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# the eye

# SUNDANCE RUNDOWN

columbia's presence in park city

DATE

SCENE

TAKE

KOMBUCHA AT COLUMBIA

FASHION BLOGS ACTUALLY  
WORTH READING

REASONS TO LEAVE YOUR  
FAKE ID AT HOME



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# SUNDANCE RUNDOWN 07

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

A couple of years ago, one very special Harvard class garnered attention from the likes of the *Boston Globe*, NPR, and CBS News. It's called Positive Psychology, and it regularly draws upwards of 800 students. Topics, according to the Harvard Web site, "include happiness, self-esteem, empathy, friendship, love, achievement, creativity, music, spirituality, and humor." All the things, in other words, that you and I wish we had time to fit into our schedules.

When Positive Psychology made news again last week—this time because it's now being offered online through the Harvard Extension School—I took a renewed interest. (Incidentally, which is the better euphemism for the continuing-education sector—GS or ES? I can't decide.) When the course's professor, Tal Ben-Shahar, appeared on *The Daily Show* last August, Jon Stewart remarked he was amazed Ben-Shahar could "get away with teaching such a course at Harvard."

Which begs the question—at least in my mind—could he get away with it at Columbia? I'm not sure the course

would be such a resounding success here. This week, now that we've all settled into the grind, I've seen that same old conversation rehash itself, all over Morningside Heights. "How are you?" the first person asks. The second answers that he or she is "fine—you know, tired," then reciprocates the question to a similar response. Then the pair parts ways, hurrying busily off in the direction of their presumably very important engagements.

This is not a novel observation, nor is the comment that we Columbians seem in our own neurotic way to thrive on our stressors—why else do we take on two internships in addition to a full class load? Why do we take 21 credits in a semester? "Well, I'm double-majoring," is a common response to the latter question. Right. Remind me why you're doing that?

I don't mean to exempt myself, either—I regularly stumble home from the *Spectator* office on the wrong side of 3 a.m. and make semi-coherent Courseworks postings on the wrong side of 4 a.m., adhering to a schedule that was, of course, my

own design. I rarely see my roommate these days, a fact we lament in Post-its left on one another's desks—she gets about six hours of sleep per night, too, but it's a totally different six hours.

Maybe elsewhere, I'd be a little more worried about my own habits—but it's just that here it feels so normal. Being overbooked and overburdened is so much a part of the Columbia experience that it might as well be added as a Core requirement. That other bastion of University relatability, the Varsity Show, has already addressed it in 2006—remember? "Hi, I'm miserable, how the hell are you?" Despite the tenuousness of whatever other sense of community Columbia has fostered, we can always rely on stressed-out solidarity.

Interested parties can still get in on Positive Psychology through the Harvard Extension School online until Feb. 10, though they'll have to pay a late-registration fee. But honestly, who has the time?

—Alexandria Symonds

# Art/School, Confidential

alex gartenfeld interviews anton vidokle

INTERVIEW BY ALEX GARTENFELD  
PHOTO COURTESY OF ANTON VIDOKLE

ANTON VIDOKLE IS AN ARTIST very much interested in the way information is distributed. He is a founding director of e-flux, a Web service that announces international art events and has opened special projects such as a pawnshop for artists and a video rental service. Vidokle was born in Moscow in 1965 but moved to the Lower East Side in 1981. On the last weekend of January, Vidokle launched a new exhibition, “Night School,” at the New Museum, on a Lower East Side very different from the one in which he came of age. “Night School” is a work of art consisting of seminars held on the last weekend of each month for the next year. It is the second incarnation of Vidokle’s school projects—the first, “Unitednationsplaza,” was held in Berlin from 2006 to 2007. “Night School” is free with the cost of museum admission.

## How did “Night School,” or its first incarnation, “Unitednationsplaza,” begin?

Basically it started when I was invited to develop the curatorial program for “Manifesta 6.” “Manifesta” is a European biennial of contemporary art. It was going to be in Cyprus, in Nicosia. The situation there is very complicated—it’s divided into a Turkish section and a Greek section. They are separated by a U.N.-administered peacekeeping force, and there has been a lot of ethnic tension there since the ’60s. When “Manifesta” first decided to go to Cyprus, it was a very hopeful moment for the island because there was a major push from the United Nations and Secretary-General Kofi Annan to develop a political unification plan so that both parts of the island could enter the European Union as one country. But the plan was rejected by the Greek-Cypriot side, and immediately, as we were a

*“I mean, imagine going to Chelsea every day. That would really be a nightmare.”*

year into the program, the political situation began to deteriorate rapidly—I’d never seen anything like it in my life. It’s this feeling of all the doors suddenly closing in your face, and you don’t know why this is happening. Shortly thereafter the officials who had invited us cancelled the biennial and fired us. And that was after about three years of research and work.

## And from there?

After the cancellation, I spoke with my immediate collaborators ... to see if we should just forget about the project or try to continue in some way. All of us felt that it was an important idea, and we’d already put so much thought and time into it, so we decided to continue and realize it as an independent project.

## What is your pedagogical approach?

I don’t have a pedagogical approach. I hate pedagogy.



## What do you see as the approach of “Night School”?

It’s something we’ve been talking about for a while, this idea of exhibition as school. There is something very interesting about public art exhibitions, in the way that they’re so accessible to the public, so radically open and temporary. With such a model you can have a school without students, where everyone is a participant in production of an exhibition without display or representations of art: a school as an artwork in itself.

One of the problems that I find with academies is that so often they’re structured in such a way that each successive generation cannot be very different from the generation before. As a student, by the time you comply with all the tests, requirements, and bureaucratic procedures, you are remade in the image of the institution and the generation above you. Schools are all supposed to be about experimentation, innovation, etc., but somehow the actual structures deployed in schools almost prevent this from happening. ... I think one of the ways of undoing this is by making the school a temporary one.

## Will you be lecturing at “Night School”?

I do not lecture in this project, and actually I try not to talk too much. I don’t think that’s my role here. Similarly to “Unitednationsplaza,” “Night School” is an artwork of course. So I do think a lot about my role as an artist and what kind of a footprint such a figure should have. You know one of the historical precedents for a school as an artwork is the academy Joseph Beuys started in Germany in the early ’70s. (I think he even exhibited this school as his contribution to one of the Documentas.) His figure was this sort of larger than life artist/shaman, so the school was basically the Joseph Beuys Academy, where he was the sole speaker all the time. Sometimes he would take the microphone and bark like a dog for hours at

a room full of people. ... I find all this terribly uninteresting, or maybe it was interesting in 1973 but just does not make sense at this time. So I mainly see my role as that of an enabler, facilitator—someone who creates a space for people to come together, brings an interesting group of people together, initiates an activity, etc., etc.

## I wonder if you see potential for downtown New York? Viability of that neighborhood?

You know actually, the Pawnshop project that we now have at the e-flux storefront is a kind of a playful degentrification strategy. It’s really amazing how fast the Lower East Side is being cleaned up. I grew up there, and it’s slightly unnerving to see this rapid transformation into yet another luxury neighborhood. e-flux opened there about four years ago, so we are also complicit in this process. ... So we were joking last fall that a pawn shop, being what it is, could start bringing down property values and rent prices on our street, and maybe scare some of the investors away.

But in general I really don’t think that real estate creates new ideas. The Lower East Side is a little cheaper than the rest of downtown, so it allows some of the more interesting people to start projects there which are maybe slightly less commercially oriented. ... In this sense I really like to be located there—I mean, imagine going to Chelsea every day. That would really be a nightmare.

## Is there a taboo today on directly political art?

Is there such a taboo? From what I see, the look of political art is really in right now. ... Just think of all the reappropriation of images of political protests with reference to ’68, the ’70s, all the reenactments, etc.

Of course, what is disturbing is that most of this new work is most often about the look of something: aesthetic gestures. It’s almost as though we lost the



# Baby Tea

breaking down the kombucha craze

BY ASHLEY JAMES AND MIKAELA BRADBURY  
PHOTO BY MOLLY CROSSIN

Forget the black market. Babies can now be found on Craigslist.

These toddlers aren't of the flesh and bone variety, however. "Baby" is the affectionate nickname given to the culture combination of bacteria and yeast, which after just a few days of growth and loving care from its health-conscious parents, becomes kombucha.

Lindsay Menard-Freeman, a Columbia graduate student, has been drinking kombucha in its tea form since 2005.

"I studied abroad in India, in a sustainable community, an eco-village, and one of the small farms or food-processing communities within the village grew kombucha. We drank it almost every day to keep our digestive system in check, which is always a welcomed benefit of anything in a foreign country," she says.

Alison Powell, CC '09, worked at a health store and has been hooked on the beverage ever since.

"We sold Synergy, a kombucha brand drink at the store I worked at in Seattle. ... A customer raved about it, and I tried it," she says, recalling her beginnings with the tea.

Powell, however, was put off by the high price of the tea.

"I got into it and was able to because of my discount. Synergy is usually something like \$4 a bottle, but I won't spend more than \$3, which is only possible if you work in health foods or it's on sale," she says.

Sale is right. In some places in the world, such as China, where kombucha had its beginnings, the drink can be enjoyed as freely as water. Yet in America, and New York City in particular, the tea is much more expensive, selling for about \$4 or \$5 a bottle, in stores ranging from Whole Foods to more modest corner delis.

Because of this hefty price, some kombucha lovers across the country are growing their own cultures. In a simple process that consists of boiling green tea and sugar, one can grow a kombucha mushroom, provided there is a starter mushroom, which can be found on Craigslist with prices ranging from \$10 to \$30.

After adding to the tea and sugar brew about a tablespoon of already-made kombucha tea, the babies mature into larger kombucha "mamas," which then yield babies of their own.



There are growing kombucha cultures both at Columbia and in this jar.

Powell has brewed the cultures herself.

"I did grow it for a while in my Plimpton suite, but I quit for no good reason, perhaps laziness, the smell, trying to keep it a secret, but couldn't. It was awesome while it lasted, free and delicious and mad-sciencey."

In speaking of her break with the growing process, Powell notes one of the well-known downsides to the beverage—the somewhat repulsive

smell of the tea.

Menard-Freeman acknowledges that the drink is an acquired taste. "It smells like vinegar and tastes even worse. ... The smell doesn't bother me anymore, but it did at first. It took a little while to get used to the smell and the general acidity of it," she says.

Powell, too, expresses her indifference to the smell. "Vinegar doesn't bother me, and neither does kombucha," she says. "When you make it yourself it smells sweeter, like hard cider."

Attributed to kombucha is a list of over 20 health benefits, as extreme as curing cancer. Though the Federal Drug Administration has not approved the tea as treatment for any medical conditions, some students still find it beneficial.

Powell says: "I drink it for the same reason people might drink that new Coke Plus stuff. ... The tingly, fizzy sensation, refreshing in the summertime, and good for you, in the same way taking a multivitamin is good for you, or eating a yogurt is good for you. It also can curb my afternoon coffee cravings. I can't attest to its miracle-giving qualities, but I know plenty of people who swear by it. And even if it is a placebo, who cares?"

Menard-Freeman says: "I've had it to drink when I was fasting, and it is a very purifying feeling. It's sort of hard to explain. It's like when you have a cold and your head clears up ... or like when you're walking around in the city in the summertime and you finally get to wash your face. It's refreshing, we'll put it that way."

While these kombucha lovers remain devoted, others are skeptical enough of the tea not to partake of it.

Danny Kelly, CC '09, is reticent to try kombucha. "In general, those health fads are stupid. If you want to be healthy, you should just eat healthy, not resort to trends," he says.

Menard-Freeman says of the possible risks of drinking kombucha: "I don't know of any risks. However, I would imagine that, like anything that is consumed without discretion and outside of a normalized standard of moderation, drinking too much of it would manifest in some sort of harmful way."

Powell says, "I'm aware of the dangers of contamination, but the fact is I have many friends, including delinquent 20-year-old boys, and pretty-in-pink sorority-type girls, who brew the stuff at home for years and have never gotten sick."

# Year of the Rat

when the mice move in

BY ASHLEY JAMES  
ART BY RACHEL LINDSAY

NEW YORK CITY IS KNOWN for its rodent infestation, and Columbia is no exception to this unfortunate trend. Last winter, Columbia students, particularly lower-floor Ruggles residents, experienced a rodent influx. In honor of the Chinese New Year, which heralds the year of the rat, we spoke to five students about their vermin encounters. Here are the gruesome details:

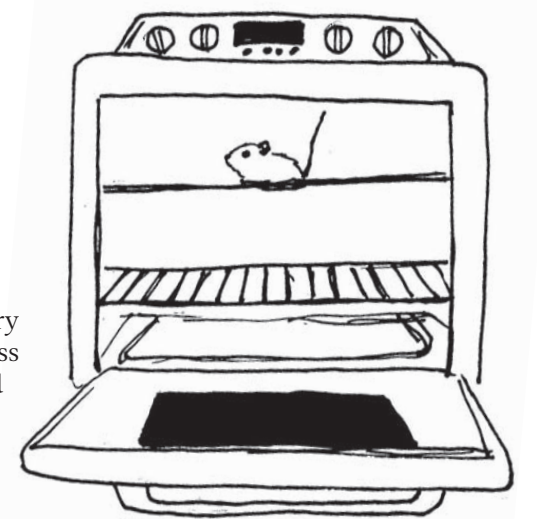


## Rat Roast

“Before it was renovated, Ruggles was a disaster. For a while we thought we were in the clear because mice had infiltrated all the lower floors. But they eventually reached my suite, too. Aside from losing a lot of sleep for fear of being crawled on during the night, there was one event in particular that was completely disgusting. We had a dinner party, and a friend brought over some brie cheese that needed to be melted a little in the oven. We didn't have a tray, though, so we put it directly on the oven rack, and it stayed in too long and spilled all over the oven. In any case, we forgot about it. Two weeks later, my roommate and I were hanging out in the kitchen when we heard a noise in the oven. Jokingly, she told me it was probably a mouse. I opened the oven dramatically, of course not expecting anything. What I find is a disgusting, pink colored baby mouse nibbling away at the cheese. I slammed the door, and we both screamed down the hallway!”

—Diana Duarte, CC '09

“THERE WAS A **MOUSE**  
IMPRINTED ON THE BOTTOM OF  
THE **GEORGE FOREMAN GRILL.**”



## Dry Clean Only

“So I was going to do laundry in Ruggles ... which is a mess anyway. My hamper is a standard mesh-wire hamper, with holes in it. ... It was in my closet, where also there was a little mouse tunnel that I didn't know about

until later. ...

But, anyway ... I was about to do laundry, and I saw a mouse start from my grey sheets! There was a mouse in my hamper! It blended in with the sheets. That was a little horrifying. I was like OK, never again. Then I got this mouse device to keep mice out. It's a little plug-in device, and it affects the surrounding areas, and I was good after that.”

—Kelli Soto, CC '09

## Rat Pact

“By the end of the year, we were running a hostel for pesky rodent friends! Waking up to the sound of crackling plastic bags, finding black pellets on your desk, and having to remember to keep all food in the refrigerator if you wanted to eat it again became normal. Where did they come from? We are not really sure. One of our roommates is really, really pro-animal rights, so we stopped setting traps and just prayed that you would not find Chandice, the name of our most prominent friend, sharing your pillow with you when you woke up.”

—Victoria Ruiz, CC '09

## Grilled Rat

“Well, a mouse died under the radiator over winter break, and when we came back from winter break it reeked. Another time, there was a pungent smell coming from the kitchen for a couple of days. Finally someone investigated and there was a mouse imprinted on the bottom of the George Foreman grill. The mouse situation was unbearable.”

—Bariitu Adam, CC '09



# The ID and the Ego

## student-ready venues open their doors

BY REBECCA PATTIZ

PHOTO BY DIANA WONG

THERE IS NO GREATER EMBARRASSMENT than being turned away by a snickering bouncer from a club after waiting on an incredibly long line to see a favorite band. Personal experiences aside, the search for under-21 venues can be difficult and frustrating. Because college students' desire to see good live music is in direct conflict with the financial concerns of music venues to make profits from their bars, seeing live music can quickly become exhausting and discouraging.

The motivations for keeping underage concertgoers out are almost entirely financial in nature. The money from ticket sales goes to pay the band and then the venue's staff. Little profit is made on tickets alone. Most venues rely on their bars to bring in profit and see little economic advantage in admitting fans that cannot drink. If the band can attract an older and therefore more lucrative crowd, the venue would rather exploit this than admit a sea of underage college students that would prevent it from making money.

College students are left with two options. Either acquiesce and forgo a show because they know they will be rejected, or try to get in with a fake ID, which is often met with unintended and expensive consequences. Luckily, a number of venues are seeing the light and making the decision to lose some profit and prevent legal transgressions in favor of providing good music to people of all ages.

A new breed of music venue is growing, including "all-ages performance/art/work/living space" Silent Barn in Ridgewood, Queens and similar DIY music-venue Death by Audio in Williamsburg. Both venues are dedicated to music for all, hosting bands

like Guignol, High Places, and An Albatross at just \$6 a ticket. This egalitarian mentality is not without its drawbacks, as Silent Barn found itself unable to pay its ConEd bills earlier this year and appealed to the community for help. Nonetheless, these venues are driven by the community, and while the bands' music is often inaccessible, the price and the door are not.

Equally experimental venue The Stone is home to seriously out-there music and student-priced tickets at \$5 each. Indie-rock legend Thurston Moore is known to frequent the space and perform experiments of his own, throwing chains at his guitar for an incredibly diverse and all-ages crowd. Similarly, the Sidewalk Café is a favorite of the likes of the Moldy

and shows, often serving as a first real show for high-school bands.

Although more financially established, the Knitting Factory also schedules a mixture of high and low-profile artists, usually playing in the basement. The venue has been committed to scheduling under-21 shows for years, and they have managed to do it even through financial constraints.

Moving beyond the traditional music venue is another good way to find all ages shows. The Brooklyn Museum hosts a free, monthly "First Saturday" dance party and day of activities. Each party is themed, from salsa to Afro-beat, and everyone from kindergartners to grandparents gathers to boogie for no fee.

### LUCKILY, A NUMBER OF VENUES ARE SEEING THE LIGHT ... IN FAVOR OF PROVIDING GOOD MUSIC TO PEOPLE OF ALL AGES.

Peaches and Calvin Johnson and also will not keep underage fans out in the cold.

Under-21 venues often host bands that are themselves under 21, which brings in young music as well as a young crowd. ABC No Rio, an art-and-activism center on the Lower East Side features an all-ages Hard Core/Punk Matinee every Saturday afternoon. The shows are all-inclusive and not sexist, racist, or homophobic, which seriously gets an activist's body moving.

Arlene's Grocery, which allows any band to audition, is another haven for particularly young talent

The Guggenheim Museum features a similar series of musical performances, such as the recent collaboration of cellist Fred Sherry and experimental music pioneer John Zorn. For the indie set, the Whitney hosts artists, which have included the Dirty Projectors and Dan Deacon, for free.

Summer in New York City is one giant all-ages show, as bands perform, often for free, in parks all over the island. McCarren Park Pool in Williamsburg is the site of free shows all summer long. Last year the lineup included Blonde Redhead, the Beastie Boys, and Ted Leo and the Pharmacists. Central Park and South Street Seaport also lend themselves to music lovers all summer long. They turn no one away and make huge outdoor dance parties. The islands—Randalls and Governors—are also often the locations of large music festivals, always all-ages.

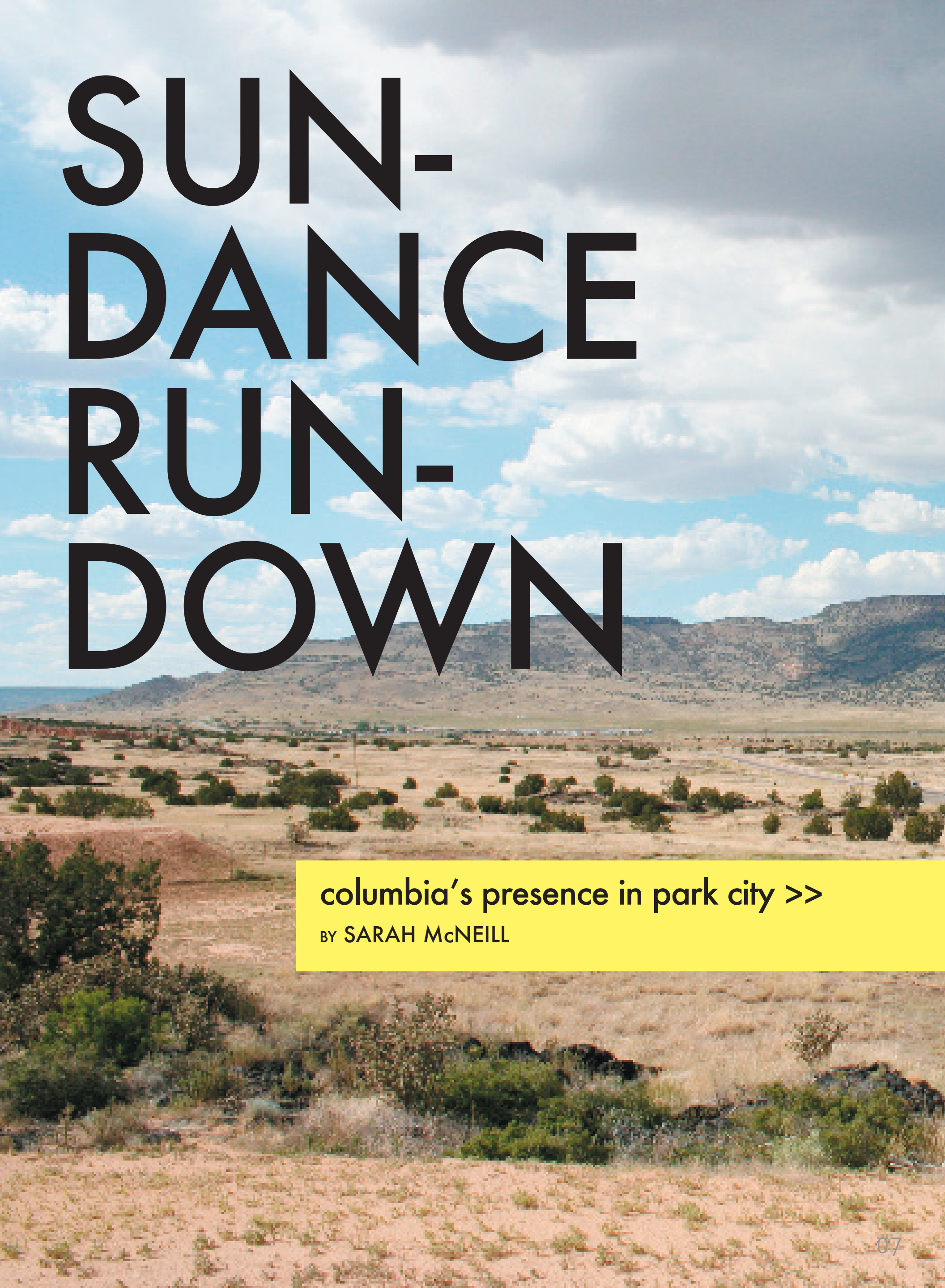
If the best concerts are the ones that make for the best stories, then Soundfix, a record store in Williamsburg, has been known to put on some of the greatest. Often completely impromptu and given in the middle of a lazy Saturday, concerts at Soundfix are all-ages and free—if you can cram yourself into the tiny space. In the past, Kimya Dawson and Regina Spektor have both been spotted there. Cake Shop, a Lower East Side record shop, is also known to put on free, all-ages afternoon shows of their own.

If the rock-and-roll world seems discriminatory toward the underage, one can always turn to high art for a warm welcome. The symphony and opera are stimulating cultural experiences that will ask for ID, but of a different sort. Student rush tickets can be purchased for the Metropolitan Opera, Carnegie Hall, and many other concert halls in New York City. Columbia's Miller Theater and the Manhattan School of Music also put on beautiful concerts that are just steps away.

Until more venues become enlightened to the musical needs of the college student, hunting and searching seem inevitable. Fortunately, enough spaces are opening their doors to the underage among us, putting an end to public humiliation forever.



Shingai Shoniwa of the Noisettes sings her heart out at the Knitting Factory, one of the all-ages venues in Manhattan.



# SUN- DANCE RUN- DOWN

columbia's presence in park city >>

BY SARAH McNEILL



Carol Becker, at a Columbia Alumni Association and School of the Arts reception in their honor during the first weekend of Sundance. As the reception commenced at the swank 350 Main Brasserie, Joseph gave a speech that commended Columbia's achievement and the artists in attendance.

"We are here because we are a Columbia family who nurtures talent, develops talent, then our network moves this talent forth into the industry. That is what we are celebrating, what the Columbia network is doing in this industry, here at Sundance and around the world." An estimated 300 people in attendance—the head of the Sundance Institute, New York state commissioners, heads of other arts schools, journalists, and alumni from Columbia's various schools—mingled over hors d'oeuvres and an open bar.

Ed McGinty, who graduated from the School of the Arts in 2006, spoke at the reception about Columbia University Entertainment, a network for alumni in the entertainment industry that was started last year. Currently, the Los Angeles-based group has a mailing list of 300 people, but is looking to expand to include alumni from all of Columbia's schools. "I love seeing all these people from different schools getting involved, when they realize the success graduates are having in the cultural arena. An enormous amount of energy is directed at Columbia this year, and I'm proud of that," Becker said.

I'm at the Columbia University reception at the Sundance Film Festival, and a handsome, scruffy-looking fellow in a Ramones-worthy leather jacket asks me to help him get a drink. When I oblige, he lets me in on a secret—he's crashing Columbia's party. A self-proclaimed free-loader (though also an actor, as if that's surprising), he boasts that he also crashed NYU/Tisch's reception earlier today—but he thinks that Columbia's party has a much better ambience, crowd, and cocktails. His comment could be seen as a gauge of Columbia's presence at Sundance this year—the achievements of students, alumni, and faculty have gained recognition beyond the academic arts community. The University has found a place at the mecca of independent cinema.

Every winter, thousands of people—filmmakers, actors, journalists, publicists, executives, bloggers, celebrities, and movie fans—invade Park City, Utah. Some come for the films, some for the overcrowded, exclusive parties, and some for the swag-gifting boutiques. From Jan. 17 to Jan. 27, more than 120 feature films were screened at the festival, with 58 first-time directors appearing this year. The work of 44 students, alumni, and faculty of Columbia was represented, and 24 films were written, produced, edited, or directed by Columbia affiliates, putting the University in eye of independent filmmaking.

"You think you know so much when you go there [graduate school], like, 'What are they going to teach me?' But you learn so much about drama and about story, and it's all the foundation stuff," one former graduate of the School of the Arts said.

In Sundance's short film program, three Columbia-affiliated shorts caught the attention of viewers. First-year School of the Arts' film student Jed Cowley brought a short that he wrote and directed while an undergraduate at Brigham Young University. Although the short—*The Loss of a Wrestling Match*—was rejected for a senior-level class at Brigham Young, Cowley said, "I finally got to a point where I decided that I am going to be a director, and I don't care what anyone else thinks." This attitude is mirrored in his short, which Cowley describes as semi-autobiographical. He said that "as a high school wrestler, I was always obsessed about winning and losing, and my win-loss record. I was obsessed with rankings and what the paper said about me and stuff like that, and that experience influenced my film. This film is about doing your best without worrying about winning or losing."

Myna Joseph, who graduated from the School of the Arts in 2006, attended the festival with her short film *Man*, a coming-of-age story about two sisters who form an unusual bond during a sexual encounter with a young man who the elder sister met on the Internet. In an interview with the *Sundance Daily Insider*, Joseph explained, "I wanted to make a film that I thought rang true to the adolescent experience, that really tumultuous time." The recent Columbia graduate says that the two sisters in *Man* actually originated in a feature screenplay she wrote at school. A former biology major, Joseph explained: "I went to film school to develop material, but also to meet people. And we've been very lucky to have a close-knit group of people to work together."

The third film, *The Second Line*, is set in New Orleans after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. MacArthur and Natt, two young men on the edge of adulthood, are forced to take work gutting a house owned by a middle-aged white couple when MacArthur's savings are stolen from his FEMA trailer. A senior thesis project, it was shot by cinematographer Chris Teague and co-produced by Jessica Daniels and Geoff Quan, all graduates of the School of the Arts.

In his first year at Sundance, Quan confided that the festival at first glance can be overwhelming. "It's as if you compressed New York and L.A.—particularly the independent piece of it—and threw everyone you would want to meet here," Quan said. He believes that "the ability to meet so many amazing, interested, compassionate people, and that you can just bump into them on the street, is fantastic."

*Morning Fall*, a short film about a man who wakes up on the

side of the road with amnesia, by McGinty, was featured at the Delta-sponsored sidebar at the Sundance Gen Art competition. About the impact attending Columbia has had on his approach to filmmaking, McGinty said that at Columbia, "the producers and the directors all have to write, so you are learning about story, and you're working with actors the whole way through film school." When asked about the reasons for Columbia's strong presence at Sundance this year, McGinty theorized that "it's just those building blocks [of plot and character]. The technical stuff they don't pay that much attention to because you can go hire someone from NYU to do it."

A portion of the films at Sundance will be bought and distributed to audiences across the country and beyond to leave an artistic imprint on the mainstream media, advancing filmmaking and the socio-cultural value of cinema. It also opens the door for an inherently commercial relationship between these independent filmmakers

**"It's just those building blocks [of plot and character]. The technical stuff they don't pay that much attention to because you can go hire someone from NYU to do it."**

and the entertainment industry, creating a market for eager motion picture executives to take hold of independent gems.

"I've been lucky that films I have worked on have gotten into Telluride, San Sebastian, and London, and all these different places—they really have their own personalities. And I think this one is a fascinating mix of independent filmmaking and also a real corporate spine. It's interesting to see how that all plays together," said producer Maureen Ryan, who graduated from the School of the Arts in 1992.

Sundance is situated in the festival circuit middle ground—it's not considered an arthouse fest like Telluride and Rotterdam but also not a megaplex fest like Tribeca. The potential transference of new independent films, filmmakers, and actors into the mainstream market relies on the commercial aspects of the festival, thus Sundance's spirit of independence

photo courtesy of Stephen Graybill

**"I love seeing all these people from different schools getting involved, when they realize the success graduates are having in the cultural arena. An enormous amount of energy is directed at Columbia this year, and I'm proud of that."**

Columbia garnered top prizes in three out of the four categories for feature films—dramatic, documentary, and world documentary. Columbia's success at Sundance 2008 is not an anomaly—previous Columbia-affiliated films include *Padre Nuestro*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, and *Half Nelson*.

Many of the 2008 festival filmmakers joined film division Chair Jamal Joseph and the new dean of the School of the Arts,







in filmmaking carries seemingly adverse yet necessary ties to corporate America. Despite enthusiastic audiences and encouragement from the independent film community, over half of the films at Sundance will fail to be sold for distribution. *Sugar* writer and director Anna Boden, CC '02, pointed out, "there's a lot of pressure to get good reviews here—Sundance is the first place people are going to see your movie and decide how they want to promote it."

Whether networking to make a film or to sell a film, the festival can be stressful. A festival expert advised me to take flu prevention seriously, warning: "I have found that my friends in New York who all had colds, brought their germs to Sundance and have made all the L.A. industry people sick. When at Sundance, use the hand sanitizer, take the free vitamin drink packets, pop NyQuil, DayQuil, whatever you can get your hands on, because the schedule at Sundance with screenings in the day and parties that last all night will wear you down." Yet the grueling schedule of most attendees does pay off. Daniels said: "I've been back for a week, and I'm still getting e-mails from people that I either met there or saw their film there and want to get in touch. So it's like summer camp, you create this instant network just by being included in it."

**T**he Hollywood swag that comes hand in hand with the necessary relationship between independent filmmakers and corporate conglomerates can be somewhat unsavory to your neighborhood cinephile. With a picturesque horizon of snowy mountains overhead, the historic western facades of Main Street storefronts are effectively taken over by sponsored lounges and gifting suites during the 10 days of the festival. I was pushed into the street by photographers trying to capture Katherine Heigl's ascent into a black Escalade. As I walked up Main Street in an attempt to get into the legendary Harry O's nightclub to see the *Bravery* and *Velvet Revolver* (by the way, Scott Weiland was a no-show), I encountered a herd of Hummers trawling up Main Street, bearing advertisements—a stark contrast to The Fields of Fuel flyers plastered outside of

the nightclub.

Paparazzi and fans crowd outside theaters, restaurants, and stores in hopes of sighting celebrities. Signposts and community message boards shape-shift daily as colorful movie posters envelop public structures. Every party has multiple sponsors—energy drinks, Web sites, clothing brands, and cell phone companies all make use of the Sundance party scene to market their products. An online search for the phrase "Sundance 2008" conjures up articles that describe in meticulous detail the swag that prominent celebrities procure from the various gifting boutiques. The celeb-following, TMZ-reading, gossip-consuming sort of festival-goer actually exists, and the rubbernecking nature of the festival takes on a

new meta level when even celebrity gossip bloggers are beatified. When Perez Hilton and Matthew Perry left the Fred Segal gifting boutique at the same time, it wasn't surprising to see them mobbed by autograph-seekers. That half of them were clamoring for the blogger's attention, not the actor's, was unexpected.

**T**he "industry" attitude that some people display can diminish the independent spirit for which Sundance is known. While the shuttle bus typically is a place where passengers extol their cinema finds, concoct film reviews on the fly, and barter for tickets, I witnessed in close proximity a middle-aged exec having a tantrum that easily topped that of any child because his Blackberry had cracked, disconnecting him from the handheld world. This is the true meaning of tragedy at Sundance.

However, it is not the celebrities or the high-powered industry buzz that is responsible for the effervescent energy that permeates the festival. An undeniable contagious excitement is evident in screening lines, festival shuttles, and dark screening rooms, where movie-goers anxiously await films, as well as the filmmaker panels, receptions, and parties where attendees discuss films and art as they meet like-minded cinephiles. The jovial camaraderie apparent in conversation struck up between strangers, enthused about their latest screening or panel, proves that Sundance is a haven for film-lovers and a goldmine for moving stories.

Several alumni argue that Columbia's success at Sundance stems from the well-rounded education students receive, which enables them to understand and appreciate the value of a good story. Producer Carly Hugo, CC '06, said: "When I was at orientation, Annette Insdorf said something that has stuck with me throughout the whole time—she said, 'NYU teaches you how to make films, but Columbia teaches you why you make films.' And I always keep that in the back of my mind. I really like that idea."



# Prized Possessions

## columbia's top entries at sundance 2008

BY SARAH MCNEILL

PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

**Adventures of Power**, a comedy about a copper miner with a passion for air drumming (air guitar's elusive and neglected stepbrother) premiered at the Sundance at Midnight series, which tends to feature more adventurous avant-garde films and attracts the drunkest and rowdiest of Sundance crowds. The film, starring Adrian Grenier of *Entourage* fame, was directed by and co-stars Ari Gold (CC '92). Although *Power* is his first feature film, Gold, who attended New York University's film school after his undergraduate studies at Columbia, has previously been at Sundance with three short films. To delve into the psychology of his character, Gold attended an air guitar competition as his character Power, playing the air drums alongside air guitarists. "On a simple level, I thought air drumming was funny and I developed this character," Gold says. "But on a larger level, I liked the theme of someone discovering that he doesn't need to have these objects outside of himself, that he doesn't need the drums to be complete. You know it's mainly a comedy, but that whole other side makes it interesting to me." The crowd responded well to this quirky comedy—screening audiences begged Gold to perform some air drumming.

After making a splash at Sundance with *Half Nelson* in 2006, writer-director team Anna Boden (CC '02) and Ryan Fleck returned to the festival this year. Their film, **Sugar**, tells the story of a Dominican baseball pitcher named Miguel "Sugar" Santos who is recruited for America's minor leagues. As he travels from an American baseball-training academy in the Dominican Republic to a Single-A farm team in Bridgetown, Iowa, he navigates a new language and culture in his journey to become a sports star. Production designer Elizabeth Mickle (CC '03) creates vivid and disparate landscapes from the Dominican Republic to Iowa and New York City. Mickle describes *Sugar* as a "story about a boy from a developing country who puts all his hope into the American dream ... then to find himself bewildered in the Bronx trying to find a life for himself after his dream has been lost. It's a much more common story than we realize, and it raises many questions about U.S. exploitation."

One of the 16 U.S. films in the Dramatic Competition category, **Frozen River** took home the Grand Jury Prize. Writer-director Courtney Hunt (School of the Arts '94) weaves together the story of two poor, single mothers—one white and one Mohawk—whose lives intersect as they work together to smuggle illegal immigrants into the U.S. The director met one of her principal actresses, Melissa Leo, at the 2001 Columbia University Film Festival, during a special screening of *21 Grams*. Carol Becker, the dean of the School of the Arts says, "I have to say that [*Frozen River*] really blew my mind—an amazing film."

Winner of both the audience and jury prizes for world documentary, **Man on Wire** is a portrait of French aerialist Philippe Petit and his daring dance

1,350 feet above the ground. Subsequently arrested for what has been deemed the artistic crime of the century, Petit pirouetted on a high-wire suspended between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. The film, directed by James Marsh and co-produced by Maureen Ryan, a '92 graduate and current faculty member of the School of the Arts, dramatically recreates the exhilarating feat. At Columbia, Maureen teaches "Producing the Short," as well as a documentary-filmmaking class, and oversaw student productions this year. "I've been on the faculty of the film school since 1999," she says, "so I am intimately in touch with people who were on the faculty



In *Sugar*, one pitcher's journey from the Dominican Republic to America's minor league raises questions about U.S. exploitation.

when I was a student. And then, of course, being a part of the faculty myself, it's had a very strong impact on myself, my career, my filmmaking. You're constantly invigorated by the energy of the students who you are working with, and their fresh ideas and fresh eyes."

Winner of the Grand Jury Prize for a U.S. documentary film, **Trouble the Water** follows a couple videotaping their lives while trapped in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, as well as their new beginning in the aftermath of the storm's destruction. Co-director Carl Deal (Journalism '96) says of his experience with directing partner Tia Lessin, "Having been through 9/11 and pretty close to the Trade Center during that, we discovered that the most we have to offer is our skills as filmmakers. So when Katrina came, it wasn't a question of when would we go to Louisiana, but how quickly could we get there."

A series of four-minute interviews, **The Black List** explores the themes of black culture and identity through the voices of influential African-American authors, politicians, athletes, actors, musicians, and comedians. The director—acclaimed portrait photographer and documentarian Timothy Greenfield-Sanders (CC '74)—created the concept for *The Black List* while having lunch with Toni Morrison, who suggested that he create a photography book on black opera stars. After sharing his ideas with friend Elvis Mitchell, Greenfield-Sanders realized the vast potential of a broader project. Greenfield-Sanders says of the meeting that "the more we talked, we re-

alized it needed to be a documentary ... and by the end of lunch we had 175 names on a napkin." Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Toni Morrison, Reverend Al Sharpton, Chris Rock, former New Orleans mayor Marc Morial, Sean "Diddy" Combs, and Colin Powell are just a few of the subjects who share their individual experiences and viewpoints.

One of the unique stylistic elements of *The Black List* is that the film, shot in medium-close up at Greenfield-Sanders' studio at his home in New York, is very minimally edited. Shots are broken up only by photographs, allowing the interviews to remain intact and foster an eye-to-eye intimacy. Interviewer Elvis Mitchell remains unseen and unheard in the documentary to allow each interview to unfold as if the subject were telling a personal story. The film was acquired by HBO Documentaries before the start of the festival and re-titled *The Black-List: Volume I*. Greenfield-Sanders says he looks forward to the endless sequel potential of the project through future films, books, and a user-generated web site that will broaden and strengthen the discourse on race issues in America.

Tom Kalin, associate film professor at the School of the Arts, returns to Sundance a second time with **Savage Grace**. The film tells the true story of the shocking 1972 Barbara Daly Baekeland murder case, starring Julianne Moore as Daly, a former actress and aspiring socialite who married into the wealthy Baekeland family of the Bakelite plastic fortune, and her dysfunctional, incestuous relationship with her son. Kalin, who teaches "the imaginatively titled classes 'Directing I' and 'II'" at the graduate school, finds that a career in academia supports his professional film work. "The students I'm working with are in the same place I was once. We have such a great body of students at Columbia. You learn a lot, teaching—about what your own game is, but also from their perspectives." *Savage Grace* will screen at the upcoming Tribeca Film Festival and in Columbia's Carla Kuhn Speaker Series this April, and it will be released by IFC on May 30.

In **Hamlet II**, British comedian Steve Coogan plays a failed actor-turned-self-loathing high school drama teacher who stages a musical sequel to *Hamlet* to try to save his school's drama department. Co-written by *South Park*/Team America: World Police writer Pam Brady, *Hamlet II* is executive produced by Albert Berger (CC '83) and stars Catherine Keener, David Arquette, and a self-parodying Elizabeth Shue. During Sundance, Focus Features bought *Hamlet II* for \$10 million, a sum very close to the Sundance record of \$10.5 million set by indie-hit *Little Miss Sunshine*, also produced by Berger two years ago. "The film is about an out-of-work character actor who now teaches drama at the high school in Tucson, and they're going to shut down the drama department, so he writes the sequel to *Hamlet* as a musical in order to save drama. And it's a comedy."



# The Web We Weave

## the met tackles blog culture

BY CARLA VASS

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Fashion has reached the pinnacle of accessibility. Designer clothing, once a rarefied entity available only to the ultra-rich, is now available at your local Target store, where you can pick up the latest from Proenza Schouler when you drop by to purchase toilet paper. Fashion shows, too, can be viewed on Style.com within 24 hours of their actual presentation time. Who needs to scramble for standing-room-only at this season's hottest show when you can have a front-row view from the convenience of your desk chair?

It seems only fitting, then, that the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art has brought us "blog.mode: addressing fashion," a series of new exhibits presented both online and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art that finds an innovative way to pair the fast-and-ongoing fashion dialogue with our blog-fueled information age. The exhibition, which presents over 40 costumes and accessories dating from the 18th century to the present, allows visitors to view and comment on the pieces using an online blog.

Featured pieces range from the austere and avant-garde, such as Rei Kawakubo's 1983 minimalist black dress designed for Comme des Garçons, to the fun and mainstream, like Vivienne Westwood's hot-pink, crocodile-leather heels that presented such a challenge for Naomi Campbell. A stunning French dress in pale-blue silk-satin, originally worn by one of Marie Antoinette's courtiers, lends the exhibit historic depth. Futuristic shoes from the spring 2006 collec-



Viewers can find over 40 costumes and accessories at the Met museum and online.

tion of Manolo Blahnik—also the exhibit's producer—flesh out the exhibit's contemporary collection.

After visitors view the pieces, they are invited to post comments online and respond to other viewers' opinions. Current posts express the blog's provocative nature and the range of its appeal. After viewing the Vivienne Westwood heels, "Zoe" wrote, "I am six years old and I like these shoes. I would wear them but I am not sure they would be very comfortable." "Elton," on the other hand, didn't like them very much, writing, "YUK! tico-tacky. help I'm fff-faaaaallllllllllllnnnnnggg!!! THUD!" Bloggers' ongoing conversations are striking because of the sheer volume of posts as well as the vibrant, ongoing dialogue between people of vastly different ages and backgrounds.

The exhibition is open for viewing at the Met now through April 13. If you prefer to stay glued to that desk chair, see some key pieces at <http://blog.metmuseum.org/blogmode>. As "La Bricoleuse" says, "Thanks for this exhibit, i hope to get around to seeing it in person before it closes, but the blog opportunity in the interim is really a genius way to expand the viewership!" And isn't that what the Internet is for?



## Our guide to the best fashion blogs:

### ① [dailycandy.com](http://dailycandy.com)

Provides you with everything you need to know about what's new and hot in NYC. Get the latest on sample sales, restaurant openings, and more. Sign up to get the daily e-mails and you'll never have to look for something to do in the city.

### ② [fashionologie.com](http://fashionologie.com)

Go here to get all the latest hilarious and interesting fashion news. Because you need to stay caught up on your current events—fyi, if you missed the Y-3 fashion show this week, know that it featured a set created completely out of ice!

### ③ [fashonaburu.com](http://fashonaburu.com)

This site, featuring the Japanese adjective for "fashionable" in its name, is aimed at hard-core fashion fans who want to keep up with the latest trends and how to pull them off. A recent entry even gives pronunciation guides for all those tricky designer names. Can you say Proenza Schouler?

### ④ [fashionista.com](http://fashionista.com)

The pictures of fashionable New Yorker street-walkers will motivate anyone to dress up a little bit—even if it is 9:00 a.m., and you have a class in 10 minutes.

## SPLURGE OR STEAL

BY MOIRA LYNCH

Valentino Garavani opened his fashion house 45 years ago and quickly became a couturier to the international jet-set. His final couture show on Jan. 23 proved the Valentino look still resonates in the fashion world, even though his heyday debatably passed 20 years ago. The ladylike looks that are his signature seemed reminders of elegance compared to the more avant-garde and minimalist designers who have spurred an evolution of fashion. The controversial Marc Jacobs ready-to-wear spring show can be seen as a deconstruction of the ladylike look that Valentino pioneered.

Regardless, his final show communicated the very essence of his style, without any modernity getting in the way of the impeccable chicness. Unfortunately, most of us cannot spring for anything from his last collection, and really, where would one sport those pastel suits? Adding an element or two of something characteristically Valentino to your spring look will make you feel elegant without making you look like a relic. There is a reason that Valentino looks continue to sell—simply stated, they are very pretty. Look for items with a lot of lace, pastel-floral prints, and bows. Wear a pastel blazer, but keep it casual by pairing it with jeans. Silk and chiffon-draped dresses in colors like pistachio, lemon, and sky blue will give you that impeccable Valentino night look for the upcoming spring formals. Or be bold in a dress in that unmistakable Valentino red. Just have fun channeling the icons he dressed, including Jacqueline Onassis and Elizabeth Taylor.



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# Repainting the Desert

## the united arab emirates' new import: culture

BY RAHEL AIMA

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GEHRY PARTNERS, LLP

Dubai's combination of expatriates, new oil money, and rapid construction can make residents feel as if they are subsisting in a cultural desert. Until now, the constantly shifting economic landscape has often starved efforts to foster art, theatre, or music in the region. Newly built areas recall silent ghost cities—understandable when everything around was seemingly built and paved only last week.

Approximately one quarter of the world's cranes can be found in the United Arab Emirates—a testament to the rapid pace of growth in the nation. With skyrocketing oil prices, there's a lot of money flowing into this small Gulf country. A glance at the skyline shows that imagination is the only limit—the UAE hosts structures ranging from the world's tallest building to man-made islands that replicate the shape of the world. Sometimes it can feel like one big futuristic construction site.

The transient nature of the country's population—85 percent of whom are expatriates who often stay for only a few years before moving away—can deprive it of the shared bank of experience that characterizes other more settled locales. The result is a preoccupation with economic growth—not surprising, considering Abu Dhabi alone has an estimated 9.2 percent of the world's oil reserves—and a relative lack of attention to culture.

The government is seeking to change all this, however, with a new set of initiatives that aims to establish the country as a regional center for the arts. Museums based in New York and Paris as well as American universities have begun planning to set up branches in this Middle Eastern nation. Most will open their doors within five years. And while some highly anticipate this rapid influx of cultural institutions, others fear that this progress will also bring about loss through the neglect of local talent and traditions.

Many of the soon-to-be completed institutions will be located on Saadiyat Island, just off the coast of capital Abu Dhabi. Over the next few years, the government will import not only a Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim and a Louvre, but also a Sorbonne, an NYU undergrad campus, and a proposed Yale art institute. Some institutions will be more closely linked to their western counterparts than others. The government of the UAE essentially paid France \$520 million in order to use the name of its world-class museum. But the Guggenheim will remain firmly in the hands of the foundation and will house works entirely from its own global collections.

By 2013, Saadiyat Island will be home to the largest cluster of global cultural assets in the world. And though Columbia has not yet attempted to get a slice of the UAE, one of its former employees, art history professor Hilary Ballon, left her position at Columbia to become the Associate Vice Chancellor for New York University Abu Dhabi. Ballon says, "There is an aspiration on Saadiyat Island to develop an urban fabric," Ballon says, "basically, creating a new town."

Despite a regional culture of artistic appreciation, it is only recently that the rapid influx of people and capital has led to a healthy commercial-art market. Ruth Burrows of the Hemisphere Gallery in Abu Dhabi notes that this lack of market history means that there are

no pricing benchmarks. "The art market is suffering due to a general confusion from buyers about what to buy, who to buy it from and how much to pay for it," she says.

Some feel the buzz currently surrounding the UAE and the incredible number of people moving to the country each year can only be positive for the scene. As Dubai College art student Natalie Robehmed says, "art can only grow here." Yet Allison Collins, founder of Dubai's Majlis Gallery, says that the accompanying "downside is that every artist in the world wants to show here." This can make it difficult for galleries to promote as much new and local talent as they would like.

While many galleries are featuring work by international artists, SIPA graduates Daniel Camara and Mitra Khoubrou are making an effort to represent and support regional artists from the Arab world, including nearby Iran. Camara and Khoubrou's XVA Gallery even plans to take this one step further with the launch of a "UAE House" this year, which will focus on bringing attention to the growing community of local artists in the UAE. Like much else in Dubai, the scene can be very profit driven, and XVA managing director Camara says that "its driving factor is the private sector with almost the complete absence of [financial] support from the government."

There have, however, been recent initiatives by the Dubai Cultural Council that look to amend this lack of support. Last summer saw the inaugural Culture and Art Forum, which provided free art classes in traditional techniques like weaving and silver embroidery. And while the forum was successful, its classes were all in Arabic, making them impractical in a country mostly occupied by expatriates. With the very stratified society of the UAE and the relative absence of public art, this inaccessibility has become an impediment to the growth of the scene.

It also doesn't help that elite public schools aside, art is often not a priority in school curriculums and there are currently no official artist residency programs in the country. Camara emphasizes that "the critical element in spawning an art scene in the UAE will be education—the large majority of the population has not had access to culture." Indeed, institutions like the American University of Sharjah are pushing boundaries and popularizing less traditional art forms like video installations and digital art. Columbia Ph.D. student Negar Azimi, senior editor at regional arts and culture magazine Bidoun, decries the lack of local art scholarship. Currently, however, she is excited to see that the government is putting "a lot of money into producing art historical texts and artist monologues."

One of the most interesting of the Abu Dhabi government's initiatives will be the NYU campus on Saadiyat Island, which is set to open in 2010. Unlike some other satellite campuses that tend to be oriented to pre-



The Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi—slated to finish construction in 2013—is a part of what will be the largest single cluster of cultural institutions in the world.

professional training, NYU expects to offer a complete liberal-arts experience. "What Abu Dhabi wanted was a full-scale university," Ballon says.

Ballon promises that the NYU team is "committed to having a rigorous art program, ranging from visual arts and film to new media and art and music history." There will be dedicated exhibition and performance spaces, in addition to "curatorial and research programs to take advantage of our neighbors on the island." It doesn't hurt that those neighbors include the distinguished Guggenheim and Louvre. This is a combination that Daniel is looking forward to as well. "Imagine ... the impact on the community of having school classes and art students flocking to the museums for tours and classes," he says.

Yet not everyone is pleased about the plans for the island. Some NYU students see the new project as the latest worrisome event in a long line of secretive behavior on the part of their university that includes the gentrification of large swathes of lower Manhattan. The students worry about who will be displaced to make room for NYU Abu Dhabi and whether the building costs will be passed on to students in New York through tuition hikes.

But they are not opposed to the project itself. Farah Khimji (NYU '11), a member of Students Creating Radical Change, an anti-oppression social advocacy group on campus, explains that her feelings on the project are "entirely up to the way NYU handles this. Are we going to be wiping out neighborhood art spaces? Pushing artists and working people out of their homes? Gentrifying our little piece of the Middle East until it becomes as sterile as parts of New York City are becoming?"

Some in France decry what they see as the crass exportation of a French cultural treasure to the highest bidder. There are also concerns locally within the art community about the sustainability of an imported international art scene without an organic and indigenous local art scene growing alongside it. Collins admits she "would prefer to see the Middle East art movement grow from its own routes slowly and naturally, just as it has been doing for thousands of years."

Ultimately though, there will need to be growth all around, not just in the commercial and fine-art sectors. Robehmed hopes local tradition and culture will assert its presence as well. "I would also love to see a growth in terms of street art here," she says. "As Dubai grows into a big city, the art scene needs to grow with it. We still have far too many gray walls out there."



# Singing Away the Weekday Blues

scott alan's *monday nights, new voices* begins its fourth year

BY LAURA HEDLI

PHOTO COURTESY OF SCOTT ALAN

ONCE A MONTH, THE WORST day of the week gets a little less hellacious down at The Duplex. In this intimate West Village cabaret, talented musical theater neophytes and veterans of the stage join a gorgeous audience to create a little night music for just over an hour. Monday blues, be gone.

The show is called *Monday Nights, New Voices* and the man behind the curtain and the progenitor of the event is singer-songwriter Scott Alan. At 29, Alan is busy reworking his musical, *Piece*, and has just released his first album, *Dreaming Wide Awake*. Still, he says that MNNV is always a top priority.

*Monday Nights, New Voices* is designed to offer exposure to up-and-coming artists and virtual unknowns in the theater industry. The monthly concert features a handful of new performers singing some of the least irritating showtunes—for all of you not sold on musical theater—under the musical direction of Barbara Anselmi. Guest hosts, who have included the likes of Ann Harada (*Avenue Q*) and Sutton Foster (*The Drowsy Chaperone*), introduce the performers. An impeccably dressed Alan hops onstage between songs, cracking jokes and cheering on the new voices.

"I didn't intend it [MNNV] to be anything when it first started. I really just intended to get a group of my friends together on stage to sing, because they wanted to perform," says Alan of MNNV's rather serendipitous creation. Alan was scheduled to perform at The Duplex in early 2005, but when one of the performers in his act couldn't make it, he was left scrambling for ideas. Within one week, he had not only decided to keep the performance slot, but had also re-envisioned the entire evening.

"I called my friend Lauren Thomas and said, 'Do you want to do a night of yourself singing?' And she said, 'I would love to do that.' And then when I told my friend, Zakiya Young, about this, she said, 'Oh can I can a part of it?'" Alan says. "In the end, we

**"IF SOMEONE SENDS ME AN E-MAIL SAYING, 'THIS IS ME, I LOVE THIS CAREER ... CAN I BE A PART OF IT?' THEN I SAY, 'ABSOLUTELY, THE DOOR IS WIDE OPEN FOR YOU.'"**

sort of just grouped people in there. We got a lot of people to celebrate each other and celebrate the industry—to celebrate struggling but hopefully succeeding at their ultimate goal and dreams."

2008 marks the start of the show's fourth season, and MNNV now plays to sold-out houses. Considering alumnae like Young, who is currently featured as one of Triton's daughters in *The Little Mermaid*,



The new cast of *Monday Nights, New Voices* perform weekly at The Duplex in the West Village.

many hopefuls contact Alan looking for MNNV to provide them with similar success stories.

Alan takes students as young as 14 and says, "If someone sends me an e-mail saying, 'This is me, I love this career, I love what this series means, can I be a part of it?' Then I say, 'Absolutely, the door is wide open for you.'"

"I think it's important because I know when I went to college, I was the outcast—not the outcast as far as social situations, but as far as in my classes. My directors, my teachers didn't really see the talent, and I always felt as though I had to fight," the Emerson grad says. "People outside the door saw it, but when you're in that room and you're thinking, 'Well, maybe I'm not that good,' you need another area for showcase. Sometimes, that's really important."

In the past, each MNNV concert has featured a guest composer, including Paul Scott Goodman (*Bright Lights, Big City*), Stephen Schwartz (*Wicked*), and Andrew Lippa (*You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*). This year, however, Alan has chosen to honor new composers and songwriters.

"I get nervous every time somebody does a new song, because it's the first time something is being

heard [by an audience]," says Jonathan Reid Gealt, MNNV's first new featured composer. His selection of songs for the concert came from his in-the-works musical, *Forward*. Drawing from the experiences of his friends and family, Gealt set the piece at a life-support meeting where each character's individual stories and growth are expressed through song. Natalie Weiss, a recent Penn State grad and one of the new voices for the evening, was asked to sing Gealt's piece, "Quiet."

"When I learned Jon's song, it was a power ballad-slash-pop ballad—my forte, which I always do—but I had no up-tempos, so I had to search for a comedic song, which would contrast," Weiss says.

Each new voice is given a song by the composer for the evening, and then they are required to come up with a second song on their own. They only have one opportunity to rehearse all together, and this rehearsal usually happens just one day before the show.

"It's about professionalism. They get the music, they get tapes of it, and they have to do it," Alan says. "We don't really have the budget to spend otherwise."

Alan strikes that difficult balance between being an encouraging peer and a knowledgeable mentor. The result of his labors is a bite-size gem of accessible musical theater that is both fresh and engaging.

Alan says, "I tell all my new voices at the end of the show, 'You know, it's very easy to get out in the real world and make it and become very bitter. But remember this moment in your life when you wanted it more than life itself.'"



# The Stranger

BY RAPHAEL POPE-SUSSMAN

PHOTO BY MOLLY CROSSIN

I've noticed recently that every time I use the toilet, I have to replace the toilet paper. I live in a suite with four people. A normal person uses the toilet eight times a week (every day and twice on Sunday for good luck). I'm no rocket scientist, but four people should not go through an entire roll of toilet paper every day. Not even rocket scientists use that much toilet paper, and they are notorious for their gaseous explosions. Point is, some stranger is obviously crapping in my toilet. It would be one thing if a friend or relative were making use of the facilities in my suite, but for a man I have never met to rest his corpulent and pasty thighs upon my toilet seat is nothing short of an outrage.

This is deeply unsettling. I don't like it when strangers crap in my toilet. Hell, I don't like it when strangers crap anywhere in my house. I just don't like the sound of that. I also don't like the sound of my toilet being flushed upwards of 20 times an hour. What the hell did you eat, man?

I must defend my toilet from invasion. Because my toilet is my oasis.

Since I was very young, I've relished my time on the toilet. Like many people, I do a lot of my reading on the toilet. But I also use the alabaster throne to relax. Unlike the other seats in the house, the toilet seat is a seat in which you can lean back—as far as you like—without having to worry about cracking your sensitive pate on the floor. The bathroom is also a pleasant place to repair when traveling. On a long airplane ride, I like to spend

about half an hour on the toilet, reading the little warning signs and working on my deep breathing. On a plane, that bathroom is the only place you can get some privacy.

And privacy is vital to me. That's why I'm so incensed about this phantom toilet-terrorist. He's invading my personal space. I won't stand for that. I can't stand for that. I am unable to stand for that. Not without wiping first.

So Mr. Mystery Shitter (or Professor Mystery Shitter, as the case may be), I am taking this opportunity to let you know that I'm on to you. I bet you're reading this right now. Perhaps you're even reading this on my toilet.

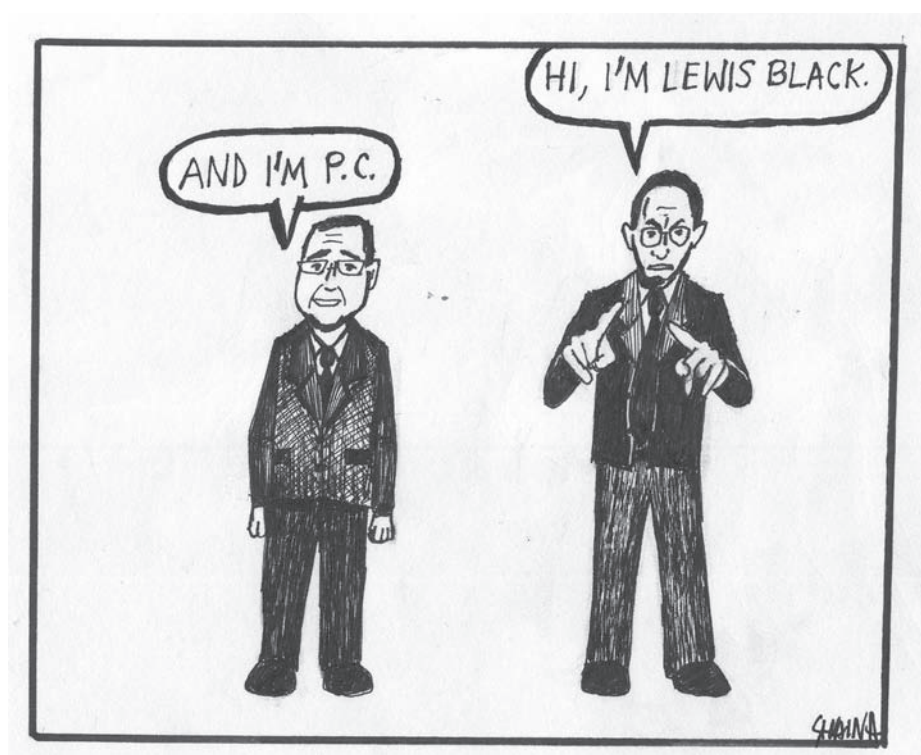
Whoever is using my toilet is eating a good three pounds of celery for each meal. Everyone knows that eating roughage makes you shit like a champion. You're a champion of a bowl, sir. But it's not the Super Bowl. It's my toilet bowl.

Stop despoiling my pristine bowl. It's terribly gauche to use another man's toilet. It's also considered impolite. So I beseech you, oh Phantom Crapper, to cease this base attack on my toilet.

It's been said that charity begins at home. Today, charity can begin at your home. Instead of crapping in my toilet, crap in your own. For if we all crap only in our own houses, then we shall all be kings on our own thrones. And what a glorious thing that would be.



You know who you are, and you know what you've done.



cartoon by shaina rubin

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Colin Currie, Percussion

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(NY Premiere)

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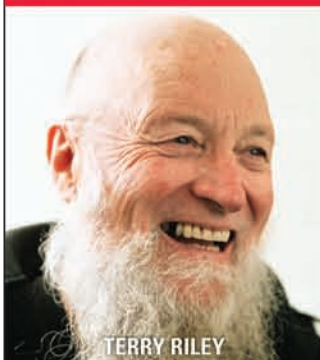
**STEVE REICH** "City Life"

The Academy is made possible by a leadership gift from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Major funding has also been provided by Mercedes and Sid Bass, The Kovner Foundation, Martha and Bob Lipp, The Peter Jay Sharp Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Judith and Burton Resnick, and Susan and Elihu Rose, with additional support from the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, The Dana Foundation, Suki Sandler, and The William Petschek Family.

Ensemble ACJW performances are supported, in part, with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.

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"[Wu Man] is the artist most responsible  
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**BERG** Violin Concerto

**SIBELIUS** "Tapiola"

**JOHN ADAMS** "Doctor Atomic"  
Symphony (NY Premiere, co-commissioned by Carnegie Hall, the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, and the BBC)

Pre-concert talk at 7 PM with John Adams, David Robertson, and Jeremy Geffen, Director of Artistic Planning, Carnegie Hall

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