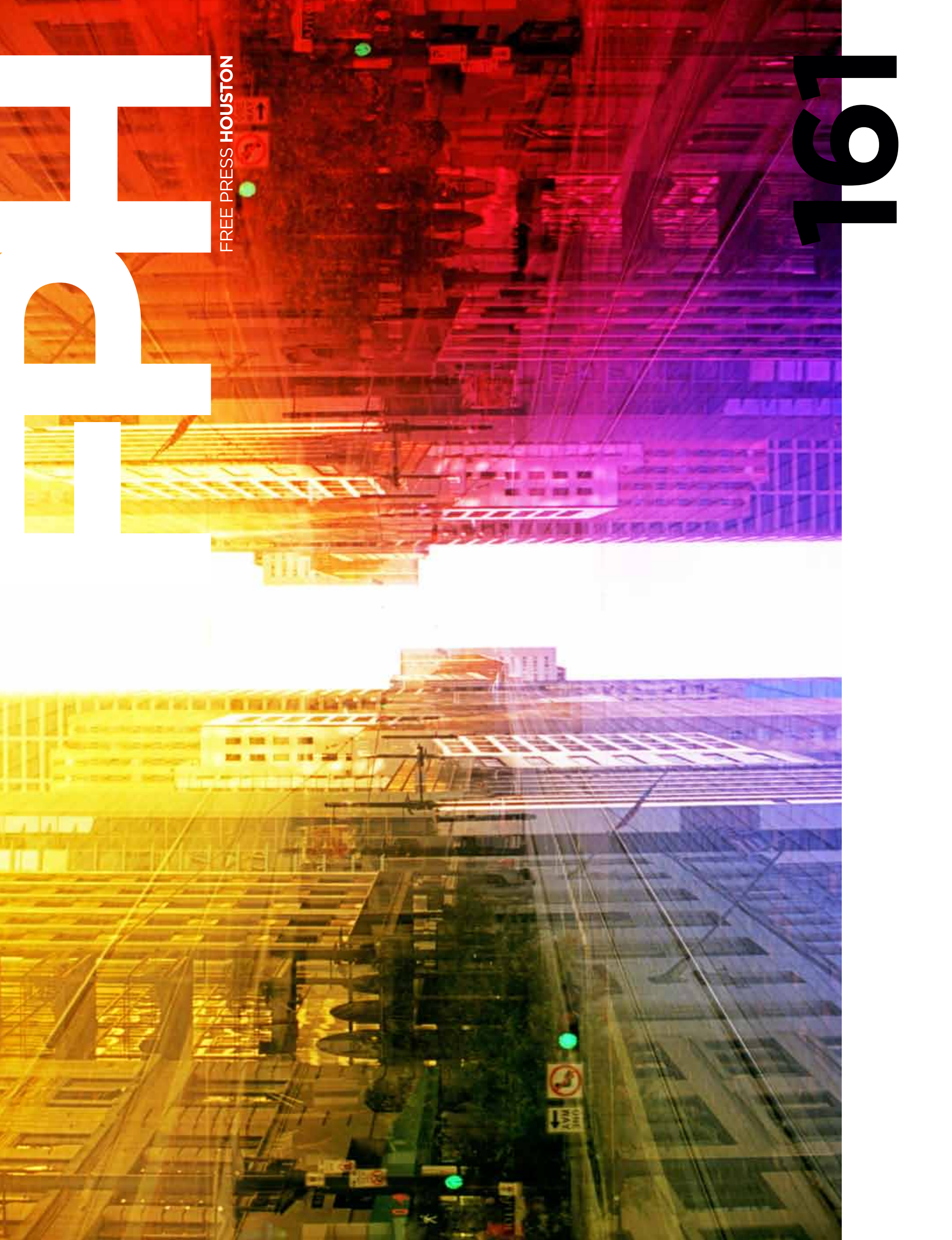
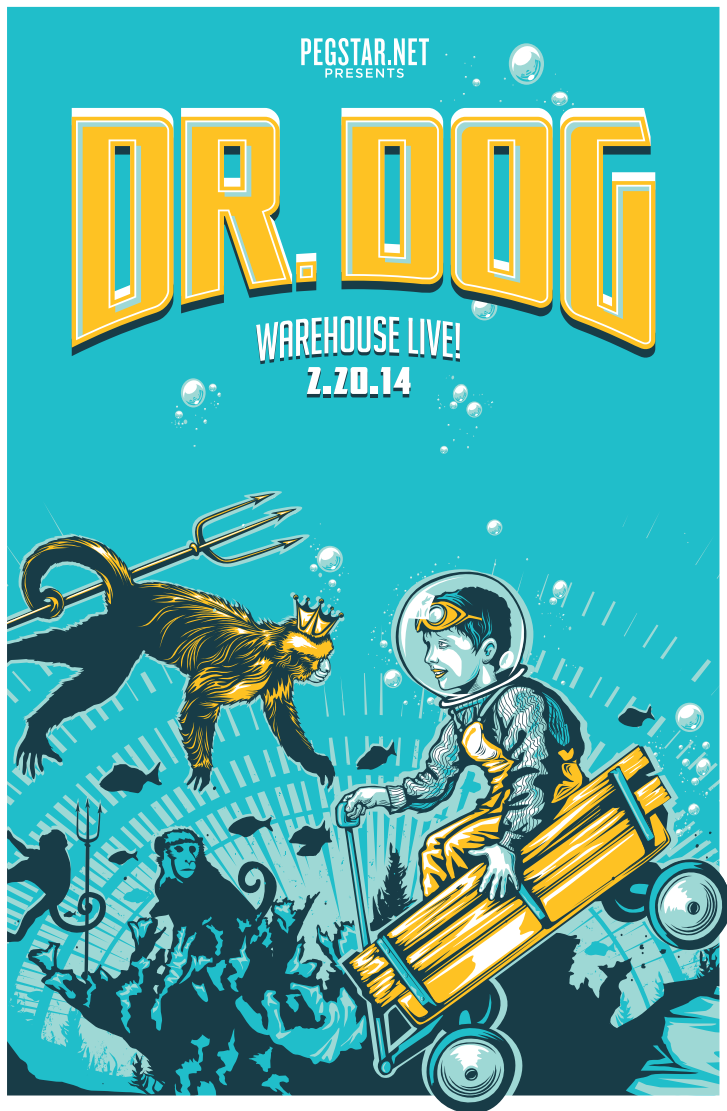




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POP-UP PERFORMANCES, pop-up restaurants, pop science, Pop-Tarts and even pop tarts: life in the twenty-first century is quick and easy. Thanks to technology and ever-increasing demands on our time, our experiences, like our food, have become as fleeting as my attention span—which I’ve been told rivals only that of a goldfish. So imagine how happy I was to hear about a new pop-up art exhibition presented by Suplex and Art League Houston featuring up-and-coming artist Ryan Hawk Feb. 7th-14th.

The exhibition will feature a selection of Hawk’s work that reflects the variety of media with which he works, from video installations to drawings, photographs to sculpture, and even a live performance on Feb. 8th. I caught up with the Houston native who is returning from a four-year stint in Boston. He explained that the idea was not just to introduce a new public to his work, “but also to give me an opportunity to show the various media that I use in my practice. This exhibition is unique in that regard, as most people identify me as either a performance artist or a video artist and have not seen my sculptural and object-based works. This show will reflect my current approaches to art making and also offer insight into my conceptual interests such as mythology, art history, technological mediation and spatial-temporal investigations.”

Each of Hawk’s video works documents a live performance, and being a sucker for performance art and anything that moves in general. I was hooked like one of those fish...what are they called again? Never mind. Hawk added that while performance art usually exists

in the moment and is experienced in real time, he feels strongly that “current engagements with the medium shouldn’t ignore our digitally dependent and technologically obsessed world... When I consider a performance for a video installation, I imagine how a performance can be sustained for a new audience who were not present for the live experience. Through the use of video technology, I can manipulate the content in order to mirror the original action.” Manipulation, illusion, and what Hawk calls inner-subjectivity and the reflective consciousness are themes that run through his work.

When all the syllables started to distract me, Hawk clarified: “Within the context of my work, the terms inner-subjectivity and reflective consciousness are not limited specifically to spiritually, but are instead meant to underline the conceptual and philosophical nature of the work. One of my overlying ambitions as an artist is to create spaces of reflection. To say that I create spaces that reflect the inner-workings of our conscious might be an exaggeration. However, I am comfortable stating my ability to manipulate, exploit, or at times temporally suspend the viewer’s belief in the work that they are viewing. By creating an illusion within a work, I create my own version of reality—one that allows the viewer to see only what I permit them to see. The viewer becomes critical and aware of the ‘tricks’ I’m implementing to create the illusion, when I abruptly suspend illusion and expose truth. This sudden exposure of the truth is something that I believe everyone can identify with.”

This got me talking to Max Fields, co-founder of Suplex and curator of the show, who pointed out that Ryan “tears down illusions as often as he creates them, frequently doing both within a single work. That paradox is one fascinating aspect of his art practice. He creates minimalist sets or stages that, at first glance, are both pristine and beautiful, then he exposes the illusion within the work.” Along with the performance installations are photographs and drawings documenting the live performances and exposing the illusions. For Fields, this “gives viewers the ability to spend time with his work and to appreciate each framed action for what it is. Because the aesthetic beauty of his illusions and the visual destruction of those illusions are both equally important to the work’s intention, the production stills document the performance, as well as supplement it. In that regard, those who have not seen Ryan’s original performance will read the stills in a completely different way than those who have. There’s some illusion in that, as well.”

Presenting the exhibition as a pop-up show is a creative solution for Suplex, which is staffed by a small team of volunteers; but as Fields points out, it also “gives artists the ability and freedom to realize works that might not otherwise come to fruition, to experiment in their practice publicly and to present work and/or performance pieces that might not be appropriate or viable if this exhibition took place over three months at one of the larger Houston arts institutions.”

FPH

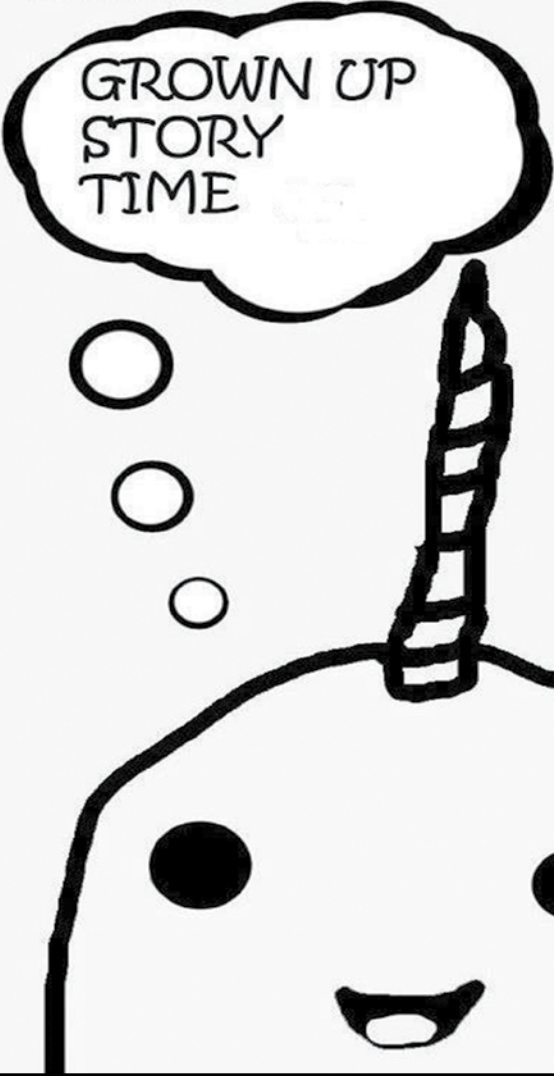
Now, where are those pop tarts I keep hearing about?

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Photo courtesy of Lisa Qualls

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NOTED IN HER BIO SECTION for living with her husband, three dogs and an evil monkey, artist Lisa Qualls balances her artistic life as a curator and a creator. Studying and portraying identity in unique ways, Qualls’ work consistently portrays layers of intrigue and intimacy. These themes carry out in her group work and curating, all contributing to the visual landscape here in Houston. Lisa Qualls was kind enough to answer some questions about her work in her various forms.

Tell me about your background and how you grew into being an artist? Was it something in particular that struck you, sparked inspiration?

I have drawn and constructed things since I was very small. I recently wrote a description for Joan Son’s Storyteller Project about drawing on the walls and lampshades in my grandmother’s house when I was about 3 or 4 years old. My mother and aunt were and are artists, painters, ceramicists and amazing seamstresses. Also, my grandmother was an incredible seamstress. I grew up in a house decorated with prints of traditional paintings. I remember looking at those prints when I was about 4 or 5 and thinking that I wanted to be an artist when I grew up. Being an artist seemed a lot simpler at four than it does now.

Speaking on identity, your upcoming series is titled “The Louisiana Portrait Project” that brings together the combination of intimate views with a larger scope. What elements are in this project and how will the project play out?

As an artist, my work continues to be about culture and identity. Most of my artwork has focused on that subject matter for the last decade or so. Sometimes I approach those ideas from a universal standpoint and sometimes from a very personal, intimate standpoint. I have concentrated on the latter recently but am getting ready to embark on a long term project: The Louisiana Portrait Project that combines the two. My plan is to interview and photograph people from Louisiana. I am starting with a few people here in Houston. Using their stories about growing up in Louisiana as a beginning, I will travel to those locations and take photographs of the landscapes and/or buildings in their stories, meet people in those towns and cities, record their stories and photograph them and keep doing so until I have made an artistic survey of the state.

The end result will be a large body of portraits and landscapes (drawn, painted and printed) and installation pieces that are visual and audio, which tells about the people and the land in Louisiana. I decided

to do this last year when I was driving from Baton Rouge, where I grew up, to Monroe, LA to visit the Masur Museum. I was thinking about how much growing up in such an incredible place has shaped me both as an individual and an artist. Growing up in a place that was rich with a culture created by many different cultures and the environment and topography itself is a culture unifying the many people that settled there—Spanish, British, French, Italian, African, Vietnamese and many more. I want people to know that Louisiana is not just stereotypes, Mardi Gras and oil spills. Louisiana is what America is: an amazing mixture of family histories. Families who have suffered and survived and thrived in spite of economic, political and environmental hardships. Families and communities that have created a unique identity and bond. I feel a very strong identification with this place and every time I get to go back and see the lush landscape and hear the language and the accents (there are many different accents in different parts of Louisiana, not just one), I feel an ease and a comfortableness that I do not have anywhere else.

One of your main outlets also includes an art gallery: Gallery Jatad. What is the mission of the gallery and what type of shows do you all focus on when curating the space?

My husband, Matthew Scheiner, and I are co-owners of Gallery Jatad. Matt is the director and I curate some shows. We curate some collaboratively. Our main concept is to pair traditional African fine art with contemporary art. The African objects are antiques and made for tribal use. We have used tribal galleries in Europe as a model, but unlike those galleries we are emphasizing aesthetic and historical value of the objects and not the provenance or European ownership. We want to honor the makers of the pieces and their skill and the complex cultures that created them. We choose contemporary art that compliments the African art aesthetically and curate shows that may have themes around materials, color, pattern, spirituality, utility or simply similar sensibilities.

The upcoming exhibition that you curated, ‘Under the Milky Way’ is on view now through March 8th at Gallery Jatad. Seeing there’s a large array of creatures and subjects under the milky way, how did you choose the artists and what are some of the pieces they have brought to the show?

‘Under the Milky Way’ includes three contemporary artists and select African objects. The contemporary artists Michael Arcieri, David Humphreys and Gregory Page were chosen for their attention to detail and beautifully crafted work, as well as their interest in capturing nature: plants, animals and atmosphere. All three of these artists pay homage to traditional naturalists who documented the flora and fauna in the New World 300 to 100 years ago, but their interpretations are contemporary in concept and execution. **FPH**

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FREARS ON PHILOMENA

By Michael Bergeron



STEPHEN FREARS' DIRECTORIAL CAREER encompasses film and television projects since 1968. American viewers became aware of his name through movies in the 1980s like "Prick Up Your Ears," "My Beautiful Laundrette," "The Hit," and "Dangerous Liaisons." Since those projects, Frears has gone back and forth from British and American cinema, most notably with films like "The Grifters," "High Fidelity," "Dirty Pretty Things," and "The Queen."

With his latest film, "Philomena," Frears delves into the true story of a mother's search for the son she was separated from, after giving birth while a resident at a convent orphanage in Roscrea, Ireland. Judi Dench stars as Philomena with Steve Coogan playing Martin Sixsmith, whose non-fiction book "The Lost Child of Philomena Lee" served as the basis for the screenplay (that Coogan penned with Jeff Pope).

Frears spoke by phone to Free Press Houston about his career, the art of directing and making Philomena. While the movie has some comic notes, it's mainly a serious drama, whereas Coogan's known for his comedy films. "I never did think that," says Frears. "Steve's a very intelligent fellow; I had confidence in him. Pairing him with Judi was very good. I knew that people would be surprised, but in the best possible way."

The production shot around London and for four days in Washington D.C. "A lot of the Washington stuff I did in London, and a lot of the Irish stuff I did in England. It's all to do with tax nowadays," explains Frears.

While Philomena opens at a specific orphanage, it sparks genre similarities to "The Magdalene Sisters," Peter Mullen's 2002 film about inmates at an asylum run by nuns. "Magdalene Sisters, I think, I'm not 100-percent sure, really covered a lot of orphanages," says Frears, adding "I believe that movie was shot in Scotland. But Roscrea, like other orphanages, took in laundry from the local community; in that sense it was unpaid labor."

The search for Philomena's son takes her and Sixsmith to America, only to find that her son passed away from AIDS (nine years previously), and that he was a high-ranking lawyer in the Reagan administration. From there, the duo attempt to track down people who knew Philomena's son, including his former partner. On shooting at the Lincoln Memorial Frears notes: "Places like that, they're not there for the filmmakers, they're there for the public. They set up rules, and you fight them all the way really. They were very, very kind to us. I think we got away with murder because we had Judi Dench with us."

Philomena mixes images of Super 8 film of the young lad with the present-day footage. "A lot of that is of the real boy, some I recreated. The original material is so powerful, you are also telling a story so you need the images to tell certain things. You keep the balance in direction," says Frears.

"You do it instinctively. I don't remember a moment when I said this is too funny, or we need a joke here.

The boys got it more or less right [referring to the screenplay's authors Coogan and Pope]," says Frears.

"When I first read the script, I gave them a copy of Frank Capra's 'It Happened One Night,' because I could see there are similarities," says Frears. Those similarities would be the air and road trip on which the two leads embark. "There's was always an argument. Well is it a tragedy or is it a romantic comedy? Or an odd couple movie, or whatever expression you like to use? You realize that in those sorts of films, there are rules where the whole story turns upside down, so I was trying to follow those rules. I was taught to direct what's in front of me. I came out of the theater and that's what you do: one week you do a comedy and the next week you do a tragedy. You specialize in both, and I've always hovered between the two."

A crucial scene where Philomena confronts her son's former partner is a lynchpin to the third act. "I knew that that was a big moment," Frears says. "How far should the car be from the door? How long should I draw this out? How long can I keep this moment going? There are things like that you are thinking about the whole time, but I knew that that shot was at center of the architecture. I knew that when Steve was failing to get in, it was her point-of-view. When you're directing, you're running those things in your head the whole time.

"Philomena" is currently in area theaters. "Philomena" has been nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Actress and Best Adapted Screenplay. **FPH**

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FEBRUARY

MUSIC PREVIEW

AS I SIT HERE in my cold apartment as the temperature drops dramatically and the ice builds on the ground outside, the only thing keeping me warm right now is the thought of how many truly badass shows the short month of February is filed with. So jam-packed that I truly struggled with which three to write about. One of the only truly respectable rock bands left, a phenomenal comeback from a legendary hardcore band, and the crowned queen of soul for this generation. Check out what this month is bringing to our city. There is not one on the list that isn't a must see.

Sunday, February 9 – Queens Of The Stone Age at Bayou Music Center
If you are to be judged by the company you keep, Queens are in a category that very few bands reach. Frontman Josh Homme boasts collaborations with the likes of Trent Reznor and the mighty Dave Grohl, with the latter playing drums on the band's most recent release, as well as 2002's fantastic album, "Songs for the Deaf". On the 2013's "... Like Clockwork", Grohl seamlessly segues from playing open, loose beats, to being incredibly tight and focused: An effort unmatched by any drummer playing modern rock music today. The guitars are intricate and technical, and Homme's voice is as unique as they come—powerful, yet never overtaking the songs themselves. The songwriting here is impeccable. They are in a league of their own, riding the line between mainstream success and everyone's favorite underground band. The band has the ability that not many other's have been lucky to have: Being played on rock radio and still being respected. It's an absolute treat to see them play at Bayou, and definitely not one to be missed.

Saturday, February 22 – Modern Life Is War at Fitzgerald's
Being in a band from Iowa isn't easy. Being in a hardcore band from Iowa is even harder. Yet, Marshalltown's Modern Life Is War broke out of the tiny midwest town and delivered three outstanding albums before

they broke up—three albums that defined an era of hardcore music. Heartfelt lyrics that the disenchanteds could relate to, that truly meant something to the youth of that era, and the music that backed it up perfectly. Listening back, it's like a soundtrack for the time period. And then, just as they had appeared, they disappeared. Last year, the band announced that they were coming back. This wasn't just a reunion where they'd be playing shows again—they had written an entirely new album. I think like most people, I kept my expectations low, but upon first hearing the album, I was blown away. Not only had they exceeded what I, and many others, had thought it would be, but they made us remember what hardcore music can be. "Fever Hunting" is one of the best heavy records of the past year, and is one of the top comeback records in recent memory. Do me a favor and look up ANY live show this band has done in the past year and tell me you don't want to be a part of that. This will be one for the books.

Tuesday, February 25 – Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings at House of Blues
After kicking cancer's ass in 2013, Sharon Jones is back with her first album in almost three years. And it's the same thing we expect from her and The Dap Kings. Swingy, soulful and powerful. Jones is an enigma. While soul music hasn't really had a place in popular music in years, she stands out like a sore thumb. She brings us back to the Motown days, taking everything that made the music of that era great, and adding her own special flair, keeping the style new, exciting and relevant. The band is no stranger to the city of Houston, having played here on numerous occasions, as well as a top slot at FPSF in 2011. A lot of groups try to do what they do, but so many miss the mark. They are the best of the best in their category, and live, they bring it. Jones is full of energy, and the band? The band are some of the best musicians you're going to have the pleasure of witnessing. She's our generation's Aretha Franklin. It just has to be seen.

Thursday, February 6 – Yuck at Rudyard's
Friday, February 14 – The Sword & Big Business at Fitzgerald's
Saturday, February 15 –Power Trip & The Impalers at Walter's
Tuesday, February 18 – Touche Amore & MeWithoutYou at Fitzgerald's

By K.M.
Anderson

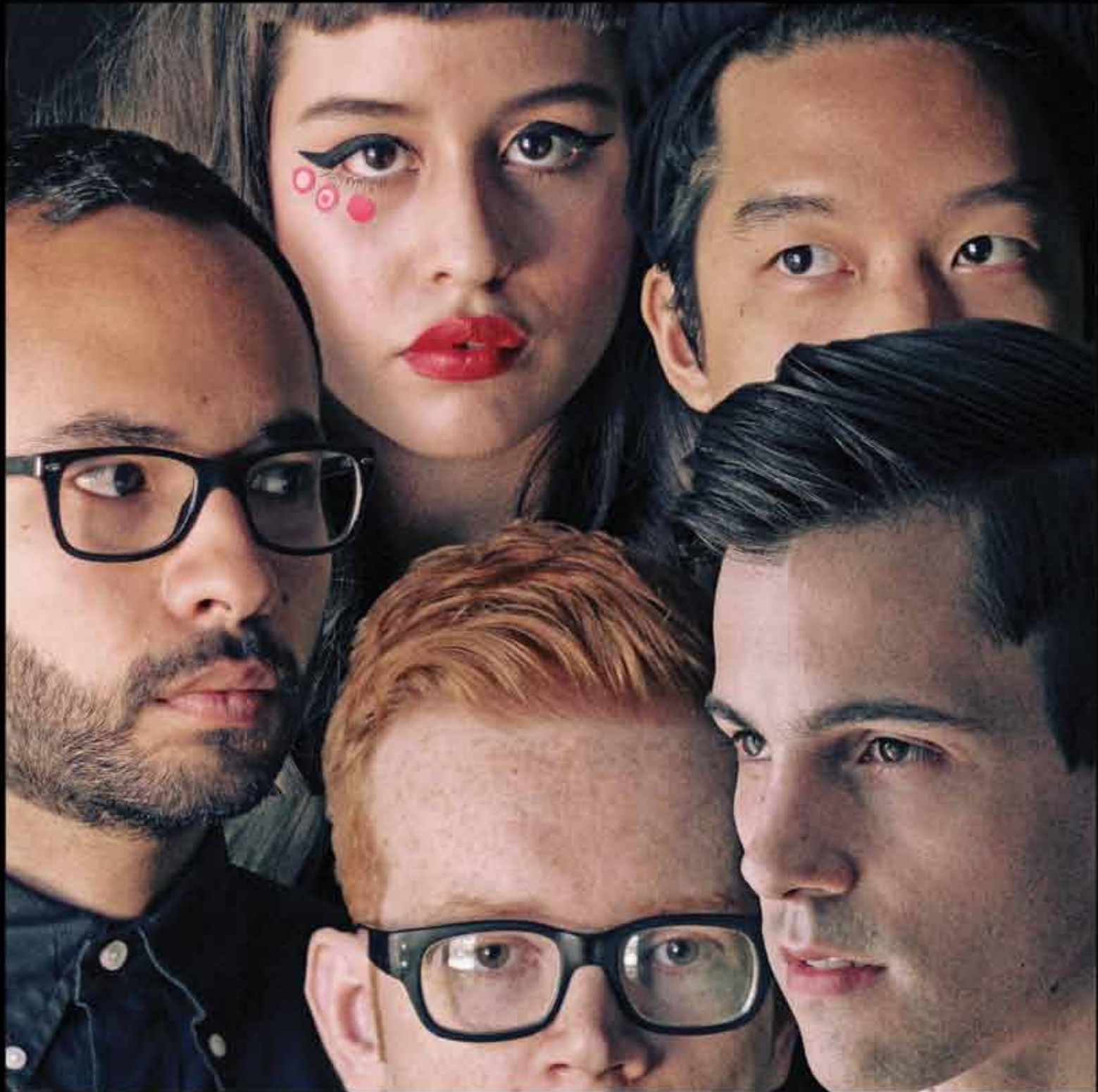
THE THIS AND THAT ABOUT THE STUFF, ALBUMS

Bill Callahan - "Have Fun With God" (Drag City)
Let's take an amazing thing like dub, then, mixed with an equally amazing thing, Bill Callahan's last album "Dream River." Now let's shit on ourselves. Dub is a music that is informed by the ethereal, breaking into new dimensions. Done right, the subtle becomes epic: The psychedelia isn't achieved by layered guitars, but rather by a finely-timed echo. It is the space between. Callahan's music is also of a similar formula, seemingly unimportant details magnified—the opera of blank stares and chin rubs, look aways and lost stares. Last year Callahan released two dub versions ("Expanding Dub" and "Highs In the Mid 40s"), both were beautiful. I expect this album to be an extension of that beauty, and the beauty of "Dream River".

Charles Speer and The Helix - "Doubled Exposure" (Thrill Jockey)
There is the idea of rock as the outsider's music. A soundtrack to the wild and unknown, the place beyond the pines, exotic locales and strangle clashes of culture. Or at least that is the rock of this album, on tracks like the old style opener "Wallwalker," reminiscent of the doo wop boogie; the same could be said of "Bootlegging Blues"—songs that wouldn't sound out of place on the soundtrack of a Robert Rodriguez film. But there is also a song like "Cretan Lords," a song with Spanish guitar flourishes, evoking images of dust and bandanas. "Red Clay Road" is old-time country—another chapter, another setting to get lost in, another nod to tradition. The excellence of the album is in the playing. The guitar lines are marvelous. Sometimes familiarity breeds comfort, for all that is traditional about these songs, there is the appreciation of the great rock n' roll tradition on full display here.

SCHOOLBOY Q - "Oxymoron" (TDE)
Schoolboy Q has held the release of this album for a while, which was rumored to come out last year. However, Q held it for one main reason: Kendrick Lamar. Lamar's imprint on hip hop was something not seen in a while. I mean Drake was big, but Lamar was important. Schoolboy Q knew that all eyes would be on this album as the next big TDE release. Still, Schoolboy Q is a different kind of rapper. "Collard Greens," the first single, established that Q is more hood and druggy. But in a way, he may have more mainstream appeal, direct more than simple. I expect "Oxymoron" to be more debauchorous, but not less amazing. Schoolboy Q's last album ("Habits and Contradictions") was just that, but for every pussy and weed song, there were more cerebral moments, and much more rawness. Q may be the wildcard of the crew, but wild is always entertaining.

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THE TONTONS CRAFT THEIR OWN SOUND

THERE ARE VERY FEW TIMES, when a lover of music can hear something that's all its own. For me, I find that as the years go on, I hear albums from artists that sound like they just copied and pasted what's popular today into their own sound. It's not a knock at contemporary music, as bands like The Rolling Stones and David Bowie have done as such in the past as well. But, every now and again, I hear an album that stands on its own, an album that I can't put a finger on what it sounds like. Recently, I was given the new album Make Out King and Other Stories of Love from Houston's The Tontons. After spending some time with it, I've come to realize that the sounds within it are set to be copied by artists in the future.

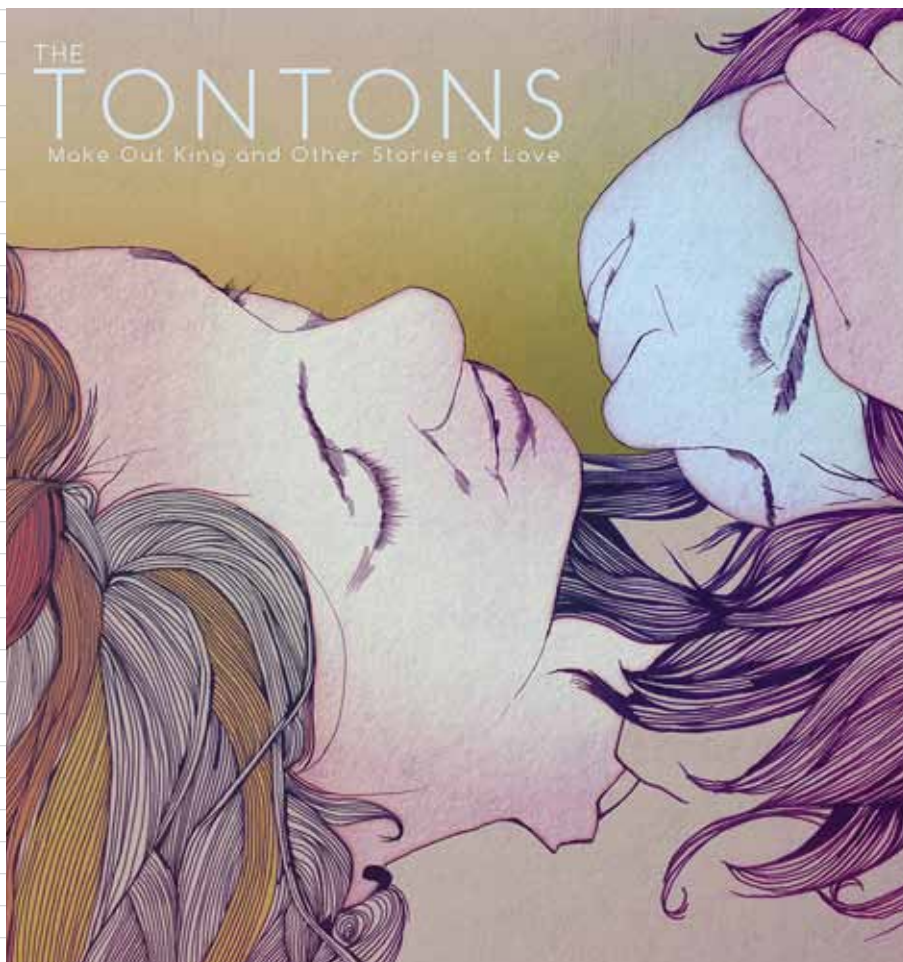
It's kind of hard for me to believe that The Tontons have been around for six years. In that time, I would guess that most of you would have heard of them. Small tour jaunts three years ago blossomed into full-scale tours in 2012, and last year, some high-profile festival appearances. All leading up to a recent New Year's Eve appearance in Dallas, broadcast on national television. It feels like just yesterday when the band was playing the small rooms of Houston only. But with hard work and an endless supply of live dates, a band can only belong to their town alone, for so long.

And now, in 2014, the band is slotted to spend the bulk of the year on the road playing festivals, touring both coasts, and opening for The Bright Light Social

Hour. It's a much deserved place for a band that has certainly come so far since 2008. Back then, the band released the Sea and Stars E.P. that was followed the next year by a S/T full length album. These albums proved that while good bands grow, great bands evolve to form their own sound. The 2011 release of Golden proved that the band had the ability to go further than the usual fare of musicians in Houston. Today, is much further from even 2011, proving that The Tontons have truly evolved beyond what anyone could have expected. A booking agent from heavy hitters The Agency Group, a dedicated manager in Mark C. Austin and even a publicist are much needed tools when you drop an album as unique and amazing as Make Out King and Other Stories of Love, due out February 18.

If you've followed the band long enough, you might feel as if I'm overstepping by calling this album unique and amazing, but you'd be way off the mark. I should note that The Tontons have never really ever sounded like anyone else. But, at first listen, it's simplistic to say that this album is different from the previous efforts. Just as it would be simplistic to compare the sound on it, to if Sade sang for Cocteau Twins. To me, the easiest comparison I can make is to say that Make Out King and Other Stories of Love is The Tontons finding their own voice. Meaning that for the first time in the band's history, they truly emote sounds that are all their own. I can only liken it to the first time I heard Silver, by Starflyer 59, in that I hadn't heard something so different in a long time, and definitely not in the mid-nineties. That's what this release sounds like. Something truly its own, like the allure of Houston in that you love all of it, but there's no one defining thing that you adore more than something else. There are obvious singles in songs like the album's opener, "Magic Hour," or last year's "Veida." There are moments of chaos in "Bones 1" and in "Bones 2," also released last year. But for me, the standout tracks are the soulful "Pony," and the tender and quickly-paced "Paradise." "Pony" stands out as such an independently written song, that the band truly meshes the soul from Asli Omar's voice, with the rhythmic groove laid down by Tom Nguyen's bass and Justin Martinez' drumming. And it's perhaps the Santana-meets-Mars-Volta solo from Adam Martinez' guitar on "Paradise," that proves that the band has grown away from their days of playing for free at Mango's. Throughout the album's 11 tracks, the listener is taken on a ride that starts with pop sensibility, flows into deep and emotional sounds, and closes with a soft ballad. When it's done, your ears have experienced something that's hard to explain, and truly difficult to compare to anything else out there today.

I think it's fair to say that 2014 could easily be the "Year of The Tontons." As a Houstonian, it's always nice to hear a band prove how unique and amazing artists in our city can be. This album proves that as unique as it sounds, it stands to be what the next crop of bands mimic and attempt to emulate. If the mark of being a great artist is forging your own path, then it's fair to say that Make Out King and Other Stories of Love proves that The Tontons are great artists. **FPH**



By David H
Art courtesy of The Tontons

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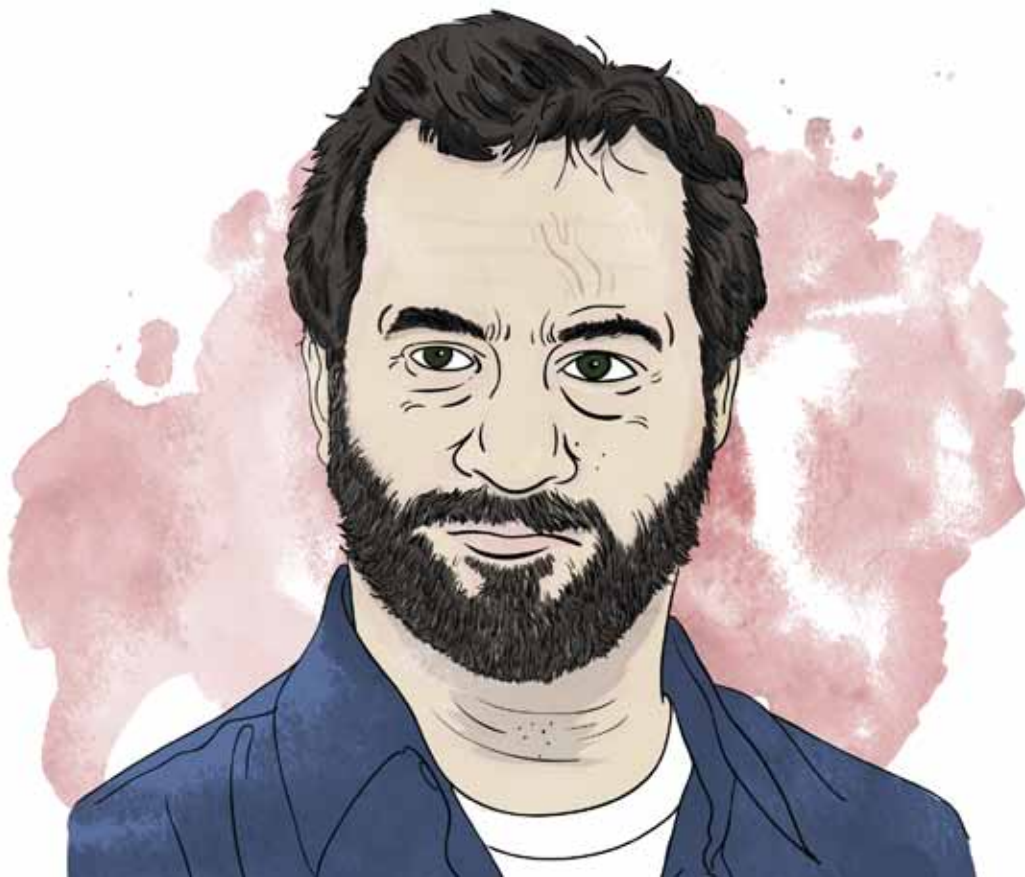
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By Jack Daniel Betz
Art by Blake Jones

MODERN AMERICAN SOCIETY has been carefully engineered to spare us unpleasantness at all costs. We have taken steps to eradicate the repugnant habit of smoking in public (and we're starting to crack down on smoking in private as well), we put warning labels on practically every product imaginable (lest we be ambushed by the confounding traces of tree nut oils in a praline) and we have been trained to trade unbridled opinions for soft, innocuous euphemisms, especially in the messy areas of race, religion and gender. America does not like to have its feelings hurt, even at the expense of honest discussion.

The examples of this ideological intolerance are with us every day, but they are rarely as obvious as a little-discussed meltdown that movie and TV writer Judd Apatow had in January about TV series "Girls."

Now, before analyzing the events of this outburst, it is fair to point out that the show's star, Lena Dunham has been the object of much unfair bullying. One of these instances, which the Huffington Post points out in its coverage of the "rage spiral," was Howard Stern's rude comments about Dunham's appearance in Jan. 2013. Career shock jock, Howard Stern, attacked Dunham's looks, referring to her as, "little fat girl who kinda looks like Jonah Hill." And if that wasn't outrageous enough, he also said of the Dunham's nudity on "Girls," "and she keeps taking her clothes off, and it kind of feels like rape."

So perhaps that was part of the pretext for Apatow and other "Girls" personnel to explode like ten tons of gasoline-soaked dynamite at the simple question one critic posed.

However, the irony of this earlier exchange is that Dunham also forgave Stern, stating that she was a fan of his, and that he had, in her words, earned his right to free speech. Those words might come back to

haunt Dunham though, after her involvement in the following kerfluffle.

The exchange in question took place at a press stop for "Girls" cast and crew at the Television Critic's Association. As the show's executive producers Judd Apatow, Lena Dunham and Jennifer Konner took questions from the press, they stumbled hard over the following (verbatim):

"I don't get the purpose of all the nudity on the show—by [Dunham] in particular. I feel like I'm walking into a trap where you go, 'Nobody complains about all the nudity on Game of Thrones,' but I get why they do it. They do it to be salacious and titillate people. And your character is often nude at random times for no reason."

Read in isolation, away from the drama that ensued, and the cast/writers' baggage, it's hard to see why it would cause so much trouble. The Wrap's Tim Molloy did not call Dunham "a little fat chick," nor did he say that, "it kind of feels like rape." There were no "slut-shaming" value judgments about how often the show characters have seemingly less-than-monogamous sex. The reporter did not even go as far to claim that the actions were a bad example for developing young adults. These comments extended to the show's art and writing—areas that are normally pretty safe from the chilling effect of discussing race, religion and gender in public. Yet the reaction was one that would have looked more reasonable if directed at naive, openly-misogynous, "men's rights" activists, rather than a critic asking questions about a show's writing and presentation.

From the reportage, it looks as if the first words out Apatow's mouth upon hearing the question were, "That was a very clumsily stated question that's offensive on it's face, and you should read it and discuss it with other people how you did that."

But it didn't stop there. Dunham jumped in with claws fully extended, tak-

ing the response to a whole new, personal level, "Yeah. It's because it's [nudity] a realistic expression of what it's like to be alive, I think, and I totally get it. If you are not into me, that's your problem." Nevermind the fact that Molloy never made comments about her body, weight or general attractiveness. Dunham's words read exactly like they might have been penned a year prior, in response to Howard Stern's far-more-pointed comments. Unlike Stern, who had "earned his right to free speech," there would be no mercy for Molloy.

At another point, and the timeline is a bit difficult because there's seemingly no video here, Apatow calls the question, "Sexist, offensive and misogynistic." The Rubicon had been crossed. There is no doubt that the panel considered Molloy to be the living embodiment of every gender-based injustice any of them had ever witnessed.

The real pity of the entire incident is that Molloy never got the chance to turn the response back around and ask a resounding, "Why?!" Apatow's outrage in particular was not dialectical—it was axiomatic. In Apatow's eyes, Molloy should have known better than to ask a question that did not come in the form of an award or some glowing praise. Did Molloy not know that random nudity carries with it such artistic gravitas that it is above reproach? Did he not know that eating a cupcake in one's birthday suit is the highest calling of a liberated, young actress? The gall!

Nudity, like any trope of writing, can be overused, and is certainly well within fair territory for a career TV critic. The replies really say more about the paranoid, thin-skinned temperament of the "Girls" writing and production team than it does about any sexism in Molloy. Apatow's self-indulgent antics do nothing more than give doubters of real sexism more ammunition. Maybe if Molloy grovels enough—if it's not too late—he can "earn" back his free speech. **FPH**

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By Kathryn McGranahan
Art by Blake Jones

THERE WILL BE NO SEX IN THE CHAMPAGNE ROOM

IN THE “SOUL SISTER” episode of Comedy Central’s satirical cop show “Reno 911”, an officer is shown wielding a folding yardstick to enforce the six-foot regulation between a dancer and her customer. As a result, they must flirt their star signs through the officer translating from his post between them. It ends with officer and customer bonding over fishing, while the dancer disappears, unnoticed by either man. I laughed my ass off.

Last October, a decidedly unfunny thing occurred in my community. A local cantina, unused and boarded up, was part of a human trafficking bust where underage girls were bought and raped, then beaten by their captors. The Houston Chronicle story reported that neighbors—my neighbors—witnessed over 20 underage girls being led out of the club. Thirteen men were caught, but one, Alfonso Diaz-Juarez, remains a fugitive. He’s still on Harris County’s most wanted list, and human trafficking is still one of Houston’s most pervasive problems. But my community received no response or awareness to the threat in our backyard.

Last November, Mayor Annise Parker’s office published a press release announcing the settlement of a 16-year-old lawsuit with several strip clubs and other sexually oriented businesses (SOBs). Lawsuits flew when Houston approved an ordinance restricting SOBs’ proximity to schools and churches, a three-foot

rule for dances and even what defines a sexually oriented business. So finally, Houston settled to drop the three-foot lap dance rule and allowed more nudity, table dances and so on.

In return for bare breasts, the suit-happy SOBs gave up their private rooms (where the drug deals and the prostitution and the rape usually happen). They cannot hire or contract anyone accompanied by another person who “speaks for her, holds her identification, collects her pay ... or appears to exercise control, force or coercion over the person.” (Which, really? Really, SOBs?) The clubs must adhere to strict drug and prostitution background checks. They must provide “annual human trafficking awareness training and disseminate materials regarding human trafficking awareness” to their staff. And on top of that, SOBs must collectively contribute \$1,000,000 to fund a human trafficking unit within Houston Police Department’s Vice Division.

Should a club fail to do their part, the 1997 ordinance will go into effect. This hurts the SOBs in two ways: the SOB loses the competitive edge of freedom from 1997 regulations, and the other SOBs now have to pay a bigger share of their lucrative trade to find the Human Trafficking Unit. So it’s in everyone’s interest to work with law enforcement.

In a city with such a huge trafficking problem, Houston has only had a human trafficking task force comprised

of officials from different organizations, like the FBI. Which is great, but its members could not focus exclusively on human trafficking.

“This is an opportunity to do something truly effective,” said Council Member Ellen Cohen, former director of the Houston Area Women’s Shelter, who championed funding for Houston’s 6,600 rape kit backlog last year. “It’s a reasonable policy to deal with ... well, there’s no word bad enough for those who think of humans as commodities.”

For Cohen, the trade is a fair one. “The three-foot rule was never enforced,” she said. “It couldn’t be. You’d have to have a huge number of officers in these SOBs, just sitting there.” The rules around covering women up were also difficult to enforce, especially as dancers wore pasties, paint and liquid latex to get around the law. “What we gave up was something we couldn’t enforce anyway,” said Cohen.

Meanwhile, Houston couldn’t enforce human trafficking violations either, or fund a properly trained unit. As a result, assaults were underreported and unaddressed, fueling our position as an ideal hub for human trafficking. Houston Police Department Captain Charles Dunn, who has worked with trafficking task forces, told Houston Chronicle that “Without a doubt, a large portion of human trafficking takes place in the sex industry...”

It is troubling, as a Houston lifer, that the unit has to be funded this way and not through, say, the usual channels of community or the city or other businesses, the way such things usually go (I think). Some religious and women’s rights advocates agree, saying the settlement makes Houston vulnerable, that it sends the wrong message or that the city has made a ‘deal with the devil.’ The New York Times reports The Houston Area Pastor’s Council may sue the city.

“SOBs exist because there is a demand for them,” says Cohen in response. “If we really want to be free of SOBs, we need to teach young women to base pride on their skill sets, not how they look—and we need to teach young men to appreciate women as equals and not people there for personal gratification.”

Others question whether (and when) the city will enforce the new regulation to all SOBs, instead of the 16 involved in lawsuits against the 1997 ordinance.

“In one way, I see and understand the controversy of it,” says Dunn. “Looking at it another way, it makes sense the industry is taking part itself to take care of this problem occurring in this industry.” **FPH**



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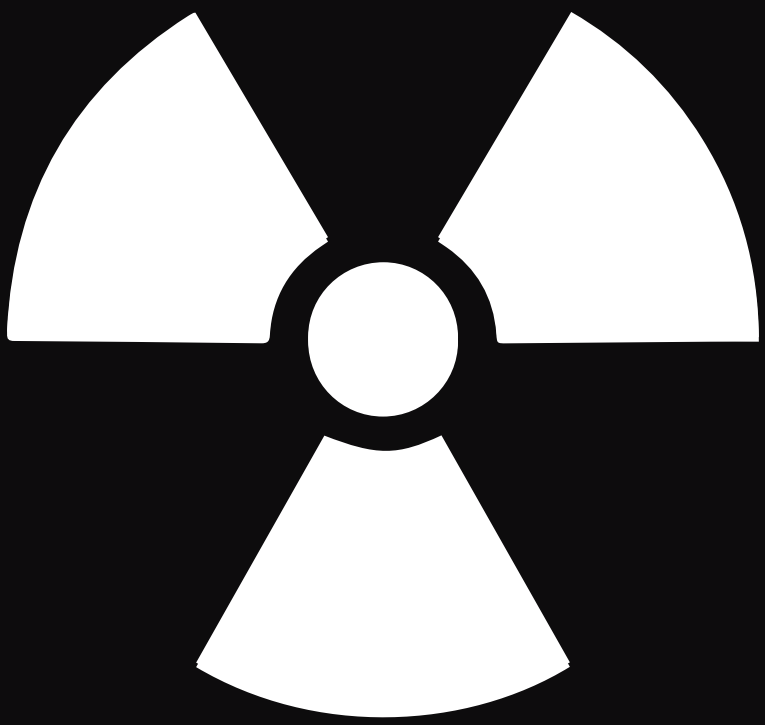
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FROM THE HAPPY PERSPECTIVE, the Houston METRO Rail's Red Line extension opened two months ago. Two additional extensions should open near the end of this year.

But Houston was supposed to have five rail line extensions open two years ago. Apologies if that bit of news is less chipper. Thanks to a handful of federal investigations and funding problems, the East End/Green Line and South East/Purple Line will open two years late -if we're lucky. According to METRO, "fund-ing issues" are why the University/Blue Line and the Uptown/Gold line are on hold. Indefinitely, mind you.

The working extension goes north from UH-Downtown and roughly follows I-45 to the 610 loop. It's also a day late and a dollar short. Unless you live there, or are going to the Houston Community College at its tip, there's little reason to ride. The denizens of northside can ride the rails from their homes, through downtown and end up smack dab in front of the Texas Medical Center. That's great. What

about getting from Second Ward to Montrose? What about jumping from Sharpstown to the University of Houston? No such luck, which is a shame. A metropol-itan city needs quality infrastructure, which includes fast public transportation. There is no loophole.

But let's back up. The METRO Rail sucks right now, but it's not the first time we've dealt with mass pub-lic transit. Houston had a streetcar system from the early 20th century to the 1940's. Just like the METRO Rail, it ran into drivers, dealt with inflation and even had a hybrid bus/streetcar system. So what hap-pened? Cheap cars and cheaper pavement. Around 1940 the mayor of Houston was involved in a propo-sition for a multi-lane highway to Galveston (AKA the Gulf Freeway). In exchange for getting the hell out of the way, the company that ran the streetcars, Houston Electric, accepted \$50K and some bus perks. The city dismantled the rail lines.

Let's face it, urban sprawl was a race street-cars couldn't win. But that was back before the Earth

OFF THE RAILS

By DL Haydon
Photo by Madelyn Keith



got seven billion people, before Houston accepted 150,000 refugees from Katrina and well before people realized that freeways aren't sustainable. Today, we're (allegedly) smarter about our transport. The METRO Line should be our evidence. But if you look at the last 10 to 20 years, Houston was dragging its feet towards mass public transit. We'd look like a bunch of bleeding heart socialists if Houston had proper infrastructure! Whatever would the neighbors think?

Pothole covered roads. Decaying bridges. Virtually non-existent sidewalks. Houston is the poster child for why the US isn't actually number one anymore. Yet if you suggest the legislature spend much needed funds on public transit, Austin suggests more toll roads on freeways . Right: more crumbling concrete will get rid of all the crumbling concrete. Legislative logic.

Not that METRO is putting up a good fight. Allegations of corruption, the CEO resigning in 2010 and the bad production speed of the rail cars ordered from Construcciones y Auxiliar de Ferrocarriles (Spain) are more than enough ammunition for METRO's opponents. Even their PR department drops the ball. A short glance on the GOMETRO.org website reveals quotes like: "While other cities have taken decades to expand their mass transit systems, Houston is taking on the challenge in just a few short years," among other optimistic outlooks and polite lies. But it took 60 years after the dismantling of Houston Electric's streetcars just to get the Red Line. It's taken over a decade since then just to start construction on extensions. And only one is finished, which is part of the pre-existing line.

The website got one thing right however: "The expanded light-rail system is an essential element of the city's plans to meet the transportation and environmental challenges of today and tomorrow, easing our growing traffic congestion, improving our air quality and changing the way Houston moves."

Not everyone in Texas agrees, which is why the path to rails is such a cluster bomb. Houston (Texas in general) doesn't get to have nice things. If we did, the deadlines on the rail extensions wouldn't get pushed back perpetually. Nice things require funds and empathy. Instead, we get members of the U.S. House of Representatives who fight federal funding for public transit out of some misplaced sense of profit, resign office amid scandal, get found guilty of conspiracy/ money laundering (but end up serving no time) and end up dancing on television.

Detractors who don't have political interests tend to point out cities with public transport "suck anyway." Start a Craigslist political post about this topic

if you want proof. The reply to this is simple: show the data. Show the data for cities that suffer from having a public rail line. If you look at everybody else, the evidence is contrary. Look at Europe in general. Look at Japan specifically. Look at the cleaner air. Look at their productive work force. Look at their lack of unsightly congestion. Sure, people in Chicago complain about their heavy rail system, but where would they be without it? The same goes for Dresden, Germany. Glance at a map of their rail lines. It's like someone in the engineering department designed a demon-summoning circle. The rail crisscrosses everywhere there. But it works.

Then there are those vocal groups who do support the METRO Rail but for the wrong reasons. The yuppies, the double income no kids types and even our dear, sweet entrepreneurs support the rail lines as though they all swore off cars. The truth is many see some kind of potential in the METRO Rail to transform Houston's "fringes." Probably from the current industrial and low-income housing landscape into some sort of overpriced, synthetic, urban rich-kid wonderland. As though the post-modern, minimalist, \$500K condos weren't already spreading like fungus.

The right reason to support public transport stems from pure, simple, infrastructure needs. Rail is a prerequisite for a metropolitan city. Non-negotiable. Unless, of course, the city wants public perception to see it as a congested and poorly-planned hellhole. Yes, businesses come and go thanks to the rail's arbitrary ley lines, and drivers tend to challenge the light rails' right of way. We don't have the patience (or geography) for a subway system, so there isn't much alternative. As for heavy rail? God, if only. High-speed, large occupancy train cars raised above street level like the Chicago L system would be great. But that's a pipe dream when Houston can't even get the METRO Line to finish on time and budget.

What would an ideal rail look like for Houston? Ignoring all the proposals for pretty architecture and underground tracks, an optimum situation includes rail access to airports. Ideal means a straight shot to Galveston Island. Perfect goes from one end of Beltway 8 to the other.

Dare to dream and we might get a commuter rail that connects to the light rail, that connects to a Union Pacific railroad that links up with a railroad headed to Austin or Galveston, respectively. Though it's more dream than dare, considering we have only 12.8 miles of rail and that took more than a decade. Linking up is a fool's errand until METRO, and Houston in general, gets its ducks in a row. **FPH**

Notes from the Ride

One Saturday morning in January, I grabbed my bike and rode down to Texas Ave. and Main. Since it was the weekend, I didn't expect there to be many passengers, not going north anyhow. Everyone would be heading southbound toward Hermann Park and the Houston Zoo.

Turned out I was right. There were only two dozen or so people in the car heading up the Red Line past UH-Downtown going to HCC on the other side of 610 and I-45. Most of them kept to themselves. A few were couples. The railcar made stop after stop, all of which were in the less frequented parts of Northside. A Fiesta Mart or occasional gas stations were the only commercial interests. Ramshackle houses and neighborhoods stood between. Every time the car's doors opened, you could hear the traffic from I-45, but the highway stayed invisible for most of the trip.

The final stop, just outside HCC, resulted in a wave of movement. The railcar was somewhat full, and like a jolt went through the seats, people made their exit. Half-a-dozen or so people at the station entered the railcar. A single, middle-aged couple got out, went to buy more tickets, argued with the dispenser machine and finally returned to their seats. Everyone else exited and left.

On the way back to UH-D the situation was much of the same. A few people got on the railcar at some of the stops, but ridership was minimal. Back in downtown, the situation changed. By the time we reached the Preston station, people were packed in like sardines. Most of them had kids and were headed to the park and zoo. By the third stop, when the second baby stroller and the first wheelchair appeared, I grabbed my bike and exited, hoping for an emptier railcar to come by.

The next railcar made it less than nine minutes later. More families. More kids. I waited. Another came by with no strollers. I slid in with my bike. It took several more stops, a few with the railcar at full capacity, before we reached Hermann Park. Most exited at that point. Some stops later we reached Fannin and 610, 12.8 miles away from the other end of the line.

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How did you first get involved with activism?

As a child living in Mexico, I was first exposed to activism by my father. He was an active member of the miners' union in the largest steel plant in Latin America in the early fifties. My maternal grandfather was also a social justice activist, and a teacher in a small rural town in northern Mexico. My father came from a blue collar working family, and my mother from middle and upper class family heritage. Adults around me made a distinction between families who lived in homes with dirt floors, from those with cement floors and from those with mosaic floors. In these terms, I realized very early that the world was full of injustice and mistreatment. However, my father and grandfather also clearly demonstrated that one had to fight it, and organize against it.

When we moved to the US, we were seen as a working class, immigrant, non-English speaking family of Mexican origin. Mexicans suffered overt discrimination in the mid-fifties in Texas. I remember not being allowed to eat in a restaurant on the road to Houston after crossing the border. Later as I started school, I would learn that the language, history and culture of Mexico, and Mexicans were objects of rejection and scorn. We were threatened with expulsion if we spoke Spanish in school (in rural areas, it was also corporal punishment). As children, we were only allowed to play in a single city park in our neighborhood in Magnolia. I remember the times when economic downturns increased our vulnerability to keep a roof over our heads and secure basic necessities. As a young girl, I confronted attitudes of discrimination against women, and the role of dominance given to men. Needless to say that by the time I was 13, I was sure that my life's work was to eradicate social injustices.

My first practical experience came through my involvement with the Catholic Youth Organization at Immaculate Heart of Mary. A priest there urged us to become active in gathering food, clothes and donations for striking farm workers in Rio Grande City in 1966. Many community leaders in the neighborhood were active in support, and I remember they got together a bus of people to go down to support the strikers. We followed the 500-mile march to Austin on a daily basis in church and at home. The possibility that social movements lead to redress of injustices became a reality for me.

Soon, I was competing in high school oratory contests. My topic was the oppression and exploitation of the Mexican-origin population in the US. Every judge either gave me a high score or the lowest score. Prejudice and discrimination continued to be a way of life, but the growing social movements of the sixties were also waking many of us up into action.

Once in college, I first joined the Young Democrats, but quickly was recruited by the first grape and lettuce boycott organizers of the farmworker movement led by Cesar Chavez. This experience enriched my understanding of labor and social movements within a political and economic system that upheld the wealth and privilege of a minority of corporations and elites. At the same time, the Mexican American Youth Organization appeared on the scene at the University of Houston and in the neighborhood. The Chicano movement became a vehicle for fighting the oppression I had long experienced in Texas. I worked to establish an independent political party, the Raza Unida Party, and ran as state representative candidate. I supported the women's liberation movement, opposed the war in Vietnam and supported revolu-

By Nick Cooper





THE NAKED AND FAMOUS



2·19·2014 | FITZGERALD'S | HOUSTON, TX

POSTER BY MOBSOLETE

tionary struggles that I had become aware of through my student activism. With the Black Student Union, we brought in Angela Davis and Stokley Carmichael. We also financed Cesar Chavez's first trip to Houston.

What has been your experience with Houston, politically, and in terms of organizing here?

Houston is easy territory for organizing since the majority of its residents are largely unorganized and politically inactive. Any place you begin to facilitate a process for an organized, collective voice that challenges power opens the possibility of change. In my youth, I assisted in organizing in neighborhoods to get support of the lettuce/grape boycott, to create independent community action through "concientizacion," organizing, mobilizing and through building independent political processes like the Raza Unida Party. When progressives were elected to the UH student government, we were able to move resources to bolster community initiatives and advance national or international movements. In the last 20 years, I have been focused on organizing in immigrant communities.

As a woman in activism, what are some of the things you could teach male activists?

In the process of transforming reality, we transform ourselves, but some of the transformation has to be deliberate. We have grown up in a society of inequalities and the reinforcement of privilege. We all have to work to deconstruct these aspects of our world view, and examine actions that exclude and marginalize. This is true with respect to gender, and also social class, ethnicity, race and so many other areas of privilege. The revolutionary state is personal as well as societal. We can't organize or agitate for any change if first we don't work on changing the influence of elitist economic, political, and social structures on our own conduct and responses. This is difficult, but a necessary step if integrity is part of our definition of revolutionary action.

Living in a capitalist system how do you find harmony? Your daughter told me that you like to kick back and enjoy the TV show "Covert Affairs"—is it odd to find yourself cheering on a CIA officer, or do you just find a way to put aside what you know about the CIA?

You do not find harmony. One lives with those contradictions and fights its systemic impacts on a daily basis. A good example is how we enjoy entertainment that is produced by mega-corporations and incorporates the belief systems that reproduce inequalities. Even worse is the current practice of allowing mega corporations like Facebook or Twitter to own the history of revolutionary movements and messages on their own "terms and conditions."

When I watch something like Covert Affairs, I do not forget it is fictitious, and I see it as reflective of the system of oppression. I like that the agent is a woman, and the fast pace of the genre of action movies. The content is always about the agent's refusal to go along with the CIA as an institution, and she battles on her terms. At the same time, it offers a view into who is deemed "the enemy." Most of the times, it is a Middle Eastern power or a Russian criminal agency, rarely has it been a revolutionary movement. Most striking is that the most serious "enemies" are rogue CIA elements within. But in the end, good triumphs over evil and the CIA is whole again. I never forget it is fiction.

However, I refuse to get on Facebook or Twitter or other social network sites because they legally appro-

priate what was the purview of the social movement or revolutionary organization. That to me is far more serious. It used to be that movements would donate their archives to public libraries for public view. Now they are instantly in public view, but are privately held by the mega corporation.

What are the projects you are working on in the Houston area, and what groups are you currently working with?

At this point, I am only working with the Houston United Prevention of Migrant Deaths Working Group to establish a response to increased deaths and disappearances of migrants in border areas. We helped establish the South Texas Human Rights Center in Falfurrias, Texas (see southtexashumanrights.org).

How would you characterize the US treatment of immigrants?

Regulatory schemes that guarantee control, high profits and low wages, and the criminalization of human mobility, are essential for the neoliberal model of global economic development. Military integration in border policing, and the denial of rights of displaced populations domestically and internationally, reproduce a defacto system of slavery for marginalized economic and social sectors, particularly unauthorized international migrants. No one wants undocumented immigration except the human traffickers, unscrupulous employers and contractors who deliberately profit from it. Ever increasing measures that deny immigrants equal protection before the law have made everyday life difficult and oftentimes, life-threatening for millions. Any immigrant can testify that being undocumented is a huge problem. Driving a car without a license, health care, educational, workplace safety and family stability all come at a high cost, and human toll. Fear, exclusion, and suffering have become permanent aspects of immigrant life in our city and in the country.

Recently, there's been some discussion in Houston on the question of letting cops participate in activism, and on activists being friends with cops in general. How do you think about that?

On this issue, I refer to Lenin. He clearly stated that revolutionary work has to take place in all institutions of society, no matter how repressive or backwards. Revolutions have triumphed when soldiers, police and other repressive forces split and support the revolution. So, I think individuals within repressive agencies can be progressives, and even revolutionaries.

What is your advice, or a lesson you would give to young activists in Houston?

Your greatest asset will be patience; the road toward fundamental change is long and arduous. One has to start where the people are; so sometimes, we have to crawl with the slowest and not run with the fastest. Study your reality, and don't just act. Theory has to be woven in the course of the struggle, but practice is the determining factor in the creation of change. To rephrase educator Paulo Freire: People act upon their environment in order to critically reflect on their reality, and transform it through further action and critical reflection. Above all, be a Zapatista—"manda obedeciendo," lead by obeying, listening to the people. Because the soul of organizing for social change is the people. **FPH**

ACCORDING TO A SIX-MONTH INVESTIGATION

by reporter Emily DePrang, who published her findings in the July and September 2013 issues of the Texas Observer, it is extremely rare for HPD officers to get even a slap on the wrist for even the most egregious abuses of authority, even though 75% of complaints against officers come from their own supervisors or from fellow cops. Because of a flawed system of oversight, only 2% of all complaints net any kind of discipline, and that discipline looks more like PTO than anything else (3-5 day paid suspensions). I recommend reading both these articles for more details—they are available for free on the Observer’s website.

DePrang’s two-part series prompted what was billed as an open community forum between HPD reps, community activists, and the academic community at Texas Southern University on October 24. Few people were surprised when HPD steam-rolled the event—they effectively silenced the community by talking at them rather than listening to them, evaded tough questions, and turned what was billed as a dialog into a grandstanding public relations monologue. HPD’s PR coup would have been a complete success, if not for the very vocal disgust expressed by many community members as they made loud exits.

The next day, October 25, I sent the following email to the top-ranking HPD representative on the panel, Assistant Chief Mattie Provost:

Dear Chief Provost,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with the community last night. I write for Free Press Houston, I was there last night, and I will be publishing a short summary of the event.

I would like to follow up on a question that I posed not just to you, but the whole panel, though you are the only panelist who addressed it (and in what I would call a very quick and cursory manner at that). My questions were/are:

I have seen the memorial to officers fallen in the line of duty in the HPD Museum at HPD headquarters at 1200 Travis. I also see a large ziggurat called “Houston Police Officers Memorial” each time I drive down Memorial Drive. Does any such memorial honoring victims of police brutality exist on any HPD property?

You did indeed answer this question, and I thank you for that. Your answer was “To my knowledge, no such monument exists on any HPD property. Next question.”

There was a follow-up to this question, which was glossed over by you and the other panelists, however. Would you mind addressing this now, please?

Would HPD consider naming a room in the HPD police academy for José Campos Torres? If not, why not?

The only logical conclusion I can draw from this, in the absence of a full answer, is that HPD feels that its victims do not deserve commemoration. If HPD’s mission is indeed “To protect and to serve,” yet we all acknowledge that officers are human and humans make mistakes, then what is the harm in honoring the victims of those mistakes? And

By Harbeer Sandhu
Photo by Madelyn Keith

rather than “harm,” a step like this could possibly quell some tension between HPD and its critics. One other possible conclusion is that no such innocent victims of police brutality exist. Please affirm if either of these is your intended implication.

I was not one of the audience members heckling you. You asked for a civil dialog, but you did not fully engage with the question that was asked, so I am posing it to you again.

Thanks again for your time. I look forward to your reply.

-Best, Harbeer Sandhu

José Campos Torres, in case you don’t know, was a 23-year-old Vietnam Veteran who was arrested by HPD for disorderly conduct on May 5, 1977. Torres was drunk and acting a fool and threatening people at a club on the East Side, so he was put under arrest and taken away. Sounds fair so far—it’s cops’ job to take people who can’t behave to jail and present them in court. But that’s not what happened.

Instead of taking Torres to jail, the arresting officers took him to a place they called “the Hole.” “The Hole” was a parking lot behind an abandoned brick building right above Buffalo Bayou where HPD were known to take suspects for a sound beating before booking them in jail. That night, while handcuffed, Torres was beat nearly to death by five officers while a sixth officer watched. He was in such bad shape that the jail would not accept him. Jail officials ordered the arresting officers to take their suspect to Ben Taub General Hospital for treatment before they could book him.

The officers didn’t want to waste their whole night in the emergency room only to get a drunk and disorderly charge, so they took Torres back to “the Hole” and uncuffed him. Then, one of them said, “Let’s see if this wetback can swim,” before shoving Torres into the bayou.

His body was found three days later. Two officers were charged in his murder, but they were convicted only of negligent homicide and given one year’s probation with a \$1 fine. This egregious injustice sparked what came to be known as the Moody Park Uprising (or the Moody Park Riot, depending on whom you ask), an investigation by the FBI and federal charges against the officers, and some much-needed reform in HPD.

So, back to my email following the “town hall” at TSU, eleven days after I emailed her, on November 5, Chief Provost finally replied:

Dear Mr. Sandhu,

First, let me apologize for my delayed response, but I wanted to get back with you on your questions. Thank you for attending the recent community meeting. HPD is not considering naming a room in the police academy for José Campos Torres.

Any further questions you have can be directed to a Public Information Officer at HPD at 713-308-3200. Thank you for your interest in the Houston Police Department.

-Assistant Chief Mattie Provost

I considered this another blow-off and I was too busy to reply, plus she told me to talk to their PR department if I had any further questions, so why in the world would I reply? That’s why was surprised when, almost two weeks later, on November 18, this email from Assistant Chief Provost landed in my inbox:

I never heard back from you, did you receive my response?

Crap! Now I’m out of space and you must be left wondering, how does this sordid story end? Check the Free Press Houston blog at freepresshouston.com for the exciting final conclusion!... (Or is it just the beginning?) **FPH**



STAND UP & DELIVER

HOUSTON'S

NEW CROP OF

COMEDIANS

By David H

OF ALL THE THINGS I WOULD HEAR about Houston when I lived in any other city, "that's a great place for comedy" wasn't one of them. It's a shame that Houston plays such an important role in the history of current stand-up comedy, and no one shares that. So, back in November, when I wrote about alternative comedy in Houston, the cast of characters I happened upon didn't really get much of an introduction. There's an old comedy saying, that the best comedians are just funny when they aren't on stage, and the first comedian I could think of that embodies that is Brian Zeolla. You may know Zeolla from when he was the doorman at Fitzgerald's, with the stature of a typical door guy, one conversation with the Chicago native proves otherwise. His brand of comedy is that of a storyteller, like a short form version of Marc Maron, but less whiny and all true. Recently, I sat down for a Q & A with the comedian, and interestingly enough, also the close and personal friend to musician Kevine Devine.

So, you aren't from here. Where are you from?
Chicago, but I've lived in Houston for 15 years

How long have you been doing stand-up?
Two years now.

Why comedy?
It's a calling, that is a sickness really. I grew up wanting to be director, or a writer, but I'm too lazy to do so. Honestly, it's just easier to talk on stage. Music, filmmaking, writing a book: Those are all things that I really wanted to do, but they aren't fast enough. Comedy is immediate.

Recently, I read an interview with longtime SNL writer Jim Downey, who described how committed to a bit Norm Macdonald was, sticking to it no matter how bad the outcome. How committed are you to a bit?

I'm hypersensitive to reality. I approach it to not tell a lie. If it's not honest, I can't sell it. So, in my stand-up, I stick to reality. That, I can commit to, so I draw from real life experiences to keep it as conversational and as real as possible. That's the only way it works for me.

How long will you hang on to a joke before discarding it from your set?

I toss the small jokes, just things that I've forgotten. I don't write, so if the jokes stay in my head, then they're worth keeping and they stay in my act. If a joke works at an open mic for instance, I'll keep working with it to form it into my act. I have a bit that was one of the first jokes I wrote. If it's good it stays in my head and I just do it. Once they aren't worth doing, they sort of fall out of my mind and they usually don't come back. For me, I start with a conversation then grow that and figure out where the jokes are, and write the jokes out of the conversation. That's what I do at the open mics, I work it out in my head, and 2 weeks later, I'm doing them at a show.

Favorite Comedian?

Past: Bill Cosby like from the "Himself" album era. Current: Paul F Tompkins, Brendon Small

How do you measure a successful comedy career?

Stand-up, writing animated shows, doing radio. I know that radio doesn't really seem to exist anymore, but music is such a big part of my life and I'd really like to mix it with comedy. I really like the adult swim 15-minute shows where there's that short time slot where you're getting the joke across quickly. That's what I want, really. To create a show like "Home Movies," or "Mr. Show" where everything clicks with perfect chemistry. My endgame is that way with stand-up as well. To be like Paul F. Tompkins and perform for real hardcore fans, not like Dane Cook at Madison Square Garden.

Do you have any Beef with the comedy scene here in Houston?

Proactivity is a problem, across the board in many things here. I grew up very DIY, with punk and zines, and 300 albums pressed. I believed in those things, 'cause it made me feel like I was part of something. Houston, doesn't have what I'm used to growing up with. There's no Ian Mackaye of comedy here. Like, I created a show, because there needed to be a show. I think the fact that there's some magic in places like NYC is from that DIY ethic and we can do that here too. Let's just create stuff. We can complain all we want, but we should create as well.

Who has been the best comedy teacher for you?

Bob Biggerstaff and Andy Huggins as well as opening for Neil Brennan. That was my first feature set, opening for someone I admire and who I think is hilarious. And it's the biggest crowd I've performed in front of.

I think Brian's best jokes are the confused and mundane ones. You can catch Brian at most of the open mics like Rudyard's on Mondays, occasionally Tuesdays at Warehouse Live, and Wednesdays at Han's Bier Haus. On March 3, you can see him at Rudyard's for his Level Up show, which always has a great feature and a great headlining performer. He's definitely someone to see before he blows up outside of Houston, as a rising star in the world of comedy. **FPH**



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ONE MAN'S TRASH IS ANOTHER MAN'S HOBBY

FOUND FOOTAGE APPRECIATION is a sub-cultural phenomenon that developed long before the internet made weird clips something we all take for granted. In 2014, with nothing more than a few keystrokes (or touch-screen taps) we can find years worth of freaky film on Youtube, archive.org or any number of other easily-accessible movie repositories. However, before Youtube, enthusiasts had to meet up and trade copied VHS tapes of their favorite oddball films to satisfy their cravings. Some of the more popular tapes travelled across the world via duplication and won large, international fan bases.

One example of this is chronicled the award-winning, 2009 documentary “Winnebago Man,” directed by and starring UT grad Ben Steinbauer. The found footage in question consists of outtakes from a decades-old Winnebago commercial, which depicted the smooth-talking narrator breaking character and having angry, profanity-filled outbursts over mistakes made in the midst of shooting. The beginning of “Winnebago Man” shows a series of interviews with all the different people who were captivated by the film. The latter half is a search for the man himself and their interactions with him. This documentary was my first encounter with the concept of found footage, and I discovered it in a rather pedestrian place, given the esoteric subject matter: Blockbuster.

To reiterate though, found footage is the dorky home movie collecting grime in the garage. Found footage is public access VHS forgotten by time. It defies classification. It is any piece of footage deemed outside the boundaries of norms for regular consumables (i.e. mainstream movies, TV, documentaries etc.). Found footage is everywhere, but few dust it off and appreciate its singular, madcap beauty. Luckily for curious Houstonians, and with many thanks to the Aurora Picture Show, our city was on the tour route for a travelling cinematographic sideshow called “Found Fiesta!”

On the evening of Jan. 10, the kind folks of St. Arnold’s Brewery opened their doors to “Found Fiesta!”, which is a celebration of the oddest and most interesting found artifacts that the participants can gather. The exhibition took place in the form of a competition, with randomly-chosen judges in the audience voting after each of the three rounds for the participants with the most fascinating finds.

The presenters broke down into three teams. First was Found Footage Festival (comprised of Nick Prueher and Joe Pickett), then North Carolina-based AV Geeks (Skip Elsheimer) and lastly, NPR contributor and co-creator of Found Magazine, Davy Rothbard. The first two teams dealt with found film, but Davy’s finds were in the form of text. These included love letters, hand-written lists and pop quizzes, just to name a few.

Found Footage Festival’s focus was a broad one, as the name might suggest. Highlights of their presentation included a montage of violent work safety videos, a seemingly-aroused crafting lady and a public access show about a man dancing in a speedo for a cluster of bewildered senior citizens. These were all extremely entertaining, but the final two rounds between AV Geeks and Found Magazine were easily the most memorable parts of the night.

The final round saw Davy present a strikingly poignant piece of found writing that seemed to take the audience by surprise, who (if they were like me) were probably expecting more ribaldry and silliness. This particular find was a letter written by a young man named Collin addressed to his mother. The words were bursting with emotion and were anything but funny.

The letter included an abbreviated life story of the author who, according to his words, had a very difficult childhood, but had finally found love. Collin told his mother that he was finally happy—that he was no longer suicidal, and it was all because of this amazing woman who had miraculously walked into his life. Now, the contents of the letter alone would have been a drastic enough change to turn heads, given the light-hearted tenor of Davy’s presentation so far, however, the story of its discovery was even more interesting. Davy told the audience that it had been sent to him by a woman who found the letter in a tree, attached to a balloon. The tree stood in a cemetery. Once the audience put two and two together, there was definitely a tender moment to be had during this evening that had so far been dominated by laughter. It was a reminder that while many found artifacts are humorous, they do in fact offer insight into the lives of real, flesh and blood people with real struggles, feelings and experiences.

The final presenter in the very last round of the night was Skip, who would not be outdone by Davy’s heartwarming letter. He pulled out the big guns. Going for an emotional 180-degree turn, Skip played his last offering. Keeping with his focus on old educational films, Elsheimer presented us with one about teaching blind children the particulars of sexual anatomy. It was the film equivalent of being redirected to lemons.party.com (a not-so-nice website for those of you lucky enough not to fall prey to this prank). A palpable awkwardness filled the dimly-lit beer hall, but naturally it was so overpowering that we all burst into laughter.

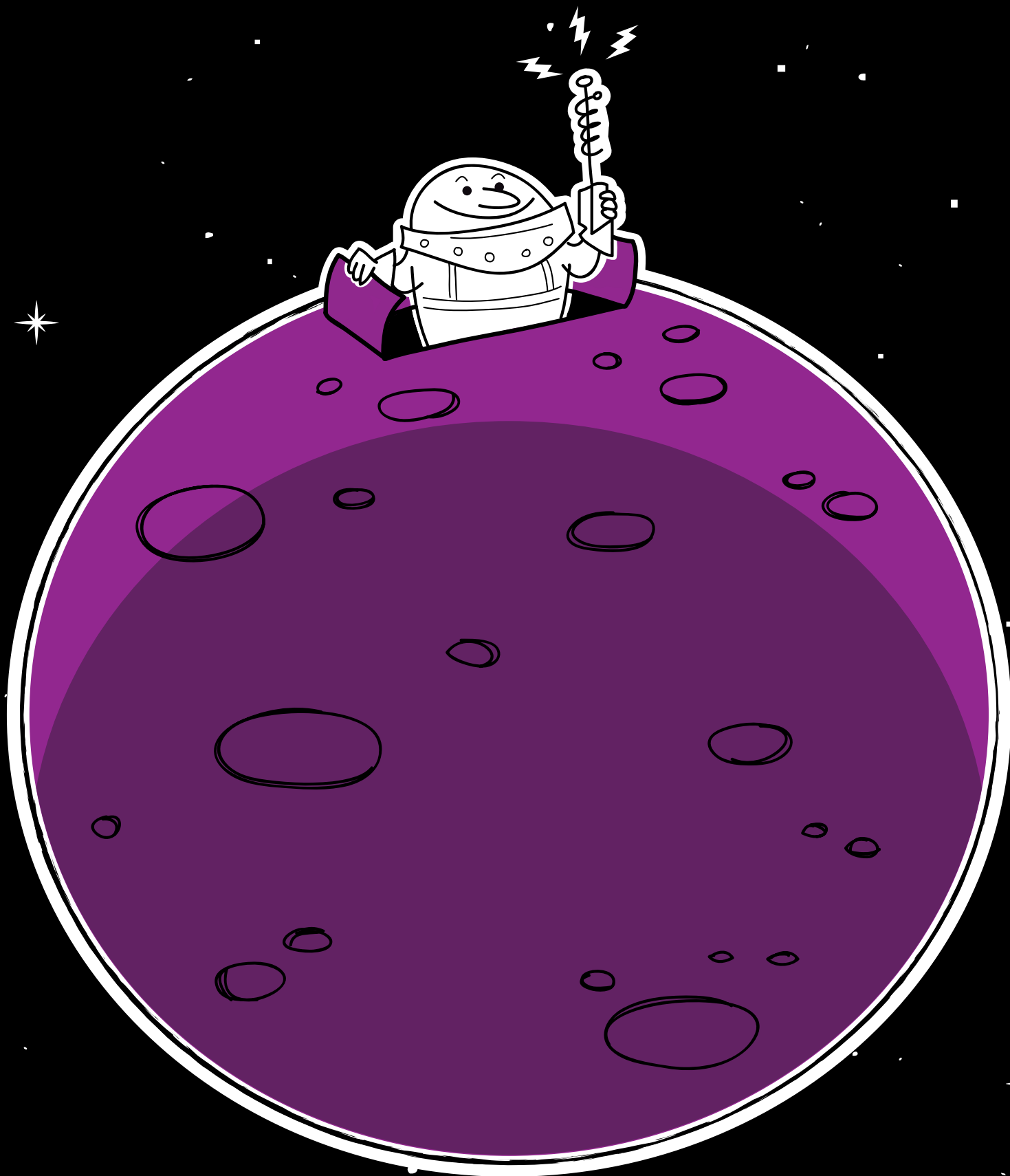
Offensive? Yes. Well-timed? Also a yes. The hilarious juxtaposition of these last two pieces definitely captured the spirit of the night and maybe even the spirit of found footage appreciation in general. For a Monday night, it was quite the outing. **FPH**

By Jack Daniel Betz

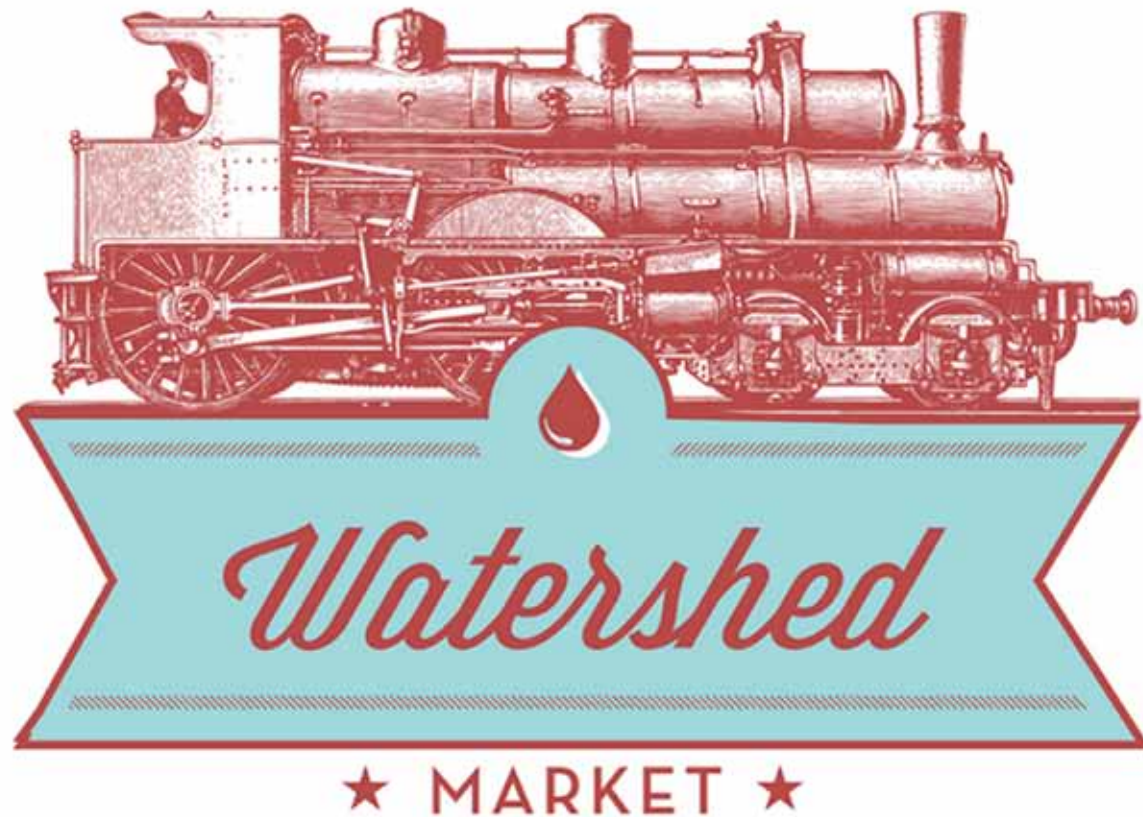
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By Robert Sussman
Art courtesy of Watershed Market

WATERSHED MARKET COMES TO HOUSTON

A NEW OPEN-AIR SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION IN EADO

STATING THE OBVIOUS, Houston is growing. As our city expands in both population and diversity, there is a need for sustainable development that will encourage pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods. Watershed Market is one project aiming to meet these needs by bringing an old-world style marketplace to the community.

"With Houston well on its way to becoming the third largest city in the United States, we need to establish a permanent destination where people can meet, shop-n-stroll, and experience local food and culture on a regular basis," said Dr. Audrey Trotti, Watershed Market founder.

Opening spring 2014 in East Downtown (EaDo), Watershed Market will showcase local food purveyors, fashion and jewelry designers, furniture makers, artists and innovators. The goal is simple: create a curated marketplace focusing on locally-sourced products, sustainable living and diverse entertainment in a fun, festive atmosphere.

"Houston is one of the most diverse cities in the U.S. and it doesn't have a large market like Seattle or New York or San Francisco," said Jefferson Fan, owner of Qahwa Coffee Roasters.

Neighborhoods like EaDo, which Watershed Market will call home, are helping lead the way in creating these

walkable communities. Last fall the EaDo Management District spearheaded a volunteer-driven initiative to plant 250 native trees along the International Promenade. This tree-lined pedestrian plaza connects BBVA Compass Stadium, home of the Houston Dynamo, to the future site of Watershed Market.

The EaDo Management District, The City of Houston and METRO have expressed their support for the development of Watershed Market as a community resource. Local artisans, patrons and sustainability professionals have voiced their need for a place like Watershed Market that captures public attention and highlights our local resources.

"The community is excited to begin this first phase of many improvements to the Bastrop Street Right-of-Way and the creation of the Houston International Promenade in EaDo," said Anton Sinkewitch, Executive Director of the East Downtown Management District. "We have numerous capable and enthusiastic neighborhood partners supporting and working with EaDo to make this vision a reality, and Watershed Market is certainly one such partner."

Watershed Market will start with four weekend events planned for 2014. The aim is to grow organically and becoming a daily destination for Houstonians and

visitors seeking access to green, local, adaptive, sustainable, innovative and reusable (GLASIR) products.

Visitors will be able to enjoy live entertainment, food trucks, local brews and demonstrations on sustainable living practices such as rainwater harvesting, bee keeping and urban gardening.

"It's all about Houston, bringing artisans and chefs, and food and fun and music all under one roof," said Tracy Jones of Street Scene Studios.

In keeping with the spirit of greener living, Watershed Market will encourage people to use alternative modes of transportation. Strolling along the International Promenade, hopping on the METRORail toward the soon-to-be-opened EaDo/Stadium Station or riding a bike will all be convenient ways to arrive at the market.

"The foundation that Watershed Market is creating today will provide a framework for the future of Houston," said Dr. Trotti. "It takes a community to create a marketplace of this magnitude and we welcome all community members to help launch this project with us, whether as visitors, vendors, volunteers or sponsors. Watershed Market is a stepping stone to creating stronger communities in Houston!" **FPH**

Watershed Market's first weekend event is March 22-23, 2014 at 2322 Polk Street Houston TX 77003, which will be located across from the George R. Brown Convention Center and US-59. For more information, visit WatershedMarket.com or find them on social media.

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By Paul Gallant
Art by Blake Jones

THERE ARE FEW THINGS IN LIFE YOU CAN'T CHANGE. Your family. Your genetics. And most importantly, your sports allegiances.

Yeah, that last one is a stretch. **TECHNICALLY**, you're allowed to root for whoever the hell you want. After all, die-hard sports loyalty is about as rewarding as streaking through a polar vortex. Seeing your favorite team win a title once in 70 years really makes up for the 69 times they blew it... doesn't it?

We always vilify the bandwagon fan. The Miami Heat "aficionado" that can't name a player outside of LeBron James. The Green Bay Packer "enthusiast" with zero clue where Green Bay is. The New York Yankees "devotee" who **ACTUALLY LIKES** Alex Rodriguez.

Still - if you passionately follow the teams in this city - can you actually blame the people above?

Houston may be the fourth-biggest city in the United States, but based off of the "recent success" of its sports teams... it feels more like Cleveland (minus the "burning river" and "crippling depression" deals).

The Texans obviously were a colossal train-wreck this past season. It's still hard to believe they were 11-1 just 13 months ago. Yet here they stand, the worst team in the NFL, with the number one draft pick - again - in this year's draft. And boy... the 14-straight-loss journey to this point was sure something to behold. Between season ending injuries to (linebacker Brian Cushing and running back Arian Foster) and quarterback Matt Schaub throwing touchdown passes to **DEFENDERS**. It was like forcing yourself to watch 14 straight episodes of "Keeping Up with the Kardashians." Hell, Schaub was so bad that we actually thought Case Keenum was the next coming of god Tom Brady... at least for a solid 30 minutes.

On to baseball. The Astros? **MUCH** worse. As if three and a half hour games interspersed with tobacco spitting and crotch grabbing weren't bad enough, the 'Stros put the cherry on top using a two dollar bill to construct a roster of minor league players. Those lucky kids finally realized their dreams, while the rest of the city finally realized "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" actually isn't the worst form of entertainment. Yes, the Astros farm system appears stocked and hope is on the horizon, but it's tough to sell hope to a fanbase that has been cheap-skated for a good seven years in a row.

The Rockets... actually aren't bad. In fact, they're very good... even though they tried to prove otherwise last Thursday with a 19-**POINT HALF** against the Thunder. Naturally, the Astros have literally come out of left field to ruin that. Their controlling interest in Comcast Sports Net Houston and stubborn refusal to truly negotiate with television providers make it impossible for half the city to watch their games.

Now, think about the all-time favorite sports teams in Houston history. The "Luv Ya Blue" Oilers of the late '70s never even made it to a Super Bowl. Craig Biggio and Jeff Bagwell never managed to take home a World Series. And whenever someone brings up the Rockets back-to-back championships in 1994 and 1995, some douche-canoe will appear out of the blue to remind you that Michael Jordan wasn't playing those two seasons (somewhat factually inaccurate seeing as Jordan played 17 games in '95, but I digress...). This sports town doesn't get any respect from the rest of the country. And outside of wisecracks about Arian Foster's alleged baby mama drama, Matt Schaub's love of pick sixes, second-half Rockets pants-poopage, and the penny-powered putrid baseball team in town, this city doesn't deserve any national recognition.

The preceding 545 words of doom and gloom bring me to my main point. These teams **SHOULD** do better. Because a city of this size and stature **SHOULD BE** better.

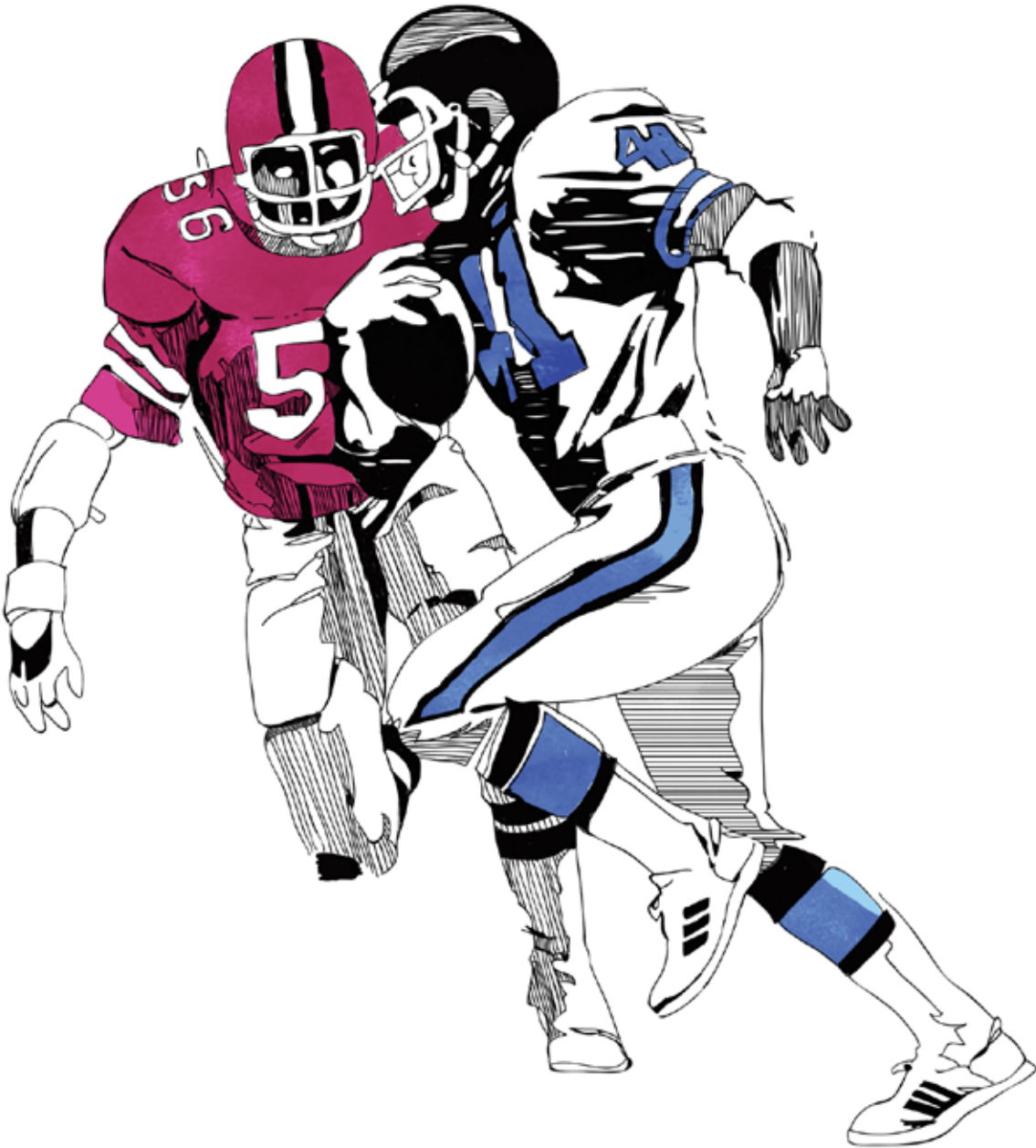
Getting better starts with Dwight Howard and the Houston Rockets. Acquiring him this offseason gave the Rockets the look of a serious title contender—at least to those who see James Harden and him on the billboards around town. But, to small portion of people who've watched and covered the team this year, they don't yet have the feel of a potential champ (though the '95 championship team didn't feel that way either at this point in the season). Getting to that level will require more efforts like Monday's 126-113 win over the Portland Trailblazers, who, entering that game, were second best in the Western Conference. I'm looking at **YOU** Coach Kevin McHale.

And when I'm not mesmerized by the keester-esque chin of newly-hired Texans coach Bill O'Brien, I'll be looking for a **MAJOR** improvement from the Texans in 2014. Gone is a regime where "accountability" and "adaptation" were nothing more than big words. In its place? Well... to this point... more words. But with an apparently hard-nosed coach, a no nonsense approach, and the right selection at quarterback in the draft, the potential for turnaround is certainly here.

As for the Astros? Meh. Forget about them... at least for a while.

So here's to a non-embarrassing 2014 in sports... oh Houston. Because this bandwagon is getting awful lonely. **FPH**

SHOOTING AWAY HOUSTON'S SPORTS TEAM 2014



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By Jack Daniel Betz
Art by Shelby Hohl

PAUL CHAVEZ OF ARTIFICIAL HEAD

INTERVIEW

IT SEEMS THAT WITH THE POWER OF THE INTERNET, and the advent of inexpensive digital recording equipment, “record labels” are popping up everywhere. Of course, we know that many of these chintzy imprints seen online are nothing more than made-up names used by small-time bands to produce synthetic clout, but Houston’s Artifical Head label is in fact a very real entity doing a lot to extoll the goodness of local H-Town musicians. Paul Chavez is the brains behind Artificial Head, and he was kind enough to answer a few questions for FPH.

Running a record label is a trying and expensive thing, especially if you’re not swimming in rich investors. Describe the hardships of running a label and how you make it work.

You know, it all comes down to passion. I had run a record label in the past called Destroy All Music and by the end, it became a grind. We liked the records and tapes we were releasing, but the whole endeavor took the passion out and it became another job. We were young and not prepared for what it took to run a label as the whole business overwhelmed us.

Years later, when Artificial Head started up, the pretense was different. The objective of the label was to give the band Art Institute some “legitimacy” with distributors and venues. The whole project expended after playing several gigs with The Escatones. We enjoyed their sound and their dedication to touring everywhere, all the time... so we struck a deal and got them to record

some songs for a 7”. From there, the label moved to a whole different level. It went from being a vanity label for Art Institute, to being responsible for product and promotion for another band. And from there, it just kept going.

It takes a whole lot of time, money and more money to get products on the market and then even more time for follow up and promotion. Getting the record pressed is barely half the battle – there’s the process of ferreting out reviewers, sending promo copies to radio, possibly doing advertising, sending promo posters / flyers to stores, getting someone to distribute your record, setting up the release on bandcamp/bigcartel/itunes/etc. And (hopefully) the band goes on tours – so I send out promo posters to record stores and the venues where the bands will be performing. And then... there’s the long wait for the first review... and then another long wait until you get paid from the distributor(s).

Postage outside of the US has become my biggest obstacle in maintaining sales momentum. So now I have a distributor in the UK and Germany who will take batches of releases and handle all the sales overseas. Building up to that point has taken A LOT of serious effort.

I heard you’ve had some pretty famous artists (at least one) do cover art for Artificial Head. Tell us who you’ve gotten and who you’d like to get if you could.

It was kind of a fluke that I was able to land Raymond Pettibon for the Art Institute LP. I pursued his agent for

eight months until they finally agreed to license the artwork to us. From there, I kept seeking out artists I respected and coupled them up with great bands.

HEAD 005 - Art Institute LP (Raymond Pettibon) HEAD 009 - The Escatones 7” (Doug Mac) HEAD 010 - The Escatones 7” (Sean Åberg) HEAD 012 - Ken South Rock / Giant Battle Monster split 7” (Savage Pencil) HEAD 013 - Jody Seabody & The Whirls 7” (Jeffrey Lamm) HEAD 015 - Hell City Kings 7” (Raymond Ahn)

I’m working on a Kiss tribute LP (HEAD 016) and I toyed with the idea of asking Paul Stanley to do the cover art, but his artwork is so terrible that I really couldn’t justify the expense.

I have solid plans to work with Greg Scott (Blue Oyster Cult) and Larry Welz (Cherry Poptart) on some releases for later in 2014. While in the future, I’d like to do something with Koop, Frank Kozik and John Baizley – but that’s a good 12 to 18 months away before I can even get in line to get on their schedules! Every once in a while, I’ll call/email Roger Dean and Tanino Liberato, just to keep my name in front of whoever is deleting their emails/voice mail.

This question practically writes itself, but it must be asked: What does Artificial Head mean to you? Does it carry meaning or is it just post-modern jive like a lot of label names are these days?

The label is all about promoting the bands that we believe in while providing a quality product for music lovers anywhere.

As someone who runs a label, what are your thoughts about Spotify and streaming services?

The customers of Artificial Head will probably use Spotify/Youtube for their quick music fix and for sharing, but they also are people who love all aspects of

music and will either go to an actual record store or see a band and buy their releases. The two mediums (online and in person) can indeed work together since they serve the same purpose of promoting music but with very different paths/outcomes.

Since you’re a local label, I bet everyone and their mom thinks that you want to, or will sign them. Do you have a lot of people beating down your door to be on Artificial Head?

Man, just being an actual label exposes us to EVERYONE wanting to have us release their products. We listen to everything that’s submitted, but we also let people know that our plate is quite full for 2014.

Tell us about the worst demo you’ve ever received. You don’t have to use the band or artist name if you don’t want to, but obviously that would be more hilarious.

We get some weird stuff in the inbox... only a few times have we received physical demos. The strangest was when we received a box of 10 CDs from an industrial metal band from Germany. No note, no press release, no invoice... nothing! I ended up dropping off the box at Sound Exchange and the band still hasn’t bothered to send us a note.

When it comes to submitting demos, I’ll ask people who submit their demos if they have picked up any of our releases and I’m (a) surprised by their honesty and (b) disappointed by their honesty. They usually write back with, “No, but I plan to buy some when I have the extra cash.”

All that being said, once a record finally makes it to the release stage, it’s a rewarding experience. For a brief moment, all the crazy drama and stress leading up to that point is forgotten and a sense of pride starts to develop. And then... you wait and hope for the orders!

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