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Feel Free to Take Us Seriously

A prayer for August,

Lord, grant me serenity, humility, and whatever else you can spare. Bestow upon my soul the answers to all of life's myriad questions. Lord, let me please shake these haters. Lord, please grant HPD adequate confusion and foul timing to avoid pulling me over and pulling my unpaid warrants. Please, spread joy and peace among all worthy Houstonians and smite all of my enemies. (Excluding Alex Wukman) Feed the hungry, emancipate the oppressed from the cruel hand of the oppressor, and please deter hipsters from writing anymore down stroke guitar riffs. Give me the strength to endure the nagging of my wife.

Strike down with a vengeful hand those that spread hate, intolerance, bigotry, and hokey myspace bulletins. Lord please clear the rainy skies of Houston and perpetrate a massive genocide against all pesky mosquitoes just as you destroyed the Moabites through the hand of King Omri. Forgive us of all our transgression both already transpired and those which will happen before 3PM tomorrow. Lastly, please deliver an acute case of genital warts upon Councilman Michael Berry in the hopes that he will re-assess his stance on the wholesale slaughter of Native Americans. We ask these things with an open heart and a focused mind. Thanks and let's talk soon-

Amen.
Editors





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DEBRIS:

KISS MY ASS

By Buffalo Sean



AUGUST IS A DEAD SPOT

in the calendar year of art in Houston, but there are a few good things that slip through the cracks and try to make it work, cussin' the sweat and the Texas heat and mosquiters- David Allen Coe anyone? Don't forget that the **Museum of Fine Arts** is free on Thursdays and open until 9 pm; their *Red Hot: Asian Art Today* exhibit comes with blasting AC and a fine collection of twisted pop icons not recommended for viewing on acid, for fear of a bad trip. Between the candy red portraits by Feng Zhengjie, the wide-eyed paranoia-inducing paintings of Yue Minjun and a giant Tyrannosaurus by Sui Jianguois; I wouldn't want to chance it. The whole explosion of Asian exhibits in Houston galleries is stunning, with no less than 8 openings in July for group shows from across the Pacific Rim. Rumor is that the MFAH pursued galleries to interest them in showing the work, a bit fishy but not as bad as the Fine Art Museum of San Francisco who released joint press releases with a gallery selling the same artist's work they had on exhibit at the time.

Saturday August 4th **The Mexican Arsenal** presents *Chiahui Ome* at Commerce Street Artists' Warehouse, a multimedia monstrosity touted "for the whole family". With Cuallitepetl indigenous music, poetry from around the world, traditional Aztec dancing by Danza Azteca Tlaloc and two other dance companies, all three galleries and possibly elsewhere will be swarming with performers. Representing the worldwide influences of sub-USA culture, Polynesian, Ecuadorian, Guatemalan, African and Mexican food will be on hand for grubbing in the sun. Look for artwork by Tina Hernandez, Skeez 181 and Lizbeth Ortiz among others.

Diverseworks' *The Real (art) World* is off and running (not that I can find the live web feed on their website) and this August 11th Mindy Kober, Keijiro Suzuki, Patrick Phipps and Rachelle Vasquez will open their doors to show what they have spent the last month making in their residency studio space.

The new curator at the **Contemporary Arts Museum**, Toby Kamps, joins the crew with his first stab at Texas art in ***Nexus Texas*** this fall. Working with Valerie Cassel Oliver and Paola Morsiani, the three have been scouring the state for "maverick pride, go-go entrepreneurship, and cultural blending." Unfortunately the choices seem to be a bit conservative to me; don't expect this show to travel. Here's the list: Sterling Allen, Cauleen Smith and Michael Smith from Austin, Roberto Bellini, Justin Boyd, Augusto di Stefano and Gary Sweeney from San Antonio, Amy Blakemore, Leslie Hewitt, Lauren Kelley, El Franco Lee II and George Smith from Houston, Margarita Cabrera from El Paso and some bitches from Dallas too.

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BEEF

Evan J. Garza



We here at the free press are so intrigued by Houston's fascination with bad architecture, social publications, and general H-town suckery that we decided it was time to bring out the guns. Welcome to Beef, a lazy examination of the frustrations associated with life as a Houstonian.

The summer social season kicked off hard with the opening of Hotel Zaza in the Museum District. If I'd had a dollar for every noticeable piece of cosmetically enhanced flesh, I'd be wealthier than Lynn Wyatt at Marshall's. Some atrocious woman with a fake British accent and a mic interrogated people on the red carpet, asking them who they were wearing while someone behind her generated flashes with their digital camera. It was like stepping on broken glass before walking inside a well-catered train wreck with free Veuve Clicquot.

My biggest frustration with Houston is that it has no sense of identity. We live in a city where a new high-rise apartment building in Rice Village is named after a wine-producing region of California, not the neighborhood it's built in. Convenient stores in Montrose are named after a heavily gay-populated district of Los Angeles and not the gay district the stores themselves call home. We live in the fourth largest city in the country, and we're the biggest small town in America.

It's no wonder, then, that Houstonians look outward for their sources of culture and influence. The hipsters that frequent Brasil and Deidrich's look like they missed the Bedford stop on the L train in Brooklyn. Even Austin, a town that is less-than-a-fraction of Houston's size, has more unique flavor in its bong water than anything that rests along the Buffalo Bayou. In its defense, the bayou could be fantastic with a few well-spent tax dollars... so long as the end result doesn't resemble the Riverwalk in San Antonio. That thing is awful.

What Houston does have, though, is time. As one of the top ten growing cities in the US, and job growth at a record 15%, city-goers can pray that homes in developing neighborhoods will more closely resemble remarkable housing than the real estate abortions that will collapse on Montrose streets in ten years. We have to admire the Heights for clinging to its architectural heritage, and it still remains the quaintest and quietest place anywhere inside the loop. But how long will it last?

I suppose all of these things – the social rags, the events, the fake tits and poorly named apartment buildings – they're all gestures that suggest a kind of wealth. Because nothing says, "we have money" like your gallery logo on a disposable plastic cup. Maybe Houston's beauty rests below the layers of sediment or in the endless miles of zoning-free humidity. Maybe it's the giant pot and not the gold.

There's a positive side to everything, I suppose. At least we don't live in Dallas.





McLovin

By Michael Bergeron





Another film broke during its initial preview screening. I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry snapped during a scene where Dan Aykroyd was lecturing Adam Sandler and Kevin James. When the film started again about five minutes later there was Jessica Biel in a montage shopping for clothes. Chuck and Larry is typical Sandler fare, partly based on a clever long-in-the-can script by the team of Taylor and Payne that was reworked for Sandler. Example: Rob Schneider as an Asian minister and David Spade in drag. The film was rated R but was re-rated PG-13, which merely portends dual DVD versions. There are a few chuckles here but the groaners outweigh them. Lest you consider the film offensive in nature consider that gay icon Richard Chamberlain (the original Jason Bourne), absent from the big screen for nearly a decade, plays a crucial role in the third act.

The AFI is up to their old tricks. It's a worthy org that has been the training ground for many great directors; David Lynch certainly bows down to no movie studio and he trained at AFI in the 70s. That was then, this is now. The AFI came out with a revised Top 100 American Film list. For instance, in the new list (the last one was ten years ago) Dances With Wolves and Amadeus are gone while other cinema classics shifted in position. (The Third Man, a great film by all accounts pops up on a lot of critic's lists and it is a British film, thus foreign. By that standard there are about five Michael Powell/Emeric Pressburger films that belong on a top American list since they too are in English.)
So should any such list be called the top one hundred films that you can rent at Blcokbuster/Greencine/Netflix?

Compiling my own list of top 100 American faves I found verily with some minor exceptions they can all be found on video or DVD. We're talking cinema classics that don't skewer the current mainstream like Edgar G. Ulmer's 1945 Detour; Tod Browning's 1932 Freaks; the films Preston Sturges helmed between 1941 and 1944. They're all available. Perhaps now's the best time to be a movie maven, so many treasures can be seen at your convenience. Just when it looked like forgotten gems would fall by the wayside the National Film Preservation Foundation (funded by the Library of Congress and NEH) has been releasing more obscure works that take on social and political issues. Two series are available and a third volume comes out in October as a 4-DVD set. Treasures III: Social Issues in American Film 1900 – 1934 should satisfy the needs of those who live in a world outside of top 100 lists. (A complete list of their collections can be found at Filmpreservation.org).

If you've not been impressed by the comic book super dudes or pirates or autobots there are still some big blowouts coming your way. Consider Rush Hour 3 or the third installment of the Matt Damon starrer The Bourne Ultimatum, or better still the big screen version of the Broadway remake of the John Waters classic Hairspray. More than Chicago, and more than Dreamgirls, Hairspray commands a hyper kind of screen attention. Walken and Travolta, as graceful as they move, actually have the least interesting dance routine in the film. Oddly enough a lot of the composer Marc Shaiman's score has a Phil Spector sound for this story of rebellion set in the early 60s. One character says "You can fight the future or you can rock out with it." Sentiments with which I'm sure we can all agree.

ALSO PLAYING

Arctic Tales

An okay guide to life north of the arctic circle but not sophisticated enough for adults while pandering to kids, Arctic Tales offers G-rated docu fare. Do you know or care about the difference in global warming and global dimming? Every time Arctic Tales starts to get informative and environmental it also shifts into kid drive. Cute animals and a couple of fart jokes. The location shooting was accomplished over a period of several years and involves the life story of a polar bear mom and daughter and a similar couple of seals. Starbucks is promoting the film, their second such venture after Akeelah and the Bee, which was not a financial success in terms of theatrical. You will be seeing a lot of cute baby polar bears.

Sunshine

You will be talking about this Danny Boyle directed sci-fier afterwards. That's because you will be asking the same people you saw it with: What just happened?

There are space operas that are metaphysical like 2001 and Solaris (Tarkovsky) and then there are the borderline bastard genre attempts at star glory like Event Horizon or Supernova. Sunshine falls comfortably in the middle of those two extremes. Sunshine has a warm pulsing momentum. Scientists are traveling to the sun in a spaceship called Icarus to set off a nuclear explosion to re-ignite its core and save the Earth. The multicultural and handsome cast debate whether to proceed to their goal or divert to investigate the fate of the previous failed attempt at the same mission.

Sunshine throws a curve ball during the last act and keeps the audience guessing what the hell just happened with subjective shots. Thinking back on the film it becomes clear that certain clues are given but they may only be in one shot. It's no problem to pay attention, the effects demand that much.

"BEST NEW CLUB 2004" -HOUSTON PRESS

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1503 CHARTRES

AUGUST

1 Mondo Generator and Circus Diablo with Subversa, The Tattooed Millionaires

3 Crystal Method

4 Symphony X

6 The Volcom Tour Featuring Riverboat Gamblers With Valient Thorr, ASG, Totimoshi

10 Against Me With Two Gallants

11 The Original Sugar Hill Gang With ED, Oran "Juice" Jones, Tre 9, DJ Larose

16 Eisley With Westly Jenson

17 Kinto Sol

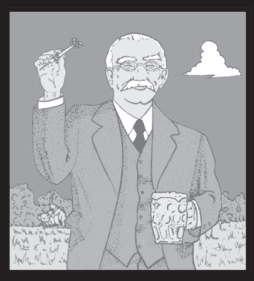
18 Rad Rich's Annual Birthday Bash in Memory of Damon O'Banion
Rad Rich from KPFT's Annual Party - Proceeds go to Damon's widow, Leslie Stewart-O'Banion
With Performances By: Poor Dumb Bastards, The Drunks, Whorehound, Aftershock, The Flamin' Hellcats, Morgue City, Donkey Punch, Brians Johnson, Amplified Heat, Dolly-Rockers, Luxurious Panthers, Bark Hard.15 Bands for $15

21 The Receiving End of Sirens With Hopesfall, Emanuel

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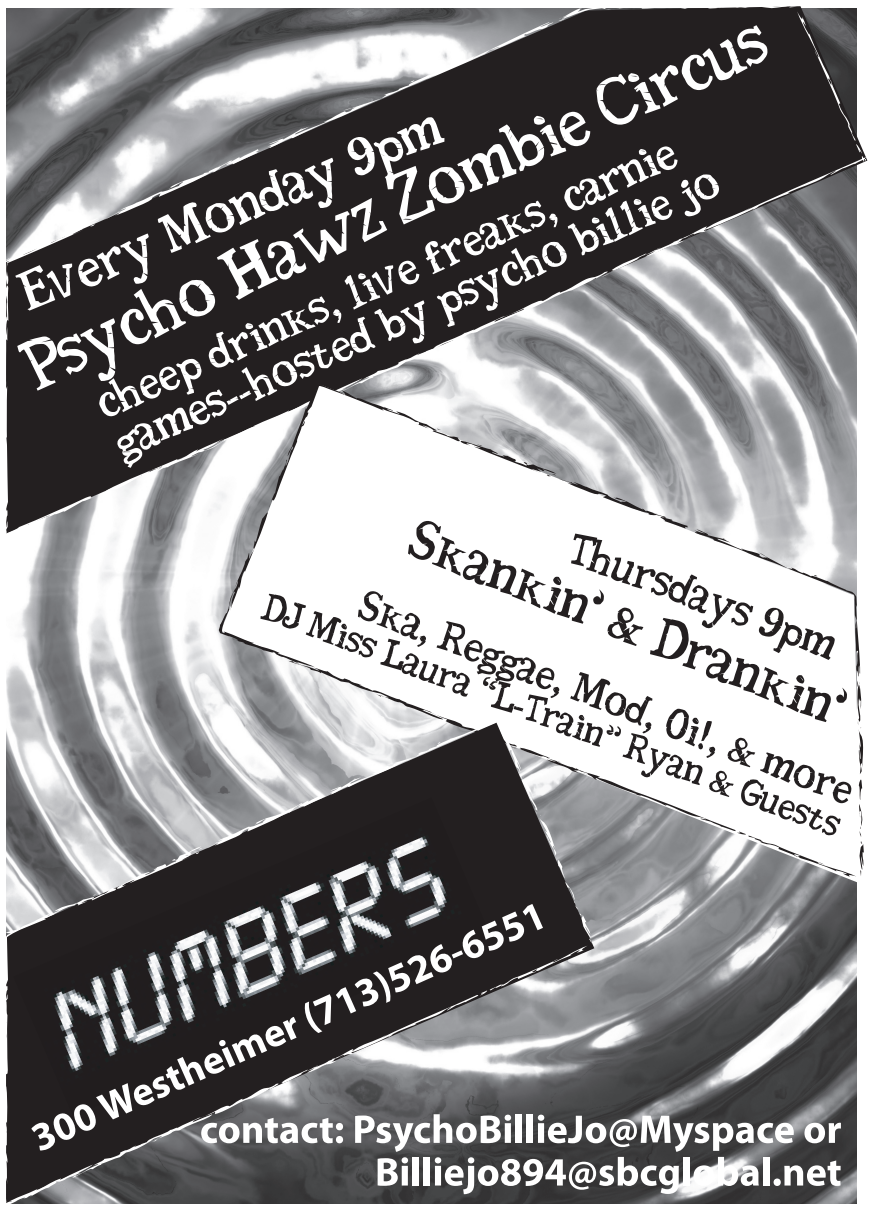
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WHAT COMES IS MUCH BETTER THAN WHAT CAME BEFORE

Kwame M. Anderson

SO, YOU KNOW, I get out of the house every then and again, and on one of my last outings I ran into my friend John. John is a drummer in a great band that's from Houston, but I'm not gonna put him out there like that, but you probably know who I speak of. Anyhoo, I asked him, if there were any shows he was excited about, and he paused, looked a little perplexed, and then responded, "Deep Purple" As if to say, I really want to see them, but is that really cool. Then he said, "I don't know, their old stuff's really good, I don't know, who's really performing these days…" This is a dilemma I find myself in more and more. I'd like to thank Omar for covering the local music scene, because honestly, I have no idea what's going on. Being sort of an elitist and a shut in, I am not doing justice to the readers of the Free Press by relegating all of this exposure to music which I think is important, while missing an important aspect of music journalism (yeah, I call this that), local music. But, luckily, that half is covered and as the table of contents states this is about Kwame's music, so I'll continue to focus on bands that I listen to, but I promise to keep my ear open for bands in the local sector.

Anyway, does anybody here like Son Of Bazerk? No? Well…It's not really August yet, but Omar has given me a deadline, and the deadline is on the day I leave to Monterrey, Mexico, I'm really excited, it's a beautiful place. I hate the drive, but the mountains, the old style architecture, the culture, the Carl's Jr., all make Monterrey a city I love to visit. Plus, my lady's family is really cool, and did I mention Carl's Jr.? However, I'm laying off that soon, I'm trying to lose weight. Nothing is better than when you see someone after a while, and they say, "You Look good." But when you're fat and out of shape, they just say "It's been a while." Someone said that to me the other day, and I immediately went home and did some sit-ups. Beauty, it's a vicious evil monster.

So here we are again talking about the shit. There are a lot of good CDs coming out in August, and the shows, well, they're not so abundant. The Rock The Bells Tour is coming on August 8th with Nas, Wu Tang, David Banner, Pharoah Monche, and some other cats, but that's an outside show, and my ass will not be outside for the heat or the rain, especially to see rappers that were all popular when I was in my early 20's, this is more like The Motown revue or some shit, rap is out of control. They recently added crunk to the dictionary, that's some of the dumbest shit I've heard in my life. All you people who fuss about immigrants not learning the language, look at the fucking language we speak, I'd rather speak Spanish or Italian or Portuguese. Ginormous? That's a word in the dictionary. Yeah, learn how to sound like a fuckin idiot, or leave the country. You know why people don't read or respect the beauty of being well spoken? 'Cause that aint crunk. Hey white people, I'm making up a word for good, it's swinky, once I can get Regis Philbin or Matt Lauer to joke on television, "I was getting crunk at a party, showing off my bling-bling, and it felt swinky," then will you acknowledge that America being at the bottom of the world in education is no mistake.

SHOW SPOTLIGHT

PTERODACTYL

08/08/07 | The Proletariat

Pterodactyl is a band from Brooklyn, New York, they have an album out on Brah Records, it is remarkable. Think Parts and Labor with vocals and harmonies or Hella or Outkast meets Hella, or just think of something that I haven't cross referenced, like a Mad Lib thing, and take two bands you really like or one band you really like and make up a reference that would get you to the show. Or, you look them up on My Space. You know, I recently read something about how My Space is becoming corny, but I disagree. For example, when looking for info on this band, I went directly to the band vortex and was able to hear songs from the album I got later. In a way technology, while seemingly something that alienates, has helped to bring the independent music scene a much-needed resource. Bands like Pterodactyl can get the word spread through simply through the addition of a friend. I mean, sure, they still have to travel the country in the van and whatnot, but hopefully they have the anticipation of the audience.

" I think the big change that happened for everybody is so easy to give your stuff away to people for free," comments Joe, guitar player and singer in the band. "Um, from the beginning it's always been, it's always seemed like the much more appealing thing to give music on the website, or through a Myspace page, or CDs or something like that, and to get more people listening to it so people have a chance to hear it other than like making money off of it, cause no one's gonna make money off this record anyway, so for us, giving our stuff away…us having access to everyone else's stuff, like I know that this record is very, very different than it would have been if we wouldn't have had all of those Myspace pages to listen to see what people are doing. "

In addition to being a great place to expose yourself, the web, specifically Myspace (and sites like it) have become a great place to become exposed to other music. It widens the community for artists who may be of a similar mentality but a different geographical area.

"Like the stuff that comes out of us is coming from like, kind of a crazy state of mind that comes from hearing so much different stuff together, and liking all of it. The smallest little things (picked up from all of the different music they are exposed to) show up in very strange place. And like having free music everywhere just gives you more to work off of, more to bounce off of, you know what I mean."

Yeah, I know, it's crazy free music. The benefits of art before commerce, it's crazy talk. But hey, we live in a world where insanity is one of the more prevalent emotions. But no, the thing is, I remember being exposed to music through all kinds of ways, but mainly it was cross referencing. Going to Sound Exchange when David worked there and him telling me, " Well, if you like this band, you'll love this band." Or buying every record on Touch and Go, or buying an album because Steve Albini or Bob Weston recorded it, so in a way a thing like My Space gives you the ability to like Pterodactyl, then visit there page, and all of the bands who have linked with them. But also, that's how you found out about the "underground" or fringe music, and with less and less viable resources, you have to what you have to do.

CD SPOTLIGHT

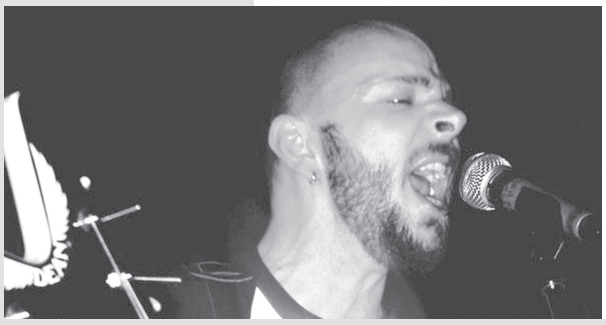
M.I.A.

KALA

(Interscope)

M.I.A's last album combined Miami/Atlanta "ghetto style" bass music with Indian, reggae, and otherworldly music, add to that her penchant for mixing sexual and political themes in the same song, and you had one of the most original releases of that year. Well, since then she caught the ear of Timbaland and Missy Elliot, toured with Gwen Stefani, got signed to Interscope, and then had her visa rejected before finishing her follow up. Well, the good news is the album is coming out, Timbaland has a song on it, and that song may be the weakest on the disc. Recorded in several locations, M.I.A will prove she is no fluke, but she also will do more in uniting people under a groove than

shows in Houston



Whorehound
8/18 | Meridian



Lanky
8/10 | Warehouse Live



Spain Colored Orange
8/17 | Rudyard's

the United Nations. For all of the instrumentation, the tribal drums, the break beat meets raga beat (or whatever) this album bumps just like anything Juicy J could come up with. She says she could never be a Rocawear model because her beats are too evil, and that they are, her flow is intact and yet still expounded upon. If I could make an early prediction for "best of '07" lists this would be it. She has the bombs to make you blow, she has the beats to make you bang.

NINA NASTASIA & JIM WHITE
YOU FOLLOW ME
(Fat Cat)

This past SXSW I got the chance to see Nina Nastasia and Jim White play together and as always, Jim White's take on percussion was a different but weirdly fitting accompaniment to Nina Nastasia's songs. While Nastasia is a brilliant singer and guitar player who can almost carry the full weight solo, her songs have almost a somber stillness. White's rolling drums and accents give the stories in the songs atmosphere and setting. The contrast between the two is what makes them album a gem, still and gentle at times, mobile and haunting at others, but the spars arrangements give the songs a lot of room to fill or leave spaces and White does a great job determining how to manipulate the song's structure

PEOPLE
MISBEGOTTEN MAN
(I and Ear)

My favorite types of music are the types that leave me with little referencing points, I am left on a cliff reaching for a branch of metaphor to work my way back to land. People is great in that this their second album, and it can really only be compared to their first. Mary Halvorson's voice is pleasant, her guitar playing is sometimes loose, simply strummed, sometimes frantic, providing the floor that drummer Kevin Shea runs all over and around. Fans of the brilliant but unknown band Storm And Stress (which also featured Ian Williams of Battles) know that Shea is a monster and octopus of percussion, time signatures switch at the drop of hat, the beat is omnipresent more than it is solid, though it can be in spots. This album combines sturm and drang, melody and madness, rhythm and wooze could be a category.. Guarantee: you will not hear another album like this until their next album. Bands such as US Maple or pieces of Beefheart or even Albert Ayler's more vocal work or Sonny Sharrock's Black Woman could be referenced, but you may not have heard any of those records either, so let's just say that this is the sound of adventure.



The Wheel Works
8/11 | Fitzgerald's



The Western Civilization
8/3 | Walter's



Pterodactyl
8/8 | Proletariat



HOMEGROWN RECORDS

Houston make good. This will be good. Let's hope so.

By Belligerent Me



SIDESHOW TRAMPS MEDICINE SHOW

"Does it translate to a record though?" is the oft asked question of bands that have phenomenal live shows and try and translate it in the studio. Sideshow Tramps, formerly Medicine Show, answer this question in the affirmative. Having gained massive local notoriety for their legendary Helios Monday night performances, they have built a firm reputation as just about the most energetic-crowd involved live show in town. These local bluegrass envelope-pushers have found the perfect balance on their new record. Both tight and gritty, the album makes obvious the instrumental and vocal subtleties often lost in their live show. This is a standard problem whenever a show involves a few hundred drunken youngsters stomping their feet which leads to the eventual drowning out of acoustic instruments and 3 part harmonies. Now that Helios has transformed to a nearly music free environment, folks can hear the total soundscape of this exceptionally talented local act whenever they fancy. The 15 track album is rife with great anthems and great local references. Funeral Song, my personal favorite, is an uber-catchy examination of death and grieving all centered on the candid request that "When I die, ya'll play at my funeral. When I die, ya'll sing 'round my grave." Another bright spot is Josie. This song is an ode to the long-time Helios bartender who ruled with an iron fist and when it reached 2AM would walk folks out "single-file." These and the rest of the songs are given justice with the clean yet organic recordings. This is definitely the record you re-discover the band with. Medici..,uh...I mean Sideshow Tramps are up for yet another Houston Press award and have a busy month of August flipping from Austin to Arkansas. See em' live and buy the record in town August 3rd at the Continental Club.



"WE ALL KNOW EACH OTHER REALLY WELL, SINCE FRANK IS MY BROTHER AND DAVIS IS MY EX-BOYFRIEND, AND FRANK AND DAVIS WERE FRIENDS AND BANDMATES FOR YEARS BEFORE THIS. SO AS MUCH SHIT AS WE GIVE EACH OTHER, WE LOVE EACH OTHER THAT MUCH TOO, AND IT COMES THROUGH A LA THE MUSIC."

SKYBLUE72 FEEL MY WAY HOME

10 Questions with SkyBlue 72

Free Press was fortunate enough to sit down with siblings Frank and Jessica Zweback and discuss their new album Feel My Way Home, Houston music, and magic wands. After listening to their new album, I soon realized these passionate Houston veterans are evolving and nurturing their signature sound. The album was recorded at several places around Houston including Frank's home where they separated instruments in rooms like the bathroom and bedrooms. Frank, a seasoned bass player who plays with such notable acts as Zwee and D.R.U.M., says this is by far the most powerful recording project he has ever taken part in. Highlights include Bobbleheads, a tune they open the gates on and play ALL the notes. The songs are all recorded slickly and 'mildly' produced. I sat down with the two siblings at the Golden Corral Buffet and enjoyed an endless array of pork shoulder, Chicken Wings, and yesterday's macaroni and cheese. Well, not really but would that not be cool?

1. Tell us about recording your new album. Pitfalls? Inspirations?

Well, I feel that this recording was remarkably pitfall free. Except for the knock-down, drag-out brawls that ensued upon Frank and Davis questioning the accuracy of my rhythm keeping. Then it was on.

Inspiration for this record honestly came for me after a really painful break up. Blah blah blah. But I just wanted to create something tangible that would try to help me, uh, feel my way home and stuff.

2. Synergy is what I think of when I think of your live show. What do you attribute this to and where can someone else pick some up?

Well, we all know each other really well, since Frank is my brother and Davis is my ex-boyfriend, and Frank and Davis were friends and bandmates for years before this. So as much shit as we give each other, we love each other that much too, and it comes through a la the music. Synergy, uh...I think you can pick some up wherever dysfunctional families are sold. And to be perfectly honest, I swear to God I drink this fermented tea drink called kombucha everyday, and the name of the product is Synergy. Swear. It rocks, I'm serious.

3. Frank, did you ever ask your sister when you were growing up to have a friend spend the night so you could try and make out when your parents went to sleep?

Nah. Since she's three years younger we had different friends. In high school, well at least mine, more than a year or two under was kinda off limits.

4. If you had a magic wand, what is the one thing you would change about the Houston music scene?

My magic wand would light a big, fat fire under the asses of both club owners and music listeners alike. For the venues, better and smarter promotions would help everybody out, and for people who are into music-step out of your comfort zone and live a little! Go out more, it's fun! We'll totally buy you shots!

5. If that same magic wand had the power to destroy any public structure in town, what would it be?

Oh, it would be pretty rad to just, like, zap out the Galleria.

6. Do you really have a magic wand and where can I get one?

I think it's from the same store where you can get those numbchucks I really like to throw around!

7. What was the first record that made the hair on your arms stand up?

Probably was Joni Mitchell, Don Juan's Reckless Daughter, AC/DC Back in Black. I liked Aldo Nova too. Then Peter Tosh crushed me. Downpressor man. Pharoah Saunders, You gotta have freedom.

8. What do you feel is most different about your new album that you take the most pride in?

Well, we did all the essential tracking live, so it's got the rawer, more rawkin and energetic feel of our live show. We wanted the record to represent who we really are when you go to see us, and we think that comes through pretty well.

9. Favorite Houston Bands?

Ninevolt, Arthur Yoria, Midnight Pilots, Studio Magick Black.

10. I don't feel like you have adequately answered the magic wand question. Why are you hiding this potential blessing to humanity?

Omar, you're my favorite writer ever.



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SMELLS LIKE AUGUST

Ween, Digital Underground, and Organ Failure make August smell even better

By Brigette Zabak



There is no better way to start out the month than with a performance from the clever and cunning duo from Pennsylvania, Ween. Having just recently released a new EP titled 'The Friends EP,' the pair is embarking on a quick but contagious tour of Texas in early August.

Though many still don't know the quiet brilliance of Ween, the band has developed a loyal and diverse following over the years. With songs like "Voodoo Lady" and "Piss up a Rope," the audience is in for some truly witty and melodious sounds. Ween will be in Houston on August 8th performing at the spiffy downtown venue, Warehouse Live.

If Ween's experimental and quirky sound isn't appealing, maybe the gentle, sophisticated crooning of James "Slim" Hand will quell your musical desires. Hailing from Waco, Texas, James Hand has been playing honest, evocative country music for almost forty years. Playing mostly to a steadily growing local fan base in dives around Texas, James Hand has managed to escape the attention of fans outside the Lone star state - until recently that is. At the age of 53, he's released his first nationally-distributed album, The Truth Will Set You Free. The album was produced by Asleep at the Wheel front man Ray Benson and notable Texas producer Lloyd Maines. The Truth Will Set You Free is one of the most sincere and beautiful albums to come out in ages. His presence is august and commanding and his voice will melt your heart. James Hand will be playing in Houston on August 10th at Blanco's.

Showing some love for the local scene check out Austin rockers, Ume. Their sound is raw, compact and crisp. Ume is so fantastic because you don't necessarily expect them to be so unbelievably loud and succinct. Lead guitarist and singer Lauren's diminutive frame is amazingly misleading. Her prowess as both a vocalist and a guitarist is what keeps fans coming back for more. Ume will be playing an all ages show with Those Peabodys, Che Arthur, and Over Sea Under Stone on Saturday, August 11 at The Proletariat.

Texas-raised Ben Kweller gives live performances that are always engaging and endearing. The moppy redheaded guy from Dallas plays an array of instruments and lavishes the crowd with his light hearted tunes. His songs are fun, no frills, and translate really well live. If you're looking for a definite good time, stop by Walter's on Washington on Friday, August 17th to check him out.

If indie rock isn't your thing, maybe a blast from the past will help you pass another otherwise uneventful Friday evening. The Scout Bar, located in Clear Lake, welcomes the 80's hip hop craziness of Digital Underground. You know…. The guys who sang The Humpty Dance. That's right people – get your fake-nose glasses on and shake your booty because Digital Underground is making a random come back on Friday, August 17th at The Scout Bar.

If you fancy something a bit more exotic, look no further than pretty much any show that comes through Super Happy Fun Land. The venue name is curious – but the venue itself is even more intriguing. Located in the Heights– SHFL plays host to some of the most eclectic and progressive musicians and artists this town has ever seen. Organ Failure definitely fits the bill. The local group plays some really clever and hilarious music. They are unquestionably entertaining and worth venturing out to see. They will be playing with the New Jersey rockers Screaming Females on August 15th.

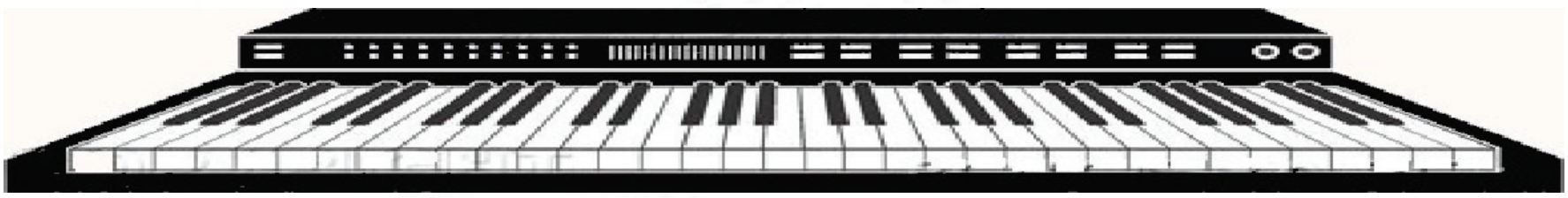
Rounding out a stellar month of shows is a performance from an incredible band out of New York City. Au Revoir Simone is a chic trio of female musical masterminds. Don't be fooled by the silly, yet awesome context of their band name. Au Revoir Simone is more magnetic and inspiring than a lot of other bands making the scene these days. And though there music is the product of nothing more than three keyboards and a drum machine – the end results are almost always stunning, complex, and graceful. They are definitely worth checking out. Au Revoir Simone will be playing on August 31 with Oh No! Oh My! at Walter's on Washington.

NUMBERS

CONDENSED

SYNTH

NIGHT



July 28th / August 4th

The E3 Holy Trinity

Three Must-haves, for three systems, from E3 2007

By Tyler Barber



Little Big Planet gives the player complete customization of their gaming experience.





Last month I attended the industry exclusive, albeit scaled-down, event E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo) and now I'm back from the trip, ready to spread word on what games to look out for this holiday season.

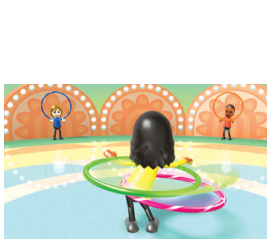
I've complied what I thought where the best three games exclusive to each system, and gave them each their own page of content. Plus, you can read on my blog about four additional games that are coming to both the PlayStation 3 and the Xbox 360 which well worth the price of entry, and will make for a happy ending to this record year in gaming.

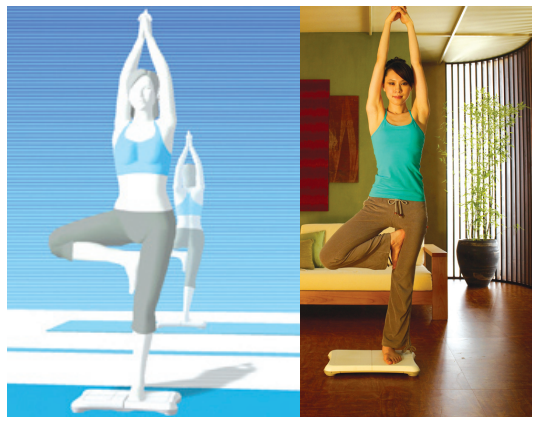
+ Also, check the Technology section at FreePressHouston.com as I'll be updating the gaming blog regularly with colored commentary, and topics aimed at gamers.

Nintendo Wii

Wii Fit | Release Date: TBA

Wii Fit, the big game for Nintendo this year, split the hard-core gaming community in two. What is essentially an exorcize videogame, Wii Fit comes with another innovative controller from Nintendo, the Wii Balance Board, which measures a plater's weight distribution, balance, center of gravity, and body posture. The controller will be used with mini-games in four categories, aerobics, muscle, yoga, and flexibility. Its obvious from the presentation of this game that it will be all the rage on mainstream media outlets across the country, but since this was the title that Nintendo was pushing the most this E3, hard-core gamers have felt left out in the cold. Maybe those hard-core gamers need to relax with some Wii Fit Yoga?





Wii fit will allow you track the ups and downs of your fitness on a chronological chart ala' Wii Sports.

Super Mario Galaxy | Release Date: November 12

Considered the first big breakthrough in gameplay for Mario since Mario 64, Mario Galaxy takes the grounded platforming genre and launches it into outer space, where planet jumping is the new flying. Mario Galaxy had a great showing last year, and did even better this year. Series creator Myiamoto showed off several levels (mini galaxies) that differed not only in the theme of the location, but also in gameplay. Each Mario Galaxy stage will have differing levels of gravity that will factor into the physics of the portly plumber's platforming. Overall, Mario Galaxy will offer an unimaginable amount of variety in gameplay, and it packs the polish of the Nintendo pedigree.





In Galaxy, Mario will not be saving Princess Peach, but a new, emo-looking princess.

My Sims | Release Date: September

With a new cute anime look, My Sims will reel in Sims universe newcomers by playing to the family-friendly image of the Wii. All Sims games center on player-created content, and My Sims is no different. My Sims takes advantage of the intuitive Wii control scheme and makes character creation fun and instantly accessible. Even building objects like houses and furniture are as easy as building with tangible Legos. My Sims differs from the other Sims games because it starts you in a run-down town where you must create an environment to nurture positive growth. This is achieved by building shops or homes that attract certain personalities to your town. Bringing Sims into your town will unlock more items for you to build with, which in turn reveals the addictive cycle of the PC Sims games which, so far, have proven difficult to duplicate successfully on a console.





Buidling your town with items that posses Geeky "essences" (pictured left) will bring nerds, and new items like the acrade machine.

E3 2007 The E3 Holy Trinity cont.

PlayStation 3



I was able to make a similar moving tank in just minutes during my demo of Little Big Planet.

Little Big Planet | Release Date: Early 08

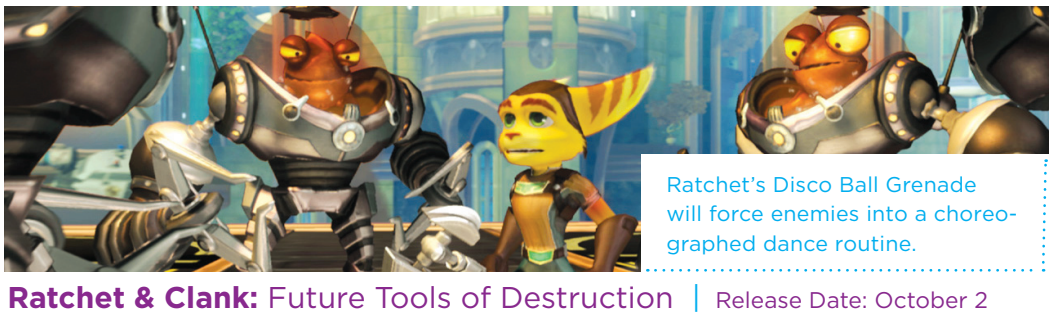
This game is going to change the videogame industry indefinitely. What on the outside looks like a simple physics-based side-scroller with cute plush doll characters, is actually the YouTube of gaming. The brilliance of Little Big Planet is in the enigma of its name. The game IS a simple physics-based side-scroller, but the twist is that you and your friends are creating everything in the game, and you can share your creations on the net. Did I mention that it's super-easy to build whatever you want?! A highlight of this year's E3 was the revelation of level creator toolsets. When I was thrown into the game with the game's creative director, Mark Healey, I instantly understood all the toolsets. After I played around a bit, Mark showed me some of the simple levels created by the development team. The level of creativity and interaction that Little Big Planet offers is commendable not only as an achievement in gaming, but also as a tool for physics-based exploration. I can already image the glut of Rune Goldberg devices that will be made in game. What's more, Sony's developers are already lining up to deliver their own creations inside Little Big Planet. Can you imagine a God of War themed stage with deadly spinning blades, hell-demons, and threesomes?!?



Uncharted focuses on cinematic presentation in both gameplay and in cut-scenes.

Uncharted: Drake's Fortune | Release Date: November

When I was a kid I was a sucker for good animation and I'd buy games solely for that reason, which is why I'm stoked for Uncharted. The team at Naughty Dog (Jak and Daxter, PS2) has been working to give this game's main character an unheard of amount of unique animations. For example, if you're behind cover while being fired at by the local pirates, you'll anxiously ready your gun, nervously jumping and looking around for vantage points. But if you're not under any threat, your facial expressions will be calm and your movements more calculated and graceful. Gameplay-wise, I'm a little worried. When I played Uncharted, the character's movement and aiming felt floaty, and it took an abysmal amount of gunfire to take down enemies. But, when the nuts and bolts of the game are part Gears of War, Resident Evil 4 and Tomb Raider, I'm brought back to the days of Flashback (Genesis), and Out of This World (SNES, Sega CD). Consider me sold.



Ratchet's Disco Ball Grenade will force enemies into a choreographed dance routine.

Ratchet & Clank: Future Tools of Destruction | Release Date: October 2

When I saw the first screenshots for R&C: FToD, I was stunned. This is the closest I've seen a game look like a Pixar film. The level I saw on the show floor showed an epic battle raining down on Ratchet's home planet. On the gameplay side of things, R&C:FToD is sticking closely to the old formula, but has revamped the level of fluidity and polish. Expect boss battles this time around to offer the type of climatic moments that are given in today's movie blockbusters. The boss fight I saw at E3 was a multi-staged attack on a giant robot who was hauling ass down these rails, high above the bombarded city, all while you're trying to dodge oncoming missiles and giant fists. It was just chaotic and fun to watch, which sums up the experience that R&C:FToD looks to deliver.

continued pg. 18

super happy fun land

Aug 1st:
Rachel Hansbro (of The Western Civilization)
Cory Derden
Lee Scaffolds
Heidi Lacey

Aug 2nd:
The Unit Breed
Ride Home
Hymn Six

Aug 3rd:
Howard's Dilemma
Indian Jenny
Litost
Electricks
Pavmire

Aug 4th:
Lisa Herrington Art opening 7pm-9pm
Soulfix at 8pm
Ali Harter
The Non Band
Pretty & Nice
Quiet Morning
rachel t(oombstone) aka sew what

Aug 5th:
Buckeye
Elaine Greer
Nice Work If You Can Get It
Bob Wall

Aug 7th:
The Quiet Company
Bombing Weather

Aug 8th:
Artbeat
Atlus
I Am The Conductor
Captain Electric And The Asians
Hailstone

Aug 10th:
The Dimes 8:30pm
Mantis 9:15pm
I Miss Being A Kid 10pm
Ernie Banks 10:45pm
Riff Tiffs 11:30pm

Aug 11th:
Sat Matinee Showcase for local bands sign up now!

Aug 11th:
King Louie and the Swinging Monkeys
Brains for Dinner

Aug 12th:
Captain Ahab
My Empty Phantom

August 13th:
Da Bears
Numerators
My Milliner
Panda 84

Aug 14th:
The Lonely H
The Watermarks
The Gold Sounds
Ladyheat

Aug 15th:
Screaming Females
Organ Failure
Darling New Neighbors
Red Pony Clock
The Matheletes

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E3 2007 The E3 Holy Trinity cont.

Xbox 360



Mass Effect | Release Date: November

Mass Effect's graphics are excellent, and feature a film-grain overlay that harkens back to classic Science-Fiction films.

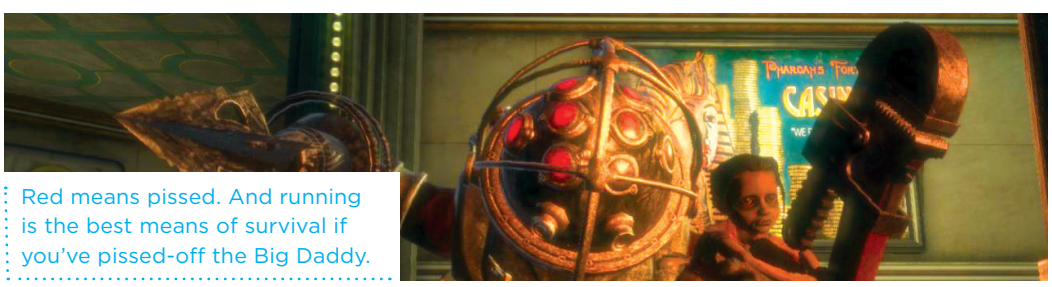
Within ten minutes of the Mass Effect demo, a room of gaming journalists—from The New York Times, Yahoo Games and yours truly—were transported to the feeling you get at the end of Old Yeller when Pa has to put down the mutt. The level of emotion that the characters in Mass Effect emit, with the complexity of the epic moral decisions you are forced to make, have created what is the most engrossing game this year. Instead of turn-based combat, Bioware, (the studio that brought us RPG epics Jade Empire and Knights of the Old Republic) is focusing on squad-based-shooter mechanics, giving the player the ability to lead a small squad of teammates who will change their moral position according to your own. This moral positioning has been a staple of Bioware games, and in Mass Effect the moral decisions you'll make are on the galactic scale, and are as gray as the Houston sky. Top it off with a fully-customizable protagonist, an entire galaxy to explore, and several endings that will segue into a planned trilogy, and you've got the makings of a new classic.



One new tactic the Cvenant Grunts (pictured) will deploy: suicide bombings.

Halo 3 | Release Date: September 25

Halo 3 is about as anticipated as the second coming of Christ. And it will more-or-less bring about the same outcome: the end of the world. Set right after the cliffhanger ending of Halo 2, Halo 3 brings the fight to Earth, and this time the Arbiter (the alien creature you briefly played in Halo 2) will fight by your side throughout the game. The demo I got from Bungie (Halo's creator) showed the very first level in the game, and given the general disappointment with Halo 2, I can say with confidence that they have acknowledged and addressed them. Also, decriers of graphics fear not, Halo 3's new graphical polish will impress. What's more impressive is the Save Film feature, of which I also saw a demo. You can save replays of your game in both online matches, and in the single player game. You'll be able to pause the action, swing the camera around Matrix-style, and edit your film for upload onto Bungie's website or YouTube (read: free marketing). When Halo 3 is released next month, Jesus may come back just to pwn your ass.



Red means pissed. And running is the best means of survival if you've pissed-off the Big Daddy.

Bioshock | Release Date: August 21

I've been keeping myself from reading anything about this game. I want it to be a complete surprise the first time I play it. So, what little I know is Bioshock is a first-person-shooter for the thinking man. The game takes place in an underwater city that was created by idealists wanting to birth utopia. However, a plane crash brings you into this bubble city, only to find it far from the utopia it was meant to be. The setting is not just a gimmick, Bioshock will cast the player into a game where the environment acts as a character, a weapon or an enemy. But you'll not only face-off against the crippling underwater city, there are also all kinds of mutated humans left wandering around, harvesting plasma out of dead, or soon-to-be dead bodies. Your weaponry will consist of makeshift guns and super-human powers. It's all packaged with some of the best graphics, and hands-down, the best looking water in any videogame. Ever. Look for the review in the next issue.



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Hidden Houston History 2:
Race, Riots and Good Ol' Texas Racism

By Alex Wukman





that HPD raid supposedly ended with the structure burning to the ground.

I've been thinking of writing a book on the fight for racial equality in Houston. To do the subject justice it would take at least 2-and-a-half years of research to produce book of no less than 700 pages.

It'll feature things like the Camp Logan Mutiny in 1918. This is one of the more interesting events in local history, what happened was that a black soldier stationed at an emergency training facility just east of what would become Memorial Park stopped two white cops after they used excessive force in arresting a black woman.

The cops pistol whipped the soldier and took him in as well, a second black soldier tried to stop the cops and he was arrested too. When word got back to the rest of the garrison at Camp Logan the soldiers deliberated for a while, some reports say they debated for a few minutes while others say they debated until almost midnight. In the end approximately 100 troops stormed the armory, armed themselves with rifles and marched on the police station to try and get their comrades back.

The soldiers were met by a phalanx of off-duty police, national guardsmen and armed citizens. The ensuing gun battle lasted into the next day and left 12 whites dead and 14 injured. Out of the black troops one was killed and 4 injured. The amount of public outcry this created caused all black troops to be taken out of Texas and a suspension of the enlistment all black troops in general. After the public outcry died down and the army had chance to investigate, there were three separate courts martial trying the soldiers for mutiny. Since it was during war time the sentences for the crime was very harsh. 110 were tried, 110 found guilty, 19 sentenced to death and many of the rest were sentenced to life in prison.

The book will also mention the TSU shootout in the early seventies—HPD heard that the Black Panthers were recruiting on the TSU campus and showed up in force, a 'firefight' ensued and quite a few unarmed college students were killed. It'll mention that while the panthers were there they were teaching students how to screen for sickle cell anemia, hypertension, anemia and diabetes. It'll go from there to the persistent rumors in the black community of a raid on a Black Panther safe house, this one located across the street from Emancipation Park and how that HPD raid supposedly ended with the structure burning to the ground.

It'll then move into the part of the story that while intriguing just can't be substantiated and doesn't stand up to scrutiny—that after the fire the city wouldn't let anyone build on the land and renamed the park Emancipation Park to quiet public outcry.

It'll include the fact that the Menil family wanted to donate the statue "Broken Obelisk," the one that is installed in front of the Rothko Chapel, to the city for use in a Martin Luther King memorial in 1968 but City Council refused. I was told to mention how the Menil's even offered to pay to build the park but again Mayor Louis B. Welch and City Council refused.

The book won't just deal with the black experience it'll mention the death of Jose Campos Torres—a Hispanic Vietnam veteran killed in 1973 by HPD officers. He was walking home from a bar when two uniformed HPD officers stopped him, handcuffed him and threw him into a bayou.

He drowned, HPD denied any involvement. A few days later the body was fished out of the bayou and the handcuffs had HPD stamped on them. This led to the Moody Park Riots.

And the end of the book will deal with the Klan, how they were marching in Houston up into the '80s and how a coalition of like minded citizens was able to prevent those marches by turning out thousands of people and forcing the city to pass an ordinance making it too expensive for the Klan to hold a rally here in town. The Klan now has to carry a $1 million insurance policy and hire off duty cops for security if they want to march in Houston.

Yea it'll be a great book; sadly I doubt I'll get around to it. There are just too many beers to drink and too many pretty girls to talk to.

HATETANK
www.HATETANK.org

Saturday, August 4th

A GLOBAL THREAT - BYO Records

MONSTER SQUAD - Punk Core Records

WEDNESDAY NIGHT HEROES - BYO Records

DIS-EASE

Walter's
4215 Washington Ave.
Doors @ 8:00 All Ages $10

Wednesday, August 8th

EVERGREEN TERRACE - Metal Blade Records

AUGUST BURNS RED - Solid State Records

THE WARRIORS - Victory Records

CASEY JONES - Eulogy Recordings

SCHOOL GIRL KNIFE FIGHT

DEAD BEFORE DUSK

Java Jazz
2502 Fm 1960 Rd
Doors @ 7:00 All Ages $12

Wednesday, August 8th

THE MURDER JUNKIES

THE QUARENTINES

RATS IN THE ATTIC

FALLIN' OVER

Walter's
4215 Washington Ave.
Doors @ 8:00 All Ages $10

Saturday, August 11th

PATHS OF POSSESSION - Metal Blade Records

DARK FAITH Still Dead Productions

VIVESECT - Obscured Records

UNCLEANSED - Grindethic Records

Walter's
4215 Washington Ave.
Doors @ 8:00 All Ages $10

WALTERS
ON
WASHINGTON

+++++++++

THU. Aug. 2
LEFT ALONE
Mad Marge and the Stonecutters, Johnny Switchblade and the Blackouts, The Jerryhatricks

+++++++++

FRI. Aug. 3
THE WESTERN CIVILIZATION
The Church Of Philadelphia

+++++++++

SAT. Aug. 4
A GLOBAL THREAT
Monster Squad, Wednesday Night Heroes, Dis-ease

+++++++++

WED. Aug. 8
THE MURDER JUNKIES
The Quarantines, Rats In The Attic, Fallin' Over

+++++++++

THU. Aug. 9
THIS YEARS TIGERS
Buckley

+++++++++

SAT. Aug. 11
PATHS OF POSSESSION
Dark Faith, Vivesect, Uncleansed

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WED. Aug. 15
JASON ISBELL and the 400 Unit (ex-DRIVE BY TRUCKERS)
CENTRO-MATIC

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FRI. Aug. 17
BEN KWELLER
Tim Fite

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SUN. Aug. 19
DECEASED

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MON. Aug. 20
THE FLOOD
Novice

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THU. Aug. 24
THE LEMURS

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FRI. Aug. 25
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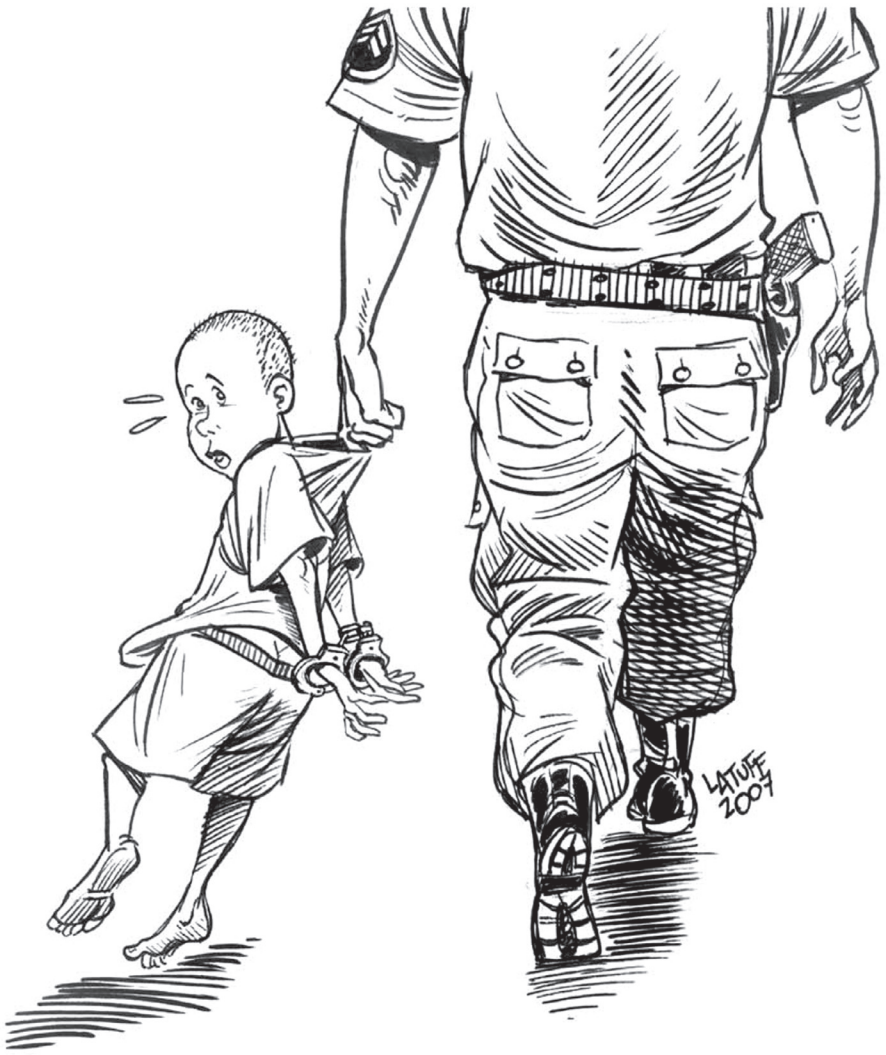
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The Children Without a Title

By Sousan



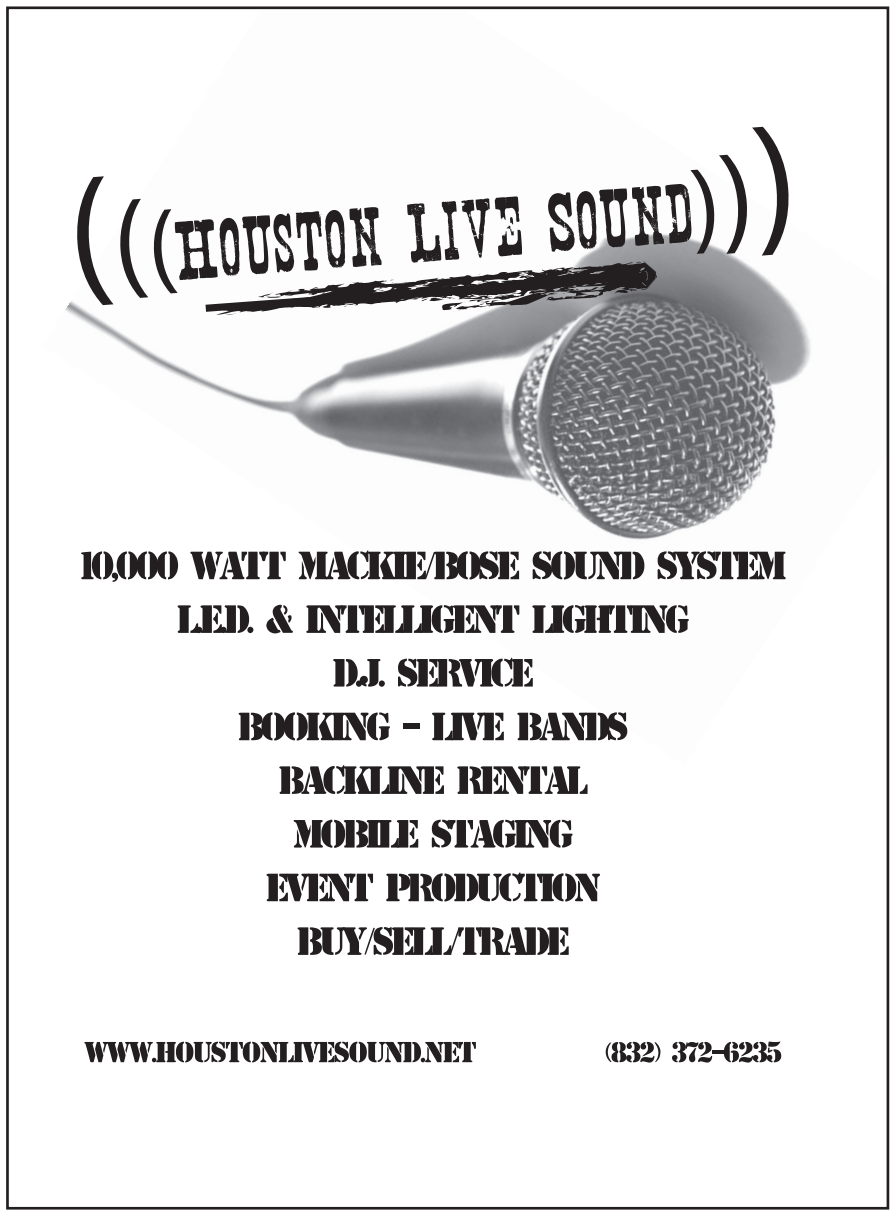
Upon reaching the age of 16, Palestinians are issued an identity card, and with this card, Israel overwhelmingly restricts the movement and life of Palestinians to and from the Occupied Territories.

And though Palestinian children are allowed to travel into Israel, they still face the travails of restriction, as they can only travel with international passport carriers.

As a result of Israel's arbitrary laws, I recently volunteered as a chaperone with the organization Birthright Re-plugged and accompanied 20 children from Jenin Refugee Camp to visit Jerusalem, Haifa, and the villages surrounding Haifa which their grandparents fled in 1948. Most of the children we accompanied are 15 years old, soon Israel will issue them an identity card and never again will they be able to leave the West Bank to go into Israel. So to further entrench their already emotional experience, the children knew that not only would the trip be their first but also their last. They will probably never again pray in the Al Aqsa Mosque or see the horizon of the Mediterranean Sea.

The journey began with the volunteers of Birthright Re-plugged spending the night at The Freedom Theatre in Jenin Refugee Camp. Half of the camp's population is under the age of 18 and so the theatre's role in the camp has been vital over the years in enhancing the children's lives. We met with Juliano Mer Khamis (the founder of the theatre) and the children from the camp; all were anticipating the journey. Toward the end of the night, after the sun had set and the sounds simmered to the roaring of Merkava tanks (Israel's nightly incursions into Jenin); it was our turn to anticipate the next day's voyage. What if the Israeli soldiers don't allow the children to pass through the checkpoint, do we have an alternate plan?

continued pg. 24





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"We need to stop wasting all this time and energy apologizing to the American Indian, which we continue to do ... We give them casinos, we give them special licenses, we give them special scholarships and why I don't understand ... We conquered them, that's history - Hello... You got to be against giving welfare to the American Indians because of the fact , that 200 years ago they were whipped in a war. Lets just call it what it is, they lost a war."

-- Houston Councilmember Michael Berry, March 27, 2007

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Where do we say we're going? Surely not to Jerusalem and Haifa.

Just as we were contemplating and discussing our worries, a young man that works in the theatre received a phone call. "There's been an operation at 'Anabta checkpoint," he said. Although the details were unclear at that moment, we eventually heard from another source that a man from the camp opened fire at Israeli soldiers, only to be gunned down seconds later. This was a problem for us and for the children. The checkpoint was closed down, and they weren't allowing anyone in or out of Jenin. Of course, for the residents of Jenin this was nothing new, it has become a normalized factor in their occupied lives. But for us, it was something both new and frightening. At the same time we could think of nothing but the children and the smiles on their faces, and what their reactions would be if we had to tell them the trip was canceled.

racism pervades nearly every level of the society - from legal discrimination to violation of cultural rights.

Regardless of the operation that occurred at 'Anabta checkpoint we decided to attempt the crossing in the morning, otherwise we would have to cancel the trip, so we left the camp at 6 a.m. and drove to the checkpoint. The organizers of the trip got off the bus to talk to the soldiers. There was no breeze that morning, and being the restless person that I am, I decided to get off the bus to walk around and cool off. I noticed there were stained patches of dry blood dispersed over the concrete - it was the blood of the Palestinian man that was killed the night before. I trembled with a sudden reaction of heaviness and quickly got back on the bus. Finally we were told that the children were granted permission to pass and after we crossed the checkpoint, a great flood of relief was evident as the children temporarily left their hardships behind.

The drive into Jerusalem was unforgettable. We gave each child a camera to document the trip through their eyes - snapshot after snapshot recorded for their remembrance. For the children, who had only seen the Al Aqsa Mosque in photos, the first glimpse of the gold dome illuminating under the sun brought them joy, some even tears. From Orthodox Jews dressed in their garb to Israeli police barricading the streets – the children walked around with wide eyes. After passing through waves of tourists, we managed to get through the narrow alleyways of the Old City without losing a child.

After the children prayed, we headed north toward Haifa. None of the kids had ever seen the sea before, nor had they been in a city where Palestinians and Jews lived side by side. The snapshots began as soon as we drove up to the shore, but when the children saw Israelis prancing around in bikinis and beer, their bewildered look was prominently displayed as they trudged along the shore. We managed to convince some of the kids to ignore the surrounding but it was especially hard since they lived such a restricted life in Jenin refugee camp.

Just as the children stared at others, it was noticeable that others were looking intently at them. An old Jewish man in a Speedo walked up to us and in Hebrew asked where we are from. Soon after, several Israeli policemen came and specifically asked about the girls wearing hijab. Juliano and others argued with the policemen and convinced them the girls were from a village near Aqqa but the policemen were not entirely convinced, they lingered around and watched our every move. It was an uncomfortable situation for us, but even for Palestinian citizens of Israel, racism pervades nearly every level of the society - from legal discrimination to violation of cultural rights.

Not too far away from the sea were the villages that the children's families escaped in 1948. We visited the remnants of six different villages, all destroyed soon after the families fled. The children handled it well though, ending the trip with a bittersweet memory as they walked through the empty fields of thorns. But for the children without a title, this extemporary feeling will soon cycle back into a life of restriction, violence, and harassment from Israel's racist regime.

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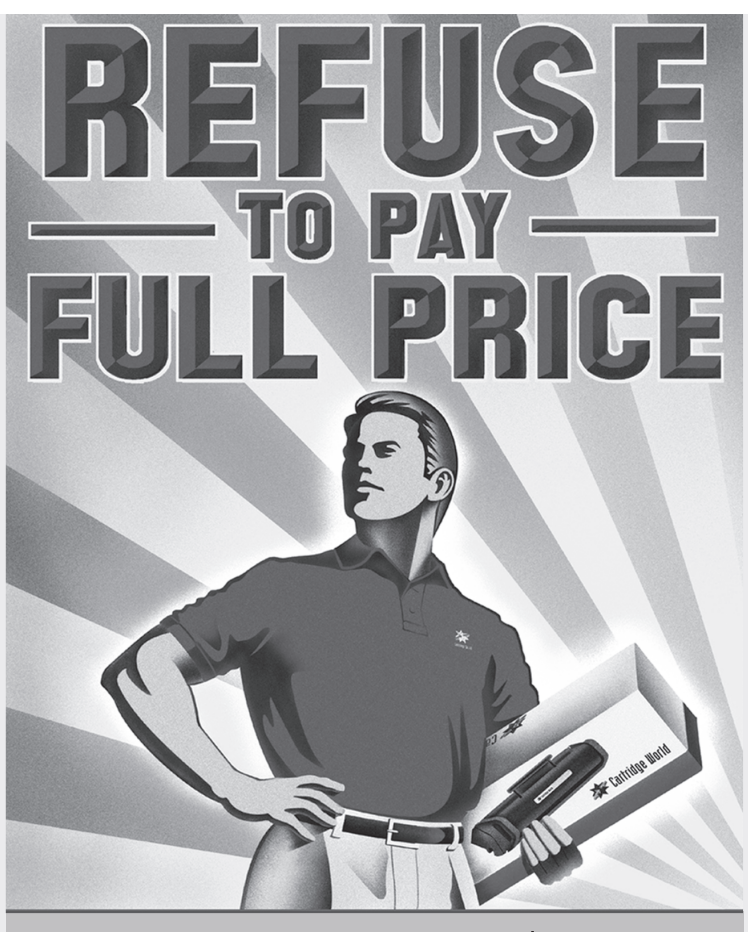


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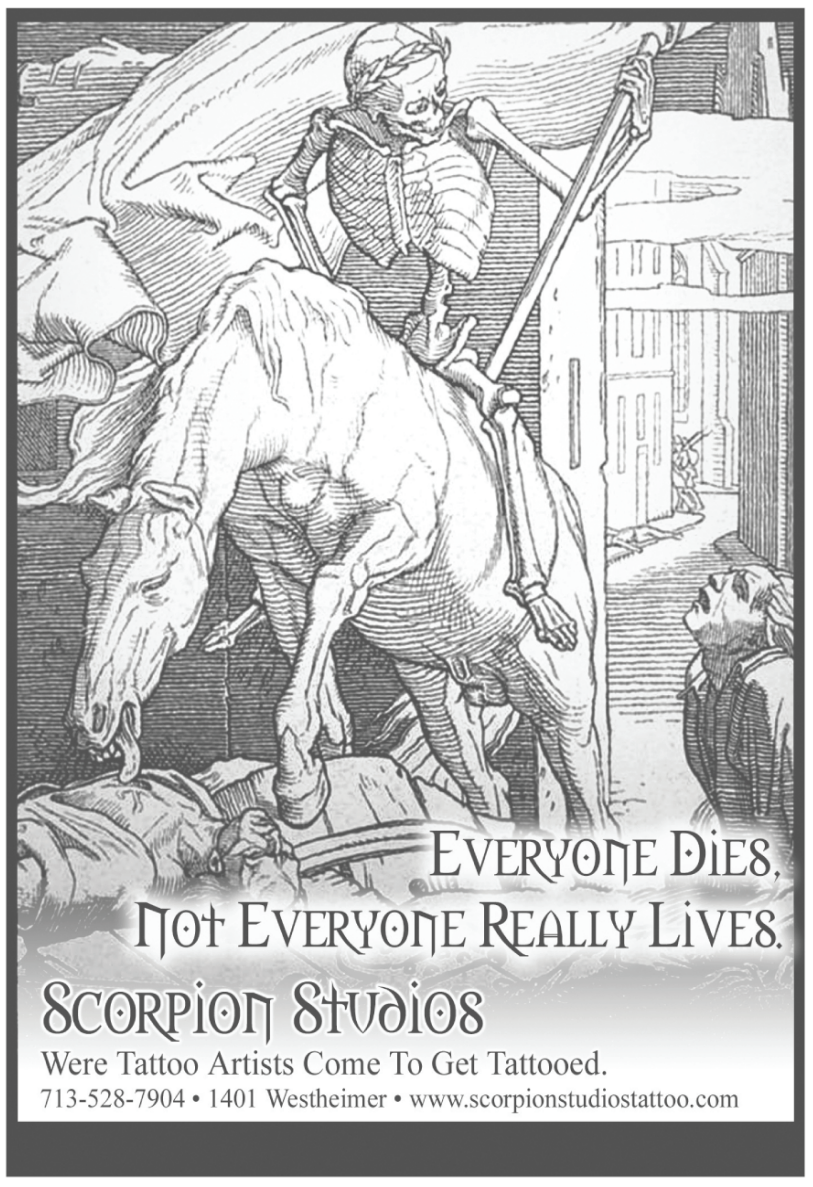


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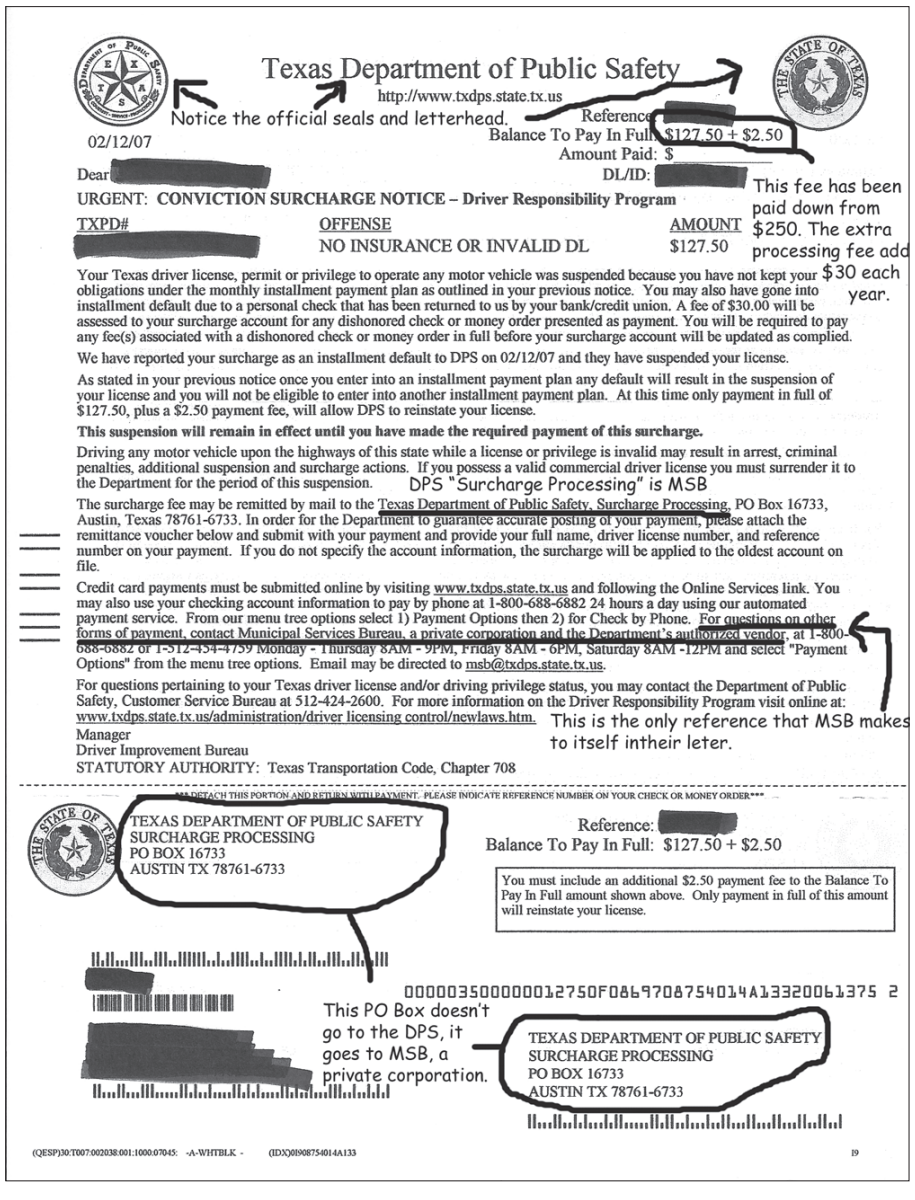


THE LOCAL

By Warren Sheible

A TEXAS STYLE ASS RAPING FOR HOUSTON MOTORISTS

SINCE 2004, A PRIVATE CORPORATION HAS BEEN CHARGING TEXAS MOTORISTS BETWEEN $300 AND $6000 FOR TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS FOUND IN STATE DATABASES.



Texas Department of Public Safety
http://www.txdps.state.tx.us

Notice the official seals and letterhead.

Reference: [redacted]
Balance To Pay In Full: $127.50 + $2.50
Amount Paid: $

02/12/07

Dear [redacted] DL/ID: [redacted]

This fee has been paid down from $250. The extra processing fee add $30 each year.

URGENT: **CONVICTION SURCHARGE NOTICE – Driver Responsibility Program**

TXPD#	OFFENSE	AMOUNT
[redacted]	NO INSURANCE OR INVALID DL	$127.50

Your Texas driver license, permit or privilege to operate any motor vehicle was suspended because you have not kept your obligations under the monthly installment payment plan as outlined in your previous notice. You may also have gone into installment default due to a personal check that has been returned to us by your bank/credit union. A fee of $30.00 will be assessed to your surcharge account for any dishonored check or money order presented as payment. You will be required to pay any fee(s) associated with a dishonored check or money order in full before your surcharge account will be updated as complied.

We have reported your surcharge as an installment default to DPS on 02/12/07 and they have suspended your license.

As stated in your previous notice once you enter into an installment payment plan any default will result in the suspension of your license and you will not be eligible to enter into another installment payment plan. At this time only payment in full of $127.50, plus a $2.50 payment fee, will allow DPS to reinstate your license.

This suspension will remain in effect until you have made the required payment of this surcharge.

Driving any motor vehicle upon the highways of this state while a license or privilege is invalid may result in arrest, criminal penalties, additional suspension and surcharge actions. If you possess a valid commercial driver license you must surrender it to the Department for the period of this suspension.

DPS "Surcharge Processing" is MSB

The surcharge fee may be remitted by mail to the Texas Department of Public Safety, Surcharge Processing, PO Box 16733, Austin, Texas 78761-6733. In order for the Department to guarantee accurate posting of your payment, please attach the remittance voucher below and submit with your payment and provide your full name, driver license number, and reference number on your payment. If you do not specify the account information, the surcharge will be applied to the oldest account on file.

Credit card payments must be submitted online by visiting www.txdps.state.tx.us and following the Online Services link. You may also use your checking account information to pay by phone at 1-800-688-6882 24 hours a day using our automated payment service. From our menu tree options select 1) Payment Options then 2) for Check by Phone. For questions on other forms of payment, contact Municipal Services Bureau, a private corporation and the Department's authorized vendor, at 1-800-688-6882 or 1-512-454-4759 Monday - Thursday 8AM - 9PM, Friday 8AM - 6PM, Saturday 8AM -12PM and select "Payment Options" from the menu tree options. Email may be directed to msb@txdps.state.tx.us.

This is the only reference that MSB makes to itself intheir leter.

For questions pertaining to your Texas driver license and/or driving privilege status, you may contact the Department of Public Safety, Customer Service Bureau at 512-424-2600. For more information on the Driver Responsibility Program visit online at: www.txdps.state.tx.us/administration/driver licensing control/newlaws.htm.

Manager
Driver Improvement Bureau
STATUTORY AUTHORITY: Texas Transportation Code, Chapter 708

DETACH THIS PORTION AND RETURN WITH PAYMENT. PLEASE INDICATE REFERENCE NUMBER ON YOUR CHECK OR MONEY ORDER

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY
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Reference: [redacted]
Balance To Pay In Full: $127.50 + $2.50

You must include an additional $2.50 payment fee to the Balance To Pay In Full amount shown above. Only payment in full of this amount will reinstate your license.

[redacted]

This PO Box doesn't go to the DPS, it goes to MSB, a private corporation.

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CHANCES ARE YOU'RE ONE OF THE thousands of local drivers receiving strange bills from a company claiming to be the DPS. Since 2004, a private corporation has been charging Texas motorists between $300 and $6000 for traffic violations found in state databases. Now, many who have ignored these dubious demands are about to face additional fines from Texas legislators.

The inaccurately named Municipal Services Bureau (MSB) is not a government "bureau" in the traditional sense, but an overstuffed collection agency which has established itself as authorized vendor for states across the nation. Whereas most collection agencies earn their living by harassing debtors so you don't have to or by buying off debt at a discounted rate, MSB has been able to reverse the usual roles by assessing fines themselves and letting the state deal with those who don't pay up.

Predictably, this peachy deal for private enterprise has its origins in a legislative accounting blunder. In 2003, the Texas legislature issued a budget for the first time in its history which was not balanced. Before peaking as second runner-up to the office of Texas Governor, Carole Keeton Strayhorn served as state comptroller of public accounts where it was her duty to refuse this budget because it failed to meet a requirement of the Texas Constitution for "pay as you go" public spending. Her office had discovered a deficit of nearly $200,000 which would take a myriad of slick maneuvers to reconcile. Enter, the Driver Responsibility Law (DRL).

Effective September 1st of 2003, the state of Texas would levy taxes called "surcharges" (or "fines, after the fact") on citizens with specified traffic violations on their record. Other than providing estimated revenue which legislators could use to cover the deficit, these measures were designed to infuse "driver responsibility" into the confused and self-indulgent populace.

A first conviction for Driving While Intoxicated already costs over $5000 in fines and administrative costs, plus jail time and probation. Now, those convicted must pay an additional $1000 annual surcharge for a three year period. This adds another $3000 to the bargain, or $6000 for those with higher than average blood alcohol contents.

Considering that alcoholism has been recognized as a disease by the American Medical Association, this superfluous surcharge amounts to an "illness fee" which benefits both state agencies and their corporate subcontractors. Other violations singled out for special surcharges include driving without a valid license or insurance. With fees ranging from $300 to $750 per offense, these surcharges are an additional "poor tax" on those with limited means who cannot afford the cost of maintaining these responsibilities.

Though MSB offers a monthly payment plan for those on a fixed income, loose guidelines allow the company to charge for multiple annual surcharges at a time. This means that you may find yourself paying two or more years worth of these fees simultaneously. Moreover, monthly statements issued by MSB contain no due date for payments, and many who make them find that they have missed a deadline and must pay an additional $125 reinstatement fee in order to resume their driving privileges.

If you think that you're in the clear because the violations I've just described don't apply to you, think again. The DRL also establishes a "points system" by which every other moving violation accrues surcharges, $100 for 3 points in a 3 year period and $25 for each additional point. Expect to soon be paying retroactively for all your dirty little traffic misdeeds dating back to Sept. of 2003.

If you still have managed to read this far without getting irretrievably pissed off, this next one's for you.

According to the DRL, MSB is permitted to charge you for moving violations committed in OTHER STATES AS WELL. As a member of the Driver License Compact, the Texas DPS shares information with that of member states across the nation. This would include your old driving record from when you lived in Michigan, for example, which would accrue points along with your Houston tickets for a Texas-sized surcharge bill likely to make your head leak fluid.

So far, thousands of Texas motorist have found it preferable to let their license lapse when faced with a mountain of surcharges they can't afford. A 2007 DPS report estimated that only $132.8 million in fines have been collected by MSB, less than a third of the $478.7 million assessed. In April, Texas legislators vowed to get tough on the delinquent by raising penalties for nonpayment. Start looking for a second or third job now.

Questions or comments? Email the author at ScreamingPackOfMonkeys@yahoo.com

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houston.indymedia.org

Petition launches to protect Port Arthur from Chemical Weapons



An online petition launches to gain national attention and build on efforts to prevent continued shipment of VX nerve agent to Port Arthur, TX. The petition calls on Congress and the EPA to stop the Army's transportation of VX hydrolysate across state boundaries and over interstate roadways.
VX is one of the most lethal chemical agents on the planet and requires extreme care and handling. The Army has tried to ship the waste to Dayton, Ohio and then to a plant on the Delaware River in New Jersey, but citizen protest prevented the shipment of the toxic waste in both cases.
Unfortunately, no public hearing was offered before shipping the byproduct to Port Arthur and more shipments are planned. The facility's location in Port Arthur, a predominantly poor, African American community brings up questions of environmental racism-whereby companies and government agencies site- whether purposefully or intentionally- polluting industries in low-income, minority communities.
Sign the Petition: .thepetitionsite.com/1/stop-vx-shipment

Felony Charges dropped against Sin Fronteras

On July 3, a Harris County grand jury no-billed Ashley Turner and Ben Browning for the charge of Manufacture of a Criminal Device. Grand jury members tend to be retired citizens with conservative values, but this one still found no probable cause to uphold the District Attorney's charge that the activists altered the U-locks they used to lock their necks to the privately run detention center's entrance and exit gates.
The Sin Fronteras defense committee expected the fight against the felony charges to last as long as six months, and the early dismissal likely means they won't pursue a civil rights case for malicious prosecution. They still need to raise $4,000 in legal fees, and have a hearing regarding their misdemeanor charge on July 24. The pending charge could land them in jail for 6 months and they face up to a $2,000 each in fines.



On July 4th folks from the Houston Sin Fronteras Defense Committee called for a rally at the Houston Processing Center to observe the one month anniversary of the action that shut down the facility for 3 hours as well as demand liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness for all people. As things seemed to be winding down, a short ICE bus pulled up to the font gate, and pulled around into the gated fence with concertina wire on top. The windows were all covered so people could not see out or in. It was a chilling reminder that the machinery of repression will continue to break up families and terrorize immigrant communities, even on a federal holiday observing freedom and liberty.

Change the World, Yes we Can; We're the People's Freedom Caravan

The People's Freedom Caravan was an initiative of grassroots leadership in communities in Southwest to attend the US Social Forum and promote a new vision of democracy. This is a vision based on human rights, a vision that bridges racial, geographic and cultural divides and moves beyond the status quo 'pay to play' politics. Inspired by the Freedom Riders who confronted racist violence in the South in the early 1960's, organizers, activists and allies boarded buses from Albuquerque to Selma on the way to Atlanta. Volunteers with Houston Indymedia joined the caravan in Houston, at a rally to address environmental injustice in the Manchester neighborhood in east Houston. By this time the Caravan had already left New Mexico, and marched through downtown San Antonio to protest for migrant rights and against the environmental injustices being perpetuated by the Kelly Air Force base.
Upon arriving in Atlanta the caravan was more than 400 people in 7 busses and a small armada of cars and vans. The Caravan marched together in the march that kicked off the Social Forum and represented a diverse cross section of the many groups in the southwest and south struggling for social justice.



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Bangkok Feminist Economics Conference

by Raj
The annual meeting of the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) is holding its annual conference in Bangkok at Ramkhamhaeng University. Over the next three days, scholars, activists, and leaders from government and NGOs from thirty-five countries will present talks at the conference. Many will focus on issues of major importance to this region of the world including international trade, sex work, migrant labor, and the informal labor market.



Four Houstonians, including myself, have traveled to Bangkok and are participating in the IAFFE conference in connection with our work at the editorial offices of the journal Feminist Economics, which is based at Rice University.
At the opening plenary, the speakers were Dr. Juree Vichitvathakran of the National Institute of Development Administration in Bangkok, Naiyana Supapung of the National Human Rights Commission in Thailand, Jean D'Cunha of the UNIFEM East and Southeast Asia Regional Office, and Jackie Pollock, the Director of the MAP Foundation for the Health and Knowledge of Ethnic Labour, Chiang Mai.

Houston Sin Fronteras at CCA protest in Austin

by Houston Sin Fronteras
A half dozen Houstonians involved with the Houston Sin Fronteras Defense Committee were in attendance at the Friday July 20th protest of around 50 people from across Texas that took place in Austin against a Corrections Corporation of America's office nestled in a strip mall nestled at 8015 Shoal Creek. We responded to this call posted on Austin Indymedia: "Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) is the world's largest and most notorious private prison corporation, operating more than a dozen prisons and immigrant detention centers in Texas alone. Demonstrators will protest CCA's profiting from immigrant detention expansion around Texas, including the T. Don Hutto detention center in Taylor which holds migrant families and asylum seekers, about half of whom are children."
Many of the protesters present were very aware of the things taking place at Hutto, but were unaware of the work Houston Sin Fronteras has been doing to challenge the Houston Processing Center in this neck of the woods. It was a good chance for us to tlk to folks and distribute literature about our struggle, and support the statewide movement against CCA and private prisons. The response from traffic was mostly confusion, it was hard to see what exactly we were protesting. a number of cars stopped and asked us what we were doing, most of them seemed to approve once it was explained. I don't recall seeing a motorist who expressed displeasure. The crowd was fairly diverse in terms of age, and there were folks from anglo, chican@ and mexican@ communities. A couple of folks came up from San Antonio and were preparing for the next demonstration outside of the Hutto detention center in Taylor Texas.
Towards the end of the demonstration, Austin Police showed up, and activists decided to deliver a petition to the office worker in the CCA storefront. following some negotiation they were able to do this and we all departed.

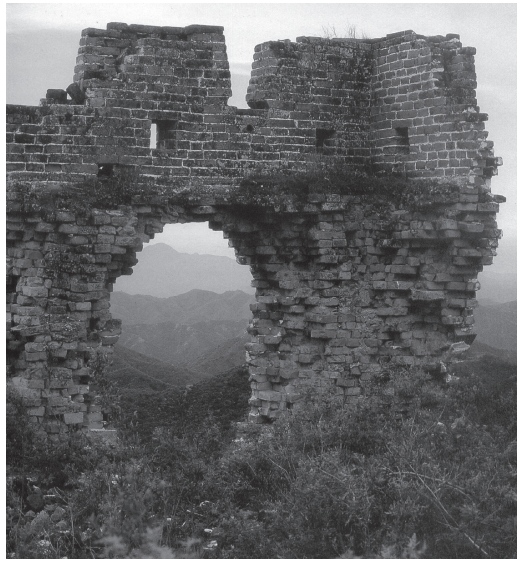
ASIAN ART EXHIBIT
LEAVES HEAVY IMPRESSION

by Michael Bergeron



TAKE THE PERFORMANCE PHOTOGRAPHY OF ZHANG HUAN. IN ONE INSTANCE HE STRIPPED NAKED, SMEARED FISH OIL ON HIS BODY AND SAT IN A LAVATORY IN THE POOREST SECTION OF BEIJING FOR AN HOUR TO GET A PHOTO.





THE AUDITORIUM-SIZED BOOTS OF KOREAN ARTIST DO-HO SUH APPEAR TO BE A TOTALITARIAN OPPRESSION CRUSHING THE INCHES-TALL FIGURES UNDERNEATH.

AMAZING IN SIZE AND SCOPE THE GREAT WALL PHOTOS WERE LASER PRINTED ONTO A SPECIALLY DESIGNED RICE PAPER MOST OF WHICH UNROLL TO WALL SIZE DIMENSIONS.

BOOTS ARE MADE FOR walking. And squashing. The auditorium-sized boots of Korean artist Do-Ho Suh appear to be a totalitarian oppression crushing the inches-tall figures underneath. This display occupies almost half of a huge single gallery in the Red Hot – Asian Art Today exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Running through the middle of October, the show beckons the curious with a life size red dinosaur in an equally surreal red jail cell that sits in front of the MFA's Law Building.

Special projects curator Alison Greene points out that the giant boots aren't really a threat. One interpretation posits the people huddling for protection under the boot's authoritative shadow.

Houston residents Jereann and Robert Chaney who started specifically collecting "cutting edge" Asian art in the mid-90s own the collection. Speaking during the media preview to the show Chaney remarked "the rise of a new economic superpower [China] has often led to a rise of greatness in the arts as well." In an interview included with the press notes, Jereann adds "the great Pop Art movement that had originated in the West in the 1960s essentially reemerged in Asia in the 1990s."

Pop culture truly exists on display with many of the artists making light satiric, or perhaps slightly malevolent, references to American commercial icons like Starbucks, Coke and Kodak. That giant dinosaur at Bissonnet and Main looks like nothing if not a giant plastic toy. One gallery houses several Japanese items that include Hello Kitty and Godzilla figures. These pets represent a combination of the otaku (tech nerd) and kawaii (cuteness) that make anime movies so popular.

The images can also be disturbing. Take the performance photography of Zhang Huan. In one instance he stripped naked, smeared fish oil on his body and sat in a lavatory in the poorest section of Beijing for an hour to get a photo, all the more amazing in its poster sized blown-up glory. Another even larger Huan photo hangs closer to the ceiling. It depicts a leg with a metal brace seemingly embedded into the skin. Not only is the image riveting, it conjures up images of amputation because of the way it's cropped and because it's in two rectangular pieces.

This exhibit constantly amazes as in the case of Qu Yan's Mao Zedong (2004). The painting shows Mao as he would appear if elongated by parallel panels, plus floating in the image are lots and lots of cell phones. The impact of this canvas recalls Magritte's painting of the floating Englishmen with overcoats and bowler hats, Golconda.

The exhibit sits all over the place, in the lobby, or in the street and don't miss the five flat panel monitor film by Chiho Aoshina that sits in the basement of the Beck Building. Running under ten minutes City Glow shows a cityscape of building with human faces. As the sunny day turns to stormy weather some of the buildings start crawling through a jungle underbrush like caterpillars. Look closely for an ominous spider (only in monitor number three) and a few heads impaled on tropical forest trees.

City Glow is mounted on a wall that leads to the parking garage and sure enough as one walks that corridor, one is walking over another part of the show, mounted under some kind of acrylic so your footprints leave no trace on the actual artwork.

Next to City Glow is a separate exhibit called The Great Wall of China, photographs by Chen Changfen (open until August 12). Amazing in size and scope the Great Wall photos were laser printed onto a specially designed rice paper most of which unroll to wall size dimensions. MFA photography curator Anne Tucker explains that much of the art in Red Hot is a reaction against established artists like Changfen, who's in his 60s.


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