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Sundance rides into Houston
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November Theater Wrap

Beast-Mode Scorpion Complex

November 2011


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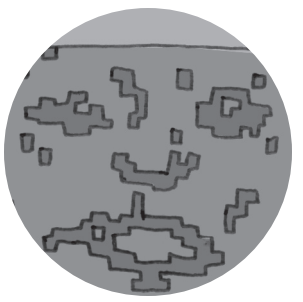

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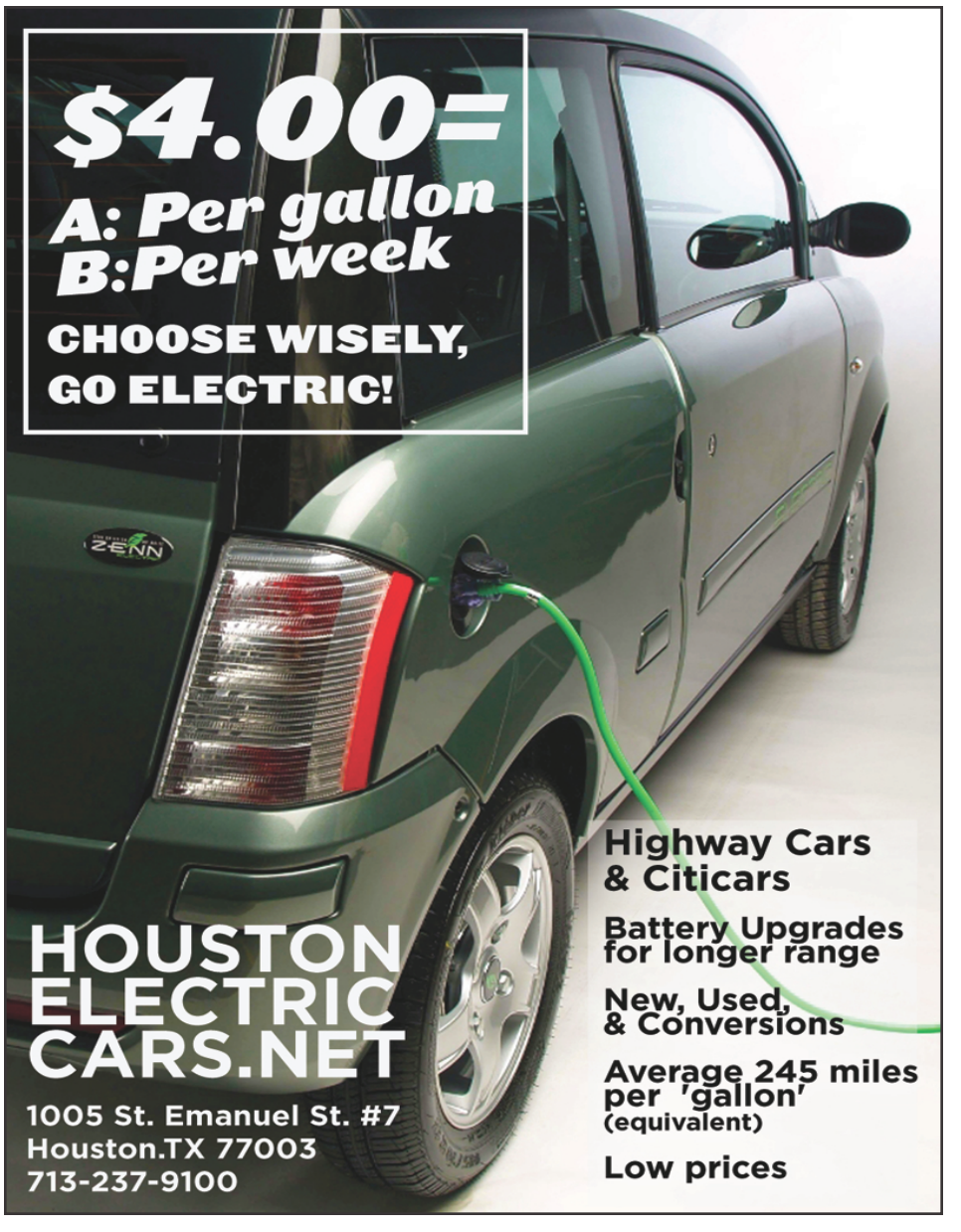
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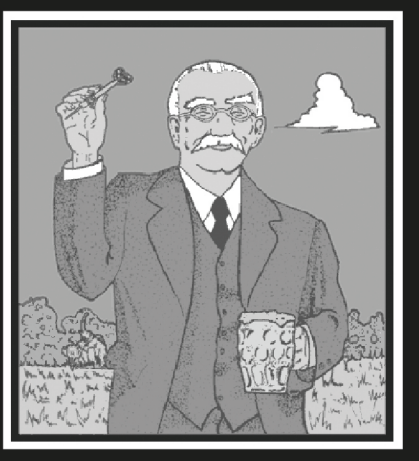
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FEEL FREE TO TAKE US SERIOUSLY

I have always had mixed feelings about Thanksgiving. On one hand, it is a celebration of the near extermination of the indigenous people of this land in order to make way for the European imperialist. On the other hand, we get to eat pie. Pumpkin, chocolate pecan, apple. Add a dollop of ice cream and you may even be able to justify the mass genocide of millions of people. Well, maybe not. Not even close. But either way, as a family of Arab Muslim immigrants, we clung hard to Thanksgiving traditions as Christmas did not hold the same significance for us as it did others. But getting together as a family and engaging in mass gluttony is something we could take part in without losing our cultural and religious heritage. I say us brown folk should stake our own claim on this holiday and manifest our own meaning. And what is that meaning?: Gravy, pie, and mashed taters. However, now that I am trying to get my soft butt in shape I will have to conjure up the supremely enlightened ascetic deep within my jiggly belly and abstain. But things have gone well since the last editor's letter where I bravely displayed my 33-year-old mancakes. I have dropped about 17 pounds, dropped a pant size, and am now able to touch my toes. So again, if you see me walking by with a pastry, slap that shit right out of my hands. That's right, no personal accountability here at all. It's the American way.

BY BUFFALO SEAN

DEBRIS: Smoke Shack



FUCKIN' A. The days are too short. If you look back on the Bush years with reverence for the spontaneous, explosive art exhibits, happenings and performances of the Houston underground scene, you may be disappointed with the poverty of rambunctious energy in the city's current state. Back in the day we trashed an office stocked with cubicles, computers and a canteen filled with vodka at CSAW. Exhibits ended with the lights turned off and indie bands playing in the center of the gallery. The parking lots were the best place to hang out. Artists got married and screamed and fought in the center of an installation of their work. Walls were covered from floor to ceiling with painting, graffiti, cloth, sculpture or glitter. Underground galleries lasted three months, a year and a half, or just a day. Someone took over a convenience store. Artists gathered in a silo to burn paintings. Shows were thrown in apartments, fields, houses, bars, warehouses and empty lots. Yes, if you have nostalgia for the years before the Tea Party, Occupy Wall Street, Angry Birds and iPads, then Friends in High Places at Summer Street Studios is the place to be.

Featuring collaborations between Aimee Jones and Skeez 181 and Skeez and Carole Smith as well as work by Mindy Kober, Nancy Douthey, Aimee Jones and Jason Villegas, High Places intimatizes the gallery space by emulating the anarchic atmosphere of the most recent incarnation of Houston's wild side. "Smoke Shack" is a living room of an installation filled with a comfy couch, chairs and a TV playing classic cartoons on a loop. A bright pink wall of graffiti is studded with photographs, paintings, sculptures and video, mostly collaborations between Aimee Jones and Skeez 181. A teepee of bamboo and shredded, brightly colored cloth hangs over the viewer like a low, enveloping home. The rug is a soft vintage quilt of neon rectangles. "Smoke Shack" is a magnet for small group interaction, encouraging viewers to engage in close quarters, comfortable in their own skin. Nearby sits the remnants of Nancy Douthey's performance piece, a smattering of pastel rags tied in knots draped over an industrial ladder, harmonizing perfectly with the Shack. Across the room hangs "Whitey Biennial Banner", by Jason Villegas. The artist's obsession with cartoon animals, Lacoste and its iconic alligator logo dovetail perfectly with his choice of materials; cut-up tee shirts, clothing and felt. The mythical, heraldic birdman evoked by the Banner looms over the space with incredible weight, bringing an Elks Club or Freemason vibe into the exhibition. Behind a screen lie Mindy Kober's paintings, straining against their edges to burst dragons, lambs, children and rainbows onto the walls of the space. Their explanatory, mystifying style mixes the simplicity of 60's children's books with the complexity of a strange and unfamiliar astrology.

Even though the new world of Houston art is cleaner, more professional, profitable and attractive enough to inspire two new art fairs in 2011, there is still something beautiful about the freewheeling, experimental time when artists claimed the run of the East End and held more sway in Montrose, the First Ward and the Museum District. Those days are over for a generation of artists as developers take over properties and rents rise. It has happened before and it will happen again. There must be a new cohort of rabble-rousers, nutcases, visionaries and ambitious thrill-seekers to poke the corpse of art, a mess of young artists to push things forward. In the meantime, you can check out Friends in High Places at 2500 Summer Street, Studio 1B, through November 5th. You can always look up the artists on facebook after that and check out the pictures. It may be a better way to experience the exhibit anyhow- behind a screen, separated by a lens from the illusion of greatness that time and distance bring. **FPH**

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See site for more shows

Sundance Rides Into Houston



IF YOU'VE BEEN DOWNTOWN LATELY, walking *Barefoot in the Park*, you might have noticed the recent renovation of what used to be the Angelika Film Center. Up until recently you could have been forgiven for thinking that *This Property Is Condemned*, that perhaps the dream of having multiple cinemas that cater to the refined and eclectic tastes of Houstonians was just *A Bridge Too Far*. Indeed, lovers of foreign and independent films felt like they would be forced to live *An Unfinished Life* when the Angelika closed its doors. With the River Oaks left as *The Last Castle* of independent movies in Houston, it seemed like this was a *Situation Hopeless... But Not Serious* for most moviegoers, but an *Indecent Proposal* for those who prefer their movies not to be a Michael Bay fest of explosions and car chases.

A few months ago, however, I heard a rumor from a few people in the *Spy Game* that a certain group was interested in taking over *The Clearing* left by the Angelika. Another cinema downtown would certainly take *The Sting* out of the Angelika's demise I thought, and so *The Chase* was on to find out who *The Candidate* was. It wouldn't take *All the President's Men* or even a team of *Legal Eagles* to find out that it was the *Jeremiah Johnson* of cinema chains, Sundance.

Of course *The Natural* reaction when I found out was to get *Up Close & Personal* with Nancy Gribler, Vice President of Marketing for Sundance Cinemas, to get some answers. According to Gribler, the new Sundance Cinema will be open to the public November 23. Pre-opening benefits will take place for The Houston Cinema Arts Society and MFAH Film Department (November 21), as well as the Montrose Counseling Center and The Galveston Bay Foundation in concert with the Redford Center (November 22).

So why am I so excited? Isn't it just a return to *The Way We Were* you might ask? Not quite. The refurbished eight-screen complex promises to be a unique experience, in line with CEO Paul Richardson and Sundance Group President Robert Redford's goal to "offer movies to the public in a way that [is] pleasurable, and respectful to the patrons and the filmmakers." This is the third theatre for the group, joining San Francisco and Madison, WI. The new cinema will boast reserved seating for all shows, no TV commercials, plush rocking love seats, an art gallery featuring a new local artist every three months, traditional concessions (yes, they have real butter for your popcorn), and best of all, the Sundance Bar.

The Sundance Bar will be a full bar that offers not only fine cocktails, interesting wines, and draft beers, but also freshly made (non-fried) food, desserts and salads which can all be carried to your seat. To top it all off, Sundance is devoted to being as "green" as possible and will have separate bins for recycling as well as real glassware for drinks from the bar.

As for Mr. Redford, apparently he is extremely involved in the company, so maybe, just maybe, you might catch a glimpse of the Sundance Kid himself sometime. **FPH**

BY MICHAEL PENNYWARK

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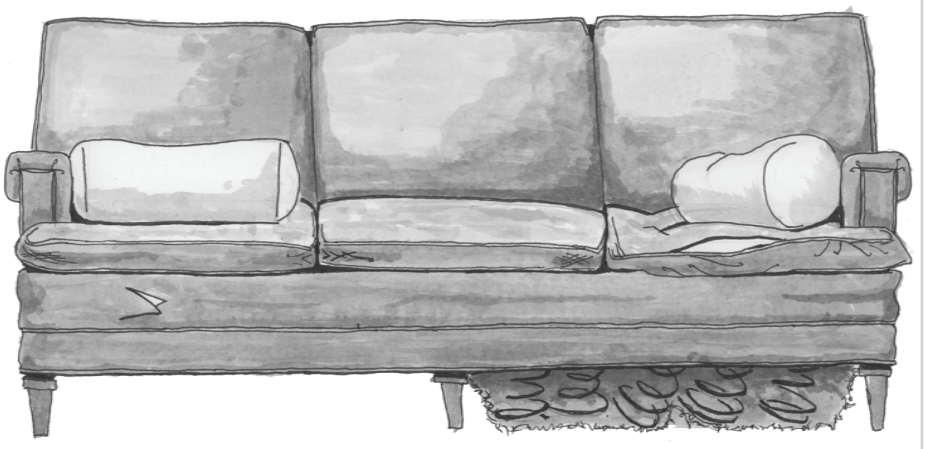
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Hank Hancock is the author of the serial fiction and zine project *Broke,* about Houston during Hurricane Rita.

Harbeer Sandhu is reading from a selection of his new fiction and poetry.

A presentation of works by grant recipients from the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance.

Deluge



BY MICHAEL BERGERON

IT'S BEEN A WAIT OF OVER A YEAR since the Angelika Theater closed in downtown Houston leaving the city without a movie theater devoted to art house films, foreign films along with regular studio movies. Sure some of the slack has been picked up by the MFAH or the Rice Media Center or the Landmark River Oaks Three or the Regal Edwards Grand Palace 24 or even outside to loop at the AMC Studio 30. But for movie mavens who want to see or have the opportunity to choose to see the latest indie film the opening of the Sundance Cinemas Houston on Wednesday November 23, in the space formerly occupied by the Angelika, means a deluge of films that would otherwise bypass Space City.

And bypass us they have. Up to the shuttering of the Angelika in September of 2010 there's always been more than one theater serving the art house scene since I moved here in the late 70s. Currently there's only the RO3, the same theater that in the 80s was a repertory house playing two different films a night or over 50 various films a month. (That same theater also used to serve free hot tea in that Reagan decade, which I know was laced with marijuana stems.)

I get it, movies aren't the attraction they were when I was growing up in terms of audience participation, and even if they were people in my age demographic don't attend films with the kind of frequency of young dating couple. But that's not how this doggie daddy rolls. I want to be able to see whatever new Lars von Trier film is rolling down the pike. I want to see the latest foreign film that rolled out in Gotham the week previously before my only option is DVD or streaming. All those films from Magnolia Pictures that played at the RO3 throughout the year as weekend midnight movies (everything from 13 Assassins to Tucker and Dale vs. Evil) should've had regular daytime and nighttime engagements in a theater. All the films that didn't get released in Houston this year because they're handled by smaller distributors that also premiere the same films day and date on the internet via limited streaming windows should've played at least for a one-week lock-in at a theater. But they didn't because there simply weren't enough screens or in the case of day and date releases because bigger movie chains like AMC won't book those films precisely due to the day and date issue. On a side note, watch the major studios over the next few years try to emulate in some way the day and date economic model.

Movies are still one of the least expensive forms of outside the house entertainment; just compare the cost of going to the ballpark or taking in an opera. Plus there's the cool factor of seeing films in a brand new theater. At least there you know the projector bulbs are new and offering their greatest potential lumens. The seats are comfortable and not yet broken in. Remember the last newest theater inside the loop (Grand Palace) opened over ten years ago. A recent visit to the Studio 30 (nearly 20 years old) turned into a nightmare when they turned the lights on full before the movie and revealed caked gunk inside the armrest cup holders that looked like it might've been alive at one time.

The manager of the new Sundance Cinemas Houston is Rob Arcos, who formerly managed the River Oaks Three and Greenway Three back during the halcyon years. Arcos also ran a successful DVD retail establishment MOVIES! The Store on Richmond most recently and was always there with a smile and more than one box of free posters for customers to peruse. The Sundance Theater chain also sports theaters in San Francisco and Madison.

There's a perception of people that tends to hold art house theaters in higher regard that bigger megaplexes. The Sundance Cinemas Houston will offer eight screens. Because people know I cover movies I have been asked often in the last year about the new Sundance opening. In some ways this support of alternative viewing fare reminds one of the advocacy against tearing down the RO3. I will ask those who ask me what the last film they saw at the RO3 or the Angelika was, and for some strange reason over 80-percent of the time they reply Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. I say something like wow man that film came out in 2004 and it's now 2011. They reply something to the effect that they have a Hulu account for fewer than ten bucks a month and they don't get out as much.

Also funny is the way that some people who I explain the new Sundance paradigm to keep referring to the new cinema as the "Angelika." That's like having your girlfriend call you by her ex-boyfriend's name because she's used to that name. Although, I still call the Olsteen Lakewood Church on Hwy 59 The Summit and never used the title Compaq Center.

Now people have a reason to get out of the house and see a movie on the big screen because there's a new theater in town, the Sundance Cinemas Houston.

AFF

A recent trip to Austin for the Austin Film Festival was vital to recharge the cinematic and writing battery that I call my brain. The AFF specializes in screenwriting and the emphasis is on what makes writer's tick. Panels and seminars focus on nuts and bolts issues peculiar to the written word while film screenings span unknown indies to hot ticket premieres. Plus it's Austin, people are there to have a good time, the weather's cool and everyone's smiling a lot.

Landing at the Driskill Hotel check-in room I had my badge in minutes complete with the picture I had emailed the festival earlier last month. I thought the headshot made my lips look a little red. When I relayed this information to someone at one of the festival's many schmoozing parties they replied that I did indeed at that moment look like I was wearing lipstick. Much like SXSW's film festival the AFF has multiple sponsors and plentiful receptions throughout the event. What's different from SXSW is the vibe; less hurried, more laid back. At least half of the people you meet are likely to have written a movie script or produced some kind of media. Some of the best conversations I had were with people waiting in line to see a movie. I literally struck up a conversation with a group of high school students while in line to see Jeff Who Lives At Home when one of them remarked on the redness of my lips.

It seems that AFF has a program for AISD students who've studied film as an extra-curricular activity that allows them comp passes. The group of five was among students at their respective high school who'd first adapted a novel (written by an Austin author) and then filmed it with school provided equipment. These precocious teens knew their cinema and that provided hearty movie banter. Another line later that same night before the movie Shame placed me between a correspondent for the Austin American Statesman who hipped me to the fact that Johnny Depp was playing at the Continental Club that very night and a young lady (with her boyfriend) who's parents own and operate the newspaper Big Bend Sentinel published in Marfa. Marfa will prove to be a pivotal conversation talking point throughout my stay. I mention that I've been to Marfa over a dozen times for star shower viewing and I maintain that the Marfa Lights are more imaginary than desert swamp gas. She tells me she saw the Marfa Lights when she was ten and that they're real.

Panels I attended the first two days offered personal reflections on writing and directing. Whit Stillman (d. Metropolitan, Last Days of Disco), Lawrence Kasdan (d. Body Heat, Big Chill, screenwriter for Empire Strikes Back) and Shane Black (wr. Lethal Weapon, Long Kiss Goodnight, director of Kiss Kiss Bang Bang) offered frank, amusing and personal stories that couldn't help but be downright inspirational. Stillman's back with a new film next year, Damsels in Distress, and discussed how as a director he has to grapple with the same screenwriter every time, himself. Kasdan's panel was a one-man presentation in a cozy small room (Driskill's Victorian Balcony) that's only available through one elevator. The super cold air-condition atmosphere was heated by the packed crowd and Kasdan's presen-

tation took on the manner of a casual fireside chat. Topics covered included how he got hired to write Empire Strikes Back. Kasden was delivering his script for Raiders of the Lost Ark and George Lucas asked him to look over Leigh Brackett's script for Empire. Brackett had passed away in 1978 and the script needed revision. Kasdan told Lucas he hadn't read the Raiders script yet, and what if he didn't like it. No worries, Lucas told him he'd call and rescind the offer. Kasdan gets his best laugh when he recounts the script meeting where Lucas revealed a major plot point. "Darth Vader is Luke's father." "Really, no shit?" At another bigger panel the next day someone asks Kasdan a very, very specific question about Han Solo's character in Return of the Jedi. Kasdan admits he really can't remember that bit of revision after so many years and that the query is "geeky."

Black's panel was another one-person affair with Black addressing a capacity Citadel Room. Your humble scribe was sitting on the floor. The subject was Raising Stakes, Reversals, and Payoffs. Black used the old television series Hee Haw in a most illustrious way. That CBS hayseed variety show had a running gag where two characters (Can't remember if it was stars Buck Owens and Roy Clark.) traded one-liners that relied on the reversal.

I jumped out of an airplane and my parachute didn't work.
That's bad.
No, that's good I had a spare chute.
That's good.
No, that's bad, that chute had a hole in it."
That's bad.
No that's good, because I was headed for a haystack.
That's good.
No that's bad, the haystack had a pitchfork sticking up out of it.
That's bad.
No that's good because I missed the pitchfork.
That's good.
No that's bad because I missed the haystack.

At times Black spoke with the intention of giving a mea culpa that would allow listeners to avoid similar sinkholes on the way to achievement. "I stare at the blank page and I feel like a fraud. I've had ten of my scripts made into movies and yet it becomes harder to create each time." Then Black adds to not feel sorry for him because he's putting the finishing touches on a script up in his room that's due in a couple of weeks: Iron Man 3. Black tells people to come up and introduce themselves throughout the course of the festival; this is guy who wants to talk sincerely about craft. The Austin Film Festival is populated with people who want to talk.

Walking back to my car later that night I see Stillman standing on the corner on his way back to his hotel. I strike up a conversation asking him about his new film. Stillman tells me he's not moving to Austin contrary to hints otherwise during his panel on Character Voices. "Austin is a city with buildings and concrete, just like New York." Then Stillman asks me about Marfa. He's driving to parts West and he was thinking about stopping there. I proceed to give him a ten-minute harangue about the dozen times I've been to the city. I tell him the Marfa Lights are a mass hallucination.

Films I took in during the festival included Martha Marcie May Marlene. I had seen this film the previous month but with a small audience and wanted to see how it worked in the 1100 seat Paramount. MMMM is a film where you want to discuss the ending shot with people who saw it afterwards. Everyone has a different take on what happened. The Nick Ray restored We Can't Go Home Again was a prime example of guerilla style filmmaking, itself wedged between films like Tobe Hooper's Eggshells\and Dennis Hopper's The Last Movie. Friday night also saw the regional premiere of The Rum Diary with Johnny Depp and director Bruce Robinson in attendance. The Q&A was spirited to say the least. Depp has hopefully resurrected Robinson's career as the colorful director of such cult films as Withnail & I, and How To Get Ahead in Advertising hasn't helmed a film since 1992's Jennifer Eight. Robinson nails the inner meaning of Hunter S. Thompson's novel even while adding such items as an adrenochrome type drug not in the book (but referenced from Thompson's Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas). From the Duplass Brothers, Jeff Who Lives At Home (early Spring release date) is a perfect movie with an Aristolean sense of the unity of time and space. Shame, which opens in December, will leave audiences shocked and repelled or wanting even more. This salacious movie from British auteur Steve McQueen follows the mindset of a Manhattan executive (Michael Fassbender) addicted to sex. At times the tone of the film reminded me of The Night Porter, not really so much for the content as the mood. **FPH**





music
BY KWAME M. ANDERSON

SO HERE'S THE THING, a zombie apocalypse. Reading the wrong book, a detriment to my already fragile sanity, I watched the Republican debates. All of them are absolutely horrifying. They were talking about making a 12 foot high electrical fence or something of that nature. So, you know, you look at Occupy Everything and Gaddafi's corpse and Michael Jackson autopsy photos, and then you read about zombies. The collapse of the financial system, the privatization of air and atoms, and then you ponder what if? Like what does the week before Armageddon look like-- will it be like a series of disasters or will it be like normal one day, and the next it's like Cloverfield? I don't know, like who really knows, just this feeling of unease, it's getting too weird. So, there I am driving, looking out the window, walking in the parking lot ready to use my car keys as a knife, shuffling my children from one place to the next, and on top of that reading faux apocalyptic literature. The imagination, once a haven, now a hell; sleep, what is sleep, an opportunity to be gotten, by them, whoever they may be: zombies, the government, the robots, the neverending threat of plague and disease…

Anyway, music, and live performance of music, the reason I have this designated space, at one time it was a strike against the man, now the man as an idea exists in the antiquity that was purchasing music and genteel capitalism. The rickety design shaketh in its borrowed boots.



THE OH SEES 11/7 AT DEAN'S CREDIT CLOTHING

TUNING NOTES

11/7/11 / THE OH SEES / DEAN'S CREDIT CLOTHING

The spirit, much is made of it. Whatever that mystical feeling that reanimates the corpse of rock n' roll is, it is present in the The Oh Sees. Once you believed because it was a certain thing, it is still that thing to the Oh Sees, raw and primal, overused adjectives, appropriate nonetheless for lack of another way of describing the sound emanting from these computer speakers. "Warm Slime" was the last assault. They have a wonderful song called "It Killed Mom", blues and R and B, and riot and horror. You move, you groove, you throw out like 10 records that used to be your favorite. You've forgotten, remember, The Oh Sees.

11/11/11 / METHOD MAN
WITH BIG K.R.I.T, CURREN$Y & SMOKE DZA / WAREHOUSE LIVE

Seriously, I have not heard a Method Man album in years, but that is how highly I regard Tical, well not really the whole album, mostly Sub Crazy, regardless…Method Man is a heavy hitter, arguably one of the greatest pure rappers still walking, unapologetic and representative of the time when the phrase "your shit is corny" applied, as in Lil Wayne "your shit is corny dawg!" Big K.R.I.T. is one of the most important artists of this time- his shit is far from corny, dawg. Both of his mixtapes channel the spirit of Pimp C and StokleyCarmichel. People say that hip hop is dead, no real deviation there, it's possibly true.

TUNES AND NOTES

BONNIE PRINCE BILLY / WOLFROY GOES TO TOWN / DRAG CITY

I am not of the hip to Will Oldham troupe, but I am somewhat hip. I dug some Palace and I was a fan of I See Darkness, but on the whole, I 'm not completely up on his steez. However, Wolfroy Goes To Town is a great album in the tradition of songs and lyrics. Oldham has a voice that signifies his music, but he does not sit restfully in the comfortable seat of complacency. Classic songwriting, a grandueur of subtlety, "As boys we fucked each other, now we lie and smile," or "Fat men smiling, bearded men, with blue eyes shining, doubt within." No song here treads the line- these song pierce the conscious, they know the darkness in you, they know your pain. Punch that mirror due not to frustration but the desire to bleed.

MICKEY NEWBURY / THE AMERICAN TRILOGY / DRAG CITY

Mickey Newbury has a history I know nothing of, but Kris Kristofferson and some classics are involved. I would say it matters to more of historicist than I would claim to be, but these songs are good. Darn good! Newbury sings of the spaces between, the faint light of passing cars in a dark room, the passing scent of a lover, the article left behind as a reminder, too hard to forget and too painful to ignore, the last words that linger, the resolve of loss. Love songs are great when they speak of love, no blame, no retribution, just love, the unsolved, the thing beyond…We all know in love there are no heroes, only stories and moments, magnified and frozen. It's not as much about her, but more about it, or her as it, or what it has done to her or him. **FPH**

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Chili Trio
(Chili Peppers Tribute)
Nude Dragons
(Soundgarden Tribute)
Nov. 11 - Roxy Dioxide with Trey Gadler & Dead Man's Hand
Nov. 18 - Highway To Hell
(AC/DC Tribute)
Nov. 25 - Carlos Santana Tribute
(by La Raza Connection)
performed by La Raza Connection
Dec. 2 - Eightyplus

SATURDAYS
Nov. 5 - GoGirlsmusic.com Musicfest
Nov. 12 - Abbey Rode
(Beatles Tribute)
Already Gone
(Eagles Tribute)
Double Vision
(Foreigner Tribute)
Nov. 19 - Black Dog
(Led Zeppelin Tribute)
Nov. 26 - Victim
Dec. 3 - Band TBA

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November 12
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Earshot, Dimitri's Rail, Guts To Glory, Warrior Spirit, Dev Electric, Signal Rising, South, Lost Element, Carmeci, Weston Brown

FRIDAYS
Nov. 4 - Spare Heart
(Rush Tribute)
with Geddy Perry
(Rush/Journey Triubute)
Nov. 11 - Spiral Out
(Tool Tribute)
Priests Of Hiroshima
(Rage Against The Machine Tribute)
Nude Dragons
(Soundgarden Tribute)
Nov. 18 - Harem Festival
"CD Release Party"
with
Hacksaw Man
The Abyss
Nov. 25 - Band TBA
Dec. 2 - The Chromatics

SATURDAYS
Nov. 5 - Chromatics
Nov. 12 - ROCK4WARRIORS Benefit
featuring
Earshot, Dimitri's Rail, Guts To Glory, Warrior Spirit, Dev Electric, Signal Rising, South, Lost Element, Carmeci, Weston Brown
Nov. 19 - Metal Maiden
(Iron Maiden Tribute)
Slip Of The Snake
(Whitesnake Tribute)
Nov. 26 - The Fab Five
(Tribute To The Beatles and the 60s)
Dec. 3 - Foo Fakers
(Foo Fighters Tribute)

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Interview: Tyagaraja

BY RAMON MEDINA | PHOTO BY MARK C. AUSTIN

Say what you want about Tyagaraja Welch. You can love or hate his music but you have to respect his sincerity, honesty, and uncompromising vision. This month, Welch kicks off his tour of India at Kohn's.

EXPLAIN THE TOUR.

We've been to India many times now. We've sought out deep austere practices, traveled to sacred places, and studied in depth. So, this time, we have a clearer focus of going there for what we call "work."

We have some friends in Mumbai [who are] encouraging us because the underground scene is blowing up and if you have a right state of mind you can make anything happen. So, they pushed us over the edge. We were going out to India again anyway so this time we just changed our focus and we're really going there to pursue music and art.

THE PREVIOUS JAUNTS WEREN'T JUST MUSIC TRIPS?

Not completely. If I'm being entirely honest, I feel that most of the general public that I perform for and even some of my close friends don't really understand what we are doing. First, I was Jonathan, then I came back from some inner quests and studies with my teacher as Tyagaraja. It was just frankly weird to some. It took time for people to realize that this was not an act; I live and breathe this lifestyle and this trip to India makes sense.

HOW SO?

...because of my reverence and understanding of Indian culture, I feel we have a deeper chance of connecting with people. Some young Indians reject their traditional/cultural upbringings in their search for something else, but at the same time being Indian isn't something they can escape. We can connect with their eastern and western identities aaannnnddd we play amazing powerful rock music! Our music is just as authentic as anything else in our lives. It's not some western bubblegum pop music, it's the real deal. Not that we are abandoning our own country, it's just that I feel more at home in India and we'll be able to share with each other to make a very beautiful thing. We also aim towards bridging the gap between East and West through music, dance, and through open dialogue, which we hope to document and film.

...In India, people who give up material life for the search of God and inner beauty can be highly revered. I've never seen more pure-hearted devotion in a group of people than I have seen in India. That is something I value. Love and devotion can carry you very far.

...upon seeing that, how did that affect you?

I exploded into millions of pieces of joy and covered the landscape with a blanket of love and gratitude. I truly felt unworthy to witness such a thing! It made me want to seek my inner-self even more. It also put my whole life into perspective. That is something that this country lacks. At the same time with "Occupy Wall Street", you can see the pure devotion toward fellow people in the hearts of our American youth. It's encouraging.

WHAT DID YOU MEAN EARLIER BY "WORK" IN THE TOUR?

My wife was laid-off and I quit my job to dive into my music full time. For us art, music, and life are work. It's amazing and liberating and very difficult; you never really know if you are still sane.

The thing about India is that people still read the newspaper there and millions live in concentrated areas. The press can carry you a long way because there is such a mob mentality there. As soon as you hit, millions are watching you. If you work hard and are aggressive with your passions, you can make anything happen in India. That work ethic is applicable universally, but is taken to another level in India. Plus, we actually stand out quite a lot in India. What I am and what I do is not that common over there. Only in the last 10-20 years have they started fusing more rock guitar and music into Bollywood movies. Not that Bollywood is everything, but... as soon as something comes out in Bollywood, it's instantly a huge success. Plus, there is a huge movement of young people mobilizing against corruption and this music and the scene goes hand in hand with that.

HOW HAS INDIA AFFECTED YOUR MUSIC?

My experiences there – especially this last trip– left a huge impression in my subconscious and every single stream of thought has come out of that. My newest song, "The Meaning of Life," was spawned from that.

I went to the famous Meenakshi temple in Madurai. It's extremely powerful – some parts date back to 3,000 years. I sat for 8 hours a day for 3 days inside the temple meditating. I became intoxicated with the dance of the temple. I was in a dancing love affair with the energy that some may call God. I can draw on this experience at any time. It made me realize that time is only in the mind, while memories and history are all piled inside of God consciousness – constantly happening at every second – this is the basis of my entire thought process.

DOES THAT PLAY INTO MUSIC?

Music is the voice of God or angels. It can also be the voice of hatred and anger. It's how you harness it. I have no control over what I do; I am merely a vessel. The energy of music surges through me. When I'm singing, it's my deepest trance-like state. It's when I bare my soul and if you ever want to see what I look like from the inside, all you have to do is watch me sing. I'm not saying I'm divine, I'm just saying that I have no control. I feel that these messages come out for a reason. I'd be wasting it if I didn't share.

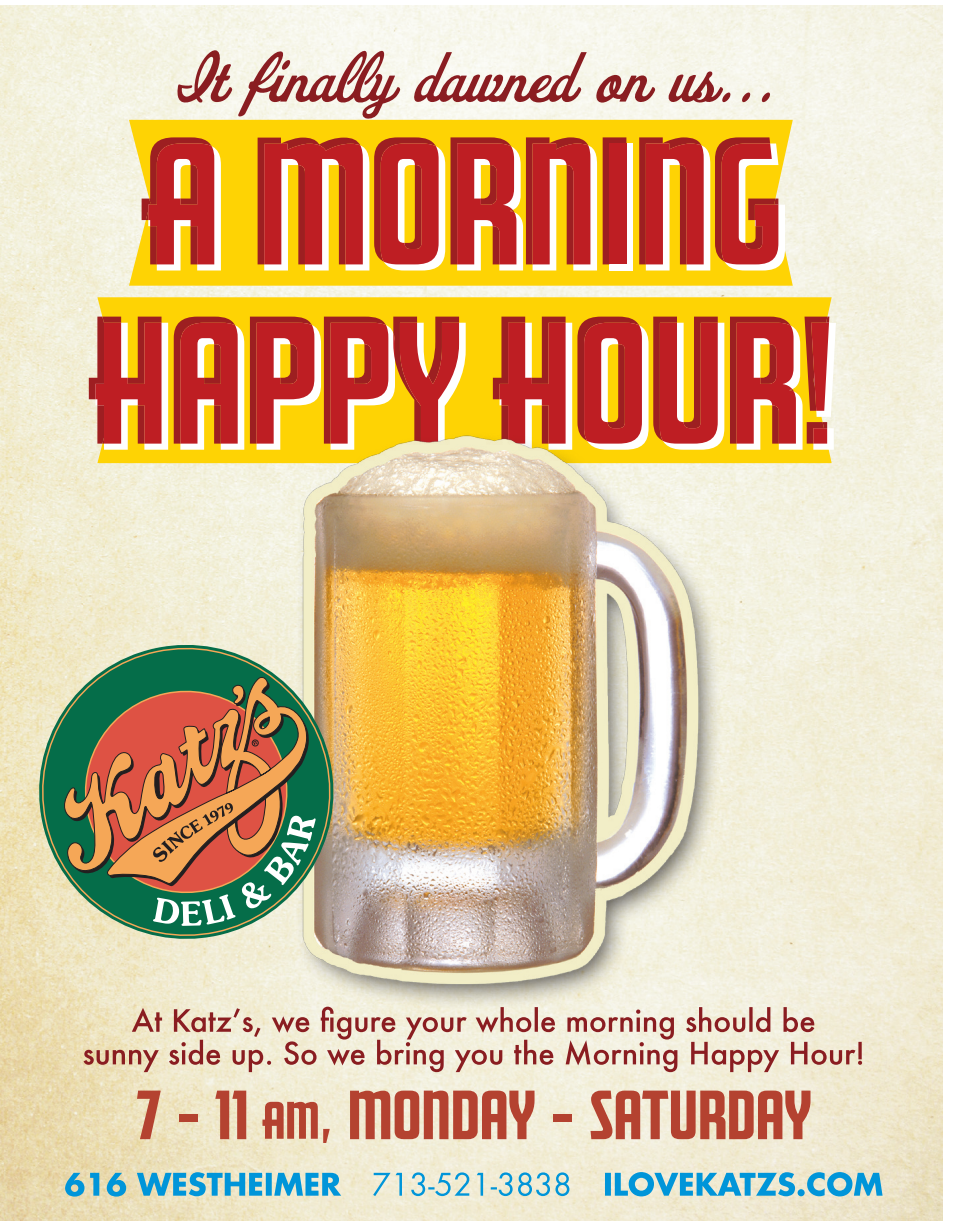
I have a song "We Will Meet Again" [that] goes, "All it really says is to love all/ we all want someone who cares and understands/ I knew it'd be you." That's really all there is to it. People just want love and most have been deprived of it in one way or another. That might be why people feel so uplifted at our shows. That's all I'm offering from my heart when I sing, love. FPH

The Tyagaraja India Tour Kick Off is Saturday November 5th at Khon's on the Roof Top.
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Interview:
BY OMAR AFRA

Rivers

DEVOID OF ANY OBVIOUS GIMMICKS, Rivers has a blatant Zep-blues soundscape with a garage-rock moral compass. In just a few months Rivers has managed to get quite a bit of attention and garnered great crowds, choice shows, and a nomination for Houston Press Best New Band. Does this mean that a band does not always need all the belts and whistles to make a few waves? Scary.

YOUR BAND DOES NOT HAVE ANY JANGLY GUITARS, KID-SIZED KEYBOARDS, AUXILIARY DRUMS, OR GLOCKENSPIELS. HOW THE HELL DO YOU EXPECT TO GO ANYWHERE WITHOUT SUCH PRE-REQUISITE INDIE-AESTHETICS?

Well, our goal isn't to meet any prerequisites based on trends or what people think. Our goal is to make a sound that is true to ourselves with or without glockenspiels. We just like to play what we know and do what we do.

BUT SERIOUSLY, IN A VERY SHORT AMOUNT OF TIME QUITE A FEW PEOPLE HAVE STARTED PAYING ATTENTION TO Y'ALLS BAND. WHY?

Well, we feel that our sound is pretty straightforward and a lot of people are able to relate to the vibes we give. There are multiple types of sounds combined into one; we just like to let the music do the talking.

SOME BANDS SPEND EVERY LAST AVAILABLE SECOND WORKING OUT KINKS IN SONGS BEFORE THEY ARE PRESENTED LIVE. SOME SLOWLY MOLD IDEAS OVER TIME. WHICH ARE YOU?

We definitely mold our ideas over time. It's important to give the song some time to develop and let it work itself out. For instance, we could think we have a song down but after playing it multiple times we can add more or take parts away. We just do what feels right.

WHAT DOES YOUR REHEARSAL SPACE SMELL LIKE RIGHT NOW? WHAT'S THE MOST SHAMEFUL ACT THAT HAS EVER HAPPENED THERE?

Ass. And as for the most shameful act, it's a pretty tight place so there is plenty of unnecessary rubbing up against each other and the usual "male bonding" time.

WHAT IS THE END GAME MUSICALLY FOR THIS BAND? KEEP IT SIMPLE OR PRODUCE TIMELESS EPIC MASTERPIECE?

The end game for us is to just keep writing songs and doing what we feel is enjoyable. If we get picked up along the way that would be amazing, if not all is well and we will keep playing.

As for the masterpiece, we will keep that bad boy as simple and epic as possible.

FILL IN THE BLANKS:

I am afraid that *government* will one day take away our *freedoms* and force us to *drink* from their *cup*. FPH

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Interview:

Chris Ryan's Time

INTERVIEW & PHOTO: RAMON MEDINA



You can hear Time at http://droneaircraft.bandcamp.com

MANY PEOPLE KNOW CHRIS RYAN from, among other endeavors, The Energy and Black Congress. Yet, what caught my attention wasn't those high profile bands but a small solo project Ryan released quietly via Bandcamp – Time. In a music scene where many bands seem to be treading similar territory, Time turns its compass around and aims for other worlds and does so with an unrelenting drive of pounding drums, a wash of echo drenched vocals, and chiming trippy guitars that drill right through your skull and out into another dimension. It's music that you don't need drugs to enjoy but they sure as hell don't hurt when you hit play. In short, Time is simply modern Texas psych at its finest. We tracked down Ryan last month to ask him about the project.

YOU ALREADY PLAY IN THE ENERGY AND BLACK CONGRESS, WHY THE NEED TO DO A SOLO PROJECT?

I've always had some sort of solo project going. Mostly it's just ambient noise or drone type stuff that I record whenever I get the itch, but that stuff just stays on a 4 track tape in the closet. With Time, I felt like maybe there was a little more substance there, and the people I showed it to seemed to like it, so I figured I would put together an albums worth of stuff and throw it out there. Playing in bands with other people is great, but there's something sort of therapeutic about taking all that noise that's bouncing around in your head and putting it to tape.

I DON'T THINK I'VE HEARD INFLUENCES LIKE SPACEMEN 3, RIDE, AND KRAUTROCK COME THROUGH BEFORE IN YOUR OTHER BANDS. WHAT GIVES?

I'm not going to lie and say that I've been listening to Spacemen 3 since '89 or whatever. Of course I'd heard Spacemen 3 and Spirtitualized before, and obviously stuff like Hawkwind and other Krautrock stuff, but really it wasn't until after I recorded the first couple Time songs that someone said "Hey this reminds me of _____." or "you must have been listening to a lot of _____." and I thought maybe I should give that kind of stuff more of a listen, so I did. That's how the Spacemen 3 cover came about. Honestly, when I started recording this stuff I was mostly listening to stuff like Skullflower, Deep Purple and The Coloured Balls. People keep telling me all these bands that it reminds them of, and I'm so terrible at keeping up with music, that it's bands that I hadn't ever really listened to. So I have kind of made it a point more recently to listen to and read about more Psych or Krautrock stuff. I'm not sure if that's a good thing, as far as what will come out the other side, musically. I always have this fear of "Oh this sounds too much like that band, or this song.", so maybe I shouldn't be listening too hard?

TEXAS PSYCH HAS A PRETTY ILLUSTRIOUS HISTORY. WHAT MADE YOU THROW YOUR HAT IN THAT RING?

(Laughing) I'm definitely not trying to throw my hat in anyone's ring. I live in Texas, and I guess you would call the music psychedelic, but I don't think it really has much to do with, or is even close to the level of something like the Elevators or Red Krayola. It probably just ended up sounding the way it does because I'm honestly not very proficient at the instruments I play, but psych music seems to be a little repetitive and blues based, and those are two things that I can do. I'm more concerned with the overall mood and atmosphere of the song than anything else. One day I hope to figure out some great songwriting secrets and cool chord changes, but there is something about just playing the same riff or chord over and over again that puts you in a kind of trance. That's more of what I'm going for.

IS THIS TOTALLY SOLO OR DID YOU HAVE A LITTLE HELP FROM OTHER FOLKS?

Totally solo. I thought about having some other people play on it, but then I kind of made it a point to make it all me. Between however many bands I am in, I think I put out six actual records last year. I wanted to do something that was just me. I'm kind of a control freak like that.

HOW DID YOU APPROACH THE SONGWRITING AND PRODUCTION AND HOW WAS THAT DIFFERENT THAN WRITING AND RECORDING IN YOUR OTHER BANDS?

As far as songwriting goes, there really wasn't any, in terms of getting things ready to record. I wrote the songs as I was recording them. Normally I would just mic up the bass and just start playing whatever was going on in my head, and if I thought it sounded cool, I would hit record. After that, I would just build on it from there and start layering stuff on one at a time. I record bands all the time, and normally it's this whole involved thing with setting up a bunch of microphones and doing things a certain way, and I didn't really feel like doing that for this. I kind of made a rule that I was going to keep a minimal approach to everything, just to keep things from getting boring. Everything was pretty much one take. If I totally fucked it up, then I would start over, but I didn't really wanna spend all of my time running back and forth hitting the record button. Plus, that's what delay and reverb is for, hiding your bad notes! I would throw 2 or 3 mics up to record the drums, and not really worry about if I was getting killer sounds or not. Mostly I just wanted to keep things creative. If there was a microphone that normally only gets used to record guitar, then I would use it to record the drums. The nice thing about recording things as they come, on a song by song basis, is that everything ends up sounding a little different.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR TIME?

I'm recording more songs now for another album. I'm not sure when that will be done. Right now it's kind of Energy and Black Congress time. The Energy just recorded two songs for a 7 inch and just wrote 9 new songs for a couple other releases, so we're gonna be working on those for a little bit. Black Congress is about to record six songs for an L.P. or that's the plan at least, but we like sitting around talking shit to each other more than we like playing music together, so that L.P. might take awhile. **FPH**

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"I get by because of the people who make a special effort to shop here - mostly young men - who spend all their time looking for deleted Smith singles and original, not rereleased - underlined - Frank Zappa albums. Fetish properties are not unlike porn. I'd feel guilty taking their money, if I wasn't.... well... kinda one of them. "
– Rob Gordon (John Cusack) From High Fidelity

BY AMANDA HART

The Heights fiddin' to get a record shop

IF SOMEONE HAD ASKED ME A MONTH AGO what was missing from the Heights neighborhood I probably would have said absolutely nothing. Soon we won't even be void of a fucking Wal-Mart. It had never occurred to me that the few times I had picked up records in the Heights it was at a thrift store or a vintage clothing store on 19th Street. So when I started hearing murmurs about the possibility of this changing in the near future my feet, heart and ears did a little dance. Heights Vinyl will soon be the newest edition to the Heights family. It will be nestled conveniently next door to Onion Creek at 3122 White Oak Boulevard, Suite D. I sat down with Craig T. Brown, the great proprietor of this glorious Heights family addition, to chat about how and why this all came about.

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO OPEN A RECORD STORE?
I've always wanted to open a record store since as far back as I can remember but it wasn't until recently that I had the resources to do it. And then once I had the funds I found it hard to find a business model to look to for guidance due to the digital boom we currently live in. So as the record store began to die it sort of propelled me in that direction in an attempt to keep it alive. I appreciate the convenience of the digital world but there is a missing quality of tangible objects lacking from it. And I would like to create an environment that allows for people to talk about music.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE RECORD STORES GROWING UP AND HOW DID THEY INFLUENCE YOUR DECISION TO OPEN UP YOUR OWN RECORD STORE?
My first real experiences as a kid were at Record Rack which used to be on Shepherd. And then during my time in Austin I was a huge fan of Waterloo. But I would have to say that one of my most memorable experiences in a record store happened a year ago while I was visiting a friend in L.A. and he took me to Amoeba Music. From the moment I walked in the door I was just blown away. And let's just be honest, L.A. isn't exactly known as the most friendliest city but I was not even fifteen minutes into browsing the records and the guy next to me just started chatting it up with me about music. I was almost caught off guard by it at first and then it happened again a few minutes later. And then the guy at the front who checked me out ended up not only discussing music with me but actually wrote down some recommendations for me. And that is when I realized that this is what is truly lacking about buying music from iTunes.

WHAT WERE THE FIRST RECORDS OR PERFORMERS THAT YOU REALLY CONNECTED WITH? THAT NUDGED YOU ONTO THE PATH TO OBSESSIVE MUSIC FANDOM?
That is a really difficult question but the first thing that comes to mind is any artist who helped expose me to a different artist that I otherwise never would have listened to. A few examples are artist like Johnny Cash who was an entry drug into old country for me. And also the Pulp Fiction soundtrack, I mean I would never have guessed that I would like Dusty Springfield. And also the Beastie Boys who on through their shout outs and samples I was exposed to artist like LeRoy Holmes and Willie Bobo.

HOW DOES YOUR STORE APPEAL TO YOUR COMMUNITY?
I hate to admit this but I use to be a Houston naysayer as a kid and then after years of traveling and living in other places I decided to come back to Houston and I realized when I returned all the great things that Houston really does have to offer. And there was this mental change that occurred as I got older and I realized that instead of complaining about what Houston needs I could actually do something about it. So this is my way of giving back to my community and creating a space in which people can come and have a good music experience. I want this to be a good experience first and a record store second and if we don't deliver on that first part then it's not successful even if we're making money.

WHAT MUSIC STYLES YOU WILL SPECIALIZE IN?
Because of the way that I purchase it is going to create a variation completely across the map. However some genres are harder to come by such as hardcore and punk but I am working on some partnerships with people around town in an attempt to stock those genres. But my personal sweet spot is for old soul and so we will be strong in that area but in no way limited to it. But outside of that I also love finding quirky and weird stuff that you normally rarely come across.

OTHER THAN RECORDS WHAT WILL YOU SELL?
Vintage turntables. Vintage headphones, the bigger the better. I have been collecting both of these for many years now and will have a wide selection available. We are also going to stock needles and belts so that people can come in and get exactly what they need as opposed to taking a chance with online orders. We will also be doing minor repairs on turntables.

WHY DO YOU THINK PEOPLE CONTINUE TO BUY VINYL RECORDS?
I would say that we are going through a rebirth stage and that in the past few years more and more people have been reverting back to buying records. The hardcore record enthusiast would tell you it's all about the audio quality, and I agree but I also think it has something to do with the tangible quality too. Buying a record is like buying a book and there is something ritualistic about being able to open it up and examine its contents. I also think it has something to do with its imperfections as well; the occasional crack and pop can be just as exciting as a smooth recording. I think people are searching for some authenticity to balance out our digital driven world.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE ADVANTAGES ARE TO LISTENING TO VINYL OVER MP3'S OR CD'S?
I am not one of those people who will say that one is superior to the other I think there are conveniences to digital music. I mean I can't go for a run with my turntable and listen to music but at the end of the day when I am home and settled nothing beats being able to browse your records and find the perfect one to chill out to.

HOW OFTEN WILL YOU HAVE IN STORE PERFORMANCES AND HOW WILL YOU INVOLVE YOURSELF IN THE LOCAL SCENE?
I have made it a point to surround myself with people who know the Houston scene really well and I am currently relying on them to educate me on the Houston scene and help me nurture this idea. I will have a space available for musicians to do in store performances and I am open to any ideas or suggestion from the community. I am currently looking for an act to perform on opening day.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST PRIZED RECORD AND WHY?
There is a couple of them and in some way it's hard to say because there is a lot of nostalgia attached to why you buy certain records so the context is sometimes just as important as the music. But I would say that one of them is the first pressing of Dave Brubeck's Time Out and also the Johnny Cash American Recordings.

WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL "HOLY GRAIL"? (THAT ONE RARITY YOU HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR FOREVER?)
I'm a big fan of 60's jazz funk guitarist Ivan Boogaloo Joe Jones and so I am constantly looking for copies of his work that is in good shape. And also New Order released a 7 inch for Everything's Gone Green with multiple colors of the pressings and I own them all but am missing the black one. **FPH**

Heights Vinyl is looking to open sometime mid November at least by Thanksgiving. For more info, questions or if you have any suggestions send them to connect@heightsvinyl.com



SUPER HAPPY FUN LAND

UPCOMING SHOWS

NOV 2ND:
Drake & Sofia
Adelaine
The Fox Derby

NOV 3RD:
David Liebe Hart Band
Poop Lungstuffing & The Puppetrells
Nonsense Music Band
Black Magic Marker

NOV 4TH:
Wham City Comedy Tour

NOV 5TH:
Eli
C-4 Band
This Holy House

NOV 6TH:
Cinema Cinema
Greg Ginn

NOV 8TH:
Stretch Dawson
The Westbound Band

NOV 11TH:
Houston Specialties Benefit ft/
NECKPIECE, ARCAVE ALCOMY,
DJWeEZAR, BGK, DEE COLONIZE

NOV 12TH:
The Standup is Dead Comedy Tour
Ganji
Shenandoah Davis

NOV 13TH:
Megan Jean & The KFB

NOV 19TH:
Art Crawl 2011 ft/
The Grass Skirts
Sentimental Journey

NOV 24TH:
Veggie Thanksgiving Potluck

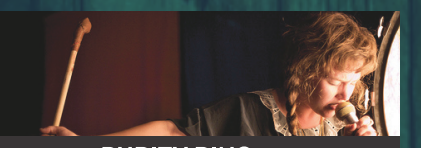
NOV 30TH:
The Wishing Well
Tinsley
Orange Iguanas

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SuperHappyFunLand.com

FITZGERALD'S

houston, tx
LIVE MUSIC SINCE 1977

UPCOMING LIVE MUSIC



NOV. 04 PURITY RING
WITH TBA



NOV. 05 MOE
WITH GREAT AMERICAN TAXI



NOV. 07 ARCHITECTURE IN HELSINKI
WITH DOM • LO-FI-FNK



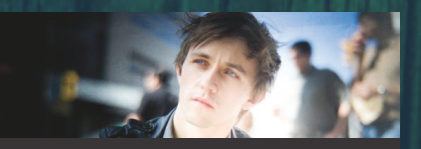
NOV. 07 THE FELICE BROTHERS
WITH GILL LANDRY



NOV. 10 PHANTOGRAM
WITH REPTAR



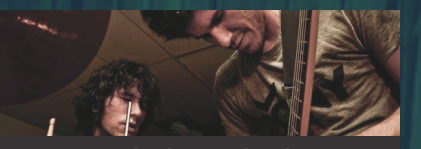
NOV. 11 THE OCTOPUS PROJECT
WITH TBA



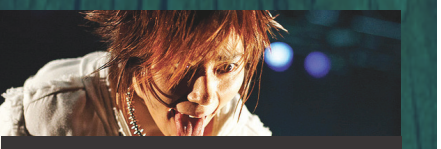
NOV. 12 SONDRE LERCHE
WITH PETER WOLF CRIER



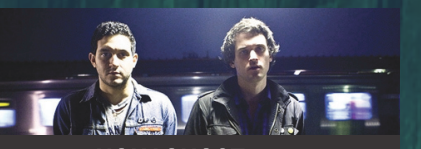
NOV. 12 IMMORTAL TECHNIQUE
WITH KILLER MIKE



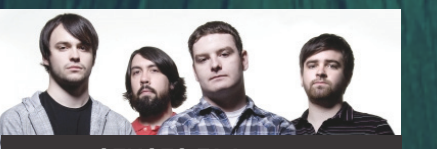
NOV. 15 ZECHS MARQUISE
WITH TBA



NOV. 17 MELT BANANA
WITH TBA



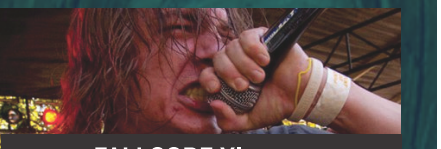
NOV. 18 HOLY GHOST
WITH ELI SCOBAR • JESSICA 6



NOV. 19 SENSES FAIL
WITH GUESTS



NOV. 23 THE QUEERS
WITH KNOCK-OUT • SKELETON DICK

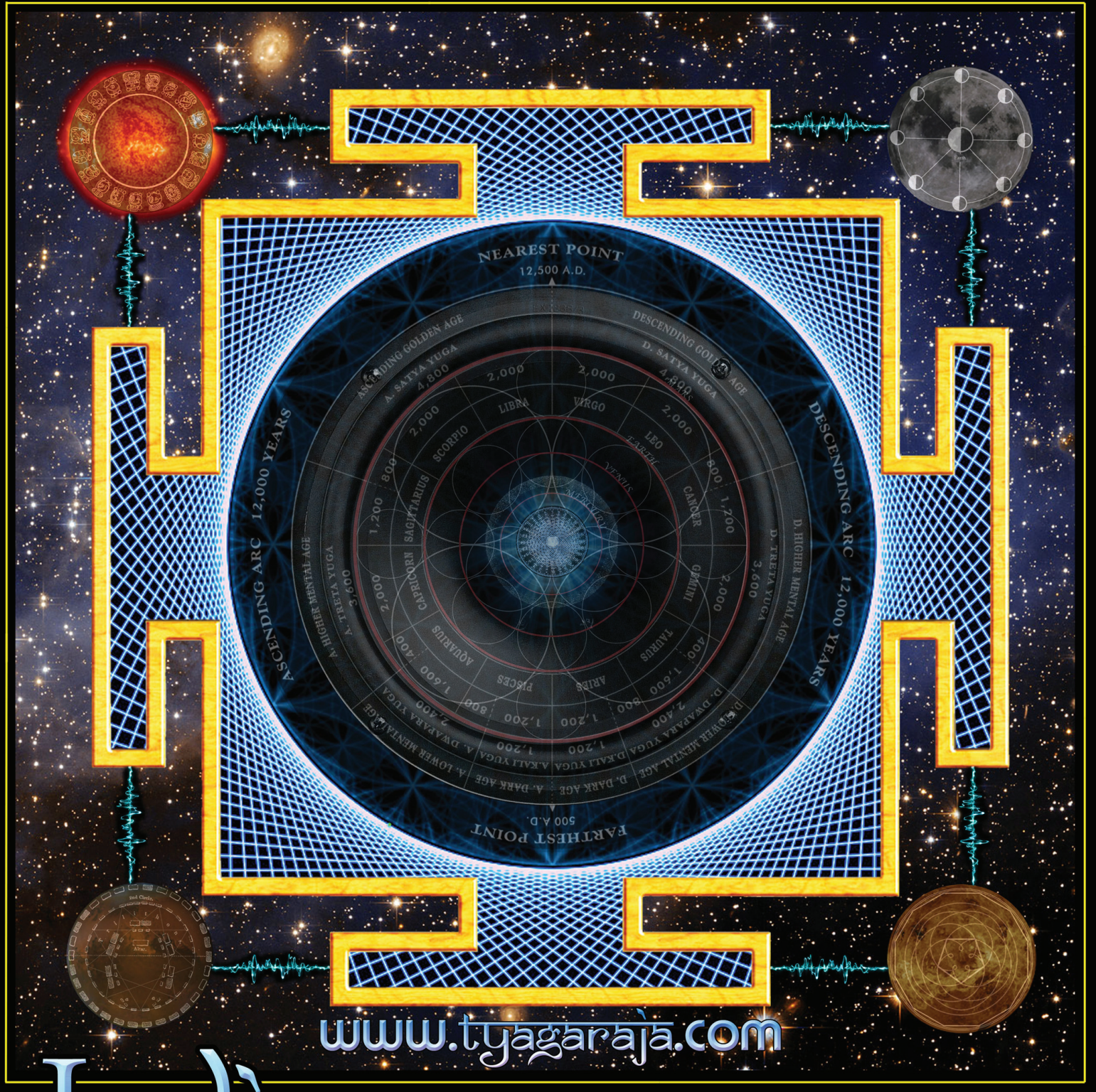


NOV. 30 FALLCORE XI
FOR MORE INFO VISIT WWW.FITZLIVEMUSIC.COM

ALSO COMING SCRATCH ACID DEC. 09 | THE MAINE DEC. 11
QUINTRON & MISS PUSSYCAT DEC. 30 | LATCHKEY KIDS JAN. 14
STARFUCKER + PAINTED PALMS JAN. 15 | THE LEMONHEADS FEB. 10

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India TOUR KICKOFF
AND FUNDRAISER
November 5th
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KHON'S ROOFTOP
2808 Milam St.

WWW.THE ART OF JOE ZUNIGA.BLOGSPOT.COM



Interview
GRACE RODRIGUEZ

EVERY CITY NEEDS a handful, or two or ten, of people who are dedicated and excited about making cool things come to life. Houston is fortunate enough to say that we've got a good number of these folks on deck and we're introducing to one of them to you this month. Say hello to Grace Rodriguez...

QUESTIONS BY BRIGITTE ZABAK
PHOTOS BY MARC BRUBAKER

CAN YOU TELL OUR READERS AT FPH A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF AND THE WORK THAT YOU'VE BEEN DOING FOR THE CREATIVE COMMUNITY IN HOUSTON?

I'm your almost-average American: Child of immigrants (Filipino), born in New York City, grew up in Houston, Manhattan, Chicago and Austin. I'm my own melting pot, living the dream. I live to experience as much of it from as many different perspectives as possible, from volunteering at social advocacy organizations to working in restaurants, to community liaising at City Hall, to helping startups through Culture Pilot (creative agency) and DFJ Mercury (venture capital fund). As much as I love books, I prefer to learn through experiment and experience. There are so many things you can only learn by doing, by observing real life in-the-works, and by interacting with real people, from all walks. I'm a big fan of the "Why/why not?" I'm the cat curiosity hasn't killed. Yet.

Of all of the cities I've visited and lived in, though, I honestly believe Houston has the most potential to be a creative mecca, if for no other reasons than it has so many assets and it constantly evolves. Houston perpetually reinvents itself. That alone requires creativity and innovation. So the question is: Where does its creativity spring from? What force is shaping its ever-evolving identity and culture? The answer lies in Houston's ethnic, socioeconomic, artistic, entrepreneurial, political, industrial and even geographic diversity. Our diversity drives the groundswell of creativity and innovation behind our cultural progress. And it's a "groundswell" precisely because it's forming underground, at the grassroots level, and bubbling up. My personal goal is to help that groundswell achieve a critical mass, so we can dispel the stereotype of Houston comprising only cowboys and oil, and awaken more Houstonians and Americans to all of the incredible people, ideas, activities and innovations that are sprouting here. This is why I work on projects like TEDx Houston and Houston@SXSW. It's why I volunteer for and support organizations like Fresh Arts, Aurora Picture Show, SWAMP, Diverseworks, Writers in the Schools, Houston PBS, Neighborhood Centers, and so on. It's why I joined the Board of Directors of Spacetaker. And achieving this creative critical mass is exactly why I co-founded C2 Creative.

WHAT IS C2 CREATIVE AND HOW DO YOU SEE IT HELPING HOUSTON IN THE COMING YEAR?

C2 Creative is a non-profit organization (501c3) that Ned Dodington (Caroline Collective, Animal Architecture) and I founded to foster creative entrepreneurship, support innovative programs and projects, and help grow our local economy. Around the Caroline kitchen table, we'd discuss how it was great to provide a space that people could drop by and collectively work at; but to be truly effective at supporting the creative community, we also needed to provide people with the education, guidance and resources they need to succeed.

In 2010, we incubated our first project: Jacob Shiach's Open Science Fund and "The Brain as Art" exhibit. This year, Pastor Chris Seay and his wonderful team have provided us with the opportunity to develop the Ecclesia/Taft Street Coffee space into a creative hub and resource for the entire community. We're raising the funds and capacity right now to make it happen. I hope more people – especially everyone reading this – will join us as members and supporters, as well as apply to the C2 Creative Incubator Program (HYPERLINK "http://www.c2creative.cc/incubator/" \t "_blank" http://www.c2creative.cc/incubator/), so we can not only make it happen, but also make it sustainable. If we can achieve that, I can see it joining Winter Street, Spacetaker, Diverseworks, Houston Technology Center, and so many other great resources in Houston providing a creative space for people to build relationships, learn "what's next," cross-pollinate ideas, incubate innovative projects, perform and exhibit ground-breaking work, solve problems, cowork, coplay, collaborate and co-create. I want every Houstonian and every guest to our city to feel like it's a creative home-away-from-home.

AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT, THERE MIGHT BE A DISCUSSION GOING ABOUT THE STATE OF CREATIVITY IN HOUSTON AND WHETHER IT IS THRIVING OR A HOPELESS CAUSE. TO SOME, IT MIGHT SEEM LIKE LEAVING OUR CITY IS THE ONLY WAY TO PROGRESS IN THEIR CHOSEN CREATIVE MEDIUM. WHAT IS YOUR PHILOSOPHY ON HOUSTON'S CREATIVE FUTURE? DO WE HAVE ONE?

(Please see my answer to #1, too.) Creativity in Houston is thriving; it's just under the radar. If we could create one of those Alien detectors that beeps whenever creative work is close by, it would be going off constantly. Unfortunately, we don't. Yet. (Maybe TX/RX Labs will create one?) This could be why some people leave: They find it difficult to discover and engage with Houston's diverse creative groups. Houston sprawl exacerbates the problem. It's easy to fall into the pit of "there's nothing happening in Houston" when everything that *is* happening doesn't smack you in the face when you walk down the street. (IF you walk down a street.)

Eliminate any doubts you may have: Houston has a creative future. We have a plethora of creative people, and creative people can never be denied, just delayed. If Houstonians can collectively begin to build greater density (by moving closer together) and/or begin electing officials who'll invest in better public transportation and cultural resources, though, the day of the unavoidable culture smack will arrive sooner than later.

MY FAVORITE SPACE FOR INSPIRATION HAS BEEN THE MENIL COLLECTION. EVER SINCE I WAS A YOUNG GIRL, I'VE TURNED TO THAT MUSEUM AS A PLACE FOR COMFORT AND CREATIVE ENERGY. WHAT LOCAL SPACE(S) FUELS YOUR CREATIVE PASSION AND WHY?

I can't pinpoint one particular space: I find inspiration everywhere. Nothing sparks my enthusiasm for all things creative more than enjoying other people's creative work, whether that be in a theater, in an exhibit, on the street, or as a scientific breakthrough or new app. Anything innovative fuels my creative passion. I like my mind being blown.

DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR PROJECT OR COLLABORATION THAT YOU'RE MOST PROUD/FOND OF? IF SO, WHAT IS IT?

That's difficult to say – it's like trying to pick your favorite child. Right now, though, I'm most proud of C2 Creative, for all that it aims to be and do for Houston. We haven't officially launched it yet, and it has already received a tremendous amount of enthusiastic support from everyone who's heard about it.

LIVING A CREATIVE LIFE IS NO EASY FEAT. MANY OF US STRUGGLE WITH HOW TO MAKE IT OUR LIFE'S WORK AND STILL LIVE A BALANCED LIFE. ANY INSIGHT OR SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS WANTING TO FOLLOW A DREAM BUT WHO ARE UNCERTAIN ABOUT HOW TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN?

As Maya Angelou said: "Ain't nothin' to it, but to do it." Whatever passion is consuming your soul in an unquenchable blaze, give it a go. It's the only way to exorcise the demons. I'm a big believer in learning through experience; so, to me, the only way to follow a dream is to start following it. Walk in its steps. Along the way, you learn what to keep and what to toss, where to turn and when to power through it. Likewise, the only way to learn balance is by balancing. If something pulls you on an uneven keel, right it. And if your dream knocks you down five times, get up six...but prepare to be knocked down again. There is no spoon to it. I'm not saying it's easy, but it is truly possible. You just have to say "I'm in charge" like you mean it, then charge forward. And if you need some inspiration, watch "Hustle & Flow." (Or "Rudy," if you have a more Disney sensibility.) **FPH**

Houston's Parking Wars

City Council uses flawed, suburban approach to define new parking ordinances

WASHBOARD STREETS AND BROKEN WATER PIPES are usually the only things that get Montrosians fired up about Houston City Council. That is, until the city goes and passes an ordinance that seems to be an all-out assault on one of the things that makes Montrose Montrose. Some of the proposed ordinances that come out of 900 Bagby command attention, becoming fodder for the rumor mill--their details endlessly rehashed and repeated in beer fueled bull sessions up and down Westheimer.

Others, like the much publicized revision of the City's noise ordinance, strike citizens of the gayberhood as so wrong-headed that it sends them down to give council a piece of their mind. However, the vast majority of the legislative sausage churned out by the 14 men and women who govern the city slides by unnoticed. One of the bills that didn't grab the 'Trose' s attention was a series of proposed changes to City of Houston off-street parking ordinances.

Most of the people who make up the Houston bar and club scene, whether the clear liquor drinkers at the latest trendy spot on Washington Ave. or the old Mexicans working on a mid-day beer buzz at an old-school hole-in-the-wall on Telephone Rd., don't really seem to care much about parking ordinances. For a lot of people a proposed change to a parking ordinance sounds about as interesting as copier repair. However, like most things that come out of City Hall the devil, as they say, is in the details and those details could have a chilling effect on Houston's nightlife.

Before we can talk about the future we first have to talk about the present and to understand the present we have to talk to a little bit about the past. For much of Houston's tumultuous history the city didn't have an off-street parking ordinance. It wasn't until 1989 that City Council got around to writing, and then passing, a bill that required home developers and anyone wanting to open a business to provide some kind of off-street parking. Over the 20-plus-years since the parking ordinance received a majority of council votes Houston has changed dramatically. The city has paradoxically become both more spread out and more densely populated. Over the same period of time the ordinance saw only minor tweaks. The relatively staid nature of the city's parking ordinance and the rapidly changing nature of the city continually led to conflicts, especially as suburban flight was reversed and people started moving into the redeveloped urban core. To resolve these conflicts the City's Planning and Development Department began issuing variances, or exceptions, to the ordinance.

As the years have gone on variance requests have increased so much that the planning and development office can barely keep up. Sonny Garza, co-chair of the City's Planning Commission, recently commented to Katharine Shillicut that since the variance requests "happen over and over again...there's obviously a flaw in the way the ordinance is written." Garza, like many in the world of Houston transit, felt that it was time to reexamine the parking ordinance. In early October, after a year-or-so of work, the Planning Commission subcommittee appointed to look into ways to update the parking ordinance made its recommendations.

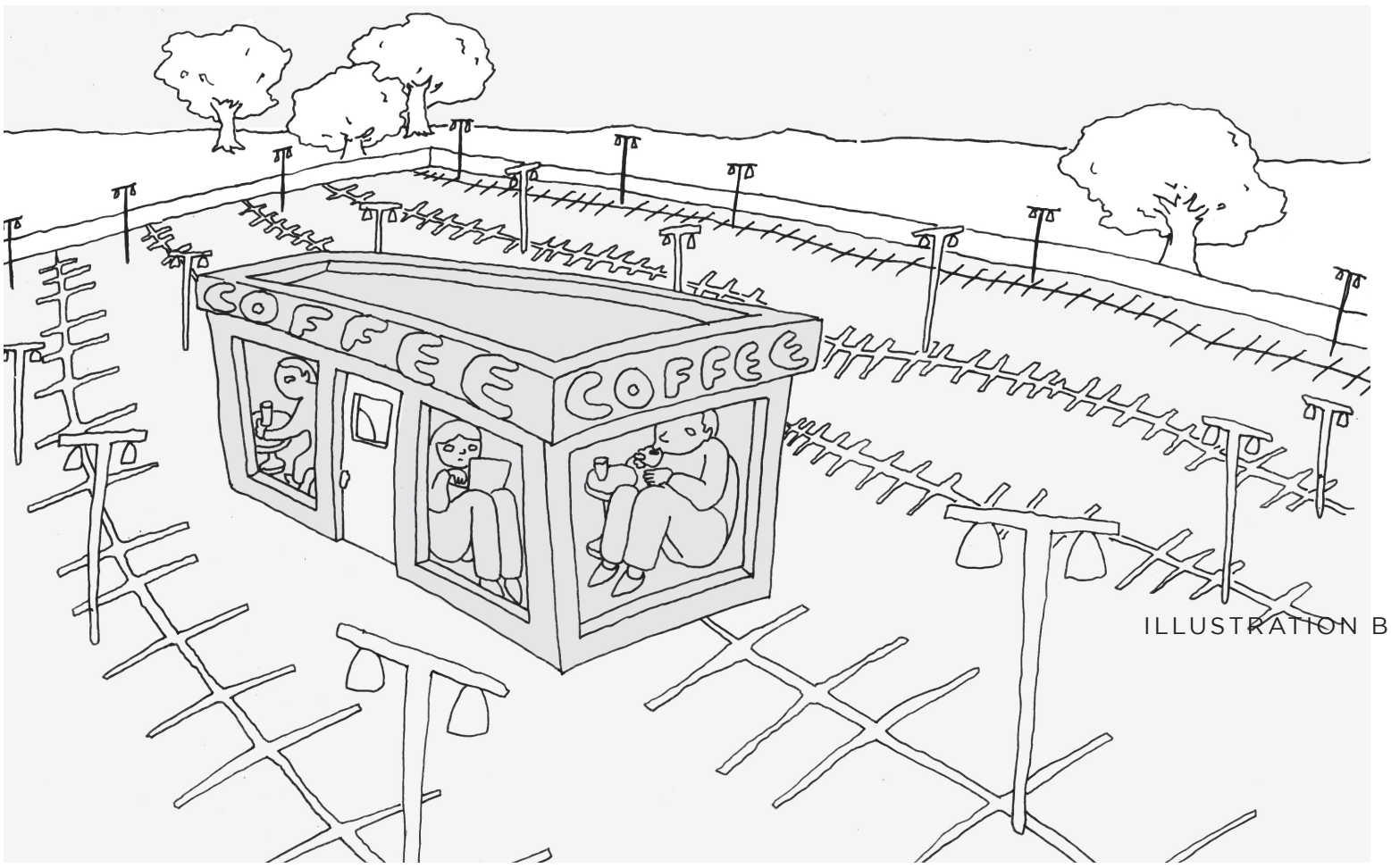
Mixed in with recommendations that new shared driveway town homes and condos provide a guest parking space for every six units and city engineers look at waste water capacity instead of building permits to determine how many parking spaces a school needs was a fairly innocuous sounding proposal that could fundamentally change the make up of Houston's nightlife.

Under the current ordinance the city defines a business that receives over 75 percent of its revenue from the sale of alcohol "a bar," and since it is "a bar" and not a restaurant the city requires the business to have 10 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet. This has led many inner-loop club owners to lease parking spaces from surrounding businesses, and sometimes those leases are written on a year-to-year basis.

The subcommittee recommended that the City bring its definition of "a bar" in line with TABC's. The TABC says any business that makes mover 50 percent of its revenue from alcohol sales is a bar. While clearing up confusion over what is and isn't a bar is admirable, it's the issue of how much parking a bar needs that has some local business owners worried. The subcommittee went on to recommend that any new bar needs to have 14 off-street parking spaces per 1,000 square feet and that any lease entered into in order to meet the city's minimum parking requirements has to be, at a minimum, 5 years long.

The part of the proposal that has angered the blood of a few local business owners is the recommendation that the parking ordinance be changed to include language that automatically revokes a businesses certificate of occupancy "in the event [a] Parking Lease Agreement is terminated without implementing alternatives to meet the required parking" minimum. It's not just bars that are facing an increase in the number of parking spaces, but also barber shops and beauty salons. The subcommittee recommended that barbershops and beauty salons be required to have eight parking spaces for every 1,000 square feet. There were no exceptions listed if the salon happens to be in some one's house.

Surprisingly, the committee's recommendations would not uniformly increase available parking across the board for every business. Regional shopping centers and drive-through/ take-out restaurants actually saw a recommended decrease in the amount of parking required. Instead of requiring a regional shopping center to provide 5 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet the committee recommends that the city only require 4 parking spaces. Under the



BY ALEX WUKMAN
ILLUSTRATION BY TIMOTHY J. DORSEY

It's not just bars that are facing an increase in the number of parking spaces, but also barber shops and beauty salons.

proposed revisions to the ordinances drive-through/take-out restaurants would only be required to have 4 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet.

Scott Repass, owner of Poison Girl, Antidote and Black Hole, was not pleased with the proposed changes. In an October 5 e-mail sent to David Hawes of the Montrose Management District Repass wrote "the new parking requirements would undoubtedly discourage small business development and encourage regional and chain stores."

Repass went on to state that, in his interpretation of the proposed changes, a "box store moving into a neighborhood has to provide one-third less parking than it did before, whereas the coffee house at the corner has to provide 25 percent more." He attacked the proposal as an affront to the idea of a walkable city and characterized it as "suburb thinking applied to the city as a whole." He concluded his e-mail by writing that he felt that "the planning and permitted process is already prejudiced against small businesses and towards the Wal-Marts and Trader Joe's. This proposed parking ordinance feels like the city is coming after us directly."

Repass isn't alone in his concerns about what the proposed changes to the parking ordinance would do to effect the development of more pedestrian friendly areas, and the concern about walkability is not a new one. The Houston Chronicle reported that as far as back as 2006 business owners in Midtown were running into the problem of having to provide off-street parking in a community that was being redesigned around pedestrians. Ian Rosenberg, who rehabbed an abandon dry cleaner into the award winning European style war bar 13 Celsius, told Chronicle reporter Mike Snyder that the city was requiring him "to provide more off-street parking than he could create even if he tore down the building." The city's parking ordinances aren't just drawing heat from small business owners; non-profits and NGOs have gotten into the fight too.

Groups like Keep Houston Houston and NeoHouston argue that requiring business owners in areas like Midtown and Montrose to have obey set back and parking ordinances prevents the city from developing into a pedestrian friendly city. Keep Houston Houston has gone so far as to recommend that Midtown "should be given a "special exemption" from any and all parking [regulations]. Period." NeoHouston wants to prohibit the development of new surface parking lots in Houston's urban areas and require parking garages to have first floor retail space facing the street.

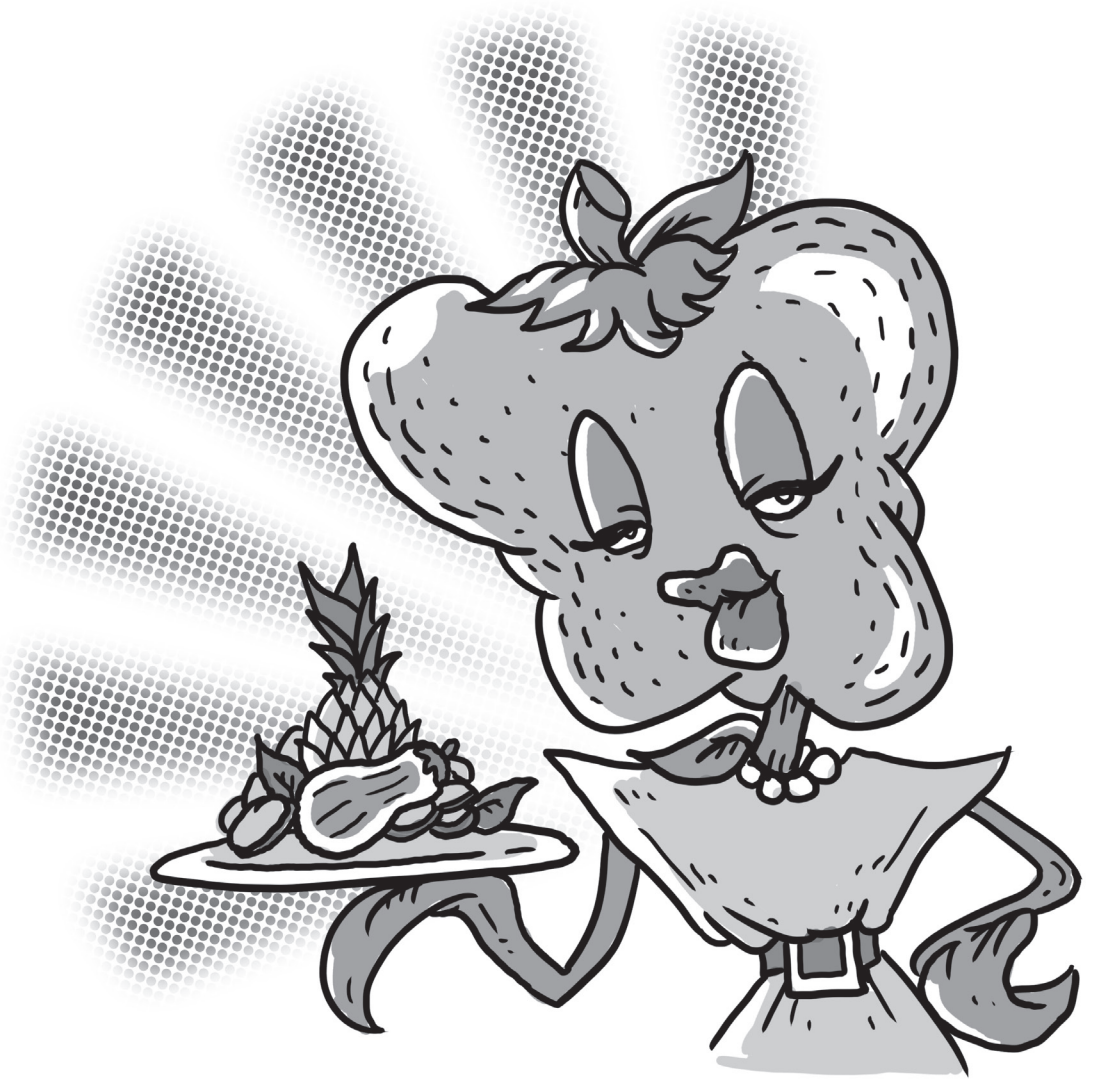
Concerns over walkability and transit-oriented development have found their way down the halls of power. In 2010 Houston City Council passed a transit corridor ordinance, which was designed to encourage more pedestrian friendly development along the light rail lines, and the Planning Commission subcommittee did make a special note of including bike parking in their proposed changes. The subcommittee recommended one bicycle space for every 25,000 square feet, however, businesses under 5,000 square feet would not be required to provide bike parking. Some in the city's progressive community will undoubtedly say that requiring two bike spaces for a 50,000 square foot grocery store doesn't go far enough and that the process still encourages big box retailers to come in and destroy older buildings. Like most complaints about Houston that line of reasoning is only half true, partly because it ignores market forces and partly because it ignores the historic provisions included the parking ordinance recommendations.

In the brouhaha about whether small business owners would be able to open new concepts one of the things that gets lost is that businesses in historic buildings, or buildings that contribute to a historic district, would have their parking requirements reduced by 25 percent. Sonny Garza, co-chair of the City Planning Commission, told Katharine Shillicut that his organization is very focused on the Inner Loop area. "There are all these great old buildings you can't use because of a lack of parking. You want to open a restaurant or a spa, but it's out of the question."

One of the main concerns about the proposed variances for historic buildings is that, because of the restrictive nature of the historic building code, there simply aren't enough to meet the demand. As the proposed changes are written the parking exceptions would only apply to buildings that are "designated landmarks, protected landmarks or contributing buildings to a historic district." Despite Garza's enthusiasm for trying to lure new development into older buildings, there are still concerns from business owners about being able to open a business in one of Houston's many non-historic buildings. **FPH**







Vegan Wives

I WENT TO ANOTHER BIRTHDAY PARTY last night. That's the thing when you're my age, twenty-nine: there's a thirtieth birthday party for one of your friends on average three times a week. It must be sort of similar to being Jewish and having all your pals turn thirteen. We newly christened middle-aged Houstonians typically gather at a local Mexican restaurant to wax nostalgic over margaritas, pretending we are excited about a new decade and the prompt arrival of adulthood, but really we're wondering what happened to our dreams.

I sat opposite a friend of mine's wife who is a health nut/ vegetarian, although she eats fish, which doesn't really make sense to me but whatever. It was there I learned a rule to live by - get out your notebooks because I'm about to drop a wisdom bomb - don't ever go to a TexMex restaurant with a health nut/ vegetarian. Unfortunately, she sat next to another buddy's wife. This one is just straight up, hardcore vegan (FYI: in Houston, getting married is a prerequisite to turning thirty). Both women are recent transplants from New York City, so you have to factor in a certain degree of superiority and snobbishness in terms of culinary sophistication when they talk. And talk they did. The conversation quickly turned to a visiting author named Michael Pollan. He wrote "Omnivore's Dilemma," one of those books people love to discuss after reading, making sure you're aware of how little you know about such an important subject. Just substitute the controversy of overprocessed foods with Jesus knocking up Mary Magdalene, and you have the same banal conversation following the release of the "Da Vinci Code." Essentially, Pollan follows the substances of the foods we eat from their source to their arrival on our plates. This falls into the bucket of "Things Steve Doesn't Want to Know," next to how hot dogs are made, what makes Cheetos neon orange, and why there aren't any cats in the neighborhood surrounding my favorite Chinese restaurant.

From listening to what the Real Housewives of Central Market had to say about healthy options in Houston, you'd think we all live in some sort of Appalachia trailer park, frying possums and breastfeeding our children until they reach middle school.

I know we're like the second fattest city in America - fuck you San Antonio - but I refuse to believe you can't find healthy options in this town. I let most of their conversation slide until they really started getting into how bad meat is for human beings. As I choked down my third beef fajita, I politely interrupted to explain how humans are omnivores. Our ancestors started as scavengers and the protein from meat is a viable part of a healthy diet. Also, it's delicious. They looked at me as if I'd just been caught smothering their cat with a skirt steak. "Meat is NOT necessary. NOR is dairy" They rattled off some facts about how the Japanese live longer and they don't eat meat (but they do eat fish- again I fail to understand this disconnect) and how perverse it is for humans to consume another animal's milk. They screeched that milk is intended to nurture other cows and goats, not humans. This was all while I was nurturing myself with another bowl of queso.

I was going to let all of this slide with standard eye rolling and sarcastic sighing, but then my buddy's wife began bragging about how their two year old daughter has never eaten a meat product. My child abuse radar went off like an air siren. It's one thing taking the whole holistic, macrobiotic tofu route, transferring the negative energy from your locally produced squash into spirit crystals and what not. But when you're forcing your own brand of crazy on a kid who doesn't know any better, it becomes a bit more complicated.

From what I remember as a toddler, I was raised on a strict diet of apple juice and those little weenie things that come in tiny glass jars, and look at me! I am as healthy as an ox and can drink most teenagers under the table. But to sit there and talk about how you are worried about finding organic, unpasteurized milk for your two year old is eerily similar to people who fret over the alignment of their chakras. The pity about vegans is that they tolerate just enough food groups to stay alive. I am worried this kid is going to grow up small and weak and then explode in college when she finally eats a McNugget on a dare and realizes her parents have been lying to her, like a Mormon trying beer for the first time. Regardless, my plan is now to sneak into their house at night twice a week and drop a couple KFC Double Downs and maybe some RBVs in her crib. That'll shoot her straight. Welcome to Houston.

@stevethompsonjr

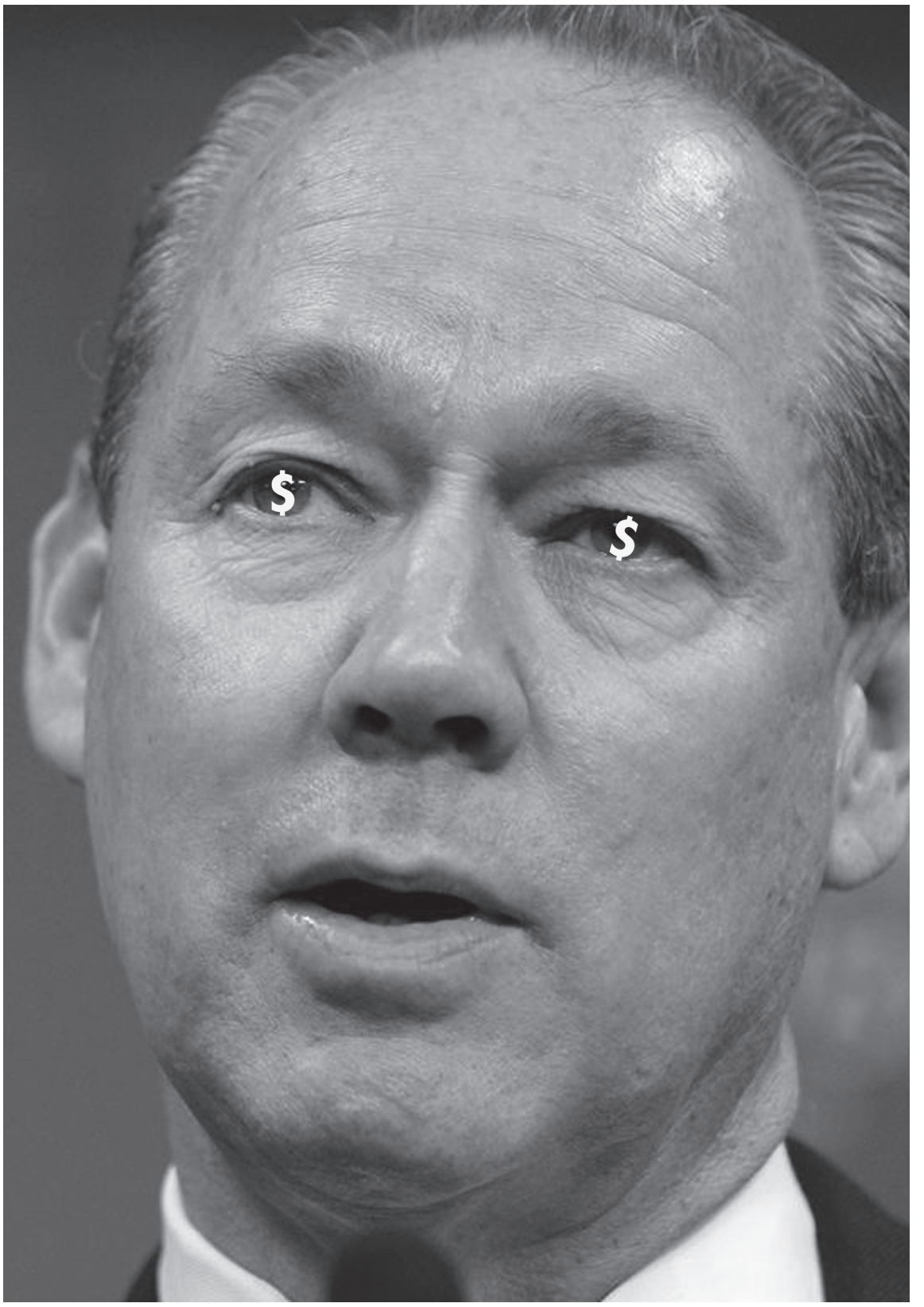

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Is a Baseball Franchise Really Worth $680 Million IF the Fans Hate You?

BY MILLS-MCCOIN



THERE'S NO DOUBT Jim Crane has asked himself this very question at least once since talk began about moving the Houston Astros from the National League to the American League. One would have to assume that such a move would alter the value of the team going forward even with our beloved Astros achieving the worst win-loss record in baseball (56-106) and franchise history this past season.

And due to the value of consumer drama, the media would have you believe that the MLB Owners are using this move as leverage against Jim Crane. Crane's businesses have been scarred with allegations of labor discrimination and war profiteering; and the MLB Owners are willing to overlook said improprieties if Crane is willing to move the team. It should be noted that these are standard negotiating tactics in business.

For now, let's table speculation regarding how well Jim Crane will fair as owner of the Houston Astros; and instead dwell (read: whiskey away) on the prospect of switching leagues. Here are few things to consider when thinking about the future of the Houston Astros...

Going from the National League to the American League is wholly unlike switch-hitting in baseball- you can't go back. The Houston Astros (under the original team name: Houston Colt .45's) began their franchise on April 10, 1962, in the National League. Their inaugural season began with a three game sweep of the Chicago Cubs. Since then, with the help of fans, the Houston Astros have developed a pageantry and familiarity (including rivalries with storied franchises such as the Atlanta Braves and St. Louis Cardinals) that will completely disappear with a move to the American League. Now, the American League (albeit the lesser "American" of the two baseball leagues by virtue of having a player that just bats- the DH) is no slouch itself with storied franchises of its own in the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox. But after nearly half a century of history in the book, what fan (read: consumer) wants to start all over?

Another hitch in the giddy-up of this move to the American League is that our new division will place the Houston Astros in the west, which means that most away games will begin at 9pm Houston time. That doesn't bother me personally because I enjoy watching sports late at night in crowded bars. But for the average fan, the new start time infringes on sleepy time; and it's theoretically impossible to root for your hometown team when you are sleeping.

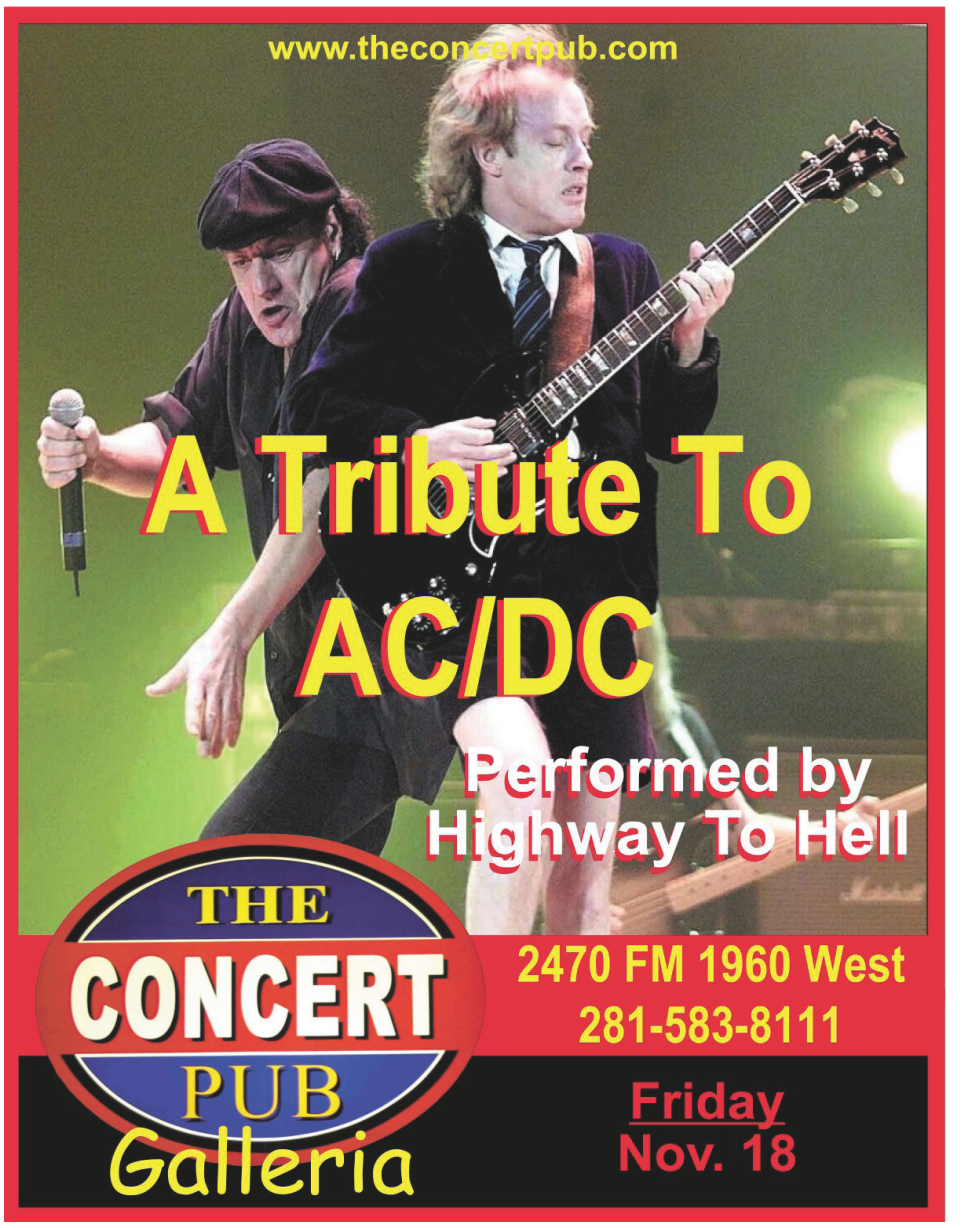
Yet another factor that Jim Crane is forced to consider is the American League's unique position of Designated Hitter. When a player is asked to simply do one thing and one thing only, that player tends to be really good at that one thing and also asks for an obscene amount of money to do it. The average 2011 salary for a designated hitter is $7.11 million. Swallow that. Before the talk of moving leagues, Jim Crane never had to consider using such a significant amount of his "budget" to achieve one thing- hits.

To return to the original question: is a baseball franchise really worth $680 Million if the fans hate you? The answer is still- maybe. Along with the franchise, Jim Crane also gets a lucrative television deal. But if your fans feel alienated by the franchise then they're likely not going to come to games or watch them on television... or buy merchandise... or pay attention to advertisers that- okay, you get my point. Of course, the MLB Owners could compensate Jim Crane for "damages" incurred from switching leagues; but none of that compensation goes to the actual victims, the fans.

So either way, Roger Clemens probably used steroids. Cheers.

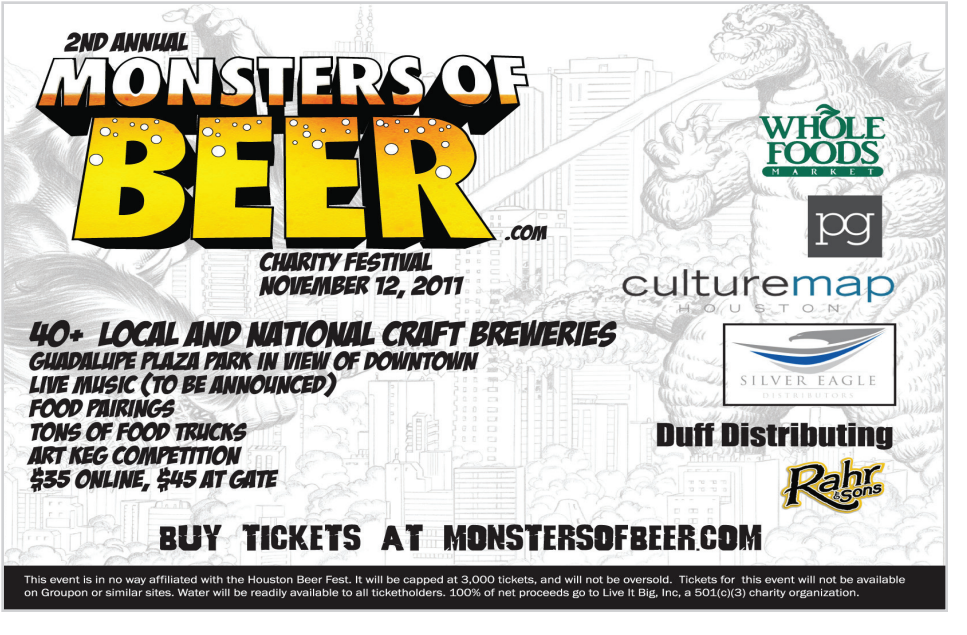
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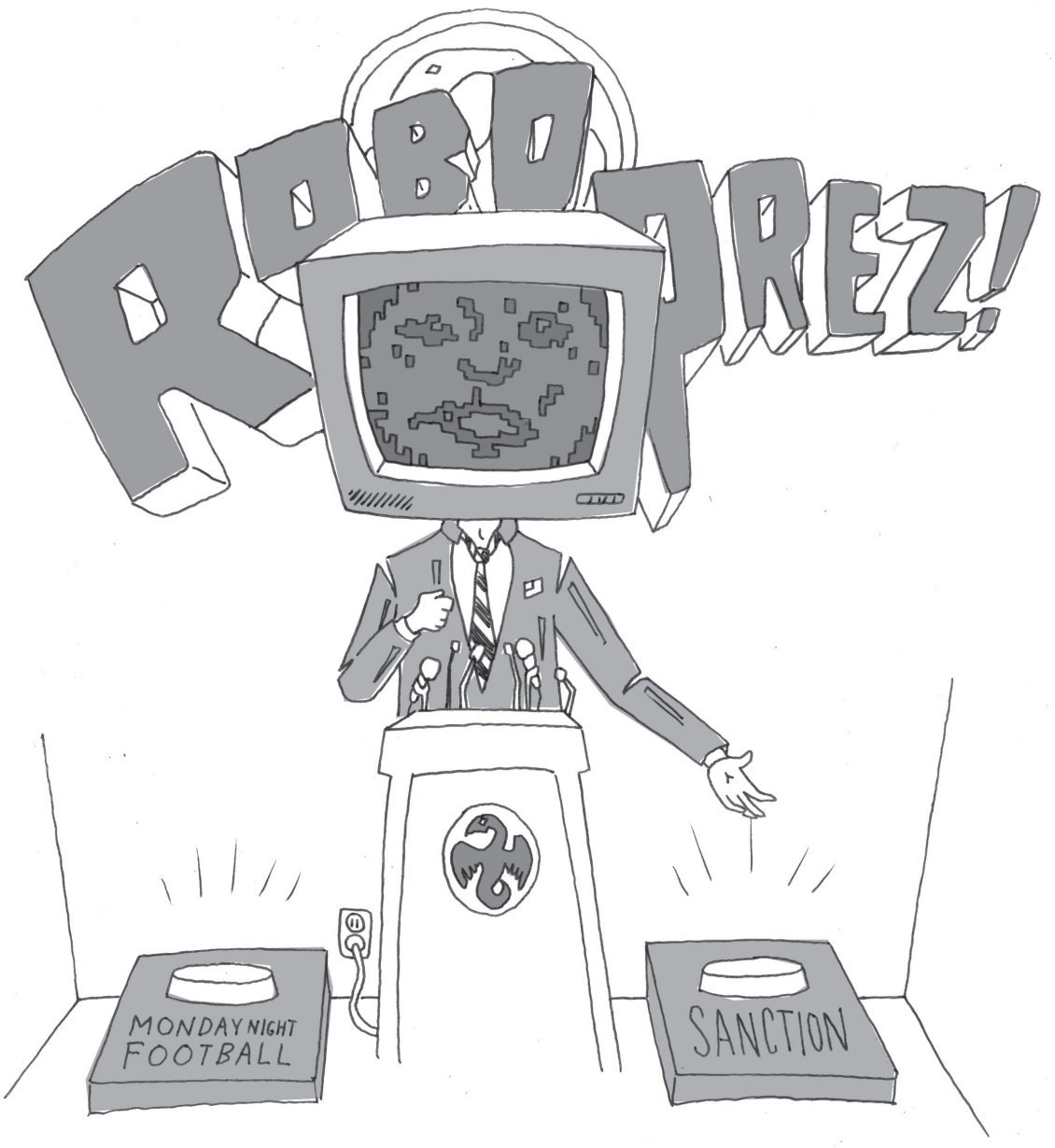
Hollywood D.C.

BY ALEX WUKMAN | ILLUSTRATION BY TIM DORSEY

LATE NIGHT, LAST CALL. Sirens scream along Montrose. Bass blasts from cars waiting on Westheimer and inside one of the half-a-dozen or so bars up and down the strip liquid courage works its way down through the body and into another hook-up. Despite liquor and posturing, it seems no one knows how to kiss. The guys are tongue fucking their partners' throats and the girls are trying to eat faces, but it doesn't matter because at some point we, as a nation, stopped living in the real world.

We all took up residence in a fever dream. No matter how odious things get, the US Senate proposed reforming immigration by giving visas to immigrants able spend a minimum of $500,000 cash on real estate, no one's shocked. And that worries me. You see I have a problem; I'm addicted to the GOP presidential race. I can't help it, I love the horse race. I check every blog I can, looking to see who's up and who's down in the latest poll. I need to know who doubled down on the crazy to impress the Des Moines Rotary Club. I go into withdrawal if I don't get to see the endless loops of pandering and flip-flopping that populates the 24-hour cable news cycle, and provides low hanging fruit for lazy internet journalists and late night comics.

That's why I'm here—sitting alone at a bar on a Tuesday night watching CNN with the sound off while the bartender collects drinks—to feed my addiction. The weirdest part is that, as I watch the coverage and read the armchair analysis, I can't shake off this feeling of déjà vu. A few years ago I penned an essay that was, at least I thought, a humorous send-up of politics and the media in that sardonic, world-weary way that college under-grads use to try to be funny.



Being a presidential candidate is seen as being better for a career than being the President.

"Our government officials need to rid themselves of this false presumption of superiority from the common celebrity. They need to admit that they are celebrities and start acting accordingly. When our government officials finally embrace the media completely—when Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan is free-styling on the MTV Video Music Awards with Eminem and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales is going to the Oscars on the arm of J-Lo and declared the new *Uber-pimp* of Hollywood by *People* magazine, it will truly mark the dawn of a new age."

Government as celebrity, ha ha. Good joke, right? Roll on the snare, everybody laugh. Go hit the bar for a drink. When I wrote those words in the dark days of 2003, I had no idea how much the world would change. No one could have predicted that Sarah Palin would come along and take a failed run for Vice President and turn it into a campaign for media domination. TV shows, book deals, speaking tours, paid pundit appearances. And then who would have thought that a former Vice Presidential candidate would, just four years later, tell the world that she feels that the Office of the President is too limiting?

That's where we find ourselves now: in a time and place when being a presidential candidate is seen as being better for a career than being the President. And when candidates don't actually care about winning an election they'll say or do anything to raise their profile—from Michele Bachmann's idea that Iraq needs to reimburse the US for the invasion to Herman Cain's proposal that we build an alligator filled moat and an electric fence along the Mexican border. Not surprisingly the campaign rhetoric so far makes reading the CNN crawl over the clatter of clinking glasses an exercise in barely contained what-the-fuckery, "seriously, he really said that?"

I'm not the only one who has been left in a state of head scratching befuddlement by the twists and turns of this year's campaign season. Pat Robertson, the guy who thinks that gay people cause hurricanes, recently said on his I-can't-believe-it's-still-on TV show, the 700 Club, that the GOP candidates need to tone it down. Robertson is afraid that the extremist rhetoric is going to turn off general election voters. I guess no one told Robertson that not everyone at those debates is interested in governing. There's a theory kicking around the internet that fringe candidates and perpetual also-rans, like Newt Gingrich, are more interested in pumping up book sales than winning elections.

It was that sense of a lack of priority that caused Gingrich's campaign staff to quit in protest. They complained that they couldn't get their guy to stop promoting his documentary and show up to do some actual campaigning. However, no person's lack of focus comes anywhere near Herman Cain's. Cain has to be running a book tour instead of a presidential campaign. It's the only way that a national campaign can justify being in Texas, a state that doesn't play an important role in primary voting, twice in the same month. It seems that, as Alex Parene memorably wrote, Cain isn't running for President, he's running for pundit. Or, as Matt Bai noted in the New York Times Magazine, that "in today's political arena, a certain class of outsider candidates seems mostly intent on achieving a kind of cultural relevance — the type of broader celebrity that attracts mega book deals and Twitter followers and reality-television contracts."

Or maybe we're all wrong. Maybe we are still trying to use Twentieth Century ideas to discuss Twenty-First Century politics. Maybe it's not about shaking hands and kissing babies, maybe Richard Cohen was right when he said "the celebrity politician need only announce himself and then get a critical mass of people to like him." Perhaps the retail politics of kissing babies and shaking hands across all of Iowa's 99 counties died, like the idea of needing TV to spread an anti-corporate message, in a drum circle that was live streamed , tweeted and Facebooked from Zucotti Park?

Perhaps it's time to stop thinking about the celebrity candidate and start thinking about the viral candidate. After all, Herman Cain's unexpected rise in the polls, in spite of his flat out refusal to visit the early primary states more than once in a blue moon and his complete lack of a traditional campaign, certainly seems to offer an intriguing example of how to become an internet sensation. Or perhaps Cain, like so many others, is just a flash in the pan who will fade back into irrelevance before Thanksgiving—some polls are already showing Cain dropping percentage points on the heels of some strange comments he made about abortion—but only time will tell. **FPH**


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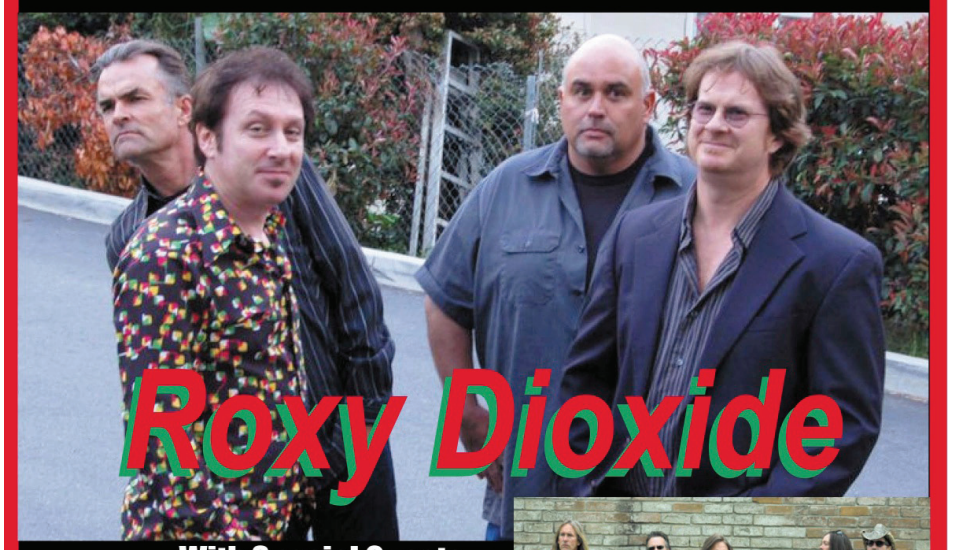
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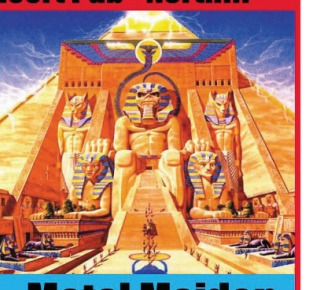
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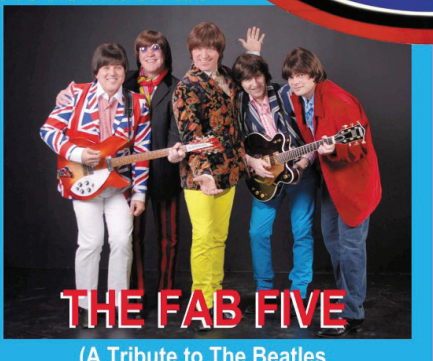
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THE END OF THE YEAR. A time when we return to our ancient roots and look to families and gods to help us make it through the cold and bitter months. However, for the Houston theatre scene November and December are the months that put asses in seats. And all those patrons, who come in their ill-fitting, off the rack at Sears suits and last year's dresses, are looking for the same thing--the true spirit of the season and Houston theatres are willing to give it to them.

Artshound, a clearing-house of information for the Houston arts scene, lists no less than eight separate Christmas themed productions going on this year. And three of them are variations on the classic Dickens Christmas Carol. It's fashionable amongst some members of the Houston arts scene to bash the Alley's big budget adaptation of the Dickens short story or the Houston Ballet's take on the Nutcracker.

For some of the city's self proclaimed indie-arts aficionados the only exposure they've ever had to the ballet or the theatre were less than stimulating school trips to partake of the city's holiday traditions. For others Christmas Carol and Nutcracker are symptoms of a much larger problem, the lack of an adventuresome spirit at Houston's premiere performing arts venues. Like all criticisms there is some truth to that, even a cursory check of this year's Houston Ballet season shows Cinderella and Romeo and Juliet both on the bill.

However, any argument about daring, originality and creativity in November and December programming runs up against the reality of Houston when one looks outside of the six-or-so blocks that house downtown's 'theatre district.' The city's smaller companies have populated their calendars with the fantastical, the funny and the ferocious.

Catastrophic: Anna Bella Emma

Jason Nodler, everyone's favorite underground theatre rock star, is directing a script by Lisa D'Amour that Catastrophic website describes as a "ghost story for three bodies with three voices." Anna Bella Emma is the classic mother, daughter, twin daughter makes from mud outside their trailer story. D'Amour describes the play as a chamber piece for three women in three chairs and asks the question "What's a mother to do when her little girl makes her own girl out of plain, wet earth?"

Obsidian Art Space/Mildred's Umbrella: Tender Buttons and Museum of Dysfunction IV

There are names and books that resonate across history. Ginsburg and Howl, Homer and The Odyssey, Cervantes and Don Quixote and Stein and Tender Buttons. The story of Tender Buttons, a young undergraduate participates in a psychological experiment that produces a ground-breaking piece of literature, is almost as interesting as the story of its author Gertrude Stein. And, now with the assistance of Obsidian Art Space and the Mildred's Umbrella Theatre Company, Houston gets to experience Stein's stream of consciousness prose-poem the way it was meant to be heard: with an avant-alt rock soundtrack.

Tender Buttons took shape at New York's Medicine Show Theatre under the guiding hand of the Van Reipen Collective before it was taken on the road to Liepzig, Germany. Billed as a live performance of a concept album the show weds Gertrude Stein's sound poems, as interpreted by Cassandra Victoria Chopourian, to a post-punk soundtrack that has drawn comparisons to Patti Smith, Tom Waits and the Sisters of Mercy.

On a side note Tender Buttons also marks the first Houston performance for score co-composer, and former Houston live music scene regular, Gary Heidt. Heidt used to front Devil Donkey an 80's era psych-experimental-noise-industrial-avant garde-hardcore band from Clear Lake that used to hold court at Houston staples like the Axiom, Fitzgerald's and the Pik-N-Pak.

In addition to helping to host the Van Reipen Collective's touring show, Mildred's Umbrella is spending the holiday season in their Museum of Dysfunction. This year's MOD features new plays from all over the country that, as Mildred's press kit says, "focus on the agony of love and the roller coaster that is the human relationship."

Gingerhead Productions: Kriegie Wartime Log

No alternative holiday season preview is complete without Nazis and Gingerhead Productions is making sure that the evils of the Third Reich are represented in the season of giving with Kriegie Wartime Log. Premiering on Veteran's Day Kriegie Wartime Log tells the story of a 2nd Lt. Warren Arieux, an American bombardier who was shot down in February 1944. Arieux was taken to Stalag Luft I a Nazi POW camp located in Barth, Germany. Arieux was issued a wartime log by the YMCA when he arrived at the camp and spent the remainder of the war documenting his time behind the barbed wire. Gingerhead Productions describes the resulting text as "painful—and sometimes humorous." The play that was adapted from Arieux's wartime log, and other sources, tells a story of "brotherhood, loss, love, greed, hope and sacrifice" and was supported in part by a grant from the City of Houston.

Main Street Theatre: Cakewalk

No mention of the Nazis is complete without a Holocaust story, and Main Street Theater helpfully obliges with the world premiere of Cakewalk. Nalsey Tinberg's script tells the story of telling a story. Bershala wants to tell about her relationship with her mother Sprintze, a Holocaust survivor. The problem is Sprintze wants to tell the story her own way. Between the two of them the audience is taken on a decade spanning journey that detailing the transformative qualities of their lives. Sprintze's journey from Holocaust surviving refugee to American homemaker is given as much weight as her transition from daughter to mother and care giver to care receiver.

Country Playhouse: Speed the Plow

I was talking to an acquaintance of mine the other night and she said, "There's this attitude in Houston theatre that's all 'Ugh, Country Playhouse.'" I told her then I didn't understand it and I stand by that assessment. Country Playhouse, or CP as it's known, is a fine community theatre that produces some interesting plays. This fall CP is offering up a David Mamet classic Speed the Plow. The play is set in Hollywood and offers a witty take on the trials and tribulations of the development process. When it debuted in 1988 Speed the Plow wowed critics and picked up Tony nominations for Best Play and Best Direction of a Play. Ron Silver, who inhabited the lead role of Charlie Fox for the B'Way premiere, took home the statue for Best Actor. **FPH**

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www.catastrophictheatre.com

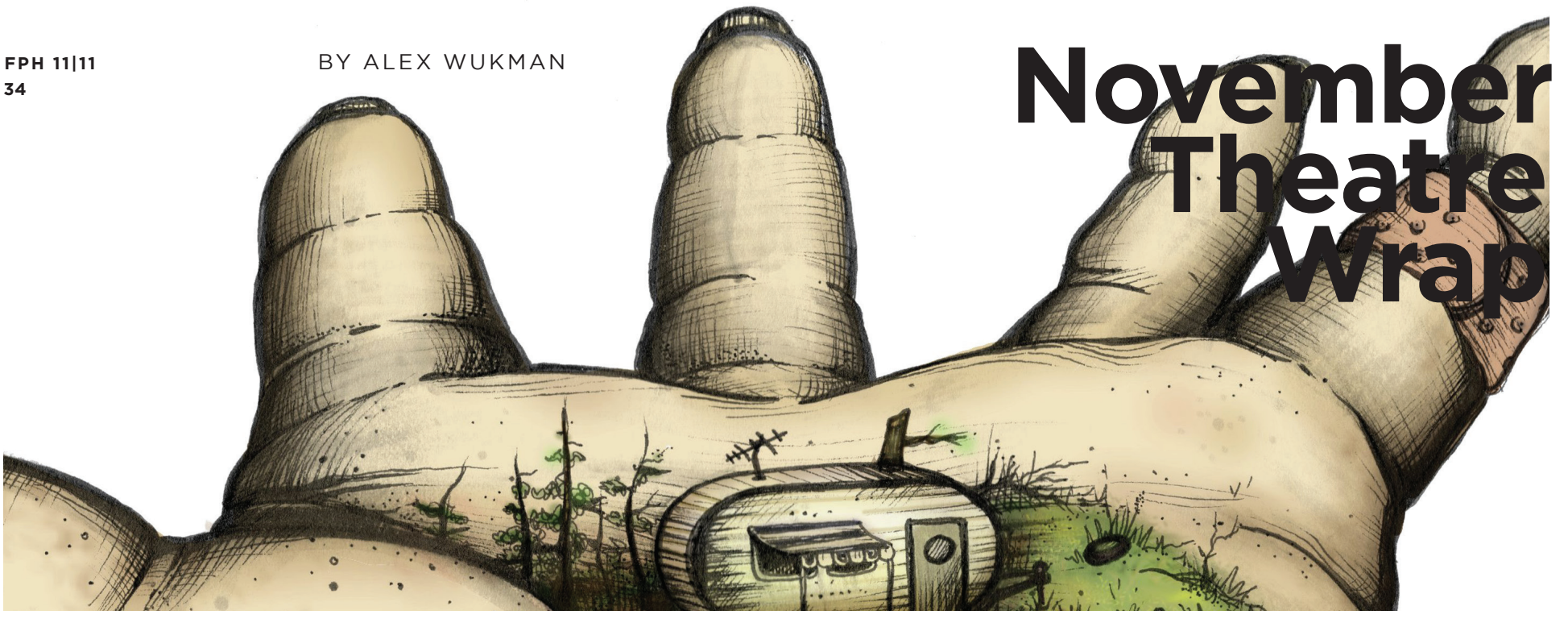
Tender Buttons &
Museum of Dysfunction IV
Obsidian Art Space
3522 White Oak Drive
Tender Buttons: November 25th
& November 26th at 8 pm
Museum of Dysfunction IV:
December 1st – December 10th
For information & tickets:
832.889.7837
www.mildredsumbrella.com

Kriegie Wartime Log
Divergence Music & Arts Space
(Spring Street Studios building)
1824 Spring St
Friday – Monday
November 11th – November 21st
Performance starts at 8 pm everyday
except Sundays: 2 pm matinee
For information & tickets
832.338.9003
www.br&y-holmes.com

Cakewalk
Main Street Theater's
Rice Village stage
2540 Times Blvd
From November 3rd –
November 27th
Show times are:
Thursdays at 7:30 pm,
Fridays & Saturdays at
8 pm & Sundays at 3 pm
For information & tickets:
713.524.6706
www.mainstreettheater.com

Speed the Plow
Country Playhouse
12802 Queensbury
November 4th – November 19th
Fridays & Saturdays at 8 pm, Sunday,
November 13th at 2 pm & Thursday,
November 17th at 7:30 pm
For information & tickets:
713.467.4497
www.countryplayhouse.org

BY ALEX WUKMAN



November Theatre Wrap

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