

**the
eye**

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OUT OF CONTROL

THE DEBATE OVER HIGHER PRICES FOR THE PILL

A HOLIDAY GUIDE FOR ALL SEASONS • MUSICAL WARFARE • ART
NOUVEAU • PIRATES' BOOTY AT THE BOTTOM OF BARNARD

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

The Eye was founded one and a half years ago as a forum for thoughtful and provocative reporting on arts and culture. For the last year, with varying ends, we have sought to select materials that reflect the Columbia community, and, within our pages to provide for dynamic, creative collaborations between writers and their subjects.

In my time at *The Eye*, perhaps my favorite feature that we've run was a profile of University Professor and scholar Gayatri Spivak. The interview succeeded for a number of reasons: for one, we were able to pair an engaged, passionate student and a talented writer with a subject that held great meaning for her. For another, within that article, Spivak spoke generously about the nature of pedagogy, paralleling the dynamics of a student-teacher relationship that was of course happening during that interview.

This semester we introduced our Editor's Picks section, more or less on a whim. I had been resistant to a non-substantive feature, particularly in a magazine as strapped for pages as ours. By all accounts, the feature was

a success. It opened onto the personalities of the people putting together this publication for you, and hence the circumstances of its production. A link between the authors and editors and the reader already existed. The feature, I believe, explores that line in a subtly substantial way.

These questions I think are important in determining how *The Eye* is different from the *Spectator*. You may not think a lot about this problem, but that definition has been one of the magazine's ongoing pursuits. It's a process of classification, a way of determining how we will write, communicate, and think. And it's been a lot of fun!

This week, Merrell Hambleton interviews artist and Columbia professor John Miller, who in the next week has two openings in New York, but who is also renowned for his generous pedagogical style. Our lead story, written by Allison Davis, investigates the impact of price increases on the availability of contraceptives, and broaches questions of class and gender. Our editor's picks turn to role models, and it is your last time to examine the trajectory of this set of editors

who contributed to this magazine.

Next semester, the magazine will take on new leadership. Alexandria Symonds, our current music editor, takes on the Editor in Chief position; Hayley Negrin, News Associate and Alison Bumke, current lead story editor, will be Managing Editors. They are all currently sophomores, in the thick of their undergraduate experience. I anticipate changes to be made to the magazine, and those changes will be an interesting case study in leadership. It will be thrilling, I promise. I have nothing but faith in (and expectations for) the three of them.

Alex Gartenfeld

EYE TO EYE: MERRELL HAMBLETON INTERVIEWS JOHN MILLER



This month, Barnard visual arts and art history professor John Miller has simultaneous shows opening at Friedrich Petzel and Metro Pictures galleries. They will feature Miller's recent work—sculptural pieces compiled from found objects and plastic fruit, all of it coated in gold. In a phone call Wednesday afternoon, Miller took a few minutes to talk about the artists and criticism, the link between gold and feces, and the excesses of opera.

You work in a number of different mediums. What is the advantage to your art? Do you prefer one medium over another?

I'm not so much wedded to a medium per se ... I think sometimes you can, of course, get ideas from the material you're working with. I'm more in the medium as a means to an end, I suppose. And I'm certainly not alone in that. I think it's part of a generational divide. When I was at art school many of my teachers were focused on medium-specific art and in school I ended up majoring in video, which was then a very new medium.

After I got out, it was probably 20 years before I went to video again. I just tended to jump around. But it was more driven by the project rather than the material.

Is there a unifying theme to your work?

There is one. A lot of my work has to do with the interrogation of value in a capitalist society and how value is assigned and sort of disparities between the price of something and the meaning of something.

What's your interest in gold?

Well, I'll tell you, the way I got into working with gold arose from an earlier body of work that stretched over six or eight years, working with a brown impasto kind of trope that had an ... explicitly fecal quality. And gold in many ways is the opposite. But also, according to Freud, gold and feces, as symbols, are interchangeable in dreams. So I'm kind of interested in that link and opposition.

Where do you find the materials for your more recent work?

With most of my recent work, I buy cheap plastic stuff online such as plastic fruit and lately I've been buying a lot of toy guns. I have to sign a waiver because they're realistic-looking guns, so they're not legal to sell in New York City unless you say they're going to be used as theatrical props or something like that.

How do you title your work?

Well now I just have a kind of system for titling my work where I'm alternately picking titles from soap operas and titles from minimalist criticism, which of course is a reductive sensibility. So there's a paradox in the titling schema. But not all of my titles are programmatic. Sometimes the title is the most challenging thing about the work.

Why soap operas?

I think of opera as having to do with excess, so maybe just in opposition to minimalism. I thought the paradoxical nature of the minimalist titles seemed fairly clear so I thought, well, something that would come out of a more vernacular discourse, rather than the rarified discourse of minimal art.

You teach a course on art criticism by artists. Does that reflect your ideas on who should write art criticism?

I don't think it should be written exclusively by artists, but I think it mainly reflects how I write criticism. I suppose that what interested me in doing that was just to see how much ... it seems that artist-critics have more forcibly shaped the discourse, with respect to the critical and the political story I focus on in that class. So maybe they're in a better position to do that just because they can also produce work that kind of lives up to their mandates that they identify in their criticism. At least in that respect, the work of the artist-critics I focus on in this class seem more consistent than, you know, journalistic art criticism or academic art criticism.

What's the most important quality for an art critic?

For me, I'm interested in trying to consider art criticism as a kind of materialist practice. In my own work as a critic, I was very influenced by a French literary critic, Pierre Macheret. He tried to set up a framework for materialist criticism. What he advocated was, rather than approaching the work with an idea of what it should be, trying to look at what it is in its own time. Evaluate how it functions based on what it is, rather than what it should be.

How do you teach?

It differs a bit depending on who I'm working with. Initially my teaching style was very much influenced by one of my own teachers, Michael Asher, who was down at Cal Arts, where I did graduate work. His style was to say very little and to force the students to produce their own discourse, and to see themselves as the subject of their own discourse. So we would have classes and he would just arrive and say, "Okay, what are we going to talk about?" At the time there were only three or four people in the class so sometimes there would be painfully long silences. He was very hardcore and he would just wait until one of us said something. In retrospect, I really appreciated that and I think it's an approach that can work with students who want to be artists or who are art majors, especially grad students. I teach an intro drawing course, and I'd set up a more structured framework for those students to work in.

How do you feel about learning visual art in an institution?

It used to be that people saw a separation between academia and the market and its become more and more evident that in a way academia is a kind of precursor for the market and a lot of it has to do with legitimation processes that are reflected in an academic setting, in terms of the grade. It might sound odd for a teacher to be saying this, but for me I would like the whole practice of art de-legitimated. Work that's just done simply for its own sake rather than, you know, for the sake of a credential. It's sort of saying that I would like to change the system, I suppose. When I was in school, all the courses I took were pass/fail, so there was less emphasis on grades and symbolic achievement. Now it's a much different time and a much different climate. Certainly grades are much more heavily emphasized. I see that as a bad tendency.

Is there such a thing as bad art? If so—what is it?

Well, I think there's such a thing as reactionary art, in political terms, so that could be called bad. But generally I don't like to couch aesthetics in a moral framework. From a personal standpoint, it's more simply a case of things I like, things I don't like.

PHOTO COURTESY JOHN MILLER

URBANITIES BRAVE NEW WORLD BY RYAN REINECK



THE NEW NEW MUSEUM'S INAUGURAL exhibition, *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*, is a testament to the institution's reinvigorated interest in providing an exhibition model as dynamic as the work it presents. Curated by Richard Flood, the museum's chief curator; Laura Hoptman, senior curator; and Massimiliano Gioni, director of special exhibitions, *Unmonumental* is comprised of the entire primary three-story gallery space. The effort is far from unimpressive.

The exhibition unfolds in four parts, the first of which opened on Dec. 1. Following the initial opening will be: "Collage: The Unmonumental Picture" in January, "The Sound of Things: Unmonumental Audio and Montage: Unmonumental Outline," in February. The titles of each of these successive openings reveal the changing content of the exhibition, which will not replace, but will instead be added to, the current installations. When all four parts finally close on March 23, the exhibition will have undergone a massive change in its structure and content. The already crowded galleries will resemble jungles of sculpture, collage, montage, and sound, and the experience of viewing such an environment will undoubtedly be equal parts mind-splitting and awe-inspiring.

The first part of the exhibition is nothing if not overwhelming, with a checklist of

79 sculptural works filling the surprisingly small space. With work by over 30 artists, including many works by John Bock, Cady Noland, Rachel Harrison, Isa Genzken, and Shinique Smith, the show is a panoply of 21st-century sculpture, a designation which does little in the way of defining the body of work presented here. The diversity of both nationalities and artistic styles represents not a curatorial shortcoming but the truly global and indefinable character of contemporary sculpture. Surprisingly, and perhaps this is just because each of the sculptures are situated so close to one another in the gallery, the works actually come to look quite similar after a few minutes in the museum.

A few sculptures do stand out, particularly those by the 34-year-old, Swiss-born Urs Fischer. "Untitled (Kerze)" from 2001 is a life-sized candle in the form of a woman. Carved out of pigment-dyed wax and with a wick through the middle, the woman slowly burns and melts, a pile of cinder blocks supporting her missing right leg. The crudely rendered human form is in constant flux, much like actual human flesh, in that it will inevitably burn faster or slower depending on the number of people, and therefore the amount of oxygen, in the gallery space. Even walking past Fischer's candle-woman causes the flame to flare slightly, boring deeper into her waxen skull. Already a

number of wax spills run down her chest and back, deforming her face slightly and giving the piece an especially eerie quality. The flame erases not only the figure's existence, but also the mark of Fischer's hand. If the museum will allow the candle to burn until the woman is reduced to a primal lump of wax, the piece will be especially disturbing.

In many ways, the concept for the exhibition is as dynamic as the works of art it presents. This comes as little surprise, given the New Museum's mission to promote not only art, but also new ideas. Originally founded in 1977, the New Museum's new home at 235 Bowery is its first free-standing structure. Designed by Tokyo-based architects SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa) with Gensler, New York, serving as executive architect, the seven-story building is certainly, unlike its first exhibition, monumental. A lightweight metal mesh, the fabric-like quality of which makes the building's surfaces undulate as one passes by, enlivens the slab-like, windowless facade. A constellation between the spectator and the museum is thus immediately established on one's initial approach to the building.

The mesh is also used as a screen for the museum's store, the form of which literally ripples throughout the first-floor lobby. The sense of transparency on the first floor makes an immediate impression; the visitor

becomes not just a visitor, but someone to be seen, someone to be observed observing. The transparency of the museum store, the large-paned glass windows onto the street, and most especially the glass wall that encloses a small gallery in the lobby are perhaps the architects' attempts to conflate the museum's audience with the museum's art works.

If anything, the New Museum's new building and exhibition assert the institution's fundamental devotion to contemporary art. Lisa Phillips, the director of the New Museum, was by no surprise especially enthusiastic about the museum's role in the 21st century. "It's part of our mission to foster the artistic community in New York and across the world," Phillips said at the museum's press preview. "We're excited about the possibilities that artist's projects and special commissions have both for the New Museum and for the artistic community."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LOCKHART STEELE AND DESIGNCRACK

SOHO'S LITTLE EPCOT

BY DENA YAGO



WALKING THROUGH SOHO ON A Saturday afternoon in late November is enough to make you damn the holidays and forget gift-giving all together. On blocks and blocks packed with tourists and high-end designer shops like Chanel and Louis Vuitton, the last thing you expect is to stumble upon a kitsch sanctuary. Kiosk, which is housed on the second floor on 95 Spring St., is exactly that—an adventure haven where all of the products take you as far away from the “bridge and tunnel” infested streets as possible. This season, in fact, they’re taking you to Finland.

Kiosk is a store defined by its dynamism. Every four months, Alisa Grifo, the store’s founder, is dedicated to finding the most beautiful products of a different

country, although she does adhere to her own concept of beauty—one of everyday normalcy and triviality. Whether it is the packaging or the product itself, everything that the store sells aims to add to a complete sense of the country’s general mentality and ways of going through daily routines. It is not propagating cultural stereotypes but rather capturing a country’s general disposition through items that she thinks are culturally indicative in their particularity. For instance, most of the products picked for Germany were totally lacking in frivolity (even if it is an “egg-pricker” for boiling eggs), and solely geared towards functionality. The products from Sweden were all very design-heavy while remaining minimal. The merchandise from Japan and Mexico

featured the most colorful items such as painted Styrofoam teeth—models for medical students. But most of the products from past countries are long sold-out at this point except for the few ongoing products from past months. Now the store is focusing on Finland.

Until February, Kiosk has its loft space store filled with Finnish products, some of which seem trustworthy, such as an industrial-looking thermos, and some of which seem safer in their beautiful packaging, such as tar shampoo. Never having been to Finland, you could deduce a few key things about the country from the products alone: it is cold, it is woodsy, and its people like fish. There are metal teapots, fish smokers, sauna buckets, and smoking chips.

Grifo is from New Jersey and founded Kiosk in November 2005 after she stopped working as a set designer and prop stylist. She and a friend, Ross Menezes, opened the store together, but after about eight months the shop became Grifo’s project. Fueled by no agenda other than her own personal interest, she chooses the countries and handpicks the products based on where she wants to go and the logistics of bringing things back.

This presents some limitations. As Grifo explains, exporting laws take some African countries out of the running, and the issue of traveling with perishable goods leaves condiments such as honeys and mustards as the only food that she is able to sell. Though not a prerequisite for

choosing countries, Grifo has been fortunate to find places where she has some network of family, friends, or family friends to guide her through the massive catalogue of country-specific products. Sometimes she finds things from craft-people and sometimes from wholesale markets.

After figuring out the cost of shipping and how to bring it back stateside, she ends up with around 80 products to fill a portion of the Spring Street store. Half of the store, behind a divider made of postcards, is where the Kiosk staff hand-packages each individual item for shipping.

The items are neatly set up on the impromptu metal shelving all with a paragraph description written by Grifo herself with anecdotes and context about why the product merits being sold in Kiosk—not that she has to justify anything. For a creepy, white plaster head of a smiling girl, Grifo writes, “What you see is the prize for the ‘best friend’ contest held yearly in most Finnish-speaking school since 1954.” That she found this mass-produced plaster head out of the thousands of Finnish products only attests to her value of the mundane. With each country also comes a little guide to the products and the city.

Unlike Lonely Planet, that has developed a bit of a track record for dead-ending people in foreign countries, Grifo’s tastes are trustworthy—even if they are based on her sincerity and lightheartedness alone. A job that requires you to travel to foreign countries on the search for candies and crayons can inspire some envy, but Grifo is ready to share her spoils with us all. She says that Southern or Southeastern Asia—Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Vietnam—will probably be the next stop.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF YELP.COM

HUMOR

NEXUS, OR GOLD HUNT?

BY ABIGAIL MARCUS



WHAT'S THE ONLY THING BETTER THAN DESTROYING A FOURTH OF THE CAMPUS TO FIND GOLD? NOTHING.

AFTER MONTHS OF SECRECY, BARNARD COLLEGE officials revealed today the true motives behind the extensive renovations occurring all over campus. From a podium in the relocated Java City, Barnard president Judith Shapiro explained that the demolition of the McIntosh Student Center and the brick sawing occurring in the quad have “absolutely nothing” to do with the development of an improved student center and quad. Instead they are actually part of a hunt for the hidden gold of Virginia Gildersleeve (Barnard president, 1911-1947).

“It is time we all know the truth,” Shapiro declared in the inconveniently crowded City. “This isn’t just about your fancy modern architecture or your building safety codes. This is about reclaiming the mysterious golden splendor that Barnard has been sitting on for decades: gold.”

Gildersleeve, one of the college’s most influential and mysterious presidents, presided over Barnard College through both World Wars and is believed to have hidden millions of dollars in gold all over campus.

“Legend has it that the gold could be anywhere,” explains Barnard Archivist Melanie Branson. “So that’s exactly where we’re looking. We know it’s here, and we’ll find it, even if we have to saw apart every brick on campus, in the quad, while you’re sleeping.”

Rumors of the gold hunt began circulating yesterday after Brooke Wellstone, BC ’09, fell through Barnard’s graffiti wall on her way to Milbank, crashing into construction workers who held a map titled “Way to Gold.”

“I didn’t know whether to be dismayed or intrigued,” Wellstone says. “On the one hand, looking for gold is so adventurous! On the other hand, I would have had all that time to enjoy the Nexus at alumni celebrations, long after I’ve graduated.”

Response to the news has been mixed, with both students and faculty excited about the mythic appeal of the gold hunt and the benefits of a potentially enlarged endowment.

“It’s like *Treasure Island*, but with a sexy Barnard

twist,” says Mal West, BC ’08, founder of the new Facebook group “I (heart) Barnard ‘Gold-Diggers.’”

Others have found new appreciation for what they initially saw as a noisy inconvenience. “I sleep so much sounder through the sawing outside my window, knowing we’re on this kind of mission,” Rebecca Schwarz, BC ’11, says while watching construction workers cutting bricks in half in the middle of the quad.

One professor notes that “instead of uniting over anger at the pointless noise on this campus, students are uniting over something so much greater. That thing is gold.” She adds: “Millions of dollars of gold.”

Even famous Barnard alumna Anna Quindlen, BC ’74, praises the historic mission.

“We all need something to seek,” Quindlen wrote in an e-mail. “If we can’t seek it in the bricks outside of us, how can we seek it in the bricks inside of us?”

PHOTO BY ABIGAIL MARCUS



ILLUSTRATION BY SHAINA RUBIN

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SHE'S LOST CONTROL

STORY BY:
ALLISON DAVIS

PHOTOS BY:
TINA GAO



Last spring, Deira Inouye, SEAS '09, went to the Health Services at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, OR expecting business as usual. Every three months, Inouye went to receive her supply of birth control, as she had done for the past two years. She was shocked to find that there was virtually nothing left in the college's dispensary. "I was going into them [Health Services] to get birth control," Inouye recalls. "I was only going in every three months, so nobody warned me about the price increase. When I went in during the middle of spring semester there was barely anything left. I couldn't get the contraception I needed." By the time Inouye left Lewis and Clark in May 2007, the college's Health Services could only offer her enough birth control to last a month.

Inouye was witnessing firsthand the repercussions of the Bush Administration's Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. The Deficit Reduction Act, designed to reduce federal spending, has caused dramatic price spikes for previously discounted prescription medicines. In January 2006, Bush initiated the Deficit Reduction Act, which is intended to save over \$40 billion in the next five years by cutting spending from certain federal programs—including Social Security, Medicare, and programs that had sponsored subsidized birth control to college health clinics, non-profit health organizations, and Medicaid, which offers health insurance to low-income recipients. These medications include birth control in all forms: oral contraception, Depo-Provera shots, and the NuvaRing.

Before the DRA was passed, Congress made it possible for pharmaceutical companies to offer certain health care establishments discounted drugs, allowing those who had no access to private insurance a way to receive necessary medication. A White House press release from last February states, "The bill helps restrain Medicaid spending by reducing federal overpayment for prescription drugs so that taxpayers do not have to pay inflated markups." As a result, prices of birth control skyrocketed an estimated 900 percent, a government oversight that caught college officials completely off-guard. Under the act, it became too expensive for college campuses and free clinics to purchase birth control for distribution.

Students and health care providers alike have been



scrambling to find alternate means or providers, but each path seems to lead to a dead end. Inflation has affected almost all viable means of receiving contraception—including private health insurance, free clinics, campus health services, and Medicare. Even Planned Parenthood, which previously had the ability to give patients a number of different types of birth control either at a discount or for free, has taken a hit—they have been forced to scale back on the amount of options offered, giving students and low-income women even fewer ways to receive a discount.

Inouye had used her private health insurance to pay for birth control before she began to rely on the supply of her school's Health Services. She made the switch when the private insurance dramatically increased her co-pay. "With my private health insurance at home in Hawaii, I was paying a co-pay of \$7. Then, they changed their co-pay to 50 bucks. So I started getting it at school until they ran out." When Inouye transferred to Columbia, the price at affiliated pharmacies increased from \$8 to around \$30. She now pays \$25 through her primary insurance. "I just have to pay. It's frustrating—I'll probably have to switch to a generic brand soon."

Laura Cole, CC '08, was surprised by the price increase when she returned to campus in September. "I had been getting birth control pills from Town Drug for \$10," recalls Cole. "When I went back [to Town Drug] to get it, it was \$242 for one month." Cole had previously used a non-generic brand of oral contraception and was forced to use her parents' insurance to cover the cost. "It's \$25 a month now, which is fine, but I realize what a problem it is for people who don't have insurance."

Brenda Slade, the medical director of Barnard Health Services, prides herself on being able to foresee trends in women's health care. Still, she was caught off guard by the sudden spike in prices. "We were shocked when we found out. The government let feminine health concerns fall completely by the wayside ... We really thought there was nothing we could do."

Starting in September, universities found themselves running low on their stores of discounted birth control. Many could offer their students only a one-

month supply before running out. Some students were encouraged to stock up on cheap contraception while they could, depleting the stockpile at a much faster rate.

Some colleges have been unable to offer birth control at all due to the rising costs. Last month, Bowdoin College in Maine stopped offering oral contraception, following the lead of schools such as Temple University, University of Montana, and the aforementioned Lewis and Clark College.

As a result the difficulty in obtaining certain forms of contraception, some students may have to discontinue use of more effective types of contraception, including the pill and the NuvaRing, a combination contraceptive ring. They'll be forced to use less reliable methods of birth control—like condoms, or worse, luck.

Statistics released by the Allen Guttmacher Institute reveal that unplanned pregnancies among the 18-24 age group are on the rise. The trends suggest that students aren't cutting back on sex, even if they're no longer able to afford adequate protection. Inouye isn't surprised. "People are going to have sex, I'm sorry. We're at the most sexually active age and not making it safe is going to make other things happen," she says.

Elizabeth Harris, a student at the University of Illinois at Chicago, proves Inouye's assertion. In September 2007, the *Chicago Sun Times* reported that Harris decided to stop purchasing birth control after her clinic raised the price by \$20. The decision to rely on less effective methods of contraception contributed to her unplanned pregnancy. At the time, Harris was a pre-med student planning to travel to Costa Rica for a semester abroad. Her plans no longer include this excursion.

Slade explains that the effects of the DRA are more than just an inconvenience. "It's a policy that could jeopardize a woman's academic future." Women have to find extra money to support contraceptive needs, and face a more severe threat of pregnancy at a crucial time in their lives.

At Barnard, students who rely on Health Services for birth control have been surprisingly fortunate. "I wasn't even aware of the severity of the crisis," says Rika Tanaka, BC '08. Her nurse suggested she buy a few extra months worth of birth control, but other than

that, she remained untouched by the crisis that faced women nationwide.

"We try to stay ahead of the curve," remarks Slade. "We knew it would be a problem." Slade has acted as medical director of Barnard Health Services for the past four years after a four-year stint at Columbia. She realized that Health Services needed to take action right away. Barnard had already offered generic birth control in addition to the name-brand options, so when news of the price hike reached Barnard's campus, Slade scrambled to make connections with distributors to purchase enough oral contraception to last. "What we tried to do was find companies that would sell us generics identical to corporate products in terms of chemical composition and effectiveness, but which would be cheaper," she says.

Oral contraception comes in two forms—one is a combination of estrogen and progestin, and the other is solely progestin. Generic brands mimic the chemical composition of their brand name counterparts. In fact, FDA regulations dictate that the generic versions must act just as the brand names do. The generic versions are often half the price of more popular brand names—while Yasmin, a popular brand, is \$50, its generic counterpart is only \$25.

Barnard Health services laid down a significant sum of money—the exact amount of which Slade won't divulge—to ensure that students can still receive discounted oral contraception. Students are even allowed to obtain a supply to last for up to a year after graduation. Still, the least expensive brands are generic, a fact that may discourage some people. "Estrogen is estrogen, but some women do better on different brands," says Slade. Though generic brands are equivalent, women may react differently to slight hormone variations and suffer side effects. Also, some contraceptive methods and brands of oral contraception do not have generic counterparts.

Slade recognizes the advantages for students of having multiple choices of contraception, so they can find a method that works best for their unique body chemistry. Still, even Barnard's Health Services have had to cut back on the number of contraception methods they offer students. While oral contraception is

SHE'S LOST CONTROL

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TINA GAO

Last spring, Deira Inouye, SEAS '09, went to the Health Services at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, OR expecting business as usual. Every three months, Inouye went to receive her supply of birth control, as she had done for the past two years. She was shocked to find that there was virtually nothing left in the college's dispensary. "I was going into them [Health Services] to get birth control," Inouye recalls. "I was only going in every three months, so nobody warned me about the price increase. When I went in during the middle of spring semester there was barely anything left. I couldn't get the contraception I needed." By the time Inouye left Lewis and Clark in May 2007, the college's Health Services could only offer her enough birth control to last a month.

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Before the DRA was passed, Congress made it possible for pharmaceutical companies to offer certain health care establishments discounted drugs, allowing those who had no access to private insurance a way to receive necessary medication. A White House press release from last February states, "The bill helps restrain Medicaid spending by reducing federal overpayment for prescription drugs so that taxpayers do not have to pay inflated markups." As a result, prices of birth control skyrocketed an estimated 900 percent, a government oversight that caught college officials completely off-guard. Under the act, it became too expensive for college campuses and free clinics to purchase birth control for distribution.

Students and health care providers alike have been





scrambling to find alternate means or providers, but each path seems to lead to a dead end. Inflation has affected almost all viable means of receiving contraception—including private health insurance, free clinics, campus health services, and Medicare. Even Planned Parenthood, which previously had the ability to give patients a number of different types of birth control either at a discount or for free, has taken a hit—they have been forced to scale back on the amount of options offered, giving students and low-income women even fewer ways to receive a discount.

Inouye had used her private health insurance to pay for birth control before she began to rely on the supply of her school's Health Services. She made the switch when the private insurance dramatically increased her co-pay. "With my private health insurance at home in Hawaii, I was paying a co-pay of \$7. Then, they changed their co-pay to 50 bucks. So I started getting it at school until they ran out." When Inouye transferred to Columbia, the price at affiliated pharmacies increased from \$8 to around \$30. She now pays \$25 through her primary insurance. "I just have to pay. It's frustrating—I'll probably have to switch to a generic brand soon."

Laura Cole, CC '08, was surprised by the price increase when she returned to campus in September. "I had been getting birth control pills from Town Drug for \$10," recalls Cole. "When I went back [to Town Drug] to get it, it was \$242 for one month." Cole had previously used a non-generic brand of oral contraception and was forced to use her parents' insurance to cover the cost. "It's \$25 a month now, which is fine, but I realize what a problem it is for people who don't have insurance."

Brenda Slade, the medical director of Barnard Health Services, prides herself on being able to foresee trends in women's health care. Still, she was caught off guard by the sudden spike in prices. "We were shocked when we found out. The government let feminine health concerns fall completely by the wayside ... We really thought there was nothing we could do."

Starting in September, universities found themselves running low on their stores of discounted birth control. Many could offer their students only a one-

month supply before running out. Some students were encouraged to stock up on cheap contraception while they could, depleting the stockpile at a much faster rate.

Some colleges have been unable to offer birth control at all due to the rising costs. Last month, Bowdoin College in Maine stopped offering oral contraception, following the lead of schools such as Temple University, University of Montana, and the aforementioned Lewis and Clark College.

As a result the difficulty in obtaining certain forms of contraception, some students may have to discontinue use of more effective types of contraception, including the pill and the NuvaRing, a combination contraceptive ring. They'll be forced to use less reliable methods of birth control—like condoms, or worse, luck.

Statistics released by the Allen Guttmacher Institute reveal that unplanned pregnancies among the 18-24 age group are on the rise. The trends suggest that students aren't cutting back on sex, even if they're no longer able to afford adequate protection. Inouye isn't surprised. "People are going to have sex, I'm sorry. We're at the most sexually active age and not making it safe is going to make other things happen," she says.

Elizabeth Harris, a student at the University of Illinois at Chicago, proves Inouye's assertion. In September 2007, the *Chicago Sun Times* reported that Harris decided to stop purchasing birth control after her clinic raised the price by \$20. The decision to rely on less effective methods of contraception contributed to her unplanned pregnancy. At the time, Harris was a pre-med student planning to travel to Costa Rica for a semester abroad. Her plans no longer include this excursion.

Slade explains that the effects of the DRA are more than just an inconvenience. "It's a policy that could jeopardize a woman's academic future." Women have to find extra money to support contraceptive needs, and face a more severe threat of pregnancy at a crucial time in their lives.

At Barnard, students who rely on Health Services for birth control have been surprisingly fortunate. "I wasn't even aware of the severity of the crisis," says Rika Tanaka, BC '08. Her nurse suggested she buy a few extra months worth of birth control, but other than

that, she remained untouched by the crisis that faced women nationwide.

"We try to stay ahead of the curve," remarks Slade. "We knew it would be a problem." Slade has acted as medical director of Barnard Health Services for the past four years after a four-year stint at Columbia. She realized that Health Services needed to take action right away. Barnard had already offered generic birth control in addition to the name-brand options, so when news of the price hike reached Barnard's campus, Slade scrambled to make connections with distributors to purchase enough oral contraception to last. "What we tried to do was find companies that would sell us generics identical to corporate products in terms of chemical composition and effectiveness, but which would be cheaper," she says.

Oral contraception comes in two forms—one is a combination of estrogen and progestin, and the other is solely progestin. Generic brands mimic the chemical composition of their brand name counterparts. In fact, FDA regulations dictate that the generic versions must act just as the brand names do. The generic versions are often half the price of more popular brand names—while Yasmin, a popular brand, is \$50, its generic counterpart is only \$25.

Barnard Health services laid down a significant sum of money—the exact amount of which Slade won't divulge—to ensure that students can still receive discounted oral contraception. Students are even allowed to obtain a supply to last for up to a year after graduation. Still, the least expensive brands are generic, a fact that may discourage some people. "Estrogen is estrogen, but some women do better on different brands," says Slade. Though generic brands are equivalent, women may react differently to slight hormone variations and suffer side effects. Also, some contraceptive methods and brands of oral contraception do not have generic counterparts.

Slade recognizes the advantages for students of having multiple choices of contraception, so they can find a method that works best for their unique body chemistry. Still, even Barnard's Health Services have had to cut back on the number of contraception methods they offer students. While oral contraception is



BRENDA SLADE DISCUSSES THE ISSUE AT BARNARD.

still discounted at Barnard, other methods are not: the price of the popular NuvaRing recently tripled. Slade is attempting to remedy the price increase as quickly as possible. “That has always been our greatest concern: the best quality health care for the lowest price. We need to take into consideration that not all students can pay the same prices and make the same quality health care available for every student.”

For other campuses, the matter is not as easily resolved. Columbia, which has not had its own dispensary for more than 10 years, has no way to distribute its own medication. Instead, Health Services offers students prescriptions for birth control that rely heavily on local pharmacies, such as Town Drug. After Town Drug ran out of discounted birth control in March 2007, just three months after the DRA went into effect, prices went from the arranged \$5 rate for Columbia students to about \$50, depending on the brand.

Students like Inouye feel betrayed by the University’s inability to provide them with birth control. “Your college is like your home, it’s your whole community, and you get everything that you need from it really,” Inouye says. “This is one of the few medical issues we have, and now we can’t be taken care of.”

Columbia students who use birth control are faced with two options. They can switch to a generic to help cut the price. Alternatively, they can opt to pay full price for contraception, generic or otherwise. Inouye considered switching to a different method—her chosen method does not have a generic option—to help with the cost, but she ultimately decided to pay the full price. “I know I can’t use that method—it’s for people who can take it every single day at the same hour, which doesn’t work for me.”

Other students acknowledge the difficulty of finding flexibility in a very tight budget. “A lot of people can’t afford price hikes. It’s a big thing to factor into your college budget if the price increases that much,” Sarah Leonard, CC ’10, says. “To go from \$5 to \$50 is absurd—we’re students; we’re not exactly earning a lot of money.” Inouye says of the price difference, “That is a couple days’ worth of food if you do groceries, or it’s a book, or subway rides—it’s a lot of things.”

Dr. Marcy Ferdtschneider, the associate medical di-

rector of Primary Care Medical Services at Columbia, says in a statement to *The Eye*, “Health Services at Columbia has not been directly affected by the Deficit Reduction Act.” That doesn’t mean they cannot help female University students seeking Health Services’ assistance. Columbia cannot control the pricing at local pharmacies, but Health Services does offer comprehensive women’s health services—prescriptions, exams, counseling and follow-up care. Still, most students wish there was more they could do to alleviate the price strain. “It’s outrageous that it’s fallen through the cracks. Columbia needs to have the students’ health as a priority. We need to see that something is being done,” Leonard says.

The federal government is acting to remedy the issue in response to student demands. On Nov. 1, 2007, State Representative Joseph Crowley, D-N.Y., introduced the Prevention Through Affordable Access Act or the HR4054. The new bill will reverse the DRA’s effect on birth control without any cost to taxpayers. It will restore and protect the right to dispense discounted birth control to all entities that were previously eligible.

Realistically, the process will take time—time a lot of college students don’t have in matters regarding sexual health. The bill is still in the early stages, and it could be years before anyone sees an effect from this legislation. Again, it is up to students and campus health services to find a way to make a difference. Campuses nationwide are mobilizing, attempting to get both the problem and its solution into the public conscience. NYU hosted a rally in Washington Square Park two weeks ago in collaboration with Planned Parenthood NYC. Other campuses are asking students to send e-mails and letters to local representatives to get the bill pushed through as quickly as possible.

Cole is on the board of Students For Choice, an organization that discusses women’s reproductive issues, organizes abortion clinic escort services, and plans events to raise awareness about sexual health. She realizes that the price increase alone isn’t enough to incite change for the University. “It [the price] may deter people from birth control, but it’s not going to pressure the University in a mass way,” Cole says.

In collaboration with the Student Activist Board, a

sub-committee of the Columbia Democrats headed by Cassie Spodak, BC ’09, and Leonard, SFC is planning a campus event on Thursday, Dec. 6 to raise awareness of the problem and bolster support. “We’re trying to make people more aware of why this is happening, who caused it to happen, and what they can do to get elected officials to address this issue, or to get the University to address it until the government does something about it,” Cole says.

The event, which includes signature drives and letter-writing to expedite the Prevention Through Affordable Access Act, will be held at Low Plaza today from 11 a.m.-3:30 p.m. There will be a public petition to Columbia University to ask them to take action as well. “There is an issue on the national level, it’s reflected on the college level. We think Columbia really needs to put a premium and a priority on students being able to afford birth control—it’s necessary to our lives,” Leonard says. Cole, Leonard, and Spodak are counting on students to rally behind an issue that affects so many aspects of sexual freedom, regardless of gender.

“Barnard is all women, so reproductive health applies to the entire student body. But at Columbia, it applies to more than half of the community. It affects the male half as well—they may not know it, but it’s a big issue for everyone,” Spodak says.

As the 3 million college women who are presently using birth control have the greatest ability to organize and the greatest amount of resources, the strength of a resolution rests in the student body. Among the many issues that have ignited the spirit of protest and advocacy at Columbia this year, rectifying the carelessness of the Bush Administration regarding women’s sexual health has joined the ranks, or highest priority.

Slade, for one, is glad to hear of the rejuvenated sense of activism on campus. “For an old hippie like me, that is wonderful to hear.”

STYLE HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE BY SHIRLEY CHEN



WHO: MOM

WHAT: ±0 Humidifier, \$259

WHY: This award-winning humidifier from Japanese design firm ±0 isn't just great for her skin—small and sleek, it's so much more chic than traditional, chunky models and a worthy addition to any home's decor. The best part? With a few splashes of scented oil, it triples as an aromatherapy diffuser! Oh, the smell, look, and feel of success.

WHERE: <http://www.dynamism.com>

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WHO: SISTER

WHAT: Clinique Happy Personalized Photo Bottle, \$52 for 3.4 oz

WHY: After years of sibling rivalry, you finally escape to college... only to realize you really miss your sister! If great minds think alike, she probably misses you, too. Just pick a picture of the two of you that makes you happy, and create your own one-of-a-kind bottle. Now, whenever she feels lonely, happiness is only a spritz away.

WHERE: <http://www.clinique.com/>



WHO: BOYFRIEND

WHAT: Holga Camera, \$70

WHY: Inspire his artistic vision with this iconic plastic camera known for creating dreamlike images with saturated colors, crazy focus, and sexy square pictures—all without ever opening photoshop!

WHERE: <http://www.lomography.com>



WHO: ROOMMATE

WHAT: L'il Critters Gummy Vites, \$14.99 for 200 count

WHY: From procrastinating to midnight snacks to convincing each other to go out more, sometimes a roommate isn't the best influence. Keep yours healthy and happy with these tasty vitamins. The only problem is eating too many.

WHERE: Your local Walgreens, CVS, RiteAid, Trader Joe's



WHO: DAD

WHAT: Mulberry Wallet, \$250

WHY: From paying your bills to giving you a few dollars to buy coffee, your dad's wallet has probably seen a lot of wear and tear over the years. Who knows, maybe he'll even take time to admire it every once in a while and throw a couple bucks your way.

WHERE: Mulberry, 605 Madison Ave. at 57th Street



WHO: GIRLFRIEND

WHAT: Kiki De Montparnasse Lingerie, prices vary.

WHY: You know that bad cliché where the guy thinks his girlfriend wants trashy lingerie? Depends on the girl.

WHERE: Visit the boutique at 79 Greene St. The dressing rooms comfortably fit two and are fully equipped with light dimmers and "accessories." Otherwise, try <http://www.kikidm.com>



WHO: BEST FRIEND

WHAT: Erin Fetherston for Target Heart Handbag, \$29.99

WHY: Show your love for your bestie by decorating this tote with all your inside jokes and memories. Play up your own personality quirks by adding lyrics from your favorite song. Mine would say "Je t'aime moi non plus..." courtesy of Serge Gainsbourg.

WHERE: <http://www.target.com>



WHO: BROTHER

WHAT: Beer of the Month, \$28.95/month

WHY: Earn some real street cred by sending him 12 12-oz bottles every month. Perfect for any guy who appreciates the finer aspects of beer. After a year, even if he isn't an aficionado, you'll still get to make fun of his beer belly.

WHERE: <http://www.amazingbeerclub.com/>

FILM THE REVOLVING RELEASE DATE

BY MARTA JAKUBANIS



JASON STATHAM (TOP) AND VINCENT PASTORE (ABOVE) TRY TO MAKE SENSE OF GUY RITCHIE'S *REVOLVER*, OUT TOMORROW.

"THE REAL ENEMY LIES WITHIN THE individual, and this is recognized by both psychiatrists and some of the more spiritual philosophies," Jason Statham says at a round-table interview, attempting to explain his new film, *Revolver*. "It's that voice in your head. ... Whatever your weakness is—gambling, alcohol, drugs, women, or shopping—you want something that you know ain't right but you gotta have it anyway. So is that voice you or is that someone who's going to destroy you? That's the con. It's the ultimate con."

To some, the ultimate con may have been the process involved in actually getting the film to American theaters. Directed by Guy Ritchie, *Revolver* has had a bumpy road across the Atlantic, to say the least. *Revolver* was first screened at the Toronto Film Festival in 2005 and was released in Europe in November of that year. The response wasn't positive.

"The film got annihilated by critics, and people didn't get it at all, so it did very poorly in box office," Ritchie says. Instead of giving up, however, he went to work and removed some confusing and tangential plot-lines, and re-edited the ending. The American cut is now far more accessible, though nothing remotely close to clear.

Superficially, *Revolver* is just another gangster movie about greed, revenge, and exquisite cons, topped with a fair amount of very in-your-face violence. Jake Green (Statham), a gambler and con man, is released from jail after seven years in solitary confinement and sets out to seek revenge on Dorothy Macha (Ray Liotta). When Jake's life is threatened after defeating Macha in a poker game, he is saved by the enigmatic Zach (Vincent Pastore) who, with his equally inscrutable partner Avi (André Benjamin), offer Jake protection. Against his better judgment, Jake accepts, and so begins the descent into the twisted world of conflicting interests of ruthless mob bosses.

Revolver is nothing like Ritchie's two previous gangster flicks, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and *Snatch*. This story is deep, dark, constantly mind-boggling, and loaded with symbolism. "I think it's fun that films have depth," Ritchie says. "I've left a whole snail trail of clues and symbols for those who care to indulge themselves."

"This film is not necessarily as accessible as the other two movies," Statham says. "I think the other two definitely had a broader appeal, because everyone wants a comedy that is lighthearted and doesn't need to be taken too seriously. But this deals with something that is quite interesting, and if you do take it seriously it can change your life."

The message sounds reasonable enough when laid out by the writer/director and the lead actor, but it is harder to appreciate when watching it for the first time. Unlike Ritchie's previous endeavors, the film was shot mostly in a studio to convey a gambling-and-crime-zone setting. It's a world that looks like a nightmarish hybrid of London, Las Vegas, and the darkest places of the mind.

The ensemble of gangsters is similarly eclectic. Jake Green is a typical British crook, with the heavy accent of London's underworld. Macha is a casino-owing American mobster with his own tanning salon. Then, there is Lord John, who epitomizes Yakuza aesthetics, whereas Avi and Zach seem to be gangsters sent by God himself.

"We wanted it to be a film about humans in general, about the human nature. That's why it's set in a no-man's land, and it has this surreal quality to it," Ritchie says, justifying the choices of radical angles, non-descript time and space, heavy filtering, and even the occasional cartoon sequence.

Ritchie is hopeful for the new edit, which opens Friday in the U.S. "I'm already getting better responses, 50-50, 60-40 even," he says. "Two years ago, people left the theaters and said, 'I have no idea what that film was about.' Whereas now they can leave and say, 'Oh, it was about this thing called the ego, whatever that is.'"

Pastrone also believes in the film's positive reception this time. "I think that because of the success of *The Sopranos*, and the success of a lot of movies that come out that are trying to be like that, I think that people are gonna appreciate it a lot more than Europeans did. They like that stuff, they like to be pulled in different directions and having to analyze what they see."

Granted there is a lot to analyze and digest. "You can't take that all in in one sitting, so to be able to understand its point, you need to see it a couple of times," Statham says, confessing, "I actually got the most of it when I watched it for the third time."

According to Vincent Pastrone, though, that might be a good thing.

"I didn't get *Memento* the first time I watched it," he says. "Guy said, 'We're not making a movie for the average person to go see it and walk out and say 'Oh, okay, happy ending, the guy got the girl.' He wanted to make a movie for us to think and discuss. But there definitely is an audience for *Revolver*.'"

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAMUEL GOLDWYN FILMS

MAKING TEEN PREGNANCY FUN

BY HILLARY BUSIS



THE AIRFLOW INTO MICHAEL CERA'S SHORTS MAY EXPLAIN THE UNLIKELY INSEMINATION OF PRECOCIOUS TEEN JUNO, PLAYED BY ELLEN PAGE.

IT DOESN'T TAKE LONG FOR DIRECTOR Jason Reitman's *Juno* to exhibit serious signs of incurable indie-itis. The movie displays several of those "unique" touches that run rampant in small films that try too hard to be unconventional. Within its first 15 minutes, the title character contemplates committing suicide by hanging herself with licorice rope.

Then there's *Juno*'s snappy dialogue, which, for the most part, barely resembles actual speech—especially in the case of Juno (Ellen Page), a precocious teen who has just discovered that she's pregnant. An early exchange between Juno and a convenience store clerk played by *The Office*'s Rainn Wilson, as seen in the film's trailer, is particularly eye-roll inducing. "That is one doodle that can't be undid, home skillet," he tells her. Home skillet? What does that even mean?

But as *Juno* progresses, it grows less mannered and more engrossing. Although the plot investigates potentially dark issues like teenage pregnancy and marital dissatisfaction, *Juno* maintains a lighthearted tone that strikes a balance between humor and sincerity. Much of the credit should

go to Diablo Cody, the stripper-turned-screenwriter who never wanted to write a screenplay until a Hollywood executive read her blog and e-mailed her, saying she should consider film writing.

"I thought, 'Hey, this guy means business. All right, I'll try writing a movie,'" Cody says in a roundtable interview that also includes Page and Reitman. "Because he kept dangling this sort of carrot in front of me, like, 'If you write a movie, you won't have to go back to work.' And I hate working, so I was like, 'All right, I'll give it a try.' So I wrote *Juno*."

Of course, it wasn't always easy to make a movie look and feel genuine when characters are saying things like, "I am for shizzle up the spout."

"The tricky thing with Diablo's dialogue is that it's so clever that it almost draws attention to itself by its own nature," Reitman says, acknowledging some of the challenges of the stylized script. "The trick is doing the exact opposite—it's, how do you make this film, which could so easily feel like we're winking at the camera the whole time, and make it actually feel very authentic and real?"

The film's direction played a large part in creating an engaging tone.

"All I wanted to do was capture the feeling I felt when I first read her screenplay," Reitman says. "Stanley Kubrick said the trick is always remembering that feeling you had when you first read something, and that was it with this screenplay—there were all these wonderful surprises."

Cody also found a surprise in Page's virtuosic performance as Juno, who broke through the potentially deadly dialogue and is already garnering Oscar buzz. "You know, she's so awesome, and she has the most... I can't even imagine what it must be like to inhabit such a relaxed body. I'm so tense," she says. "Certain lines that I had always imagined as being very distinct, she'll kind of run them together sometimes, and it works so well. It actually sounds like human beings talking, not like a nerd sitting at her computer. And I think the dialogue that I wrote had potential to be too snappy. If someone had given it like a sitcom delivery, I think it could have been really gross. And Ellen just nailed it."

Despite *Juno*'s stylized dialogue and a

tendency to overindulge in whimsy—*Juno* has a phone shaped like a hamburger as well as a kid sister named Liberty Bell—Reitman and Cody's aggressively hip film is ultimately successful. On paper, *Juno* seems like a combination of *Knocked Up* and *Superbad*. On screen, though, the film is nothing like those Judd Apatow hits—it's funny and touching, and most definitely has its own voice.

Though that distinctive voice may be difficult to overcome, Page notes that other depictions of teenagers are no more realistic. "I think I fell in love because I felt like it [the script] was devoid of stereotype," she says. "I'm just excited that that'll be out in the world, because I'm so sick and tired of there just being a void of young, genuine females," Page says. "Something that's different from trying to bang the guy before prom, or girls being vindictive bitches to each other. And it becomes so intoxicating and frustrating. Or at the end of the film, the weird girl gets beautiful. I can't even tell you how mad that makes me. It makes me want to stab myself with a fork in the eye."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

MUSIC

TAKE THE 1 TRAIN

BY REID SANDELANDS
PHOTO BY TINA GAO



GAVIN HARRIS, CC '08, CAME TO Columbia looking to pursue his interest in jazz performance. At the time, however, the program was underdeveloped and lacked a strong, supportive guide in the music department. Comprised of just three small four-to five-member performance groups, the semi-semesterly jazz performances on campus were generally poorly attended and did not generate even the slightest degree of publicity.

"We used to perform in the lounge of Philosophy Hall or the basement of Lerner—just a few of us. Basically, no one would ever show up," says Harris, now lead trumpeter and the head of Columbia's big band. While the program has made great strides in recent years, there is still much progress to be made toward the end goal of becoming a dominant force in the university's thriving musical community.

But even this recent jazz resurgence at Columbia does not compare to similarly competitive institutions where jazz performance groups have long been some of the most robust and prestigious programs on their campuses. So what is the problem? An examination of the University's music-department curricula could help answer that question.

A traditional bias has persisted in

the department toward the academic aspect of its programs, namely the study of arrangements, composition, and other training techniques.

In the face of this prominent obstacle for would-be performers at the administrative level, Harris and company realized that if they were to make any sort of difference in the program, they would have to dictate their own changes and act on them. "A couple of the older musicians and I realized that we had to do it ourselves," Harris says. "If we were to truly gain any sort of presence on campus, we would have to take the initiative."

Harris and his older counterparts were largely unable to impart any significant changes or gain much recognition during the '04-'05 school year. The following fall semester, though, the crew was able to re-establish an undergraduate big band, which had disbanded numerous years prior. In reviving the big band, the centerpiece group of any jazz performance program, they made a giant first step toward their goal of attaining a respected and recognizable status in the University's musical community.

In the wake of these early start-up efforts, a response could be seen in the efforts of certain figures in the jazz studies programs and the music department

at large. Most notably, Columbia's own five-time Grammy-winning professor, Don Sickler, has acted as an important guide and a motivating force for the big band. While preserving and supporting the band members' desire to take their own initiatives, Sickler has provided the big band with many valuable opportunities. Just last spring, famed jazz trombonist Curtis Fuller came to campus upon Sickler's invite, to play with the big band at a concert in Miller Theatre. This past November, the group played at Miller Theatre with legendary jazz saxophonist Frank Wes in front of an audience of about 400.

By hosting events of this magnitude, Harris believes that Columbia's big band is beginning to get the experience and recognition it deserves. As the awareness and depth of the program grows, the music collective here at Columbia will benefit enormously, especially in its interface with the larger New York City community.

"New York City is so steeped in the history of jazz and is a home to many famous jazz clubs and musicians," Harris says. "I feel that it is important for our jazz performance programs to be able to cooperate with and take advantage of the rich jazz culture."

The Columbia/Harlem Festival of Global Jazz held in September could have been the perfect forum to integrate jazz performance students at Columbia with that "rich jazz culture" of our immediate surroundings—yet none of the student performers were invited to play at the festival. Here, the University may have missed an opportunity to make the most of our location in one of the country's most vibrant jazz communities by performing in the community and interacting with its residents. Though the academic jazz program insists first and foremost on traditional learning, jazz students believe the actual application of this learning is what makes Columbia training truly worthwhile for the musicians.

Currently, a large number of the big band members are underclassmen, which bodes well for the future of the program. This spring, Columbia will host a number of jazz events, including a still-in-the-works showcase with invites going out to a number of other institutions. They'll also be performing in Lerner Hall on Feb. 7 as part of Glass House Rocks. For a group that used to meet in the basement, the jazz performance program is moving up in the world—or at least in Lerner.

IN BATTLES, ANYTHING GOES

BY JAMIE JOHNS



“RACE: IN,” THE OPENING TRACK on Battles’ debut album, *Mirrored*, begins with a steady drumbeat. Then an escalating guitar line enters. A loop of whistling, another guitar, keyboards, and sleigh bells all join the fray in a steady coalescence. Like many of the other songs on *Mirrored*—an album that drummer John Stanier describes as a “simmering volcano”—“Race: In” toes the line between being restrained and chaotic.

A veritable supergroup, Battles consists of Stanier (also of Helmet, Tomahawk, and Mark of Cain), guitarist/keyboardist Ian Williams (Don Caballero, Storm and Stress), guitarist/bassist Dave Konopka (Lynx) and guitarist/keyboardist/vocalist Tyondai Braxton. With such illustrious resumé’s, it would be easy for the group to rely on their reputations to power them to success—but there’s more nuance to Battles than that.

Battles began in New York four and a half years ago, when Williams’ previous band, Don Caballero, broke up and he moved to the city. Williams and Braxton were fans of each other’s work and started a collaboration that involved a choir of 10 women. Williams soon brought in Konopka, whom he knew from Chicago, and they started to play a few shows together. When Stanier ran into Williams on the street in Brooklyn, he too joined the group.

“Ian mentioned what he was doing and this choir of girls, which obviously sparked my interest,” Stanier says. “A

choir of 10 girls—of course I was interested in playing with them.” However, the ladies were not around for long, and, according to Stanier, “the group kind of went from being an art project and turned into an actual band.”

Although the group was a “real band,” Battles still required a series of EPs and singles released in 2004 and over two years of non-stop touring to come into its own.

“It wasn’t one of those things where the first time we played together it was magic,” Stanier says. “It took a long time for it to get off the ground. When we started, we really didn’t know what it was going to be. There was no rush to be this kind of band—no master plan.”

Despite the players’ undeniable rock backgrounds, their recently released EP, *Tonto+*, features contributions and remixes from rapper Joell Ortiz, techno act The Field, and electronic musician Four Tet. On tracks like “TIJ” and “Tonto” from *Mirrored*, dueling, interlocking guitars are accentuated by animated keyboard notes, all while Stanier beats the living daylights out of his drum kit.

Although there is some serious riffing going on, none of it sounds quite like average rock music—there is always something a little unfamiliar about the group’s sound. “I’d be stupid if I was just like: we’re a rock band, because it’s so vague,” Stanier says. “But do you need some kind of label?”

Rock, electronic, experimental—call Battles anything you want. Just don’t use the m-words: “math rock,” a category that has followed the band since its inception.

“The term ‘math rock’ is lazy and bad journalism. It’s just the worst,” Stanier says. “Math rock is so gross. Ian’s old band [Don Caballero] basically invented math rock so I think he feels guilty about that. That scene kind of sucked, it was just a bunch of super-duper nerds. I want nothing to do with that scene.”

But Stanier himself acknowledges that when you make music that is different or that pushes boundaries, falling into the avant-garde and elitist trap is easy. “We walk that very thin line,” he says. “When we first met I thought it was cool but I had to ask them ‘Can we not fall into that avant-garde, *Wire* magazine wankery?’ I don’t wanna be in a band like that. But thankfully we escape being that.”

Upon entering the band, Stanier admits that neither he nor any of the other members had any idea of what they were going to do.

“One great thing about the way it started was that we got together and said ‘Let’s do something different and not put any rules on there,’ right off the bat,” Stanier says. “So it was a weird, blank-page, anything-goes kind of thing.”

For a band with such an aggressive name, the members of Battles tend to keep things jovial. Take, for example, Stanier’s answer to the question of whether the band has any pre-show rituals. “Before the show? Well no fucking Lord’s Prayer or anything like that, just beer.” Asked about

the dress shirts the group tends to wear onstage, he says, “We’re classy guys. Not wearing a collared shirt onstage... well, that’s just tacky.”

It’s this irreverent, uninhibited, and balls-out attitude that allows Battles to pursue what they consider the most important part of performance: a good time. “The whole point is to have fun. I hope that’s the vibe that comes across,” he says.

Onstage, Battles certainly look like they’re having fun. At a show last month at Webster Hall the band bounced around, sweated through their collared shirts, gyrated, gesticulated to one another, and smiled, all while playing to a crowd that was half awed, half dancing. Over the past year, the band has toured almost non-stop, playing shows in Japan at the legendary Fuji Rock Festival, in South America, and all over Europe and the U.S. After such a whirlwind year, the band plans to take March and April off, then work on new material and begin touring again.

However, the group does try to stop themselves from going too far. “The only rule we have is that what we’re playing can be super crazy, but it still has to be digestible, it’s gotta be fun and sound fun,” Stanier says. “A lot of music from our world is so damn serious, serious music made by serious people. I don’t want to cater to a few people. I’d rather there be many different elements that appeal to people.”

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