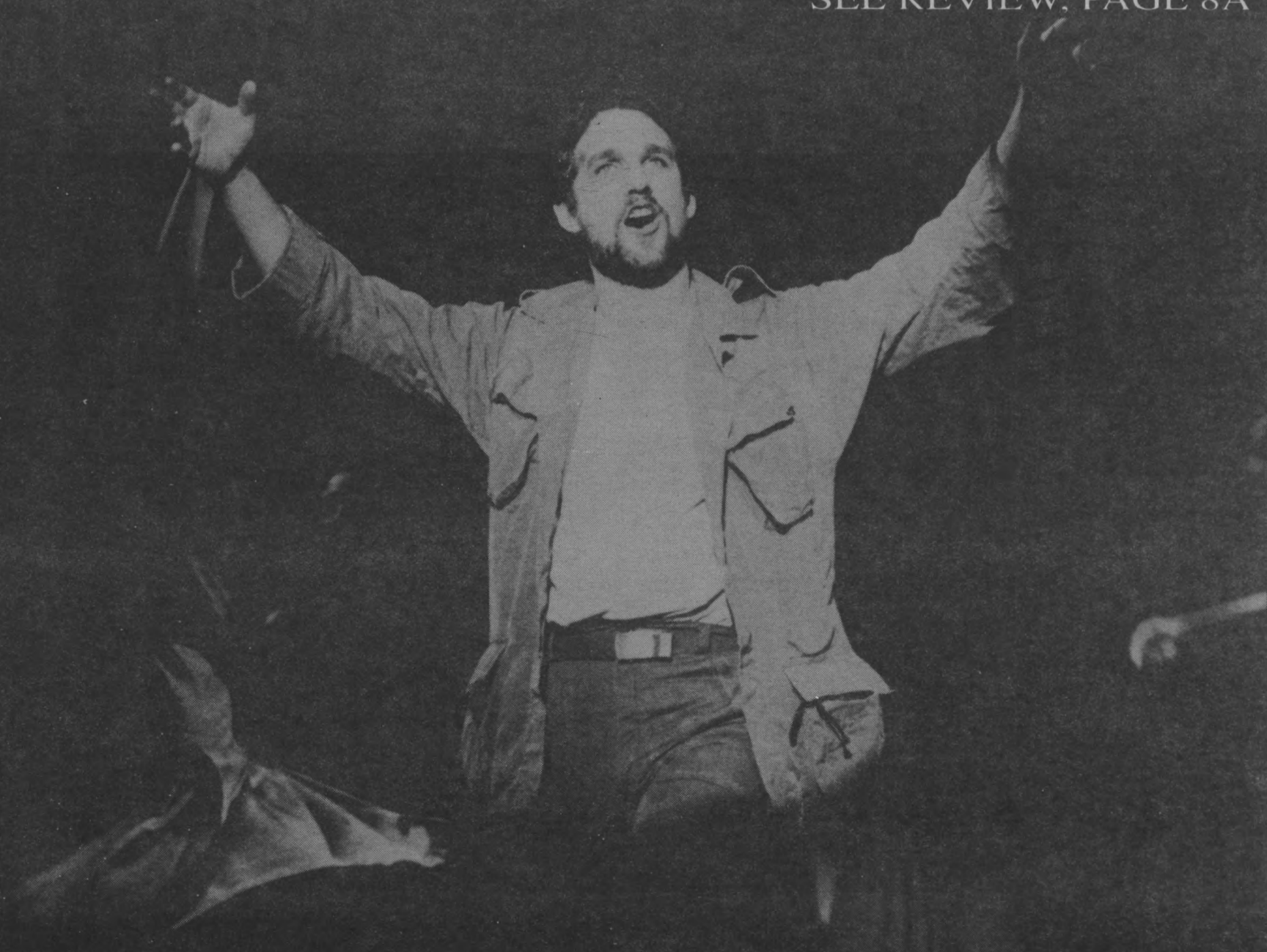


ARTS WEEK

The Arts and Entertainment Supplement to the Daily Nexus, For the Week of May 5-May 11, 1994



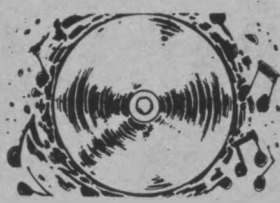
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OPERA'S PRODUCTION OF "EVITA"
SEE REVIEW, PAGE 8A



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FUSE THE HOUSE



Various Artists
Fusion Volume 2
 Hardcore Recordings

fusion
 volume 2

If anyone recalls, it was last year at about this time that KCSB's general manager, Dave Brooks, took a chance and attempted to put together a full-length CD of mixed house and techno. He enlisted the skills of local DJs Andre Lucero and Monty Luke, who mixed up two very smooth and pumping sets. The result was an exceptionally good disc where there had been somewhat of a void.

With an enthusiastic reception to his first endeavor, Dave is back with a new and improved Fusion CD, "Tracking the Groove." Now working out of Los Angeles, Dave recruited top L.A. DJ Markem (formerly Markem X) to support Monty's second Fusion appearance. Together they redefine what is phat in the house compilation category.

Monty begins the disc with a spiraling digital frequency that weaves through a light snare kick. He quickly brings in a tattering break beat that shoves his set into top speed. Monty hits overdrive with a series of beat monsters, from Dubtribe's "Mother Earth" to the Stress mix of "Happen."

After getting you to sweat a little, Monty brings the pace down and slides into some trancey tunes. An array of mesmerizing tones wafts through your eardrums, and ethereal voices call you upward, while a steady beat firmly anchors you to the dance floor. Later, the hollow resonance of bongos leads you through a pertinent speech by Martin Luther King, into the tense smattering of Plastic Man, which slowly brings the ride to an end.

But we aren't done yet, kiddies. Next, Mr. Markem steps on the wheels of steel to rock the house. Markem wastes no time slamming into this one with a hard steel bang that seems to unleash a horde of rabid synth sounds. The set turns tribal with Middle Eastern-type vocal chants and mad percussion. Some slap-happy bass jumps all over the beats, before giving way to a relentless piano jam. These unadulterated grooves keep charging with crazy horns, more bongos and flute until a slightly trancey track smooths it out and finishes it off with a reassurance that we will be hearing from Dave again.

—Matt Turner

Helium
Pirate Prude
 Matador

Eggs
Eggs Teenbeat 96 Exploder LP
 Teenbeat

You may not care, but I want to be Mary Timony when I grow up. Her sexy, languid, little-sister vocals and great big guitar work anchor the Massachusetts band Helium, whose EP *Pirate Prude*, on Matador Records, fills up the A-side of the tape currently in my Walkman (more about the B-side later.) As I was saying, Helium is possibly the only band that could inspire me to pick up a guitar in this band-infested town. Timony, formerly of Autoclave, and Shawn and Brian of Dumtruck on bass and drums, have created an EP that leaves me eagerly awaiting a full-length album.

The album opens with "Baby Vampire Made Me" and the words "Doesn't matter if it's day or if it's night. You won't remember after I bite," and then Timony kicks in with riffs perfect for air guitaring around campus. The lyrics may seem a little inspired out of context — "I'll be the pirate if you'll be my loot, I'll jump out of the plane if you'll be my parachute, you better catch me or I'll kill you" — but Timony sings them with

THIS IS AN EGG ON HELIUM

such sweet ferocity that it works. However, this is not a riot grrrl band, nor a bratty punk trio. Helium reminds me very slightly of the Breeders without the smiley pop production, but it's unfair to categorize them, because they are so damn good. Eight bucks for six cool songs. Just go get it, OK?

Another undefinable band, Eggs, graces the B-side of my tape. Eggs is a nouveau rock-pop-jazz conglomeration from Virginia, a hotbed of new music these days. While we on the West Coast are lying in the sun, relaxing to easy-listening party music, those poor snowbound shut-ins back East have been messing with instruments in new and unique ways, and the result is freaky, but often brilliant. The Eastern seaboard has given us artists as varied as Superchunk, Sebadoh and Avail, and now Eggs, who sound like none of the above. Their second album, *Eggs Teenbeat 96 Exploder LP*, is a sprawl-

ing masterpiece designed as a double vinyl LP, and it barely fits on one CD. I can hear influences from the '60s, '70s and yes, even the '80s, but don't let that scare you.

Eggs member Rob Christiansen's housemate is Mark Robinson, former ringleader of Unrest and head of the Teen Beat label, and the lunacy factor is high. There are songs about the perils of body piercing ("Ampallang"), pseudo-Latin dance numbers ("Salsa Garden"), Casio keyboard experimental pieces and "Rebuilding Europe," which opens with the line "I don't wanna be part of your Marshall Plan" and ends with "Lose Pakistan...." Those wacky kids! Other highlights include an Arthur Lee cover and "the oblivist part 3," which reminds me of the slow-burning grooves on the last Beastie Boys album. If you like high-energy music with trombones and a left-field approach, check Eggs out.

—Rena Tom



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OH THIS IS ONE BAD MOVIE... HaHaHaHaHaHa!

The film *Thelma and Louise* broke new ground for female buddy movies, Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* redefined the modern western, and Lorena Bobbitt forever changed the way we view angry women with sharp objects. With all these recent precedents, it would seem logical to expect that *Bad Girls*, the new female buddy western about four angry women with sharp objects, might offer some new and interesting social commentary.

Think again. Not a single thing about this movie — which stars Madeleine Stowe, Andie MacDowell, Mary Stuart Masterson and Drew Barrymore as the aforementioned bad girls — is new or even remotely interesting, and you'd be hard pressed to find anything that qualifies as social commentary. A big-screen version of what must be the lamest romance novel in history, this movie leaves viewers muttering to themselves as it moves from one implausible

plot point to the next. Not only is it about as exciting as watching paint dry, but it happens just as quickly — no scene is finished until each and every character says something extremely stupid, preferably a tired cliché.

What passes for the movie's plot goes like this: The four women, who of course are prostitutes just itchin' to leave the world's oldest profession, get into trouble when Stowe kills a fat pig of a man who gets out of line with Masterson. They go out on the run, with Pinkerton detectives hot on their trail, and meet up with a Kevin Costner wanna-be who makes Stowe swoon. But she runs into her ex-lover, a two-dimensional villain who runs the proverbial band of bandidos, and further absurd events ensue — none very interesting or at all believable.

Although it would not be surprising if audience members who paid to see this trash looted a theater and demanded their

money back, the real pity of *Bad Girls* is that someone actually paid good money — millions of dollars, in fact — to make this bomb. Millions of dollars! Can you believe it?! For this?

Yet, there is something to be said for this movie. At first glance, *Bad Girls* is exactly what it appears to be — an appallingly bad western so insidiously burdened with tired clichés that audience members are practically driven to gnaw off their own limbs in an effort to escape. But as each unbelievably stupid scene is played out and each line of unpardonably unimaginative dialog is uttered, the comedic genius of *Bad Girls* emerges. Once you stop taking the film seriously, it finally dawns on you: this is a hysterically funny movie!

You just can't help but burst out laughing: watch as Barrymore — a former childhood alcoholic — guzzles more tequila than the bandidos (ha ha!); see the

dramatic super-slow-motion close-up of a Bible being trampled by the women's horses as they flee a mob of Christian fundamentalists intent on lynching Stowe (hee hee!); watch the unbelievably unbelievable shootouts in which every six-shooter contains 20 bullets and nobody can seem to successfully shoot anybody (Ahahahah!!).

Ho, doggie! You just can't imagine how funny this movie is! The totally bogus face smudges contrasted with the perfectly styled hair, the tedious romance subplot between MacDowell and a sensitive 1990s man, Barrymore's bobbling bosoms ... too many laughs to remember! While the filmmakers responsible for *Bad Girls* probably didn't intend to leave viewers rolling in the aisles, they succeeded in creating one of the funniest movies in years.

—Scott McPherson



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**Mmmm
Good!**

Read all about it
in the *Weekend
Connection*,
next Friday in
the Daily Nexus!

REMEMBERING THE KING



By
Scott
Tipton



On February 6, 1994, Jack "King" Kirby died of heart failure at the age of 76. Most people won't even recognize the name. What they will recognize, however, are the wondrous four-color creations that Kirby delivered onto the comic book page.

In the 1940s, Kirby collaborated with partner Joe Simon to create Captain America, one of the most popular comic books of the World War II era. Besides Captain America, Simon and Kirby created the Boy Commandos, the Guardian, the Newsboy Legion and many other successful strips.

Before splitting up in the '50s, Simon and Kirby created *Boys' Ranch* and invented the romance comic. All this may seem like a full career for most artists, but the King was just warming up.

Working at upstart Marvel Comics in the 1960s, Kirby and partner Stan Lee let loose a series of creations that set the comics world on its ear, forever revolutionizing the industry. The list of Lee and Kirby's creations reads like a "Who's Who" of super-heroes: the Fantastic Four, the Incredible

Hulk, the Mighty Thor, Ant-Man, the Avengers, the X-Men, the Silver Surfer, Nick Fury of S.H.I.E.L.D., the Inhumans and countless others.

In the 1970s, Kirby moved over to rival DC Comics, and was given free creative rein, working without a collaborator. On his own, Kirby created the New Gods, the Forever People and Mr. Miracle, fashioning an expansive and bombastic body of work known as the Fourth World Saga. The villain of the piece, Darkseid, proved such a menacing and powerful presence that, long after the publication of the Fourth World Saga, he remains the premier villain in the DC stable of characters. He, along with all of Kirby's creations, makes up a large part of the fabric of the DC universe.

In recent years, Kirby fought for creator's rights with the publication of his comic "Captain Victory," and many of the financial benefits that comic writers and artists now enjoy are due to the efforts of Jack Kirby. Today, Topps Comics publishes a line of books known as the "Kir-

byverse," devoted to even more of Jack Kirby's creations.

While working at Marvel, Stan Lee dubbed Kirby "the King," and the nickname stuck. It stuck because it was true. I can think of no other individual who contributed more to the industry, and anyone who writes, draws or reads comics should be keenly aware of just how much we all owe the King.

Thanks, Jack.

Metro Comics, 15 W. Anapamu, Santa Barbara, has two upcoming events that comics fans might want to look into. On Saturday, May 7, J.M. DeMatteis, writer of such series as *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Justice League International*, *X-Factor* and *Moonshadow*, will be signing comics from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Also, Metro and KTYD 99.9 are sponsoring a midnight premiere screening of the motion picture *The Crow*, to be held on Friday, May 13. Tickets are free with the purchase of a "Crow" T-shirt, poster, trade paperback or selected back issues. Call 963-2168 for more details.

-Scott Tipton

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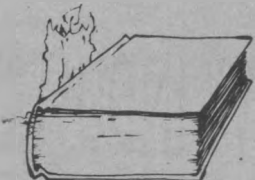
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FICTION OF MUSINGS AND THOUGHTS

In the late 1980s, Josh Kirsch and I were sufficiently self-absorbed, self-obsessed students at Cleveland High School (population 3000 or so) in Redwood. Long nights we spent together in conversation, on topics ranging from sex and drugs to musings and hallucinations or whatever into prose. Our teachers liked what I wrote, but Josh's stuff was a little far out for them.

Nevertheless, we both tried, in the way that only angst-ridden teens in the San Fernando Valley can, to form our free-floating desires and musings and hallucinations or whatever into prose. Our teachers liked what I wrote, but Josh's stuff was a little far out for them. In any event, we managed to convince enough people of our self-worth to gain entry into UCSB. Six years later, I'm still writing, I'm still in school. Josh, his life given some focus through the acquisition of a psychology degree and subsequent move to San Francisco, is still writing as well.

More than that, a collection of his short fiction, *small talk stinks*, has been published by The O Press. Everybody from my graduating class who isn't dead is doing better than I am, but that's OK.

Judging from *small talk stinks*, Josh is still writing straight from the uncensored soul. None of the shame or "awareness" bullshit that constricts modern writers is evident in this tome, which is expressed

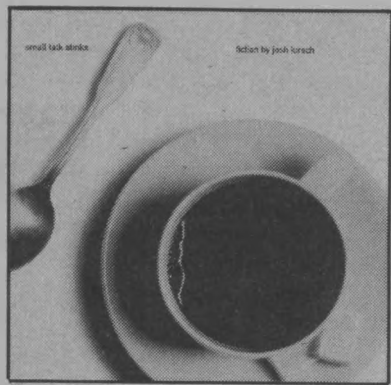
through the dozens of references to masturbation, Joy Division and Nietzsche.

Josh belongs to a vanishing class of people — those who can write well. You may think you can do it, but I have my own doubts and I write for a living. Josh puts my work to shame, a shame unworthy of his effort.

I won't do his work the injustice of quoting it, I'll simply urge you to find it for yourself. *small talk stinks* is available at the UCSB Bookstore and at the Earthling Bookshop. Direct order from The O Press is also possible by writing to 1506 Leavenworth, Suite 3504, San Francisco, CA 94109.

If literature means anything more than spoonfed assignments in English class, support independent publishers. Thanks, Josh. It's still all on the dashboard.

—William Toren



AN ALBUM MAKES GOOD

Receiving honors doesn't always mean you are an honorable person. This is the lesson learned by actor Brendan Fraser in the role of Monty in Warner Bros.' *With Honors*.

Releasing a film about university life in the spring has become a cliché. However, director Alek Keshishian puts a spin on this type of tired presentation by insuring that the interplay between the two main characters remains fresh throughout the film.

Monty, a senior studying government at Harvard, is driven to succeed. From the early completion of his senior thesis — some dribble about the loss of the American Dream — to the organized way in which he runs his life, he is a winner. That is, until he meets up with Simon.

When a sudden power outage melts down the hard drive on Monty's computer, he races to make copies of the 10 chapters of his thesis that he has printed. In his obsession to have the copies made, he drops the thesis down a vent and into the library boiler room.

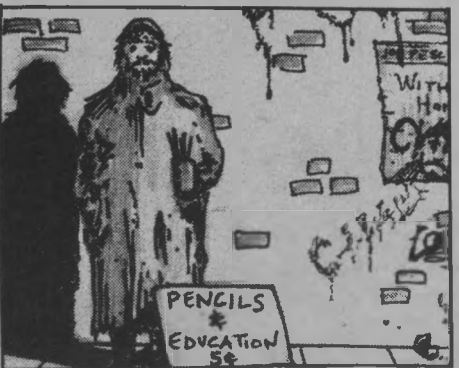
Enter Simon (Joe Pesci), a homeless man in his early '50s who has found a place to live in the bowels of the Harvard library. When he discovers the misplaced chapters of the thesis before Monty can recover them, Simon begins to extort favors from the government undergrad. He returns one page for each favor, and there are 88 pages in all.

Simon, who is far from the stereotypical bum Hollywood delivers, is sometimes passive but usually abrasive in the way he helps Monty fill in some of the voids in his life.

For example, a somewhat predictable yet rather entertaining segment is Simon's confrontation with Monty's pompous mentor, played by author Gore Vidal. Simon stands toe-to-toe with the professor in a discussion of being homeless in a legally corrupt United States.

With Honors is a whimsically funny film that will also tug on your tear ducts. If you have seen the absolutely terrible trailer previews that do the film no justice, you may feel that a keg of dynamite couldn't blow you back into the theater for this one. But if you find your way back, you'll be very happy you did.

—Duke Conover



OR A LIFE TO ADMIRE

Thirty-two Short Films About Glenn Gould is just that. Thirty-two segments, ranging from a few seconds to several minutes long and from documentary to drama, each tell something about the acclaimed Canadian classical pianist who died in 1982. Presented in chronological order, the films form an extremely effective portrait in that they go straight to the essence of the personality and its effects, avoiding the tendency of more conventional life stories to get lost in detail and melodrama. It was an ambitious gamble, and it's paid off.

Taken together, the films (directed by Quebecois director Francois Girard) are as elegant and original as their subject, and give much insight into not only Glenn Gould, but into eccentric creativity in general. It's a grown-up movie for grown-up people.

For those who, like me, had no knowledge of him before, Glenn Gould was a child prodigy musician who could read music before he could read words. His fame at the piano was such that a recording of him playing Bach was chosen to be sent on the Voyager spacecraft, whose mission is to contact other life in the galaxy. One of the great musicians of the 20th century, he made his last public performance in 1964 when he was 31, and died from a stroke at the age of 50.

Now, the position of the "creative" person is perhaps the most fawned-over role in modern society, and it is to the movie's

great credit that we are spared all that tortured-artist nonsense. (This sycophancy by the audience may well have been the reason Gould gave up live performing; he reportedly said that "the ideal artist to audience ratio is one to zero.")

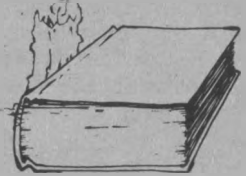
Instead, we get a glimpse of a figure who, apart from the discipline of practice, did not have to strive for his originality: it was simply the product of the continual pressure of his perception. Standing alone with little outward show, he never tried to generate this pressure, only to foster it.

Classical actor Colm Feore, with his rich voice and striking face, gives a magnetic performance as Gould, and appears in most of the pieces.

Unlike the empty feeling after a depiction of some dreary rock star's tawdry lifestyle, we feel at the end of this film that we can genuinely admire and be drawn to the man and his work, his intellect and his sensibility. A refreshingly free spirit who faced the world on his own terms, he had come some way to achieving the harmonious union of the cerebral and the sensual.

Thirty-Two Short Films About Glenn Gould has to be one of the best films of the last few years about any type of music. I urge you to see it.

—Martin Knight



LOOKING FOR THE REAL THING

T. Coraghessan Boyle is one kooky bastard. A writer in the social-visionist tradition of Vonnegut, Heller, Pynchon and DeLillo, his new collection of stories, *Without a Hero*, blends a kitsch connoisseur's eye for embarrassing detail with a master storyteller's virtuosity.

Typically recounting stories of middle-class excess and apple-pie American neurosis, he writes with the craft of Ernest Hemingway and the artistic vision of John Waters. This usually entails quaint vignettes of suburbanites negotiating quiet lives of desperate hyper-reality, whether realized as a Beatnik runaway searching for the authentic Jack Kerouac-On-The-Road Experience, or a glasnost Russian émigré who, under the spell of Akhmatova's romantic poetry and various Harlequin romances, searches for True Love as a professional escort.

I was particularly fascinated with "Big Game" and "The 100 Faces of Death Volume IV," two of the more macabre pieces in the collection. "Big Game," a post-modern variation on Hemingway's hunting stories, tells the unfortunate saga of Mike Bender, "King of Encino." Fired up on "the Classic Comics version of King Solomon's Mines," and perhaps some of the pathetic men's movement bullshit flying around these days, this Southern California "necropolitan" real estate mogul follows his quixotic fate to a tragic inci-

dent on virtual safari.

Hoping to assure himself of his masculine mastery over nature and to bring home a couple of attractive taxidermic wall hangings, he goes in mock-heroic quest of the Big Game at Puff's African Game Ranch in Bakersfield. Alas, though, our necropolitan monarch bites the big one. Cry for the blood that was spilled on the desert sands of Bakersfield!

"The One Hundred Faces of Death Volume IV," far from the pathos of "Big Game," is a disturbing account of a young man who only experiences emotion in relation to television images. Confronted with the deaths of his mother, his aunt and his best friend, he finds that they are sadly lacking when compared to the tragic end of "Renaldo The Great Escape Artist," rendered eternally in the *100 Faces of Death* videotape.

T. Coraghessan Boyle will be giving a reading of short stories from *Without a Hero* on May 11 at UCSB's Campbell Hall. Tickets are free. For more information, call UCSB Arts & Lectures at 893-3535.

—Chris Dunlap



Eyewitness Report on the South African Elections

Prof. Kum-Kum Bhavnani

UCSB Professor of Sociology, who just returned from South Africa, where she served as an international observer of the national elections, will give an eyewitness account and an assessment of the future of democracy in that troubled land.

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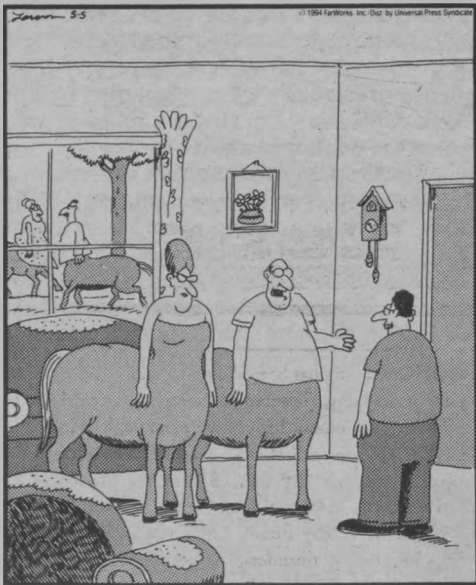
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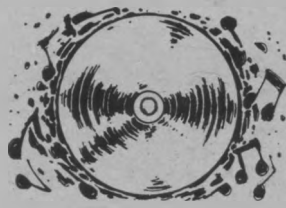
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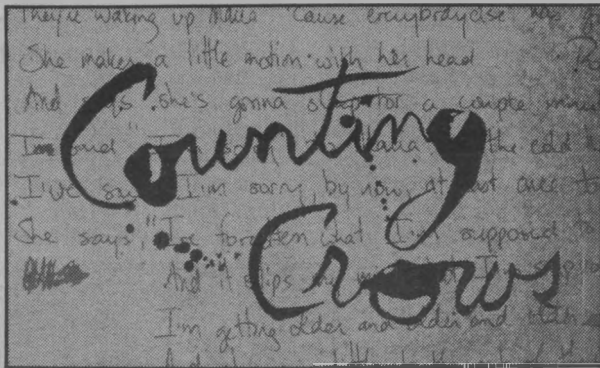
Counting Crows
August and Everything After
 Geffen

In under two years, Counting Crows have gone from an unknown, unsigned San Francisco band to an instant success, which is very rare in the music business.

Back in October, they did a couple of shows in which they opened for Midnight Oil and introduced their new album, *August and Everything*

"Round Here," has recently been released, and seems to be headed down the same road as "Mr. Jones." But there are plenty of other impressive songs on the album, like "Omaha," "Rain King," "Sullivan Street" and "Raining in Baltimore." They are musically, lyrically and stylistically interesting in that Adam Duritz way.

Duritz is the lead singer and is the glue to the band. He writes not only the lyrics but the music as well,



After. Since then, their accolades just keep growing.

As of May, "Mr. Jones" is the No. 1 single on the Billboard chart, and *August and Everything After*, released under Geffen Records, is the fourth-best-selling album in the nation.

Since the release of the video for "Mr. Jones" in December, the song has wrongfully been the only one associated with the band. Their new single,

lending a unique mix of poetic words to melodic tunes.

Part of the Crows' instant success has to be attributed to the work of the album's producers: Scott Litt, who has produced R.E.M., and T-Bone Burnett, who is a talented producer and musical chameleon.

—Michael Cadilli

A NIGHT OF HEAVY INDUSTRY

KMFDM
Angst
Wax Trax

So, you were afraid that angst had died right along with Mr. Kurt Cobain, "spokesperson for the angst-filled." Well, think again, and prepare to be angst-ridden as KMFDM roll into the neighborhood this Friday at the Ventura Theater with Sister Machine Gun and Chemlab.

As any fan of "industrial" music should know, a concert such as this promises to be one butt-kicking, gut-wrenching, mind-ripping, ANGST-filled affair.

Some fans of KMFDM may have been put off by the increased use of guitars

has helped put KMFDM into MTV's Headbangers Ball as well as Alternative Nation.

Sister Machine Gun and Chemlab are excellent "industrial" bands that can hold their own. Sister Machine Gun have just released their second album, *The Torture Technique*, and they had some help from KMFDM member En Esch. Don't expect any cloning, though, as theirs is a grittier form of angst, with its own distinct sound. Chemlab's latest release, *Burn Out at the Hydrogen Bar*, has been p-angst-akingly sutured together to create an angry social commentary.

With two such bands that would be worth see-

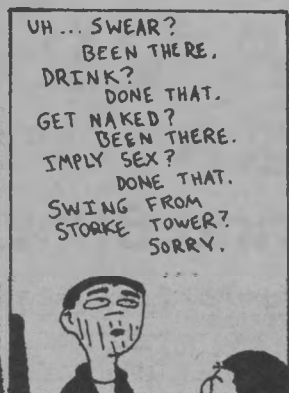


in the new material, but it has definitely increased the band's coverage and expanded their number of followers here in the U.S., where the guitar reigns supreme. Combining much of their "industrial" sound with heavy-metal guitar

ing alone opening up for the likes of KMFDM, this is shaping up to be one of the best concerts of the season. If you miss any concert this year, don't let this be it. Rejoice and let the ANGST begin!

—Pete Pistek

ANDY PHARO



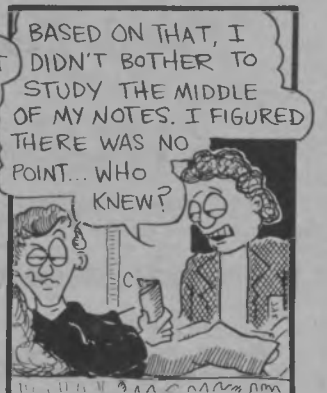
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ROOM 101

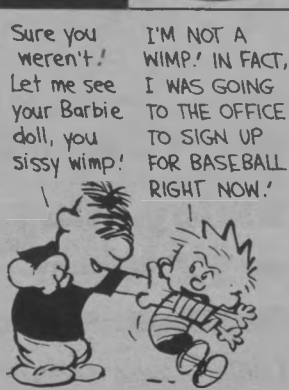


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GLASS BREAKS IT DOWN FROM THE FRONT

Pounding away softly halfway between the contours of minimalism and maximum rock 'n' roll soars a musician so provocative, so constantly redefining *musique contemporaine*, that no self-respecting lover of music can fail to be on campus late Friday night.

For over 30 years, the works of composer Philip Glass have captivated art lovers high and low, who indulged in the inordinate supply of productions he helped create.

Danny Elfman.

In the '70s, Glass dominated the New York music scene with *Music in 12 Parts* and the grandiose five-hour opera *Einstein on the Beach*.

Glass compositions since that time have ranged from opera, dance and theatre to film scores, including the recent *A Brief History of Time*, about Stephen Hawking. Among his recent works are *The Low Symphony*, based on the music of Brian Eno and David

The smart, snappy new group Frentel has been gaining acclaim across Australia in recent years, and over here just recently. Now they have released *Marvin the Album* on Mammoth and Atlantic.

Angie Hart's vocals will appeal to those who like the Sundays, but some of the songs sound as though Edie Brickell (on helium) has joined Throw That Beat in the Garbagecan — especially on "Dangerous" when they go off on a string of ba-ba-ba's like the German band would do. This track and most of the others are full of backbeat, made for some kind of dance involving a lot of elbow.

But it's the quiet, acoustic cover of New Order's "Bizarre Love Triangle"

that has been getting noticed, which sounds great to me if it means that people get the album and hear the songs the band wrote themselves, like "Ordinary Angels," "See/Believe" or "Accidentally Kelly Street."

Now here's the exciting news: Frentel will be playing Extravaganza here at Harder Stadium on May 21. Program Board has really done a good job — this is one of the best bookings they have ever made, and I hope they keep it up. With They Might Be Giants and Del the Funky Homosapien as just a couple of the other acts, it promises to be a really good show. More stuff on Extravaganza will be featured in future issues of *Artsweek*.

—Kevin Carhart



Screenies surely enjoyed the magical film scores on *The Thin Blue Line*, *Koyaanisqatsi* and *Powaqqatsi*, works whose cult status is soaring.

But to modern-day writers of (musical) notes, Glass might well be the most important man alive today, or even of the century. His music has had a more profound effect on both coasts, as well as shores abroad, than a bucketful of Aaron Copelands or a breadbasket of

Bowie, and *The Voyage*, commemorating the Columbus quincentenary.

His Campbell Hall show will feature solo piano pieces from *Einstein on the Beach* to the present.

Philip Glass will perform at UCSB Campbell Hall at 8 p.m. on Friday, May 6. For more information call Arts & Lectures at 893-3535.

—Martin Boer



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THE MUSICAL

EVITA

REVIEWED
BY
DAVIN
McHENRY

If you never saw the original Broadway version of "Evita" or even a national touring cast and have always wanted to see what you missed, now is your chance. The Santa Barbara Civic Light Opera's production of "Evita" is touted as being a recreation of the original Broadway production. In fact, it is a clone of the show. There are obvious changes, but for the most part the scenery and staging are the same and the music is almost completely identical. Some of the actors even perform recreations, some subtle and some not so subtle, of the Broadway cast performances.

Economically, it's a great idea. How can you go wrong, copying a show that ran for over 1,500 performances and garnered seven Tonys? Add to that the fact that there have got to be several complete "Evita" sets and costumes running around from the endless national tours (this production's sets and costumes were built for a production by the San Jose Civic Light Opera), and it's a wonder that original productions ever get done. Despite the lack of orig-

inality, this incarnation really does succeed. How can one go wrong with production designs by Hal Prince, the man who has probably directed more musical hits than anyone else has shows. Not to say that this production doesn't have its problems, but most are actually residual troubles left from the show's creation and not specific to the Santa Barbara show. Because "Evita" was written and recorded before any stage production took place, Prince was really handicapped when it came time to stage it. Andrew Lloyd Webber's score, while beautiful and replete with soaring melodies, lacks real dramatic focus.

This posed and still poses a real problem for any director undertaking this show. How do you fuse the score's many and different parts into a coherent whole? Many songs, while beautiful, seem out of place. Take, for example, "Another Suitcase in Another Hall." While there is no arguing its musical value, the song has very little dramatic purpose and strays away from the plot. In a show with such a broad time span

and scope, there is precious little time to waste, and this song really doesn't advance the plot enough to justify its presence.

With these kinds of problems, Prince really has to be credited with the success of the show just as much if not more than Lloyd Webber. While the plot is fragmented and vague, the music more than makes up for it. Lloyd Webber has made millions on his talent for melody, and "Evita" is one of his best. Tunes such as "Don't Cry For Me Argentina" or "Buenos Aires" really soar and redeem an otherwise jumbled plot.

This show also marks the real maturity of Lloyd Webber as a Broadway composer. It is "Evita" where Lloyd Webber first really expands his songs beyond the simple, and introduces recurring themes and other complex musical ideas.

Evita is the story of Eva Perón, wife of Argentine dictator Juan Perón, and her rising from the lower classes to become the most powerful woman in South America. Throughout the story, we the audience are treated to the commentary

of Che, an everyman based on Che Guevara, the famed Cuban revolutionary. Evita, as Eva is called, spends the first act slowly climbing the political ladder of important Argentine men (read: sleeping with them) until she finally reaches the top, Juan Perón. At the same time, Perón has been fighting off the other officers in the military to achieve his position. The first act ends with Evita convincing Perón to hold general elections and run for president, submitting himself to the approval of the masses. Together, they will build "A New Argentina."

SBCLO's production has a wonderful first act, and the transformation of Eva from a poor backwaters girl to first lady of Argentina is as convincing as it gets. This is an act full of exciting dance numbers and show-stoppers. The design team has done an excellent job of using all its tools (lighting, costumes, choreography) to evoke the feelings of Eva. Russell Pyle's lighting is particularly effective in driving home the emotional state of Evita as well as illuminating the stage. The major dance numbers, such as

"Buenos Aires," really scorch the stage with never-ending energy, only slowed by Eva's own disillusionment, brilliantly amplified by both cast and crew.

In the second act we see Eva pursuing many things (international acclaim, the vice presidency, embezzlement) until "her own weak body" finally steps in and ends her life. While the first act is full of song and dance numbers, the second act is home to the true drama of the story. Scene after scene, we are forced to watch as the brilliance of Evita is slowly tarnished and eventually fades away into nothing, leaving but a shell of the woman, destroyed by cancer. Scenes such as "Dice Are Rolling" (where Perón confronts Eva with her illness) are extremely moving. This is all the more impressive for a medium like the Broadway musical, which has for so long been only about having a good time, and has had precious few shows about real life.

Much of the credit for the success of this production must be given to the cast. They perform the show with a fluidity and skill that one would not

expect from local theatre. This is probably due to the amazing amount of talent and experience the actors have, many of the leads having performed their respective roles for years.

Valerie Perri does little wrong in this show, her voice seemingly born to sing Eva's role. Her performance is meticulous. David Wasson truly brings new life to Juan Perón — he transforms a vocally reserved role into something truly exciting. He performs with more drama than any other Perón I have seen or heard, and is this show's real surprise.

Tim Bowman, while vocally effective, seems to reduce Che to a caricature. Despite the fact that his performance seems to be his own personal recreation of Mandy Patinkin's performance on Broadway, he still comes off wrong. He would do well to tone down his overwhelming sarcasm just a bit.

"Evita" opened at the Granada Theatre, 1216 State St., on April 29. It runs until May 22. The Granada can be reached at 966-2324.

—Davin McHenry

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