

SAMPLE FRESH WINTER PRODUCE AT THE NEWLY OPENED TASTING ROOM
BUTLER THE STILLS MOVE ON • ADAM GOPNIK: A REAL NEW YORKER

the eye

COLUMBIA ON THE STREET

VOL I, ISSUE 11, 11.30.06

THE GAY AREA

WHY THERE'S NOTHING GENERAL
ABOUT THE GS STUDENT BODY



the eye

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Skimpy Negligee

Tim Shenk

The Top of the Masthead

Julia Israel, Julia Stroud

Passing Class

Jason Kim, Sumana Rao

Menorah

Risa Chubinsky, Xiyin Tang

Boyfriends

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New Björk Album, and Not Being Jewish

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Nintendo Wii

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New iPod

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A Furby

Kibby McMahon

Hanukkah Is Better

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Robin Yang, Carly Isman

Coal

Jake Olson, John Mascari,

Steve Moncada

If you have questions, comments, or letters to the editor, e-mail Tim Shenk, editor in chief, at eye@columbiaspectator.com. You can also call us at (212) 854-9547. To place an ad, call (212) 854-9558.

"The baby looked at you?"

©2006, *The Eye*, Spectator Publishing Company, Inc. No part may be reproduced in part or in whole without the express, written consent of the editors. All rights reserved. *The Eye* is published every Thursday during the fall and spring semesters. It was also in the closet making babies, and I saw one of the babies, and the baby looked at me.

CORRECTION: "In a League of Their Own: How to Punch and Kick Your Way from Working Class to World Class" (Nov. 16) mistakenly excluded a byline. The article should have been credited to Dan Haley. Send any corrections to eye@columbiaspectator.com.

From the Editor...

Before the death of God, which I think happened in America around the same time as the death of disco (perhaps for related reasons), religious texts shaped people's lives in ways both obvious—answering questions about what is the good life and how it should be pursued—and subtle—for instance, providing a vocabulary with which people could interpret their world. It must have been a fun time. Not fun in the actual "this is enjoyable" sense. More like fun in the "I wake up every night drenched in the sweat of a man condemned to the fires of eternal damnation" sense. Those Puritans sure knew how to live.

As should be obvious to regular readers of this column [*Editor's Note: Ha!*], I didn't have this. Instead, my worldview emerged from a combination of *The Simpsons*, what I heard the cooler kids talking about, and other such fiddle-faddle and foofahra. That was obvious, right?

Consequently, I didn't have many principles. But there was one that I held absolutely sacred: I should **never**, *never*, **never** play sports. Never.

For the first twenty-one years of my life, I adhered to this belief with a devotion that made Mahatma Gandhi look like a chump. Friends tried to convince me to play soccer, and I would laugh in their collective face. Loved ones informed me that I was growing eerily pale, and I would hiss at them before returning to my secret lair. Columbia administrators told me that unless I met a simple athletic requirement I would not be able to graduate, and I...

On the Cover



GS Pride

Until recently, students unsure of their sexuality had to shape up or ship out. How does Columbia's School of General Studies provide gay students a safe harbor?

Urbanities



Between the Sheets

Spooning addicts divulge their juiciest platonic sleeping habits, proving that a dorm bed can comfortably (or uncomfortably) accommodate two.



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[*Editor's Note: Wait. If Tim is the editor, who writes these?*]

INTERVIEW

By Johanna Smith

Inside the Gates of the new yorker



New Yorker staff writer **Adam Gopnik** and I recently met for elevenses at the Hungarian Pastry Shop. His new collection of comic essays, *Through the Children's Gate*, picks up where his last, *Paris to the Moon*, left off: the Gopnik family returns to New York in the fall of 2000 after five years in Paris. The book is named after the 79th Street and Fifth Avenue entrance, or "Gate," to Central Park. Before dashing off to a meeting at his son's school—where he and other parents are lobbying for less homework—Gopnik shared his thoughts and a cherry danish with me.

In "Paris to the Moon," your wife Martha remarks that in Paris you had a beautiful existence, but in New York you've got a full life. Is life in New York unbeautiful?

Well, I mean right here is beautiful. [Gopnik gestures to the swirling leaves overhead and St. John the Divine across the street.] This is the kind of thing I love about New York. Little places like this and the odd juxtaposition. This is the largest Gothic cathedral in the world. It's bigger than Chartres, it's bigger than Amiens, it's bigger than Westminster Abbey, and yet it's sort of hidden away up here. [Gopnik's cappuccino and danish arrive at the table. He takes a bite.] Mmm, that's good and real—it has the pits in.

New York's not beautiful the way that Paris is beautiful—physically, architecturally. New York more than any place I know is full of bumping-intos. You know a thousand people not particularly well in New York and ten people extremely well,

and that I think is one of the things that makes it a remarkable place to be. As I say in the book, I love Paris, I love Paris, but I believe in New York.

What will your kids think of your book when they read it?

Well, they already have. I mean, Luke [12 years old] has read most of it. I think that they recognize that the things I use from their lives are exactly the most ordinary things that happen to them. I feel sure that they think of it as a stylized version of their lives that I use to make fables, make parables, tell jokes. As always in writing, people become characters even when they're real people.

In the book you write that journalism is done from the outside in and writing from the inside out—which type of writing do you prefer to practice?

I make my living, most of my living, as a reporter. I write about the transformation of Harlem, or I did a long piece on a high school in Rikers Island, which became a documentary for Showtime. I love doing it and it's an honorable track, but it's an outer track and it's necessarily of that sort. Inevitably you're writing about someone else's life as seen from the outside, and it's their story, it's their experience. The truth is that I think writing, real writing, can only be done from the inside out. I value both. I practice both. I guess if I'm being honest with you, I do value the second more.

What is it like writing for the New Yorker?

I've been there now for more than 20 years, through four editors, and it's wonderful. The thing about the *New Yorker* that maybe is hard to see from the outside is that it's simultaneously a literary magazine and a weekly magazine. So though it has the appearance I'd imagine—at least it did for me as a kid growing up—of these wonderfully sort of free and polished indulgences by privileged writers, the truth is that its exigencies are weekly, and they're just like the exigencies of *Time* or *Newsweek* or *Parade*. You've got to get a piece finished and fact-checked and closed and perfected, not for all time but for Thursday. So if you make your living there it doesn't feel leisurely in any way. It feels quite driven.

You were their art critic for eight years before moving to Paris. What's the best exhibition you've seen recently?

Recently? Bryce Marden, at the Museum of Modern Art. If you love American abstraction this guy is an exquiscist. Also, the [Edward] Hopper show, which is still up at the Whitney. That was a revelation because it's got all of Hopper's early Parisian pictures in it, which are both very beautiful and a demonstration that Hopper had that light that we think of as kind of American melancholy afternoon-light in his head when he was a very young man.

Your piece in the New Yorker's food issue last year about L'Arpege [in Paris] and St. John [in London] was great. What New York restaurants do you like?

I'm hoping someday to do a collection just of food writing. I even have a title for it that came from Fergus Henderson [of St. John]. He was saying to me, very dignified: "I don't understand these young couples. They buy a television and a sofa, and they don't buy a dining table. Don't they know that the table comes first?" I thought that was a beautiful title, *The Table Comes First*. I love Blue Hill and Savoy, which are both owned by friends, but I think they represent the kind of cooking that I love—seasonal. Those would be my two stand-by places. My son, Luke, grew up eating French food so it's sort of his nursery food. So whenever he gets anxious he likes to go to Quatorze, which is a very nice bistro/brasserie on 79th Street, and have poulet frites. That's his idea of a corned beef sandwich.

Is the quality of life lower in New York than it is in Paris?

It's actually higher in a funny way. It's so much more varied. We used to look longingly for Chinese takeout in Paris. When we came back here Luke was stunned with how at the snap of your fingers you could get Burmese and Chinese and Indian and Malaysian and kosher Thai, and it comes to your door within seconds. The quality of life in that way, the variety and flexibility of life, is much higher in New York. I can't imagine living anyplace else, except Paris, but we've done that.

november 30, 2006
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urbanities



the eye | november 30, 2006

04

The Science of Spooning The Warm, the Platonic, and the Occasionally Sexual

BY LUCY TANG

I got a Care Bear from Rite Aid because my pillow was uncomfortable, and it's kind of like having a spooning partner," Anton Glamb, CC '07, joked.

Of course, even the softest childhood Care Bear can't compare to the warmth of another person, which may explain the phenomenon of spooning among Columbia students. Once considered a pastime limited to couples, all-night cuddling is actually popular among friends in a purely platonic setting. This need for physical intimacy could stem from the close living quarters we face in college.

Keith Hernandez, CC '07, elaborated: "When you cohabit with people, the dynamics are completely different." The tiny twin beds that Columbians are confined to sleeping on for all four years may also have something to do with it. As Mary, CC '08 said, "There's not a lot of bed space, so if you're sleeping over at someone's place, you're obviously in bed with them."

The concept of spooning may not be new to some, as many students grew up cuddling in bed with family members or friends during sleepovers. Mary "comes from a snuggling environment," otherwise known as an all-girls school. She still sleeps in her parents' bed at home. Similarly, Anna, CC '07, snuggled with her parents and siblings when she was younger. But for others, spooning is just another college first. Indeed, Columbia was the instigator for Hernandez's spooning. Living in Hartley freshman year, he and his suite-mates became really

"comfortable as a group of people living together." Marcel, CC '10, recalls that his first time was actually an accident. "We were just studying and got really tired, but it was really convenient because we both had the same 9 a.m. class, so it became a little tradition."

As a college, Columbia imparts its fair share of stress upon students. Factor in relationships, friends, and family, and you have an automatic equation for anxiety. So it's no surprise that people are reaching out for comfort. In fact, during a particularly troubling and difficult period, Jamie, CC '07, and her friends started a cuddle club for support. Many of her friends were going through break-ups, and Jamie asked herself, "What's missing?" She soon realized that her friends "need[ed] more human contact." Hernandez supports her conclusion, claiming that "spooning goes up exponentially during stressful times."

While most spooning remains on a strictly platonic level, such physical intimacy undoubtedly arouses romantic or sexual desires. After all, it could be slightly misleading to hold someone so close without the thought of going further. Glamb differentiates between spooning and foreplay by explaining, "[Spoonings] a different experience ... and you're not really thinking about [sex]." But he's quick to qualify that statement by adding, "Other

times you are thinking about [sex], but it has to be a mutual thing."

Mutual or not, for some like Marcel, feelings often do "go beyond platonic cuddling." Sometimes it's best to resist acting on these desires.

"[Spoonings] is a bad way to initiate a hookup—it's sneaky, taking advantage of a physical intimacy and turning it into something sexual when it's supposed to be platonic," Anna said. She's had unfortunate experiences with two male friends who attempted to cross the line, thinking that their cuddling "[was] going to go elsewhere" and not realizing that sometimes a girl just likes to spoon. But once you cross the platonic border, don't count on foraging back into neutral territory—you may have just lost a spooning partner for good.

Despite how open today's society can seem, it is still somewhat taboo for two straight males to spoon without piquing questions about their sexual leanings. Anna admits that she only knows one pair of straight guys who will spoon each other. Though many guys claim to be comfortable with their sexuality, she contends that they nevertheless shy away from such physical contact. Moreover, some female students still remain uncomfortable with the idea of platonic spooning. For those in that pool of "advocates for personal space," perhaps it's time to give snuggling a shot. Like Mary said, "Everyone's a spooner secretly." So what about you?

**"EVERYONE'S
A SPOONER
SECRETLY."**

—MARY,
CLANDESTINE SPOONER

PHOTO: REBECCA TONG

the rundown
the best New York has for...
Studying Abroad

Just because you're not going to Rome or Shanghai next semester doesn't mean you can't get out of the country for a day

BY JAMES DEWILLE



The Place	The Scene	The Food	The People	Cons	Rating
Flushing	Take a short train ride to Queens to find a piece of Asia in NYC. This hidden Chinatown has its own trump card over the original: Flushing Meadows Corona Park provides peace and quiet that is lacking below Canal Street.	Sweet buns and scallion pan-cakes cost less than \$1, and there's a dim sum place on almost every corner. Plus, you can't beat the fresh fruit stands.	Ethnic diversity and a lack of tourists ensure a more welcoming feel than Manhattan.	Flushing may be pretty far, but it's well worth the day trip.	★★★★
Belmont	Nestled all the way up in the Bronx, this neighborhood is what Little Italy might have looked like before people knew what NoLiTa stood for.	Feast at a trattoria or a sidewalk raw oyster bar. If you can't finish, be sure to pack up some cannolis and homemade noodles for later.	It's a microcosm of the ethnically diverse Bronx, plus a few stray Fordham kids.	Taking an uptown 1 train from 116th Street may bring back bad memories from Baker Field.	★★
Corona	Stretching almost endlessly beneath the elevated 7 line, Corona is stocked with Latin American restaurants, bars, and shops.	Sidewalk vendors sell everything from tacos and empanadas to fruit with hot sauce. If you're not craving food from a cart, there are also plenty of restaurants and bars.	Diversity is once again the key word, as the high Latino population ensures authentic, quality dining.	Thanks to the 7 train tracks, it might not be the best place to enjoy a bright day or a quiet afternoon.	★★★
Koreatown	K-town is actually stuck in Midtown, so be prepared for the old push-and-shove on your way out from Penn Station.	Night owls can feast at the 24-hour Korean barbeques, buffets, and sushi places.	Nearby Herald Square and Madison Square Garden ensure a steady flow of sidewalk traffic.	K-town is tiny, so decide for yourself if you want to fight the Midtown shoppers for the last mandoo.	★★
Brighton Beach	It's been dubbed "Little Odessa" and lives up to the name. Wander down Brighton Beach Ave or along the boardwalk past stores selling caviar and sweets.	Food marts offer a variety of teas, cheeses, and meats, while snacks like syrniki (fried dough with sour cream or honey) and other treats can be acquired from vendors.	All the fur is a sign of the Russian heritage which has remained since the '70s and '80s.	It's about as far from Columbia as the real Red Square.	★★★

PHOTOS: DIANA WONG

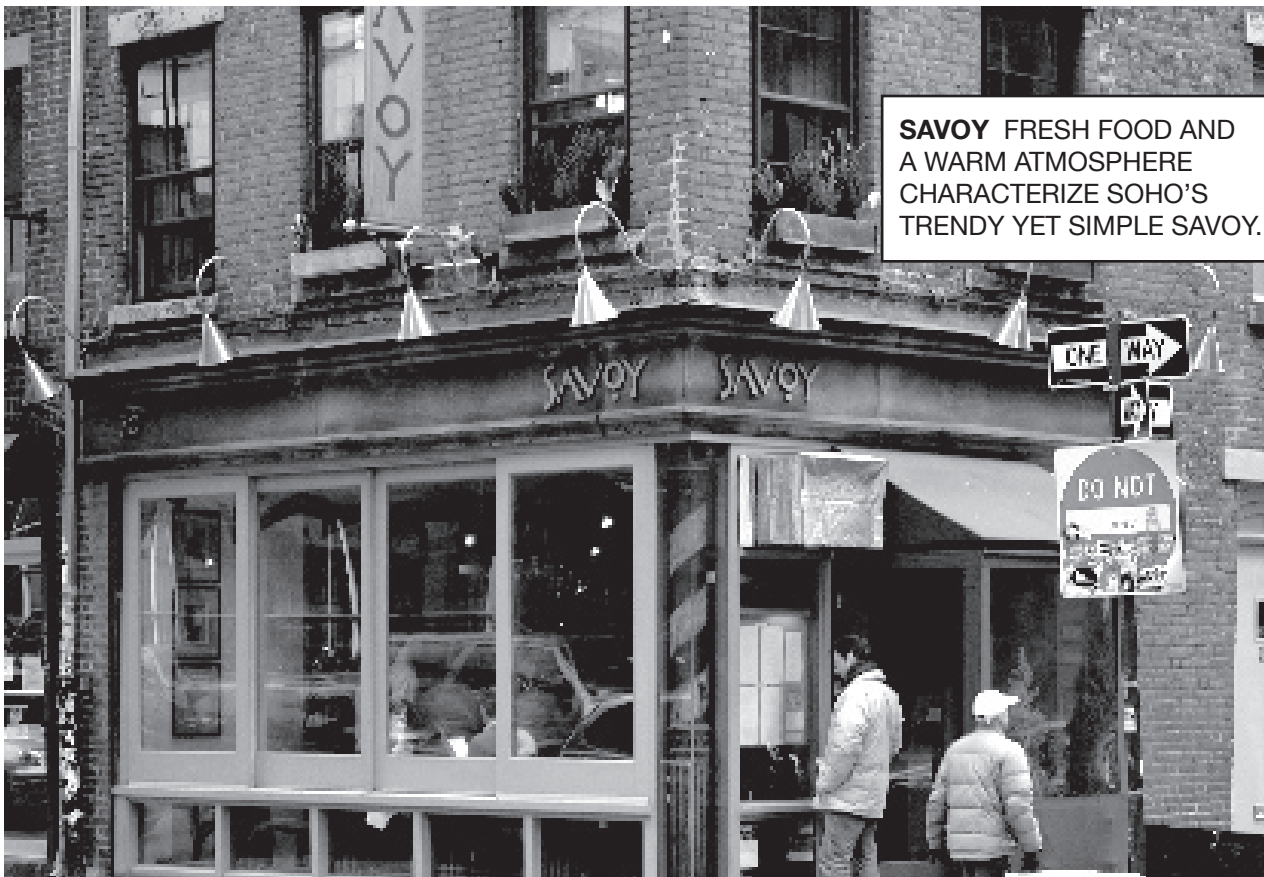
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Tasting Room and Savoy Sample Two of Downtown's Most Well-known Greenmarket Restaurants

BY JOHANNA SMITH

If certain restaurants strike tones that seem particularly well suited to certain seasons, Savoy's moment has come. The SoHo restaurant is chic yet warm—something of a rarity in these parts—and its menu brims with greenmarket bounty. There are two rooms, one upstairs and one downstairs. The former is slightly more staid and would please many a parent, while the latter is more lively, with a buzz emanating from the bar. Both the proper menu and a short menu of “small plates” are offered downstairs. A few of these shared with friends, along with some wine or beer, might serve as a light dinner

or a much needed mid-day respite from shopping. Offerings include a stellar taramosalata (a spread made from cod's roe) served with crisp turnip slices, and pungent barrel-aged feta accompanied by soothing Greek honey and nuts.

Peter Hoffman, the chef and owner, is a leading proponent of local and organic food and wines, which are far more exciting prospects now than, say, in the middle of February, once the frost has seized New York State and all edibles have been either cellared or frozen. Autumn—as Thanksgiving reminds us—is the golden season in this part of the country, and Savoy presents the bounty lovingly. The menu is always changing, presenting straightforward renditions of farm-

house cooking brightened up with a squeeze of lemon or a shaving of radish to suit the downtown surroundings.

Savoy is big on broth and jus, which is to say the mains are satisfying but not particularly heavy. Exceedingly fresh Violet Hill Farms chicken floated in mushroom broth, the slight sweetness of the meat brought out by plump slices of pear. My friend's snapper filet was bathed in autumn vegetable broth scattered with mussels. On another visit, I tried the salt-crusted baked duck, served with dreamy plum dumplings, which are dumplings in the European rather than the Asian sense: solid dough balls. The house special creme brulee is burned with an antique fireplace tool in the dining room fireplace, lending it a deep, dark flavor and provoking many a longing gaze in its direction.

The food and muted surroundings foster such a comforting atmosphere that one might be tempted to ensconce one's self in Savoy for an entire afternoon, which is what author Malcolm Gladwell appeared to be doing on a recent weekday. Tucked into the corner, he tapped away on his laptop, looking up every so often to take a sip from his glass of wine and drink in the surroundings.

Another downtown restaurant dishing up greenmarket produce is The Tasting Room, which recently moved from East First Street to more spacious digs on Elizabeth Street. Oddly, when we called for a reservation about a week in advance, we were offered either 7 p.m. or 9:30 p.m. When we arrived for the earlier seating, we were surprised to find the restaurant exceedingly quiet, with only about half of the seats full, even upon our departure two hours later.

The hushed ambiance resulted from both the small crowd and the concentration required for studying the menu. The categories offered were a little too conceptual for my tastes: “To Start” and “To Continue” and “To Finish” were each divided into “Taste” and “Share.” This proved confusing, and was ultimately a scam. When, after much deliberation and debate over what each category meant, my table didn't specify which we wanted, our server brought out all “Share” portions—which cost twice as much as the “Taste” portions and are really too big—by default.

The menu reads as far more adventurous than Savoy's, but many offerings had better ring to them than bite. The Dandelion salad, for example, was exceedingly bitter—the mature weeds were not suitable for raw munching and begged for a boil or steam. The chicken, also from Violet Hill Farm, was just as tasty as Savoy's, but we sent back a duck dish so salty it made our lips pucker, and the inelegant pile of beer-glazed short ribs—which the waiter had pushed so hard—were leaden, with a fat-to-protein ratio of around 20-to-1.

Review

Awash in Ethiopian Food

The restaurant: Awash, 947 Amsterdam Ave. between 106th and 107th streets

What you'll find: Walk through the curtains at the front of the restaurant and you'll enter a cozy space with beautiful light fixtures hanging from the ceilings and portraits of men and women in traditional Ethiopian dress on the walls.

What to order: To start, get some kind of sambusa, a pastry shell stuffed with vegetables, chicken, or beef and lots of spices. The lentil sambusa in particular is delicious—a friend described the experience of eating one as “taking your taste buds on a wild ride.” All entrees are served on teff injera, an Ethiopian flatbread made from teff grain with a slightly sour flavor

and spongy texture. The injera is used to scoop up meat and vegetable stews and functions like an edible plate. Awash is most enjoyable when dining with a group—if you choose to do this, order the all meat combo, which comes with assorted meat stews and vegetables of the chef's choosing. Items include doro wat, chicken simmered in berbere sauce with boiled eggs, tibs wat, beef strips cooked in “specially seasoned” berbere sauce, and yebeg alicha, lamb cooked in butter with onions and green peppers. What's more, you get to eat with your hands—a rare and pleasurable experience that's fun to share with friends. Be warned, however, that the service is slow, and consistently unfriendly. —Lydia Ross

Review

Dine Like Indian Royalty

The restaurant: Royal Bangladesh, 93 First Ave. between Fifth and Sixth streets

What you'll find: One or two men standing outside the restaurant, luring you in with promises of the best food in Little India (a string of Indian restaurants in the East Village mainly along Sixth Street from First street to Avenue A), and describing the beautiful, exotic tent in the back in which you can dine. The food may not be the best, but the tent is beautiful, with hanging lights and flowers, and lots of bright color. The whole restaurant is lit with bright red lights, and once

you step in the door, no traces of the outside New York world remain.

What to order: The food, while serviceable, is not the lure of the restaurant. The tent is. Be sure to order papadum, a crisp flatbread made from lentil, chickpea, or rice flour—it comes with delicious dipping sauces of various sweetness and spice. They offer a three-course dinner for 15 dollars—it's a lot of food. Stick with traditional Indian dishes like chicken tikka masala or lamb vindaloo, and save room for their mango ice cream for dessert. Sometimes it comes for free. —Lydia Ross



STARTING OUT

HOW GS OFFERS A HAVEN IN THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

By Sally Cohen-Cutler and Fernanda Diaz

november 30, 2006
07
the eye

Chuck Griffith, GS '08, was growing increasingly unsettled by his hazy sense of identity. He worried that he might be gay.

For Griffith and many a pre-frosh, the expectation of “college” is to find yourself. It’s where you shop courses, investigate different social sets, maybe even test out the S&M club. Of course, these ideas adhere to a very specific notion of college, one that necessitates a broad base of varied populations.

In many parts of the country, such a luxury is not easily found, and for some gay students, Columbia’s School of General Studies is the long-awaited promised land discovered after years of wandering.

In 1994, Griffith was a student at St. John’s University in Minnesota. His grades were suffering. He had always liked musical theater and Madonna, but recently every aspect of his character felt as if it were under scrutiny. Griffith rushed a fraternity and penned a sports column, but his peers nonetheless joked about his sexuality. Rumors circulated. So did the word “fag.” Worse yet, the speculation resonated.

Griffith, now 31, has become quite a different student. He’s openly gay, and in addition to his studies, he holds down a full-time job creating educational online programming for Pokemon. Today, when speaking of his experience, Griffith is playful, relaxed, and quite obviously relieved that he has come out. But 12 years ago, Griffith did not want to be gay. The strict Catholic campus where he lived suggested to him that embracing this lifestyle would elicit crippling repercussions.

“I didn’t know if I would fit in, or if in the future I would ever have a family,” he remembers.

Hoping to start anew, Griffith transferred to the University of South Carolina. Looking back on it, the choice seems like a cry for help, a testament to the degree to which he was afraid of finding what he wanted all along.

Almost immediately, Griffith was tagged by other gay students, who invited him to a party.

“By gay people on campus, I mean maybe six or seven students,” he said, laughing at the irony of his statement. Undoubtedly ambivalent about being so easily distinguished from the crowd, Griffith attended the gathering with hesitation. Once assembled, the group bonded over horror stories: “They were telling me all these ... stories about how they’d been gay-bashed, and attacked, and it was a really scary time for me. I wanted someone to just tell me I was gay, and instead, they told me I had to figure it out on my own.”

After another year, Griffith packed up and left for San Francisco. He had a duffel bag and \$450 in savings.

The trip became an epic soul-searching quest, during which he found himself depressed and homeless. “Could you tell me where the gay section of San Francisco is?” he asked a woman in the middle of Golden Gate Park. “It’s all gay,” she said, “but you should go to the Castro.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

GS STUDENTS ARIE DELA CRUZ, LEFT, AND CHUCK GRIFFITH HAVE FOUND A WELCOMING COLLEGE EXPERIENCE AFTER FALSE STARTS ELSEWHERE.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

At the corner of 17th Street and Castro, he found the huge rainbow flag he had so coveted. No longer aimless, he headed to The Café, a famous gay club, with his fake ID and no shortage of insecurities. “This was real life,” he recalled. “It was people dancing and kissing and holding hands—not a small group of kids hiding out in a dorm.” He felt at home—he was gay.

To be gay in America is to acknowledge yourself as a minority, with all of the problems of marginalization and prejudice that come with it. Griffith feared that by being himself, he would lose the people in his life. He traces confidence in his identity to the 1996 San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Pride Celebration, where he first felt like he belonged to a community. “I felt safe,” he recalled. “I thought, ‘I’m gay, and that is something to be proud of.’ That’s not something to feel bad or guilty about. And once I did that, the weight was lifted off me and I succeeded more than I ever thought I would.”

With growing confidence, Griffith noted how every aspect of his life improved: “No one realizes how big the weight is, when you come out and affirm that it feels great. I wonder if I could have felt that way in college, could I have excelled that way?” Swept up in the dot-com boom, he opted to start his own company rather than return to school. The company later faltered with the dot-com bust, and he sold it, but he’d garnered enough money, experience, and contacts to move to New York to teach at the Pratt Institute School of Art and Design. Even though he held a full-time job and made short films on the side, something was

still missing. He felt as if he had hit a ceiling, both professionally and intellectually.

“No matter what I was writing, it just didn’t have the depth that it really needed. There was a certain amount of limitation in my education.” He noticed an advertisement in the *New York Times* for GS, which read, “Continue Your Story.” “I immediately sat down and wrote my essay and sent it in two days before the deadline,” he said. “That’s the story.”

The relationship between the student bodies of Columbia College, Barnard College, the School of Engineering and Applied Science, and the School of General Studies is notoriously tenuous. The community at Columbia is, without a doubt, richer for its diversity, and for the wisdom that GS students bring. Still, the experiential and age gaps among the schools can prove social conundrums for the undergraduate set.

Chad Miller, GS ’06, is 33 and has been openly gay since high school. Once at GS, he found that the community, though welcoming, was unfamiliar. Many gay GS students struggle to work in a non-traditional educational situation and encounter some difficulties in relating to the younger gay crowd.

Recalling his first meeting of the Columbia Queer Alliance, Miller noted: “It was like, ‘Friday, we’re going to meet at the gates and go to the Limelight and Saturday we’re going to go to the Roxy.’ I thought, ‘I did that, I did that like 12 years ago.’”

Gay GS students who have already become ac-

customed to a like-minded community, and who have, in many cases, overcome the initial demons of coming out, transform into another minority—this time, one consisting of adults. Not quite as “grown-up” as their professors, and not exactly “college kids,” GS students occupy an awkward transitional space. Miller said of the undergraduates at that first CQA meeting, “It felt like they were saying, ‘We finally found some people like us and, by god, we’re going to go party, as a collective.’ It was like, a group of 18- to 21- [year-olds] and me as granddad.”

In the end, however, Miller found a place for himself in the group. He took on the role of advisor, mentor, and organizer—a wise uncle rather than a grandfather. He now serves as the vice president of student life at GS and signs his e-mails, “Veep of student life, school o’ general studies.”

Miller feels that the diversity of ages and experiences that GS hosts can create problems in trying to establish an active gay community within the school. He noted that while some gay students in GS took time off to party and are therefore not interested in partying anymore, others took time off to quietly explore their identities and want to party now that they have returned to college.

“For every person that’s over that [club, partying scene], there’s someone who’s never had that experience, because they were repressed because of their sexuality or they felt victimized by their situation,” he recognizes. “And because of that, we have 30-year-olds wanting to relive that 18- to 21-year-old business.”

Above all, Miller’s prime commitment remains

to the community: “How do you bridge that? That is what we struggle with.”

New York City is a famous bastion of gay activity and acceptance, and Columbia is an—at times infamous—emblem of diversity. Chuck Burton, CC ’08, came out to his family only two weeks before leaving for college. Since starting at Columbia, he has been openly gay, and he has also been in a serious relationship for over a year. For Burton, knowing that he was rushing toward the embrace of such a gay-friendly school made the decision to come out that much easier. “I can definitely imagine wanting to take time off and explore my sexuality if I were going to go to a college that’s not as liberal,” he said.

Still, Burton and others recognize that the process of coming out has come a long way in recent years. Though Columbia will undoubtedly continue to foster an open environment, the population of GS may change as gay culture mainstreams elsewhere.

Of course, acceptance of gay culture is still in many places a long way off. Aries Dela Cruz, GS ’08 and 21-years-old, is out at school. Dela Cruz has yet to come out to his parents. He is more comfortable being identified in a large community of near-strangers than by his family, who he worries might cut him off financially or even disown him. He did not wish to discuss further the nature of their disagreement.

Dela Cruz left home in part because of a familiar conflict. After his departure, he volunteered at various social justice groups designed for gays. Upon his return to Columbia, he noted the problems that

persist—chief among them the hate crimes that occurred on campus last spring. Still, he still feels safer here than at home.

Griffith, now out even at home, values the strength of the community no longer because of its mere existence, but for the diverse personalities it brings together. “The great thing about GS is that being gay doesn’t seem to be an issue,” he explained. “It has to do with having time off from school. There is an ability to see more about being gay and reaching out to a community. The gay students I know within GS, we connect in a way that is more about camaraderie and knowing that there are many other things besides being gay that we have in common.”

That said, in October of this year, Griffith wrote an editorial titled “Out and Proud” in *Spectator*, decrying Columbia’s “lackluster support to its LGBT awareness groups,” and specifically noting the lack of a LGBT center or adviser.

For most students, rushing straight into an undergraduate education from high school is an unquestioned norm. But for some, achieving the *joie de vivre* of undergraduate life is impossible. The lives of the aforementioned GS students witness opportunities for self-discovery that are lost when we cruise through the stages of life on auto-pilot.

Dominic Stellini, a close adviser to Miller, remarked, “It is important to remember that one of the most important things that students learn at college is ‘Who am I?’ That goes for traditional aged students as well as non-traditional students. A college education is a journey of discovery on many

levels. The person who you are at the end is often very different—not just older—than the person you were at the start.”

Stellini hesitates to exclusively ascribe the success of Griffith and others merely to newfound comfort with their sexuality. Miller’s own comfort with his identity, however, has led him to reach out to other students in a more productive manner. He facilitates students’ attempts to gain sense of self when they haven’t yet reached a point of comfort.

“Chad [Miller] is a great person and he is a great VP of student life,” he said. “Does any of that have to do with his sexuality? I doubt it. It does have to do with the fact that he is happy with who he is, and that his community is happy with who he is too.”

A cultivated identity outside the classroom is also a resource within it. GS students have been stereotyped for their active involvement in class, but for gay GS students, this classroom participation brings with it new levels of free discussion and confidence. Dela Cruz said: “That time off made it much easier for me to deal with all sorts of people and be critical of all ideas and experiences. It brings me new perspective, and it makes me less afraid to say whatever’s on my mind in class.”

Despite Columbia’s often insulated vibe, its composition and academic discourse is without a doubt affected by social realities. Columbia’s tolerant, if still imperfect, community has lent both GS and other undergraduates alike the chance to analyze the meaning of a liberal education.

“If I were 19 today, would I come out at Columbia?” Griffith asked. He answered, without pausing, “Absolutely.” ■



**Rhett Miller and
The Believers**
Bowery Ballroom
Thurs., Nov. 30,
doors open 7 p.m.
\$20, 21+



**CX Kidtronic
Southpaw**
Fri., Dec. 1, doors
open at 9 p.m.
\$10
21+



AFTER A FALL FROM GRACE,
THE STILLS ARE BACK WITH A
PLAN FOR YET ANOTHER NEW
DIRECTION.

a great thing... Our second record actually wasn't very well received, and I think that a lot of fans these days just wanted the same record as number one for number two. While fans may be happy because they get a little bit more of the share, in the end, I don't really care when I listen to it."

The lineup changes are just a small part of The Stills' overall change of pace. In an MTV interview, when choosing between "sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll," they chose "life." It looks like a band that borrowed its first tape recorder from a friend who needed drug money and that came of age amid bands like The Yeah Yeah Yeahs and The Strokes is finally slowing down. In regard to new bands, Fletcher says: "I'm not very hip to things right now. It's a problem with being on tour all the time. You lose track of what's going on and miss the real world." Indeed, The Stills seem to have been on tour constantly since the release of their sophomore album. Just now, after a successful leg in Canada they are decelerating and heading to New York for their last two dates. "New York is my favorite city to play," Fletcher says. "It's where we started, you know?"

One of the reasons why The Stills took off so quickly in 2003 is because of the raw energy of their live shows. They attempt to maintain this spontaneity but still sound polished. Fletcher claims, "I think that you have to keep things fresh." Their shows at the Bowery on Friday and Saturday will hopefully join their two sounds: dark, sad, and angst-ridden with the more upbeat, bright sound of their second album.

So what's next for The Stills? "I think that now we have both [sounds] out of our system we can make one [an album] that is free of context. We can do whatever we want right now. While I don't care whether it's well-received, I think the second was a really good stepping stone to do whatever we want next. I think it will be a combination of the two. I think our next will be darker and more up-tempo. I think we'll make a good mix." Perhaps the fresher and more mature Stills have finally found in their music, as in life, the median between the black and white, preferring to play in the gray.

Moving on With The Stills

If You're Looking for an Apology for *Without Feathers*, Forget About It

BY JENNIE ROSE HALPERIN

Tim Fletcher is a hopeless romantic. When asked about the angry diatribes of his band, The Stills, against women and love, he responds: "I am particularly confused with this topic. I don't know what to believe any more. All of these things are pretty big topics for people. It's the main thing that affects people, you know—sex, love, your own mortality, and your family. So I mean, it's natural that in every day life you write about these things as they affect you." In songs such as "Allison Krause" and "Destroyer," The Stills take hold of their own lives and love, just as on their second album they took hold of a new sound in an attempt to be progressive and groundbreaking.

Logic Will Break Your Heart Forever was considered one of the best albums of 2003, and The Stills were poised to take their place among other mopey rock greats like Echo and the Bunnymen and Joy Division. However, in 2006, after extensive lineup changes, they surprised critics and fans with the more upbeat, rootsy follow-up *Without Feathers*.

"Part of you says, let's do something different and let's try to change, and part of you is just the evolution of things and wants to explore naturally as well,"

vocalist Fletcher says. "You just sort of try to follow your heart and you let your instincts follow."

The greatest change has been, perhaps, the loss of guitarist Greg Paquet for, as Fletcher puts it, "musical reasons," but The Stills gained Liam O'Neil as a full-time keyboardist and Julien Blais on drums, as former drummer Dave Hamelin stepped forward as a lead singer and guitarist.

Fletcher stands by the choices his band made musically, but does acknowledge that *Without Feathers* was not received well by critics and received mixed reviews from fans. "You have to change, you know, you wouldn't have a challenge if you didn't," he says. "No matter what you do, as long as you're happy with it, then no matter what anyone else says, it's

"YOU HAVE TO
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GREAT THING."

—TIM FLETCHER, VOCALIST AND
GUITARIST FOR THE STILLS



AFTER OPENING FOR THE LIKES OF PANIC! AT THE DISCO AND FALL OUT BOY, THE HUSH SOUND RECENTLY EMBARKED ON ITS FIRST HEADLINING TOUR ACROSS THE U.S.

Quiet, Please

Two Albums Later, the Hush Sound is Out of Fall Out Boy's Shadow

BY WHITNEY HOOT

Just how much can a fledgling band accomplish in a two-year period? A whole lot, if you base your standards on The Hush Sound.

Bob Morris, Greta Salpeter, Darren Wilson, and Chris Fall-er officially became a band in February of 2005 and since then, they've wasted no time. They released their second album, *Like Vines*, this summer and are currently working their way across the nation, playing their fourth tour. These Chicago natives have played their Motown-inspired tunes alongside big names such

as Fall Out Boy, Jack's Mannequin, and Panic! At the Disco, but this time through, it's all about The Hush Sound.

The Hush Sound's first album, *So Sudden*, took about two

and a half months to record. It was released independently in early 2005 and then re-released that October, after Fall Out Boy's Pete Wentz offered to sign the band to his label, Decaydance Records. Guitarist and vocalist Morris says *So Sudden* "has a lot of mistakes," but the music is very real. (Think Motown and pop influences, with some sweet piano and a little bit of The Beatles on the side.) *Like Vines*, released in June 2006, was recorded in about three weeks, but a lot more time went into songwriting and producing. "We had a better understanding of the music and each other [with the second album], but it took longer because there were so many producers!" Morris says. "For *So Sudden*, we were trying to record as many songs as possible. With *Like Vines*, we were trying to make

the best album possible."

While listening to any of the songs on *Like Vines*, it's impossible to ignore the changes that have occurred in The Hush Sound's music since their first album. By incorporating several horn instruments and new rhythms, its sound is still clearly recognizable, but much smoother, more varied, and less raw. When asked to describe his new album with only one word, Morris said it would be "colorful." Considering songs such as "We Intertwined," "Wine Red," "Sweet Tangerine," and "Lions Roar"—in which the music is lively, bold, and dynamic—"colorful" is an excellent description. The Hush Sound has managed to create a quartet that can sound like a dozen musicians playing at once, while not seeming crowded or disorganized. According to Morris, he and Salpeter, who plays guitar and piano and also sings in the band, usually serve as lead singer for the songs they write. While the lead vocalists get most of the writing credit, instrumentalists Wilson and Fall-er also contribute to the creative process.

Considering how quickly they've risen to the top, the members of The Hush Sound have remained remarkably down-to-earth. They continue to respond to fans' questions submitted to their Web site and record journal entries about their tour's progress. On their Myspace page (www.myspace.com/thehushsound), they've posted a handful of home videos of everything from Salpeter fixing a tire to Wilson snoring to an especially flamboyant rendition of the "Ding Dong Song." Morris says that he loves to interact with the crowd, and sometimes the band sings the horn parts since it doesn't have all of the instruments on stage. The band loves its fans, but it's a little wary of fanaticism. "Austin is our favorite crowd outside of Chicago. The fans are very polite," says Morris. Hopefully New York City will treat them well, and maybe next time around, Panic! At the Disco will be opening for them. ■

HEAR IT

The Hush Sound
With Murder by Death, This
Providence, This Is Me Smiling
The Knitting Factory
Tues., Dec. 5, 6:30 p.m.
\$12 advance, \$13
at the door



FAST TRACKS

Album Reviews

Josh Groban *Awake*

What is it that makes Josh Groban's sappy pop songs better than the Backstreet Boys or 'N Sync? The lyrics? No. The use of Italian? Nah. It is the wide range of notes that his voice covers perfectly and his understanding of his limits. He does not venture beyond the teen pop realm and in doing so, displays (somewhat ironically) a mature approach to his art. Groban's new album, *Awake*, appropriately focuses on his vocal talent and concentrates on his strengths. The 10th track, "Un Giorno Per Noi," is an adaptation of the theme of the 1968 *Romeo and Juliet*, and it is a smart choice. He seems to envelop the tragedy of the story and releases the passion of the lovers through his voice, and the inspiring song is definitely the highlight of the album. Unfortunately, the last song, "Machine," takes a dive into the sphere of bad pop. But since every other track before that is powerful and interesting, one mistake isn't enough to ruin the sugary pleasure of the rest.

—Cedric Cheung-Lau



Tenacious D *The Pick of Destiny*

A new Tenacious D album with a sprinkle of Liam Lynch—anyone would cream their jeans. Sure, it's only the soundtrack to their new movie, *The Pick of Destiny*.

But Tenacious D fans have been waiting almost four years for a new masterpiece, something to sit down and memorize immediately so they can quote it with their friends while grabbing a late-night munchie snack at Tom's. The music on *The Pick of Destiny* isn't varied or even particularly interesting, but the lyrics are so enthrallingly vulgar that it's hard to lose interest. With songs like "The Government Totally Sucks"; "The Divide," which includes a flute reminiscent of *The Little Mermaid*'s singing sea creatures; and "Beelzeboss (The Final Showdown)"—a battle of the bands between Tenacious D and the devil—it's hard to not want to rock out with your buds while singing "Fuck-a-loo" at the top of your lungs.

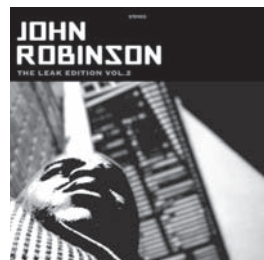
—Lana Limón



John Robinson *The Leak Edition Vol. 2*

He might not be wearing mink and drinking Krystal yet, but John Robinson is well on his way. Underground hip-hop heads may recognize Robinson as one half of the groups Scienz of Life and Sol Up-rising. His vocal tone is reminiscent of fellow New Yorker Nas, although Robinson's lyrical style is more universal and less identifiable as East Coast-inspired. The political and social lyrics featured on *The Leak Edition Vol. 2*, akin to those of many hip-hop artists, are laced with snippets of personal interviews and are paired with striking and appealing beats that add his own flair. With production credits to Madlib and MF Doom, blues heavy sampling, and talented female vocalists, Robinson proves he has the talent and the reputation to swim in the mainstream.

—Jenn Mayer





FRENCH FILMMAKER ANNE FONTAINE CELEBRATES HER NATION'S 100TH YEAR OF MAKING AMERICAN MOVIES LOOK LIKE CRAP.

Frenchwoman Directs Rather Than Murders

BY MICHAEL DREYFUSS

Director Anne Fontaine presented her 2005 film, *In His Hands*, at the final installment of the film departments' "On Set With French Cinema" two weeks ago. In her film, Fontaine offers us an interesting twist on what seems at first to be a normal romantic tale. Claire (Isabelle Carré), an average woman, explains that as a child her parents forgot her on the beach, simply because they did not notice she was missing. She falls for Laurent—a charming veterinarian played by Benoît Poelvoorde—once he notices her in a way she has never been noticed before, and she cannot resist him. But soon after Fontaine allows us into their warm relationship, Laurent is revealed to be a serial killer. Rather than reporting him to the police and allowing greater moral principles to guide her actions, Claire chooses to face him personally, to see if his love for her is in fact greater than his urge to murder. We know that his actions are terrible, but we know him better as Claire's love. Dealing with the cognitive dissonance that these contrasting images of the same person create is what makes *In His Hands* a uniquely rewarding film.

"I always break from a definition of solidarity," Fontaine explained when I met with her about her films. She creates characters that "seem to have a normal, ordinary social life." She establishes an attachment in us to the characters we see by presenting them as people viewers can relate to. Once we can sympathize with them, we are not able to judge their actions outside of the context of the human beings we already see them

as. Their actions, however, are hardly commonplace, and thus the viewer must desperately reconcile the extraordinary with the ordinary.

Fontaine's films treat the experience of individual characters as central—she believes that "the character is the entire film." Her films forego any discussion of broader, more external pertinent issues of morality and sociology in favor of a very character-driven perspective. Thus we are forced to digest the more external issues of the situation they are in through the individual lens of the characters. But dropping our external perspective can oftentimes be difficult, as appears to be the case with *In His Hands*. Fontaine commented that a common criticism of her film is that Claire should immediately report Laurent to the police. Because she chooses not to, she loses some credibility as a real character, and the effect of binding our sympathies tightly with the characters' is weakened, if not altogether lost. Fontaine maintains, however, that the human being is innately emotional and illogical, and hopes to present that in her characters.

What reaffirms her opinion is that Fontaine herself truly believes that the characters she creates are real. "I cannot direct a movie where I am not close to what I am speaking about," she explained. "It's too foreign for me." In her attempt to capture the real human experience, Fontaine draws on her own experience and her own understanding of the human condition, and her films are beautiful in what they capture. For her sake, though, let us hope that Fontaine keeps her understanding of human nature restricted to the silver screen or her days in prison might not be so far off.

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Lamer Than Fiction

Talented Screenwriter Zach Helm Learns The Hard Way That in Hollywood, Intelligence Can Cost You a Career

Screenwriter Zach Helm's debut film, *Stranger Than Fiction*, should have been a singular success. His original script not only solidified a new breed of literary, metanarrative screenwriting but was also helmed (pun intended) by edgy, young, and critically acclaimed director Marc Forster.

The final film, however, was not only unmistakably bland but also blown out of the water by an anti-Semitic Kazakh. Here was a well-scripted fictional film dismantled by the improvised, script-less antics of a comic in a G-string. If you were to put the situation in literary terms, well, it was ironic.

These days, intellectual storytelling appears to be the new ticket into Hollywood. However, while Helm's meta-story script aspires to new heights of originality, the resulting film is a monument to the lowest common denominator. This disparity—between original script and the resulting film—calls into question Hollywood's respect for the screenplay.

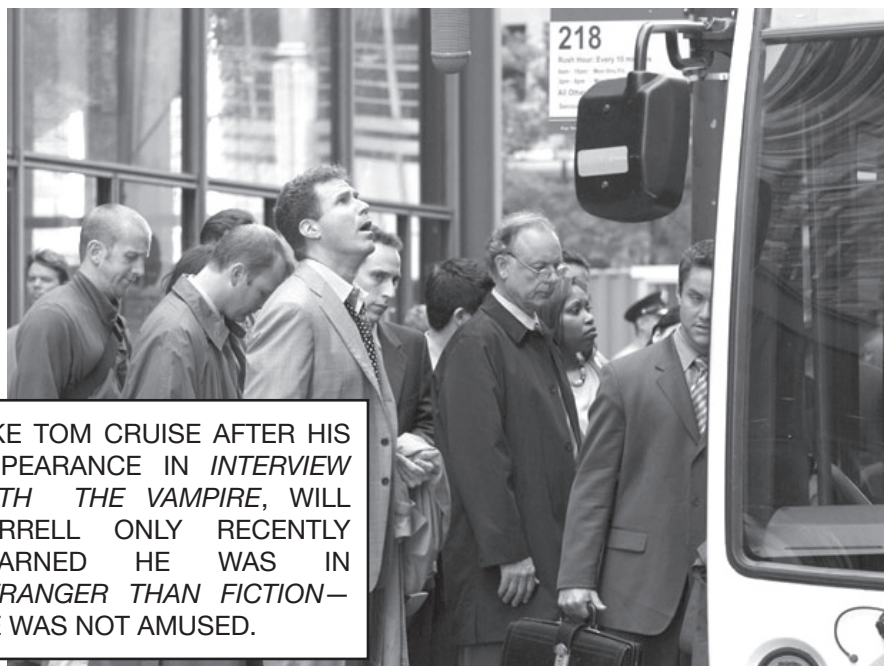
Moviemaking has always been a matter of dollars and cents, but with the recent trend of cerebral-minded films, creative sabotage in the name of cutting corners is more obnoxious than ever. Consider the musical choices made in *Stranger Than Fiction*. The film's original script is preceded by a dedication from Helm: "For the sovereign state of punk rock and those whose names begin with I." A mix CD was distributed alongside his script, and specific songs from bands such as Bad Religion and The Pixies were written

into the screenplay (he even wrote that lyrics from Fugazi, Soundgarden, and Bad Brains would be flashed on-screen). Helm planned on a decidedly hard-edged, distinctive tone.

None of this music made it into the film. The cutesy (though pleasing) bounce of Spoon, which dominates the soundtrack, is no replacement for Godspeed! You Black Emperor. While the film suffers on an aural level, the song switching speaks volumes about how Helm's punk attitude was castrated in favor of easy-to-swallow blandness.

Forster, moreover, dilutes the script's charm with ham-fisted visual gimmicks. The protagonist, Harold Crick, is an IRS agent who lives his life by his wristwatch and meticulously counts toothbrush strokes. In the opening sequences, Forster adds graphs, numbers, and maps that follow Crick to work. Such choices appropriately suggest a film that doesn't trust its subtext, and *Stranger Than Fiction* is a chore as a result.

The "happy" ending says it all. Novelist Kay Eiffel (Emma Thompson) is on the way to literary greatness—all she needs to do is kill off Harold Crick to complete her masterpiece, *Death and Taxes*. Instead, she decides to save Harold's life by introducing an alternate ending at the last minute. She reveals the final manuscript to Professor Hilbert, who remarks: "It's not bad. Not the most amazing piece of American literature in several years but... it's okay." To which she responds: "You know, I think I'm fine with okay." In the end, this is the problem with *Stranger Than Fiction*. It's ultimately about—and is a victim of—artistic compromise. Once producers, marketers, and studios have had their say, the film is



LIKE TOM CRUISE AFTER HIS APPEARANCE IN *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*, WILL FERRELL ONLY RECENTLY LEARNED HE WAS IN *STRANGER THAN FICTION*—HE WAS NOT AMUSED.

not the most amazing piece of American cinema in several years but... it's okay.

Those looking for a second effort from promising screenwriter Helm may be disappointed. His next screenplay, *Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium*, features Natalie Portman and Dustin Hoffman. So far, so good. However, Helm tells *Creative Screenwriting Magazine*: "I was fired. They hired another screenwriter to rewrite me, Linda Woolverton (*Lion King*), who is a very good writer. But *Magorium* was my baby... I said, 'That's okay, I just hope the movie still gets made.' And as an act of good faith they sent me a ham, because it was the holidays. I mean, I was shocked. I went through this whole process and got a ham."

Zach Helm has been blessed with talent, opportunity and a wonderful director-y name. Many should look forward to the day where he can finally get behind his own script. Until then, his debut will stand as an unfortunate reminder of Hollywood's priorities.

—Jessica Ling

Beautiful People Sink Into Deep Depression

3 Needles' Sincerity Proves Too Much to Handle

With an all-star cast boasting big names such as Stockard Channing, Lucy Liu, Sandra Oh, and Chloë Sevigny, a two-hour running length, and a plot that winds its way through three stories across the world, *3 Needles* certainly has enough at its disposal to make for a great film. Unfortunately, the film loses track of itself an hour in and winds up in a rather somber category: just plain depressing.

In China, the very pregnant Jin Ping (Lucy Liu) has a blood collection service that she moves from village to village, paying the destitute inhabitants a few dollars in exchange for a pint or two of their blood. In a disappointingly predictable progression, a terrible disease (assumed, by the audience, to be AIDS) follows Ping's enterprise across China, forcing her to move on every few weeks, before the over-trusting villagers realize what is causing their family members to drop dead.

In Canada, Denys (Shawn Ashmore) is a B-rated porn actor, hiding his vocation from his hard-working, middle-class mother. Denys, who is knowingly infected with HIV, cheats on his mandated blood tests by drawing blood from his terminally ill father while the old man sleeps. After his poorly

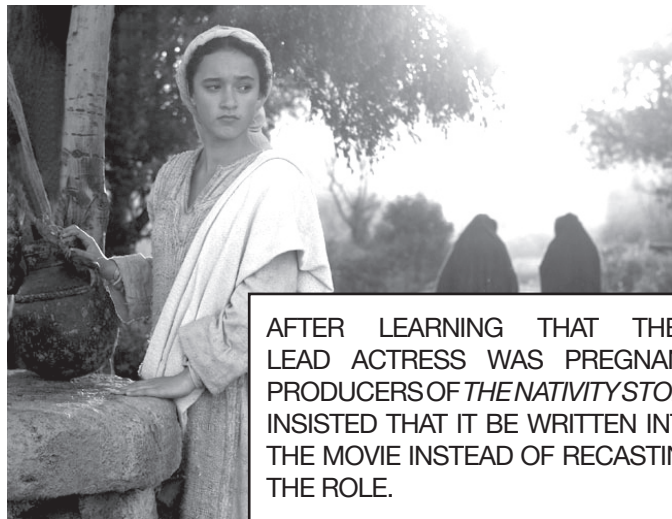
orchestrated ruse is discovered—the false blood tests reveal that the still very-much-alive Denys died that morning—his mother plots a complicated (and absolutely disturbing)

insurance fraud scheme to ensure her family's financial security while sacrificing her own life.

In South Africa, three nuns (Chloë Sevigny, Sandra Oh, and Olympia Dukakis) struggle to convince a cluster of dying, AIDS-infected Africans that they must accept Christ as their savior in order to preserve their immortal souls, even if their lives on earth are far beyond rescue. In yet another dimly foreseeable development, the youngest and least experienced of the three women (Sevigny) forgets that her work is to save souls and commits some very un-nun-like behavior in an attempt to save the living.

Although they lack any sort of definitive narrative relation to each other, the vignettes share such pleasant topics as AIDS, corruption, poverty, rape, blood, deceit, and death. Writer-director-producer Thom Fitzgerald wanted his screenplay to "define our moment in history," but our generation has never been this cheerless. Hopefully, he was a little off the mark—otherwise, this generation has much grimmer prospects than anyone predicted.

—Whitney Hoot



AFTER LEARNING THAT THEIR LEAD ACTRESS WAS PREGNANT, PRODUCERS OF *THE NATIVITY STORY* INSISTED THAT IT BE WRITTEN INTO THE MOVIE INSTEAD OF RECASTING THE ROLE.

The Virgin Mary's Kid: Savior or Plot Hole?

The Nativity Story Hopes to Be World's Largest Collection Plate

For adherents, each sentence in the *Bible* inspires a flurry of emotions and associated images lacking in the literal version. Catherine Hardwicke's *Nativity Story* expands the terse Biblical source, tracing the journey of Mary and Joseph that concludes in the familiar scene of Christ's birth in a Bethlehem manger. The film hasn't frightened Christian purists—in fact, the premiere was held in the Vatican, an unprecedented gesture on the part of the Catholic Church. The minimalist histrionics and serene rendition of events make for a rather touching—at the very least, harmless—movie.

Though the story is told simply, the details are precise and exhaustively authentic. The film introduces Nazareth with what look to be historically accurate shots of traditional foods, garb, and technologies until the camera settles on the cen-

tral character—the demure, placid Mary (Keisha Castle Hughes of *Whale Rider* fame), who at this point is a girl and not yet the iconic maternal figure. Hardwicke wisely doesn't invent a new psychology for Mary. Rather, she understates personalities and proceedings, so that there remains a quiet dignity to this retelling, achieving a soothing if not arresting effect.

Though the story is not emotionally manipulative, it achieves a true poignancy. At one point when admitting their apprehensions about raising the son of God, Joseph shyly tells Mary, "I wonder whether I will have anything to teach him." The characters sacrifice

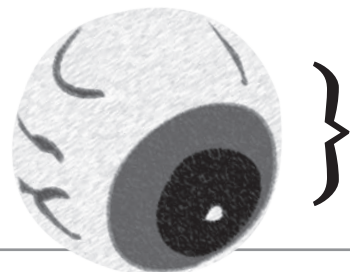
food, reputation, safety, and fulfillment of love, but discreetly and humbly—their virtue is their restraint. Otherwise, there is no moral agenda furthered in this project, and certainly no sermons or theological discussion.

Unfortunately, the simplicity extends to the characterization of the Romans, as lusty, chaos-wreaking sadist imperialists. Even the Three Wise Men suffer, foolishly employed as comedic relief. The strict bias against non-Jews is intended for emphasis—to enhance the mildness of the Jews—but its apologetic nature is a burden to the plot though it surfaces infrequently.

Though the actors are from such diverse countries of origin as New Zealand, Ireland, and Iran, the accents and physical features are distinctly reminiscent of the Near East. The look of

the movie is not, however, exotic or glamorized, despite the effort for an ethnic feel—the atmosphere relies on the qualities of locations used for filming. This original Christmas story is refreshingly spare and unpretentious, far more worthwhile than the sentimental concoctions that usually take advantage of the holiday.

—Goda Thangada



A Taxonomy of Bloggers

BY MATT KANTROWITZ

A guide to a few denizens of the blogosphere for all you intrepid InterWeb e-splorers. If these blogs scare you, noble traveler, fear not, for they are easily frightened. If they attack you, simply wave your arms and shout something about the Internet being made of tubes. Then they'll leave you alone.

PERSONAL BLOG:

The most common blog in the blogosphere. Most have never been read by anyone. Often written by 12-year-old girls and the 55-year-old men who love them.

POLITICAL BLOG:

There are three styles for these blogs. The creators of all three types are totally convinced that only their blog is right, and nothing anyone on the other side has ever said has ever been right.

SAMPLE LIBERAL POSTING:

It's clear that George Bush is the worst thing to ever happen to this country. All Republicans are [crooks/

pedophiles/evil robot lizards]. The South is full of hicks. If people were smart in this country, which they aren't, they would listen to me, and not to them.

SAMPLE CONSERVATIVE POSTING:

Liberals are responsible for everything wrong with this country. Why don't they just move to Canada and have all the [gay sex/abortions/stem cell research] they want? Massachusetts is full of gays. If people were smart in this country, which they aren't, they would listen to me, and not to them.

SAMPLE EXTREMIST POSTING:

KILL ALL TEH [Jews/Muslims/lettuce]!!!!!!11111

CRITIC BLOG:

This is a way that a famous-in-his-own-mind critic can post his real thoughts about cinema or music without any censorship from his so-called "editor." Never mind the fact that most of these people are bitter loners who know no more about their subjects than a normal person.

Screw CULPA. Read This Instead.

BY BRIAN GEORGE

The challenge of scheduling intellectually stimulating classes that will be useful in a student's future endeavors is an integral part of the collegiate experience. Having been through this rigmarole for a few years, I've decided to share some pointers that I believe will be of assistance in this process as you rethink all your choices over winter break.

1.) Never read course descriptions.

First off, the time you waste reading a course description could have been spent doing something totally cool, like hang-gliding or Sudoku. I find that it's more interesting to take a class based on the title alone. Remember though, still be logical about your selection. For example, "Otolaryngology" is a class offered this spring at Columbia. Otolaryngology sounds like a word that Doc from the classic film *Back to the Future* would have used. Doc was really cool. Doc was also really, really smart. I will take this class and be both really cool and really smart. Like Doc!

2.) Do not let upper-division course numbers or prerequisites discourage your selection.

This administrative scare tactic is deplorable. Take the aforementioned example of Otolaryngol-

ogy, which is a 7000 level class. Most likely your adviser or the department of Otolaryngology will inform you that the course is "far beyond your comprehension" and "a ridiculous choice." Do not back down. This is your education, buddy. Do you think great minds like Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, or Doc would have received mass acclaim had they just acquiesced to some guidance counselor? I'm willing to bet my hover-board otherwise.

3.) Last, but not least, don't fret if a class you want to take is full.

Although the media pays less attention to drive-by shootings than in the early to mid-1990s, they are still quite common. While drive-by shootings are certainly a gruesome and cowardly crime, they are nonetheless a beneficial occurrence to a large segment of wait-listed students during the add/drop period. R.I.P. Ray Ray.

THE HOUSE ALWAYS WINS

By Shannon Donnelly

Say Anything (Within Reason)

There's a phenomenon that I like to call the "conversational albatross." It's a statement that, when tossed into any conversation, stops it dead in its tracks. Guaranteed.

A while back, I was watching a volleyball game with a casual acquaintance, making the kind of mindless chatter you make when you're not friendly enough to actually talk and too stubborn to let awkward silence reign.

"I used to like volleyball in high school," I said. "But people always thought I'd be better at it than I actually was, just because I'm tall."

Clearly, Hollywood movies will be built around this kind of sparkling dialogue.

"Yeah, I played volleyball a lot when I was in the hospital. I was there for a while, so I got really good at it—lots of practice," she said.

"Oh? How long were you in there for?"

"Six years."

"..."

"It was, you know, a mental institution."

Stubbornness: 0. Awkward Silence: 1.

Now, I have no particular mental health hang-ups or discriminations. Mental illness shouldn't be stigmatized. And hey, I have a lot of respect for her being so up front and not all mopey-furtive about it.

That said, *holy hell*, there is no way a casual conversation can recover from a statement like that. There is just nowhere to go from there.

"Six years in a mental institution, huh? Wow. Anyway, yeah, people also thought I'd be good at basketball, 'cause of the being tall thing..."

No.

Of course, I'm acutely aware of this phenomenon because I'm probably the worst offender. I have a knack for blithely spouting off awkward, uncomfortable, and unsettling statements. It's never intentional; conversational albatrosses rarely are.

Take, for example, my friend David, who is really sweet and really socially awkward.

Once, at a party, our friend Carol was talking about how she got out of speeding tickets.

"I just make sure my shirt is low-cut and ... you know."

We all laughed, because we knew what she meant. David, however, felt obliged to spell it out for us.

"Oh, yeah," he said, three times louder than strictly necessary. "You just whip out your breasts! Let them bounce around a bit! Boi-oi-oi-ing! You can squeeze them together, get out of any ticket!" Pause. "Your breasts are really big."

I don't think anyone even attempted to recover the conversation after that. We all just quietly slipped away, which is pretty much all you can do in that situation.

Keep in mind, however, that the conversational albatross can be turned to your advantage if you use it correctly. One of my friends is originally from Bosnia and brings this factoid into any debate that she wants to win. Apparently, you can trigger an immediate guilt-based concession from your opponent by starting your argument with, "Yes, well, when I was growing up in Bosnia, during the war..."

I'd give it a spin myself, but "my childhood in suburban New Jersey" just doesn't evoke the right kind of sympathy.





**NEW YORK CITY BALLET'S
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Was the last time you saw *The Nutcracker* when you were 8 years old? Or did you yearn to play the role of Clara every year in your ballet class, yet somehow always ended up as a rodent? Now is the time to sit back and enjoy a real performance of this holiday classic, as the Sugarplum Fairies whisk you away to this fantastical dreamland.

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This newly arrived musical is based on a novel that was banned for 71 years due to having content that was too graphic, and its music was written by alternative '90s rocker Duncan Sheik. Among the scandalous content? First loves, sexual awakenings, and hidden desires. All of the ingredients for an adolescent love affair—the staged, rock-musical version, that is. A special Columbia student discount is available.



**HOLIDAY WINDOWS
PRIMARILY FIFTH AVENUE
AND MADISON AVENUE**

Saks, Barneys, Bergdorf, Bloomingdale's—yes, this may read like some people's list of where to go in New York. But even if your budget doesn't allow for frequent trips to said stores, at Christmastime, they become destinations not only for those with a long shopping list and an open wallet but also for those who appreciate the art of window displays. Where a simple mannequin usually stands, the windows in these storefronts are transformed into holiday-themed masterpieces, lending a whole new meaning to the concept of window shopping.



**MARY POPPINS
NEW AMSTERDAM
THEATER**

42ND ST. AND BROADWAY
Practically perfect in every way, she's told you that a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down. Mary Poppins spoke such inimitable words in her classic movie, which has now been brought to life on Broadway. This Disney production, meant to delight audiences by bringing a familiar tale to the stage, maintains what we loved about the story as children, replete with the dancing and singing that are sure to please the widest number of theatergoers.

**TENACIOUS D
DEC. 1
MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
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STREET
8 P.M.**

Jack Black may have a knack for playing kooky characters on the big screen, yet his real love has always been music—remember how knowledgeable he was working in that record store with John Cusack in *High Fidelity*? Now, Black's comedy-rock duo Tenacious D, which also has a movie out right now, is playing at the Garden, proving that people have finally learned to appreciate the pair's offbeat artistic style.



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February 24 at 8 PM

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MYUNG-WHUN CHUNG, Music Director and
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VLADIMIR FELTSMAN, Piano
Works by RAVEL and STRAVINSKY

April 19 at 8 PM

**UBS VERBIER FESTIVAL
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LAWRENCE POWER, Viola
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MYUNG-WHUN CHUNG,
Music Director and Conductor
VLADIMIR FELTSMAN, Piano

April 20 at 8 PM
**UBS VERBIER FESTIVAL
CHAMBER ORCHESTRA**
MAXIM VENGEROV,
Conductor and Violinist
LAWRENCE POWER, Viola

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DANIEL BARENBOIM, Piano

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PIOTR ANDERSZEWSKI,
Piano

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