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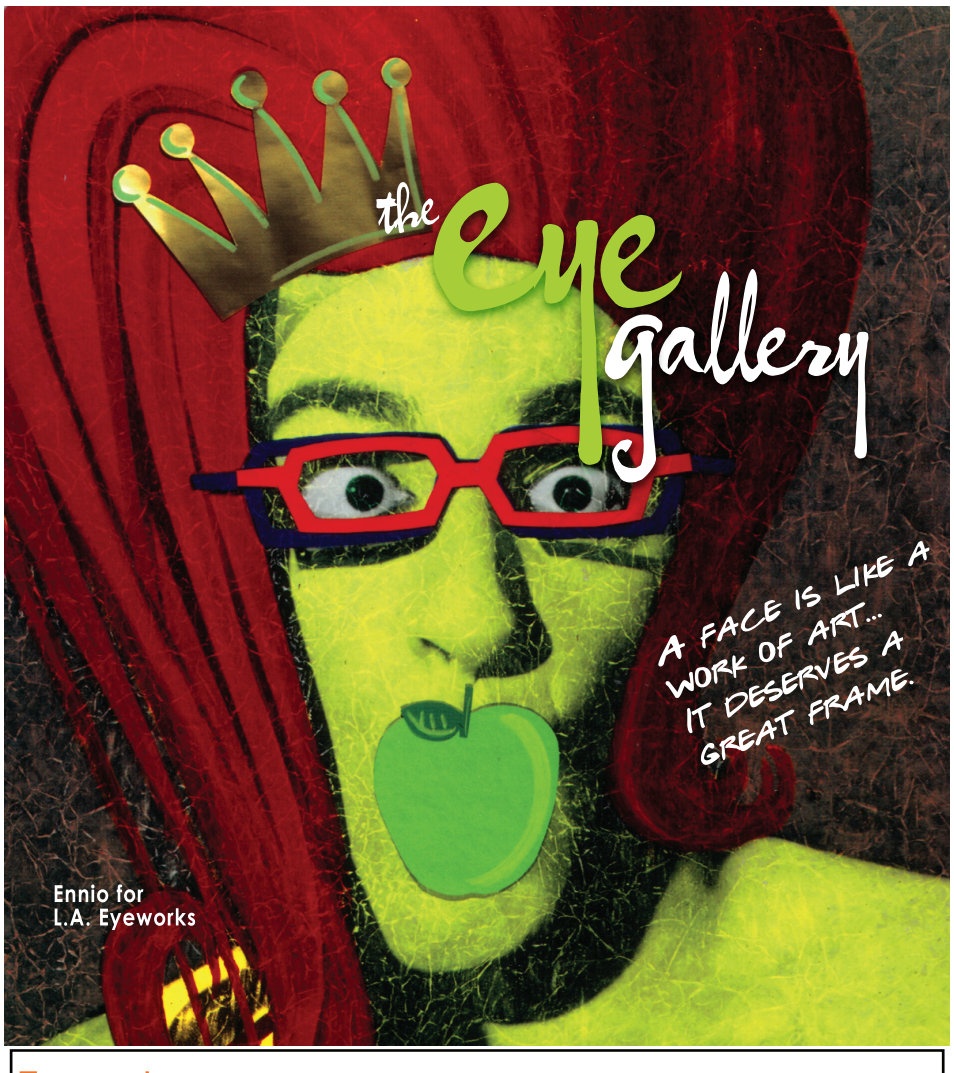


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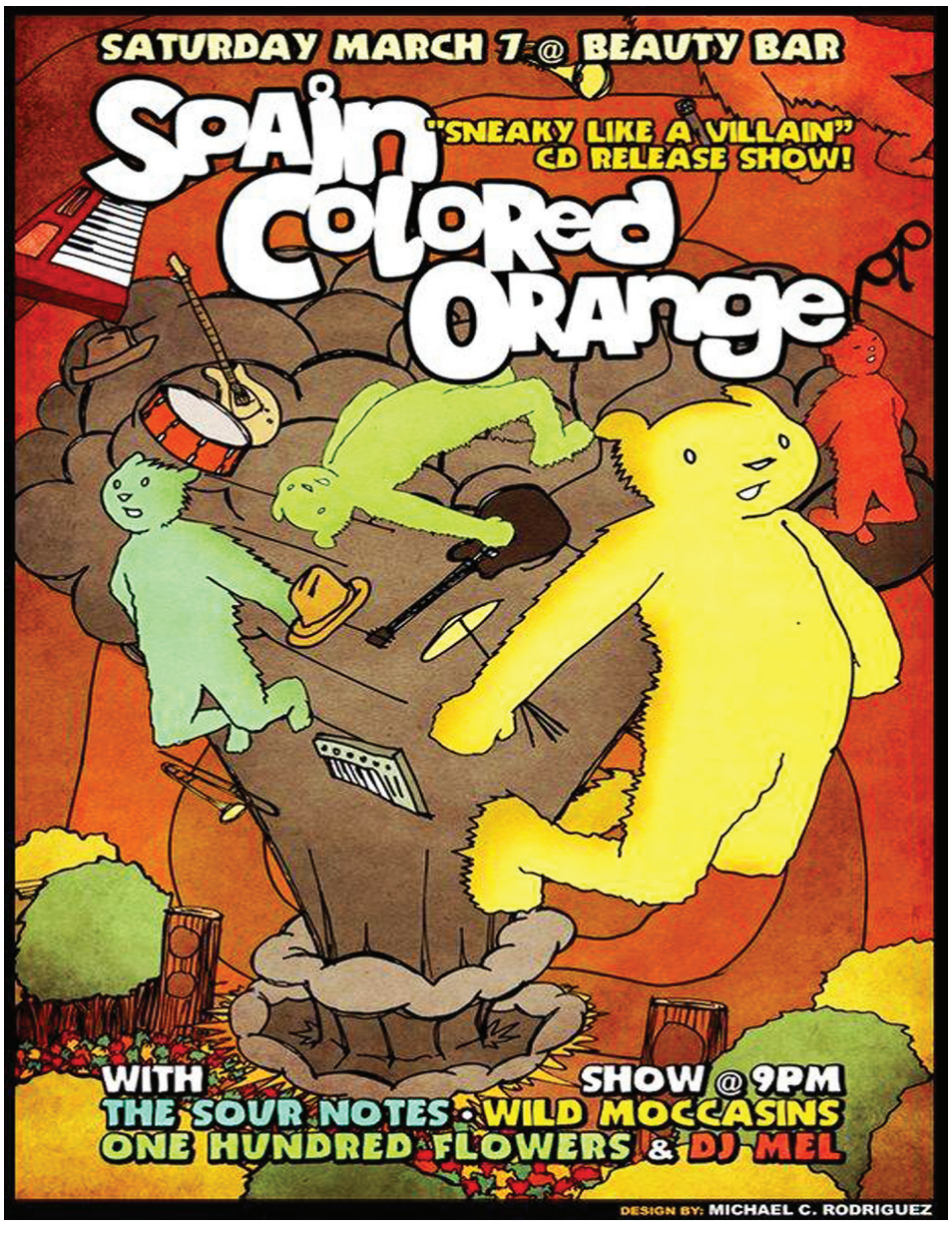
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this issue MARCH



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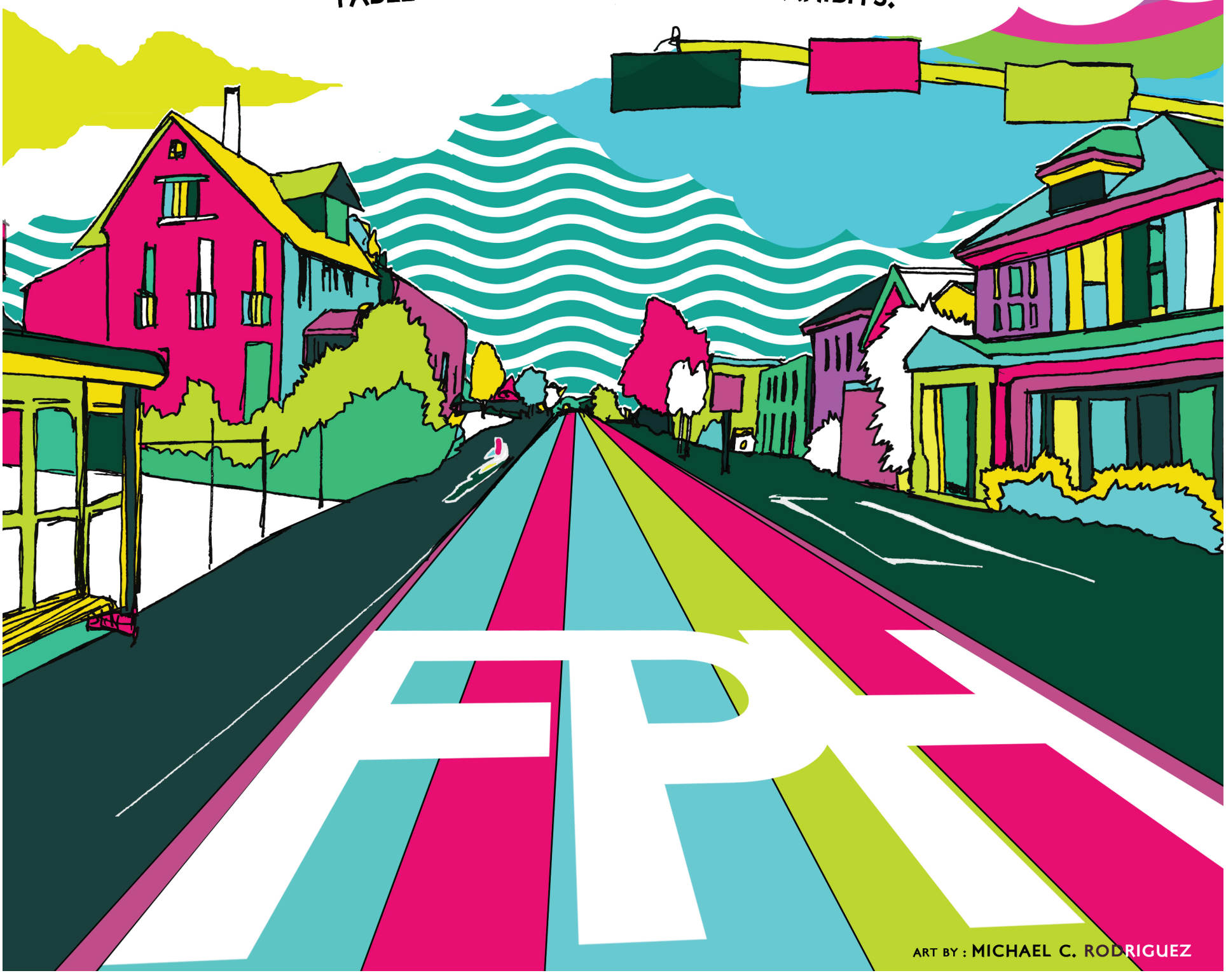
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WESTHEIMER BLOCK PARTY

OPEN CALL FOR ARTISTS

FPH OPENLY INVITES ARTISTS OF ALL MEDIUMS TO MAKE THE STREET COME ALIVE AT THIS MARCH 28TH WESTHEIMER BLOCK PARTY. WHETHER IT BE LIVE PAINTING, DECORATING THE STREET, PERFORMANCE ART, OR AN INSTALLATION PIECE, WE URGE YOU TO COME PARTICIPATE IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE BLOCK!

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ART BY : MICHAEL C. RODRIGUEZ

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Fri, 3/13 - Ian McLagan @ 5:30pm
Sat, 3/14 - Low Man's Joe @ 1:00pm
Mon, 3/16 - Hugo @ 5:30pm
Tues, 3/17 - Deer Tick @ 5:30pm
Mon, 3/23 - Nicholas Tremulis @ 5:30pm
Weds, 3/28 - Monte Montgomery @ 2:00pm

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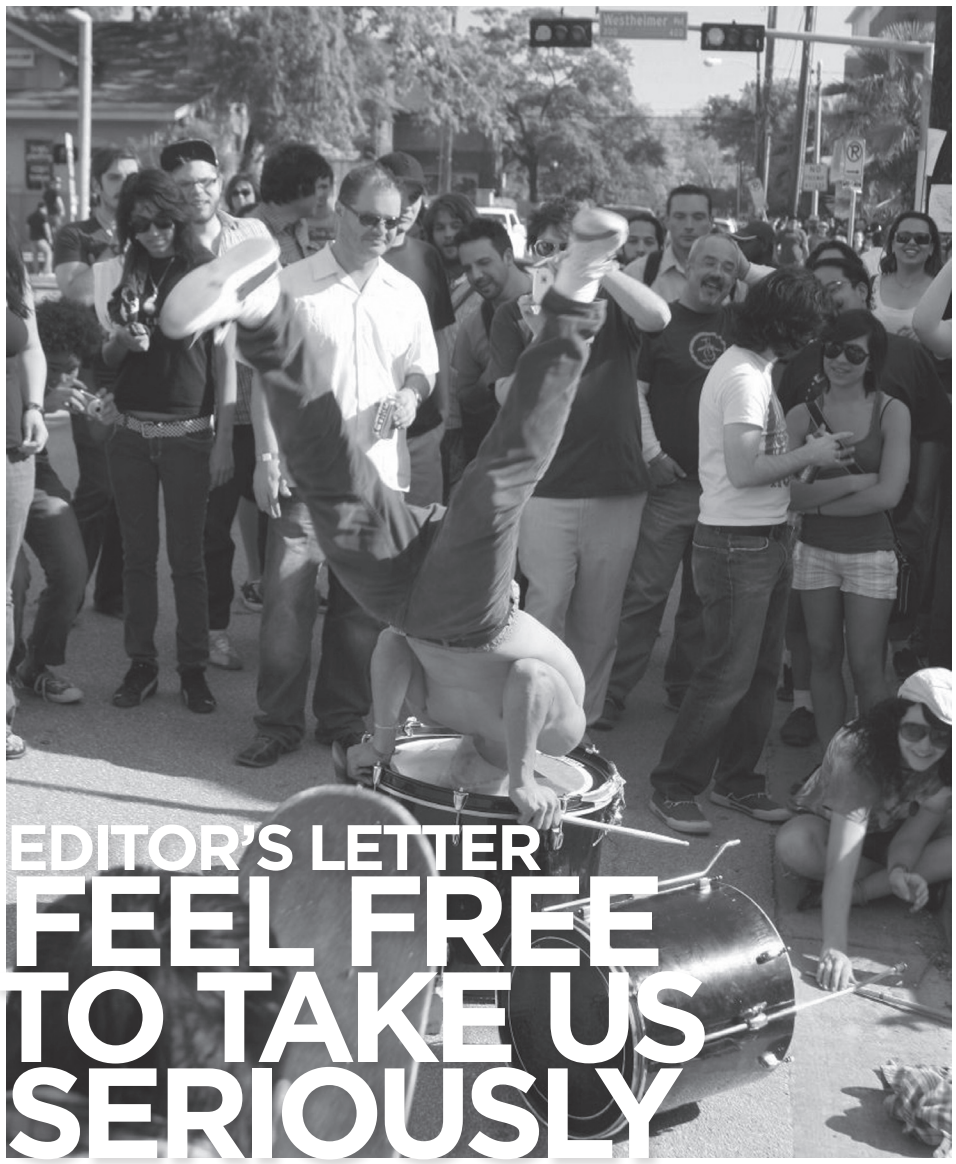
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EDITOR'S LETTER

FEEL FREE TO TAKE US SERIOUSLY

HOUSTON
WE ARE REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MARCH 28TH WESTHEIMER BLOCK PARTY AND HAVE BEEN BURNING THE MIDNIGHT OIL TO BRING YOU A LEGIT ARTS AND MUSIC FESTIVAL. WE HAVE EXPANDED THE EVENING PORTION BY HOSTING MULTIPLE NATIONAL ARTISTS AT MULTIPLE VENUES. THE DAY EVENT IS FREE AS ALWAYS AND YOU CAN SEE 100+ GREAT, LOCAL AND REGIONAL BANDS FOR FREE.
HOWEVER, THE SOOPERDOOPER-CLUTCHTASTIC-ACES-BOSS-BATSHIT-CRAZY-WHIPS-KICK YOU IN THE PANCREAS-TIGHT EVENING PORTION OF THE EVENT WHICH HOSTS NATIONALS PAIRED WITH LOCAL GREATS WILL REQUIRE A WRISTBAND. SO, IN AN EFFORT TO AVOID SLIGHT STICKER SHOCK WE WOULD LIKE TO EXPLAIN OUR MOTIVES AND INTENTIONS: WE HOPE TO SNOWBALL THE BLOCK PARTY INTO A LEGITIMATE ARTS AND MUSIC FESTIVAL AND MARQUEE EVENT FOR THE CITY. AMBITIOUS? YES. RISKY? YES? BUT WE HAVE AN UNDYING FAITH IN THIS CITY, OUR COMMUNITY, AND THE POTENTIAL FOR BIG, WONDERFUL THINGS TO HAPPEN. WE ARE EXCEEDINGLY PROUD OF THE LINEUP WE HAVE PUT TOGETHER AND ARE STOKED ABOUT VALIENT THORR, ST.VINCENT, DEVIN THE DUDE, HEALTH, THE SHOW IS THE RAINBOW, BELAIRE AND THE MANY OTHER BANDS LINED UP FOR THE SPRING FESTIVAL. SO FOLKS, YOU HAVE OUR SOLEMN PROMISE THAT IF WE CAN MAKE THIS HAPPEN TOGETHER, WE WILL GIVE THIS CITY THE REAL FESTIVAL WE HAVE ALWAYS DREAMED OF.

SO, TO SYNOPSIZE:

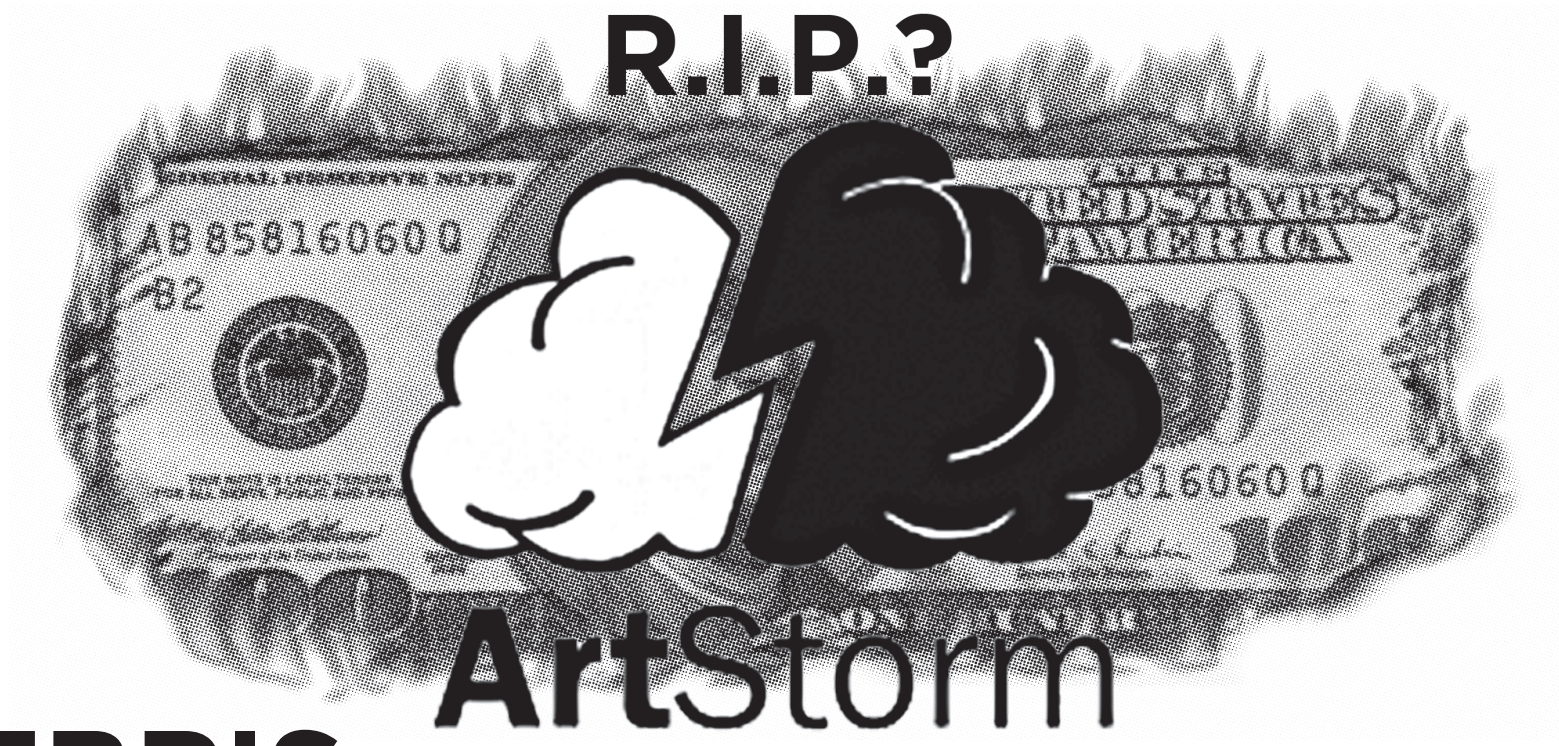
1. IT IS STILL FREE ALL DAY LONG TO SEE 120+ BANDS, ARTISTS, PERFORMERS, ETC.

2. THE EVENING FESTIVAL, WHICH INCLUDES ST. VINCENT, VALIENT THORR, DEVIN THE DUDE, THE SHOW IS THE RAINBOW, HEALTH AND 18 MORE, REQUIRES THE PURCHASE OF A $20 WRISTBAND WHICH GETS YOU IN THE MULTIPLE VENUES WHICH WILL HOST THESE BANDS THROUGHOUT THE EVENING.

3. THERE WILL BE AN ACTUAL WEDDING AT 7:30 PM.

4. RIDE YOUR BIKE. AS ALWAYS, PARKING WILL BE A THORN IN YOUR SIDE.

editors page 5



DEBRIS

Lions and Lambs | Buffalo Sean

IN LEAN YEARS THE STRONG GET WEAK, AND THE WEAK GET WEAKER. AS THE US AND THE REST OF THE WORLD DESCEND INTO THE DOLDRUMS OF A LONG RECESSION I FIGURED IT WAS AS GOOD OF A TIME AS ANY TO EXAMINE THE STATE OF THE ART STATE.

ARTSTORM GALLERY, FORMERLY THE BEST PARTY-THROWERS on Caroline Street, is no more. In the East End, BOX 13 continues on strong, hosting the best of the University of Houston's photography and painting departments March 28th through April 30th. The Contemporary Arts Museum is settling into more local shows, thawing to Houston artists this May with *No Zoning*, throwing in the kitchen sink too. Mel Chin, Bill Davenport, Ben De Soto, Sharon Engelstein, Dan Havel and Dean Ruck, George Hixson, Lauren Kelley, KnittaPlease, Jim Pirtle, Nestor Topchy, Zach Moser and Benjy Mason are all gonna do some shit. Should be a good party. The Museum of Fine arts seems fine; it won't go the way of Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art, which had to merge with the more solvent Los Angeles County Museum of Art. They are looking to the home team though, with a mid-career retrospective of photographer Amy Blakemore. Project Row Houses continues to grow its influence, reaching out to international artists as Rick Lowe travels the country speaking about community activism and saving neighborhoods based on the art and activism project in the 3rd Ward. Finesilver Gallery closed late last year down on Main Street, but there is no doubt that Midtown's popularity will trump any other losses in the area in the short term. If the short term looks bleak, the long shot seems rosy.

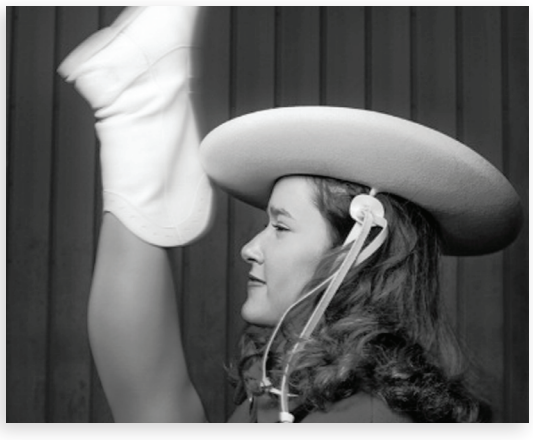
A myriad of galleries throughout Montrose, Kirby and the Heights can't be happy about belt tightening, R. Allen Stanford's $50 million dollar swindle, and the continued low price of oil or high price of rent. It feels like some of them are going to go down, just like the early 80s when the "donut hole" carved downtown out of the city's vernacular. Many of the galleries lost then sold second-generation Impressionists, and for all the bad Abstract Expressionism I've seen around I won't be surprised when the end is near. The Menil might have to postpone some of that massive construction, but if the Richmond rail line gets going I doubt they will slow down at all. The Bayou City Art Festival will shrink, just like the Houston Press has. Domy won't go anywhere, I hope the Big Block at 4411 Montrose stays full, and the Art League probably restructured and expanded at just the right time to cruise through the recession. March 6th The Art League will host WEAH, ACK!, Raiko Nin, and Alex PR!MO Luster for their first show of taggers, across Montrose a block down on Drew Street are some great pieces by WEAH and ACK!

Dwindling ranks of newspaper critics scream that art, in its physical body, will soon cease to exist. Soon enough the critics won't be there to talk about it, that much is for sure. The definition of an artist is breaking down, and the next time the next big thing rears its head it may be impossible to tell if it was anything more than a daily experience. Eating toast. Walking in the park. Meeting a new computer. Artstorm Gallery, with its emphasis on outsider art and illustration, recognized the issues with following the direction that academic art is going and fought against it with Americana. Both indomitable spirits and unequaled enthusiasm permeated the place, its artists and its events. If in its short run there is anything to regret it is only that it left so soon. Then again, I've been in art collectives that have been shorter. The appetite is out there for well thrown art parties that for sure. Who's gonna pick up where they left off?

FPH

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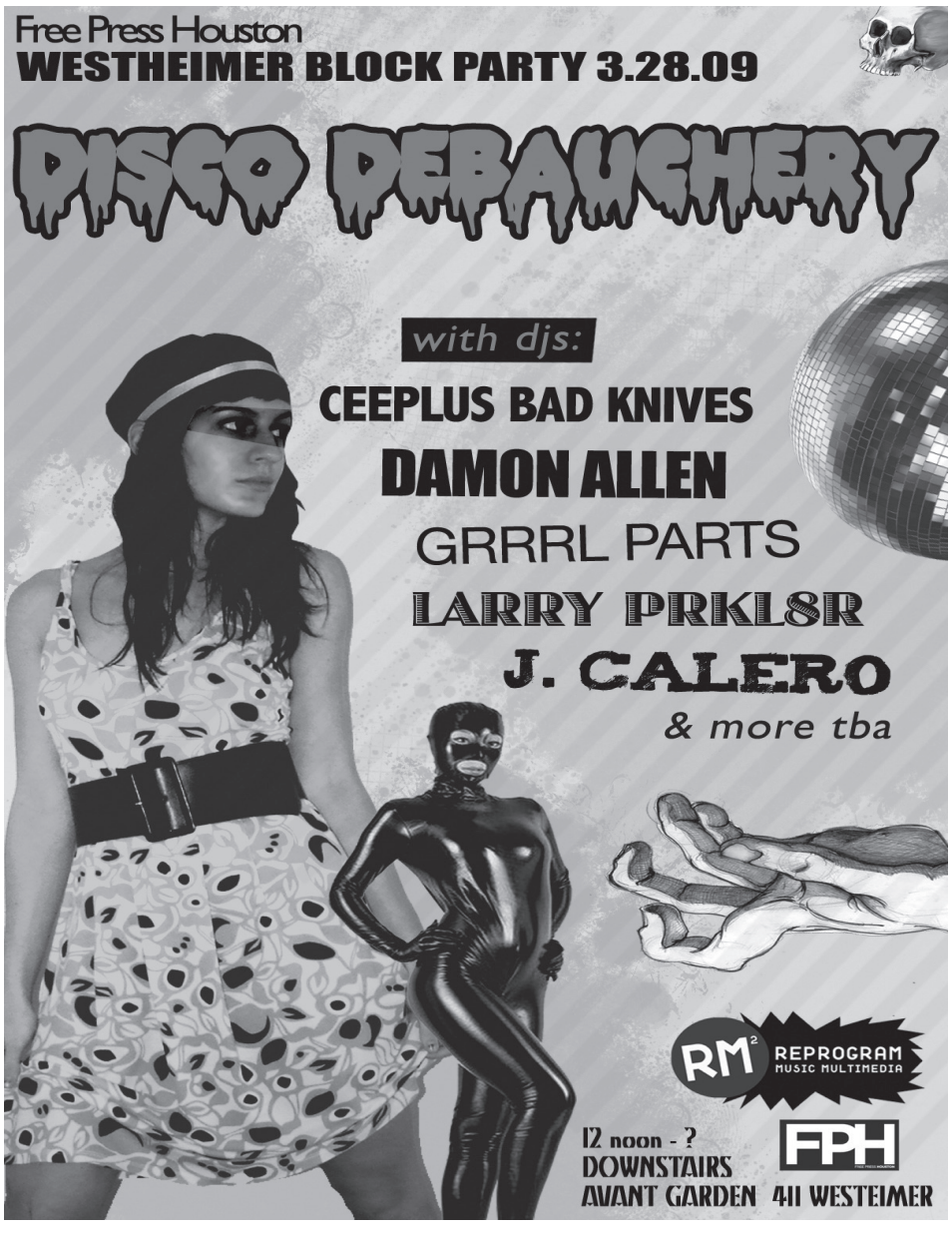


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WEEKENDS IN MARCH:

Mar 6- Opie Hendrix w/ Carrie and Steelbeam
Mar 7- Blue Hit, Live Oak Decline & Three Fantastic
Mar 13- LL Cooper/Rich Hopkins/Lisa Novak
Mar 14- The Lovers (Austin, TX)
Mar 20- Zoogma
Mar 21- Praia Urbana
Mar 27- John Elliot w/ Special Guests
Apr 3- Uncle Fucker w/ Shotgun Party

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MARCH BAND LISTINGS

WEDNESDAYS
Mar. 4 - Mystery Cover Band
Mar. 11 - Strange Brew
Mar. 18 - E.P. Vallejo
Mar. 25 - 11th Hour

FRIDAYS
Mar. 6 - Echoz
Mar. 13 - 8E Plus
"80s Rock Music"
Mar. 20 - Mambo Jazz Kings
Mar. 27 - Funksion

SATURDAYS
Mar. 7 - Police & Bon Jovi Tribute Bands
Mar. 14 - Chili Peckers *(Chili Peppers Tribute)*
Mar. 21 - Fab 5 *(Beatles & 60s Tribute)*
Mar. 28 - MODOC *(Southern Rock Tribute)*

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THE CURIOUS CASE OF SORE EYES

| Michael Bergeron

WHEN JOAQUIN PHOENIX ZONED OUT ON DAVE LETTERMAN'S SHOW PEOPLE BOUGHT THE GAG WHOLESALE. A GENERATION AGO THE CONCEPT OF REINVENTING YOURSELF MULTIPLE TIMES IN VARIOUS GUISES WAS FRESH, BUT NOWADAYS IT'S AS DEAD AS ANDY KAUFMAN.

Coraline

IN CASE YOU DON'T KNOW THE INCIDENT to which I refer, about this time last month (2/11/09) Phoenix appeared on Dave Letterman with the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers look he's been sporting for, well, as long as it took to grow that Rip Van winkle beard. Television is so controlled that there's no way Phoenix's meltdown was the spontaneous combustion it pretended to be. I don't pretend to be a critic of hip hop but Phoenix wants us to believe his future as an artist follows the path of music as opposed to film.

It's too bad if Phoenix does plan to retire because he's worthy of your sore eyes with his turn as a thirtysomething guy down on his luck that recently moved back with his parents (in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn) in Two Lovers. There's a touch of angst like Marty felt. Marty was the guy who lives with his mom (a role won an Oscar for Ernest Borgnine in the mid-50s) and never wants to go out. Unlike his black and white counterpart Phoenix's Leonard meets two rather hot women (Gwyneth Paltrow and Vinessa Shaw) right off the bat, and then spends the rest of the film deceiving them and himself.

The Brighton Beach locale will ring a bell to viewers familiar with director's James Gray previous films like Little Odessa and We Own the Night. Like those films Two Lovers observes the tight knit binds that hold families together. Unlike Gray's other films Two Lovers never wanders into violence. In that sense Two Lovers plays like the comic doppelganger of Gray's forays into familiar relations.

Paltrow's Michelle, a kept woman, offers the glimpse of another lifestyle to Leonard whereas Shaw's Sandra represents the status quo since her parents and Leonard's folks want them to get married. Much of Two Lovers' humor comes from Leonard's attempts to be different, like in the way he acts suave around Sandra but is kind of a dweeb with Michelle, even going so far as to mimic her taste in alcohol by ordering a Brandy Alexander.

Two Lovers, playing exclusively at the River Oaks Three, suggests that Phoenix is at the top of his game as an actor. The film swirls with potential with its romantic comedy balanced by dramatic obstacles.

THE CLASS

The Class feels like an assignment that requires serious concentration. This French film won the top prize last year at Cannes and competed for the Foreign Film Oscar.

Imagine To Sir With Love but where the teacher embodies the same son of a bitch tendencies as the students. The Class (Entre les murs) doesn't tread the path of Hollywood school themed films, there's no glint of Stand and Deliver or Dangerous Minds. As directed by Laurent Cantet the action vacillates back and forth as a contest of wills between Mr. Marin and his students. The story unwinds with the in-your-face mood of a documentary and there's a reason why. Cantet shot the film throughout the span of a school semester using the author of its source material (François Bégaudeau) as the teacher and wisely casting a diverse group of teens to play the students.

Although the central Paris setting with an ethnic range of students gives added subtext to the simplicity of the story (the French title translates as Between the Walls) you can imagine the story itself unfolding in any metropolitan city. At first the script seems like a series of vignettes strung together set in the same class but the dialogue carries that thought a step further. The individual scenes are long and talky but reveal nuances of all the characters. A shorter number of scenes are set in the teacher's lounge and conference room. The Class captures the short depth of confined spaces in keeping with its confrontational moods.

As the semester progresses the drama gets specific and we focus on whether one Asian student's mom being deported affects his learning curve or the disciplinary action taken against another student from Africa. At the same time everyone has grown or more correctly achieved an arc. Mr. Marin actually gets quite testy towards the end. When he calls one obnoxious girl a "skank" the drama escalates to new heights. The Class never overwhelmed me but I had to respect what the director was saying about education and about people. Fortunately there's no quiz at the end.

WENDY AND LUCY

Wendy and Lucy makes for an easy review if you just want to talk about what happens. Girl loses dog girl finds dog. Nothing happens, Wendy and Lucy rejoices in exploring lackadaisical moments between a girl and her dog. Michelle Williams dresses down and stars while director Kelly Reichardt seeks the small moments of joy that occur in life.

Wendy follows the path of a different drum. Driving her compact car in route to a summer job with dog (Lucy) riding shotgun Wendy is laid back but poor, easy going but living week to week. When her car breaks down the situation goes from sleeping in the car to save motel money to wondering if there's enough money to fix the car and finish the trip.



Wendy and Lucy

Just when things look bleak Wendy shoplifts a couple of dollars worth of junk food from a supermarket and gets popped by the nerd checker/security dude. In the time it takes to pay bail (there goes the car repair cheese) and return to where she left Lucy tied outside the store the dog has gone missing.

Wendy and Lucy plays like an art film, the emphasis rests on emotion and the performances of Williams with a little Will Patton (as the car repairman) thrown in for good measure. Wendy and Lucy plays like a quiet festival film, there's not a wealth of action other that looking for the canine. Wendy is an everyman (or everyperson) for our times. Her economic reality mirrors what everyone else presumably is going through. Her mental equilibrium consistently vibrates with the entire bad buzz but she maintains a quiet grace throughout her ordeals that you have to admire and relate to on some level.

Williams as Wendy looks uncombed and non glamorous throughout the film in sharp contrast to her previous role as the supermodel in I'm Not There or even her appearance in Synecdoche, New York. Williams easily channels the kind of common sense and fair play that Henry Fonda used in his simple portrayals of workingmen. For Wendy it's just a series of bad breaks that have left her homeless along the uncharted roads of America.

CORALINE

The thing that instantly blew me away about Coraline (in 3D) was the depth of the world created by Henry Selick. Coraline is the demented spiritual cousin of The Nightmare Before Christmas (also directed by Selick) with traces of Being John Malkovich and Spirited Away in the bloodline. Once you get the film references out of the way the literary bloodline to Alice's Adventures Through the Looking Glass become clear.

I would've sworn the film was CGI even though I am aware of Selick's stop motion work (Nightmare Before Christmas, James and the Giant Peach) because the animated movement was so smooth and in tune with Coraline's world. in an interview Selick stated that there is some digital manipulation of the image but it is def stop motion. For instance they would use two parts for the head, a top eye expression and the bottom mouth, and then digitally erase the horizontal crease in the middle. For the cool 3D effect Selick stated that in order to capture Coraline's point of view he had to photograph the right and then left view because the space between her eyes wasn't wide enough to fit the lenses next to each other at the same time. Whatever the reasons Coraline visually stuns, especially in a sequence where all the color drains from the screen and the already multi-dimensional Coraline now exists in a nether region not unlike a particular incident in a Daffy Duck cartoon.

Coraline is a young girl who finds a secret passageway in the new house into which her parents have moved. Once through the looking glass Coraline discovers an alternative universe with really cool parents, the kind of place a kid wants to stay forever. There's just one catch. In order to stay you have to have buttons sewn into your eyes. At this point whatever idyllic visions Coraline has conjured are merged with that moment in The Diving Bell and the Butterfly where Bauby has one of his eyes sewn shut.

Coraline has great creepy moments for adults and yet retains an innocent charm for all ages. Puppetry for the digital age is Selick's bag.

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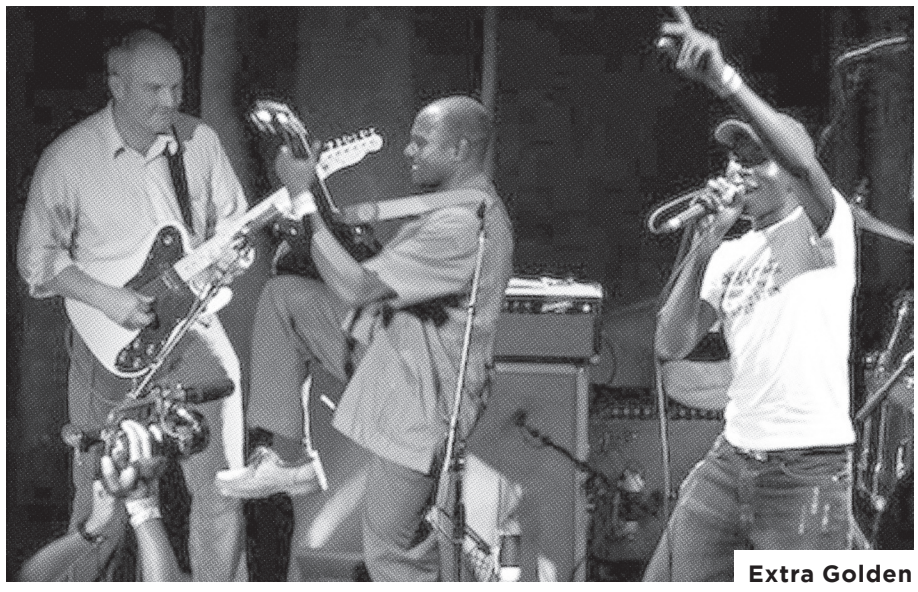




EXTRA GOLDEN

THE BAND NOT THE MYTH

| Kwame M. Anderson



Extra Golden

EXTRA GOLDEN IS BAND COMPRISED OF AMERICAN AND KENYAN MEMBERS WHOSE MUSIC INCORPORATES THE SOUNDS OF AMERICAN ROCK AND KENYAN BENGA MUSIC TO CREATE SOMETHING NEW. NOW WITH THAT STATED, LET'S TALK ABOUT EXTRA GOLDEN, THE BAND, MORE THAN THE CONCEPT. IN THESE DAYS OF MIXED RACE PRESIDENTS AND "SLUMDOG MILLIONARE" AND WHATNOT THERE IS A NEW ACCEPTANCE OF ALL THAT IS MULTICULTURAL.

WHICH IS GREAT, except for the fact, that Extra Golden is a real band that hopes to exist as such, not as just a representation of the new attitude toward "foreign." When the idea changes, or let's say it changes to something else, for example, music made with kitchen utensils, what will become of Extra Golden?

"Yeah, I don't know, we'll see," guitarist Alex Minoff responds. "You know, for Ian (Eagleson) and me it's kind of funny the way this has happened lately, I mean cause like you mentioned some of those Golden records (writer's note: fabulous, all of them), I mean those records are more than 10 years old, you know, and we were basically trying to do the same thing."

Ian Eagleson and Alex Minoff began in the band Golden with Phil Manley (Trans Am) and Jon Theodore (One Day As A Lion, Mars Volta). They released a series of great but widely unheralded albums. However, on those albums there was always a hint of what was to come. African rhythms, Middle Eastern rhythms, guitar rock, and some psychedelic-ness. However, when Eagleson moved to Kenya to finish a degree he became friends and eventually band mates with Otieno Jagwasi. Their musical endeavors would soon become enhanced with the addition of Minoff and Onyango Wuod Omari. After Jagawsi's untimely death, Opiyo Bilongo would join the band, and that is how Extra Golden came into play.

The band's first album "Ok-Oyot System" was a more rocking affair, sharing a lot with the original Golden sound, but with a heavier Benga influence as a result of Jagwasi and Omari. A few years after they released "Hera Ma Nono". In addition to being their first with Bilongo, the album was more of a Benga affair. Their newest album "Thank You Very Quickly" (3/10/09 Thrill Jockey) is probably the best encapsulation of both styles, the idea of them trying to find a sound, is replaced by a realized creation.

"It was a conscious effort this time. (Omari and Bilongo) had the most interest in trying to step outside of what they were used to, and they started to see the value in adding the rock to their thing. When we did the second record, there was little bit more like, let's try to mold ourselves to try to play their music. I mean, trust me, no one will ever confuse that record with an actual Benga record, especially a Kenyan. They'll be like 'What the fuck is this.' This time, I think part of it had to with the way the record sounded, it has more of a live, it has more a rocking sound. The last record was little bit cleaner sounding. I think lot of it had to with a conscious decision to really like Okay, we got together and made this first record, we were able to get together and make a new record that allowed us to go on a big tour, it's like now is the time where we can really actually focus on, like really consciously decide to do something musically and try to like make this new style of music, as opposed to like let's take an element from this and an element from this and put it together and see if it works, it's like let's just do our own thing now."

On their last album, the two Kenyan members of the band were having Visa issues, which, coincidentally, were resolved by the, now, President of the United States, Barack Obama. This led the band to do a song thanking him, entitled "Obama." I was curious how Minoff felt about the whole election since he lives in D.C. and being that this interview was conducted a week after the inauguration I thought I'd ask how he felt about all of this. His answer was nothing short of fantastic.

"You know, the one thing that concerns me about the whole inauguration situation, I mean being here and seeing everything that was going on here, and how different it was than what is normally going on here, I mean, it was really exciting in one way and inspiring, at the same time, I feel like, as of Tuesday at 11 AM (1/20/09) or whatever, it's time to cease the fanaticism for him, and I wanted him to be elected as much, or more than anyone else, and obviously in the context of American history the election is really big, I appreciate all those things, but now he's the President of the United States… the bottom line is, yeah, maybe he's cool, but he's still a politician. I just wonder how people are going to be towards him, are people going to be really apologetic, or what's going to happen when people realize things haven't completely changed."

FPH



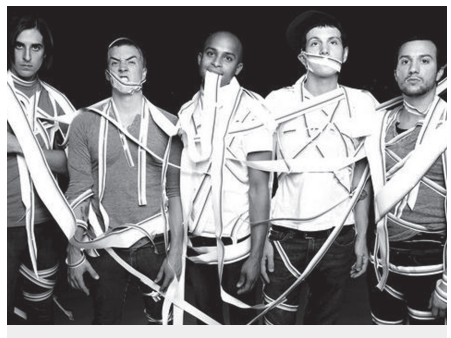
MONOTONIX
02.07 | NUMBERS



STATE RADIO
02.07 | NUMBERS



THE TONTONS
02.07 | NUMBERS



AMERICAN FANGS
02.07 | NUMBERS



THE DEVIL LOVES THE MCKENZIES

The McKenzies release an EP and bathe with each other

| April 5k

I'M NOT GOING TO IGNORE THE OBVIOUS. Everyone in town has compared The McKenzies to another little band that also recently released an EP. Sure, line-up wise there are glaring similarities but where that other band were lovingly fed the worms of tweeness by the indie rock mama bird, The McKenzies are at most the evil twins booted from the nest left to subsist on cigarette butts and half empty bottles of MD 20/20.

The McKenzies are rooted in far more punk territory than their de facto doppelgangers. They delve into the darker subjects of rejection and heartache yet emerge as shiny and happy as the bubbles from their live show bubble machine. Lead-off track "Shall We Booty Dance" is a condemnation you can dance to...in hell. "Run Run Run" is definitely the hit, with the awesomely catchy chorus and up and down beat that will have you once again, shaking that ass. And just as you're worked into a frenzy (by The McKenzies! ...oops) it brings you gently to the ground with a grinding outro.

"This Lonely Heart" is a beautiful down tempo number full of longing and desperation. It serves as the perfect "couple's skate" interlude for a rollicking dance party of an EP. Strains of girl-group majesty are reconfigured in a manner reminiscent of a more technically skilled (and less lo-fi) Vivian Girls. They pick the pace back up with the out-and-out Rondelles-esque "My Baby Doesn't Understand". The McKenzies knack for indie pop with an edge is most apparent on this track bringing to mind times of dancing and drinking to the punky poppy indie dance bands that used to grace the stages of places like The Oven way back in the day. Album closer "The Devil Loves Us" is a great send off track, all breakdown and drum cadence one minute and sweet harmonies gently nudging you towards that repeat button to relive the magic all over again.

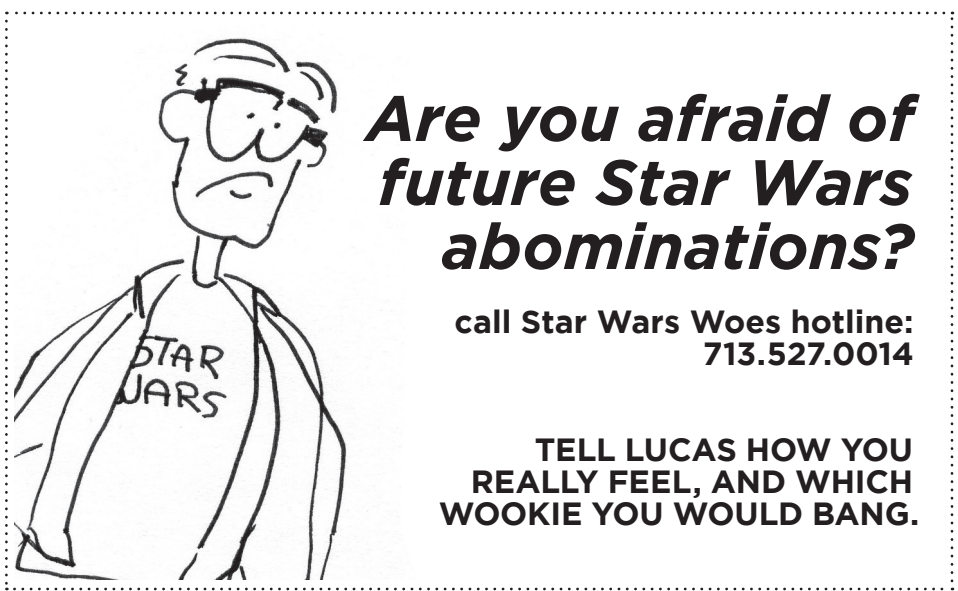
These songs would fit seamlessly on a mix tape consisting of The Crabs, Wolf Colonel, Cub, Heavenly, and any more of those hard hitting, danceable indie pop bands of times, regrettably, passed.

I should also add that this was recorded at Pigeon Eater and is perhaps the best sounding thing I've heard from them yet, I hope they find a new home soon!!! Also, this was released in part by the gang over at IndieHouston.org, and is a testament to how quickly some kids with a passion for local music can turn a scene around.

FPH















WHERE THE GIRLS ARE

To be a female musician in Houston..

| April Brem

WHEN I FIRST STARTED BECOMING INVOLVED WITH MUSIC THERE WAS NO NOTION THAT IT WAS ONLY FOR BOYS. SURE, ALL OF THE BANDS WERE FULL OF GUYS, BUT WHEN I WAS YOUNG ALL OF MY FRIENDS WERE GUYS SO I JUST DIDN'T NOTICE THAT THINGS WE'RE MORE THAN A LITTLE OFF-BALANCE.

I JUST SAW REALLY COOL PEOPLE DOING REALLY COOL THINGS and couldn't think of one reason why I couldn't yell Prince songs to the strums of a tennis racket guitar (which was a Prince brand racket, oddly enough) to an audience of Ninja Turtles. But as I got older and replaced the catgut with round-wounds, I started experiencing first hand that not every 4-Point stag is keen to let you in on the Reindeer Games. Awesomely enough, in the past few years it seems that this "boys-only" rule is going the way of Jim Crow, Gay Marriage Bans and Grass Illegality. More and more guys are abandoning that outdated notion that only boys can rock & roll.

And no more is this more obvious than our own backyard. In all aspects and all capacities, women are essential to the awesome directions the Houston music scene has been taking as of late. From the roles of musicians to photographers, to promoters, to producers, the ladies of Houston enrich and nourish the community at large and without them, I hate to think of the sorry state we'd still be in. I've had the unparalleled pleasure of hearing what many of these great women have had to say on various topics. And with the space I have been allowed, it is with great pride and appreciation I present to you a unique glimpse into the experiences and perspectives of the women of the Houston music scene.

This month we'll be exploring the essential experience of being a female in a realm that has for so long been male dominated and controlled. From artists like Rolling Stones to Pavement and all the way to svengalis like Phil Spector to Kim Fowley, men have always been taken seriously as artists and forces behind the scenes, while women were ones to be in some cases written about and wooed, and other cases manipulated and sculpted. Yet, there were always the Moe Tuckers, and the Patti Smiths, pounding out a rhythm unencumbered by the limitations of gender roles as dictated by the status quo. Today it seems that ratio of men to women in music approaching stasis, as evidenced by the women I spoke to. By and large it seems that females are readily accepted by their male peers, though moments of friction do arise.

Asli, of The Tontons expressed a reoccurring sentiment, "Probably the most common experience I have had being a female in a band is people assuming that I am a band member's girlfriend, I get asked who I'm with a lot."

Artist/Promoter Kam had the same tale to tell, having been told by security at her own show "band girlfriends aren't allowed in the green rooms".

Melissa from Sharks and Sailors shared a similar experience, "Occasionally venue employees (in Houston and elsewhere) would think I was lying when my band was loading equipment into a club and I'd have to repeat 'Yes, I'm IN the band. I play an actual instrument in the band. No, I'm not trying to get in free and I'm not someone's girlfriend, so please let me load my gear.' Though, she admits situations like this are becoming fewer and farther between. It seems that the farther from Houston you go, the more problems you encounter.

Dominique, vocalist/bassist of The Delta Block, has been literally beaten up for having the gall to ask for her band's cut of the door.

Sometimes it's the audience, as evidence by an experience of Ema Kid vocalist/bassist of punk outfit Penny Arcade who was once told "Wow, I thought you were great and I was surprised too cause I wasn't expecting you to be good because well…you know, you're a girl."

And Natalie of Wayside Drive found a perfect way to counter the gear snobs. "They would ask me what kind of gear I was playing and you know what kind of guitar my guitar was. It's like they didn't take me seriously. I worked at Guitar Center for about six months, got familiar with all the gear, I worked in accessories. Now I'm at a point where I can tell them what they're playing and I know more about their gear than they do!"

But these clashes aren't just happening out in the clubs, sometimes it's going down in the practice room. Stacey of Guitars and Lenny Briscoe had this to say about a former outfit. "I was blatantly ignored. They would walk into my home when we would practice, look at my husband, who was the drummer, and tell him 'Will you tell your wife to play this instead?'" An experience shared by Dominique who also was faced with friction by a stand-in band mate "He bold faced refused to listen to me and my sugges-





tions as to how to play the song, and simply told me 'I'm following (guitarist) John.' He wouldn't even look me in the eyes when he spoke to me. It was quite obvious that he couldn't handle taking directions from girls.

Fortunately, sometimes it's a little lighthearted competition, "I think the farthest it goes is to see just how much gear I can haul around," says Gillian of News on the March.

And as much as we'd like to make this a black and white, cut and dry gender issue, being a female in a band often means facing oppositions from other women. Asli had this to say, "it's been my experience that when you're in a band with other females they tend to compete with you." As if feeling the need to compete in musicianship wasn't enough. Zahira of Wild Moccasins adds, "I've definitely had experiences where I've read that I wasn't pretty enough, and then they don't mention if I'm talented or not.

Not all of the ladies I spoke with faced any of these obstacles; many have had the good fortune of either life long equality with childhood friends or sharing common goals and interests with open-minded band mates. Those that haven't been so lucky have found ways to get by. Anna, formally of Hands Up Houston, and now a promoter on her own, says, "I purposely didn't socialize with any of the touring bands because of being seen as a groupie. Male musicians tend to think that if you're female and you're nice to them you're hitting on them, they don't take you seriously."

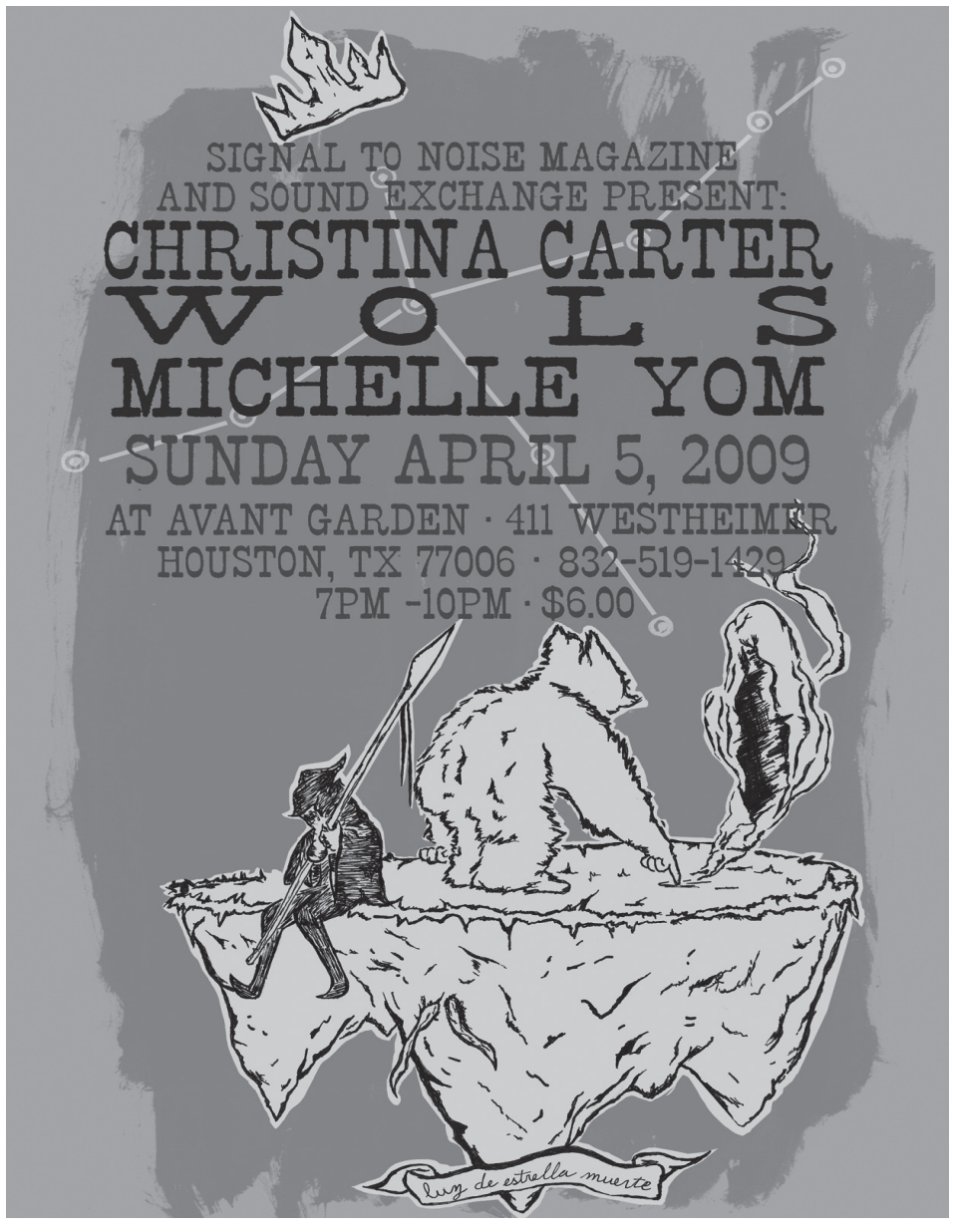
Rosa of Ditchwater took an opposing approach. "I want to be more Mae West about things than trying to go in and bulldoze my way through anything". When describing her dealings with less than levelheaded hard rockers, "That's what boys are used to."

I received similar replies regarding the charms of the fairer sex from other females like singer-songwriter Elaine. "Sometimes it's helpful because people tend to be more impressed when you don't completely suck." And Asli had this to add, "I think that having females in a band adds a level of sensuality, and balance that is necessary. I think it's harder for us to win the approval of an audience but if and once you have it then its easier for us to captivate an audience in a way that most men can't."

But in the end, it seems that this biggest source of competition comes from within. Amye of Wols admits, "I think I'm always more concerned with proving myself to myself rather than other people." Mlee of Hearts of Animals and sometime collaborator with Amye shares a similar outlook. "I guess I have not really felt that it was ever my gender that caused me to feel the need to prove myself in a band situation, but rather my insecurity either in my skill or creativity."

I hope that this month's insights into the experiences Houston women have had gaining equal ground in the music community has been at worst and entertaining read, and at best enlightening. I would like to thank all of the wonderful ladies who contributed to this and future articles in this series. When I first started contacting women in the scene, the responses came fast and frequent. If I missed you in my initial call, please feel free to contact me at april5k@gmail.com, your insights are enthusiastically welcome. Next month I will be looking at what roles females are playing in this music community and their drives and interests.

FPH





skyblue72



Vicarious Me

Wayward Sons

Saturday March 7th @



2010 WAUGH DR. HOU TX . 77006 - 10 pm

Interview

VALIENT THORR

| Shelby Hohl | Photo by Roberto Alegria

NOT ONLY WERE WE LUCKY ENOUGH TO SCORE VALIENT THORR TO PLAY THE WESTHEIMER BLOCK PARTY BUT WE GOT THE BAND TO SIT DOWN FOR A FEW QUESTIONS.

WHAT WOULD ONE NEED TO SURVIVE ON OR INSIDE THE PLANET VENUS, PARTICULARLY BURLATIAN PROVINCE? ¶ Knives. And courage. It would probably be smart to bring along a canteen of water too, seeing as there isn't much there and you are humans. Well, there's a lot of ice, but you'd need to melt it somehow. So, add matches to that list. And chocolate. There's no chocolate on Venus (Strange huh? You'd think there would be, but you'd be wrong.)

ANY NEW BOOKS OR MUSICIANS OUT THERE WORTH LOOKING INTO? ¶ Metalheads check out Children from NYC. Peeps who enjoy psych rock or krautrock, check out this band Dead Man from Orebro, Sweden. That's the same town as Witchcraft, and Winchester Widowmakers, and Truckfighters. They're cranking out the jams over there. Then there's a band from Iowa called Radio Moscow. Young dudes with a Hendrix/Blue Cheer vibe. They really wail, and I was super impressed with them when I caught their show about two weeks ago. Books?? Hmmm... I'm reading a lot of old sci-fi Bantam books lately... Dead Inside by Robert Silverburg, and I'm reading Kurt Vonnegut's son's book, the Eden Express. His name is Mark Vonnegut. It's about his battles with schizophrenia in the 60s. I recommend everyone picking up a copy of Watchmen by Alan Moore and reading it before they see the movie. And finally, everyone should read "The Road" by Cormac MacCarthy before the flick comes out as well. Actually, if you dig that, an even better book by him is called, "Blood Meridian".

WHAT MOVIE SHOULD ANYONE WHO WANTS TO START A BAND WATCH? ¶ Mad Max. Get ready for a future with no gas. Then sing about it. Or how about "There Will Be Blood"?

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THE REPTILIAN AGENDA ON THE PLANET EARTH CAN BE DESTROYED? PLEASE LIST ANY TOOLS/SKILLSETS THAT WOULD AID IN THIS REVOLUTION: ¶ Well first of all, I don't believe that a revolution ever works. The root word in the word revolution is "revolve". And that means to come back around. That's like putting a band-aid on a severed artery, or treating pneumonia with o.t.c cold medicine. The "solution" is not a "revolution", its an "evolution". And by evolution, I don't mean evolving. So don't take that literally. I mean going up a level, not going in circles. Taking it to another level, evolving our theories about how we are going to battle these menaces that plague us. My first maneuver? Evacuate Charleston, surround South Carolina, and declare a state of emergency. That's how we flush out the lizards from their homes in the swamps. Nobody's talking about it, but our own government is breeding them down there on the Blackwater base. Hence phase two: Who do we trust? All tough customers should head to Barnes and Noble and find books on slaying. Whether its vampires, lycans, or lizardmen, dudes should be getting your militias together. Right now, forming a militia is even more important than forming a band. If everyone didn't move over to facebook, you'd see that instead of bands trying to get you to add them on myspace, now its militia after militia.

WHAT SHOULD ANY ATTENDEE OF A VALIENT THORR SHOW GO IN EXPECTING? ¶ Lust.

ANYTHING ABOUT HOUSTON THAT YOU WILL NEVER FORGET? ¶ Yeah, but its kind of a private thought. Some would call it an intimate portrait.

IF YOU COULD RIDE IN A CADILLAC THROUGH THE MOJAVE DESERT RIPPED ON MESCALINE WITH ANY CELEBRITY WHO WOULD IT BE? ¶ I'm gonna have to say Kurt Russell-w/ an eyepatch, but not the one from "Escape from New York", I mean the one from "Captain Ron".

WHAT IS THE MOST INTENSE THING A THORRIOR HAS DONE FOR THE BAND? ¶ Well I don't think that there is one specific "intense" act that has been perpetrated. I think think that there IS a certain intensity that happens at our shows that is the coming together of the spirits of everyone... the positive vibrations will heat up to a fever pitch... and that has been reflected in the last few months with the coming of this new administration founded on a platform of hope and positive vibes, rather than fear. And some nights you can feel it in the air, its so thick. I'm hoping that's what happens during the party. We'll see, I know it'll still be March. But maybe we can get it humid and muggy with our bodies, if but for a few moments.

AXL ROSE: APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION OR ANYTIME A BRAZILIAN FAN THROWS A ROCK AT HIM LIVE IN CONCERT? ¶ Not a fan. That dude is weak. He's got Michael Jackson Complex.

HOW HAPPY ARE YOU TO PLAY THE WESTHEIMER BLOCK PARTY? HAPPY ENOUGH TO PLAY ON THE STREETS AND CAUSE A RIOT? ¶ Well, I don't know about a riot. There are certain needs and causes for riots, and I don't believe there's a need for one there right now necessarily. Maybe a good old fashioned freak-out though?!? That's sort of what I have in mind. Lot's of butts shaking together simultaneously like in those old motorcycle gang/beach bunny movies. See ya'll there!

FPH

Valient Thorr plays the Westheimer Block Party Evening Festival inside Numbers March 28th

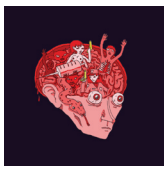
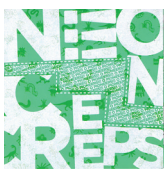


HOMEGROWN SCHEIZZER

BOUNTIFUL SPRING

BY OMAR AFRA

This spring is rife with album and EP releases by Houston artists. This is merely a shorthand list of the many to keep your eyes on. With recent releases by Wild Moccasins, Mechanical Boy, and with upcoming work by Spain Colored Orange and Young Mammals, 2009 is looking to be a great year for local music.

WHO	SOUNDS LIKE	LYRIC	WHERE TO LISTEN	NEXT SHOW	SHOES
 **THE MCKENZIES** *SELF-TITLED EP*	Driving Indie-pop with two faces and voices that's reminds one of The Sundays in all the best ways. Featured are songs that capture love, lust, ambivalence, and friendly-type phenomena. The vocals by Jodie on This Lonely Heart are exceptionally beautiful and summon Loretta Lynn and Patsy Cline.	*"Please remember if I die that you remember how I cried for the likes of you."*	On your headphones as you stroll in Menil Park and dream of heavy petting.	**Westheimer Block Party** March 28th	
 **BORN LIARS** *RAGGED ISLAND*	The gritty garage punk yet blatantly Houston. You will know it when you hear it.	*"Your looking real beat and we know you need sleep, baby cool your jets"*	Anywhere your Converse take you.	**Rudyards**? Where else? March 20th	
 **THE GENERIC TRIBE** *IN GUNS WE TRUST*	Bob Dylan, Beastie Boys, and Velvet underground having a hallucinogenic inspired ménage e trios for the listening pleasure of the Ipod generation.	*"I got blood on my right hand and blood on my left and now I am wanted for a murder, robbery, and auto theft."*	In your getaway car as you leave the convenient store you just robbed and ponder the morality of what just transpired.	possible surprise performance at the **Block Party**	
 **MIC SKILLS** *DEFIANT*	Clever and Forward thinking rhymes meet pop hooks. Mic Skills is equally accessible by hip-hop fans who enjoy both backpacker and radio styles.	*"Turn it out, spit it out in double time. What's your best ya'll I am gonna double mine."*	House party	March 6th at **the Mink**	
 **OZEAL** *JOYFUL STRUGGLE*	James Brown and Common with a decidedly Latin influence. Ozeal's band shines particularly in a live context.	*"I wanna kiss your soul and put a lil' sugar in your bowl."*	In the backseat as you try and seduce your high school teacher/ babysitter/parole officer.	March 14th at **The Cellar**	
 **O PIONEERS!!** *NEON CREEPS*	The new Americana ala' Against Me, Murder City Devils.	*"I am hoping I can sleep through this and forget about all the depression and debt."*	Live context is the only way to go.	March 18th at **Rock Bottom (San Antonio, TX)**	
 **PHILLIP FOSHEE** *HAVE WE BEEN ACTING?*	Alt-country-folk prettiness with song-craft that is often missing from said genre. Brilliantly yet simply recorded.	*"Like lying in wait for a train to come and separate us all"*	By your lonesome self in your room as you cut yourself out of photos which capture memories you wish to repress.	*tba*	
 **AMERICAN FANGS** *SELF-TITLED*	Sounds like: Grimy rock with surreptitious melodies and lyrics that insinuate bad things happening to your loved ones.	*"We can drag you out here backwards, it ain't hard to put your family inside a hole."*	Working behind the counter of Subway fantasizing about putting the hurt down on your boss and his family	**Westheimer Block Party** March 28th	

WESTHEIMER BLOCK PARTY
EVENING FESTIVAL

Starts at 8 PM **March 28, 2009**

20$ Wristband = 20 bands at **4** venues

Numbers | Helios | La Strada | Mangos

Presale at **www.freepresshouston.com**

FPH
FREE PRESS HOUSTON



ST. VINCENT
VALIENT THORR
DEVIN THE DUDE
H E A L T H
B E L A I R E
PICTUREPLANE
DANIEL FRANCIS DOYLE
THE SHOW IS THE RAINBOW

HOMOPOLICE
THE EASTERN SEA
GOLDEN AXE
FAT TONY
THE RIFF TIFFS
NEWS ON THE MARCH
FACTORY PARTY
GRRRL PARTS
GHOSTTOWN ELECTRIC
AMERICAN FANGS
WINDSOR DRIVE
CEE PLUS

March 28
2009

BLOCK PARTY

YESTERMEN

SIX UNDER

DEATH FROM ABOVE

ALEXISONFIRE

VALIENT THORR

THE SHOW IS THE CANDLE

CLOSURE IN MOSCOW

BEARE

DANEZ

ECHOES

FPH
FREE PRESS HOUSTON

THE REAL WEDDING OF ALEX WUKMAN AND ANDREA TAGUE

ART

STEEL PANTHER

GANDHI

ARTWORK BY SHELBY HOHL WWW.SHELBYHOHL.COM

FPH CITY OF MONTROSE

WESTHEIMER BLOCK PARTY

STAGE GUIDE

Evening

Wristband required! $20 pre-sale at freepresshouston.com or available at doors day of festival.

Numbers

St. Vincent 10:40
Valient Thorr 9: 40-10:20
The Riff Tiffs 8:55-9:20
Windsor Drive 8:15-8:40
DJ sets by Grrrl Parts-YPPAH
after-party w/ Babel Fishh, Studemont, and Flowers to Hide

Upstairs Numbers

Groggy 10:55- 11:25
Balls Deep 10:15-10:40
Juzcoz 9: 35-10:00
Perseph One 8:55-9:20
Guerilla Foco Clan 8:15-8:40

La Strada

Devin the Dude 10:15
Pictureplane 9: 35-10:00
Fat Tony 8:55-9:20
Factory Party 8:15-8:40

Helios Upstairs

The Show is the Rainbow 11:40
Belaire 10:15-10:40
Daniel Francis Doyle 9: 35-10:00
Eastern Sea 8:55-9:20
The Sweaters 8:15-8:40

Helios Downstairs

Spain Colored Orange 10:55-11:25
I am Mesmer 10:15-10:40
Sarah & Octopus 9: 35-10:00
Dizzy Pilot 8:55-9:20
News on the March 8:15-8:40
DJ sets by CeePlus

Mangos

HEALTH 11:40
Golden Axe 10:55- 11:25
GhostTown Electric 10:15-10:40
Homopolice 9: 35-10:00
American Fangs 8:55-9:20
Muhamid Ali 8:15-8:40

FREE UNTIL 8PM

NUMBERS KTRU Stage 300 Westheimer

OUTSIDE

Wake and Bake w/Guy Schwartz	11:00-11:45
Church Camp	12:00-12:30
D.R.U.M	12:45-1:15
Western Civilization	1:30-2:00
Hueman	2:15-2:45
Meriwether	3:00-3:30
Dremnt the End	3:45-4:15
Linus Pauling Quartet	4:30-5:00
Come See my Dead Person	5:15-5:45
The Small Sounds	6:00-6:30
Woozy Helmet	6:45-7:15
Southern Backtones	7:30-8:00
Motion Turns it On	8:05-8:30

INSIDE

Lazlo	12:00-12:30
Noon	12:45-1:15
Hungry Villagers	1:30-2:00
Marry Me	2:15-2:45
Ozeal	3:00-3:30
Mechanical Boy	3:45-4:15
Tha Fucking Transmissions	4:30-5:00
Clubs	5:15-5:45

Guerilla Performances

BLACKIE
Cop Warmth
Female Demand
Limb

Reprogramm Lounge's Disco Debauchery
hosted by ***CeePlus Bad Knives***
Downstairs

AVANTGARDEN 411 Westheimer

OUTSIDE Indiehouston.org Stage

Sings	12:00-12:30
Listen Listen	12:45-1:15
The Pons	1:30-2:00
Giant Princess	2:15-2:45
Nosaprise	3:00-3:30
The Tontons	3:45-4:15
The Mckenzies	4:30-5:00
Your Kisses Cause Crashes	5:15-5:45
skyblue72	6:00-6:30
Plump	6:45-7:15
Free Radicals	7:30-8:00

UPSTAIRS

Without a Face	12:00-12:25
Mothertone	12:40-1:05
Trusty Taperecorder	1:20-1:45
The Unbearables	2:00-2:25
One Hundred Flowers	2:40-3:05
In Beds	3:20-3:45
Jim and the Toms	4:00-4:25
Electric Attitude	4:40-5:05
Abbey Birds	5:20-5:45
The Manichean	6:00-6:25
TheLastPlaceYouLook	6:40-7:05
Bolt	7:20-7:50

LA STRADA hosted by ParyFone 203 Westheimer

Upstairs

Eric Salzman	Killswitch
Chris Costello	Lukas Keizer
DJ Drew	Kung Fu Pimp
Chello	Suraj K
Sasha Braverman	Brad Slack
Henry Chow	

AUSTIN LAYNE HOTEL 408 Westheimer

OUTSIDE Secret Saturday Stage

Darwin's Finches	12:00-12:25
Skeyptecynic	12:40-1:05
City of Compton	1:20-1:45
Dead Roses	2:00-2:25
Desmond Zavala	2:40-3:05
Cry Blood Apache	3:20-3:45
American Sharks	4:00-4:25
Wild Mocassins	4:40-5:05
Lenny Briscoe	5:20-5:45
Guitars	6:00-6:25
Mathletes	6:40-7:05
Listen Listen	7:20-7:50
Buxton	8:05-8:30

INSIDE

Barstool Forest	12:00-12:30
Finnegan	12:45-1:15
Sew What.	1:30-1:55
Airon Paul Dugas	2:10-2:35
The Literary Greats	2:50-3:15
Robert Ellis	3:30-3:55
Winter Wallace	4:10-4:35
Elaine Greer	4:50-5:15
Phillip Foshee	5:30-5:55
Chase Hamblin	6:10-6:40

MANGO'S 403 Westheimer

INSIDE

Lady Heat	12:00-12:30
Shit City High	12:45-1:15
O'Doyle Rules	1:30-2:00
The Last Starfighter	2:15-2:45
Stadium	3:00-3:30
Hell City Kings	3:45-4:15
DISSENT	4:30-5:00
Bowel	5:15-6:20
PLF	6:35-7:05
The Gold Sounds	7:20-7:50

OUTSIDE

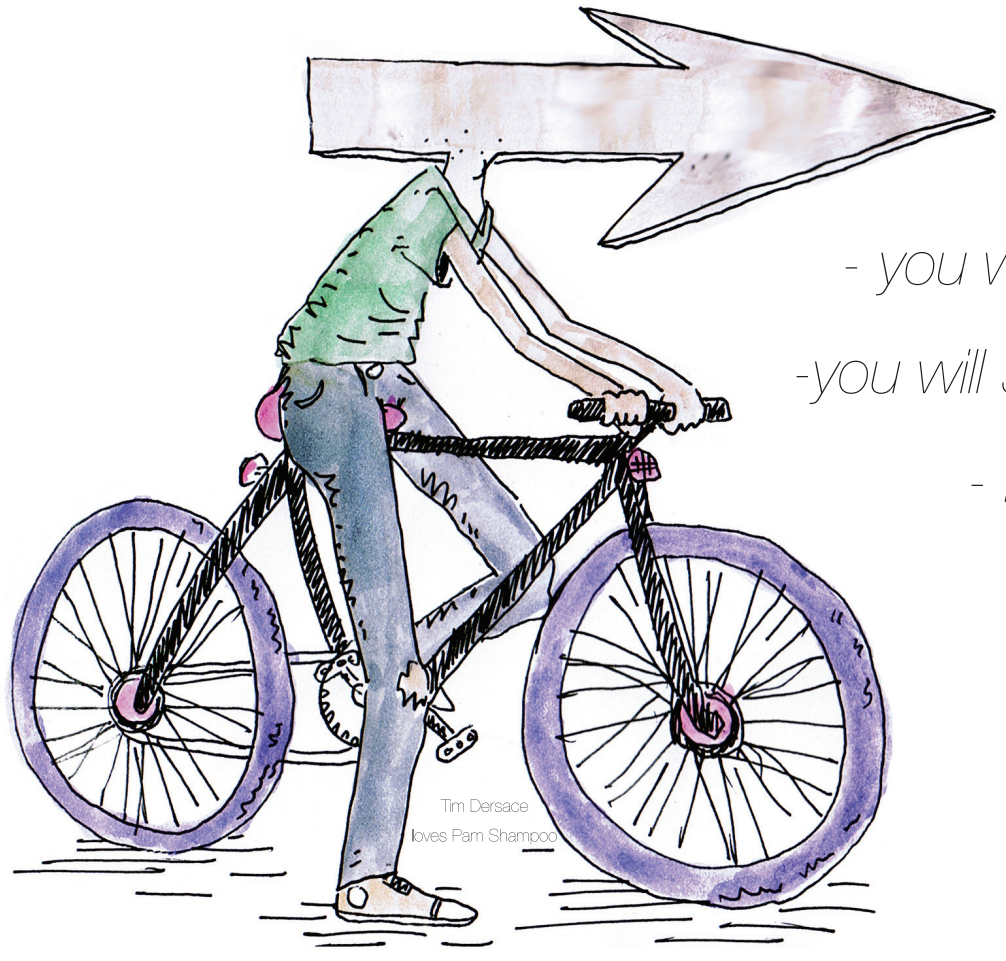
Rainbows in your Wildest Dreams	12:00-12:30
Searching for Signal	1:30-2:00
Caddywhompus	2:15-2:45
The Handshake	3:00-3:30
Ringo DeathStarr	3:45-4:15
Poopy Lungstuffing w/Suspender Man	4:30-5:00
Organ Failure	5:15-5:45
Muzak John	6:00-6:30
Delta Block	6:45-7:15
Side Show Tramps	7:30-8:00
Oh No Oh My	8:15-8:40

203 WESTHEIMER City of Montrose Stage

OUTSIDE

Bugchaser	12:00-12:25
Death by Texas	12:40-1:05
Heptic Skeptic	1:20-1:45
The Watermarks	2:00-2:25
Elaine Greer	2:40-3:05
Estudiantes Social Club	3:20-3:45
Tax the Wolf	4:00-4:25
Half Nelson	4:40-5:05
Future Blondes	5:20-5:45
A Dream Asleep	6:00-6:25
The Takes	6:40-7:05
Giant Battle Monster	7:20-7:50
Magnetic	8:05-8:30

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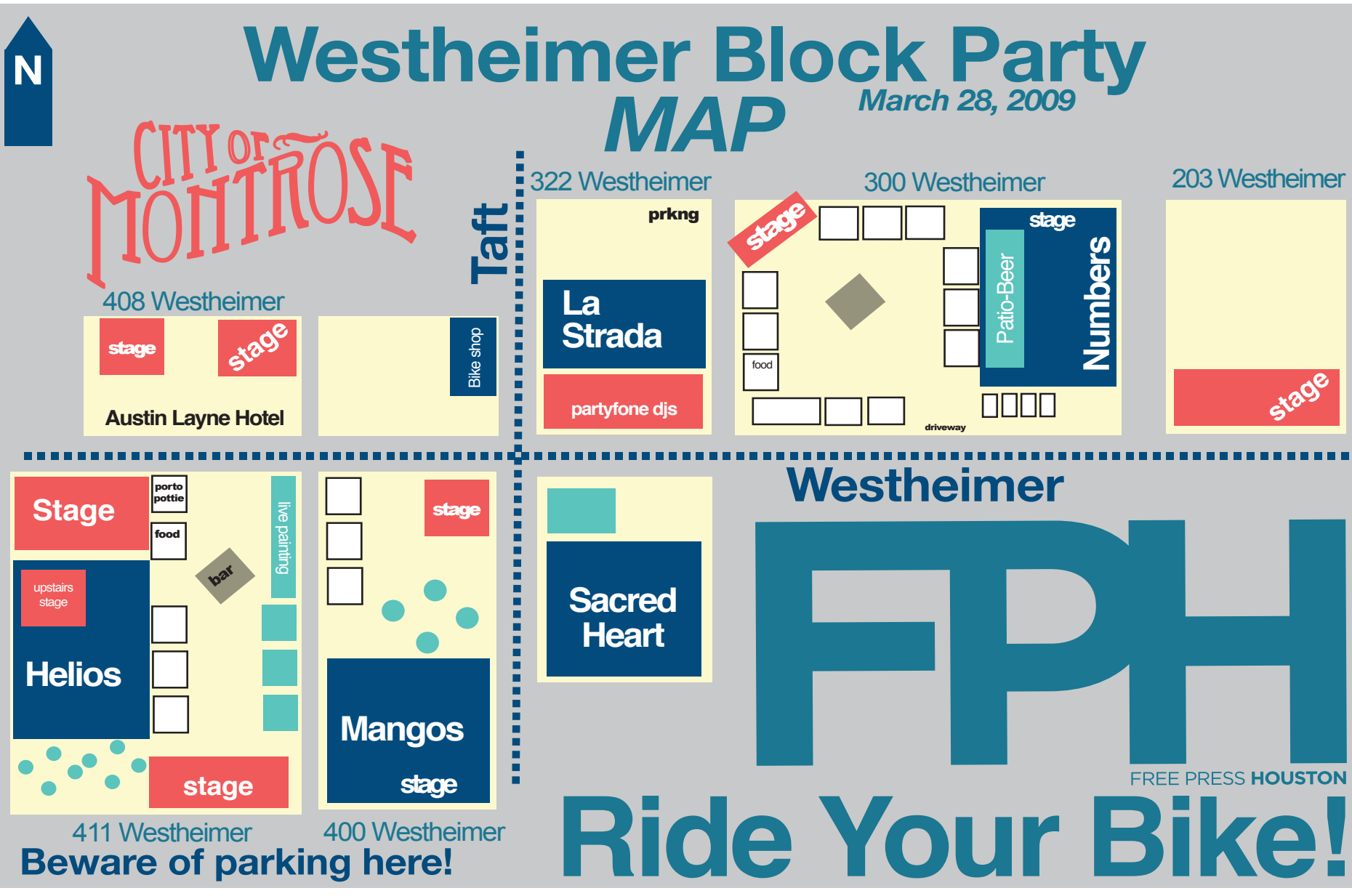
-you will save Cold Hard $Cashish$

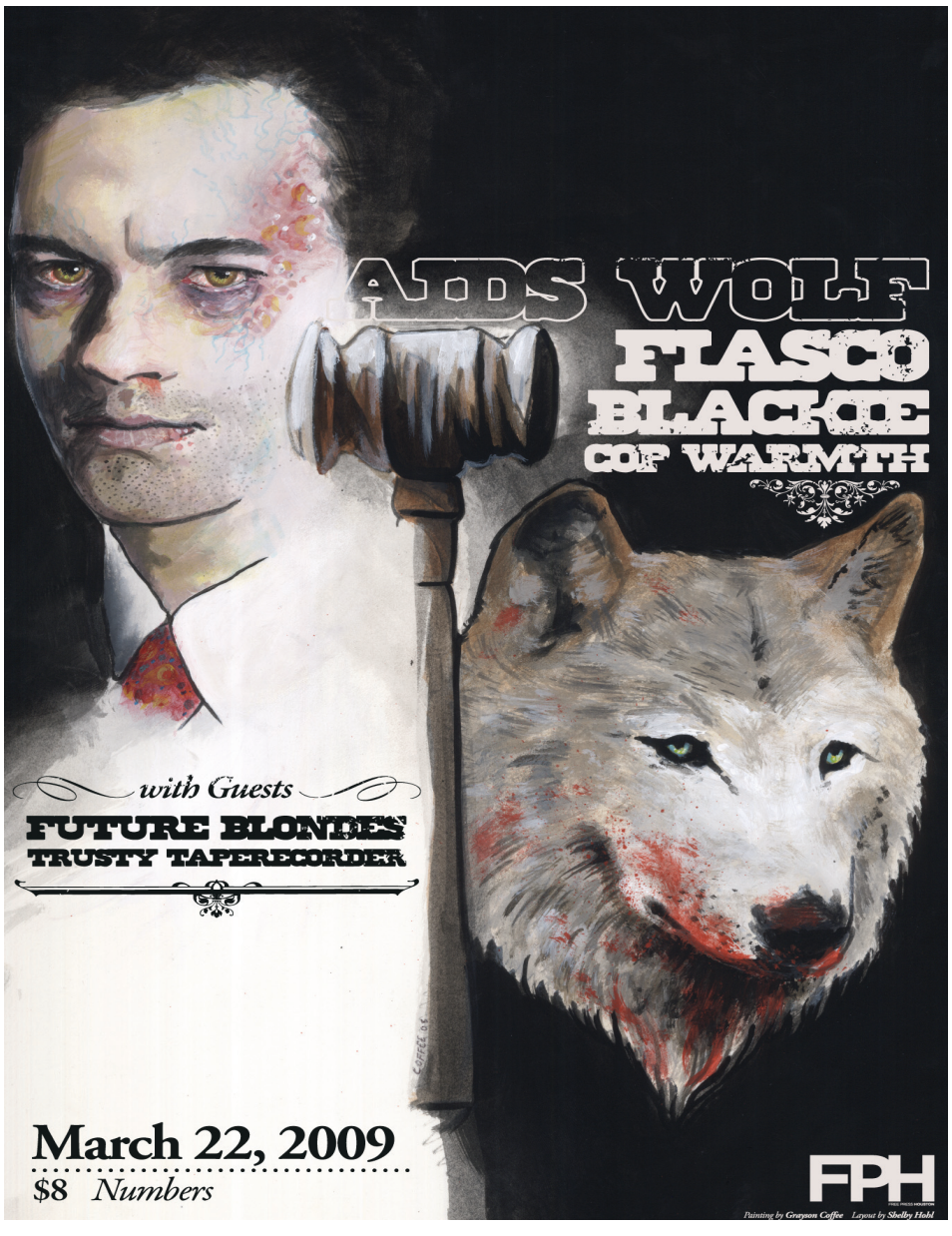
- it burns off excess calories from sausage on a stick

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WORDS AND PHOTOS M. MARTIN

Hardly anyone even knows it by name, but virtually anyone who has spent time in Montrose at all knows of Wilshire Village. Seventeen mostly vacant apartment buildings largely obscured from view by beauti ful old magnolias and oaks. The buildings are in varying states of decrepitude, the consequence of generations of benign neglect. Most of them are effectively uninhabitable and uninhabited.

OTHERS ARE SURROUNDED BY CAREFULLY TENDED GARDENS, PATIO FURNITURE... children's toys. The parking lots between the buildings contain an unusual assortment of vehicles. Vintage Cadillacs sit on blocks next to Cooper Minis while late model American pickups stand next to motorcycles, motor scooters and bicycles of every description.

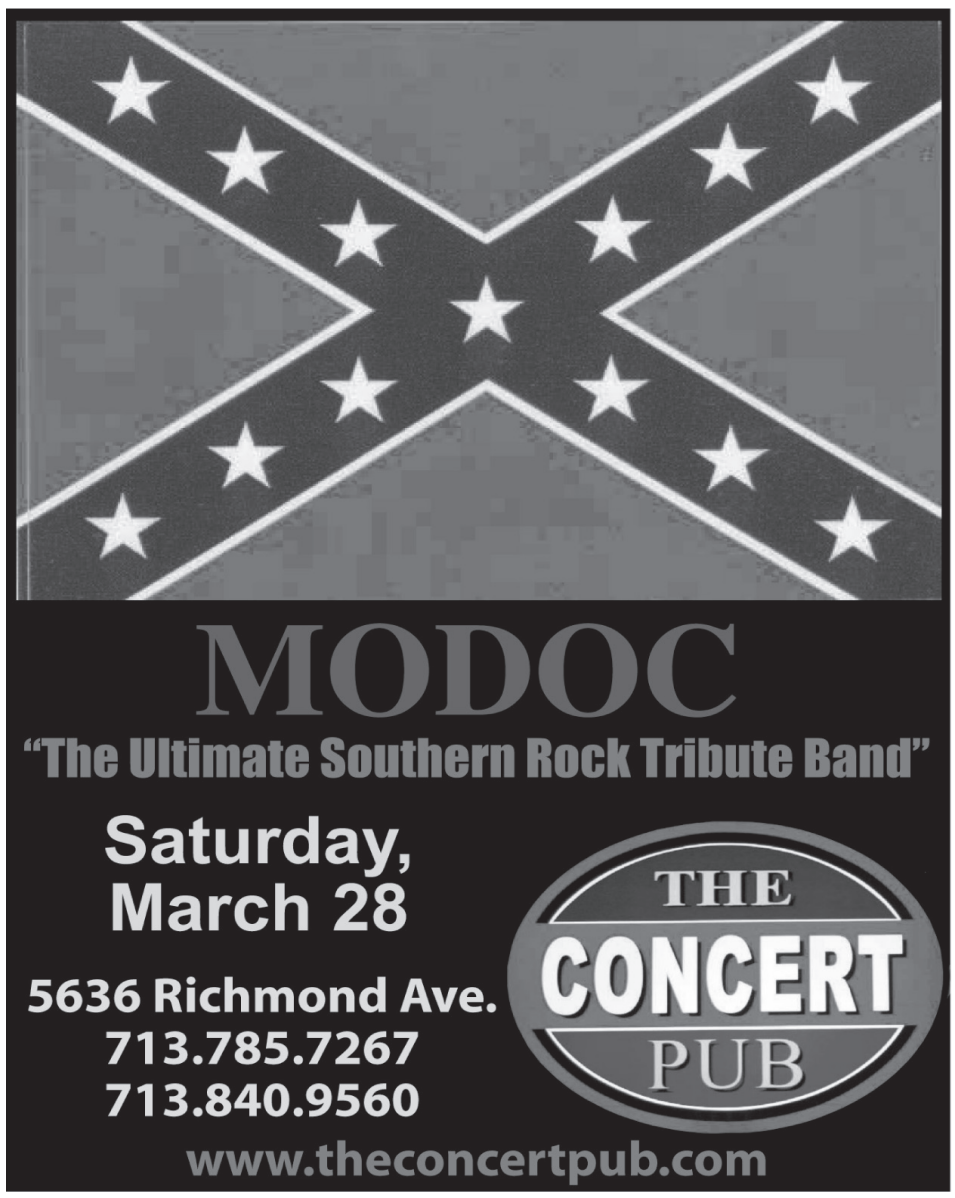
Over the years, tenancy at Wilshire Village has become a matter of word-of-mouth referral and waiting lists. Since its construction in the 40's, a close-knit and private community of residents has come into existence. Consisting primarily of artists, students, families of modest means and increasingly the elderly and/or disabled, the residents of Wilshire Village were, and very much are, a microcosmic reflection of the diverse community that surrounds them, with little more in common than a shared love of the place they call home.

Of course, it could not last. It has been considered a given for decades that there would come a day when the slow decay would be accelerated by bulldozers. Years of rumors of demolition began to segue into fact in 2005, when plans were announced for the construction of a pair of high-rise residential condominiums on the property. Although the plans never got beyond the press-release stage, public records show that within a year the property had changed hands. This change was largely invisible to residents. They continued to make out their rent checks to Wilshire Village and continued to drop them off at the same on-premise office. The property owner, Jay Cohen, went so far as to send tenants a letter advising them to ignore the news stories.

Ignoring the stories of impending demolition ceased to be an option at the beginning of February, when eviction notices began to arrive via certified mail. Although there were and continue to be questions regarding the legitimacy of these notices, it became something of a moot point on February 19 when city workers affixed notices from the Fire Marshal's office to the buildings of Wilshire Village. The notices state that the buildings are unsafe for human habitation.

It seems highly unlikely that anything can save Wilshire Village. Only 20 to 30 of the 144 units are currently leased, and not a single tenant has had a formal lease agreement in years. Even if the tenants were to organize, it is highly questionable that they could do anything to protect or retain their homes. There are virtually no city statutes to protect historical buildings and even less interest in the community at large in using what few protections do exist.

The purpose of this story is not to rally support for a worthy cause, no matter how worthy the cause might be. Allen Parkway



Village was just as historically and architecturally significant, actually inhabited, and had residents who did fight for their homes. It was still destroyed.

There is a purpose served, though, in commemorating this place and its place in the community. There is a purpose served in speaking on behalf of people who are losing homes they love. There is a purpose served in pointing out the more dubious aspects of how this story unfolded, and how Houston's values and lack of values permitted it to happen.

Most of all, there is a purpose served in asking what, exactly, makes a place a home or makes a city a community. There is also a purpose served in questioning the unquestioned assumptions behind the story of Wilshire Village and wondering if this city can sustain itself... or if it even deserves to.

Houston is a little over one hundred seventy years old--but compared to other cities of comparable age, it might as well have been founded in 1950. What little urban planning the city's aggressively pro-business culture permits makes absolutely no provisions for the preservation of anything of historical or cultural value. There are no legal or social mechanisms to protect anything that might tangibly contribute to Houston's identity as a city. At the same time, that pro-business orientation means that property owners have no obligations beyond paying their taxes... and experience considerable leeway in even that obligation.

What it all adds up to is a city that is literally a hundred miles across and a few inches deep. A place where a sense of civic identity extends no further than cheering for the home team in your sport of choice, and any sense of shared social responsibility is derided as "socialism." In no instance are





Houston's failings as a city more apparent than in the case of Wilshire Village.

Designed by Eugene Werlin, the same award-winning architect who gave the city Miller Outdoor Theater and Allen Parkway Village, Wilshire Village received widespread acclaim at the time of its construction in 1940. It was one of the largest FHA-insured garden apartment complexes in Houston and represented the pinnacle of New Deal-era public policy. As Houston expanded and became denser, Wilshire Village's eight acres of beautifully landscaped grounds became ever more of a rarity in a city not noted for attractive cityscapes. For decades, it served as an affordable and attractive housing option for students, artists and young families, as well as the elderly and the disabled.

Unfortunately though, when Wilshire Village wound up in the hands of a property owner who came to consider cheap rent a fair exchange for property neglect, it was considered the landlord's business, the tenants' business, and nobody else's business. And so Wilshire Village became a happy well-kept secret for the people who lived there and a subject for speculation and urban folklore for those who did not. Located in the Southwest quadrant of what is commonly considered The Montrose, Wilshire Village further benefited from being in one of the few parts of Houston where not minding the business of one's neighbors is virtually written into the cultural DNA.

The original owner of Wilshire Village was the Wilshire Village Corporation, which was registered in 1939 with J. Howard Cohen listed as its registered agent. In 1987 the deed for the property passed to Jay Cohen.

Described by residents as "a Howard Hughes-like" figure in his 60's, Cohen seems to have had the best of intentions over the years, if perhaps not the resources to carry those intentions out.

A Wilshire resident recalls that there had been a property manager who passed away in the 80's, and that Mr. Cohen sought to save money by assuming those responsibilities himself. Doubtless, it seemed like a good idea at the time.

Wilshire residents have, for some time, had responsibility for basic maintenance and upkeep of their apartments, Cohen continued to take an interest in matters like landscaping and upkeep of common areas until recently. He has, according to tenants, always been prompt in attending to matters like roof or plumbing repair. Over the last two years, attention to matters like landscaping has all but completely waned. Nevertheless, the residents I spoke with were unanimous in their praise for Cohen's generosity and caring spirit.

His finances and business acumen, however, are another matter. In 2002 Cohen filed for chapter 11 bankruptcy. The title for Wilshire Villages then passed to two subsequent limited partnerships, both of which had the same registered agent, Matthew Dilick.

Even after Dilick assumed ownership of the property, rent checks continued to be made out to Wilshire Village and continued to be dropped off at an office on the premises that may at one time have been Cohen's residence. Cohen continued to represent himself as the property's owner to tenants. After residents received the eviction notices Cohen promised several tenants that he would provide a letter clarifying matters by the end of the month and advised them to ignore the notices from Dilick's office.

The first contact any of Wilshire Village's residents have had with Dilick dates from the arrival this month of the eviction notices mailed from his office.

While Matthew Dilick's name may not be familiar to his tenants, it is very well known in the world of Houston real estate. Between 1994 and 2001, he served as Director of Real Estate for Landry's Restaurants, Inc. During that time Dilick supervised the development of the Kemah Boardwalk. More recently Dilick's current company oversaw the demolition of the Bayou on the Bend Apartment complex. Bayou on the Bend was a 40-year-old, 31 unit complex on four acres of land facing Memorial Drive. It has been replaced with 242 units of high-density luxury housing.

The proposed pair of 16-18 story residential towers that have been on the drawing board since 2005 to replace Wilshire Village would sit at the intersection of a pair of narrow two-lane streets, neither of which has much possibility of being widened. The same criticisms leveled at the proposed Ashby Highrise, which developers are attempting to create at the nearby intersection of Dunlavy and Bissonnet, apply with equal, if not greater force in this case.

West Alabama and Dunlavy streets can't handle the traffic two high rises would bring. Such a development would also inevitably alter the character of the neighborhood. The only real difference is that the developers of Ashby High-rise are dealing with protests launched by relatively affluent home owners, while the majority of those who live in the near vicinity of Wilshire Village are neither affluent nor property owners.

It is also difficult to understand where Dilick thinks he is going to get either financing for his project or potential buyers in the middle of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. It seems all too likely that he intends to follow the example of the developers of the Sonoma midrise project in Rice Village. They apparently had enough money to tear down several blocks of vintage mid-20th century commercial property, but not enough money to actually start building anything in their place. Recently, the rented fences restricting access to the property went away... not a good sign.

It would be easier to assume that Dilick intended to deal in good faith if he had done so to date. The eviction notices distributed at the beginning of February to Wilshire Village Residents were plain-paper typed documents advising residents that they had until the end of the month to vacate, at which time utility services would be cut. The only problem is that, at that time, no formal eviction process had been carried out.

When contacted, City Council Member at Large Sue Lovell expressed doubt about the notices' legitimacy, stating that there "appears to be a dispute amongst the partners." Lovell also stated that her office is "trying to find out who has [the] legal authority" to evict. Lovell also pointed out that the normal eviction process requires a Justice of the Peace order, which is delivered by a Deputy Constable, and a 30 day period to vacate.

Wilshire residents contacted for this article characterized the notices as "intimidation"-- a description also applied to handwritten lists of available, low-income housing options that appear to also have been distributed from Dilick's office.

The most confusing thing for residents has been lack of consistent communication. Cohen has been assuring them that they have no urgent need to vacate, even as his apparent partner tells them they are being evicted. The Houston Department of Public Works stated that "the City of Houston is not shutting down the property" mere days before another city agency, the Fire Marshal's office, posted condemnation notices.

Public Works' claims are even more suspect in the light of the extensive street and sewerage repairs now underway on Sul Ross street between Wilshire Village and South Shepherd Drive. At the very least there is one colossal failure to communicate tak-



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ing place; whether it is intentional or not remains to be seen.

None of this will be sorted out by the time this story goes to press. In all likelihood, it will all still be in a state of confusion when the bulldozers finally show up to settle matters, at least in the short run. In the meanwhile, I want to share some of the thoughts and comments that Wilshire residents have shared with me.

All of the people who spoke to me requested anonymity--partly to avoid possible legal issues, partly out of respect for Cohen's well-known desire for privacy. A desire for privacy is one of the few well-known things about him.

One resident wrote they "hate to see this place go. It kept me and a very dear friend safe through Ike without even a sound. If I had not seen the news or listened to the radio, I would not have known we were having a hurricane. My grandchildren have played in the courtyards and hidden Easter eggs in the structures each year. They have climbed in the big magnolias and played hide-n-seek among the buildings and the landscape... What a shame. It's destined to become another huge plot of land that will have a honeycomb of tiny residences that no one can afford in this economy. It will be filled with people who will further congest the small streets, and the utility capacities. In the name of progress, I think we will regress..."

Another resident told me that "this place, for all the pain it has sometime brought, allowed my wife to take five years of maternity leave to raise our daughter. The affordable rent gave us the chance to travel. Leaving here will change our lives completely."

A former resident who lived in Wilshire in the 60's as a Rice student wrote "...I believe that most of the other residents of Wilshire Village were older people – people who had retired and had sold their houses to live more simply... My husband's father, who I never knew, lived in Wilshire Village in the forties after he and his first wife were divorced and while he was building himself a house... I met my husband while I lived in Wilshire Village...

"I hate to think of Wilshire Village being torn down. Houston has changed so much since 1965 when I went there to attend Rice. All the old places have changed. Rice Village is unbearably overbuilt and congested...

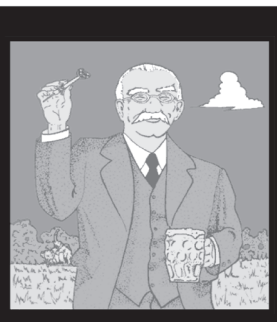
"I actually liked Houston back in those old days. It had a soul back then, which I think has since been sold to the devil."

FPH

(Reader comments are appreciated -- please direct to m-martin@earthwire.net)



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Electric Attitude, Magnetic, hueman

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Mar 18
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Mar 20
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Mar 21
Skeletonwitch, Kylesa, Black Tusk

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RED ROOM: THE QUAKES W/ PICKLED KREW, THE GHOST STORYS, LUXURIOUS PANTHERS, DJ JOHNNY BLUEDOTS

SUN. MAR. 8:
MAIN ROOM-HOOBASTANK
RED ROOM-SUNRISE AND AMMUNITION W/ TBA

SAT. MAR. 14:
TEN OUT OF TENN TOUR ERIN MCCARLEY, TYLER JAMES, BUTTERFLY BOUCHER, AND MORE

WED. MAR. 18:
AIRBORNE TOXIC EVENT W/ ALBERTA CROSS

SAT. MAR. 21:
MARTIN ATKINS W/ THE QUEERS, LOS SKARNALES, SIMPLETON, AND MORE

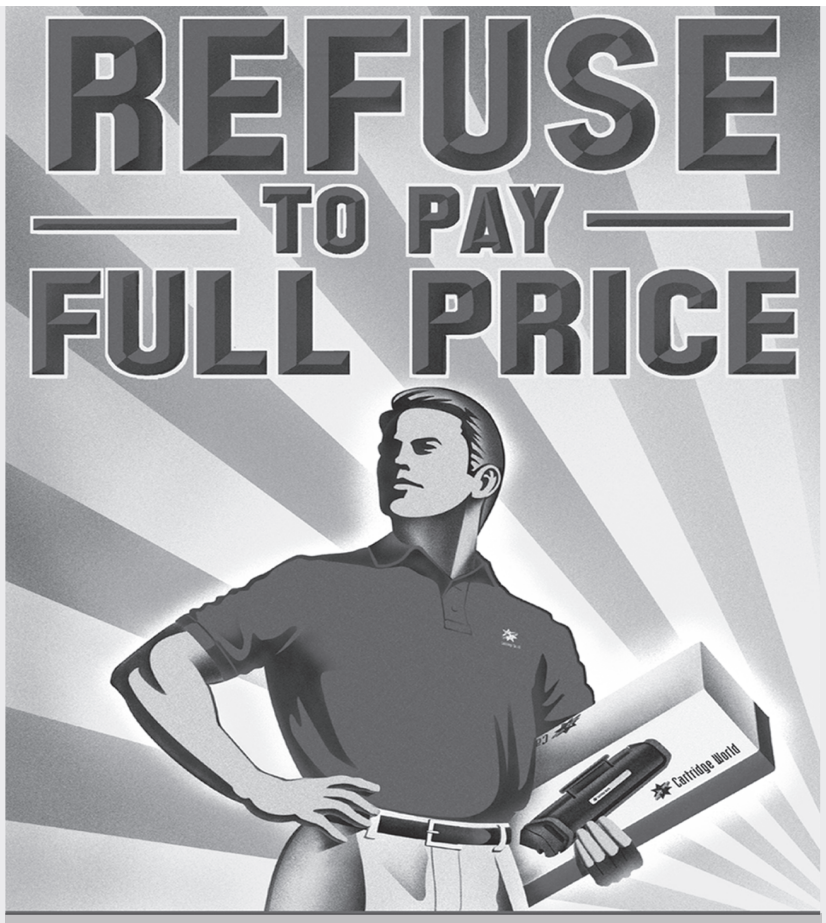
SUN. MAR. 22:
TEXAS METAL FEST W/ CARCASS, PINHED, SUICIDE SILENCE, SAMAEL, DECREPIT BIRTH, ARSIS

SAT. MAR. 28: DARE WARE'S FETISH BALL

SUN. MAR. 29:
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HOUSTON MAYORAL ELECTION 2009

A FRIENDLY PROLOGUE

Mills-McCoin |

PHOTO CAPTION: 'TRUE STORY: PETER BROWN WALKED INTO THE FPH OFFICE RECENTLY THINKING IT WAS THE GLBT CAUCUS OFFICE THAT IS IN THE SAME BUILDING. HE WAS KIND ENOUGH TO TAKE THIS PICTURE WITH US.



<antacid tablet plops into a hotel glass full of water>

HERE WE ARE AT THE DOORSTEP OF ANOTHER ELECTION one in which your vote matters soooooo much it might drive you to drink. This big decision is for Mayor of Houston. Not "Leader" of "the Free World." So maybe it won't be too stressful. But to be honest, I'm still hungover from the last one.

If revenue from retail sales tax decreases in light of the recession, specifically where in the city's budget would you make sacrifices?

This is a question I posed in an email to Houston Mayoral Candidates Annise Parker, Peter Brown and Gene Locke.

Read the question again (I had to read it several times and I wrote the damn thing), and then read the responses below. See if you can guess who said what.

<Jeopardy Theme Song>

A

"Houston has managed our tax dollars and budgets responsibly, and we are in better shape than other cities that gambled on risky strategies and irresponsible budgets. All city departments and the Controller's office have contingency plans to deal with anticipated revenue shortfalls, and we are not projecting service cuts at this time."

B

"We have the preliminary budget for 2009-10 and the projected sales tax revenue is expected to only increase 3%, instead of the initial 6% forecast, but the decline in the increase of property tax revenue will be even less. No matter the percentages, the city, like its citizens should and must tighten its fiscal belt. Such fiscal restraint involves holding the line on most of the existing departmental budgets, while generating new city revenue. Revenue may be generated by enforcing city ordinances that are currently not being enforced; increasing the collection of commercial trash hauling fees; and accelerating building permits so as not to lose out on property tax revenue. This sound fiscal policy would even allow for slight increases in areas of public safety, such as the Houston Police Department."

C

"."

You won't be surprised to know that C was the response from our former City Attorney under Bob Lanier- Gene Locke. And it's just like an attorney not to respond. But this is a Mayoral Race for God's sake. Have an opinion. Learn how to use email.

A is for Annise Parker.

B is for Bad Ass Answer from Peter Brown.

I'm not saying I'm going to vote for the guy (yet); nor am I trying to make a statement "formally endorsing" him (as if that would matter) (yet). But you can't deny the honesty and arithmetic that Peter Brown put in his response.

Annise Parker responded with a lovely little bedtime story in which everything turns out to be fine. Commonly referred to as "Bullshit." She's off to a bad start.

In the same email, I addressed a question specifically to Annise Parker.

Many people credit you with the demise of the Westheimer Street Festival. How does that make you feel? And what was your motivation in writing the ordinance prohibiting such street closures?

Response: "I love a good street fair. And call me old fashioned, but I still believe a good event needs to be safe (police or other security, adequate parking), sanitary (trash cans, public toilets and clean-up afterwards), and legal (appropriate permits, and compliance with alcoholic beverage laws). The ordinance that I supported permits very successful street festivals that are enjoyed by thousands of Houstonians today – including the Greek Festival and Pride Fest."

The FPH Westheimer Block Party has all of those things and yet no free street closure.

AGAIN, SAME EMAIL. BUT THIS TIME- PETER BROWN:

What opinion do you have on the matter of street closures? In what way does the City of Houston suffer from the prohibition of free street closures?

Response: "By setting criteria to reserve streets that take into account safety and traffic flow, the City should deregulate streets for temporary closures. Street festivals are vital to creating a sense of community, enhancing Houston's character and celebrating City traditions. I support a walkable, pedestrian and bike friendly city that street festivals help foster."

Hey OOOOO! That's What I Want To Hear. Peter Brown Sweeps The Pre-Lim's!

FPH

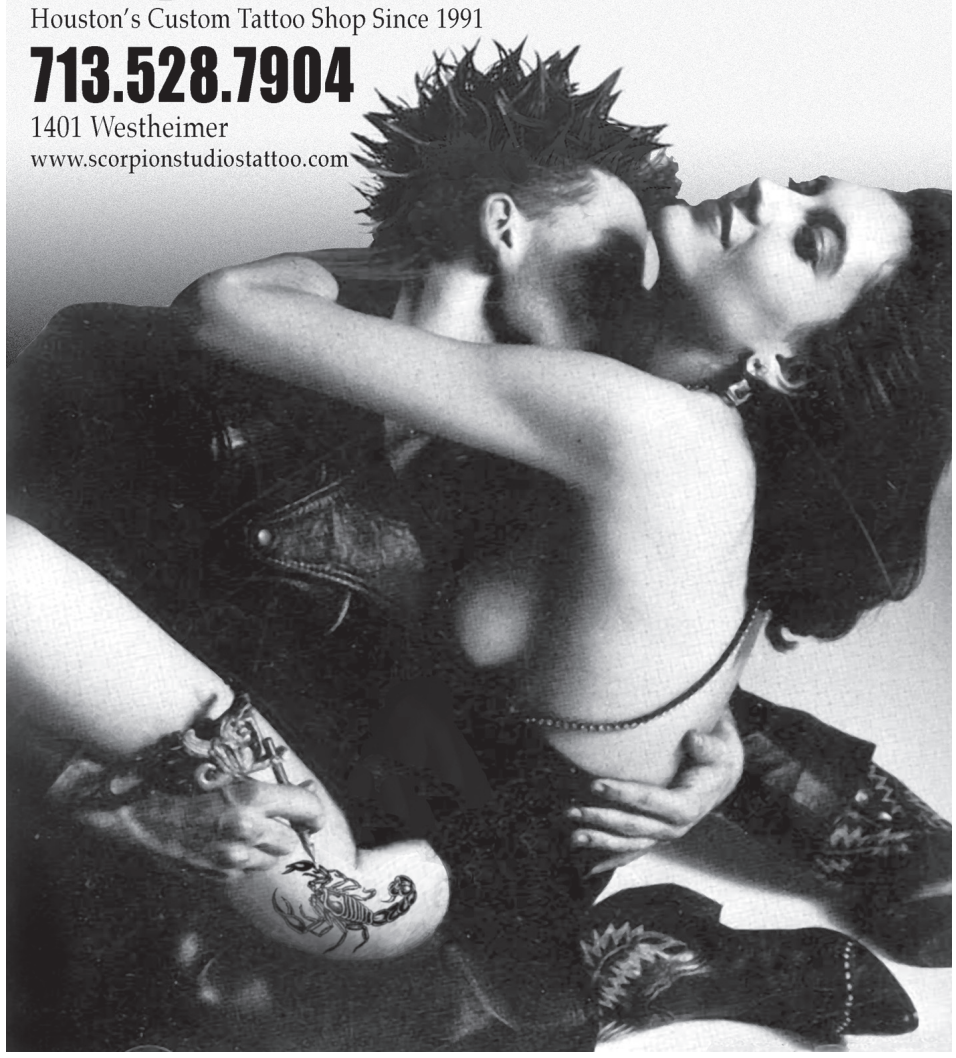
I may have shown my cards a bit, but don't think my investigation stops here. And neither should yours. Don't settle on a candidate just (yet). Cheers.

LUCKY BURGER



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HIGH SCHOOL NEVER ENDS

(or why I like Slayer and Ghetto Boys over Animal Collective)

By Nedbones

Illustration by Tim Dorsey



WHAT HAPPENED? HOW DID I BECOME ALIENATED FROM A SCENE THAT PUNK ROCK HELPED CREATE? I DON'T GET THE FASHION, ALL THE BANDS SOUND THE SAME, AND DON'T GET ME STARTED ON THE LYRICS. (LET'S JUST SAY, BOB DYLAN WOULD GO "I DON'T UNDERSTAND THESE LYRICS") EVEN THOUGH FAT MIKE FROM NOFX WROTE "THE SEPARATION BETWEEN CHURCH AND SKATE", ABOUT HOW PUNK ROCK WAS BECOMING SAFE, TO ME IT STILL CAN BE APPLIED TO INDIE-ROCK AND THE SCENE TODAY.

WHAT PUNK STOOD FOR — dissent, anti-authority, anti- conformity, individualism, and thinking for yourself— has been replaced with noodley guitars, horrible metaphors of emotions, rehashed 70's and 80's sound (not to mention fashion and drugs) and worst of all, dance music. Indie music nowadays sounds like that mind numbing modern rock, TRL bullshit that made me like punk to begin with. Every show is the same. First some rip off of a Joy Division riff, then dancey drums, and some chant of "yeah" and finally getting the audience to clap hands in unison.

All the dance-punk bands sound like samples of the worst bands of the 80's, jigsawed together by a Mac with lyrics more absurd than Camus. My mom put it best. "The 80's sucked then and it sucks now." I hate that formula shit. I know punk was known for just using three cords, but to us it is like what an old blues man said, "It isn't how the notes are played, but WHY they need to be played."

Content: That's what indie rock is lacking. As Fat Mike said, "Confrontation and politics...Replaced with harmonies and shticks. When did punk rock become so tame? These fucking bands all sound the same!"

Punk was ideal, an attitude you could never lose. In middle school I was a nerdy kid who read sci-fi novels (Doom series, Animal Farm, Star wars: Extended universe, and Phillip K. Dick), comics, and played Magic the Gathering and D and D. So I got picked on all the time at school and on the bus. I was an outcast, a loner, unpopular, and I didn't care. That's when my friend Hunter let me borrow his NOFX CD. By the 9th grade I was a punk/ska kid. Nerdy kid no more, now I drank, talked shit, did drugs, and tried to get with punk girls (poorly). Punk was the Hulk of the nerd Bruce Banner. (Yes, a comic reference.) Punk allowed me not only to be an outcast, but also to be proud of one. More importantly, I was feared. Sure we fought about who was "more punk" and fashion played a part, but it was anti-fashion. It was a "fuck you" to preps and kickers, our mortal enemy. You could get beat after a show at Fitz for having blue hair or a mohawk, so it was more about individuality than fashion. The Houston punk/ska scene was fun and there was a weird feeling of community, filled with crazy bands like 30foot-FALL, Middlefinger, and Bickley, the first punk show my mom took me to at Fitz. I miss that. I miss going to a show and everyone knew everyone, no matter what school you went to. Reagan, Lee, Jones, Waltrip, HSPVA, whatever. (Except Lamar and St. John's. That where all the poser and preps went.) It was singing "I wanna fuck the pink Power Ranger" (a Bickley song) at the top of your lungs with your best friend and stage diving into the pit. There was the raver scene, but most of the real ravers were old ska kids who were cool and enjoyed the same community feel, unlike the preps and poser who just wanted to get fucked up. Above all, I felt alive and part of something. How does this relate to indie-rock? Well the funny thing is that most of my punk friends from high school hate indie-rock and scenester shit. Most listen to grindcore/metal and hip-hop/dance-hall. Also to note, I always noticed that punks always had a cool relation with the thugs. Both of us were poor (mostly) and we both hated the rich ass preps. No wonder that by the time I graduated from high school, I would bump Tupac, Biggie, Geto Boys, Fat Pat, Screw, Wu-tang, Eight ball and MJG, and of course N.W.A and Ice Cube. I could write a whole other essay on the parallels of punk and hip-hop, but lyrically for me, they dealt the same issues: drugs, poverty, making ends, seeing friends die, bitches, and of course bling. (Is there really a difference between an iced out watch and a spiked bracelet?) Indie-rock has no content, no songs about the real world and real life issues.

Life isn't about unicorns playing Crossfire with ninjas. Not everything is about girls, one-night stands, clubs, being cool, and partying. You know who cared all about that stuff? Preps. Hipsters are the new preps. So the scene is high school all over again, the preps make the music and I am yet again in the corner reading a Neal Stephenson novel and playing my Nintendo DS. Now I listen to metal/grind core, punk, and Hip-hop/screw/nerd core. Now I have gone back to what I was in middle school: A nerd.

That's why I alienated myself from the scene. The scene isn't a collection of poor (keyword) misfits, losers, and rejects who just wanted to skate and read comics. It's all the preps in high school that went to college, finally read a book or two and pretend to be intellectual with music. So, in a real punk rock fashion: THE SCENE CAN FUCK OFF!!!

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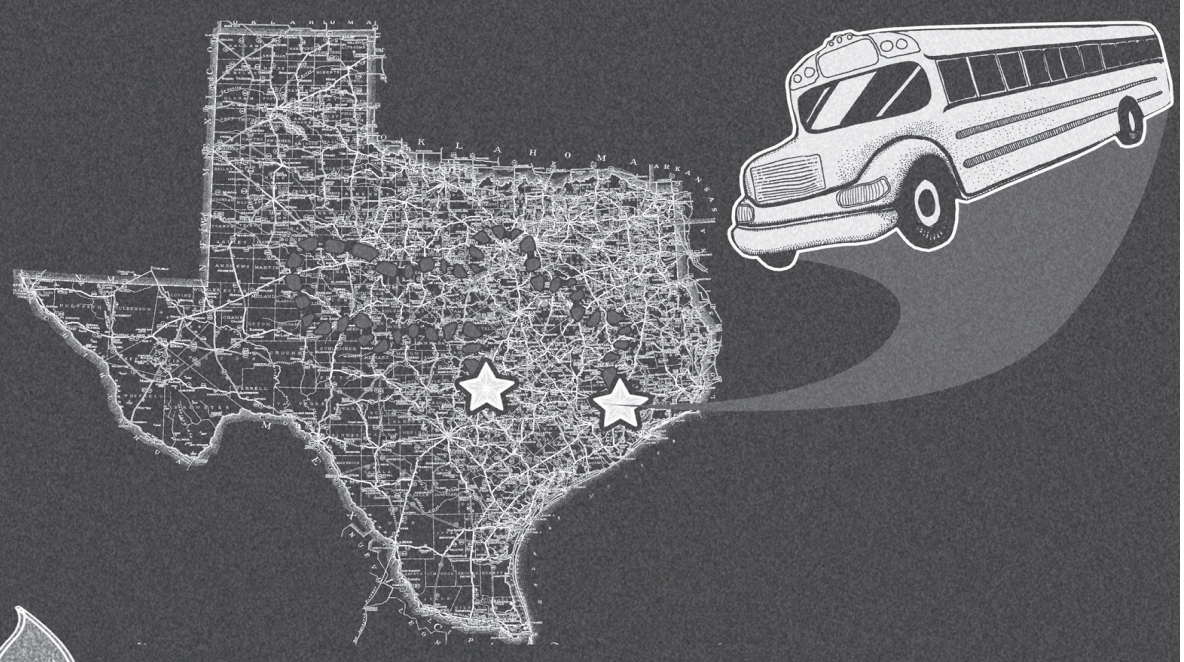
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SUGAR HILL STAGE
10:00 Muhammid Ali
11;00 Sings
12:00 Romanteek
1:00 Jana Hunter
2:00 The Mathletes
3:00 The Watermarks
4:00 The Mckenzies
5:00 The Ton Tons
6:00 The Wild Moccasins
7:00 Young Mammals
9:00 Tambersauro

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10:30 B L A C K I E
11:30 Future Blondes
12:30 Welfare Mothers
1:30 News on the March
2:30 Paris Falls
3:30 Buxton
4:30 Kristine Mills
5:30 Riff Tiffs
6:30 Giant Princess
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Z-Rocks
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Hank Woji
Celeste Terrell
Teri Greene Band
Wrecks Bell
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2009 occupation demands:

* Amnesty for all parties involved.

* Full compensation for all employees whose jobs were disrupted during the course of the occupation.

* Public release of NYU's annual budget and endowment.

* Allow student workers (including T.A.'s) to collectively bargain.

* A fair labor contract for all NYU employees at home and abroad.

* A Socially Responsible Finance Committee that will immediately investigate war profiteers and the lifting of the Coke ban.

* Annual scholarships be provided for thirteen Palestinian students.

* That the university donates all excess supplies and materials in an effort to rebuild the University of Gaza.

* Tuition stabilization for all students, beginning with the class of 2012. Tuition rates for each successive year will not exceed the rate of inflation. The university shall meet 100% of government-calculated student financial need.

* That student groups have priority when reserving space in the buildings owned or leased by New York University, including, and especially, the Kimmel Center.

* That the general public have access to Bobst Library.

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1. The inclusion of an elected representative from the student body in New York University's (NYU) Board of Trustee meetings. This representative should have rights, including voting rights, equal to that of Trustees, as well as the authorization to make public statements on the operations of the Board of Trustees without prior approval from any administration official.

2. Public release of NYU's annual operating budget, including a full list of university expenditures, salaries for all employees compensated on a semester or annual basis, funds allocated for staff wages, contracts to non-university organizations for university construction and services, financial aid data for each college, and money allocated to each college, department, and administrative unit of the university. Furthermore, this should include a full disclosure of the amount and sources of the university's funding.

3. Disclosure of NYU's endowment holdings, investment strategy, projected endowment growth, and persons, corporations and firms involved in the investment of the university's endowment funds. Additionally, we demand an endowment oversight body of students, faculty and staff who exercise shareholder proxy voting power for the university's investments.

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Iraqi Art Exhibit Closes, Palestine Film Fest Kicks off

by RoB Sunday, Feb. 01, 2009 at 9:19 AM

The exhibit Iraqi Artists in Exile closed on January 31st, which coinsided with Houston Palestine Film Festivals kickoff for their 2009 program.

Iraqi Art Exhibit Cl...

settingupoutside.jpg, image/jpeg, 640x480

At least 300 people came out Saturday evening to check out the installation, eat delicious home made Middle Eastern food, and support the work of the film festival organizers.

The event in addition to food drink and some fancy merch including books photos and t-shirts, including live Oud music performance, and screening the begining of Salt of This Sea, on of the films that will be screened this year by the festival.

While the event was free, and most likely the majority of people didn't pay, the organizers did a very impressive western auction style "Who can give us 100$?" pleas which garnered thousands of dollars in large and small donations. This money goes toward rental of the cinema, paying for the rights the screen the films, bringing film makers and other artists to Houston, and paying for receptions after the screenings.

I am always amazed by the high quality events that are put on by this scrappy grassroots group, and it is due in no small part to their ability to think big and aggressivly fundraise to make things happen.

The Houston Palestine Film Festival is going into its third year of bringing an honest and independent view of Palestine and its diaspora's society, culture, and political travails through the art of film. This year all the films will be screened at Rice Cinema, on April 17th, 18th, 24th, and 25th.

FBI's 5-Step Process to Criminalize First Amendment Activity as "Terrorism"

Feb 24th, 2009 by Will Potter

censor_statue_of_libertyThe recent FBI arrests of animal rights activists as "terrorists" for chalking sidewalks, protesting and making fliers marks a drastic turning point in the Green Scare, and in the history of this country. The government and corporations are clearly hoping to set a legal precedent for the sweeping power of the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act. But these arrests are much more than a test case, or an isolated incident of ambitious prosecution.

These arrests are part of a 5-step process the FBI and other government agencies are using to overtly label First Amendment activity as "terrorism."

The process has worked something like this:

1. Label. The first step was to label illegal direct action by groups like the Animal Liberation Front and Earth Liberation Front as "terrorism." The FBI, corporations, industry groups and politicians began doing this in the 1980s, through media campaigns, think tank reports and legislation like the Animal Enterprise Protection Act.

2. Guilt by association. Next, these groups expanded their smear campaign to anyone who ideological supports direct action and economic sabotage. They began labeling the above-ground supporters of those movements as "terrorists." A turning point was the conviction of the SHAC 7 for running a controversial website that vocally supported a wide range of tactics.

3. More guilty by association. This is now. The guilt by association is spreading from those who vocally support direct action (and, like the SHAC 7, perhaps even publish anonymous communiqués) to those who are merely lawfully protesting as part of the same campaign. In the SHAC 7 case, the government argued that the defendants were "conspiring" to promote illegal activity by running a website. In these recent arrests, the government is arguing that the First Amendment activity itself is "terrorism" because it's part of a campaign that involves illegal tactics.

4. Expand the net. With the latest arrests, the government is still trying to play up the fact that illegal actions have happened recently in California, including bombings that have been recklessly attributed to animal rights activists. The next step is to completely drop that pretext. In other words, the next step is to go after people who are using their First Amendment rights and are not engaging in home protests, chalking sidewalks or wearing masks. This is the same expansion of the net that happened during the Red Scare: targeting writers, speakers, journalists, and public figures. I feel strange writing this but, in many ways, the next step is to go after people like me.

5. Repeat. This process will be repeated for different organizations and different types of people (activists, non-profit leaders, writers) and it will be repeated for other social movements. The government is not establishing these legal and legislative precedents simply to abandon them once the animal rights "radicals" are imprisoned. The legal latticework will be used against the next social movement, and the next, and the next. This has happened in every era of government repression throughout history: once those in power discover tools for silencing one opposition group, they never stop there.

In analyzing a process like this, it should be very clear that I don't mean to imply, in any way, that this process is inevitable. The FBI is formulaic in how it cracks down on protest movements—we can see the patterns throughout U.S. history. The responses of activists and everyday people, though, need not follow any formula. The future is fluid. We have the power to intervene in this process—through education, community building, media outreach, lobbying, and the courts—and we must do so immediately, swiftly, and forcefully.

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DID OBAMA SET-UP MITCHELL TO FAIL IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

By Mazin Qumsiyeh, PhD*

In naming George Mitchell as special envoy to the Middle East, President Obama unfortunately made statements indicating no departure from the failing policies of previous administrations.

IN PARTICULAR OBAMA EMPHASIZED Israel's right to "defend itself", never once mentioned things like the occupation or International law, attacked Hamas (a duly elected movement that represents a significant portion of the Palestinian people), supported the strangulation of Gaza, demanded no resistance from an occupied people, and supported the Israeli occupiers in their violence that most recently killed over 400 children. This logic has been tried before including under the "aggressive diplomacy" of Bill Clinton and has yielded only a strengthening of Hamas, weakening of Fatah, continued Israeli colonization on Palestinian lands, and setting the stage for future conflicts. Further, such approach is even more untenable now after the setback of the June 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon and the current war on Gaza.

As articulated well by President Jimmy Carter, it is wrong to frame this conflict simply as "democratic Israel" facing "terrorist groups like Hamas" and it is wrong to continue to fund Israeli wars while claiming to be an "honest broker." It is analogous to describing the struggles in South Africa in the 1980s as "democratic South Africa" facing off against "terrorist groups like the ANC" (actually that was President Reagan's framing in his first term in office as he supported Apartheid). Yes, some members of the ANC did use terror (including "necklacing" or burning their rivals alive) but that was miniscule compared to the state terrorism and apartheid they faced. The US cannot be an honest broker so long as the US government continues to:

A) Give billions in military aid to Israel that is used to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity (see human rights reports on the recent Gaza aggression including use of White Phosphorus and DIME weapons).

B) Use its veto power and diplomatic muscle to shield Israel from International Law and Human Rights obligations

C) Demand that Hamas accepts Israel's right to exist, renounce violence, and abide by previous agreements (that they did not sign) while they US refuses to demand the same from Israel. Why not insist that Israel recognize Palestine's right to exist (or at least Palestinian right to true independence on the land that Israel has been stealing since 1947 partition resolution). Why not ask Israel to renounce violence and why not demand it abide by the signed agreements (e.g. freezing settlement activities, opening borders, allowing freedom of movement etc.).

Both Palestinians and Israelis have work to do but one cannot equate the nuclear armed 4th strongest army in the world with a dispossessed and occupied people (2/3rds of the 10 million Palestinians in the world are refugees or displaced people). It is ironic that Mr. Obama talks about Israel's need for security when in three weeks 1300 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces (most of them civilians, over 400 children) while in the same period 13 Israelis (10 of whom soldiers) were killed by Hamas! It is more ironic that Israeli Prime Minister Olmert interrupted President Bush while the latter is giving a lecture and instructed him to stop Condoleeza Rice from going along with the UN resolution (per Olmert testimony) when Bush continued to read a story to schoolchildren when told that America was under attack on 9/11!

If we truly want to advance peace in this area to promote US national interest, President Obama and Secretary Clinton would do well to stop parroting Bush, shift US policy to neutrality instead of always taking the side of Israel, and simply instruct Mitchell to insist that all people and countries comply with International law and human rights. This would mean ending the Israeli occupation that started in 1967 and respecting basic human rights like the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and lands. We can even start simpler by immediately endorsing the 2002 Arab peace initiative (it won't be on the table for too long), accept and deal with a unity Palestinian government (which must include Hamas and Fatah), and engage in serious negotiations based on International law. With Obama's popularity and people's interest in real change, it is even more doable than when President Eisenhower called the Israeli Prime Minister and successfully demanded that Israel withdraw its occupation forces from the Sinai and the Gaza Strip in 1956. Obama has the power to reclaim that legacy of US independence and leadership and truly change the future of the Middle East. Otherwise, it might be better if George Mitchell not waste any taxpayer money trying the same failed and biased approaches that threaten US national interests in that vital part of the world.

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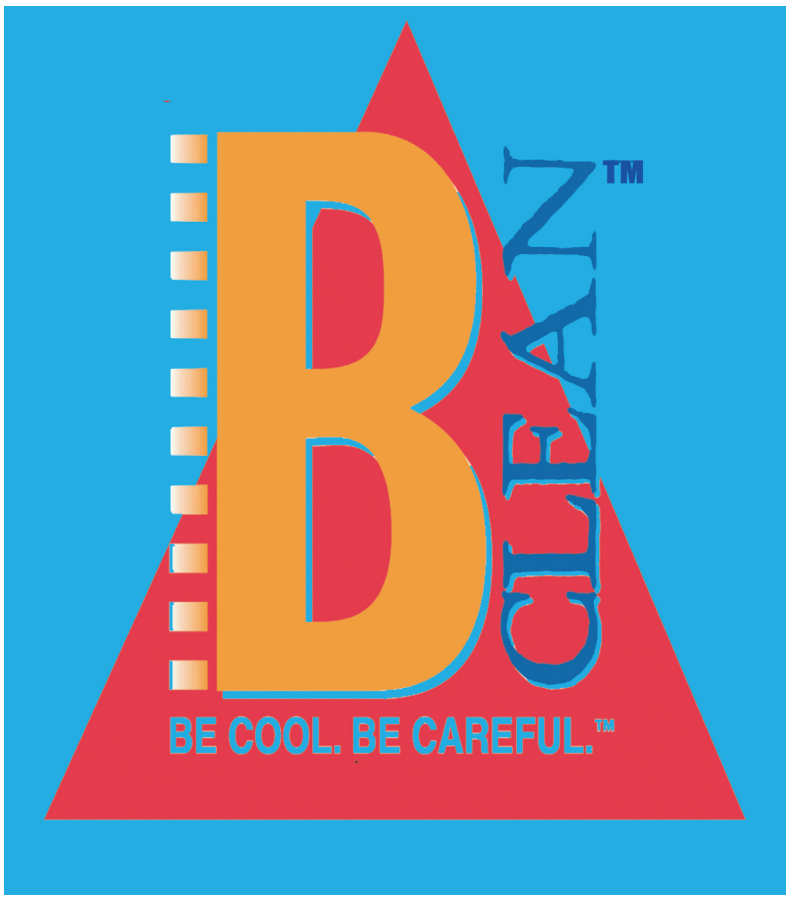
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