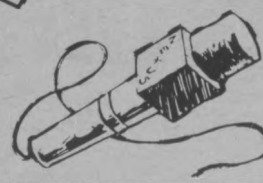


Artsweek

The Arts and Entertainment Supplement to the Daily Nexus, for March 9th through March 15th, 1995

LOIS

PLAYS THE LIVING ROOM



Interview by
Kevin Carhart



It's one of the live-show

Highlights

of the year! With Lois, Shove, and 3 other bands. It's at 7190 Hollister, beginning at 7:30, this Saturday, the 11th. Don't miss it!

The music of Lois Maffeo is a very pleasant sensation: memorable melodies over minimal acoustic guitar chords and a crunching drum. The catchiness doesn't give a clue to the depth that sinks in upon closer examination — Lois' lyrics are a balance of warm and cutting, heartfelt and stinging.

It's a further pleasure to see Lois in concert because she's really funny — her jokes all hit, she has the crowd roaring. For years she's been a staple of the principled independent music scene up in Olympia, Wash., where her label, K Records, is located.

Her new tour has just begun, and she's playing the Living Room on Saturday. You can't get much better than melody, humor, warmth, principle *and proximity!*

Artsweek spoke to Lois on the phone just before the tour started, and what follows is an edited transcript.

Artsweek: You're about to have a new tour.

LOIS MAFFEO: Yeah, leaving tomorrow morning. ... First stop is in San Francisco, then to L.A. and Santa Barbara, and then we'll head across the Southwest, through the South, up through the East Coast and back. Really long — seven weeks.

AW: It's a real treat not to have to think about the L.A. show of something. This club, the Living Room, it's a pretty new thing that they're having Kill Rock Stars bands, and you, and Some Velvet Sidewalk was just there. ... It's kind of a treat.

LM: Did you see Some Velvet Sidewalk?

AW: Yeah I did, and there's a question there. They're very much a punk band in terms of how their music sounds, and I've heard you use that phrase, but your songs are really pretty.

LM: And it's 'cause I say I'm a punk band as well?

AW: Well, I'm curious, I think it's interesting, is there a rift? You seem to use punk rock as the spirit, kind of an ethic....

LM: Rather than a sound? I definitely was influenced by punk rock. You know, I used to be a big fan of American hardcore — I loved Black Flag. When people say, "Oh, you're a folk singer," well, I never really listened to folk music. I love folk music, but I always listened to punk rock.

AW: Well, how does it change the message to be coming through in a pretty context?

LM: I think how it's changed is that American kids used the framework of original punk rock, of kind of getting away from the corporate structure and trying to be shocking, in order to start their own labels and their own fanzines, that kind of do-it-yourself ethic. Radical music to me doesn't have to be earsplitting. I think it could be very minimalist and I think there are some minimalist punk rock bands, for instance, Young Marble Giants or The Raincoats both used a non-rock 'n' roll framework to create punk rock.

AW: I have a feeling that some punk-rock musicians who are really noisy but who have something to get across, maybe they feel as though to be pretty-sounding would be too complacent, like you have to put up a hard sound because you're working on hard ideas.

LM: Right. ... I don't find that necessarily to be the case, although I definitely honor it. I love punk music, or hardcore, whatever you want to call it.

AW: Are listeners receptive even though it's ...

LM: Sure, I think so. I've played with some harder bands like Unsane and Fugazi, and I was nervous, like "Oh, my God, they're not going to dig this at all." But I don't think anybody's so narrow — I mean, some people are — but I think a lot of people are really educated music consumers, their tastes are broader.



Get Down on the Get Down

Professor Trance & The Energizers
Professor Trance & The Energizers
Island

Within the last few years there has been a fairly large explosion of trance and ambient compact discs. However, none to my knowledge have taken the idea of trance music to the spiritual extremes of Professor Trance, a.k.a. Frank Natale, and the Energizers.

For the Energizers and their "spiritual elder," Frank Natale, trance music is part of a larger global phenomenon called trance dancing. According to the Energizers, trance dancing is "an ancient Shamanic practice which invites Spirit to embody us; to heal us through spiritual ecstasy." The Energizers, who are an international tribe of creative people with a common belief in the "Great Mother Earth" as the original deity, practice trance dancing, as well as soul hunting, spirit animal journeys and teacher plant rituals to achieve these states of ecstatic

healing.

Now, I have been known to "cut a rug," "get down on the get down" or "bust a move" on occasion, but I must admit that I never looked into the healing qualities of dancing. But what the hell? It has been long thought that music held amazing healing powers, and regular physical exertion is proven to keep people healthier. The combination of the two couldn't hurt.

Luckily for me, thoughtfully included in the slip cover was a five-step list of directions on how to trance dance.

As it said in the directions, I first placed my feet parallel to my shoulders and allowed my body and mind to let go and relax. Then I tied a bandana over my eyes and became aware of my breathing as I inhaled and exhaled deeply. After the recommended five minutes, I further relaxed and let my body move to the rhythm. Soon I was supposed to feel a "vibration or energy moving through" me, but all I got was a cramp and I sat down.

Obviously, I really need this, because I'm not very healthy.

However, sitting down, I finally got to listen to the music in a very relaxed state. Prior to this, I had listened to the disc a couple of times in my car, but trance states are very difficult, if not dangerously illegal, while driving down the 101. It is in this winded-yet-comfortable state that the real beauty and depth of this music hit me.

The style is distinctively tribal in nature, but it is not of any particular national region. While the music provides an extremely primal feeling, the quality of production is on par with any current technophilic excursion, and there is a definite influence by contemporary underground dance music.

"Xingu" begins with a slow heartbeat pulsing under quick, airy breaths and a relaxing synthesizer chord. Then the roll of a drum sets off a jumpy conga and djembe beat layered with tribal mutterings, quick vocal blasts and short flute melodies. As the track continues, a snare drum kicks in for extra power and a catchy bassline bumps alongside. "Drumming Circle" leads in with a steady beat as the insects and other inhabitants of the jungle wildly call out to the deep rumbling of an aboriginal digeridoo. Quickly, the strange



screams of the digeridoo bring forth a multitude of percussion layers and tribal chant samples, building like a primal hunger.

The other cuts range from spacy, wandering tunes like "Energise" to pumping dance floor-filling tracks like "Breathe Connect Us All." As a whole, Frank Natale and the Energizers have created a very interesting work that can be appreciated on many levels.

—Matt Turner



Biting Sounds

Sharkboy
Matinee
nude/Tristar

In addition to the grandiose egotism I enjoy when writing reviews of other people's work comes another, even more self-serving advantage to being a music critic: I get free CDs! To be honest, most of them are better frisbees than they are music, but once in a while, a rare and special disc will come in the mail and I find myself able to forgive the record labels for their many past mistakes. Sharkboy's album, *Matinee* is one of those efforts; it's a finely crafted debut glowing with raw emotion

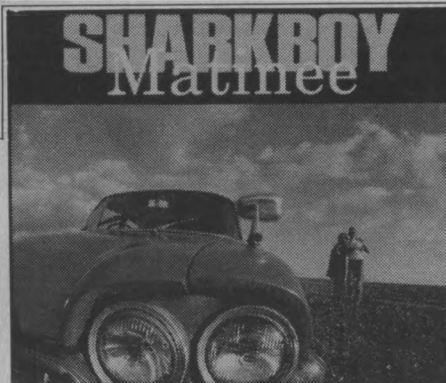
and powerful images.

Sharkboy is a six-piece act from Brighton, England, that incorporates luscious melodies and unorthodox arrangements to create a surreal sound which is truly captivating. *Matinee's* mix is peppered with muted trumpets, cello, guitars, bass, drums, percussion, keyboards and saxophone (!), which all fit together in a paradoxically unstructured way. The songs' lack of arrangement (or is it their abundance of arrangement?) is refreshing in that you never quite know what to expect. No, these songs probably won't make their way onto MTV's regular rotation any time soon, but that's just as well

— this is music you will want to keep quiet. It's private music for you and you only.

Private, because lead singer Avy is a unique soul, whose affecting voice and lyrics are the perfect companion to loneliness, anguish and frustration. When you find yourself moping because "love stinks" — don't feel bad, simply spin this disc and be reminded that someone knows just how you feel. Avy has been to the desolate part of the mind where pain lives — you can hear it in her oddly beautiful voice on every track of *Matinee*.

Also impressive are Avy's bandmates, who do some pretty heavy experimentation on this disc. A lot of different styles show up in the music of *Matinee*, but none of them are blended in familiar ways. The rudeboy horns in "Yo Yo" will have you swearing that Sharkboy is some kind of gnarly British ska band, while the nasty guitar in "Sugar" will convince you



that they're a blues act. In every case, though, the band's music ideally accompanies Avy's haunting vocals. It's dark and brooding, but hopeful and heartening at the same time.

Admittedly, Sharkboy plays mood music — music for a lonely, pissed-off night or an afternoon of deep introspection — but when the mood does in fact strike, this disc is its perfect companion. *Matinee* is like a giant, colorful swirl painted on a deep, black canvas. This is good stuff.

—Eric Steuer

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In Friday's Daily Nexus

You Talkin' To Me?

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SANTA BARBARA



High-Tech Introspection

One of the grand themes throughout music's history is innovation. From Beethoven to Mozart to Scott Joplin to Miles Davis, the one distinguishing feature of great musicians is that no one had ever quite heard what they were doing before.

UCSB Ph.D. candidate Anne Deane has worked her whole career to enter this tradition. She started writing at age 13 and pursued music through the Oberlin Music Academy undergraduate program to UC Santa Barbara's Music Dept., which has led to the discovery of her current instrument, a NeXT computer.

Deane has composed and produced some of the most successful computer-based music in the collegiate world. Her flagship piece, *Positive Thinking*, has been performed by the Synchronia new-music ensemble in St. Louis. It was also performed at Bowling Green State University and the 1993 National Flute Conference in Boston. In February, she was selected as one of seven American composers to be distributed worldwide to public and college radio stations for possible broadcast.

The composition, which is about the AIDS-related suffering and death of one of Deane's close friends, has surprised Deane with its wide popularity.

Her newfound success may have something to do with her philosophy on composing and performing, which has developed into her impetus to write music. "I really want to communicate with my audience," she said. "I'm really interested in setting up a dramatic musical experience so that people will feel something."

This is why Deane



chose the dying and death of Fred Chance, a long-time friend and poet, as the subject of *Positive Thinking*. Chance recorded himself reading the poem for her composition and actually lived to see much of its success. Three weeks before his death, he recited the poem at a performance in Boston. Deane dedicated the composition to him in her performance program.

Audiences have discovered in her work old memories of their own past losses and traumatic events, and some have found themselves compelled to speak to her about them. "People have come up to me after performances and started telling me about when their grandfather died or what happened when their son had a big accident," she said. "[*Positive Thinking*] really helps people get in touch with their feelings over a loss of a loved one."

Deane included two pages of "Special Instructions" in the performance program, followed by the

musical score of the piece. The instructions are for computer-generated sounds, which are an essential part of the piece. The sounds, which have no other description in music, combine with flautist Betsy Cuffel and Chance reading his poem "Positive Thinking" into a strikingly touching expression of grief.

Using computers has allowed Deane to explore what would otherwise be impossible for acoustic composition. By overlaying the flute and poetry reading and precisely timing their interplay, Deane produced extraordinary sounds. "At times, it almost sounds as if the flute is speaking the words, and I really like that," she said.

Deane's own favorite composers include the likes of Luciano Barrio, Ravel, Stravinsky, Ricky Lee Jones, Talking Heads and XTC, all of whom "have a dramatic kind of bang to their work, and that's what I'm trying to do."

Belly
King
Sire/4AD

Comparisons between Kristin Hersh and her stepsister and former Throwing Musemate Tanya Donnelly are sure to come up when someone mentions either one of them or their bands. (We could also mention Kim Deal and the Breeders, but that would really make things complicated.)

Listening to both bands' new albums, Throwing Muses' *University* and Belly's *King*, quickly highlights the songwriting differences between the two. Hersh prefers a harder edge, while Donnelly favors fuzzier guitars and poppier arrangements. Along these lines, *King* is a great follow-up to the Belly debut, *Star* — although, unlike the clean-sounding *Star*, *King* has heavier guitars and distortion, as Donnelly wraps and twists her soft voice around the music. But much like its predecessor, the new album possesses ambiguous lyrics that take a few listens to understand.

The album begins with a Sonic Youthish screech that develops into the daze of "Puberty." Like its namesake,

However, she acknowledges that none of them sound anything like her music. "Secretly, I would love to be a pop star," she said. "But that's not the music I hear in my head."

Her ultimate goal is therapeutic, combining various musical mediums (she is currently working on a piece about Chance's last day of life, scored for a chamber quartet) with her personal experience to produce catharsis both in



"Puberty" is confusing. Lines like "Covered in honey / Showered in beer / Now when you spin on your head like a monkey" are strange and don't make sense at first, but a childish sense of glee and fun begins to take form.

The theme of life soon changes to death with "Red," a mad epitaph that changes from a eulogy to a wild, crazy death, ending with a great riff. It all makes you ask, Who's Red? The child?

The entire album begins to take form as a progressing life, as "Silverfish" asks the father of the child for emotional support and

to "hold his tiny frame in your arms," and the mother in "Super-Connected" sees a child with a "third broken window" and "hair full of glass." A variety of styles and statements on the subject follow, from "L'il Ennio" exploring the inside of our minds to the folksy "The Bees," telling a wayward son to beware of life.

King is one of the best albums of this year. It shows that beautiful vocals and lyrics can be mixed with loud guitars and distortion. And production is by Glyn Johns, whose work goes back to the Beatles. *King* is definitely worth getting.

—Michael Lin

herself and her audience. "If people can engage in a musical experience which helps them get in touch with their grief," she said, "then maybe they'll be able to discharge some of those feelings."

However, she believes her art will always start with her own interests.

"I'm really trying to look inside as to what's important to me and what I want to say," she said, "and not just to write another piece,

but to really do something that makes an impact inside me. I think that doing that will also make an impact on someone else. The *Positive Thinking* piece was really neat because that was something that I was working through in my personal life.

"The hardest thing about being an artist is looking in all the time."

—Chris George



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Speakin' Up the Yin/Yang an amerasian man in america a performance by Kip Fulbeck



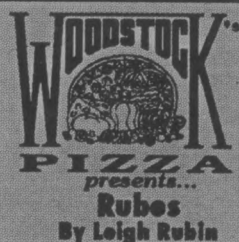
Photo by Roger J Porter Composite by Kevin Tam

Performance and video artist and UCSB Assistant Professor of Art Studio and Asian American Studies, Kip Fulbeck presents his brand new solo performance, "Speakin' Up the Yin/Yang: an amerasian man in america." Using improvised monologues, autobiographical stories, comedy sketches, and video shorts, he will address his experience as an Asian and Amerasian man in the United States.

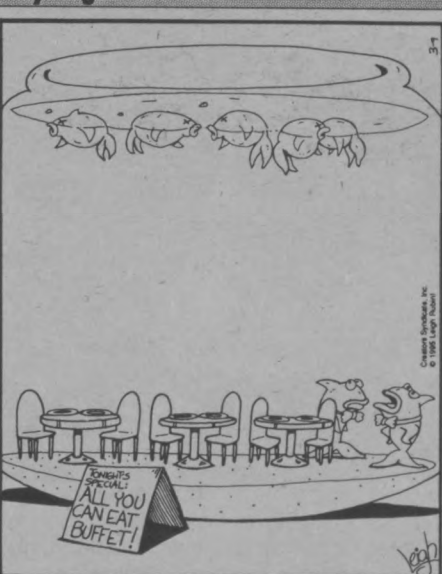
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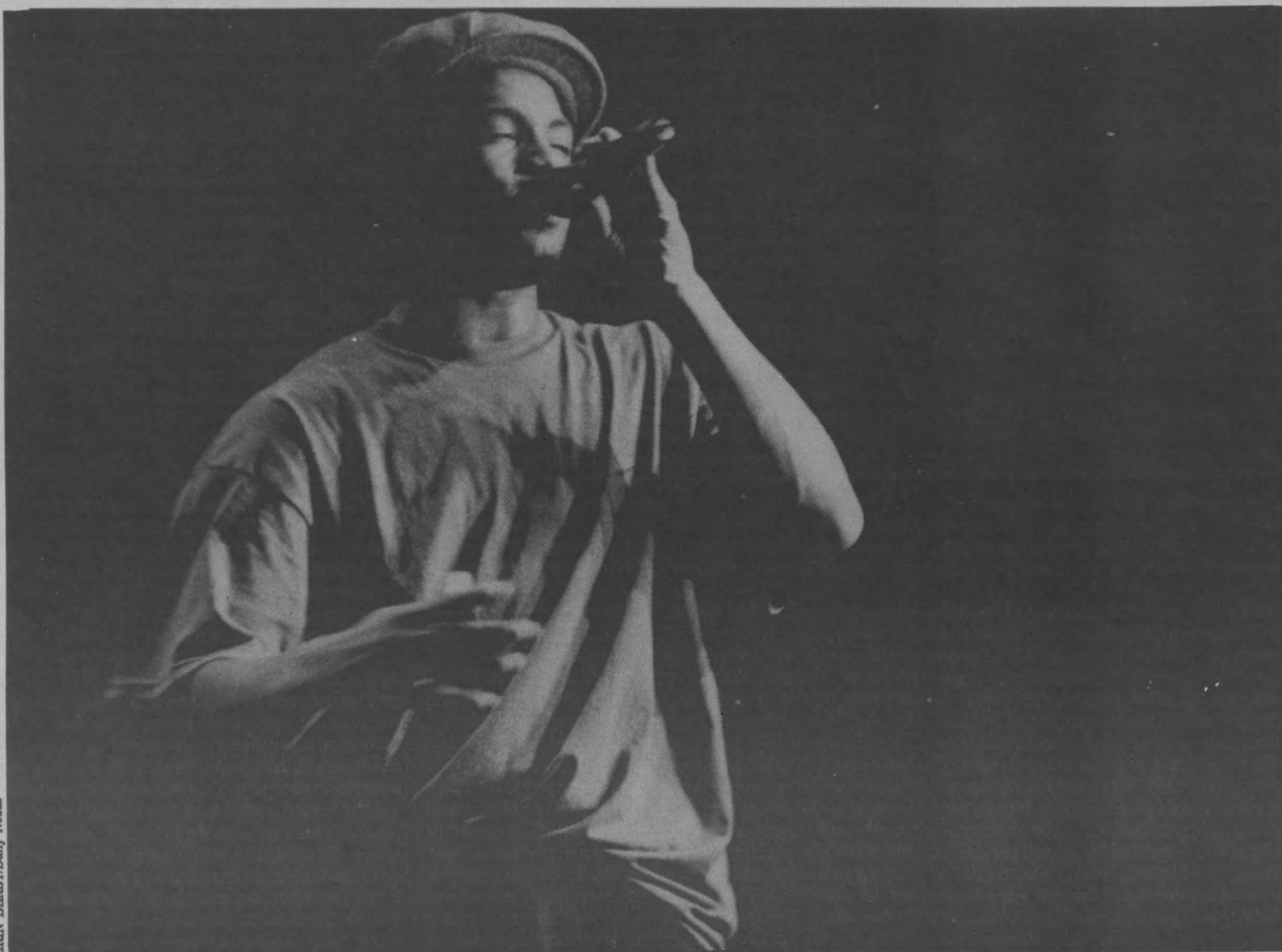
An Interview with Digable Planets' Mecca by Monty Luke

A very gray day. As I chill inside my car in the Campbell Hall/Cheadle parking lot, I realize that my mood right now is very similar to the weather outside. Gray, cool, kinda *blah*, really. I'm very tired from an eventful Friday night before, which kinda spilled over into Saturday morning. But it's now Saturday afternoon, and I'm still exhausted. Do I have to do this interview? I'm afraid they're gonna eat me alive for some reason. I usually don't get anxious before an interview, but I am right now. Probably just from a lack of sleep.

I spot a friend sitting in front of the doors which lead into Campbell Hall's lobby. She's chatting with a brother I've never seen before. I say "Wassup" to my friend, and as the brother turns towards me, I see his "blowout comb all access" laminate dangling from his neck. I proceed to complain to my friend about how tired I am from the previous night's activities and the brother from the Digable crew begins to laugh. I ask him what's so funny as I introduce myself to him. And he tells me that it seems like everyone on the tour feels just like I do, and that the past week has been particularly grueling for Digable Planets. One night in L.A., the next in Santa Cruz, then back down to San Diego and finally to Santa Barbara — an exhausting California tour indeed. Somehow, hearing that the group I'm about to interview is as tired as I am makes me feel much better, and I look forward to meeting them and recording a good interview.

What follows is an edited transcript of *Artsweek's* interview with Mecca, also known as Ladybug.

Artsweek: It seems like



ERIN DERRY/Daily Nexus

cepts. They *both* have themes. This one just happens to be different, that's all.

AW: What would be the theme of *Rechin*?

M: Well, the first [album] was just an introduction of Digable Planets, you know ... biggin' up where we're from in rap music. It was a representation of us then. It [was] just a reflection of us — that's what the theme is on both [albums]. ... But lyrically on the second album, we talk a lot more about different issues that were present on the first album but were overlooked or

"jazz hip-hop group," or whatever, that is definitely a concerted effort from record companies and journalists [she pauses and looks directly at me]. But you can't escape that 'cuz when people are tryin' to push plastic, they gotta do what they gotta do.

AW: What's the creative process that you all as a group go through?

M: Well, we do all of our own production. There's no set formula or anything to putting together a song. Sometimes musically ... we would come up with the music on the production end, and then the lyrics

ideal of what hip-hop should be?

M: Hip-hop should be ... I mean it is an expression of youth, from urban areas. The state of hip-hop now is that there's such a level of exploitation. ... This country has the power to just push everything ... so right now, it's kinda outta control. There's a lot of less-quality groups, I think, being released. Finish the question — what was the rest?

AW: How do your own political beliefs fit into what hip-hop should be? Your ideal.

M: Hip-hop is a culture

your question — I didn't really like it.

AW: That's all right. Your label, *Pendulum Records*, is now owned by *EMI*, as opposed to your former label, *Elektra*. How has your treatment by the label changed in view of that?

M: [Becomes very hesitant while holding tape recorder — it looks as though she's trying to figure out how to turn it off] Um, well ... the treatment by the record company ... it's just, I mean, *Pendulum Records* ... [pauses several seconds]

AW: You don't have to answer the question....

M: I can answer it. The treatment — there's no special treatment because of a successful first album, first single, whatever, or winnin' a Grammy. There's nothin' that's changed. You're still a slave to your record company regardless of who's distributing your product. We just hope that this time around with *EMI* and [their new president], hopefully our stuff will be promoted more this time around. So far, I can't say that that's been happening. But what can you do? You just gotta always be ready to make moves.

AW: How would you explain the success of your first album? From my perspective, it almost seemed as though when you released the album, it came outta nowhere, and it blew up. What do you think was responsible for that?

M: Well, first of all, the album didn't come from "nowhere." It came from a lotta hard work, a lotta trials and tribulations in our lives, you know, since our birth....

AW: I meant "outta nowhere" in the sense that no one really had heard of you guys before that al-

bum dropped.

M: Uh-huh, yeah. Well, that happens with all new groups. But the success ... I guess the first single, "Rebirth of Slick," was different. In conjunction with the video, the way it was stylized — we're in a jazz club — it had a whole different feel. It was a different rap video from all the other songs. ... It was like a breath of fresh air — that's what a lot of people seemed to take it as, plus just having a multigender group also appealed to a lot more people. And a simple hook like "Cool Like Dat" always does the job.

AW: What are some of the goals that you as individuals want to accomplish through your art?

M: We just wanna make good music, you know? It's an art form, it's something that we practice every day. It ain't something that

"You just gotta always be ready to make moves."

... you just make a record and that's it. It takes practice, just like any other career or art form, and just to make good beats and at the same time have some meaning and depth to your lyrics.

AW: What's in the future for Digable Planets?

M: The future? Um ... [laughs] we're all gettin' into production for other people. I'm interested in getting into the film business, directing. ... [someone with the band yells something to Mecca, indicating that she should finish soon] Yeah, I answered your question. Hopefully you heard it.

AW: Cool, thanks.



ERIN DERRY/Daily Nexus

this new album, *Blowout Comb*, is very thematic, as opposed to the first album.

Mecca: Is very thematic?

AW: Well, is more thematic than the first album. Is that true? And if so, what would that theme be?

M: Both albums ... have their own. ... They're both separate entities. They both have their own con-

misunderstood.

AW: Discuss the group's image then as opposed to how you feel it is now. Do you think there was a conscious effort on your label's behalf to portray you in a certain way as opposed to now?

M: Well, our image has always been just us. Who we are now as far as labeling and placing us in categories in music such as

might follow, or it might have been an inspiration lyrically that translated and we came up with the music afterwards. So there's no set formula — it just changes. I guess you would call it like a vibe or whatever.

AW: What are your feelings on the current state of hip-hop, and how do your own political beliefs correlate to your

that includes style, dress, language, film or whatever. It should just be an expression of that, you know, but how it should be, I can't really say how it should be. People gotta make money. You can't say it shouldn't be on the radio, it shouldn't be on MTV, because people gotta survive. People gotta make that money, you know. I hope that answers

LOIS

Continued from p.1A

AW: I feel as though there's something to the fact that you're still recording on [K] that some of your contemporaries are signed to major labels. ... What are some of the things you like about [K]?

LM: Well, they're my friends and I can trust them completely. They're people I've spent the last 10 years of my life knowing and working with. I've never been offered anything by another label, so it's kind of a moot point. I think some people assume that I have, but I haven't.

AW: Connected to that, I was wondering about the song "Indie." Is it an anthem or is it ironic?

LM: No, it's not ironic at all, but I think it's not necessarily about indie rock. It's about your own self-independence and your self-confidence and your willingness to be an independent person. When they handed out the songs, they were supposed to be about the holidays, so I picked the Fourth of July, Independence Day.

AW: Ahhh... I'm wondering, it's never bad to be an idealist, but is it possible to have an indie label these days, what with so many arcane financial ties? I don't know particularly how to feel about it. On the one hand, I feel as though you judge every song on its own merits.

LM: You mean about keeping indie vs. major labels very separate?

AW: Right. I'll hear word that, oh, SpinART is funded by somebody, and Sub Pop is, people have distribution deals — I guess it's a question of a personal spirit. Do you think it can keep on in spite of the overt circumstances that some people take to be a comedown?

LM: There'll always be an "underground," there'll always be the point where the underground merges with the mainstream, and I think that's what we're seeing right now. But then there'll just be another underground created. One of my favorite records this year came out on Slash, which is basically a major label, the record by the Latin Playboys. And I love that record. I'm not bummed, you know. I wish I could give my money directly to every band, but it doesn't exist. I think the more you try to stratify it and say, "Oh, you suck because you have this deal..." There are some real enemies, and I don't like giving money directly to the major labels because I don't think that they, they spend it on really weird stuff.

AW: Junkets and ...

LM: Yeah, stuff like that. But if a band makes that decision and chooses to sell their record like that, and I like the band, I have to support them in that decision, and hopefully they'll get some of my money.

AW: Yeah. That seems like an important thing. Thinking about an indie label and a major label is sort of the same line of reasoning as people who boycott a particular product because of where the corporate interests are putting their funding, and it's sort of like a personal line of reasoning within a web, a circus.

LM: Oftentimes, the people I hear say-

ing the most vociferously that indie is the greatest and major labels suck are standing there smoking cigarettes, drinking beer — I mean, they're giving their money to even bigger corporations. I'm not saying I dig corporations — I hate them — but I'm saying there's a lot of subtlety in this argument. It's not cut and dry.

AW: Yeah, it's confusing. ... I'm wondering if there's anything to this kids imagery, with Yoyo, the Yoyo A-Go-Go concert in the summer, and back when you were in Courtney Love [Lois' old band, which was totally unrelated to the Hole woman], when you had the Highlights single, and I was wondering if there was an idea to that.

LM: I'm not really sure. I do recognize your point about that, and a lot of people actually said about riot grrrl that a lot of these young women were choosing baby-doll aesthetics. And some people kind of took a feminist argument about it, like that they're trying to create childlike appearances, which are useless if you're trying to have a strong woman's voice... but I think a lot of us just have an aesthetic that's closer to '50s and '60s styles, and that the closest we get to that is that childhood format or aesthetic or graphic style. So it really speaks to me — I know, but I hate all the '70s stuff, but that's partially because I've lived through the '70s, but '60s and '50s stuff I feel much more of a kinship to.

AW: That reminds me of your Zombies cover, of "The Way I Feel Tonight." I'm almost hoping on Saturday that you'll break a guitar string because it gives such a good reason to sing an a cappella.

LM: [Laughter] Is that a request?

AW: And where did you get your comic timing? It's brilliant.

LM: [More laughter] I grew up in a really large family. It's competitive — you have to go for big laughs if you want to get seconds at the dinner table. ... I talk a lot when I play because I used to be a lot more nervous to play, but I was never nervous to talk in front of crowds. But

"Young Marble Giants or the Raincoats both used a non-rock'n'roll framework to create punk rock."

playing in front of crowds is really hard for me so I was just trying to cover up my scaredness by, kind of, almost coming down in a sense.

AW: Well, it goes over great! You ought to do an album of stand-up.

LM: [Laughs] Yeah, some people said, "When's your spoken-word record coming out?"

AW: That Alligator Lounge show was great. ... I saw Grant McLennan play there, and the other band was Los Lobos, which has members of Toto.

LM: Oh, really. That is freaky.



Drummer Heather Dunn (l.) and Lois Maffeo

AW: It was a weird bill. All the Go-Betweens fans sort of left after Grant. ... That's kind of like my secret pet band, the Go-Betweens. Do you have any that are...

LM: Oh, you've named one of mine. The Go-Betweens are an incredible influence to me. I've been lucky enough to see them three times.

AW: [Kevin has convulsions] Wow!

LM: — And one of two shows in my life that I wept, I was so happy to see. ... I'm a big fan of Marine Girls, Beat Happening, Jonathan Richman, Black Flag. ... I love old jazz standards, I love Peggy Lee, I love Stax records, Otis Redding, Al Green...

AW: I first heard you when I heard about the One Last Kiss SpinART compilation on e-mail and heard the song "Baserball Bat," which doesn't sound very much like you....

LM: No, just the spirit of when it was recorded, the style of it — kind of an angry and violent tune.

AW: Yeah. Do you have any feelings on electronic mail, the Internet?

LM: I'm not really a computer person.

AW: Uh huh. It can be a bad thing.

LM: I've found it to be very handy in some instances and in other instances that I feel it's somewhat elitist and I feel not very connected to it. I'm kind of waiting, kind of holding back, but I see it as kind of handy. I heard Exene Cervenka read some of her writing recently, and she said, "You know, if computers were so great, why would anyone let us have them?" Of course, she's kind of conspiracy-theory oriented in that response.

AW: Yeah. I just use it as a means to an end for a lot of music — I mean, there's an indie-pop list...

LM: And I think that's really great, but I've also read some things that people have written, articles about me, that I know that they've taken something off the Internet that they're using as a fact which I know is not a fact. That's when it kind of bothers me, when it's used as a

source but it's not verifiable. So I'm optimistic but not wholly involved.

AW: On the new single, there's a new recording of your old Courtney Love song "Hey Antoinette!"

LM: Yeah.

AW: Are you going to bring back the Courtney Love songs?

LM: I don't think so. We kind of did that because we've been doing it live, and I really like the way it sounded with Amy drumming — she no longer drums with me — and ... Heather and I play them live. They are pristine to me, the memory — I enjoy playing them. I figure, I wrote 'em, I might as well. There's also been talk of, should they be rereleased on CD — the single is impossible to find — but you know, we were a really small band. When we existed, hardly anybody knew about us. And we cut our singles...

AW: What is the song "Charles Atlas," from the new album, about?

LM: I think it's kind of a metaphor for change. You sometimes wonder if you would have liked someone better if you knew them when they were a child, or sometimes you know someone and you're really happy when you first know them, and then something changes in their life, like they make money or they go to college or they do something. And it's kind of saying, I'm wistful for the time when we were less-developed people or younger.

AW: I see...

LM: It's kind of a request, saying OK, you're Atlas now, you hold the world on your shoulders. Now can you just take a few minutes to just go back, to have some nostalgia — the good old days.

AW: Is that running through the album? I'd written down "wistful."

LM: It's a little bit of a moody album, a period of change in my life. I moved back to Olympia right prior to recording it, and I just kind of decided that I wanted to put my roots down in Olympia rather than stay in Washington, D.C., so a big period of change for me.



On the Street

In honor of their 10th anniversary, the Santa Barbara Civic Light Opera has resurrected perhaps their most celebrated production ever, *42nd Street*. Their original production in 1989 became a colossal hit and marked the turning point in SBCLO's history toward a higher quality of theater.

If it is anything, *42nd Street* is fun. There are no serious issues addressed here, no social statements, no meaningful themes — just two and a half hours of good, clean entertainment. And *42nd Street* is well-endowed in the entertainment department. The dances are huge, happy and hoppin', and you'll be exhausted just watching them. The songs are likewise — there's not a serious one in the lot. *42nd Street* was written

in 1980, but is based almost entirely on the film of the same name. In fact, all of the songs in the score are from the original composers, some from the film, some not. As a result of this mish-mashing of film songs and nonfilm songs, sometimes the show lacks a tightness and focus that an original piece would have.

The book of the show, ironically, is the weakest part. Since it was essentially the only contemporary part of the show, one would hope/expect it to be of a higher quality. No such luck. Instead, the dialogue stumbles along awkwardly and the plot wanders here and there. Songs are shoehorned into the story with little regard to their necessity. Characterization is inconsistent and often contradictory, leav-

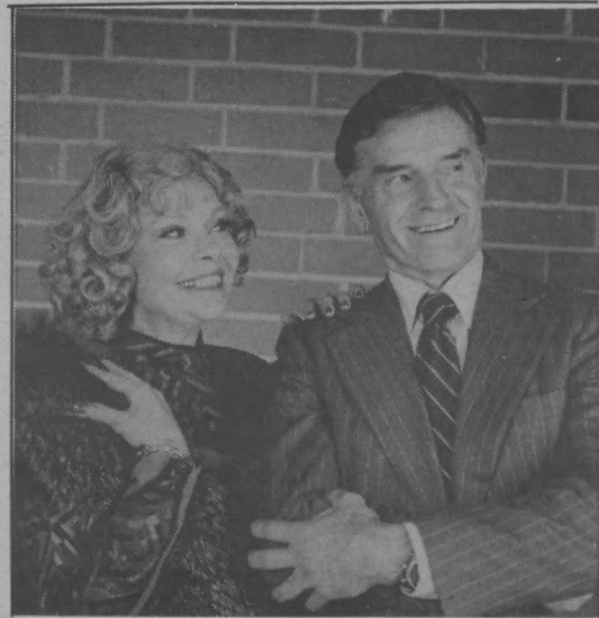
ing the audience confused as to just who these people are. At several points, the audience broke out into laughter as a character would suddenly switch momentum. In one scene, the show-within-the-show's director goes from kissing the lead to lecturing her in a matter of seconds.

But the saving grace of this show is the dance numbers. SBCLO has assembled a wonderful cast of dancers who pull off each number with seemingly limitless energy. Choreographer Jon Engstrom, who was a member of the original Broadway production, has done a fantastic job at creating some exciting dance moments.

42nd Street follows the rise of one young actress. Peggy Sawyer, our her-

oine, begins the show as innocent and shy as can be, but through the influence of her incredible tapping toes, she lands herself a role in the chorus line of a Broadway show. Then the impossible happens. In what seems almost to be a Nostradamus-like prediction of the legendary rise of Shirley MacLaine, Peggy rises to the occasion when the show's star breaks her ankle. In just short of 36 hours — ten minutes of show time — she learns the entire lead part and saves the show.

Played demurely by Cathy Wydner, Peggy is the shy girl next door, quiet and reserved until she gets on stage. Once there, Wydner dances up a storm and adds some quality vocals to boot. Peggy's required love interests are the show's male lead and



the director, played by Reece Holland and Don Stewart, respectively.

Holland's character steals the show. Easily the show's warmest singer, he leads the dancers on several tour de force numbers that'll leave you panting. Joy Claussen, too, puts in a quality performance as the aging and annoying Dor-

othy Brock. All together, the cast pulls off the show with a professionalism and energy rarely seen elsewhere in Santa Barbara. This production of *42nd Street* may have its flaws, but in terms of pure fun, it's just about as good as it gets.

—Davin McHenry

Deep Themes

Well, it's not every day you get to see a Scottish black comedy about death and dismemberment. It's also not every day that you see a film as consistently entertaining as *Shallow Grave*. Set almost entirely in a large apartment, it's a cheerfully immoral tale told with quick wit and bad skin — quintessential urban Britain, in fact.

Accountant David (Ewan McGregor), doctor Allison (Kerry Fox) and the fast-thinking, slightly obnoxious Alex (Christopher Eccleston), the comedian of the trio who works as a (what else?) tabloid journalist, need to rent out the fourth room in their spacious flat. After teasing and ridiculing some prospective tenants, they decide on a placid, mysterious, self-described "writer" (Keith Allen), whose air of mortality hints at what's to come.

A few days later, they break into his room to find him lying on the bed naked and, more importantly, dead. To confuse their emotions further,

they also find a suitcase full of high-denomination banknotes, presumably proceeds from some form of organized crime. After some soul searching, they decide to do what any worthwhile set of movie characters would do — keep the money and dispose of the body. Allison raises some reservations and is countered with "But you're a doctor; you kill people every day."

But David raises the most objections, and unfortunately, it's he who draws the short straw and must perform the grisly acts that will stop the body from being identified. Understandably, this unhinges the poor boy's mind and later he becomes paranoid and moves to the attic, taking the money with him and hiding it in the water tank. Here the film enters a surreal phase as David, perched in the rafters, peering down from holes he's drilled in the ceiling, scuttles from one end of the attic to the other lit from below by probing beams of ghostly light. It's



scenes like this, rather than the one-liners, good though they are, that leave a smile on the lips.

It is instructive to compare *Shallow Grave* to the celebrated *Pulp Fiction*, which also had a wry look at organized crime and violence. This picture has none of the vacuousness that ultimately made the other so unsatisfying, slick and dazzling though it was. The violence, even when farcical, is never sensual or designed to give you pleasure; it's not a moving comic book. Perhaps a closer comparison

would be *Red Rock West* (for me, last year's best film) with its tight turns of narrative and calm conscience.

On a small budget, director Danny Boyle and writer John Hodge have achieved something of a coup. Some of the scenes might be hard to stomach, and you may not lose much by waiting for it to come out on video but, if you understand the humor, *Shallow Grave* has to be one of the most stimulating films of the year.

—Martin Knight

Rising Above

Arthur Agee and William Gates dream of being NBA players like Isiah Thomas. *Hoop Dreams* is the true and intensely moving story of the two boys who begin playing basketball in the inner city, where they are "discovered" by talent scouts. It traces their two very different high school careers on their way to college.

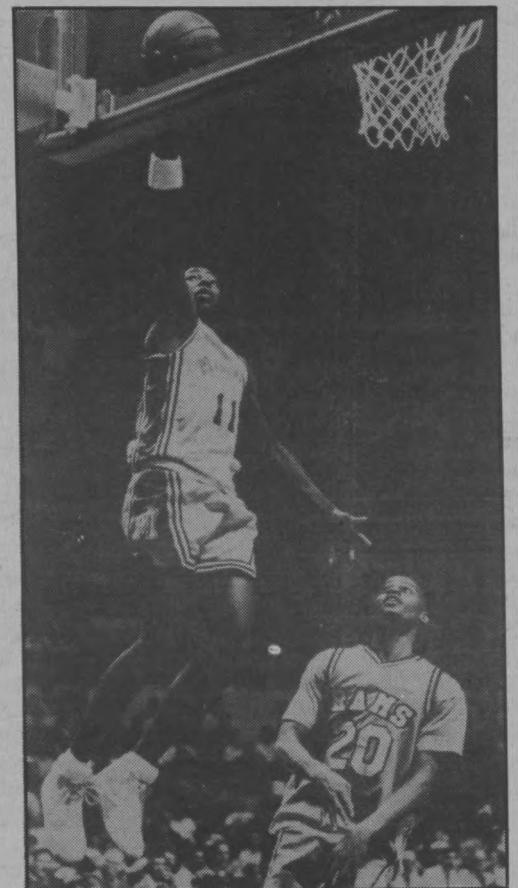
The film ricochets between the boys' two families, incorporating direct interviews and personal accounts into the film's lengthy but meaningful and well-put script.

Arthur realizes his ambitions when a scout for the predominantly white private school St. Joseph sees him play. The school recognizes his talent and pays 50 percent of the tuition. It seems to be the beginning of the consummation of his dream of leaving the ghetto, getting an education and playing in the NBA.

The camera closely documents Agee's loving family. They don't scorn him for his ascension, instead feeling as though they can live their dreams through him. The pride and closeness are shown, as are the hardships, as the family struggles with the father's cocaine addiction.

The other hopeful, William Gates, is drafted straight to the varsity team as a freshman at St. Joseph. He finds a very generous family, the Weirs, to become his sponsors and pay half of his tuition.

William plays extremely well during his first two years at St. Joseph and, as a sophomore, receives letters from different universities asking him to consider their school. Both of the boys learn numerous lessons through their game — that it's more than just shooting hoops, it's



a lifestyle.

While the film is tracing William through St. Joseph, Arthur is driven back into public high school after two years when he can no longer afford the tuition. The event crushes Arthur's morale, and he realizes the function and power of money in a basketball career.

This point is made further in the depiction of the two boys' coaches in the later years of high school. Arthur's coach back at his local high school is from the community and possesses the same concerns as the boys on the team. He's interested in winning, but also in the team's morale.

While William's coach at St. Joseph is not depicted as a bad guy, he admits that his paycheck depends on the team's performance. If his squad of boys produces a star player, he receives substantially more. He understands William's concerns, but is at conflict between the boy's welfare and the concept that winning leads to money.

William attends a summer basketball camp intended for the top high school players, where coaches from all of the top basketball schools come to rate the players. They tell the camera that they must find only the best players because their job depends on how well their team performs. The school loses a lot of money if their domes are not filled with fans. Because William is on this higher-league team, he gets disillusioned with his dream of being the next Isiah Thomas and playing for the NBA. He concludes that "basketball became more like a job" and wasn't enjoyable anymore.

Hoop Dreams superbly documents the lives of these two boys. It shows how one seemed to have an edge over the other, but that both were basically just kids striving to reach their goals in any way they could. One of the film's strengths is its depiction of realistic, imperfect characters with good and bad qualities. Although the running time of three hours is a bit daunting, I would highly recommend this film.

—Melissa Altman

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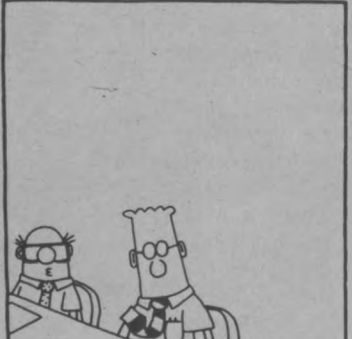
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Mystical Flight of Fancy

Borrowing from mystery writer Ruth Rendell: There are some films one wishes one had never seen, in order to have the pleasure of seeing them for the first time. *The Secret of Roan Inish* is such a movie. You leave the theater wishing you could see it with the eyes of a first-time viewer.

Roan Inish tells a charming, deceptively simple story. But it's not easy to dismiss it after you've seen it. The images, tales within the film, and characters linger with you, bobbing up unexpectedly from the subconscious so that you find yourself thinking about them at the oddest moments. And the more you think about it, the more you realize how much there is beneath the film's veneer of a simple tale about an Irish family.

At the start, we meet Fiona Coneely, a young girl going to live with her grandparents off the coast of Ireland sometime after World War II. After setting up the situ-

ation — the Coneely families had recently departed the island of Roan Inish, where they had lived for generations, to take up life on the mainland, where the living is hard — director John Sayles plunges us deep in the waters of the family's history.

And a strange history it is. Apparently, a few years earlier, when the family was abandoning Roan Inish for the mainland, the ocean colluded with seagulls to steal the family's baby as he lay in his cradle on the beach. The sea was angry with the family for leaving Roan Inish, and took the infant as punishment.

And in the film's best sequence, Sayles tells the story of the seal woman. It seems that long ago, a Coneely took a selkie — a seal transformed into a woman — as his wife, and she bore him children. Since then, every generation of the family would produce a "dark one," a Coneely with black hair who is most comfortable at sea. These dark ones are, of course, products of the seal woman's blood,

which had mingled in the family bloodline generations ago when the Coneelys were the only folks on the island. As she learns more about the family history, Fiona becomes determined to regain her infant brother, the baby lost to the sea when the waves stole him away in his cradle. Fiona's efforts drive the film, but it is the peculiar tales of Coneely history that drive Fiona.

As these stories provide the engine which propels *Roan Inish*, Sayles' directing gives the film its flavors and colors. He wisely uses Ireland's inherent connection with the mythic to lend his film mystical weight. The mysteries of Roan Inish, the links between the Coneelys and the mystical ocean, and the haunting seals that have been caring for young Jimmy since he was taken from his family seem perfectly natural and believable in this legend-ridden land.



The production is impeccable. Every detail fits smoothly within the otherworldly mood that Sayles carefully crafts and deftly maintains throughout the film. *Roan Inish* the film is as far from a typical Hollywood movie because Roan Inish is far from the New World. You won't find any of the brash, precocious children that are popular with Hollywood screenwriters in this film. Fiona, played naturally by young Jeni Courtney in her first performance, acts like any girl her age. She gets frightened talking to a Coneely with a reputation for being odd, and acts with resourcefulness when she is confronted with a strange situation.

So run, don't walk, to the Riviera, where *Roan Inish* is playing in limited release. The mysterious waters of Roan Inish and the peculiar history of the Coneely family beckon. Come on in — the water is fine.

—Tony Luu



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