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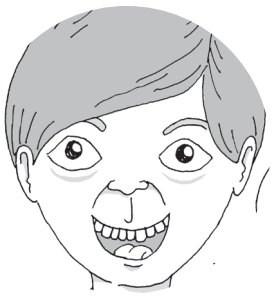
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April





05 LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

06 DEBRIS

08 STICK EM' UP ●

10 SHOWERS

12 THE GAME HAS CHANGED

15 SPACE CITY GAMELAN

16 INTERVIEW: FEMALE DEMAND

18 SANDY EWEN

20 INTERVIEW: YOKO ONO ●

22 DAVID DOVE

24 BIKES AGAINST BUCKS

26 AN OPEN LETTER TO OUR MONTROSE GUESTS ●

28 CRUISE MISSILE LIBERALISM

30 ASOI

32 HIMC

34 UNDER THE BIG DARK SKY ●

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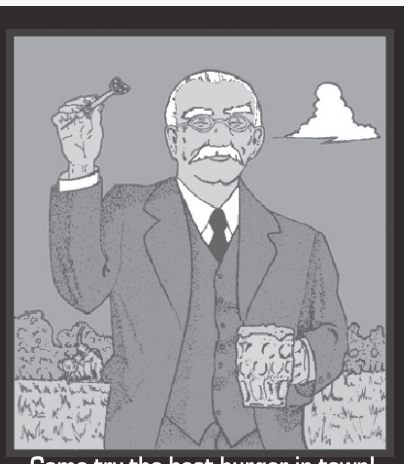
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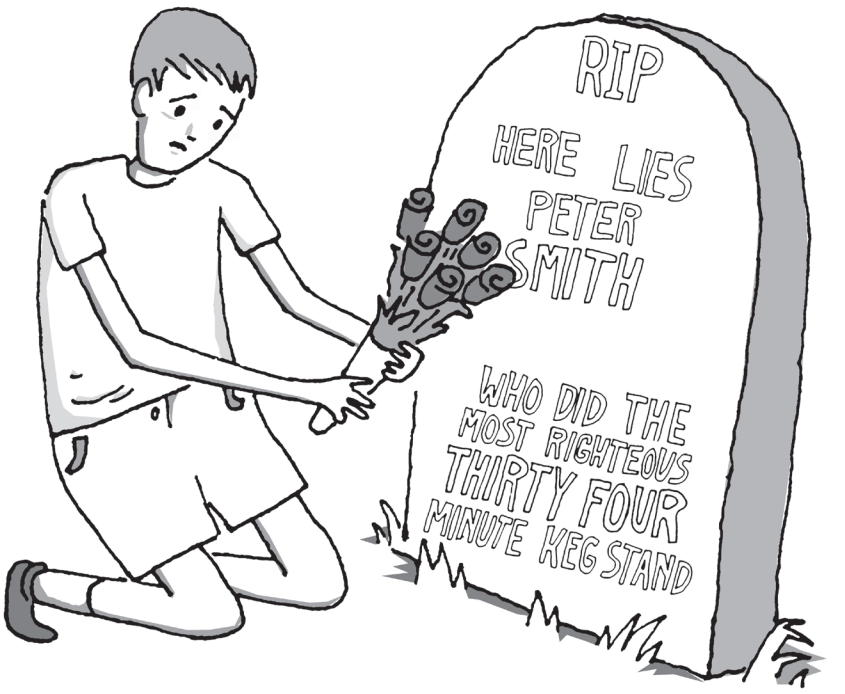
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It's that time of year again!
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We are not cool. You are not cool. I am not cool. Nothing we do will ever be written down in textbooks. Historians will never dissect the fun nights we had, the cool shows we planned (visit www.freepresssummerfest.com for more information!) , the shitty little drawings you do, that one epic performance of yours, that really space age haircut you got, or the quasi-intellectual conversation you had at that coffee shop. Everything we do now our kids will surely laugh at. We will be embarrassed for our style, social mores, artistic preferences, and MOST OF ALL FOR OUR ILLUSIONS OF GRANDEUR. Your silly tattoo will fade, your band will break up, that clever idea for a DIY community based fair trade collective will implode, and all you ever thought was forever will be a turd that passes through time's massive sewer. What's the point? The point is to enjoy the ride. Nothing in this world matters more than how you treat the ones you love. This life is short. Nobody on his or her deathbed ever had the final regret of not being hip enough. So let's get over ourselves.

Letter to the editor...

Dear Free Press Houston,

I am writing to praise the high quality of your extraordinary newspaper. To date, I have used issue #78 of FPH to kill 65 mosquitoes, 41 flies, 11 cockroaches, and 1 cricket (it jumped at me and I was frightened). The paper holds up well after repeated and vigorous strikes, and it wipes clean easily with just a few rubs on the neighbor's doormat. FPH has a killing power that the Chronicle or the Houston Press simply cannot match, and is far better than the 002 magazine, which actually seems to attract critters instead. I've found that an Alex Wukman article or a Shelby Hol illustration can be just as deadly as Raid, lacking only the country fresh scent that takes me back to springtime in Conroe. Could you incorporate such a fragrance in a future issue? Just a thought. Anyhow, keep up the good work.

Sincerely, Jason Ginsburg

DEBRIS
Fruits & Vegetables

BY BUFFALO SEAN

We all want local. Local food, local labor, local jobs, local service. If everything you needed was within walking distance, I think we could all agree that life would be a lot easier.

LEAVE THE STREETS TO CARPOOLS and drag racers. The most obvious market for local fever may be produce- an easily identifiable starting point for leftist global warming fighters, right-wing Made in USA enthusiasts, foodies and trend hoppers. Central Market and Whole Foods label their local produce, marketing it with a hefty price tag and implied piece of mind. Unfortunately for them bulky corporate structures make sure that theirs is an inferior product, shuffled from warehouse to storehouse for days or weeks before making it onto the shelves. Freshness takes a backseat.

One step beyond the grocery store is the market, outdoor venues beckoning to the adventurous who desire to leave the fluorescent lighting behind and embrace the kind of communal shopping space that the 3rd world has in abundance but America abandoned somewhere in the 20th century. There are several markets in and around Houston and no two are the same (but some are uncannily similar). Unfortunately, some people thing that a market means that it is local- and this is leading to a lot of clear consciences in culpable heads.

There are 3 kinds of markets in this town- Urban Harvest, The Farm and The Belly. Just because you're at a farmers market doesn't mean that it's local. They all contain some local produce but don't take that for granted. If you don't know, ask. If you don't get an answer, ask in Spanish. ¿Donde es crecido? Or something like that.

Urban Harvest is an umbrella group that manages streetside markets around town. They are the standard bearer, consistently dedicated to 100% local produce, fish, meat and eggs in the raw. To them local means within 60 miles- and that's pretty damn local. The USDA limits local to within 400 miles, meaning that carrots from just south of Oklahoma City are local. Under Urban Harvest's rules not even Huntsville is local. The only thing non-local at the market are the food vendors, who are held to a 51% standard, and prepared foods like cheese and olive oil, which are Texas based. Other market operators set different standards, both higher and lower, that are roughly in the ballpark. Urban Harvest operates markets on Eastside Street Saturdays, Discovery Green and Highland Village on Sundays and City Hall on Wednesdays. Other markets include the Rice University market on Tuesdays and the Midtown market on Saturdays.

Markets at farms are deceivingly straightforward. If it's on sale there, it's grown there. Right? Nope. I've seen roadside stands selling peaches from Georgia and farms displaying California oranges. Many times there is a good faith effort to distinguish between grown and bought produce, but don't fool yourself into thinking something is local if it isn't labeled as such. If you don't ask, it's your fault. Think seasonally (or google seasonal Texas produce). Apples are never local and neither are bananas. Strawberries in November come from Chile no matter where they're sold. Lettuce in August probably drove in from California. Watermelons in February are from Mexico.

All those fruits and vegetables from elsewhere come through The Belly of Houston. The Belly is the Farmers Marketing Association on Airline Drive. Don't let the name fool you, there are no farmers plying their wares here. Instead, the fuel for every restaurant, grocery store and dinner plate in town is bought and sold, unloaded off of trucks looping like a steady stream of ants from the ever-busy Port of Houston or streaming down 610 from all corners of the USA and Mexico. Wandering the concrete stalls of the market is a feast for the eyes, exciting for its raw vivacity. Huge bins of dried peppers punctuate mountains of brilliantly colored fruits. Stacks of cardboard boxes bursting with vegetables lurch in the background. From behind rolling hills of green leaves and brown roots vendors hawk specials. Some shops are filled to the ceiling with spices and herbs, while others offer small batches of the best (or the cheapest) produce. In this miasma of produce from across the world, we can become lost in a search for the exotic or lulled into seasonality blindness by the year-round presence of all of our favorite fruits and veggies. Why buy local when the Belly is filled with a melting pot of flavors, colors and scents from as many cultures of the world as the city's immigrants hail from? Shake it off, you're not that easily swayed.

The advantage of the Belly is that you can get produce days or weeks before it ends up in your local store at the same or cheaper prices. Ask around, make friends, and cut deals- some of the best advice is right around you. They'll know what's seasonal, when the best stuff comes in, and what the weather will be like. Poke around a little and you'll find that some local produce makes its way here too. Farms in Waller, Spring and Alvin sell their goods at the market. Produce from the Valley, San Antonio and North Texas pop up here and there if you know what to look for and who to ask. At Canino's, the largest retail vendor at the market, they label local as "homegrown." You can't miss Canino's yellow façade when you pull up to 2520 Airline, and some people think that their store is the whole market. Press on through and you'll get to the rest of the place but Canino's has some of the best prices and freshest local produce.

In other cities markets are celebrated tourist attractions. Camden Market in London, Rue Cler is Paris, Union Square Greenmarket in New York and Pike Place Market in Seattle have all been elevated from sustenance to prominence. With austerity on the city's mind there is little hope that Houston will consider investing in market infrastructure in the next decade, but with every passing day the Belly gets bigger and every week the streetside markets attract more people. Soon enough they may get the recognition they deserve, but they will still be out in the cold in terms of parking, buildings, regulation, promotion and equal access. No matter. The sale will go on, the rain will come, and the plants will grow. For consumers in Houston the local food trend is only starting, but at least it has 3 legs to stand on. **FPH**



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SAT APR 16:
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FRI APR 22:
FUNKOTRON

SAT APR 23:
NORML 420 FEST

THU APR 28:
MARCHFOURTH MARCHING BAND

FRI APR 29:
D.R.U.M.

SAT APR 30:
PONDEROSA SHOW

SEE WEBSITE FOR CALENDAR

Stick ‘Em Up!

BY MICHAEL PENNYWARK



WHEAT PASTING MIGHT SOUND LIKE what the kid sitting next to you in kindergarten did whenever he ate the glue that was supposed to be holding together his macaroni Michelangelo, but the actuality is way more interesting and way cooler than that kid ever was. Wheat pasting gets its name from wheatpaste, a type of adhesive commonly made from a heated flour and water mixture that has been used by activists and advertisers for centuries to post their propaganda or peddle their products wherever they can. It’s not surprising that over the years this has developed into an art form embraced by guerilla street artists around the world who have their own message to tell.

Stick ‘Em Up! is a new documentary by Alex “PR!MO” Luster of Shoot. Edit. Sleep. Productions in collaboration with Stone Kanyon Productions and Aerosol Warfare that explores the inner city art form of wheat pasting and the subculture of street art. I caught up with Luster, and GONZO247 from Aerosol Warfare, to find out more about Stick ‘Em Up!, the life of a street artist, and whether little Johnny had discovered the secret to feeding the world all those years ago in kindergarten. Okay, maybe not that last thing.

As PR!MO explains, “Stick ‘Em Up! is a documentary about our local street art scene with a focus on wheat pasting. Wheat pastings are essentially the street art posters you see glued to utility boxes, abandoned buildings and sometimes billboards. Our film focuses on this new but old trend of ‘gettin’ up’ in Houston. But instead of making just another one-sided movie about street art we decided to go a different route. My approach was simple... look at it as an art appreciator and at the same time a citizen whose tax dollars pay to take them down.” True to this vision, the film includes commentary by notable street artists and top local law enforcement officials to reveal the story behind some of the more ubiquitous images you see every day here in Houston.

Founded in 1990, Aerosol Warfare has showcased many local artists and over the years has hosted parties, paint jams, and art exhibitions. With the opening of the gallery in 2000, Aerosol Warfare has also come to house a street art education organization, CKC StART, that helps manage and coordinate professional services such as art commissions, design, event management, custom art and large mural installations.

So what makes a street artist and why would they risk being arrested, beat up or even shot for their art? GONZO247, one of the founders of Aerosol Warfare, explains that “when I think of a “guerilla” street art, I not only think public, but mass production and installation of the art,” that “as a street artist you have the same amount of power for mass communication as most multibillion dollar ads get you. You can possibly get the same amount of traffic and exposure as other paid advertising and use it to prove to the world that you exist.”

As for people’s reactions to street artists, GONZO’s view is simple: “People either love street art and artists or hate them. There is probably a small percentage that just does not care or even notice. I don’t care [what] the reaction [is] of people to the street art as long as there is a reaction, good or bad it does not matter as long as you get someone to stop to look, stop what they are doing in their own matrix to question or think about whatever message you may have to say. This is when you have accomplished your mission.” **FPH**

Stick ‘Em Up! will be screening for one night only
Thursday, April 7th at the River Oaks Theatre,
2009 West Gray, Houston, TX 77019 @7:30pm and 9:30pm.

Tickets are available exclusively at Aurora Picture Show
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Black Death

The medieval horror thriller Black Death moves into the River Oaks Three for a limited midnight run on April 1 and 2. Set in England in 1348 at the outbreak of the bubonic plague the story follows a group of religious zealots who are hunting down a necromancer. They believe that a society in a hidden village has the power to raise the dead and they want to raze said village to the ground.

Led by Ulric (Sean Bean) and with Osmund (Eddie Redmayne) a young monk as their guide the group marches through the woods with their implements of torture. Upon finding their quarry they discover there is indeed a woman goddess (Carice van Houten) who may or may not have power of the elements. There are scenes of bloodshed in the name of all kinds of religion.

Director Christopher Smith, whose previous films include Creep and Severance, told Free Press Houston in a phone interview how he wanted to avoid the tendency "of making a silly historical movie." Smith emphasized how the violence in Black Death manifests "in a realistic manner."

Smith added that the hidden village represents "a utopia where madness has been left behind." Or so the audience is led to think. The last part pf Black Death was lensed at an actual village in Germany that allowed Smith to accurately recreate a 14th century village on the film's modest budget.

Also On

The Alamo Drafthouse in Houston offers some unique retros and local premieres during April. Hitchcock's North By Northwest unwinds April 10 at the West Oaks Alamo and April 24 at the Mason Road Alamo.

Special engagements include Harry Shearer (Spinal Tap, The Simpsons) introducing his documentary The Big Uneasy (April 29 and 30). Also the Houston debut of American: The Bill Hicks Story plays the week of April 22-28. Check the Alamo Drafthouse website for full details. (www.drafthouse.com/)

Showers

BY MICHAEL BERGERON



SXSW 2011 wrap

Your humble scribe whipped through another year of feature premieres and interview sessions. There were a lot of good films and perhaps ironically the films that took competitive honors were among the more than 100 that I missed.

Among the titles I saw over the course of SXSW were: Source Code; a cool film noir crime thriller from the Democratic Republic of the Congo titled Viva Riva!; Super; Conan O'Brien Can't Stop; Square Grouper; 13 Assassins; Paul; A Matter of Taste (great doc on a NYC chef that runs later this year on HBO); Win Win; Hit So Hard; It's About You (A John Mellencamp docu that winningly concentrates on the music more than the man); a great docu from Errol Morris called Tabloid that I want to see again; Tell Your Friends! The Concert Film; the romantic and funny Ceremony; and a documentary on SXSW appropriately titled Outside Industry: The Story of SXSW.

Source Code director Duncan Jones told me that there are six source codes in the film with a couple of deviations running off of those that travel in parallel universes. What I am talking about will only be clear upon seeing Source Code, which opens in April. Super, directed by James Gunn, wants to be Kick Ass but the direction doesn't bring the level of farce to the forefront. Instead Super gives us scene after scene of religiously frustrated cuckolded husband Rainn Wilson dressing up as a super hero and being cruel and mean for the sake of cruelty. He's a bit of a psycho actually and Super constantly showers the audiences with violent scenes with little of the humor it promises.

At the post screening Q&A someone asked co-star Ellen Page (She's actually the one good thing in the movie.) what super power she would like to have in real life. Page replied "The power to digest glutton." Asked the same question Wilson, quite keeping in character said, "That's a stupid fucking question." Conan O'Brien slayed the audience during a Q&A with snappy answers about the making of his documentary. At the beginning of Conan O'Brien Can't Stop he addresses the camera while driving his BMW SUV. Coco's driving behind one of those Hollywood tour buses. "These people think they're going to see Brad Pitt in front of his house sweeping leaves off the sidewalk," baits Conan as he pulls up alongside the bus, rolls down the window and shouts "I'm Conan O'Brien the host of the Tonight Show." Highly recommended when COBCS rolls out later this summer. Later that same day the screening of 13 Assassins unrolled without director Takashi Miike in attendance. Miike wasn't able to leave Japan after that country's horrible natural disaster, itself the subject of quite a few conversations at SXSW. 13 Assassins ends with a bloody 45-minute battle between the 13 protags of the film and an army of 200. Walking from 13 Assassins to The Future by Miranda July I stumbled upon a line where the standees were being given free barb-q and being filmed eating same. Similarly there was a Fed Ex truck handing out free hummus and falafels earlier the previous day. If you buy food here in Austin during SXSW you're doing something wrong. The Future was packed and I couldn't get it so it was back to the Paramount for the US premiere of Paul. Simon Pegg, Greg Mottola, Nick Frost and Kristen Wiig gave the audience all they could want in the way of laughs and good vibes during the Q&A although the film itself only works some of the time.

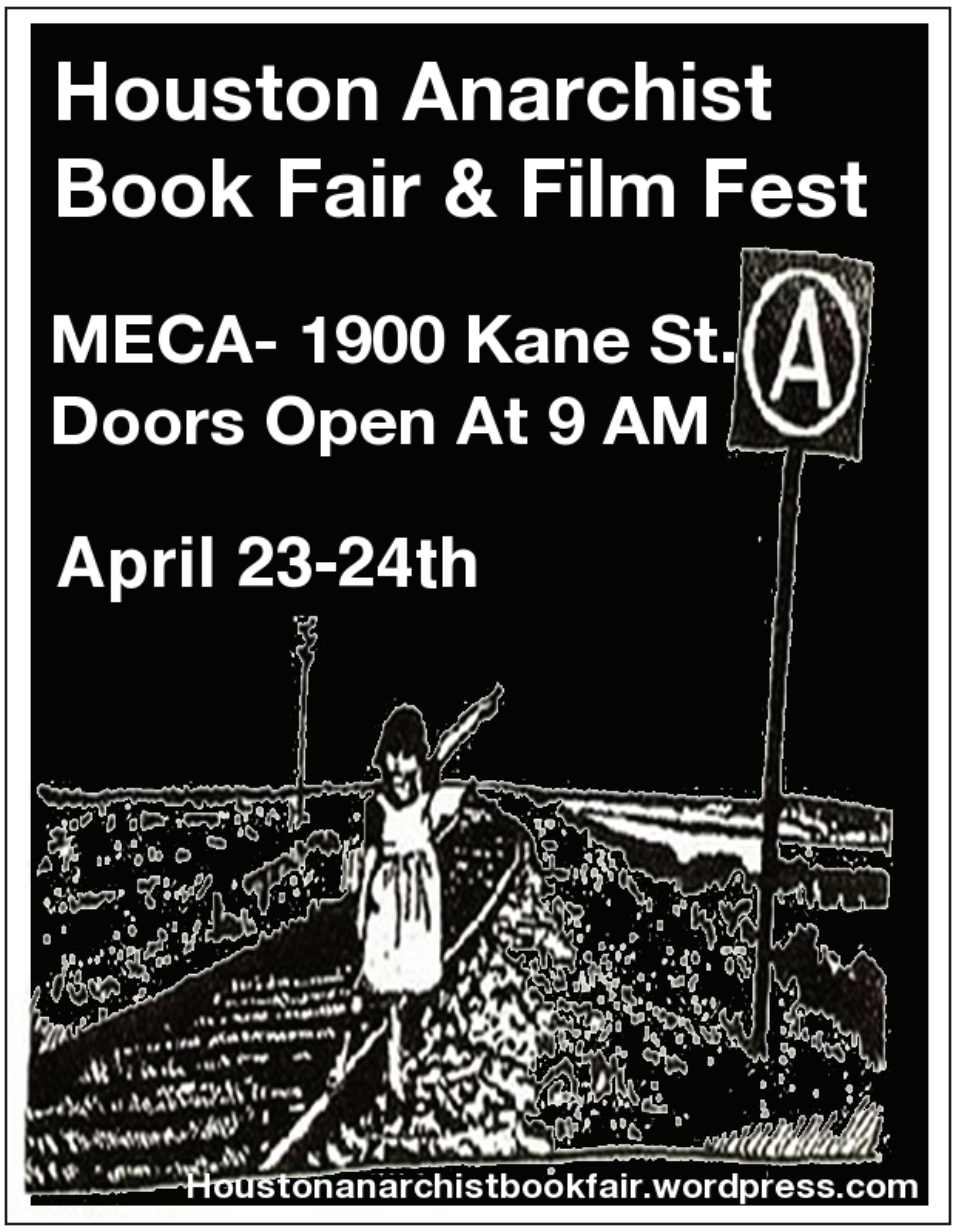
The next day was the Win Win junket. Tom McCarthy's third movie moves him to the top of American writer directors. Paul Giamatti who plays Win Win's morally conflicted lead notes that McCarthy "writes very precise characters, and as an actor himself he has compassion for actors. With Tom you don't get bogged down in exposition." Another actor in the movie, Alex Shaffer appears in his first role ever playing a high school wrestling champion. In real life Shaffer is a state champion from New Jersey. His look in the film, bleached blond hair, was how he came to the audition. The entire team he wrestles for had dyed their hair like that to psych out opponents. McCarthy comically notes it's the first film set in the world of high school wrestling since Vision Quest. McCarthy adds that the dialogue for a good movie doesn't have to be understood so much as a component of the story. For instance, there are a lot of terms dealing with the technical side of scoring in wrestling. "In The Wire," remarks McCarthy who played a reporter in that series, "we often never explained to the audience what we're talking about, but they got the meaning." And so it is with Win Win, which opens April 8. On Wednesday the offerings included Michael Stipe presenting select videos from the new R.E.M. record (Collapse Into Now), all of them from name directors (or actors) like Sam Taylor-Wood and James Franco. A documentary on the Foo Fighters

with the eponymous title Foo Fighters that had its world premiere Tuesday. Another music docu, Hit So Hard, examined the life of Hole drummer Patty Schemel and included rare footage of Kurt Cobain sitting around the house jamming with Courtney. Tell Your Friends! The Concert Film! proves that there's little difference between alternative and mainstream stand-up comics; they both make us laugh. The doc provided straight up performances by some very humorous comedians filmed at the Bell House in Brooklyn. Particularly funny is a duo act featuring Liam McEneaney and Kristen Schaal. The documentary Outside Industry: The Story of SXSW, directed Alan Berg provides a comprehensive view of the festival from its humble beginnings in 1986 to being the world's largest convention encompassing music, film and the latest interactive innovations. For instance Twitter got a big boost at the 2007 SXSW even though it had been around for several months previous to that. Berg was formerly an on air reporter at WFAA in Dallas and has also won Emmys for PBS docus, one of which was a short version of Outside Industry that looked at the SXSW music festival as it had evolved through 1994. "The film was produced independently of SXSW," said Berg to Free Press Houston. Berg felt that editorial independence was necessary to give the film a balanced look at the festival. Indeed the doc stands on its own legs in demonstrating the growth of the festival from a single hotel venue to the present day where the founders have to contend with everything from people bootlegging SXSW wrist bracelets to suing copyright violators. Some of the doc's amazing found footage includes Iggy Pop playing "Lust For Life" at the 1996 festival and the 1991 arson fire of the Austin Chronicle (never solved). Berg notes that he obtained footage from sources as diverse as filmmaker Lee Daniels and Austin historian Tim Hamblin. A concurrent exhibit titled 25 Years of SXSW Music is on display at the Austin History Center (at 810 Guadalupe).

Before the world premiere of The Beaver director Jodie Foster, who also co-stars as the wife of the delirious character played by Mel Gibson, told the audience that The Beaver's not a comedy. The audience was amused and laughing at least up until the third act when The Beaver becomes decidedly dark. As helmed by Foster The Beaver is not a film for everybody, yet the people it is for will embrace it with open arms. As Foster told the audience, she wanted to depict "sentiment without sentimentality."

At one of the heavily attended panels Todd Phillips admitted that people ring his doorbell in the middle of the night and when he presses the speaker they yell a line from Old School. Karmic payback for one of his previous films you might ask? Elvis Mitchell was interviewing Phillips. Sometimes the conversation got animated, sometime feisty. Phillips always makes cameos in his films, or as he explains it "I like to play the sleaziest character in my movies." Sure, Phillips discussed his current movies, like Hangover, Hangover 2 and Due Date but a solid chunk of the conversation dealt with his early career. Mitchell knows his movies and Phillips seemed eager to recall his beginnings. His first two films were documentaries. Hated (1994) chronicled the sordid performances and life of G. G. Allin, the punk rocker who threatened to off himself onstage (and eventually overdosed anyway while the film was in post). Frat House (1998) was financed by HBO but because Phillips had obtained releases through nefarious means the project was shelved. You want to see this film and according to Phillips there are bootleg copies floating around. To hear Phillips describe the shoot, they were getting such good footage of college lads getting drunk and being their bestial selves that he waited until late in the day when all the students were really drunk to have them sign the releases. As a result some families threatened to sue. Frat House played at SXSW in 1998.

On the closing weekend of SXSW the premiere of Ceremony, starring Michael Angarano and Uma Thurman, took place at the SXSW mainstay the Paramount Theatre in the Festival Favorites category. Ceremony, which with its brief theatrical rollout is simultaneously available on demand via internet download, unwinds in a manner similar to Rushmore or The Graduate. Angarano crashes Thurman's wedding with the express intention of making her change her mind. Director Max Winkler, talking to Free Press Houston, acknowledged that the movie hinges on "how much fun it is to watch Angarano try to get what he wants." The film was primarily lensed at Oyster Bay on Long Island, and features a cool soundtrack that includes Ringo Starr, The Animals, and French rock and roll. SXSW appropriately closed at the 1200-seat Paramount with a Billy Bob Thornton directed documentary on Willie Nelson called The King of Luck. FPH





THE GAME DONE CHANGED ON THIS SIDE

BY K.M. ANDERSON

THE GAME HAS CHANGED, OR maybe the game is changing. The world is looking through new eyes, the beautiful is not the beautiful we grew up on, it's now our beautiful. Now, let's not get into too detailed of a discussion of us vs. them or anything, because I'm presenting us in a way that signifies a point: the game has changed.

"People are becoming more accepting…once you are fed something over and over and over and over, even if you hate it, you're bound to like it," comments artist Dual.

But what is the "it" he speaks of? Well, "it" in this case could be graffiti, aerosol works, street art, painting and murals (sans permission) planted on sides of trains, billboards, and buildings. Hip hop, the entire culture, at one time was offensive. But it is nothing now to see rapping, breaking, deejays, and graffiti styled writing in ads, as a sign of fashion or authenticity. It is no longer counterculture, it is culture.

Has this change been good or bad for the street artist? In the case of Dual, the idea was never for his art to be unknown, HE is not as concerned with being known, but the art, the pieces, have been given a more public light, a showcase. Dual has gone from one basic graffiti artist to commissioned artist without changing his style, without sacrificing his vision.

The vision will be on display April 1st Donysus Hair Salon (3201 Louisiana St.), but also in the upcoming film "Stick 'Em Up", a documentary by filmmaker Alex Luster which examines street art in Houston, but for Dual, the film gives a well rounded view of graffiti from the point of view of the artists, the city government, and even the crew who clean up the pieces. While, Dual does not necessarily do graffiti in the sense of aerosol cans and tags (his is more silkscreened pieces), the basic premise is the same.

"Graffiti to me has always been the application of a medium to a surface without permission," notes Dual. While he may be an active and willing participant in the art form, he empathizes with people who may be upset with his chosen expression. "You're taking a poster and applying it to one of those electrical boxes (around or in the city), it's possible someone's gonna get upset."

Then there is the acceptance of someone like Banksy or Shepard Fairey, once ostracized as vandals. Street art is being accepted as respected and viable, and even (dirty word) profitable. Meaning dreams can come true, even ones outside of the proverbial box.

"Since the perception has changed, there's so many more options and opportunities…(for example) gig posters for bands, designs for companies, so many different things, labels. It's cool because the whole idea of being able to survive by doing something you love to do, it's hard, and to accomplish that, that's a good accomplishment. FPH"











GRUPO FANTASMA
WARPAINT
LIL WAYNE
ACID MOTHER'S TEMPLE
SLEIGH BELLS

EYES

4/8/11
GRUPO FANTASMA
at Warehouse Live
WARPAINT at Fitzgerald's
THE PAINS OF BEING
PURE AT HEART & Twin
Shadow at the Rhythm Room

4/16/11
LIL WAYNE, Nicky Minaj & Rick
Ross at the Toyota Center

4/20/11
ACID MOTHER'S TEMPLE &
YACHT at Fitzgerald's

4/24/11
SLEIGH BELLS & CSS at
Warehouse Live

EARS

Panda Bear
Tomboy (Paw Tracks)
All the singles have been great. Person Pitch was great. I think it will be great.

TV On The Radio
Nine Types Of Light
(Interscope)
On a streak of great albums, could this be the third. It will be record of the year, or most disappointing record of the year, or both.

Chris Brown - F.A.M.E. (Jive)
Great album with bad back story. Let's not focus on redemption, let's just dance to it.

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April 27 - Volatil

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April 1 - Blackbird Pie
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April 8 - Big Noise
with
The Scars Heal In Time
April 15 - Wattzit2ya
April 22 - Tokyo Road
(Bon Jovi Tribute)
April 29 - Modoc
(Southern Rock Tribute)
with
Magnus
May 6 - Band TBA

Sundays
Teen bands 2-6pm
All Ages Show

SATURDAYS
April 2 - Victim
with special guest!
April 9 - The Dogz
with special guest!
April 16 - 2 Big Events!
(Day) C.O.C. Meeting
Music by Kat James & Troublemaker
(Night) Black Dog
(Led Zeppelin Tribute)
April 23 - Ozz
(Ozzy Tribute)
with Double Vision
(Foreigner Tribute)
April 30 - Flicker System
with 3rd Power
May 7 - The Fab 5

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April 15 - James Rivera's Birthday Bash
featuring
Sabbath Judas Sabbath
(Priest & Sabbath Tribute)
April 22 - Band TBA
April 29 - 3rd Power
"Rock Night"
May 6 - Vertigo

April 20
HUGE 420 PARTY!

SATURDAYS
April 2 - Black Dog
(Led Zeppelin Tribute)
April 9 - GoGirlsMusic.com
presents Chicks That Rock!
"3 Kisses", "Staci's Edge", "Nancy Silva Project"
"Also Join Outlaw Dave Live and 950am-Mojo from 7-9pm"
April 16 - Santana Tribute
performed by
La Raza Connection
April 23 - The Spicolis
(Huge '80s Party)
April 30 - MTA
(Metallica Tribute)
with Genghis Bon
(AC/DC Tribute)
May 7 - Victim

Saturday, April 9
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Promoting Women in Music
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Space City Gamelan

BY JACK DANIEL BETZ

THERE ARE MANY KINDS OF MUSIC that conjure images of the celestial: Holst's "The Planets", Pink Floyd's older music, Tangerine Dream, The Flaming Lips, even Houston's Red Krayola. There seems to be an ineffable thread running through space-influenced music but all of it gives listeners a glimpse of a place few of us will ever get to visit. For those looking to make that musical journey, Houston's Space City Gamelan is a good starting point.

The working definition of a gamelan is an Indonesian orchestra. The original purpose of gamelans, said member Rashida Alisha, was "musical wallpaper for dance and martial arts, ceremonies and puppet shows". However, Space City Gamelan has repurposed their performances so that the music itself is the main attraction.

But what goes into a gamelan? What does it take be called a gamelan? Alisha said the key instruments for this unique outfit include "a myriad of metallaphones: instruments that resemble xylophones (called sarons), kettle gongs (called bonangs), a kempul (small gong) and the "mama" gong and an instrument called a slenthem; there are also drums, bamboo flutes and an instrument called a gambang (all wooden slats played with 2 mallets). Everything listed here would constitute a bare bones gamelan!"

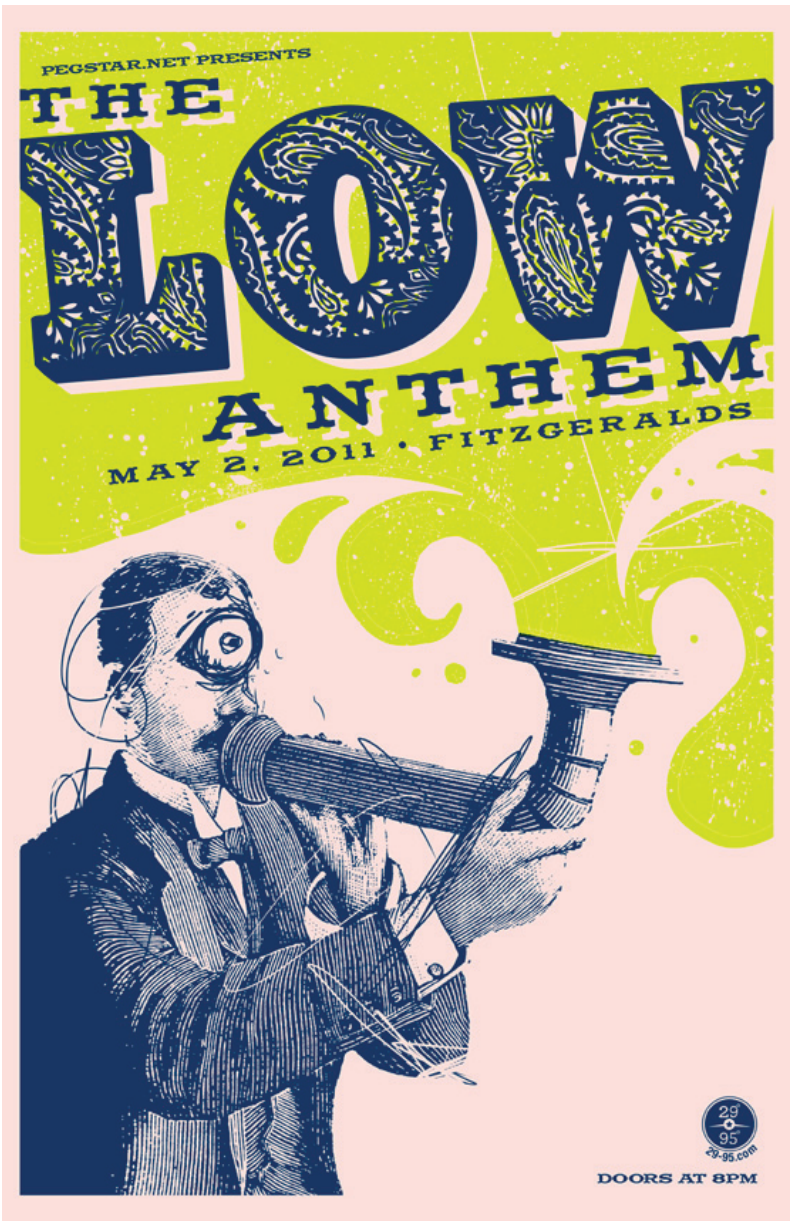
The group's full name, Space City Gamelan Swara Dewa, means Sound of the Gods. SCG has been together for seven years and includes mostly performers from the US trained in the arcane Indonesian musical style. SCG's music relies primarily on tuned metallic percussion and is far off from any standard western scale. "The instruments were custom made for us in West Java to the specifications of our master teacher, Gatot Winandar. The tuning of the instruments is done when the metal is forged, all according to the characteristics of the gong; based on the sound of the gong, all other (metal) instruments in the gamelan are thus tuned. These instruments can never be swapped out with another gamelan set because the tuning is specific for this set. This set is a 7 tone scale, called pelog in Bahasa. The most wonderful thing is that there really is no standard tuning! In terms of notation, we use numbers," said Alisha.

SCG performs frequently in Texas and have played along such legends as Houston's own Jandek at SXSW. Their next performance will be an outdoor show at Houston's Mandell Park on March 18. The gamelan will be setting the mood for the screening of a feature-length film about the solar system called "Orbit" courtesy of film-making collectives Rooftop Films and Cinemad. "Orbit" is a compendium of short films that includes artistic representations of each planet (which may or may not include Pluto). "[the film will be] preceded by music that takes the crowd from sunset beyond dusk, when it is dark enough to project on the outdoor screen." Alisha said.

Mandell Park on March 18. The event will start at 7 p.m. and will include music, film and guided tours through Meredith Gardens. Attendees are welcomed to bring chairs, blankets and picnic supplies. Black Orbit Cafe will provide refreshments. **FPH**






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Interview

Female Demand

BY OMAR AFRA

2 PIECE DRUM AND BASS GUITAR DUO Female Demand has grown in the several years from a low rent Lightning Bolt knock off act into a pair of sonic pioneers. Creating soundscapes much larger than the sum of 2 people, Female Demand is pushing the envelope and finding new frequencies on their soon to be released new record. Problem is, they just won't admit to exactly how much they enjoy fingering their own dickholes.

HOW MUCH HAS THE SONG-WRITING PROCESS CHANGED SINCE YOUR FIRST EP? ¶ Our song writing process hasn't really changed much since our first recordings. It's kind of a very gradual ongoing process. We're pretty open to what ideas both of us may have for a song and usually we have at least 3 or 4 different song ideas that are kind of floating around. So when we get really serious about writing new music, we draw whatever ideas we've already created and mix those old ideas and concepts with newer ideas we may have. But what usually happens is that we get stuck on some songs and we just kind of leave them alone until we decide to try and finish it later on in the future. But for us, a song is usually never really finished until its laid down and recorded.

DOES ADDING MORE VOCALS AS YOU HAVE CHANGED THE DYNAMIC MUCH? ¶ Yes and no. No in the regards that we pretty much lay down all the music first (with vocal parts in mind) and add vocals later on once we've rehearsed the material. But the addition of vocals has changed the live show dynamic for sure. With more vocal parts, Bradley really has had to consider his sound system and how that translates live. With how we've operated as a band thus far, most shows are plug in and play. But now a day we're kind of trading that mentality in and considering our sound on a stage. We can't just blast our speakers and jam out and expect people to hear the vocal parts. So we've made many changes (mostly brad) to our set up and have added another thing on the list to worry about. But it's all right. We can handle a challenge.

TRUE OR FALSE: JONATHAN FINGERS HIS OWN DICKHOLE? ¶ False. That sounds really painful actually. Who'd do such a thing?

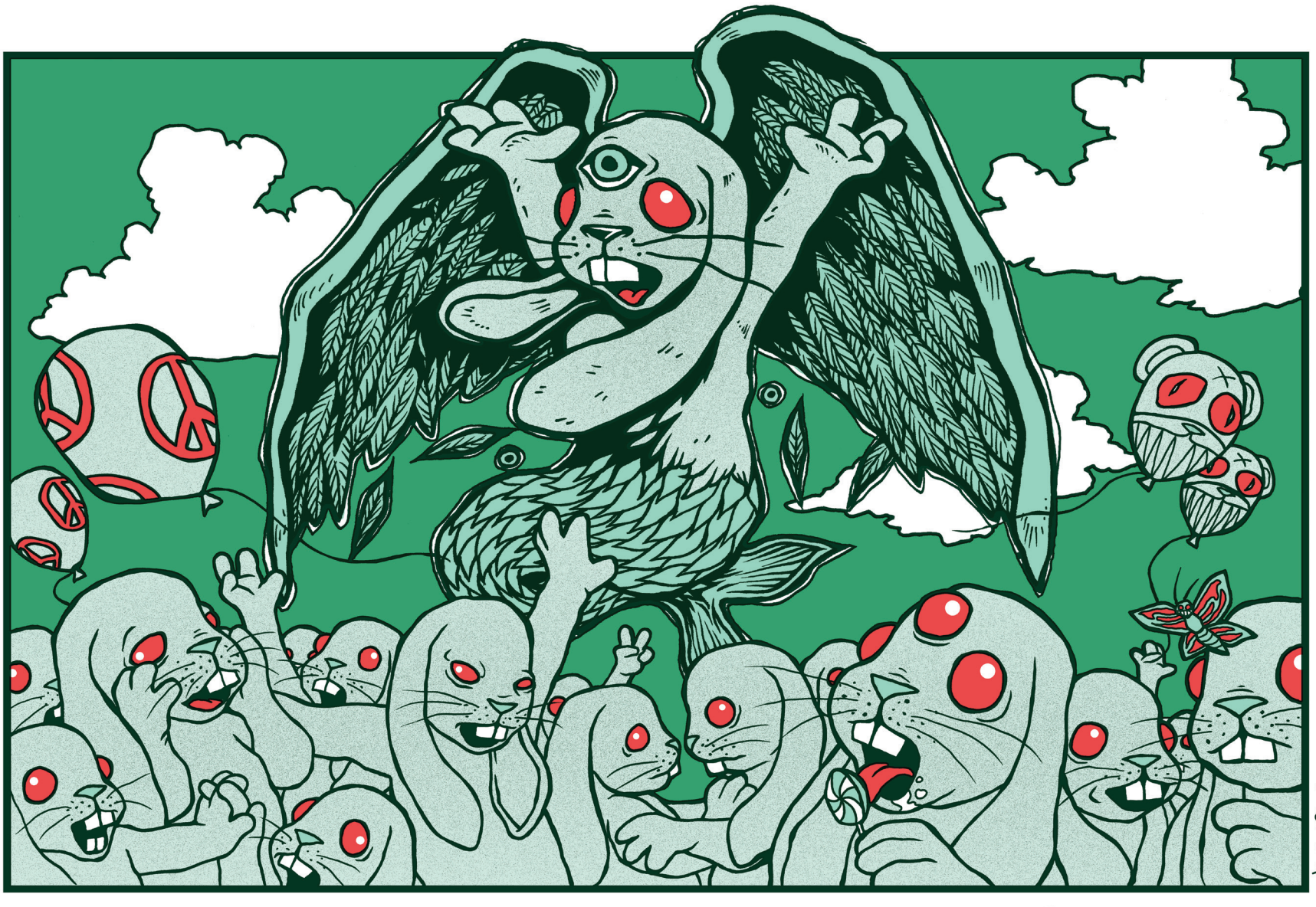
THE SOUNDSCAPES YA'LL CREATE ARE BECOMING MORE AND MORE NUANCED. WHERE IS INSPIRATION FOR THIS DRAWN? ¶ Well, as a 2 piece we work pretty hard to not sound so one-dimensional. When we first started the band one thing that we wanted to do is make us sound like there are more then 2 people in the band. Just a full sound. With the absence of a guitar player and a singer there's a lot of space to fill in if you're in a rock band. Most bands see that as an end all say all to their music, we just saw it as a way to create something unique and fun at the same time. We pretty much wanted to show people that you can make really intricate music that is musical and enjoyable with out your standard guitar wailer and your attention hungry singer. So in a nutshell, the desire to create music that is fun for us to play without a guitar player and singer has inspired us to do what we do. (For the most part)

WHY THE NAME FEMALE DEMAND? ¶ One day I was driving down Richmond to Shepard to buy some lunch while listening to Prefuse 73. As I was flipping through tracks I stopped at a song called 'female demands'. For some reason it just struck a chord in my mind and I started to repeat it in my head, envisioning how it would look on a flier or an album cover. When I ran it by Bradley he took to the name immediately. We decided that the plural at the end made the name sound kind of weird so we just dropped it and from then on we called ourselves Female Demand.

SERIOUSLY, WHY WOULD ANYONE FINGER THEIR OWN DICKHOLE? ¶ Beats me. But for real, that sounds excruciating.

WHAT IS THE NEXT ECHELON FOR YOUR BAND? ¶ What's next for us? First, we plan on releasing our debut album around mid to late July. And then tour our Asses off. I'm currently in school so we may not hit the road for a little while. But it will give us time to save up a buncho money and set up an epic tour! We also have plans of signing to a label but the details for that are still in the works. Other then that we have some tricks up our sleeves for Free Press Summer Fest and look forward to what the future has in store for everyone.

FILL IN THE BLANK - HOUSTON IS THE CENTER OF THE MUSICAL UNIVERSE BECAUSE WE HAVE: ¶ ZZ Top. **FPH**



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Interview Sandy Ewen

BY RAMON MEDINA

SANDY EWEN IS HARDLY your typical guitarist. Whereas many players focus on notes and melody, Ewen treats the instrument in a manner more akin to how a painter approaches colors and a canvas. She famously employs bows, chalk, screws, and all manner of implements to coax textural and abstract expressions of sound that are something unique to Ewen. Despite the serious manner in which this University of Texas Architecture gradate approaches her work, her manner is anything but dour or pretentious. Her love of Houston's Experimental scene seems to gush out in waves of good cheer and admiration. One minute she is praising Lucas Gorham and his band Grandfather Child and the next she is praising Nameless Sound. It's the voice of someone who is a part of something important and meaningful - something she came across simply by making a record purchase.

"I had this idea," recalls Ewen, "that you should get a record player, Captain Beefheart, Sun-Ra, and The Minutemen - like that was something you were just supposed to do. So, when I moved to Texas as a junior in high school, I got my record player at Sound Exchange and I was buying Sun Ra and Captain Beefheart when Dave Dove (Nameless Sound) saw me there and he thought 'Ah, here is someone who needs to be aware of what I am doing in this city.'" So, Ewen went to see The Sam Rivers Trio a few days later and hasn't looked back since.

"Dave's whole group is about finding young people and exposing them to free jazz and Experimental music," she continues, "I didn't know at the time what I was looking for but that was it. So, through Nameless Sound, I had this musical grounding and, when I moved to Austin, I started playing with Tom Carter (Charalambides). That very first day I moved to Austin, I unloaded all my stuff into my dorm room and then went off to play a gig with Maria Chavez and Holland Hopson. Tom Carter saw me there and we started playing weekly. We have tons of recordings and ended up with a release on Jyrk records and another on Music Fellowship. Tom had been talking to Aaron [Russell] from Weird Weeds about how he thought it was funny that here I was 18 and playing Experimental guitar and so Weird Weeds asked me to play with them and I ended up joining the band."

"I consider myself an improviser," she continues, "but everything I do in Weird Weeds is within a context that is really scripted and tight - everything is completely composed and where it is supposed to be. But whereas the rest of the band is precise to a note, I have some flexibility. I know our pieces, what implements I intend to use and how. My playing can be textural, melodic, and percussive but it is always rehearsed and specific."

That purposeful playing is also apparent in her other endeavors such as her work with dancer Yet Torres and the band unofficially called Girl Band. "My work with Yet is collaborative. We have a lot of pieces we've written where we have a description of where the sound is supposed to go - these can be spatial ideas, specific sounds, or methods of interaction."

"Last year at SXSW," she laughs,"we learned that if you make harsh noise, you will get unplugged. We were playing at a hot dog stand (I don't know what they were expecting) but I just jumped into this noisy loud crunchy sound and they just weren't into it and we got unplugged immediately. I was kind of taken aback but Yet was in good spirits so we went down to the next place and did something there and it was fun."

Girl Band is a much looser collective of people but no less inspired. "The name of the band changes all the time and we have about 8 people right now; the exact roster is hard to pin down. We've been doing pieces that are more performance art and we think about how to perform these pieces in ways that are engaging and creative. So, for example, when we performed a graphic score made of shapes at the Salvage Vanguard Theatre in Austin, we were dispersed in the audience and the score was on the stage. The score was printed very large and we used flashlights and laser pointers to communicate to each other and the audience what part of the score we were interpreting – that was very effective.

"We're doing this performance on Sunday April, 3 at the Menil [3PM sharp at the North entrance]. Damon Smith wrote us a piece that relates to Max Neuhaus' sound installation at the Menil. I've adapted one of our previous pieces for Michael Heizer's earth sculptures where we lie on the grass face-down and are cued to sing by a bandmate who will roll us onto our back one by one. Then, we have another one for Barnett Newman's Broken Obelisk."

The enthusiasm you her in Ewen's voice when she discusses her work in the Improv community (which Ewen explains is just one small part of Houston's Experimental scene) is not shared by all. One objection you hear from detractors is the same one you hear when some people first experience Jackson Pollock's drip paintings or Mark Rothko's multiforms – the dreaded cry of "I could do that." To those people, the whole exercise appears easy, undisciplined, and self-indulgent.

Ewen finds this critique uninformed, "I play and practice this music several times a week and so it's really refined. I practice weekly with Damon Smith, Yet Torrez, and Under the Covers (which plays Jazz standards) and it's there that I try new things. I know what the different screws sound like – I know the variation between a small and large toothed screw. I've played with steel wool, chalk, and pieces of metal and the nuances of these materials have become second nature. As much as some people might see it as unrefined, they actually couldn't sit down and do what I do because I'm actually technically proficient at it. To hear the subtle tone qualities is something I've worked on and I know how to adjust what I'm doing in relation to my guitar pick-ups, tone controls, and all the other variations. It seems like it's easy – and that's good – but for someone to say that they can do what I do…you have to work on it to do what I do."

Another objection made by some is that Improv and Experimental music is unimportant because sales and attendance are so miniscule especially in comparison to pop acts like Beyonce or Justin Beiber. Ewen sees that as a foolish way to gauge success, "In terms of numbers…I really don't care to look at that. Experimental music has a transformative quality that has the power to change how you see things. Seeing a really good Experimental performance can really change your concept of how people can interact and what the reality is of the human experience. Pop music may be fun to dance to but it doesn't change my worldview. It doesn't challenge you in different ways and that challenge is important.

"It's like any other style of music where the more you listen to it the more you can distinguish. There are lots of people who don't like Gamelan because they've never heard it before and so it makes no sense to them. Some people think that way about Rap music too. There has always a barrier to entry [in music] and that barrier is simply taking part, listening, and figuring it out. If you put a lot into it, you can get a lot out of it and if people don't want to put the time in, it will seem like a bunch of garbage but that's their loss.

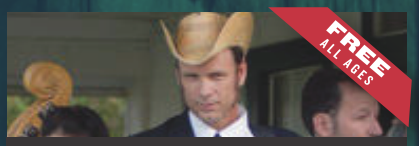
"The fact is the Experimental scene here is world class - there is an impressive pool of talent, a supportive audience, and receptive venues. There's a lot of freedom and everyone can do what they want. In other cities, it can be hard to find gigs or you have some established people who hold the gates open or close them for whoever they want. Here, we have a lot of series that include whoever wants to play and that is really healthy. There are enough venues where people can set things up really easily and there are so many performers and players that anyone can do it and a lot of people do and a lot of people put in enough time and energy to make it good. I wouldn't move to another city to pursue Experimental music." **FPH**

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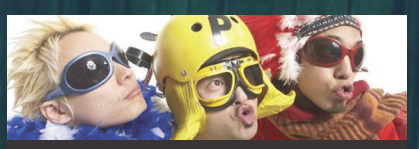

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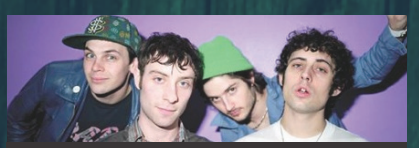

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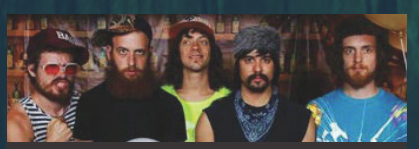

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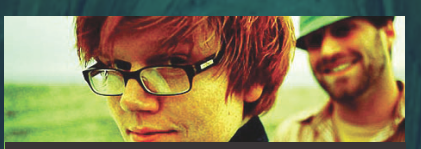

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Interview
Yoko Ono

Yoko Ono. What else is there to say? She is a woman who needs no introduction. She is a woman who was in love with the most significant musician in the world.

BY JACOB CALLE



imaginepeace.com
twitter.com/yokoono

WHEN THE PRESS RELEASED THAT YOKO ONO would be performing in Austin, TX with her Plastic Ono Band for SXSW I immediately jumped at this opportunity to see something that billions would not. Not only did Ono perform, but she also was a keynote speaker for Austin's music/film festival that generated more than one million people to town. Ms. Ono has had numerous consecutive dance singles ranking at #1 on the top of the Billboard Dance Chart. She also was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by Mojo magazine. Aside from her achievements she was also an inspiration to many songs from The Beatles, such as Abbey Road's "Because" that was written due to Lennon watching Yoko play Beethoven's "Moonlight" backwards.

The new Plastic Ono Band's new album "Between My Head And The Sky", which was co-produced with her son Sean Lennon, who opened up for his mother under the name The Ghost Of A Saber Tooth Tiger along with his girlfriend, singer Charlotte Kemp Muhl. The new album is supported through Chimera Music label, a record label that Sean Lennon runs out of his kitchen in his apartment in New York.

The Chimera Music label's show case was Saturday, March 19th at Elysium on Red River off of 7th street with Ghost Of A Saber Tooth Tiger, Kemp and Eden, If By Yes (Petra Haden of Superchunk's band), Consortium Musicum (Lennon and Greg Saunier), Fig, MI-GU, and of course Plastic Ono Band. In GOASTT, while Lennon led the way, supermodel instrumentalist Muhl followed behind with milky whispers that could possibly be the most gorgeous sound ever produced. It was Saturday night and the crowd was tired and sunburned from early in the day. Yoko would enter stage at 1am, which would then be Sunday March 20th. The wedding anniversary for Ono and Lennon. It was a very special moment. A rare one at that. While most women in their 70s are asleep and have not been in a bar since their 30s, Yoko was dancing on stage as if she were trying to do her own style of zumba. She smiled through the whole set while looking over her sunglasses that slid half way down the bridge of her nose. Mid set Yoko tossed her hat into the crowd for a lucky fan to catch such as the time Michael Jackson tossed out the pillow from his hotel room just before he hung his baby over the balcony.

The night was indescribable. It still seems dreamlike. I met Yoko Ono. I talked to Sean and it just seems so surreal that when I referred to Yoko to him I said "your mom." I also did another interview with Charlotte in the men's bathroom.

The first time Yoko met John Lennon she handed him a note. It had seven letters that formed a word of inspiration, "Breathe". So as I walked out I took a deep breath. Those seven letters hung over my head like yesterday's news. My lungs were occupied by Austin's air. I still felt the impression of Lennon's hand in my hand from our greeting, Yoko's ambient dolphin cry rang in my ears, and Charlotte's silly gang sign tossin' while we were chit chattin' wouldn't leave my mind. I exhaled and disappeared into the heavy traffic of thousands on 6th Street where nobody knew my name, but I didn't care because I just saw Yoko Ono.

IN MY OPINION LADY GAGA IS THE GRANDEST LIVING RENDITION OF YOU. YOU BOTH SHARE THE SAME MANIFESTATIONS OF THE AVANT-GARDE ATTITUDE. HOW DO YOU FEEL THAT THE LARGEST NAME IN THE WORLD RIGHT NOW IS SPREADING THE SAME MESSAGES THAT YOU AND JOHN SUPPORTED IN 70S?

I love it! They say looking good is half the game. The other half is how you present it. Well, you can't say we weren't looking good then. We were, too, right? For that time. Lady Gaga is sparkling now. I love her!

TO NAME A FEW GREATS THAT HAVE GOT THEIR FEET WET IN THE PLASTIC ONO BAND, BETTE MIDLER, KEITH MOON, AND ERIC CLAPTON, AND NOW YOU CAN ADD LADY GAGA TO YOUR LIST WHO PERFORMED WITH YOU ON OCTOBER 2ND IN L.A. OF LAST

YEAR IN CELEBRATION OF JOHN'S BIRTHDAY. HOW DID IT COME ABOUT, THE TWO OF YOU COLLABORATING FOR THIS VERY SPECIAL OCCASION? WHAT WAS THE WHOLE PERFORMANCE LIKE AND WHAT DO YOU THINK OF GAGA'S BOTTOM THAT WAS FULLY EXPOSED DURING THE CONCERT?

I thought she exposed a great looking butt. If you have a good one, why not? In fact, she was modestly hiding it with lacy stuff. I think that was cool.

YOU TWITTER POSITIVE MESSAGES THAT MAKE PEOPLE THINK. THESE MESSAGES CAN GET ONE THROUGH THE DAY. IF JOHN LENNON HAD A TWITTER ACCOUNT WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE HE'D BE TWEETIN' ABOUT?

We were like one apple. So we would have sent good messages together.

YOUR NEW RECORD "BETWEEN MY HEAD AND THE SKY" WAS JUST RELEASED IN 2009, WHICH IS AMAZINGLY PRODUCED BY YOUR SON SEAN. THE LAST TIME BEFORE THAT WAS IN THE 70S. WHY NOW?

Just happened that way. But the last one was not in the 70s. I put out a few CDs since then. I hope you'll look for them and listen. You may enjoy them....

I'M SORRY, I SHOULD HAVE SAID THE LAST TIME THE NAME PLASTIC ONO BAND WAS USED. SO YOU'VE RECEIVED GREAT REVIEWS FROM ROLLING STONE, PITCHFORK, AND OTHERS. DO YOU FEEL THAT PEOPLE OF THIS GENERATION UNDERSTAND YOUR ART A LOT MORE THAN YOUR AUDIENCE FROM THE 70S?

I suppose so. I am still in awe and dazed about it.

YOU ARE IN YOUR 70S. BY NOW WOMEN OF YOUR AGE ARE LIVING THE LIVES OF GOLDEN WOMAN AND THINK THAT THEY SHOULD GO TO DOCTOR TO GET VACCINATED FOR BEIBER FEVER, BUT YOU ON THE OTHER HAND HAVE BEEN ON THE BILLBOARD CHARTS FOR DANCE MUSIC FOR MORE THAN 2 MONTHS. WITHIN THESE MONTHS YOU'VE HAD 6 CONSECUTIVE #1 CHART TOPPERS. SO WHAT'S IT LIKE TO KNOW THAT BRITNEY SPEARS, RIHANNA, AND KATY PERRY ARE IN COMPETITION AND THE PEOPLE'S SHOES HAVE SPOKEN. IT'S YOUR SONG "MOVE ON FAST" THAT PEOPLE WANNA DANCE TO! HOW DO YOU WRAP OUR HEAD AROUND THAT?

I am not competing with anybody. If I thought about it, I'll probably faint...How could you compete with those strong acts? What happened to my songs in dance charts is because of very talented and creative remix artists. I'm a lucky girl!

MANY ARTIST SUCH AS THE CURE, ARCHITECTURE IN HELSINKI, LADY GAGA, AND THE FAINT HAVE PUT OUT A REMIX ALBUM OF THEIR SONGS, BUT YOU ON THE OTHER HAND PUT OUT AN ALBUM OF 10 DIFFERENT REMIXES OF JUST ONE SONG, "MOVE ON FAST", BY VARIOUS ARTISTS, A SONG THAT YOU WROTE IN 1972 WHICH IS NOW GETTING HEAVY COVERAGE. OBVIOUSLY THE RECORD HAS DONE VERY WELL FOR ITSELF, BUT DID YOU AT ALL FEEL IFFY ABOUT PUTTING OUT A RECORD OF TEN VERSIONS OF ONE SONG?

My first record "Two Virgins", I called it "Unfinished Music No. 1", because I wanted people to put their own twist to it. I visualize many artists doing it. They didn't do it then, but now they are doing it after 40 odd years. I'm very happy. **FPH**





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houstonpress.com Houston Press We've Got Issues.

Those of us who have been veteran comrades in the struggle for peace and justice in Palestine have quite often been frustrated by the inability to galvanize enough support in the political and media establishments in the West against the brutal occupation of the West Bank and the strangulation of Gaza.

Introducing ASOI

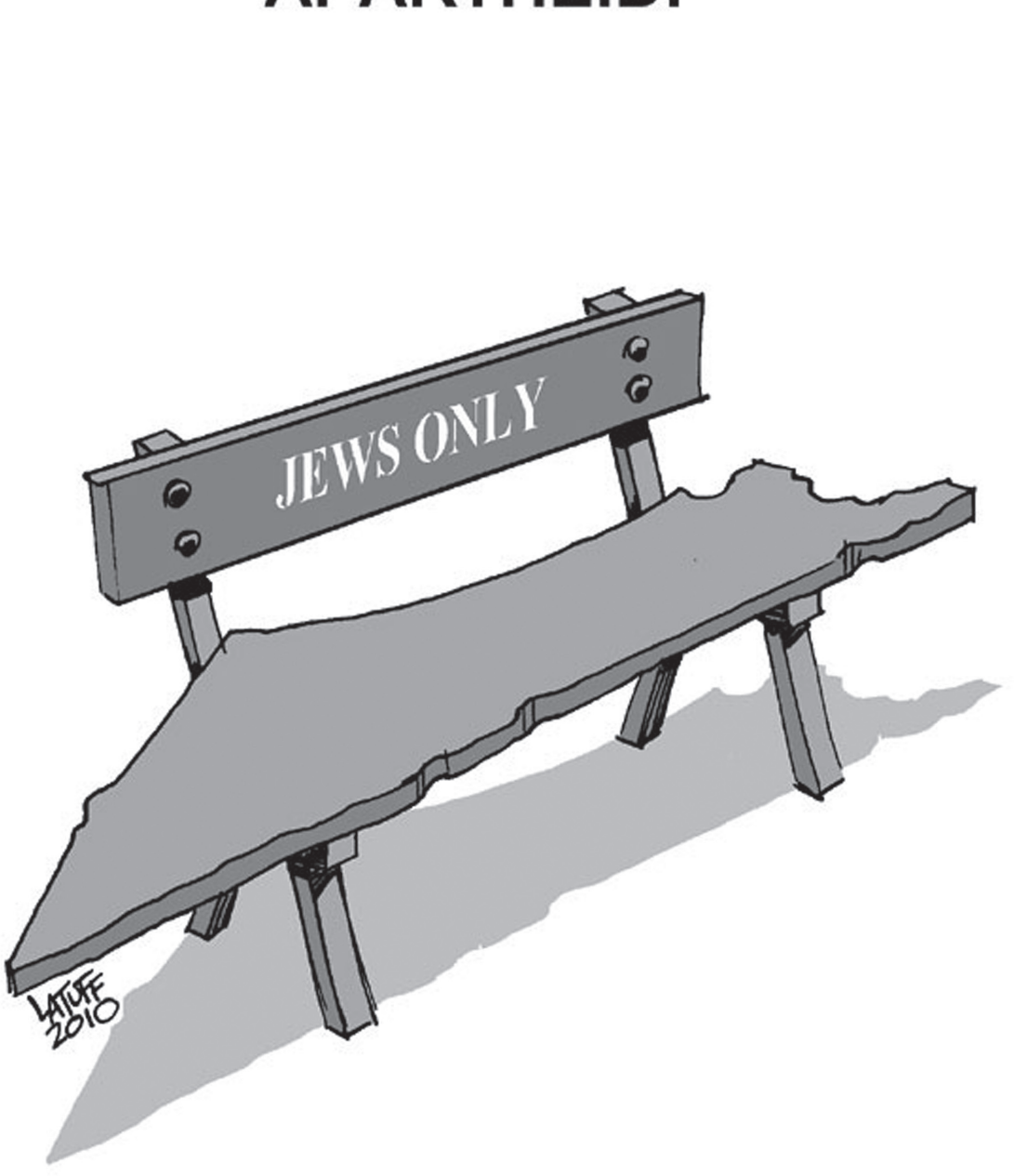
Israel's Latest Apartheid Law

BY ILAN PAPPÉ

WE BELIEVED THAT CLEAR CUT EVIDENCE of the oppression and the highly visible criminal policies that raged since 1967 should have at least triggered a world reaction similar to the one that now takes place against Libya, and even more so.

But we know all the reasons why it did not, and will not happen. And yet we may have overlooked one particular reason, indeed one successful ploy of the Israeli peace camp that seems to have aborted any such effort in its buds. The liberal Zionists believe strongly in the existence of two discrete entities one Israel and one that lies on the other side of the 1967 green line which have very little in common. The acceptance of this line as a hard fact is the main justification given in the West for the inaction against Israel (one which is also supported by some of Palestine's best friends and of course the Palestinian Authority). The line drawn is not just a political boundary it is mainly a moral border. Everything that is happening in the occupied world is diametrically opposed to life in democratic Israel and hence the argument is that if you treat Israel as a pariah state then you will also harm the 'good' part, the pre-1967 state. This is also the basis to the continued support for the two states solution that bases peace on the ability of moral Israel to re-invent itself in the pre-1967 borders.

I hope this distinction would at least disappear from the vocabulary and dictionary of the Western solidarity movement with Palestine (where it can still be heard in loyalty to the peace camp in Israel, the PA and the invisible lord of realpolitik).That this distinction is false was proved once more this week (20 March, 2011) when yet another apartheid law was passed in Israel. This new law allows Jewish settlements built on state land inside Israel not to admit Israeli Palestinian citizens as residents and legalizes the wish of these new settlers not to sell land to the Palestinians citizens of the state. This is one of many such laws passed recently (the loyalty oath law that turns the Palestinians in Israel to second class citizens by law and one which does not allow them to live with their Palestinians spouses from the occupied territories are two of the more famous apartheid laws passed recently). The new law, like the previous others, institutionalize the Apartheid State of Israel or for short ASOI.



ASOI is now one of worst apartheid regimes in the world. It controls almost all of Palestine (apart from Gaza which it imprisoned hermetically since 2005). It has, in absolute terms the highest number of political prisoners (China was reported to have less then 1000, Iran has few thousands); Israel holds nearly 10,000 of them. It has the largest number of apartheid laws and regulations than any country in the world and apart from the Arab regimes that are now collapsing and rogue states such as Miramar and North Korea, has the longest imposition of emergency laws and regulations that rob citizens of their most basic human and civil rights. Its policies against the discriminated native population, now composing nearly half of the overall population in ASOI, include atrocities such as barring people from using water sources, from cultivating their fields, building more houses, from getting to work, schools or universities and it bans them from commemorating their history and in particular the 1948 Nakbah.

ASOI is protected by left wing philosophers, mostly Jewish but not only, in the USA and the West as well as by the new members of the European Union whose deplorable record during the holocaust may explain their unconditional support for ASOI. It enjoys the unconditional backing of many Jewish communities in the World, Christian Zionists and cynical corporations who benefit from ASOI's military elite's proclivity to use lethal weapons at will and from the state's progressive banking system and a high tech know how.

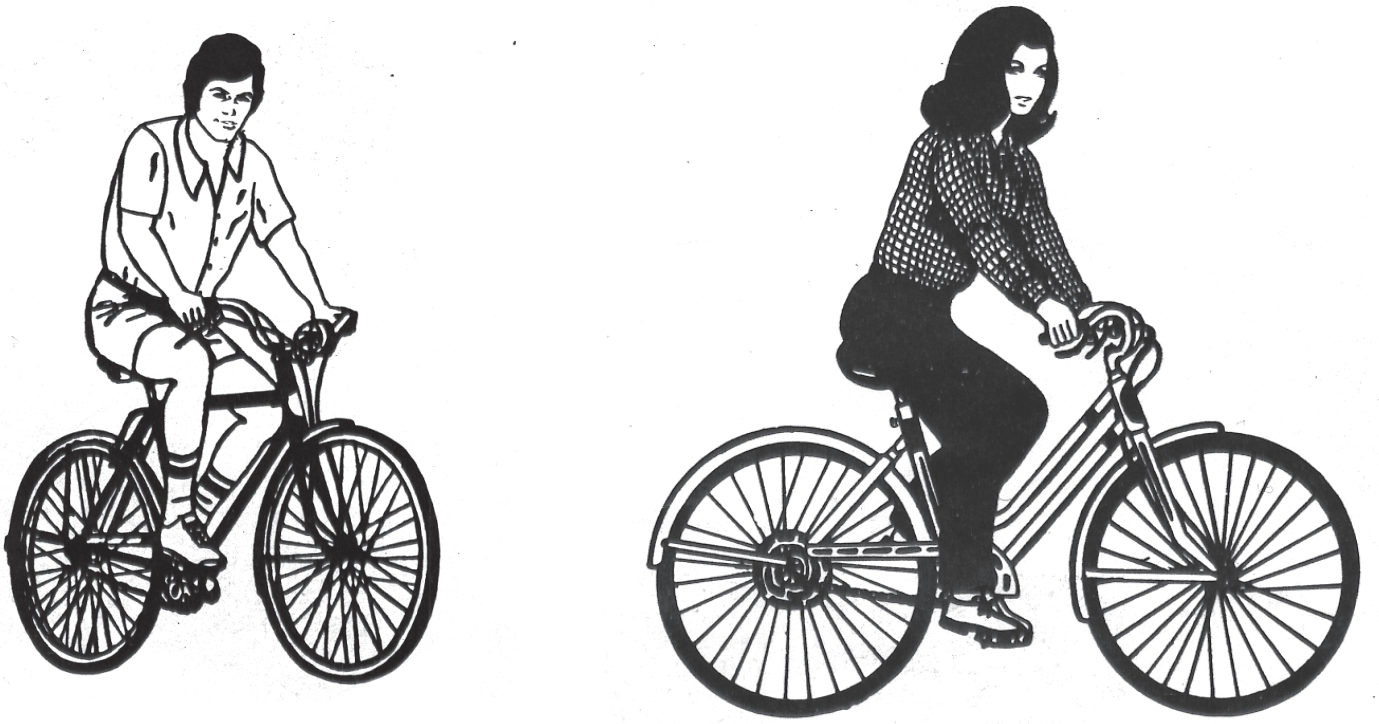
ASOI could become the Free Republic of Israel and Palestine (FRISP) or any similar name, where people would enjoy the same rights now fought for all over the Arab world and which the West claim to disseminate and protect all over the world. If ASOI will not become FRISP, any action such as the one taken now by the West in Libya would rightly be regarded suspiciously as cynical and dishonest.

Linkage has lost it attraction since it was misused by Saddam Hussein in 1991. But now is the time to revive it. It is time to realize that there will not be a new Middle East - in fact, there will no world peace - if ASOI continues to enjoy immunity and is not curbed and stopped - and hopefully one day - replaced by the democratic FRISP. **FPH**

Bikes against Bucks

Grassroots coalition challenges city transportation plan

BY ALEX WUKMAN



WHEN WORD FIRST LEAKED OUT in late February that the Houston Galveston Area Council's (H-GAC) Transportation Policy Council (TPC) was considering spending options for Houston's 2011-2014 Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), a nearly $10 billion program that covers all transportation projects approved for funding for the next four years, people got interested. In fact they got so interested that they started signing petitions and attending meetings.

What sparked a surprising level of interest in the business of the Houston Council of Governments was a proposal put forth by the TPC's executive committee, that Houston area NGO's interpreted as a desire to cut about $13 million from pedestrian and bicycle projects, add it to the nearly $80 million in "unprogrammed monies" that the TPC is sitting on and use the resulting $92.6 million to build more roads and freight lines. Needless to say this proposal did not go down well with some of the city's most active progressive groups.

"We've never seen as large an uprising as we've had with this," said Jay Crossley of Houston Tomorrow, which was one of the five groups most active in opposing the TPC's proposal. He explains that between his organization; Bike Houston, the Citizen's Transportation Coalition, the Greater East End Management District and the Energy Corridor District thousands of people became interested in how transit dollars were going to be spent. "I don't think as many people have ever signed a petition for or against something involving H-GAC as signed this," said Crossley.

"People from all over the Houston area are involved; we've got people from inside the loop out to Katy who are interested in good infrastructure spending," said Crossley. A map Houston Tomorrow put together of all the signatories of a petition they circulated that stated that "road building should be just one of many priorities [and make] up no more than 55% of our regional transportation infrastructure spending" found that residents of the Houston area ranging from Galveston to Conroe and Baytown to Sealy wanted to decrease the amount of money that was being spent on roads.

In a town with the most aggressive freeway expansion program in the country the idea of taking money away from roads was more than a little bit controversial. However, the controversy stemmed more from how the information was being presented than about what was actually being said. According to Harris County Judge Ed Emmett's office Bike Houston and Houston Tomorrow were not being honest with the information they presented to people.

Joe Stinebaker, Emmett's director of communications, said that the grassroots coalition that formed around the issue of preserving/increasing funding for bicycle and pedestrian access was "being disingenuous at best and outright lying at worst" when they claimed that the TPC was, as one headline on Houston Tomorrow's website put it, "gutting walk, bike, and livability projects." Stinebaker explained that "alternative modes," as bike and pedestrian projects are referred to, already received "a lot of money" in the first round of funding and that the activists were trying to increase the allocations in the second round.

"They already got a lot of money in the first round," said Stinebaker. He went on to say that Houston Tomorrow and Bike Houston were "trying to scare everyone" by saying that funding for bike, pedestrian and livability projects was going to be eliminated. Based on the summaries of the options that were presented to the TPC that Bike Houston posted to their website, one could be forgiven for thinking the worst. Out of the four summaries two explicitly said that, if passed, "Existing Ped / Bike projects will be

delayed and no new projects will be funded in the current TIP" the other two stated that bike and pedestrian projects would be funded with one showing a 10:1 discrepancy in road to bike funding.

Stinebaker said that the information Bike Houston put out was fraudulent and that in the end it may have done more harm than good. "Judge Emmet got a little ticked off at Bike Houston and Houston Tomorrow for misleading people," said Stinebaker. He then provided the county's side. According to an interview Emmet gave to Houston political blogger Charles Kuffner in February, the TPC had a goal of allocating 78 percent of the funds they had control over to roads and freight and to accomplish this they would have had to use all of the nearly $80 million in unprogrammed money plus take $12.8 million from alternative modes.

Removing the nearly $13 million from alternative modes would have dropped the bike and pedestrian allocation down from $51.6 million to $38.9 million, or from 14.9 percent of the money to 11.2 percent. Kuffner outlines the county's position by writing that, contrary to Bike Houston's claims, "no Alternative Modes project that already had funding lost funding as a result of this." Some projects that had been approved but not funded were pushed back to 2015.

Even though those projects were going to be postponed Emmett promised Kuffner that they won't have to go through the approval process again and "will be at the front of the line" for any road and freight funds that are left over. Stinebaker explained that part of the reason that Emmett was particularly upset with the way the TPC was being presented was because he felt that the committee had "done the right thing in this instance."

The debate about how best to spend the TPC dollars brought to mind the old saying about how a good compromise leaves everyone dissatisfied, which is something that Crossley understands about the situation. "There's no right answer, it's just as radical an idea to spend [all the] money on alternative modes as it is to spend it on roads," said Crossley. One of the main difficulties H-GAC faces in deciding how to spend transit dollars comes in the form of the different areas it represents.

H-GAC makes decisions not only for urban counties, like Harris, Fort Bend and Galveston, but also for rural counties, like Brazoria and Liberty, this divergence in need and experience can often lead to problems between interest groups lobbying for increases in transportation spending and politicians having to ask themselves whether the money should go to improving US 90 in Liberty County so freight can get to small towns like Dayton and Liberty faster or should the money go to improving sidewalks on the East End of Houston?

Often the guiding principle in how best to use government mobility funds lies in the number of people it will effect; and when pressed about rural transit needs Crossley saw the need but then cited population disparity as an argument for increased spending in urban areas. He explained that "dense populations that would benefit from alternative modes are the biggest chunk of our region, whereas [roads in] sparsely rural areas don't serve a lot of people."

"There's also an environmental justice argument that could be made here," said Crossley. "Many of the proposed road projects are on Houston's west side, so the TPC is planning on spending money on roads for areas that are, or expected to be, middle and upper class instead of on sidewalks to help poor people on the east side get to buses or light rail lines."

When all was said and done the TPC voted to leave the $12.8 million in alternative modes and dedicate the other $79.8 million to roads, which some in the coalition considered a pyrrhic victory. "It's something," Crossley says, "we got the TPC not to do something and we were like 'Has this ever happened before?'" Even though the non-profits and citizens involved were able to accomplish what they initially set out to do the energy and involvement increased their expectations of what they thought they could accomplish.

"A lot of us got optimistic and we thought we might be able to get all the money put into alternative modes," says Crossley. Despite suffering what some saw as a setback, something possibly more important emerged from the months-long process: a new grass roots coalition. He went on to say that he expects to the organization to continue being involved in advocating for policy changes throughout the rest of the year.

"This is an amazing movement and this is just the beginning," says Crossley. "The world is changing…the bike monster has been unleashed in Houston." He goes on to say that he hopes this experience helps to serve as a counterpoint to the cynical apathy that is all-too common among people of a certain age. "It's important for young people to know we can do something…we're taking a stand saying 'it's time to change the way this metropolis works." **FPH**





Don’t fuck this up for the rest of us

An Open Letter to our ‘guests’ in Montrose

BY OMAR AFRA ILLUSTRATION BY TIM DORSEY



e a checklist

‘ The Montrose’ and its portion of the Westheimer drag in particular have undergone a few notable revisions and additions in recent months. High dollar-boutique drink purveyor Anvil has popped up in the last couple of years and similar establishments are following suit. Gone is historic lesbian bar Chances and in will go Hay Merchant. Similarly, the ‘ Tex-Mex’ joint El Real has taken over the famed spot of the former Tower Theater, which was subsequently Hollywood Video. Add the demise of Mary’s and the popularity of the new Royal Oaks and you have a marked change in the dynamic of the neighborhood. What has happened is a good and bad thing. For the first time in quite some time, Montrose is becoming a ‘destination’ for days that are not weekends. Yes, our fair neighborhood is starting to see more men in pink collared shirts, women in 6-inch heels (who are not prostitutes), and other Washington Avenue types. More people, and their money, in the hood is a good thing as long as they behave. Here is a quick etiquette guide for these imported folks:

Stay in your safe zones: El Real, Hay Merchant, Anvil, Royal Oaks, and Poison Girl on amateur nights. Please avoid Catbird’s and Lola’s at all costs for your own safety.

Our safety and comfort takes precedence over yours. If an ambulance is called for you yet a native Montrosian needs urgent care, you will be passed over.

Keep quiet when leaving the bars, as much of our neighborhood is asleep. See, we get wasted on Mondays not Fridays because we all work on Saturdays.

Dude-bros must not travel in packs larger than 3.
When you see our Honorable Mayor Chris Hutto in the streets, give him the proper salute. This consists of prostrating before him and singing anything off of Fugazi’s In on the Kill Taker.

As a matter of protective breeding, any native Montrosian has full carnal rights on your girlfriend / boyfriend while she/he is in our jurisdiction.

Try to speak as little as possible. Make sure all of your ‘hoorahhhs’ are under the proscribed 50 decibel limit
If you follow these simple guidelines, you can help us keep Montrose the great place that it is. For now, we enjoy your company. We may even find you humorous. But remember, you are here as our guests. Don’t fuck this up for the rest of us. **FPH**

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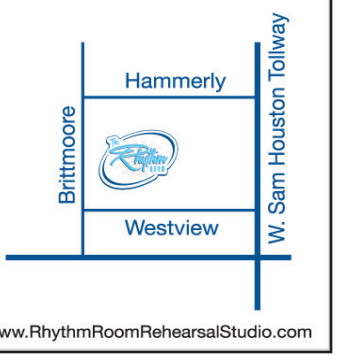
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Cruise Missile Liberalism

Instead of Bombing Dictators, Stop Selling Them Bombs

BY MEDEA BENJAMIN & CHARLES DAVIS

When all you have is bombs, everything starts to look like a target. And so after years of providing Libya's dictator with the weapons he's been using against the people, all the international community – France, Britain and the United States – has to offer the people of Libya is more bombs, this time dropped from the sky rather than delivered in a box to Muammar Gaddafi's palace.

IF THE BITTER LESSON OF IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN has taught us anything, though, it's that wars of liberation exact a deadly toll on those they purportedly liberate – and that democracy doesn't come on the back of a Tomahawk missile.

President Barack Obama announced his latest peace-through-bombs initiative last week—joining ongoing U.S. conflicts and proxy wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia—by declaring he could not "stand idly by when a tyrant tells his people that there will be no mercy, and ... where innocent men and women face brutality and death at the hands of their own government."

Within 24 hours of the announcement, more than 110 U.S. Tomahawk cruise missiles were fired into Libya, including the capital Tripoli, reportedly killing dozens of innocent civilians—as missiles, even the "smart" kind, are wont to do. According to The New York Times, allied warplanes with "brutal efficiency" bombed "tanks, missile launches and civilian cars, leaving a smoldering trail of wreckage that stretched for miles."

"[M]any of the tanks seemed to have been retreating," the paper reported. That's the reality of the no-fly zone and the mission creep that started the moment it was enacted: bombing civilians and massacring retreating troops. And like any other war, it's not pretty.

While much of the media presents an unquestioning, sanitized version of the war—cable news hosts more focused on interviewing retired generals about America's fancy killing machines than the actual, bloody facts on the ground—the truth is that wars, even liberal-minded "humanitarian" ones, entail destroying people and places. Though cloaked in altruism that would be more believable were we dealing with monasteries, not nation-states, the war in Libya is no different. And innocents pay the price.

If protecting civilians from evil dictators was the goal, though—as opposed to, say, safeguarding natural resources and the investments of major oil companies—there's an easier, safer way than aerial bombardment for the U.S. and its allies to consider: simply stop arming and propping up evil dictators. After all, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi reaped the benefits from Western nations all too eager to cozy up to and rehabilitate the image of a dictator with oil, with those denouncing him today as a murderous tyrant just a matter of weeks ago selling him the very arms his regime has been using to suppress the rebellion against it.

In 2009 alone, European governments—including Britain and France—sold Libya more than $470 million worth of weapons, including fighter jets, guns and bombs. And before it started calling for regime change, the Obama administration was working to provide the Libyan dictator another $77 million in weapons, on top of the $17 million it provided in 2009 and the $46 million the Bush administration provided in 2008.

Meanwhile, for dictatorial regimes in Yemen, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, U.S. support continues to this day. On Saturday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton even gave the U.S. stamp of approval to the brutal crackdown on protesters in Bahrain, saying the country's authoritarian rulers "obviously" had the "sovereign right" to invite troops from Saudi Arabia to occupy their country and carry out human rights abuses, including attacks on injured protesters as they lay in their hospital beds.

In Yemen, which has received more than $300 million in military aid from the U.S. over the last five years, the Obama administration continues to support corrupt thug and president-for-life Ali Abdullah Saleh, who recently ordered a massacre of more than 50 of his own citizens who dared protest his rule. And this support has allowed the U.S. can carry out its own massacres under the auspices of the war on terror, with one American bombing raid last year taking out 41 Yemeni civilians, including 14 women and 21 children, according to Amnesty International.

Rather than engage in cruise missile liberalism, Obama could save lives by immediately ending support for these brutal regimes. But for U.S. administrations, both Democratic and Republican, arms sales appear to trump liberation. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute documented that Washington accounted for 54 percent of arms sales to Persian Gulf states between 2005 and 2009.

Last September, the Financial Times reported that the U.S. had struck deals to provide Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Oman with $123 billion worth of arms. The repressive monarchy of Saudi Arabia accounts for over half that figure, with it set to receive $67 billion worth of weapons, including 84 F-15 jets, 70 Apache gunships, 72 Black Hawk helicopters, 36 light helicopters and thousands of laser-guided smart bombs – the largest weapons deal in U.S. history.

Instead of forking over $150 million a day to the weapons industry to attack Libya or selling $67 billion in weapons to the Saudis so they can repress not just their own people, but those of Bahrain, we – the ones being asked to forgo Social Security to help pay for empire – should demand those who purport to represent us in Washington stop arming dictators in our name. That might drain some bucks from the merchants of death, but it would give non-violent protesters throughout the Middle East a fighting chance to liberate themselves.

The U.S. government need not drop a single bomb in the Middle East to help liberate oppressed people. All it need do is stop selling bombs to their oppressors. FPH



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Profile
David Dove

BY ALEX WUKMAN

For once Dave Dove isn't smiling. The affable founder of Nameless Sound, who grabbed audiences' attention over two decades ago as part of the seminal ska/funk band Sprawl, rests his hand on his chin and listens in rapt attention as legendary jazz trombonist Roswell Rudd's latest project the Trombone Tribe breathes new life into Fats Waller's often overlooked classic "Blue Turning Gray Over You."

RUDD, REACHING BACK to his days leading a Dixieland band at Yale, lets his trombone ooze sweaty Gulf Coast jazz mixed with fat-back bar blues all over the stage at Diverseworks. His familiarity with the music leads some of those unfamiliar with his career to think he just walked off a New Orleans Second Line, which is strange because he's from New York.

"We've been in Houston a couple of days and we're starting to get the vibe," Rudd says. "It's a very different place than where we come from…but it's a special place." Rudd's drummer, Barry Altschul, kicks off the next song with a Max Roach/Buddy Rich breakbeat that shakes the skins of his pearl colored drum kit. Scattered applause comes from the audience of Houston's improvised music aficionados as Altschul settles into the groove and Rudd and the rest of the band settle in. Almost immediately they start hinting at a melody that's both familiar and strange, and strangely always just out of reach.

At the show's intermission Dove chats with audience members about what's it been like spending the last few days with Rudd and his band, he explains how they guest lectured at one of the many music workshops for inner city and underprivileged youth Nameless Sound puts on every week and how many of the band members had never been to Houston before. Roswell Rudd's performance at Diverseworks is the just the sort of thing Dove has been doing in one way or another since the mid 1990s after Sprawl's rather spectacular implosion, which led to the lead singer kicking over the drummer's kit while the guitarist punched holes in his amp with his instrument, he says he was "pretty lonely."

"There weren't a lot of people who were doing experimental music [then]," says Dove. He goes on to explain how before he had an organization, before he had ever taught a class; he was a musician with ideas about "how conservative music education was." Over a veggie burger, Cesar salad and glass of white wine at Onion Creek Dove describes how, when he was learning to play, "young musicians were rarely encouraged to explore." According to Dove one of the things that frustrated him about traditional music education was the idea that young people weren't encouraged to improvise, compose or learn extended techniques.

Coming up in the DIY culture of the late 1980s and early 1990s gave Dove a perspective that young musicians don't "have to wait to do [their] own music," which may seem like common sense to anyone in the rock or hip-hop scenes, but is antithetical to much academic music education. Dove's focus on teaching young people to use music to express their own feelings and ideas has often rankled some in the academic music establishment who mistake teaching improvisation for ignoring fundamentals. He's quick to counter that assumption.

"What I tell people is that I don't propose a replacement of traditional music education, I propose adding something that is missing," said Dove. He goes on to say that he recognizes that not everyone is going to be interested in walking his path, but then again not everyone is going to be interested in a traditional path either.

"Someone may have the path of learning Chopin or Bach or the Jazz Standards while another person may have a path that uses a turntable or takes apart a piece of electronic equipment. It doesn't make sense to give them [all] the same curriculum," said Dove. However, that doesn't mean that Dove and the rest of Nameless Sound don't have a firm grounding in the basics of music instruction. He explains that the way he got space to hold the first class of what would go on to become Nameless Sound was by agreeing to teach basic music instruction.

"The seed [for Nameless Sound] was planted in 1997. I talked with Alice Valdez the director of MECA [about my ideas] and she said 'If you help us out teaching kids scales we'll give you space to do your thing," said Dove. Within a few years of starting classes at MECA, Diverseworks invited Dove to curate a series of concerts which led to the further evolution of his theories about music education.

"I had the idea of getting Joe McPhee from New York and having him give a workshop to some kids I'd gathered," said Dove. The first workshop was met with a positive response from everyone involved and it encouraged Dove to keep going.

"After a few years my mentor, Pauline Olivarez, said she really liked what we were doing and that we could start a branch of her non-profit in Houston. So in 2001 we became the Pauline Olivarez Foundation Houston," says Dove. He goes to explain that the organization's relationship with Olivarez "made raising money and getting support easier." And that they continued to work with Olivarez's group as they both evolved, the Pauline Olivarez Foundation morphing into the Deep Listening Institute and Dove's group moving back onto their own.

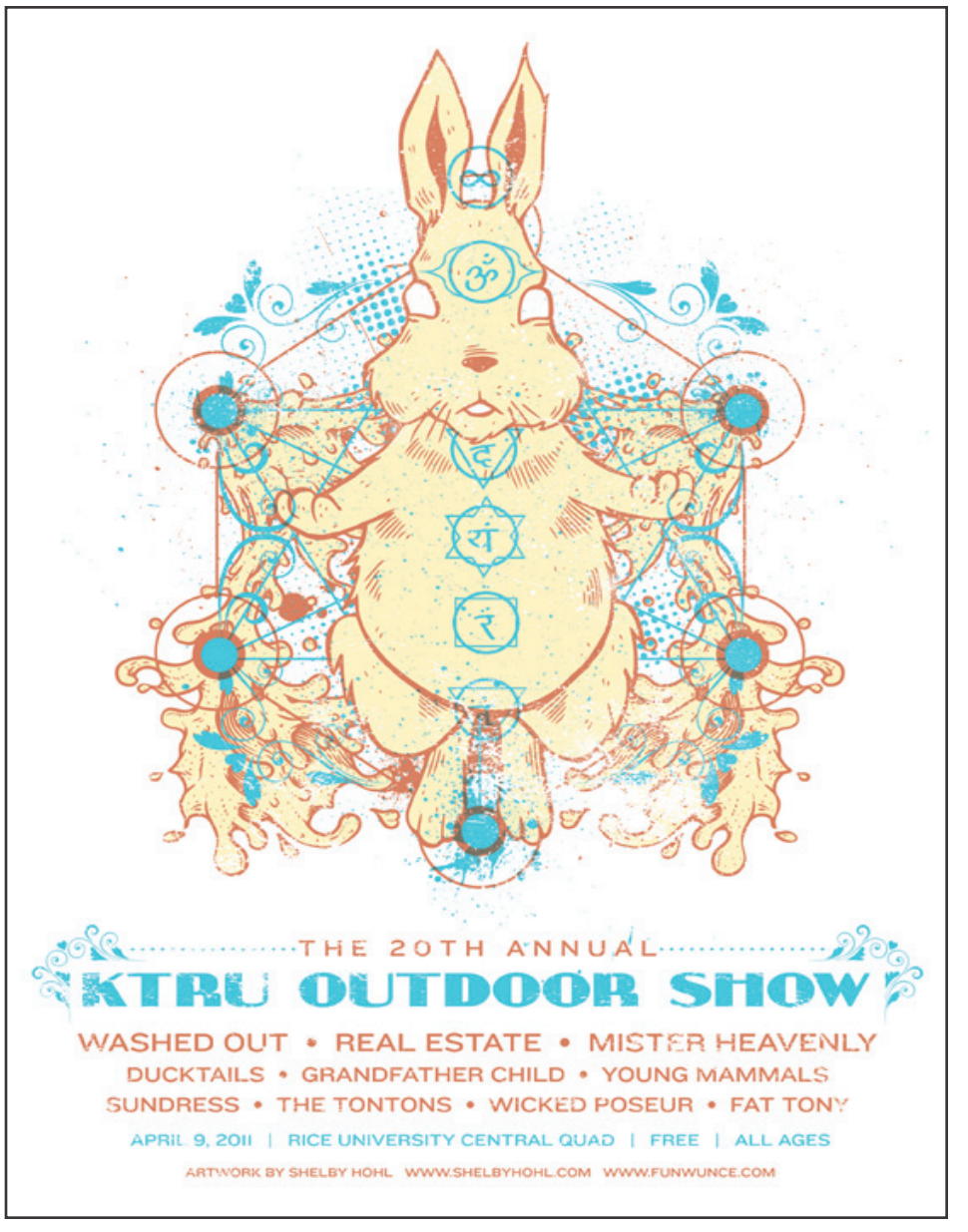
One of the things that have helped make Dove and Nameless Sound the respected members of the music community that they are is who they work with. "We take our classes to homeless children and refugee children. Kids who need the confidence and the knowledge that you can break the rules, you can go your own way, you don't have to follow the preconceived path."

Dove puts down his burger for a moment, wipes his hands and says "there's something no one's ever written about us. You can go out and see experimental or improvised music three or four nights a week. Some of the people we've taught have gone on to become my peers, like Lucas Gorham, Jason Jackson, Sandy Ewen or Jawaad Taylor in New York. You can see the experimental elements in Jawaad's hip-hop music or in something like Grandfather Child, they're still there." **FPH**


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Thousands March In Austin

by John H. Wednesday, Feb. 23, 2011

Several thousand people from all parts of Texas converged on the state capitol to demand the state legislature not enact Arizona type immigration legislation. Tuesday's activities started with a march from a local downtown park, to the state capitol, for a rally. Followed by some legislative visits.

32 buses from around the state arrived through the morning, bringing people from all parts of the state, including 3 from El Paso. There were also contingents from the Rio Grande Valley, Dallas, Corpus, San Antonio, and Houston. By the time the march left for the capitol, there were about 4,000 people.



March in Montrose defends abortion rights

On February 26th, Scores of Houstonians marched from Cherryhurst Park to Menil Park in Montrose as part of the (inter)national day of action Walk for Choice. Here are some totally sweet photos from MelEP.

Peaceful protests are planned for cities around the world in response to Congressional bill H.R. 3. The bill, called the "No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act," was introduced by Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ). Pro-choice activist Raven Geary was horrified, and sprung into action immediately.

Walk for Choice 2011 rallies took place in cities like Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Washington D.C., Minneapolis, Alaska, the United Kingdom, and even Pakistan.

Mohini Lal, one of the event organizers, said H.R. 3 threatens a woman's bodily autonomy.

"The environment of political speech right now is dangerous for women," Lal said. "Women are adults and should be treated as nothing less, but the current actions of Congress threaten individual autonomy on more than a medical level.

Walk for Choice 2011 was created directly in response to the events in Congress surrounding H.R. 3. Women and allies around the world will peacefully protest against limiting a woman's right to choose and the right to have a safe, legal abortion. Abortion is a legal procedure that saves the lives of 70,000 women each year. Walk for Choice will take place in multiple cities on February 26th, 2011. The official Walk for Choice website is http://walkforchoice.tumblr.com.

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Please Send Letters of support for BDS to the Pacifica National Board

by KPFT BDS Committee Wednesday, Mar. 09, 2011 at 2:11 PM

Support the call for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions of Israel at KPFT and in the Pacifica network.

Please address your emails to: pnb@pacifica.org and remember to add your name and information at the bottom. You may also, of course, write your own letter or edit and add in your own thoughts to this letter.

---

http://kpftbds.wordpress.com/2011/03/09/please-send-letters-of-support-to-the-pacifica-national-board/

Pacifica National Board,

Starting on Dec. 14, KPFT 90.1fm began airing during the Open Journal time slot, a regular bi-weekly program called "Voice of Peace," produced by the Israeli Consulate of Houston. The name was taken from a pirate radio show created by an Israeli dissident who opposed settlements and occupation, and was himself oppressed by the Israeli government. KPFT management's decision to give this show free reign for a half an hour every two weeks on KPFT assisted the Israeli Consulate in a co-optation of this legacy.

Peace and justice activists in Houston were shocked and deeply concerned. Many began organizing, emailing, circulating petitions, calling the station, and meeting with management to insist that KPFT must not give open airtime to an official voice of the Israeli government under the auspices of the far-right Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, especially during a time of an active illegal military occupation and bombing. One of the groups that responded began organizing for KPFT to sign on to the BDS campaign, so that situations like this would not occur in the future. The group drafted a BDS statement as follows:

In light of the escalation of human rights violations in the Occupied Territories of Palestine, and until the end of the Israeli military occupation, Palestinians achieve the right of return, and equal rights are achieved for all Israeli Arabs, Pacifica agrees to support the call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions put forth by Palestinian academics and intellectuals by refraining from partnerships with Israeli institutions unless they are specifically anti-occupation.

The management of KPFT next moved to modify the program. Duane Bradley, the station manager announced that the program would no longer be produced by the consulate, and a new producer would be found. The KPFT listeners organizing against the consulate show hoped the new producer or producers would have strong peace and justice qualifications, but that's not what happened. Management replaced the consulate with a series of individuals who each used the show to promote Israel, including Bridge Houston, a group that routinely calls any protest of Israel "anti-Semitic."

KPFT runs shows like Arab Voices and Al Jazeera that are critical of Israel, but of course never support brutality or war-crimes, nor lavish praise on armed parties to hostilities. Programs promoting Israel are doing just that on Pacifica's airwaves. Instead of giving airtime to such programs, management could choose from the many Jewish groups that share a similar mission with Pacifica, such as Jewish Voices for Peace, Rabbis for Human Rights, The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Anarchists Against the Wall, Women in Black, Gush Shalom, and the Jewish Antizionist Network.

Recently, in La Plata, Argentina, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) joined the BDS movement, making their own detailed BDS statement (http://usacbi.wordpress.com/2011/01/22/amarc-world-association-of-community-radio-broadcasters-joins-bds-movement). Instead of leading the way on a crucial human rights issue, Pacifica in Houston is moving in the opposite direction.

Decisions made by KPFT management have allowed several months of bi-weekly Pacfica airtime to be given to pro-Israel propaganda. The management and program director have not moved to correct the error, and the public has not received an apology. We request your help in moving forward a comprehensive BDS statement in the Pacifica network, as we perceive this as the fullest action to address the current situation and prevent pro-colonial propaganda in the future.

sincerely,

The break-out indie film "Flood Streets" premiering at WorldFest Houston., has local connections. "Flood Streets" follows a diverse group of creative malcontents as they struggle to find love, money, and marijuana in the surreal streets of post-storm New Orleans.

Flood Streets premieres at the 44th Annual WorldFest-Houston International Film and Video Festival, Monday, April 11th at 7p.m.



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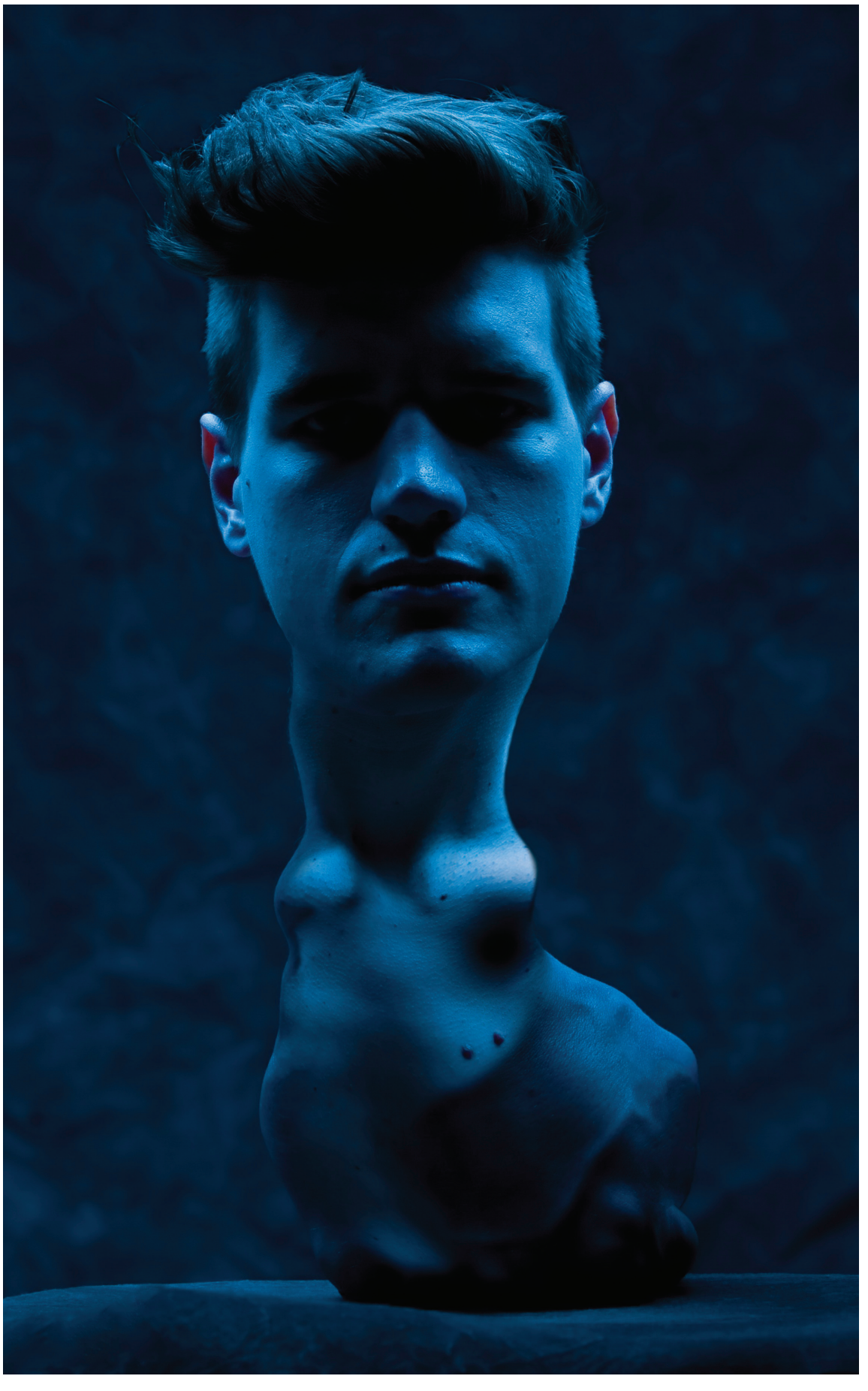
BY ALEX WUKMAN PHOTO BY ANTHONY RATHBUN

Even though she's a little frayed from teaching English at Houston Community College and hurried because she's on her way to a rehearsal,

MILDRED'S UMBRELLA ARTISTIC DIRECTOR Jennifer Decker is in a good place. The company she co-founded with University of Houston Professor John Harvey is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year and is set to debut their eighth full length play by Harvey.

"Harvey's work defines the company's aesthetic," Decker says over a beer at the West Alabama Ice House on one of Houston's all-too-rare perfect spring afternoons. She goes on to explain how her close association with Harvey and his writing has informed the choices of what type of plays Mildred's Umbrella stages. In the decade since Harvey approached her, then still an undergraduate student at UH, about producing one of his plays, Mildred's has come to be recognized as one of the best alternative theatre companies in Houston.

Decker explains that their reputation is built on choosing plays that are "very poetic and language driven." She describes how the first play Harvey showed her was barely qualified as a play. "It was initially a long poem and had very few stage directions," she says. The lack of pre-existing requirements for sets, music or costumes in Harvey's writing is one of the things that Decker finds most exhilarating about working with the man who has been described as the company's resident playwright.



"It allows for more collaboration between musicians, designers, actors, etc." she says. "His shows require a team of people and everyone gets to do something." As the bartender, one of Mildred's Umbrella's regular actresses comes over to ask about the status of Decker's drink she explains that because of the lack of specification in Harvey's scripts the company is free to create "a completely original piece that could not have happened on its own."

The upcoming show "Under the Big Dark Sky," which premieres at Barnevelder Movement and Arts Complex on April 21, is one that seems to define the collaborative approach that Mildred's Umbrella has forged with Harvey. Despite being set in a small seaside resort town the action of the play revolves around the characters of a freak show/carnival that has clearly seen better days. Decker explains that unlike traditional, and current, freak shows that prominently feature people with physical deformities the 'freaks' in Under the Big Dark Sky are more psychological.

"There's a woman who slices off her own skin. The main character, Teresa, is in love with John Keats and walks around reading Keats," says Decker. Aside from lyricism and literary allusions Harvey's plays and Mildred's Umbrella have also come to be known for an unflinching look at darker aspects of human nature and Under the Big Dark Sky is no exception.

"Teresa is constantly sexually molested. There's one scene where she is reading her book and someone comes up and has sex with her and she doesn't even notice," says Decker. Another of the elements that often strikes audiences about the collaboration between Harvey and Mildred's Umbrella are the religious themes, which Decker explains are still present in Under the Big Dark Sky.

"There's a three-headed dog that can tell the future, which is obviously a reference to cerebrums and then there's the father who is trying to resurrect his son and trying to make a deal with God," says Decker as she finishes her beer. Unlike many other small Houston theatre companies Mildred's Umbrella has weathered the ongoing economic downturn rather well. Part of that success comes from smart resource management and part comes from community support.

Decker explains that currently the company has a budget around $30,000 which allows them to put on five shows a year. She states that while five shows is not a lot, it is what the company can afford and that early on they tried longer seasons but it didn't work out. Unlike other Houston theatre companies, Mildred's Umbrella does not have a board filled with well-heeled patrons and Decker is just fine with that.

"I'd rather stay little forever than have my lips glued to some rich person's ass," says Decker. "The best thing about Houston is that the artists support each other, if they didn't I wouldn't have a company. Every show we have people from all over the theatre community comes out."

She goes on to explain that for the last decade the majority of the company's budget has been made up of micro-donations and in-kind support from fellow artists. "We got our start upstairs at Helios. We'd go on at seven and had to be out by nine because the band was going to start setting up," says Decker. "It's good to have people on your side, even if they're not rich. Without people who want to donate $20 we wouldn't have made it this long."

Decker describes how things have started shifting for Mildred's Umbrella; that after a decade of putting on shows they finally received some institutional support. "We got our first grant this season from the Brown Foundation and it's going for Under the Big Dark Sky and our next show Notions of Right and Wrong by Elizabeth Keel, which is like Tarantino meets Alice in Wonderland. That one goes up in July."

Under the Big Dark Sky premieres Thursday, April 21, at Barnevelder Movement and Arts Complex, 2201 Preston, and runs until Friday, April 30, with a pay-what-you-can performance on Monday, April 25. For more information or to make reservations e-mail info@mildredsumbrella.com or call 832-463-0409. **FPH**

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