of the various and sundry Red Bull 'Art of Can' parties, she lured young Dorsey and I back to her lair where we engaged in dark rituals and drunken shenanigans till the wee hours of the morning. We drank the blood of the innocent from infant skulls and danced to Wagner (pronounced 'Vogner) in various states of undress. I must say, that despite her 143 years of age, her stamina exceeds that of a teenager. After an evening of exhausting and near tortuous licentiousness, we grew hungry and decided to hit up La Tapatia. She had the Verde Enchiladas whereas Timmy and I shared a Burrito. Bewildered and still reeling from our first blood rituals, she dropped Tim and I off at home and bid us farewell.

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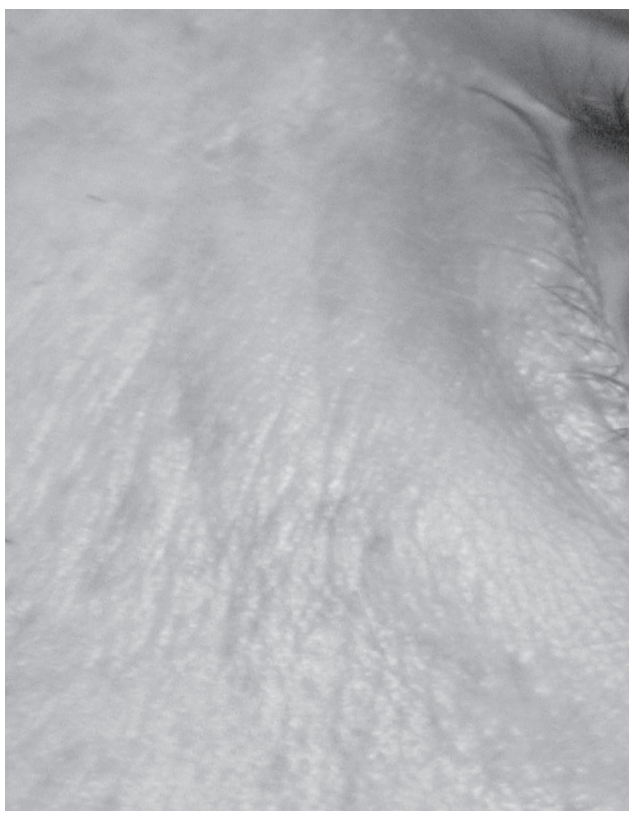
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RED BULL
Can of Bullshit
| Buffalo Sean



ABRE TUS OJOS

NOW IT DOESN'T BOTHER ME THAT THEY COST TWICE AS MUCH PER OUNCE AS ANY OTHER ENERGY DRINK. OR THAT THEY HAVE INTRODUCED A NEW AND LEGAL HIGH TO AMERICA. NO, IT BOTHERS ME THAT RED BULL DECIDED TO THROW THEIR BULLSHIT ART OF THE CAN IN HOUSTON.

HAVEN'T HEARD OF IT? Seen the billboards of bauxite pterodactyls? Or their web ads with a shiny tin cowboy boot? Hmm… then you must not be one of the five hundred artists who submitted to the exhibit. Pardon me while I tell those artists **FUCK YOU YOU GOT HOSED**. Excuse me, but I had a feeling one of them might read this and I couldn't resist the urge to publicly insult someone. If you are sitting next to someone who entered the show tell 'em for me. Their ridiculousness is only eclipsed by the willingness of advertisers to use, exploit and degrade you. Three things strike me as particularly stupid in this endeavor, an artist's willingness to forgo one's judgment of materials, the inestimable monetary cost of the project and the complacency and triviality of the artworld.

Materials, malleable objects and ideas, are explored through trial and error and practice. Conceptual artists screaming in a dark room go through the same shtick as a watercolor artist painting on a Sunday afternoon. Exploring materials, finding what you like to work with is a big part of artistic identity. Warhol had silkscreens, Rauschenberg had ink transfers and Oldenburg had cloth. Robyn O'Neil has pencils, Bert Long has ice and the Art Guys have their bodies. Why would you limit yourself to a prescribed, corporate material? Barring an intensely enlightened group working

The Joannaversary: Parachutists are the Loneliest People
The Joanna Gallery 4014 Graustark
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Left Alone
ArtStorm 4828 Caroline
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713.864.2328

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Aerosol Warfare Gallery
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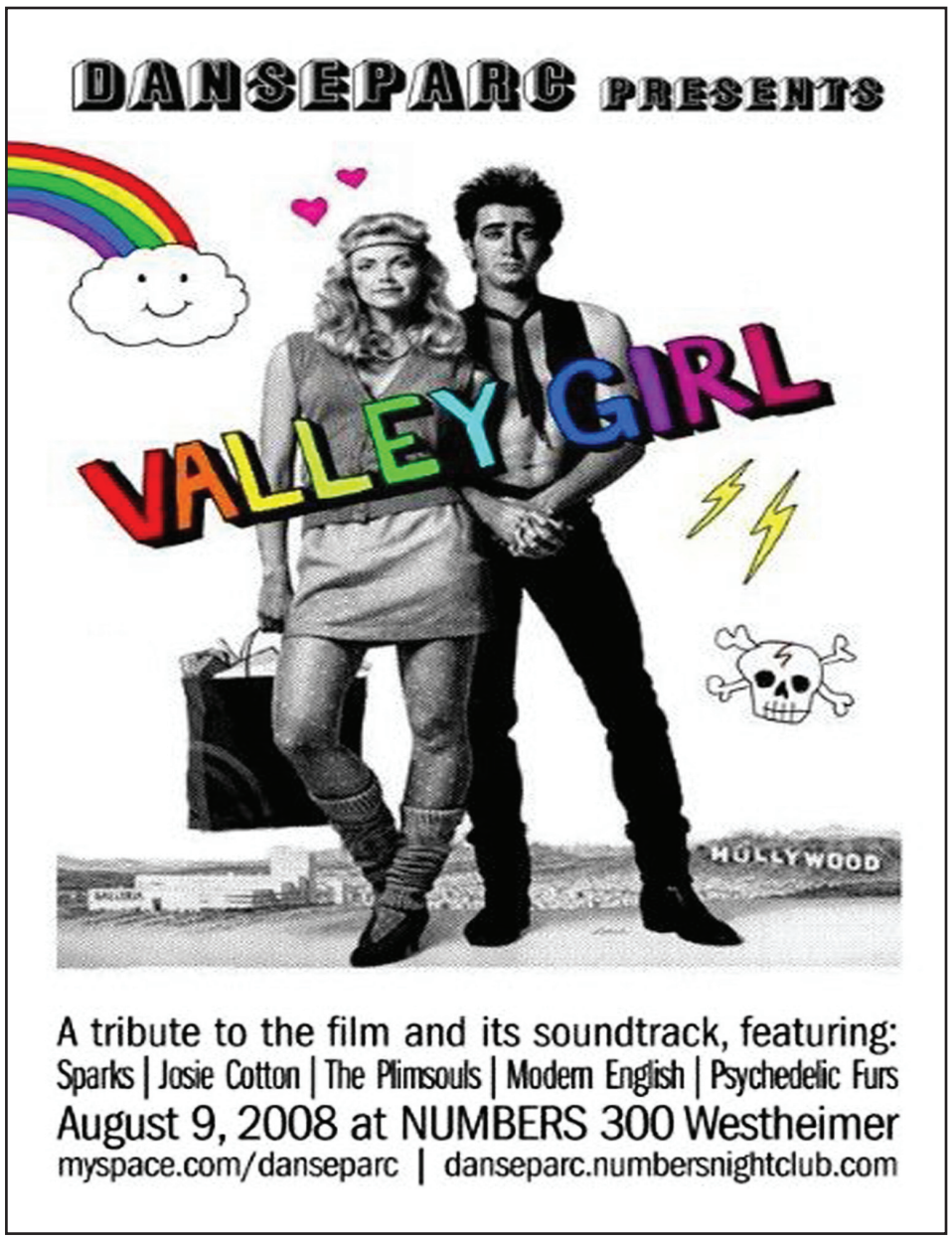


together for a very long time I would not believe an exhibit of one material could *ever* be justifiable. The fact that the show looked like a high school hallway on parent's night was unavoidable, but shame on you guys for getting duped into thinking this could ever be worth it beyond that navel-gazing moment of delight that comes with being included. On the team.

By the way, in getting on this team, how much did you guys spend on those cans you've woven into dragons, moustaches and the Statue of Liberty? Didn't think about it did ya. Or maybe it just blew by; you were so high on fructose syrup and guarana. No entry fee for the exhibit? What a crock of bullshit. It'd cost you $200 to construct a spaceman out of your product's encasement. Maybe it only cost a hundred bucks to cover that guitar in $4 eight-ounce cans. It's kind of like usury. Does it seem stupid to enter yet? Or would you like to hear about Arthur Vaisvilas' piece? The hapless son-of-a-bitch drew The Ramones wearing Red Bull t-shirts as they rock out in a stilted colored pencil attempt at thankfulness. Unless you're in high school Arthur, you should be punched in the face. You might be big so I'm not gonna do it- but The Ramones deserve better. The oodles of cash Red Bull throws around all over the country on fun, stupid shit is reprehensible if you're not having fun, but if you're part of the crowd you may feel some sense of elation, like there's something new happening and you're in the thick of it. Shut the fuck up. It's all the caffeine.

The jittery feeling you get sometimes, when it seems like there is a comprehensive, wide-ranging spectrum of artists out there and possibilities for advancement; that means that someone should back over you with a truck. Don't assume that those collectors and critics at the opening spell validation. I am terribly surprised at the ability to bend over backwards and lower their standards that many jurors demonstrated, as well as the media outlets and even well meaning artists. Oh, I mean that I'm so surprised that they can do that when there is money involved. Did that slip my mind? Woops. As one juror stiffly said; "don't take it so seriously, they're not artists." I was staggered. I kind of hoped that they were artists. I kind of believe that they are, even Arthur, and they shouldn't have to go away when the money leaves. The kvetching that went on when the Hunting Prize patronized to artists sent the community into an uproar, but no one takes this seriously? Damned bull, I would have preferred a pinewood derby or an air show, and this will not do. At least it has proven that corporations have an extensive reach in the artworld, and to resist it is futile. I'm not drinking a can of that shit. I'll drink the Kool-Aid.

FPH





THIN WIRE LINE

| Michael Bergeron



The edge of my seat was the last place I expected to be. Some movies can produce vertigo by tricking the eyes. For instance, a special Imax process called Omnivision (literally a one-of-a-kind screen that stretches both in front of your eyes and over your head, located in Las Vegas) where your entire peripheral vision is engaged.

THE OMNIVISION FILM UNSPROCKETED WITH A HAWAIIAN THEME and the first image hurled you into the azure Pacific Ocean at rocket speeds. The first reaction is to roll up into a ball and duck under your seat.

But this was a documentary on the small screen no less. Yet the effect of watching the Man on Wire trailer on YouTube can leave you dizzy. In the theater the very act of watching high wire hi-jinx being performed with no fear of death coupled with shots establishing the depth of the fall will produce armrest-hugging fear in even the most fleetfooted viewer.

Man on Wire documents what has to be the ultimate performance art crime of all time. Artist and acrobat Philippe Petit schemed and planned and surreptitiously assembled an international crew, snuck into both towers of the World Trade Center at the appropriate time, strung cable throughout the night and at daybreak walked across the span about eight times over a period of forty minutes. All this went down on August 7, 1974 although Petit had planned the walk for several years. Petit flew to New York a few times during his planning and as he tells the story in director James Marsh's Man on Wire he was planning it like a noir crime caper.

Marsh unfolds the events like a mystery. Every 20-minutes or so there's a new character introduced or a new development in Petit's strategy. To string the wire an initial guideline is shot tower to tower via bow and arrow. How Petit finds the arrow in the dark, and how Marsh recreates this particular recollection, clearly demonstrates how weird the whole expedition had become.

When the police finally show up, Petit stops just out of reach of the cop and walks back out into the middle of the wire. This is where you engage the theater chair drink holder located near your right knee as a foothold.

We see the participants, as they were through photos and some filmed footage, and in the present day much wiser and over 30-years older. Colorful 1970s industrial shots of the Twin Towers puts their grandeur in perspective even showing the progress of construction. On one trip Petit got to the roof and is seen in photos joking with a crew up there.

After taking precise measurements Petit recreated the set up in a field back in France, and practiced the 200-foot walk, even if it was five feet off the ground. When the climatic moment comes we have a combination of re-creation, actual photos and briefly a moment of film shot from a news helicopter spiraling above Petit, a man without trepidation.

The title comes from the police description of the crime in progress. The cop had written on the crime report "man on wire." Part of the fascination rests in Petit's mischievous manner, an almost uncanny resemblance to the antics of silent film stars like Harold Lloyd or Buster Keaton, both who performed many of their own stunts. Man on Wire includes snippets of other equally death defying walks that Petit performed before being arrested at Notre Dame and the Brooklyn Bridge. Petit even contributed illustrations to the new Debra Winger book she was signing at the MFAH last month. Somebody put Petit in a movie with Jackie Chan immediately.

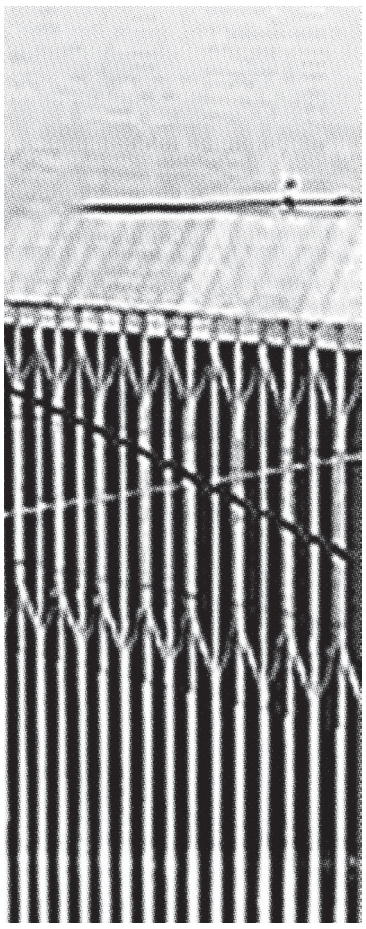
Man on Wire opens in Houston on August 15.

Swing Vote delivers chad

There's a blunt edge to its political humor that's tempered with a young girl single Dad dynamic so common in Disney films that permeates Swing Vote. In a storyline out of a Capra film, right down to the sacks of mail in the finale, one person holds the destiny to an upcoming Presidential election because of their uncounted election stub.

In fact the movie could be more about a single parent raising a precocious child than the current political fracas. "And Bull Durham wasn't about baseball and Tin Cup wasn't about golf," Kevin Costner tells Free Press Houston during a round table interview. Costner and Madeline Carroll, who play Bud and Molly Johnson in Swing Vote, swung through town last month to stump for the film.

In a slightly outlandish turn of events Bud has gotten laid off work by what he calls "insourcing," Mexican immigrants brought in replace him at the egg factory. It didn't



Man on a Wire

help when security cameras caught Bud sneaking a beer behind a huge stack of egg crates and then knocking them all over. Bud also plays in a Willie Nelson tribute band called Half Nelson, only a couple of members are still incarcerated. Bud cusses a lot. "Bud's not a PTA Dad, he's not a soccer Dad," Costner intones.

"I'm glad they gave it a PG-13 because I wasn't going to cut one goddam out of it," Costner continued. You can get a lot of goddams and quite a few scatological euphemisms into a PG-13 flick, but you usually only get one or two F-bombs. "I wasn't going to cut 'Fuck, thank you Jesus.' There's a saving grace about Bud, that's the strength of the movie," Costner declared.

In an effort to court Bud's one and deciding vote the Republican incumbent President Boone (Kelsey Grammer) and his wry advisor (Stanley Tucci) determine that Bud, an everyman if there ever was one, leans to the left. The Republicans adopt a friendly gay marriage stance with Boone's next campaign spot. Meanwhile the Democratic challenger Donald Greenleaf (Dennis Hopper, Costner's nemesis in Waterworld) takes an anti-abortion position and decries an unguarded border situation because his manager (Nathan Lane) thinks Bud fields to the right.

One spoof commercial has Hopper walking in a schoolyard of children who subsequently each disappear in a puff of smoke: "Join me and the Democrats as we preserve all life, thus fulfilling God's intelligent design," Greenleaf states.

Asked whether anyone on the production saw parallels with the current Obama/McCain race Costner reminded the film was shot a year ago. "Nobody was calculating in the first place. If this movie could only work in election year then it'd be a failure. It has to work five years from now. For me it had the kind of emotional bottom I like."

The third installment in the Mummy franchise, The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor, opens against Swing Vote. Costner doesn't play the game of guessing opening weekend grosses. "I'd like to kick Mummy's ass but we don't stand a chance," he laughs. "That doesn't mean we're a bad movie."

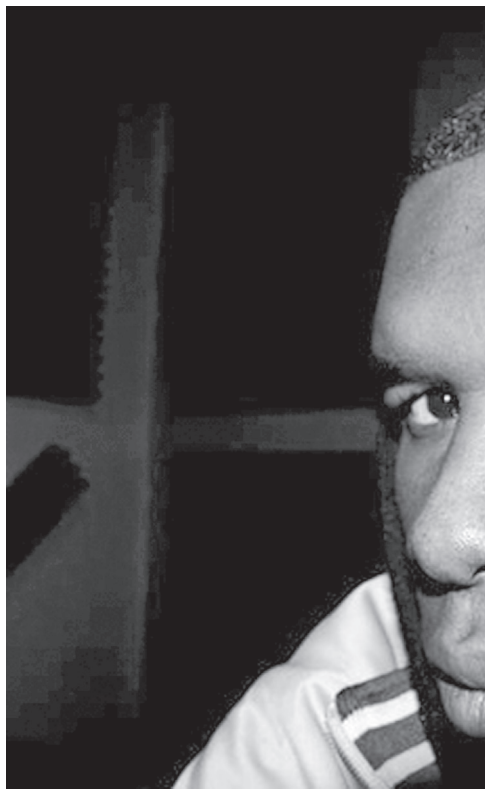
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I KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND I KNOW WHO YOU ARE TO ME

| Kwame Anderson



HERE IS WHAT I'M SICK OF. I WILL PUT THIS OUT THERE AND THE FREE PRESS MAY RECEIVE SOME ANGRY LETTERS, BUT BARACK OBAMA'S RUN FOR PRESIDENCY IS JUST ANOTHER RUN FOR PRESIDENCY. ANYONE WHO KNOWS ANYTHING ABOUT AMERICAN POLITICS KNOWS THAT THIS IS THE GAME THAT HAS TO BE PLAYED, THE FALSE HOPE, THE PONTIFICATING ON ISSUES OF RACE, THE PROCLAMATION OF CHANGE, WHATEVER.

The PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES has many people to answer to, mostly, the corporate interests that grease the pockets of all politicians. Can 'change' override capitalism in American politics? Really think about that. What has any president done to effect the impoverished class, do we talk about the poor class as much as the middle class? Examine Obama's views in the beginning of his campaign versus his present position. The "flip flop" as it has been called is an adjustment that has to be made and may or may not positively effect you. When Bill Clinton was president, when it seemed he did great things for the economy, his welfare and crime initiatives pushed through legislation that caused great harm to poor and minority people. Yes, poor and minority are two different things. Does it mean that Bill Clinton was a bad president? Can Obama do all the things that he says he is going to do AND be elected president of the entire country (racists, liberals, poor, middle class, rich, white women, white males, Latinos, African Americans, Asians, conservatives, gays, corporate america). I'm going to vote for Obama, but I am also a realist, whether the president of the United States is Black, White, Mexican, Asian, Multi-Racial, Female, Homosexual, Handicapped, whatever, they are still going to be politicians who must appease a plethora of political interests, but the idea of the president and the actual presidency are two different things, realistically. Anyway…

CONCERTS

EARLY MAN
08/06/08 | Rudyard's

When the term 'metal music' is used what image does it conjure in your mind? Well, I'm sure Early Man is not concerned with that, but what they are concerned with is presenting metal in the way they do best. Pretty good if you ask me. Early Man remind me of Black Sabbath. Sabbath is one of the, if not the, primary things one can look to in order to understand metal. I would say that says great things about Early Man. A few years ago there was this resurgence in all things metal, although many would argue it had gone nowhere. It was just that indie kids needed something new to consume, plagiarize, and discard. Well, now that has sort of passed, but Early Man is every bit as great as they were then. Go and rock, Satan beckons you.

XIU XIU w/ EVANGELISTA
08/21/08 | Orange Show

Some music is made to get into your system. Xiu Xiu and Evangelista are two bands that make music that demands reaction, and that demands more of you than dancing or socializing. They touch a place in the psyche that is reserved for things that are not usually part of the public forum. However, I feel the same way about The Isley Brothers.

Xiu Xiu's wonderful album "Women As Lovers" is a display of the gentle and the chaotic combining to form the beautiful. It encapsulates the many eccentricities of emotions and warps them into an entirely new portrait. Evnageslista's album

"Hello, Voyager" is a relative in this family of thought. Beautiful and damaged, gentle in points, jarring at others, it is operatic. The mixture of these two bands in a live setting will be nothing short of amazing. So, yes, you REALLY should go.

NAS w/ JAY ELECTRONICA, TALiB KWELI, and DJ GREEN LANTERN
08/25/08 | Warehouse Live

There are many reasons to go this show however the main two, for me, would be Jay Electronica. While you may or may not know about dude, he is the truth and a bag of chips. Electronica makes progressive hip hop that acknowledges every aspect of hip hop, but also is way beyond the box that is "real" hip hop. There is always a light that appears in the darkness of popular music, and Jay Electronica is that light. Nas is Nas, and Talib Kweli is an institution, but please do not sleep on JAY ELECTRONICA!!!

ALBUMS

BLACK TAJ
Beyonder (Amish)



Red Alert
08/23 | Numbers



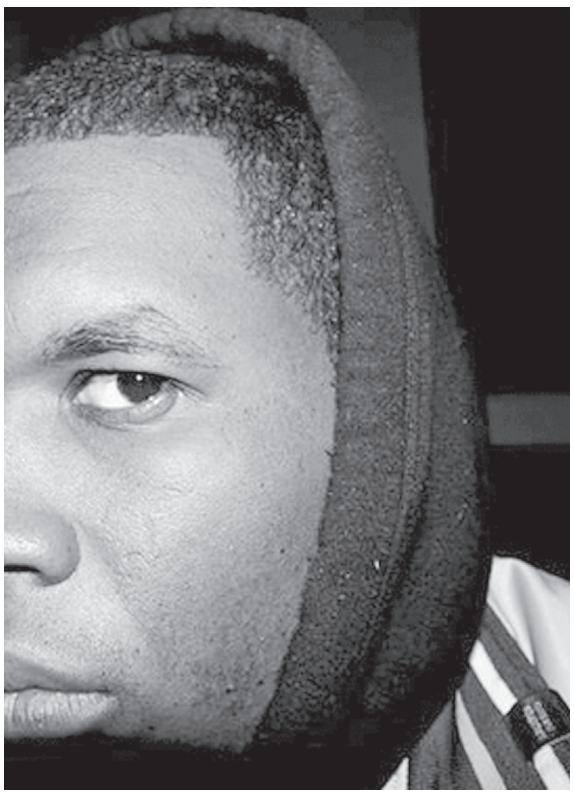
Memphis Pencils
08/12 | Notsuoh



Soilent Green
08/10 | Warehouse Live



The Gougers
08/16 | Mucky Duck



JAY ELECTRONICA W/ NAS, TALIB KWELI & DJ GREEN LANTERN
08/25/08 | Warehouse Live

Black Taj produces classic guitar rock. When you think of rock music, you think of the guitar, and whether it be Hendrix or whether it be Polvo, the most essential ingredient in the rock stew is the guitar, and here it is served as an extremely tasty dish. "Fresh Air Traverse" is as if Cream and Thin Lizzy met in a mystery scenario and tried to reinterpret Clapton. "Damascus" nods to psychedia while still remaining as rocking as the marijuana smoke that lifts into the air decorating a Jimmy Page chord progression. As style trumps substance in most music today, Black Taj is a reminder as to why one loves rock, and why the guitar is a sword that slays as it emancipates. Guitar, bass, and drums, yes, it's that simple.

MILES BENJAMIN
ANTHONY ROBINSON
Miles Benjamin
Anthony Robinson (Say Hey)

Miles Benjamin Anthony Robinson is of the Syd Barret Ian Curtis school of rock. His life contains the horror and beauty that bleeds into his music. You've probably heard stories of drug addiction and homelessness, and I can mention his biography to help to explain his sound, but all of the things I could tell you decorate his music. The album features members of Grizzly Bear and TV On The Radio, but that is only a namedropping bio thing, the star of the album is Miles Benjamin. 'The Ongoing Debate Concerning Present Vs. Future" is the street, the trash, the wind, the desperation. In "Written Over" he exclaims "You can pick but you can't peel away" and this is probably the statement that best describes the sound of the songs, splendor and misery while still joyous. The sun shines through, even after the worst storm, and for however weathered and worn Miles Benjamin's voice and music sounds, it's a journey that's well worth the price of admission.

FPH



The McKenzies
08/04 | Boondock's



Yndi Halda
08/11 | The Mink



IT'S ALL ABOUT THE LOCALS, YE HEAR

We Ain't Messing Around in H-Town

| Brigitte Zabak



AMERICAN SHARKS
at a house party
(like the movie)

If you happen to be a fan boy (or girl) of the indie music scene and manage to get out and about every once in awhile, you have probably encountered a conversation or twelve about the music scene – or lack thereof- in Houston.

I can't count the number of times I've been at a show or on the patio at Rudyard's and either started or got sucked into an intense – sometimes tipsy – discussion about why my favorite bands hate Houston and are once again skipping over our beloved town in lieu of playing in Austin or *gasp* Dallas.

Another aspect of this beating-a-dead-horse debate also centers on the issue of local music. More specifically, the debate sometimes involves some variation on the question of whether Houston has the kind of local music scene that rivals other large cities. Anyone who faithfully reads our humble little paper probably already knows the answer to this question. But, for the rest of you slackers, I am going to give you the lowdown on some of the best local talent Houston has to offer.

When I was a teenager, so many years ago, there were a handful of local bands I adored (e.g. Bee Stung Lips, The Last Wish, Clouded). Sadly, these bands have long since parted, but the memories of hanging out at places like Urban Art Bar and Zelda's, ogling my favorite local band of the month, still remain. And though most of the places I frequented as a kid are gone, my appreciation for local bands has only grown deeper over the years. Despite what some might believe, Houston's local music scene is thriving…you just need to get off your ass and see for yourself.

The month starts strong with the much anticipated CD release for **Sharks & Sailors**. These guys (and girl) have been playing music in this town for a lot of years. Their first EP was released back in 2006 and we (and by we, I mean I) have been waiting with baited breath for a new recording. Their sound has changed a bit over time. The songs are still heavy and intense, but there is now a sort of ambient softness to some of the tunes that makes the music all that much more interesting to hear. Sharks & Sailors will be pimping out their new record over at Walter's on August 1. **The Jonx and Ume** will also be performing.

One really great and inexpensive way to check out some of the local bands that you haven't seen is by checking out either the Secret Saturday Shows over at Shady Tavern in the Heights or Recession Thursdays over at Numbers. The SSS shows are every Saturday no matter what the weather and are…free! Yes, you read that correctly, free. Shows take place from 2 to 5 pm and will feature three to four local acts. This is the ideal way to get out and support the local scene, hang out with some cool people and see some darn good music. August 2-3 will be the SSS Festival featuring some of Houston's finest like **The Tontons**, **Basses Loaded**, **The Monocles**, **Hearts of Animals**, **The Wiggins**, and **Giant Princess**. The festival will start at noon on both Saturday and Sunday and will collectively feature over 30 local acts. The cost is minimal with a small cover charge of $3 for one day or $5 bucks for the weekend. This is an all ages show, so bring the family out and take advantage of this unique event.

August must be *the* month for record releases because there are a handful of local albums set to come out. **Balaclavas** crept quietly onto the scene just a couple of years ago and has been creating a post-punk rock sound that is remarkably focused and has become more robust with age. The music grabs a hold of your insides and forces you to pay attention. It might be hard to take in all at once – but don't fret – it doesn't take long for the music to make sense…well, sort of make sense. Just accept every plunk of the guitar and every rumble of the drum for what it is and you'll be fine. **Balaclavas** is having their LP release on August 7 at Walter's alongside **The Wiggins** and **Ariel Pink's Haunted Graffiti**.

If that isn't enough to wet your local whistle, **Arthur Yoria** will be playing a couple of shows with other local favorites like **Spain Colored Orange** at the Mink on August 1 and at Rudyard's with **Pale and Glasnost** August 16. Houston rock stars **American Sharks** are sharing the stage with **The Monocles** and DC punk band **The Points** on August 7 at Rudyard's. There is also the **Leave Your Genre At The Door** event over at Fitzgerald's on August 1. For just 10 dollars, you get a night's worth of local flavor with performers such as **Kam**, **Satin Hooks**, **The Tontons**, **Perseph 1 & Andacc** and **The Television Skies**.

In a city as big as Houston it can be hard to feel connected to anything. Supporting local music is an economical and creative way to get to know your city a little better. From booking companies to musicians, there are a lot of people dedicating their time and resources to bring quality music to town. Take a little time and check some of it out – you won't be sorry you did.

FPH

SONS OF BITCHES

Q and A with Lisa's Sons



LISA'S SONS

WHAT INSPIRES YOUR SLICKLY PROGRAMMED BEATS AND WHAT DOES THE PROCESS CONSIST OF??

I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED POP MUSIC MORE THAN PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING IN LIFE.

SO IT IS NOT HARD TO RIP OFF, steal from, be inspired by, all of the music that I listen to all day, everyday. It really just consists of me sitting in my room at a laptop with headphones on for hours and hours. Just like Dr. Dre taking time to perfect a beat.

I will fuck you? Yes or no?
Our first date was pretty bad, and you even made me pay for my own ticket to see Meet Dave. I doubt it.

In your opinion, who is pushing the musical envelope in Houston?
To be honest I don't really go to shows other than the ones we play, and very rarely bands that I just love. I would have to say personally Young Mammals are my favorite Houston band. I don't think that they are really pushing the envelope, but they are amazing all the same.

Local artist and celeb Jacob Calle dances onstage during your shows in costume. Do you really want to be associated with such trash? I heard he punches babies?
Jordan and I really do not want anything to do with that guy at all. He pretty much just shows up and does his own thing. All Jordan and I want is to make people feel good, and dance when we play live. Sometimes it takes an idiot in a bear suit to make that happen. People these days!

Do either of you have health insurance? Allergic to any medications?
I don't, and I am not. Jordan most likely does, and can't be around cats without bitching for seven hours.

What's next for Lisa's Sons? More of the same or are you getting ready to bring a massive paradigm shift in human consciousness with a new sound and songs that force humankind to touch the face of God?
Even though we just released our first full length two weeks ago, we are working the second one already. I would say that it is a step forward music wise, and in the production sense.

God already posted on his blog that it's his favorite record of 2009. He has the advance copy.

Any last statements you would like to make to our readership before I lather you down with peanut oil>?
Buy our album so Jordan and I can pay our bills, and so we can stop eating out of the dumpster.

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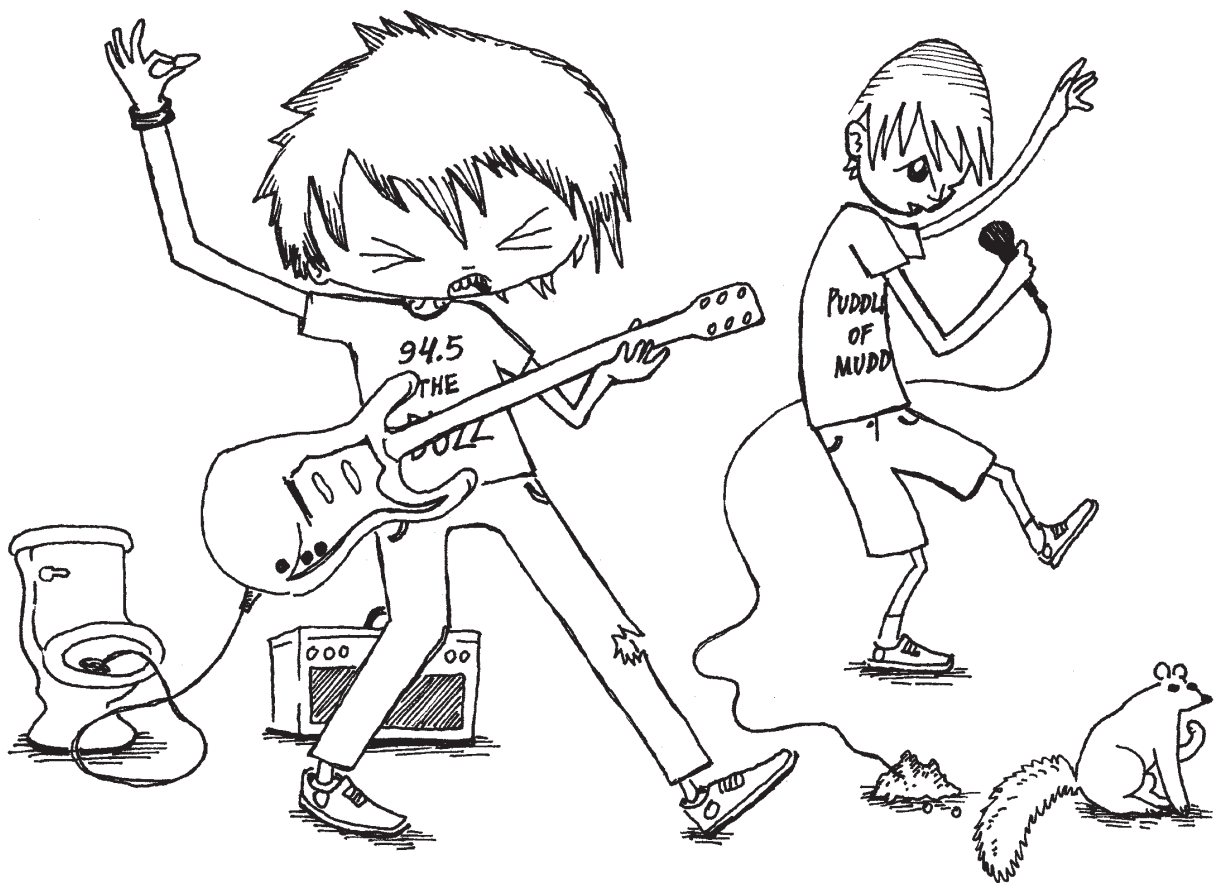


WHAT IS A SONG?

Conversations, not conclusions

| Omar Afra | Tim Dorsey

(I am not an asshole. This is not a thesis, just a rant. Take it for what it is.)



Men profess to be lovers of music, but for the most part they give no evidence in their opinions and lives that they have heard it.

— Henry David Thoreau

WHAT IS A SONG? Sounds like such a simple question? You may say there is not a simple answer. What is simple is the fact that what constitutes a song has really been lost. There has been much discussion in Houston lately pertaining to the music scene and what folks can really do to make it better and convince people to go to more shows. What better solution than to write stellar songs?

Well, to do this people need to know what really makes a song. Therein lies the tricky part. A song is more easily recognized than defined. To understand this, you need to erase all of the baggage that contemporary culture attaches to the word song. Forget about singer-songwriters. Forget about top 40. Most importantly, forget about 'structures' like verse/chorus/verse/chorus/bridge/chorus. Then what is a song? I am not sure I can tell you but I am very sure I can tell what is not a song. A song is not a collection of 'riffs' in the same key. A song is not a melody smashed on top of musical masturbators rocking out. A song is not a catchy hook with unfortunate verses crowded around it.

Fact of the matter is that many critically acclaimed bands, even local heroes, have everything it takes to be a great band except for the elusive song. Bands spend decades honing their chops, developing their own sound, deciding on the coolest pair shoes, and playing before thousands of people. Many a great local band here in Houston make it just short of the mountaintop but fall short because they have no songs. Now a 'piece of music' can be great and popular yet not be a song. Huh? Ya see, there are great bands out there with no songs. Shitty bands write great songs. There are also terrible pieces of music that are indeed songs as well. Conversely, many great bands do not write songs.

Know what I am saying? Neither do I.

Now, you may be saying to yourself that experimental and fringe music takes the blame here. Not at all. This is not a genre specific argument. Band of all breeds differ on this one critical detail. For lack of a better example take Jimi Hendrix for instance. There were legions of hyper-talented guitar players during hat era that get not an iota of the same credit as Jimi does yet were comparable guitar players. Why did he get the kudos for revolutionizing the instrument? Simply said, because he put his wondrous playing in the context of great songs. Another example would be the world of indie rock.

With countless new bands born and dying every 15 minutes, why are only a handful remembered despite us living in an age where recording, producing, and delivering music has become so easy thanks to technology. Again, songs. So many of these bands are so focused on peripheral factors like aesthetic, soundscape, identity, and novelty that they lack a vehicle to deliver these things.

As I see it, counter-culture music was once leaning more towards literature and has veered to lean way too far towards entertainment. Not just that, but learning music has become frowned upon by the masses. Which brings me to my sad yet sobering hypothesis. We are entering an era where our brightest days are behind us just as literature was in Europe shortly after the apex of Shakespeare or Star Wars after Jedi. Yeah, there is more to come but it won't be is good as it's predecessors. Where are the Stevie Wonders of our generation? The Ramones? The Willie Nelsons?

Now, I am sure I sound like a cantankerous old man and I have to mention that amazing songs are being written everyday around the world d and here in Houston. Local artists like Fat Tony, The McKenzies, Craig Kinsey, Satin Hooks, and countless others all push the song-peddling envelope. Nonetheless, the problem of putting songwriting on the backburner persists. Do I have any solutions? Shit no. But I can make a few suggestions to the many musicians that complain to me of the status of their band, scene, or city? Do yourself a favor and study music, listen to the greats, and dig deep in your soul and internalize what a song means to you. Who knows, you just may prove me wrong. I actually need that. I pray to Allah you do so.

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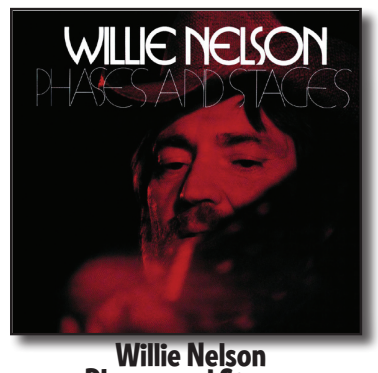
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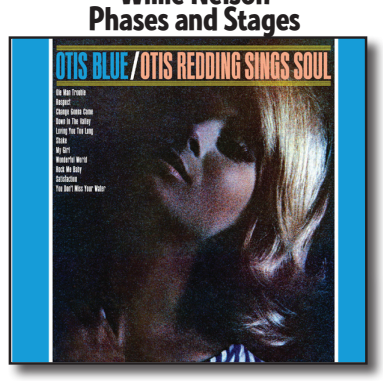
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COME SEE MY DEAD PERSON

| David A. Cobb



LOCAL BAND COME SEE MY DEAD PERSON SHATTERS ANY PRECONCEIVED NOTION OF FOLK MUSIC AND HOW PEOPLE MAY THINK IT SHOULD BE PLAYED. SOME OF THE BAND MEMBERS LOOK MORE SUITED TO METAL THAN FOLK BUT MATT MEJIA SAYS THAT TO THEM, IT ISN'T ABOUT IMAGE. "IT IS ABOUT THE MUSIC AND THE MUSIC SPEAKS FOR ITSELF."

THE BAND'S MUSIC IS BEST DESCRIBED AS A MELTING POT OF MUSIC. "Just like America," Mejia jokes. "It is a mix of all musical genres and all cultures done in our way."

Brothers Matthew and Michael Mejia trade off on vocals and each plays the electric or acoustic guitar. Along with banjo player Brian Green, bassist Ray Herod, Martin Johanson on mandolin, guitarist Brice Knight, drummer Sean Martinez, and violinist Dave Thomas, the group takes command of the stage and forces listeners to attention with their unique blend of folk rock.

The band got its start in small town Texas, each member playing in different bands over the years. "About 10 years later we came together to jam and create something new," Mejia says.

Come See My Dead Person has been playing in Houston and around the state and Mejia says they hope to expand their horizons when the time is right. "Eventually we would love to tour outside of Texas, but it isn't a realistic goal for us at the moment. I think it is safe to say that some day we will be going beyond the Lone Star State's borders."

Mejia says that the band's favorite thing about performing live is unequivocally the crowd's reaction. "It is amazing to see the energy flowing from the crowd to the stage all because of something we created...So far we barely have a foot in Houston's door, no… more like a toe. But, in the crowds that have seen us, we have seen people dancing the two-step, an Irish jig, and moshing all at the same show."

As is evident in their live set, when it comes to songwriting the band relies on collaboration. "Every song is created differently and there is no one process we use for making one," Mejia says. "Some are deliberate and some are accidental. Generally one or two of us come up with a concept and then everyone contributes to create the finished product."

The group is currently preparing for the release of their debut and continues to work on songs for a second release. "Beyond that you will just have to Come See My Dead Person to find out," he says.

Come See My Dead Person can be found online at www.myspace.com/comeseemydeadperson2.

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SHARKS AND SAILORS

| Ramon Medina | John Van



SHARKS & SAILORS
August 1st at Walters
with Ume, and the Jonx

On stage, Mike Rollin releases a soft cascade of notes that shimmer from his guitar. Unexpectedly, the notes segue into a blast of syncopated chords that churn an ugly black bile. Melissa Lonchambon's bass meets his guitar with a harmonic, perhaps a fraction of a frequency off, and the dissonant oscillations discharge fury into the air like St. Elmo's Fire demanding everyone's attention.

Suddenly, at the front of the stage, a tide of metal dudes has rolled in - a sweaty dark clothed wave of men called forth by the riptide of Phil Woodward's pounding drums and the dissonant amplified strings. Fists are clenched - thrusting the Dio devil sign. The crowd is screaming at the top of their lungs while their veins burst from their necks from the force of their voices. The song being played is instrumental but that doesn't stop one blonde haired kid from reaching up with an arm dripping in the slick salty humidity of the atmosphere. He grabs the microphone on the stage and emits a guttural growl that would summon Cthulu. The black gang, though smiling, keeps to the task at hand and feeds the boilers through to the end of "Rickshaw" where they are met with wild cheers from over the gunnel of the stage.

Sharks and Sailors may, from this description of a recent show at Rudyard's, sound like the most metal of metal bands - the darkest of the dark things to rise from the depths – but that would be misleading. The band is actually one of the most odd and original constructs to arise from Houston's music scene - combining elements of metal, indie rock, and prog into a sophisticated machine like no other. Beyond the brutal pounding described above, their new album, Builds Brand New, employs smooth melodic pop elements (Thrill), jarring time signatures (Fix Your Radar), and lovely psychedelic shoegaze (Condor).

The band went for a quartet (with Allen Hendrix) to a trio during the making of the new album. When I ask them what differences they experienced, I'm met with a wry "Fewer strings!"

"There is also less volume," says Phil. "We've already proven we can play louder than a 747. With a three-piece there is more space and we pay more attention to the vocals."

Melissa, whose vocals are one of the wow elements of the album, says, "I'd never sung before, so singing was odd for me particularly because I'm not a very loud person to begin with but, when I go to a show, I want to hear people belt it out."

That's pretty typical of the band that never seems to want to take the easy route. "We push each other hard," says Mike. "There are tapes of us tossing Fs at each other."

Melissa explains the dynamic, "What happens is we hit this friction point where 98% of a song is written then we spew venom."

"That just comes from the excitement and passion of almost having it done," says Mike. "'Rickshaw' was a song I wrote on this shitty Peavy Rage amp. It never had a pretty quality to it. While writing it, Phil and I got into an epic argument and Melissa got it all on video tape."

As if on cue, Phil burst out a re-enactment, "Fucking help me here!!!"

"That's not my responsibility!!" shouts back Mike.

"Just Point!" laughs Phil.

"What the fuck is that pointing thing?!!!" retorts Mike

"Just Fucking Point!" screams Phil.

After some composure is restored, I explain how I'm always surprised that despite their lack of theatrics people always give them their full attention. Mike attributes that partly to how their shows are structured. "It's a drag when bands play then stop to tune or ask for a beer; all the momentum is lost. I never take the audience for granted or want to waste their time. That's why we'll have samples going off between the songs - to keep it seamless."

I suggest that odd time signatures are normally a turn-off for non-musicians but Mike counters, "We were just listening to 'Master of Puppets' and it's in 15 but you don't really notice it because it's done so well."

"We make odd grooves but we don't want to shove it in people's faces." explains Phil, "I'll use a bass drum pattern against a guitar's odd time signature where my beat smoothes it out. I can geek out on stuff like that but we're not forcing it - that just comes naturally."

While Phil elucidates on the matter, I point to two odd music notations on the dry erase board. "What does this mean?" I ask.

"Oh, that? See, there are two kinds of songs." says Mike.

"Trucker," explains Phil, "that's a song that keeps your head bobbin' - where you're driving 80 in the middle of downtown with your rig and nothin' is stopping you! And Alabama? That's a song where you can substitute the lyrics with the word Alabama!"

Suddenly, the band that I previously described as sophisticated is laughing and shouting "AL-U-BAH-MUH!" at the top of their lungs.

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Sharks and Sailors will celebrate the release of their newest album Builds Brand New at Walters with Ume and the Jonx on August 1st. The album will be available for digital download and as a limited edition CD.

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| Tyler Barber



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I'm at E3, at a demo of Borderlands and BioShock, when 2K rep comes over, asking if I want a demo of Sid Meirer's Civilization Revolution.

"NO THANKS," I RESPOND. "I have a meeting in 15 minutes, and I don't want to be late."

"It only takes 15 minutes," the rep quipped.

"Thanks, but I gotta get going," I said, thinking myself: "Yea, like I'm going to miss my hands-on with Fallout 3 to see the absolute train-wreck of Civilization's PC exodus to home consoles."

And my pessimistic attitude stood firm, until I got home from E3 where a review copy of CivRev was waiting for me. I felt a little bad for declining the demo at E3, so the first night I got home (even though I had my fill of gaming) I popped the disc into my Xbox 360, and gave it a try. Next thing I know it's 4 a.m., and I've just won my first campaign. CivRev is addictive in the just-one-more-turn kinda way. Each new turn meant I would have another infantry unit to defend my home base, that I'd be one more turn closer to finishing my Nuclear research. Would a great leader abandon their civilization at a time like this? Hell no.

The turn-based system is the sole reason CivRev works so well on consoles. It plays more like a board game where each side takes its turn (think: Risk, Monopoly) than the PC counterpart which plays without any turns whatsoever. It's because of this turn-based system too, that every single bit of gameplay that's in the Xbox 360/PS3 version also makes it in the Nintendo DS version. And with that, developer Firaxis Games has struck gold with a winning translation of a revered PC strategy game to the home and portable consoles.

You won't find the immense depth of the PC version, but I wouldn't call CivRev shallow either. There are the 16 civilizations to choose from, and you can still win a campaign through means other than the total annihilation of your enemies. Technological, financial, and cultural domination are all other paths to victory, but a main complaint I have with the game is that it doesn't give the player enough cues of how to win with these other ways. And, it's much easier to just farm out the most military units and win with military might.

When you are engaged in combat, there's this great one-to-one/dice-roll mechanic. Your troop's stats will factor into the dice-roll aspect of combat, but there's also this one-to-one system where the actual animation of your troops deal damage. If your troops move in right away, they'll gain an advantage on the offensive, but if they back-up, they'll be handicapped. Likewise, if your troops are on a hill, or defending a home base, they'll gain defensive bonuses. And even the map and characters interact. If one of your archers gets struck by a warrior unit near a mountain or building, he'll fly backward and actually bounce off of the structures.

There's also much less micromanaging. Your villagers collect resources near your home without having to be directed to do so. They'll automatically balance the type of resources they collect, but you also have the options to tell certain villages to mine more technology, gold, or food.

Another element that was designed specifically for the console versions is the size of the maps. And while I don't feel that they need to be bigger, it is a little concerning that you'll always be surrounded by other civilizations competing for the same resources. And, things get claustrophobic quickly if you don't make alliances, or dominate a neighboring civilization early. But at the same time, the size of the maps, or lack of, is also a factor that helps speed up the game -- you can complete a campaign in about three hours, whereas some campaigns on the PC can last upwards of eight to ten hours.

Given that real-time-strategy games usually suffer when brought to consoles, CivRev is able to side-step the traps of the PC translation. Other console RTS games suffer from the pacing and controls, the size of the characters and maps, but developer Firaxis Games turns the disadvantages of the hardware into advantages, and paves the way for the console RTS' revolution.

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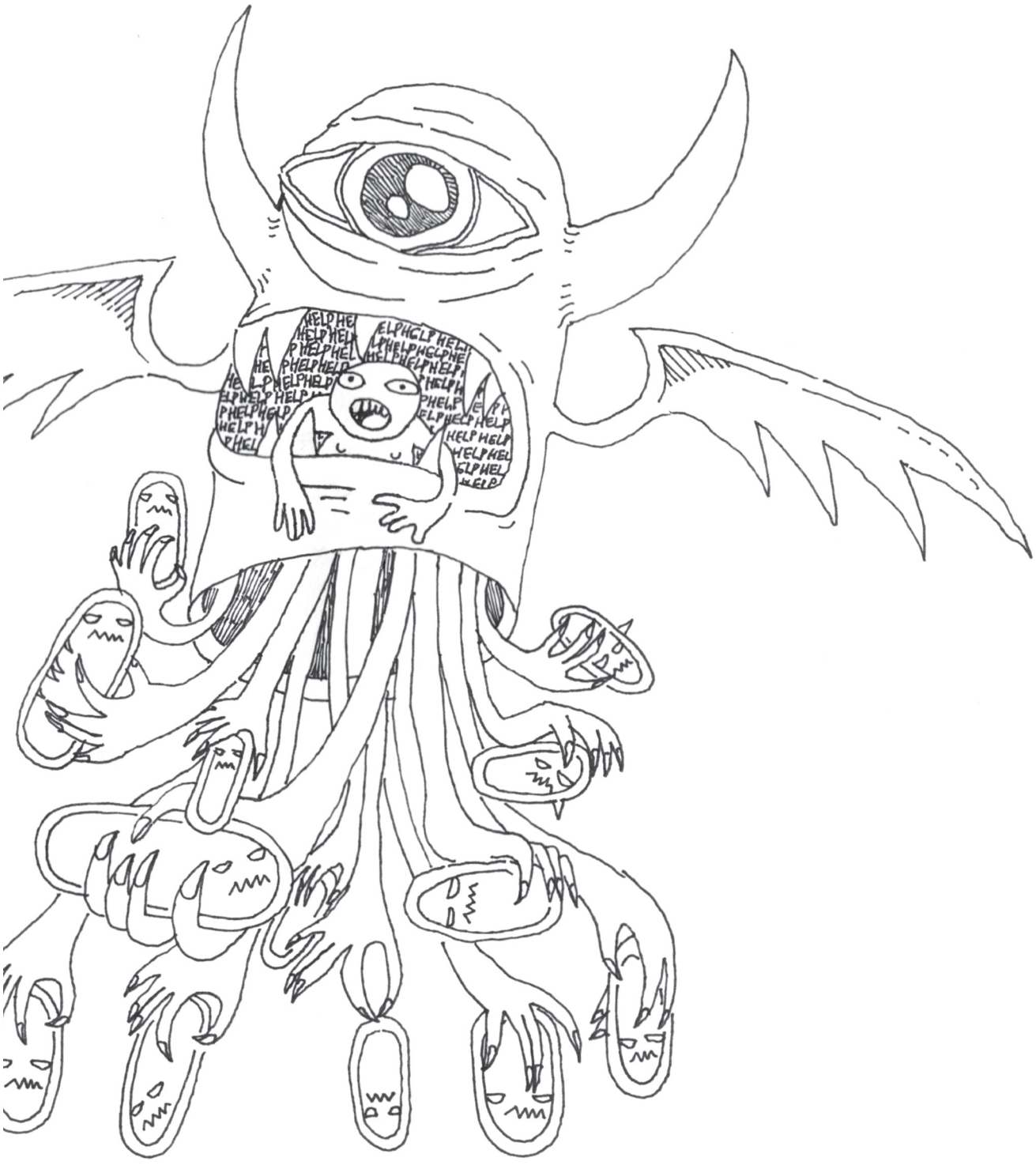
| Anonymouse | Tim Dorsey & Shelby Hohl

"WELL, DOCTOR, I GOT INTO A CAR ACCIDENT, HURT MY BACK, AND CAN'T SLEEP AT NIGHT," I TOLD THE CROOKED DOC AS CONFIDENTLY AS POSSIBLE. WE BOTH KNEW THAT WAS BULLSHIT. HE MUMBLES UNDER HIS BREATH AND WRITES ME A PRESCRIPTION, LICKETY-SPLIT.

THAT'S IT?" I ASKED MYSELF. So there I had it: A prescription in hand for 150 Lorcets, 100 Xanax, and 100 Soma. There are dozens of these crooked 'Pain Management Clinics' here in Houston and across the nation that conveniently facilitate legions of prescription opiate addictions.

I began experimenting with Vicodin pills in high school. Man, those things made me feel so good. They helped me shove everything else to the side and made me feel like what I was doing was worthwhile. However, back then, they were really hard to come by. That was until I met Brian. He was giving them to me at a cheap price, or so I thought, as I indiscriminately took what I could. It did not seem like anything bad. I mean, it was just a pill. Next thing I know, I am taking ten to twelve a day.

After growing tired of paying street value, I decided to ask Brian how he was getting them so cheap and how I could flip a few to make some money back. That's when he introduced me to the glamorous world of Pain Management Clinics. Houston is bursting with these crooked doctors that make great livelihoods on others' misery. He took me to an innocuous building off of Beltway 8 at West Bellfort. I had no idea what I was getting into. You enter what seems like an ordinary doctor's office yet it is teeming with armed security. You fill out your entry form as you watch junkies rushing to fill theirs out to get their precious goods. Now, the waiting room is packed full of hungry fiends exchanging information about better deals on their drugs and who they know that can help you out. People are there to get everything from Lean (Codeine cough syrup), Vicodins, Lorcets, Percocets, etc. But in the end, it's all the same shit. Now, these places are so packed that they call patients into the doctor's office in groups of ten. To give a veneer of legitimacy, they then scuttle patients momentarily into individual rooms. Even the nurses are shady. After a 45 second 'discussion' with the 'doctor', you are raced out of the door with the quickness in which you came in. The visit costs 90 dollars. Funny thing is that there are junkies outside the door propositioning you to buy a few from you. No way. Why would I let you in on my hard earned harvest? Then comes the doozy. The back of the prescription has a list of the shady pharmacies that will fill these out and give you the opiates. These are the kind of pharmacies with burglar bars. See, your standard Walgreens or CVS won't touch these illicit prescriptions. So you are forced to make your way to 'mom and pop' pharmacies that are used to filling these orders as much as they get robbed. After handing over my 140 dollars, they doled me out my precious 300 pills. I remember sitting in my car staring at this huge, beautiful bottle thinking, " I am set." I made plans around these



bottles. I had a few weeks of peace of mind. Opiate addicts always feel like their running out though. Nevertheless, the great thing was that I had legit bottles with my name on it. That means if I got pulled over, a cop couldn't stick me with the felony per pill I was carrying. I returned to this place a handful of times. Unfortunately, at the time, patients were only allowed to enter this place once a month. Bummer.

For at least 18 months, I was steady taking nearly a dozen a day and feeling diminishing returns on the effects. One day, at my retail job in the mall, I ran out of pills and had one of the worst withdrawal episodes of my life. Waking up feeling like death, I got ready for work with cold sweats. I shit my pants on the way to work. Violently feeling the effects of no opiates, I lied down on the floor behind the cash register hoping no customers would enter the store. You see, opiate junkies get body pains, visceral stomach pains from their nerve endings desiring the drug. It's like having the flu on steroids. I remember lying in bed punching the wall and being angry with God. I soon became tired of this life and found the fortitude to at least try to get off the opiates. I went through several unsuccessful attempts and worked my way back onto the drug. My life at the time was one big plane crash and Vicodin was my parachute. I struggled back and forth like this for months until I had the guts to look inward and see my desperation. I was no longer myself. I was enslaved to getting these pills. After many physical struggles, lots of soul searching and a few spiritual LSD trips, I have managed to stay away from the addiction for some time now. However, if you met the old me and you had a few 'beans' in your pocket right now, I would start to sweat. I would be oblivious to anything else. I just might think about breaking your neck and hiding you behind a building.

! **+**

- Two million Americans use prescription opioid painkillers every year
- Abuse of prescription painkillers has overtaken that of cocaine and marijuana.
- About 9% of the U.S. population has used pain relievers illegally in their lifetime (according to the 2002 NHSDA--National Household Survey on Drug Abuse).
- An estimated 1.6 million Americans used prescription-type pain relievers non-medically for the first time in 1998.
- Among youths age 12-17, the incident rate increased from 6.3 to 32.4 per 1,000 new users from 1990 to 1998.
- Young adults age 18-25 increased in first use from 7.7 to 20.3 per 1,000 new users between 1990 and 1998.
- Prescription Opiate abuse is more prevalent than Heroin
- Source: SAMHSA U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

THIS DUDE THINKS HE'S JESUS

Benny Hinn visits Houston, Free Press pays Benny Hinn a visit

| Mills-McCoin | Tim Dorsey



I was practicing my short game in Omar's front yard when he walked out to complain about the noise. Tim was drawing pictures and keeping bar from his lawn chair situated next to the record player but safely behind the tee box. He was serving Bloody Mary's on this particular Saturday morning in July.

I chipped another ball.

OMAR GRABBED MY NINE IRON WITH ANGER and expletives; and asked that I no longer hit golf balls at his bay window. I grabbed his shoulder and said, "Hey, man... this dude thinks he's Jesus."

Omar was stunned, so Tim threw a paper airplane from behind the bar and hit him square in the belly. He unfolded the airplane and found a ticket to Benny Hinn's Holy Spirit Miracle Service. He looked up at me with the joy of a boy trippin' on Christmas. Tim cued up the record player to Paul Simon's "Me and Julio Down by the School Yard" and thoughts of good old-fashioned trouble poured over Omar's brain.

We ran around the yard like children until the song ended; then jumped in the car and headed to Rudyard's to brief over beer and burgers. Omar was familiar with this crazy bastard, but I had done some "research" and felt the need to share. So I began to regale the mythology of Benny Hinn.

Toufik Benedictus "Benny" Hinn is a smarmy mad man that lays claim to special powers of healing given to him by God (specifically, the one from the Bible). He moved to Orlando and founded his first church in 1983, the Orlando Christian Center. That's right, this jackass opened shop on Walt Disney's turf. Normally, the idea of someone trying to compete against Walt Disney in a contest of "who's got a bigger imagination" seems silly and predictable. But no. No. Nope.

But back to Benny and his jet. The alarming success of his "healing services" has allowed Benny to relocate to Southern California's Orange County with his family and television show, which is called "This Is Your Day." The name of the show never changes. It's always YOUR day.

Benny Hinn lives lavishly in his ten million dollar home and flies around to his various "miracle crusades" on his jet (I wasn't just making a pun earlier- he actually has a jet that costs nearly $200,000 a month to operate). And he doesn't just go to the local pentecostal church downtown. No. No way. There's no money in that. This dude fills stadiums with people- that either believe he is actually a circus freak with magical powers or skeptics, like me. And on this day, Benny's Travelling Bullshit Show was at the Toyota Center.

We parked downtown two hours before the show started and left Tim sitting on the hood of the car- drawing, of course (he was our getaway driver if it came to that). We walked into the Toyota Center and Omar's head began to change colors as he tried to take in all the information from his new environment at once like a child.

As expected, it was crowded; and it didn't take long for me to get separated from Omar. I knew he would show up later though, so I wasn't worried. I continued walking about by myself trying my best not to participate in the madness but failing beautifully. The scene was surreal. It was a circus. When was the last time you went to church and the concession stands were open? Popcorn, peanuts, hot dogs, nachos- the usual suspects,



but draft beer was not available. I was heart broken. Sorta. Alcohol and miracles do seem to go hand in hand though.

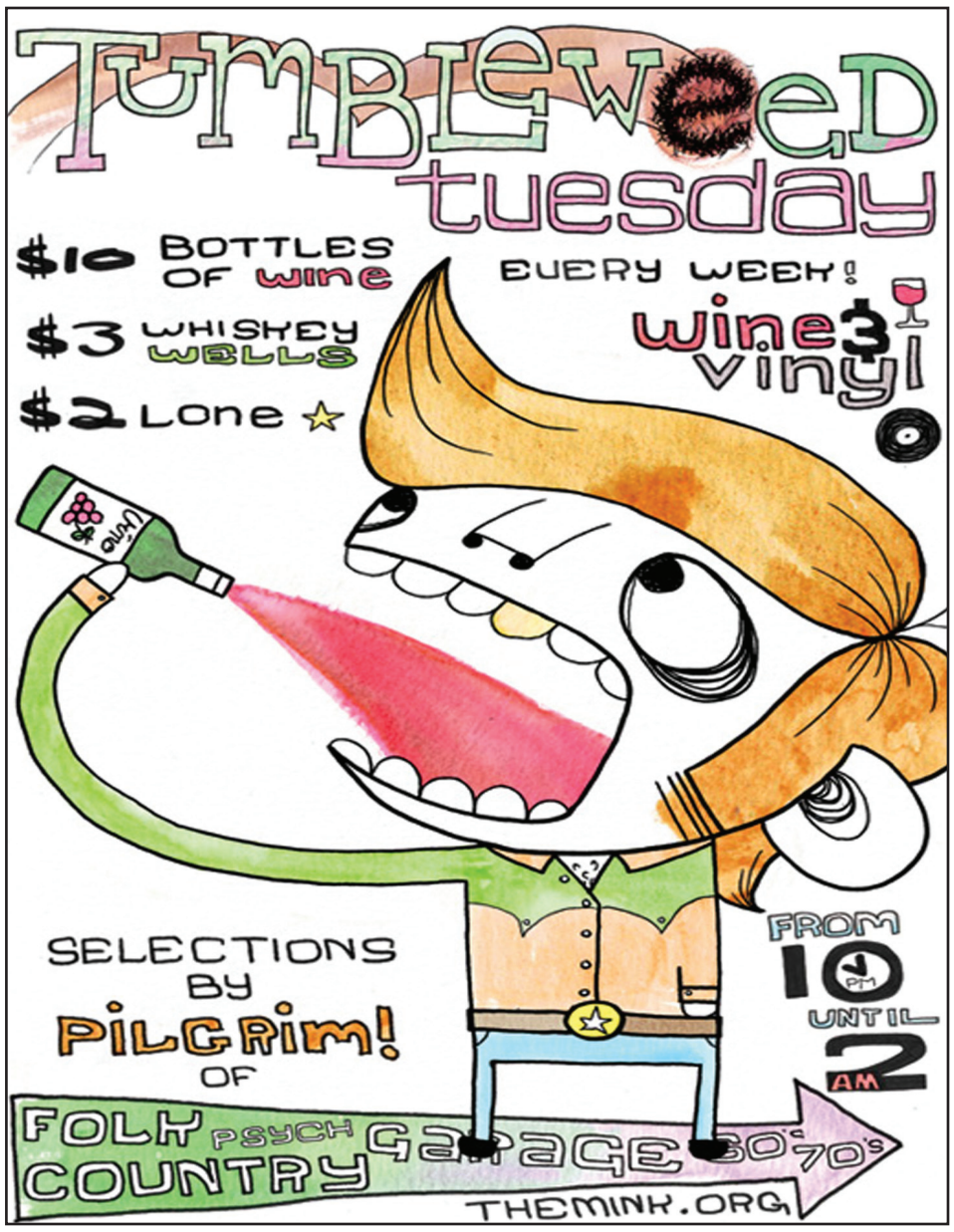
There was a table near the entrance where old women with blue hair were loudly selling books (no Bibles though) and other merchandise used to brainwash all of humanity. Amongst the propaganda was a DVD which assured me that if I believed in God (again, specifically the one from the Bible) and did whatever the DVD commanded me to- then my FINANCIAL CRISIS WOULD GO AWAY. I knew then that I was dealing with liars. Familiar foes of mine. And sometimes not foes at all.

In any case, I left the table and went to look for a seat before any of the old ladies could trap me with the magic they were hiding in their hair. I found a spot halfway up, between a middle aged black woman who was already weeping and a middle aged Mexican woman sitting with her children who were eating cotton candy. I felt very alone.

The air smelled like a thousand different perfumes battling it out to see which one can remind me of church the most.

The service began with songs being sung by a patchwork choir-for-hire (Benny Hinn doesn't have his own choir because that would require him to pay people money- so he works the sympathy gig and gets the voices for free from different churches around whatever town he's flown to on his jet). All of a sudden, Benny Hinn appeared in front of the pulpit on the stage. I had no idea what was going on until I saw him. I didn't understand the mechanics of his show... until I saw him. He was clad head to toe in white- like a klansman almost. He sported tannish ostrich skin dress slippers with his white cruise director suit. I won't lie, he looked godly. On his left was the music and on his right was a bullpen of pastors and other minions dressed in dark suits. Behind Benny was the choir. Earlier, when I said it was a circus- it got circus-ier.

The first act was an eleven year old girl that Benny called out of the audience to the stage. She looked like Rudy from The Cosby Show. Rudy proceeded to sing a song like a miniature Whitney Houston strung out on electric cocaine. I will concede- it was pretty miraculous.







The next act was a heart-warming lesson from Benny on how to dodge the IRS. He actually talked about it. I was shocked. With his forked tongue, Benny said that all inquiries into his ministry had been concluded and he's cleared to continue stealing people's money.

The third act was a music/salvation combo. The music was wondrous and probably scored by Andrew Lloyd Webber or whoever does work for Jerry Bruckheimer. Benny climbed back to the top of his mountain and asked that everyone who had been "saved" by that point- stand up. Omar magically reappeared on the floor, five or six rows from the front!

Omar was the first to stand up then hundreds of others scattered across the Toyota Center followed suit. Benny applauded their salvation and commanded them to come to the front of the stage so that he might bless them- closer. He ran up to the stage like he was going to sit in Santa's lap. Everyone stood silently during the blessing of "the new people"; all except Omar, who was wiggling like a puppy dog. After the blessing, I made eye contact with him and he joined me up in the cheap seats.

Then it was time for the wallets and checkbooks to come out and vomit forth revenue into the belly of Benny the Hinn. Buckets were passed around to collect all of the booty. I didn't donate but Omar scribbled, "You are a fraud," on the back of his business card and dropped it in the bucket with hopes of a free lunch. Benny continued to preach words that encouraged people to donate and assured them that they would get something back- someday. For crying out loud (which is what a lot of people were doing at the time), he wasn't even being Karl Rove about it. He laid out his evil right in front of us... and people bought it. He hadn't even performed a miracle yet!

But then he did- and that's when the shit hit the jet engine.

After the buckets were collected, Benny's enthusiasm took a turn for the violent. His speech got darker and more condemning. Over and over again, he repeated exact phrases as if to cast a spell upon us. Then without warning, Benny screamed at the minions like a dirty old pirate, "Fire on ya!" and they all fell back into their chairs or to the ground. He did this several times while yelling and carrying on like a professional wrestler on pay per view.

And that was it- that was the "miracle". After six hours, he healed, what was essentially, his entourage. You can't "heal" people that work for you and call it a miracle. That's flagrant. And the biggest surprise of all was that nobody asked for their money back. That's what disturbed me the most. It wasn't Benny Hinn that bothered me; it was the fools perpetuating his fraud. Benny Hinn simply manipulates people's vulnerabilities for profit. He's not the only one, so I can't throw stones. But the people that "contribute to his cause"- those are the vipers. They are the ones aiding and abetting this con artist; and getting nothing in return but more lies.

If you ever see a man dressed in white with Bibles in his hands and dollar signs in his eyes- he ain't Jesus.

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REDEFINING PROGRESS IN IRAQ

| ROBERT FANTINA | LATUFF



Just in time to sabotage Republican presidential candidate John McCain's signature issue, President George Bush is happily proclaiming progress in Iraq. Mr. Bush has always counted on the voters to have a short memory, and he apparently sees no reason to alter that view now. His statements rely on it

FOR EXAMPLE, THIS WEEK HE MADE THIS ANNOUNCEMENT: "Violence is down to its lowest level since the spring of 2004, and we're now in our third consecutive month with reduced violence levels holding steady."

One might be tempted to ask the president about the levels of violence prior to the U.S. invasion. Certainly, an enterprising reporter from one of the few newspapers or magazines whose owners do not benefit from Mr. Bush's policies that are disastrous for the average citizen might broach that query. Violence is down, compared to the last few years, but it is still astronomically higher than the time period before 130,000 U.S. soldiers invaded.

He also made this statement: "A significant reason for this sustained progress is the success of the surge." One must remember that the addition of 30,000 troops to terrorize the citizens of Iraq was not an escalation, but a surge. Be that as it may, it seems to have been sufficient to kill sufficient numbers of Iraqis to reduce the amount of open opposition to the occupying army. This, apparently, is Mr. Bush's definition of success.

A day earlier, a major offensive was begun in Diyala. Said Mr. Bush: "This operation is Iraqi-led; our forces are playing a supporting role." Thus, with U.S. military support, the Iraqis are fighting the Iraqis. Does Mr. Bush not know what a civil war is? Perhaps it doesn't matter as long as the U.S. gets the oil.

A news article states that the province of Diyala "…has been one of the hardest areas to control since the U.S.-led war began in March 2003." So in the bloody chess game that the U.S. plays, and that its opponent never wanted any part of, getting Diyala to admit to checkmate has been challenging.

Perhaps we might take a good hard look at the 'progress' in Iraq. There was no more violence in Iraq prior to the U.S. invasion than is experienced by any other third world dictatorship. The U.S. war overthrew the government and put nothing in its place; destroyed the infrastructure, thus depriving millions of innocent people of the basic services they previously took for granted; killed over 1,000,000 people; displaced millions more and still could not 'control' the populace. So it became necessary for Mr. Bush to add 30,000 more terrorists, and still there is difficulty in breaking the will of the Iraqi people. Finally, says, Mr. Bush, enough of those uppity Iraqis, most of whom, in his estimation at least, seem to be terrorists, are dead that the U.S. can force its will on that broken nation.

But, Mr. Bush warns darkly, all is not yet right with the world. "We remain a nation at war. Al Qaeda is on the run in Iraq - but the terrorists remain dangerous, and they are determined to strike our country and our allies again."

The U.S. government's own careful studies show that Al Qaeda had no significant presence in Iraq prior to the U.S. invasion. Its presence there now is questionable, since the group known as Al Qaeda in Iraq apparently has only the most minimal ties to the group that is allegedly responsible for the attacks on the U.S. of September 11, 2001. One wonders when Mr. Bush will feel that the nearly 4,000 American deaths that occurred on that day will be adequately compensated for: more U.S. soldiers have now died in Iraq than U.S. citizens died on September 11, and more Iraqis, by a factor of 25, have died than Americans died on that day. But Mr. Bush's rabid desire to invade Iraq seems to have had little to do with September 11; the world now knows, and has for some time, what many only suspected prior to the invasion. Oil, and not U.S. security, is what the U.S. has sacrificed so much blood for.

Mr. Bush is right on one point: the terrorists remain dangerous, but it is not Iraqis, Iranians, or anyone but the Americans who are the dangerous terrorists. Ask any Iraqi parent who has buried the maimed, bloody body of his or her child; question the wife, mother, sister or daughter who has watched in horror as their innocent father, son, brother or husband was dragged from their home in the dead of the night, and taken to undisclosed locations. Some of those families have never seen their loved ones again.

While foreign terrorists were able to hijack three jetliners nearly seven years ago, their potential for destruction pales compared to what the U.S. is able to destroy, and what it has destroyed. Baghdad suffered the unspeakable terror of Mr. Bush's 'Shock and Awe' campaign, which lasted for weeks. The U.S. horror was over within a matter of hours. Yet the beast had been wounded, and while it had always been dangerous, the sight of its own blood fed its insatiable appetite for empire and oil. Iraq would do nicely as a victim: a nation impoverished by years of U.S.-supported U.N. sanctions, sitting on more oil that even Mr. Bush could dream of, and with no military that could in any way match the size and technology of the U.S. Throw in a few lies connecting Iraq to 9/11; add a spineless, stupid U.S. congress, and war was inevitable.

Mr. Bush and his fawning yes-men and women did not give much thought to Iraqi culture; they did not recognize that anyone other than U.S. citizens have any pride in their nation. It did not occur to them that Iraqis would do all in their power to repel their U.S. invaders. The Bush war-mongers did not consider the rivalries between Kurds, Shias and Sunnis and the fragile peace that existed. The fact that the Iraqi people did not strew flowers beneath the feat of the occupying invaders was dismissed by Mr. Bush. Every Iraqi patriot, willing to sacrifice his or her life for Iraq, was called an 'insurgent.' This derogatory term masked for some the fact that these heroes were freedom fighters, seeking to rid their nation of an imperial, occupying army that cared nothing for them, but only sought to allow its leaders to steal its oil.

So this is Mr. Bush's idea of progress. The blatant and bloody annexation of a once-sovereign nation means, to Mr. Bush, that the U.S. is 'winning.' If so, it is winning the most immoral, unjust, unnecessary war of at least the last 100 years. One struggles to find a war that matches it in terms of violating U.N. regulations and the Geneva Conventions. One cannot imagine that history will look back on this dark chapter of an already long-benighted U.S. with any degree of allowance.

Yet what does that matter to Mr. Bush? When empire and oil are the highest gods, why care about what is said at any other altar?

Perhaps the most tragic aspect of this war, and Mr. Bush's proclamations about it, is that it is simply business as usual for the United States. And to add to the tragedy is the fact that there does not appear any prospect for real change on the horizon.

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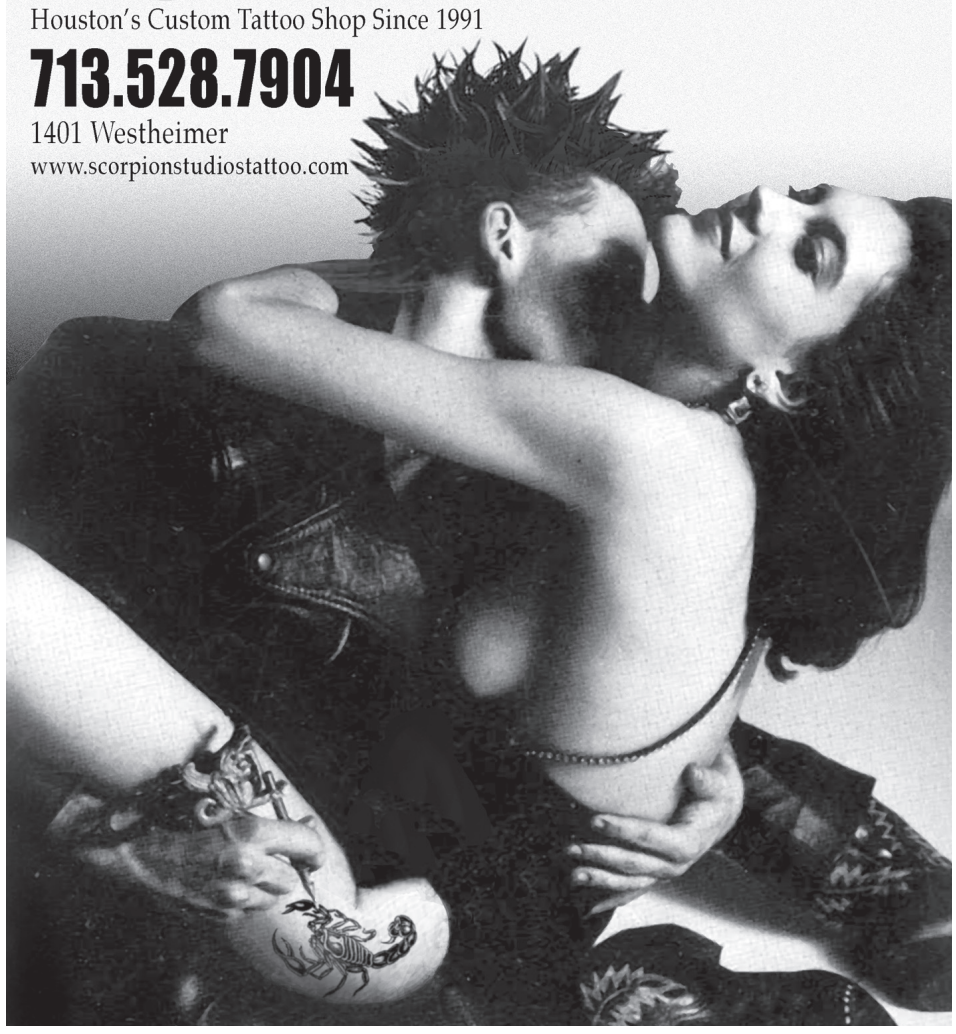
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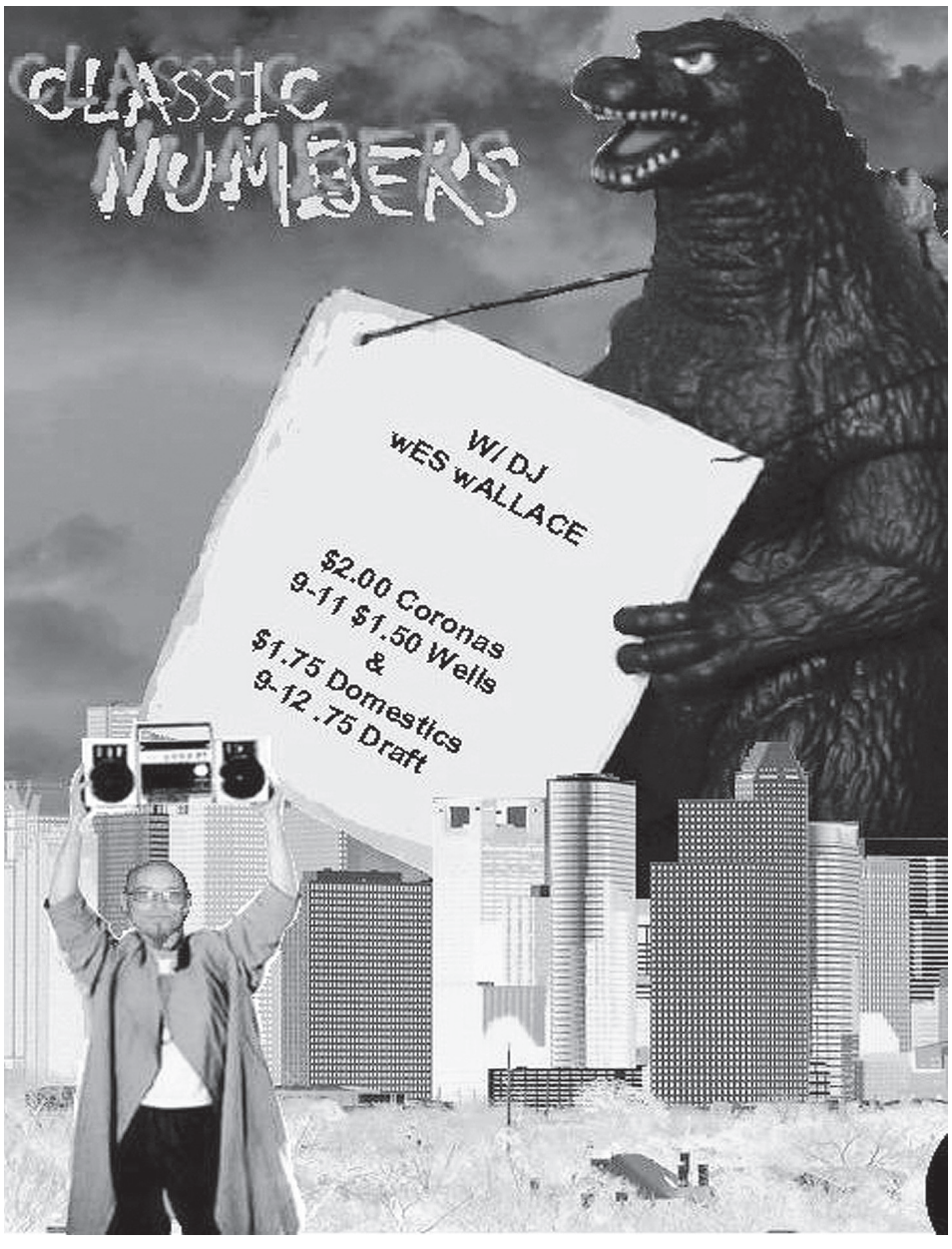
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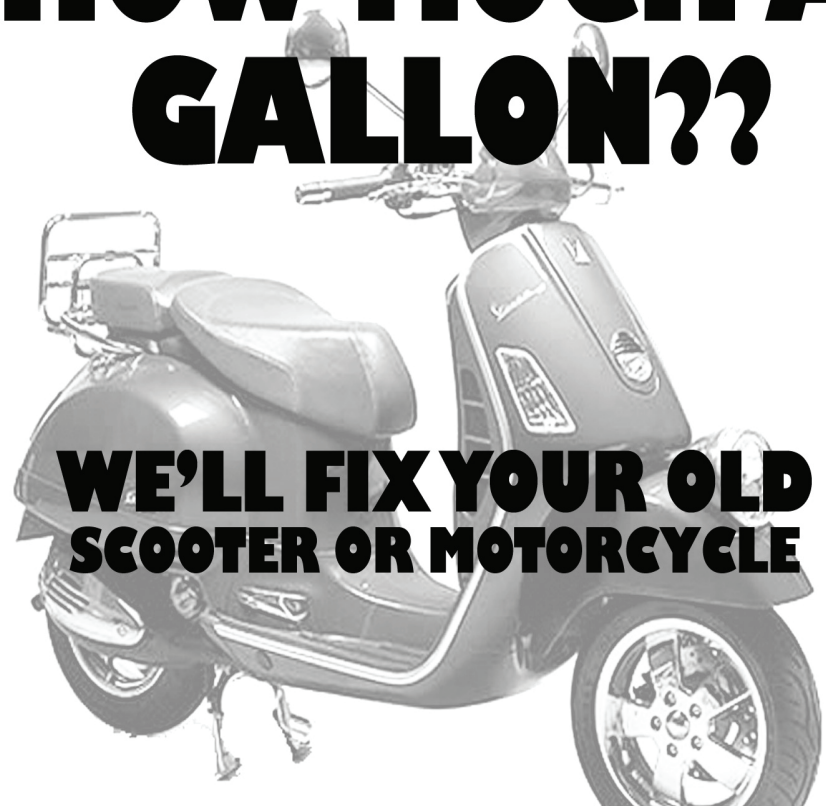



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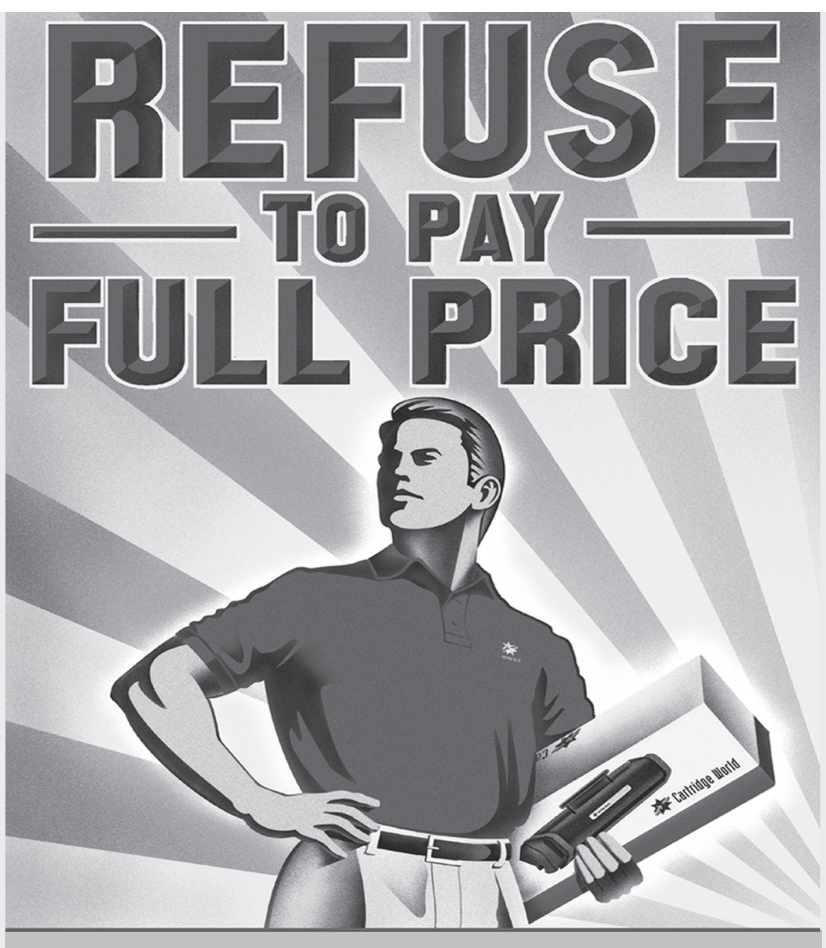
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The Innocent Children Of Death Row Inmates

Paige Lynn Wood holds a sign for the crowd to read, "If You Kill My Dad, Jeff Wood, Your Killing Me." Her dad Jeff Wood is scheduled to be executed by the state of Texas on August 2008. Paige was only about 3 years old when her dad was convicted for murder under the "Law of Parties" Statue in Texas for the murder of a store attendant. She is now 14.

Her plea for help can be read on a website constructed by Wood's family, "Jeffrey Wood has only one child and that is me. I have been without my father for many years, and I have suffered greatly because of this. I need my father. I need to be able to hug him, and to sit in his lap, and just talk when I need somebody. I have been deprived because of somebody else's crime. Should I continue to be punished? I have has a lot to deal with over these years. I have struggled in school, I have been alone, and I have done it all without my lifeline..my father. Please do not kill him, he did not kill anyone. He is a kind gentle man, and I need him. If you kill him, you are killing me."

Wood was convicted and sentenced to die under the "Law of Parties Statue" in Texas, where you are held responsible for someone else's actions of murder, despite the fact you never touched the gun, never pulled the trigger, or never knew the intentions of your codefendant. Wood's codefendant, Daniel Earl Reneau was executed on June 13, 2003.

Last year, Nydesha Foster, then 11 years old, daughter of former death row inmate Kenneth Foster also pleaded for the life of her father who was scheduled to be executed in Texas on August 30, 2007, and also under the same "Law of Parties" statue in Texas. Foster was convicted of murder and sentence to die by lethal injection for a murder that took place while he was seated in the car, quite a distance from the crime. Foster's family and supporters generated thousands of calls to the Governor and Texas Parole and Pardons resulting in a commutation of sentence for Foster. Foster is now serving time in a Texas prison. Wood's case has many similarities to that of Foster's. You can listen to Nydesha's pleas to save her father from execution here.

7/2 Jeff Wood - On Death Row / Law of Parties Conviction

At approximately 6:00 a.m. on Jan. 2, 1996, while Jeff Wood waited outside, Daniel Earl Reneau entered a gas station in Kerrville, Texas, with a gun and pointed it at Kris Keeran, the clerk standing behind the counter. Reneau ordered him to a back room. When he did not move quickly enough, Reneau fired one shot with a 22 caliber handgun that struck Keeran between the eyes. Death was almost instantaneous. Proceeding with the robbery, Reneau went into the back office and took a safe. When hearing the shot, Wood got out of the car to see what was going on. He walked by the door and looked through the glass. Then he went inside, and he looked over the counter and ran to the back, where Reneau was. Wood was then ordered, at gun point by Reneau, to get the surveillance video and to drive the getaway-car.

Jeff Wood was convicted and put on death row, despite not commiting murder, under the Law of Parties. Texas is the only state in the nation with such a broad "Law of Parties", allowing the goverment to execute people who have not commited murder, with around 80 people on Texas Death Row (according to the Austin American Statesman).

"My cousin was the person killed by Danny, not Jeff. I say this as a family member who realized long ago Jeff had no part in my cousin's murder and he shouldn't be executed. It's insane to kill another person who did not kill Kris. The video showed Jeff took no part in it. Jeff was one of my friends growing up and someone I think deserves a chance. If he didn't kill him, why should we kill Jeff? This is ridiculous." - Amanda Smith, Cousin of Murder Victim Kris Keeran - June 19, 2008

Please contact Governor Perry and the Texas Board of Pardon and Paroles on behalf of Jeff Wood. Jeff was charged under the Law of Parties and was not the shooter in this crime. The actual shooter in this case has already been executed by the state of Texas.



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7/11 Grand Jury No-Bills Joe Horn

Hundreds of outraged and energetic people rallied in front of the Harris County Courthouse today to demand that Joe Horn be indicted for murder. Horn is the Pasadena, Texas man who shot in the back and killed two alleged burglars as they left his neighbors house in November, 2007..

A Harris County grand jury no-billed Horn two weeks ago, enraging many in Houston's African American community as well as many others of all nationalities throughout the metropolitan Houston area. The two men gunned down by Horn were Afro-Colombians. Today, the speakers berated the racism that is systemic in Harris County's criminal justice system and demanded that Horn's shooting be taken before another grand jury, one that is made of of all nationalities. [read full story] Interview with Parnell Herbert of Millions More Movement on The Joe Horn Verdict & Protest

7/2 Community Mobilizies to defend Day Laborers

Wednesday July 2nd, around 30-40 people met at the Shell gas station at the intersection of Westpark and highway 59 to protest against the support given by the folks in charge of the gas station to member of the facist group "US Borderwatch," who in the past have intimidated day labores who work hard every day.

With Chant of "Racists,Go Home!" and "Si se puede, si se puede", and the precence of 5 HPD Patrol Cars, the people gathered there demonstrated the there will continue to be support for the workers and that they will respond to any threat or provocation of racist groups.

6/30 Sweatshops message to Presidents Doorstep

UH Students Against Sweatshops and allies from the Green Party, the Houston Peace and Justice Center, Rice and Houston Community College attended a demonstration at UH Chancellor Renu Khator's house at 1505 South Boulevard in the museum district. SAS wanted to remind UH Chancellor / President Renu Khator's house her decision about signing on to the Designated Supplier's Program (DSP) is due. In March Khator appointed an "apparel task force" and told SAS and the public that their recommendation was due to her by the end of June at the latest. The task force was made up of 5 faculty members, 1 staff and 1 student. The faculty members have never published in the field. Faculty members who have published about globalization and child labor were kept off the "task force."

Khator has thus far ignored the student government resolution to sign the DSP. She has also ignored the entire shared governance procedure which showed that the Faculty Senate and Staff Council did not object to signing to DSP.

6/29 ICE Raids detain more than 150 workers

MORE than 80 community members and organizations congregated in front of the Federal Building today to denounce the Raid that occurred yesterday at a clothing factory. Today was a success because with this action we are able to show Houston and ICE that we will not stay quiet in the mist of all of these raids which are splitting up families and leaving children without mothers. There will be many more actions like this and as always I thank all of you who came out today in the fight for social justice. Whether there are 10 or 100 people present we must never stay quiet and we must always say that there are those Houstonians like us that will continue to fight for social justice.? As long as their is life their is hope!

Around 2 dozen people gathered Saturday Morning at the Houston Processing Center, an immigrant detention facility run by the private corporation Corrections Corporation of America, to protest the raid. Many folks parked on the north side of Greens road, and the protest took place on the south side, right next to the facility, making for quite a spectacle on a busy 2 lane road in north Houston.

7/18 Field Hearing Examines injustices in Harris County Law Enforcement

Friday Morning at 10am, dozens of community members, activists and victims of the criminal "justice" system came to Houston's City hall to attend, testify and support the field hearing of the House Judiciary Committee looking into Crime, Justice and Race in Harris County. Congress People Sheila Jackson Lee of Houston and John Conyers of Detroit chaired the events and were joined by Texas State Legislators and members of Houston City Council.

They invited people to testify, including The District Attorney of Dallas County who has been trying to reform the office and has began retesting DNA evidence of folks convicted by the office, thus far freeing 8 innocent people. There were also number people who are victims of the Harris County Sheriffs office and other local agencies, including Sean and Erik Ibarra who recently won a 1.7 million dollar settlement from the Sheriffs office following being beaten and facing manufactured charges by the Sheriffs office in 2002. Also the Children of Margarita Savadrea who died in Harris County Jail after not receiving medication to treat her diabetes.

The audience was extremely supportive and frequently broke into applause and cheering in support of those giving testimony. Some people were able to bring signs into the hearing reading: "Houston we have a problem" and "Time to Clean House".





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THE ASSASSINATION OF BARACK OBAMA

| Nick Cooper (nickcooper.com)



LIZ TROTTA, A FORMER EDITOR OF THE WASHINGTON TIMES JOKED ABOUT AN OBAMA ASSASSINATION ON FOX NEWS SAYING, "AND NOW WE HAVE WHAT SOME ARE READING AS A SUGGESTION THAT SOMEBODY KNOCK OFF OSAMA, UH OBAMA. WELL, BOTH, IF WE COULD."

Mike Huckabee, a former Republican candidate for president saying "That was Barack Obama, he just tripped off a chair. He's getting ready to speak and someone aimed a gun at him, and he, he dove for the floor." Hillary made a reference to RFK, also bringing up the idea of assassination saying "My husband did not wrap up the nomination in 1992 until he won the California primary somewhere in the middle of June, right? We all remember Bobby Kennedy was assassinated in June in California. I don't understand it." Plenty of others have referred to the eventuality of an Obama assassination, including one KKK leader who felt that an Obama assassination was relatively certain if he is elected.

While it is fine to criticize those who make jokes about it, there is another question of what would happen to the country's soul should such an assassination take place. The United States would cease to be able to present itself to the world as a country that can handle its own (much less anyone else's) problems. Many around the world may have already come to this conclusion, but an Obama assassination would transform a widely held opinion into an indelible fact. Those who choose to not vote for Obama due to the threat of assassination might be concerned for more than his personal well-being. The confirmation that we have nothing to hope for can have catastrophic results on world economies and thereby, our capacity to feed and take care of ourselves.

Bush has smashed illusions about the U.S., destabilized the world, pushed economies to the brink, and chose war over peaceful solutions. The many movements of those who would like to see the world transformed into a better place and the economies of war replaced by sustainable, balanced systems are fueled by hope that things can still be turned around somehow. While electoral politics could be part of this transformation, some are critical of Obama's equating his campaign with the idea of "hope." It seems to them a co-optation. However, many of them would agree that his assassination would dash hopes. Perhaps Obama cannot truly bring the things we hope and dream for, but his assassination could bring hopelessness.

There has always been a thought among radicals that maybe things have to get much worse for people to realize they must demand better, that people are too comfortable to stand up and so maybe they must be deprived. This theory hasn't much of a track record. When Hitler became Chancellor there was some discussion among radicals that it would make the masses wake up and rise up, but it doesn't happen like that. There are no great awakenings during truly oppressive governments. Whether the authoritarian leaders rule by fear, lies, or having the radicals disappear, it takes a very long time for their effects to dissipate. Assassinations are similar. They make the victim's supporters want to curl up and forget. There would be no redeeming aspect of an Obama assassination.

During elections, we can only speculate about what candidates truly represent. Questions about whether Obama represents anti-war, universal health-care, etc. are up in the air. Folks in other countries necessarily have an even murkier view. To most people of the world right now, Obama is a black man who seems to have come pretty far. If America fails to control its white power nationalism and someone kills him, we will have a hard time convincing ourselves, much less anyone else, that we have any idea how to conduct ourselves. If Obama gets elected it could do a little to convince folks that the U.S. is ready to let go of its racist systems, but if he is assassinated it will convince us that we never will.

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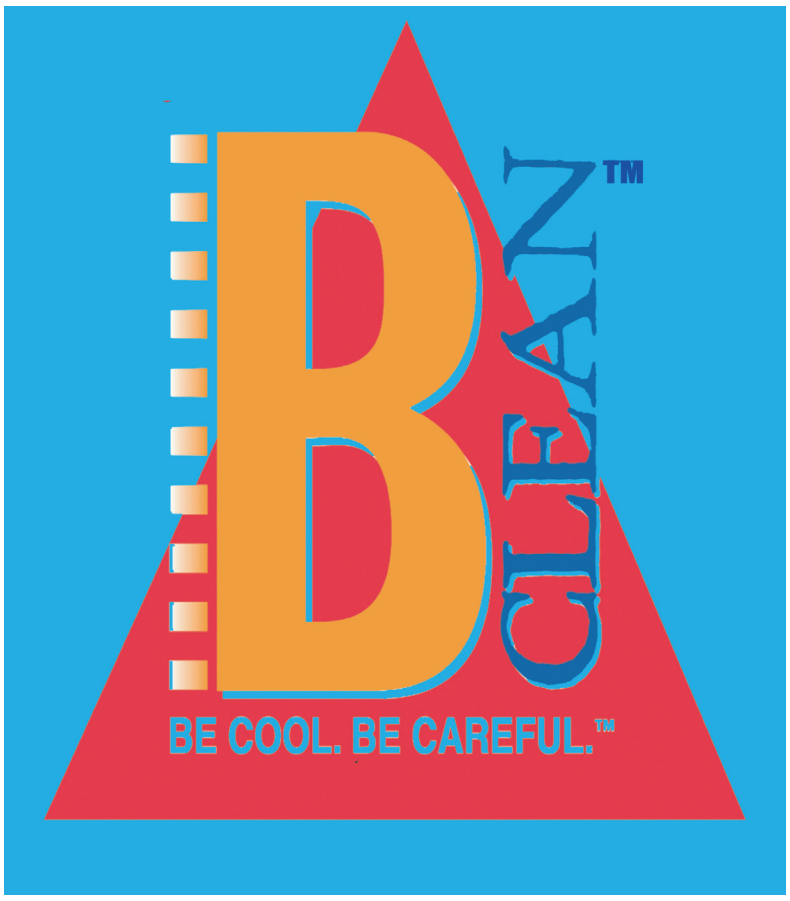
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