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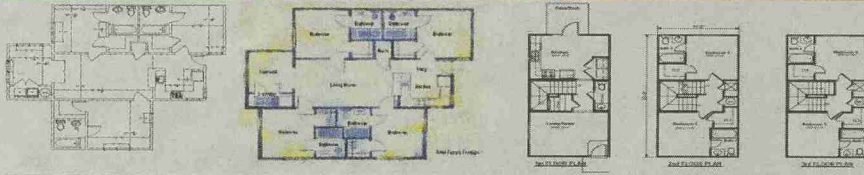
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Taking Metal by storm

Lamb of God lead singer D. Randall Blythe sat down with Technician for an interview about the band's sophisticated sound and other related topics

BY JOSH EURE

Lamb of God, the powerful metal quintet from Richmond, Va., has taken the rock world by storm with its latest release on Epic Records, *Ashes of the Wake*. Vocalist D. Randall (Randy) Blythe, bass player John Campbell, drummer Chris Adler and guitarists Mark Morton and Willie Adler have been leading the contemporary assault on timid metal for the past decade and are continuing to gain steam.

Having toured on MTV's *Headbanger's Ball* Tour and *Ozzfest*, Lamb of God has been propelled into the mainstream it loathes and is actively working to reshape it. Abandoning the traditional approach to songwriting, the band has allowed its tracks to evolve in a more technical and complex way that lends further credibility to the sound. Recently, front man Randy Blythe sat down with Technician for an interview about the band's sophisticated sound and other related topics.



Richmond-based Lamb of God released its album *Ashes of the Wake* with much critical acclaim. Randy Blythe describes the band's sound as progressive, "balls-ass Metal" with mathematical elements.

PHOTO COURTESY LAMB OF GOD

TECHNICIAN: For those who aren't familiar with the history of Lamb of God, the band name was changed from Burn the Priest in '99. Can you tell us what the significance of that choice was?

BLYTHE: There is none. It's just a name. Our old band name sounded too much like a cliché metal name, you know? Lamb of God sounded good.

TECHNICIAN: What genre would you classify yourself in? Balls-ass Metal or a prog/traditional rock mesh?

BLYTHE: Umm... metal I guess. But there are more progressive elements in our sound. Math-ie, you know? But basically, balls-ass Metal would be a good description, although we try not to categorize ourselves.

TECHNICIAN: Of course not. Who would? There is an awesome Metal scene in Richmond. Are you fellows making sure that you're still a part of it?

BLYTHE: Yeah, definitely. Although we never really played much there in the past, even as Burn the Priest. But we make sure to play a couple of shows a year there.

TECHNICIAN: Right on. Well, speaking of Burn the Priest, you released a self-titled full-length album under that alias in '98 on Legion Records. Rumor has it that your new label, Epic, is re-releasing that album. Is there any truth in that?

BLYTHE: Yeah, Burn the Priest was a generic name, but it was a good record. And there's been a lot of demand for it, so Epic is re-mastering all the tracks and releasing it again.

TECHNICIAN: That's awesome. Epic also has you on tour with Slipknot this spring, right?

BLYTHE: Yes indeed.

TECHNICIAN: You've toured with some major metal bands. One of your first tours was with an other Richmond band GWAR. Now, speaking from experience, GWAR fans are notorious for having zero tolerance for opening acts. How did you fare under that pressure?

BLYTHE: We had no problem at all. We were expecting some difficulty, but because we came out, pounded through three to four songs, took a little breather, then blasted through the rest of the set, the [fans] never had a chance to stop us with "GWAR!" chants.

TECHNICIAN: Nice. While we're on the topic of other bands, you knew Dimebag [Darrell] right?

BLYTHE: Yeah.

TECHNICIAN: The metal community worldwide has obviously been mourning his death. I know I wept. How did that affect you guys?

BLYTHE: It sucked. The last time I saw Dimebag, I drank heavily with him. Actually, it was when we were on tour with Shadowsfall. He was the coolest dude ever. We walked up and he started mixing us drinks. He was great. That gunman is [expletive] disturbed. Everyone tried to make it out to be about the Pantera break-up, but that [expletive] had nothing to do with the music. The guy was just [messed up in the head]. I'm glad he's dead, personally.

TECHNICIAN: So what's the deal with Phil [Anselmo]?

BLYTHE: Well, we're really good friends with Superjoint Ritual as well and I think he's just lying low. He's obviously really tore up about it, but he's just lying low right now.

TECHNICIAN: Ok, let's change the subject a tad. Your new release on Epic, *Ashes of the Wake*, was their a shift in your sound, lyrically or instrumentally, from your 2003 release *As the Palaces Burn*?

BLYTHE: Each album is different. There wasn't so much of a shift as a progression. The production on *Ashes of the Wake* has a lot more low-end and it's thicker. But lyrically, it's a sequel to *As the Palaces Burn*. *As the Palaces Burn* was about what was coming on the political horizon — *Ashes of the Wake* is about the repercussions.

TECHNICIAN: It's widely known that Lamb of God is politically charged. What's your opinion on the Iraqi elections? Do you see them as a success for the Bush administration or inconsequential in the broader scope?

BLYTHE: I don't know. Anything that happens in that region right now, Bush is going to make out to be a personal success. They want to keep the war machine rolling, which eventually results in big money for them. If Bush had been in office during the Vietnam War, he would have labeled that a success as well. It sucks, but because the youth vote didn't turn out, we have to deal with four more years of that chimpanzee in the Oval Office.

TECHNICIAN: Alright then, so not a Bush fan. How about another topic change? You mentioned the production on your latest disc being better. Why is that?

BLYTHE: Well, we switched producers. We got a guy named Machine on this album.

TECHNICIAN: Devon Townsend was the producer on *As the Palaces Burn*, right?

BLYTHE: Yeah.

TECHNICIAN: Any bad blood?

BLYTHE: Not at all. We love Devon.

TECHNICIAN: Yeah. Strapping Young Lad rocks my very-intense, Wal-Mart-brand socks off. So let's talk about the trendy Rock-based shift towards the Seattle sound of '91. The Rock mainstream has appeared to embrace a rather antiquated sound with bands like Seether, Velvet Revolver, Breaking Benjamin, Three Days Grace and Audioslave. What do you think?

BLYTHE: Some of my friends do, but I try not to pollute my ears with that [stuff]. I will say though, I [really] hate Modest Mouse!

TECHNICIAN: Really? Modest Mouse? That's an odd choice.

BLYTHE: God, listening to them is like emptying a jar of diarrhea into my ear.

TECHNICIAN: Tell me about it. I did that last night with some folks and...all right, well I need to ask you about some lyrics. Your song "Laid to Rest" seems to be directed at someone, but the target is elusive. Who's it about?

BLYTHE: Mark actually wrote that one. He was fighting with a girlfriend at a hotel one night and he wrote it in his room. It's actually our love song; our "love ballad."

TECHNICIAN: Wow... that's precious. I especially love the part, "I'll turn the screws of vengeance and bury you with honesty/ I'll make all your dreams come to life/ Then slay them as quickly as they came." That's love, no? All right man, is there anything else you want to tell our readers?

BLYTHE: Yeah. Come to the show at Ziggy's in Winston-Salem March 17 and bring us some Carolina BBQ. But no [flipping] coleslaw.

TECHNICIAN: No coleslaw indeed.

A celluloid future

As a medium that is recognized as the most important art form of the 20th century, film continues to play an integral part in society. The film department helps to guide students in the direction of a career that may capitalize on this beloved pastime



Tim Kirkman, alumnus of the N.C. State Film Studies Program, walks with actor Bonnie Hunt on the set of his film *Loggerheads*. PHOTOS COURTESY OF LASALLEHOLLAND DISTRIBUTORS

BY MILES SNOW

Any film studies program is going to involve watching films, but how is this getting an education? Isn't going to the cinema or watching a DVD on your big screen, or small screen, about enjoyment? This is certainly true, but the United States is an incredibly visual culture and studying film can tell a great deal about society.

So what do film students actually study? First, there are the films themselves and the objective is "actively" watching them. This doesn't mean running around or jumping in your seat; it means watching a film closely, breaking down the images that are seen and thinking about what the director was attempting to do. Then you will see the film again, read about it, discuss it and criticize it. Students will analyze and know the film in every possible detail. The peer will then begin to see things in an entirely different way.

The cinema has been recognized as the most important new art form developed in the 20th century — one that has had a profound and pervasive effect on all of modern culture. The growth of programs that specialize in film study as an academic discipline testifies to the importance of examining film, not just as a cultural artifact but also as an influential art form and an industry of global significance.

"People want more arts education and the intrinsic value of the medium of film needs to be stressed," Maria Pramaggiore, director of film studies at N.C. State, said.

The model of scholarship in the NCSU film program is to provide students with a variety of skills that will be beneficial to any social responsibility that they will undertake. Film majors study the motion picture in a unified manner; combining historical, formal and cultural analysis with filmmaking at beginning and, eventually, advanced levels.

Emphasis on the study of the medium, its industry, aesthetics and technology benefit students who want to have lengthy careers in the industry. Film majors should be able to examine a diverse spectrum of films and explore the ways in which wider contexts relate to individual film form and content. Hopefully, students

who graduate with a film degree can benefit from the industry as much as the industry can benefit from them. "Our program trains students to go into an industry that supports our economy," Pramaggiore said.

Although the program is relatively young, it continues to grow, and the student success rate is high, as film professor Tom Wallis attested: "We have had former students who now work in Hollywood. Master of Fine Arts (MFA) programs, American Film Institute (AFI), and we have had ones who work as screen writers and producers." Some of the current alumni include John Baker, who is a MFA candidate at the AFI, as well as screenwriting award winner Robert Greene, who is the post-production supervisor at 4th Row Films in Manhattan, and Russ Mick, who works as a nonlinear editorial/photographer for News 14 Carolina in Raleigh.

The range of success is definitely strong among those who have majored in film, but these film majors are certainly not the only students who have received benefits from the program. Film study is invaluable for students who progress to careers in journalism, teaching or design.

The professors want to expose all their students to a variety of films that they wouldn't normally get to see. "I try like crazy not to repeat myself between classes, though I regularly teach Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* in my Film History from 1940 course simply because that film is an amalgam of cinematic history up to that point and a glimpse — albeit 20 years ahead of its time — at things to come" Devin Orgeron, a professor of film studies, said. "I also attempt each semester to plug in a film that is of near current vintage," Orgeron added. In addition, the film series events that take place at Witherspoon Student Center also play a great part in this exposure.

The Campus Cinema at Witherspoon consistently hosts more than a handful of film festivals and series showings each year as well as recent mainstream and independent works. This month's Hard Knocks and Tough Luck; Warner Brothers in the Golden Era series has already shown such hard-boiled classics as *They Made Me a Criminal* (1939) and *They Drive By Night*

(1940). All these screenings have been free of charge and open to the public. Each screening also has been preceded by either a film faculty member or film curator from the N.C. Museum of Art.

The demands of teaching film are constantly evolving because the influence and quality of films continue to reach new levels throughout society.

"The accessibility of filmmaking for more people has increased due to digital technology, satellites and computer editing software such as Final Cut Pro," Pramaggiore said. More and more people are able to make movies of their own without any kind of formal training, and the Internet displays millions of short movies that people have made for personal interests.

Due to the constant access that people have to some of the current filmmaking technology, the standard quality of films now will have to be raised. If people are able to make better movies with their digital cameras than the movies they pay close to 10 dollars to see at the theater, then the potential for future industry filmmaking should inevitably improve.

The recent decline in film quality is more than evident nowadays and hopefully won't last for much longer, especially since America seems to be approaching a new golden age, technologically. "There was much more visionary control for directors in the '60s and '70s. Due to this kind of control, watching movies was much more of a cerebral process than it is currently. The target audience now is primarily teenagers instead of adults," Wallis said.

"Movies like *Sideways* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* have been receiving accolades far beyond their worth because, in comparison to the other movies out now, they actually seem like great movies instead of good ones," Pramaggiore said.

But the artistic vision that seemed more realized in the films of the '60s and '70s has not entirely been condoned.

"The Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* was a high point for me, though its greatness lies in its ambiguity and its understatement — which would make it pretty far from great for many viewers," Orgeron said. "*The Aviator* is the kind of prestige

film that Hollywood loves and needs to showcase," Orgeron added. These are fine examples of more recent films that arouse the intellect. Orgeron, for the most part, considers *Taste of Cherry* and *The Aviator* great movies.

The urge to create storytelling magic also remains too strong among some Hollywood figures to smash the hopes of making emotionally and even intellectually satisfying films, if not works of art.

In the past, one could recognize a score of artistic triumphs, like *The Godfather* (1972), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) and *The Deer Hunter* (1978), that dipped deep into Hollywood's pockets while surviving its stupefying embrace. Hollywood's sully innocence and soiled ideals go hand in hand with the parameters of American society — and vice versa.

The larger the audience sought, the more the magnetic pull of higher numbers begins to tear away at the quality of art. This pragmatic temptation could definitely change, of course. It could be that the ever progressing DVDs and home videos will someday allow movies to ignore the mass-market altogether and bypass onerous distribution arrangements; maybe such films, like books, will acquire the integrity of a solitary art. Yet nothing in this country that is meant to satisfy even a select group of people seems to stay unprotected from the economics of mass appeal for a long period, if it's successful.

It is great to see that independent film has grown much more popular over recent years and is beginning to hint at greater possibilities. Much more focus is being paid to performance and story without the use of behemoth budgets or gratuitous special effects.

Independent film festivals, such as Sundance, have blossomed and continue to aid in the establishment of great filmmaking talent. Two North Carolina filmmakers, Phil Morrison and former NCSU student, Tim Kirkman, made it to the main dramatic competition this year with their respective films *Janebug* and *Loggerheads*.

"It's great to have our group of students bond in the classroom and on their projects. It becomes a great way to work and to learn," Pramaggiore said.

Shakespeare, comedy and puppets...oh my!

With an array of varied performances, Center Stage begins to kick up the semester with two performances by Shenandoah Shakespeare Express followed by Jazz singer Cassandra Wright

BY MEREDITH RICHBOURG

Center Stage. Arguably the best-kept secret of N.C. State, this performing arts series offers students access to some of the nation's greatest performers — from Jazz singers to theater productions to dance troupes to comedic acts — at reduced prices, held at a convenient, on-campus location.

Mark Tulbert, assistant director for Center Stage, describes the program as “a museum, except of performances.”

As curators, in a sense, we pick different types, different professional arts for the students to sample.”

Although the primary purpose of college involves preparation for the work force, a cultural education — easily gained within the same four years — can

greatly enhance not only the University experience, but enlighten students to the many facets of the arts. Exploring the performing arts is “the fun part of an education,” Tulbert says.

The eclectic mix of shows offered by Center Stage provides a truly diverse look at cultural and artistic endeavors; Center Stage acts as “a window on the arts world,” Tulbert says.

Andrew Cherry, a freshman in industrial design, attended several Center Stage events last semester. “Each [show] was unique in its own right and all were presented in a very professional manner,” Cherry says. “It’s kind of hit-or-miss [due to personal tastes], but it’s good to see such variety and such original performances.”

The assortment offered by Center Stage ensures that every student on campus can find at least one item in

the series to spark his or her interest.

This season offers performances that range from the classical theater of Shakespeare to the sarcastic humor of witty writers David Sedaris and Sarah Vowell.

Reinventing the experience of Shakespearean drama — to depict the lighting, staging and attitude intended by the Bard himself is no small feat.

But the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express acting troupe attempts just that. Instead of performing the works of Shakespeare in the style of modern theater — with spotlights on the players, ornate sets and a disconnection from the audience — the SSE actors prefer a bare stage and uniform lighting throughout the entire venue.

“The management doesn’t hinder the magic of Shakespeare’s plays; it heightens it. Such close proximity to the audience allows an unparalleled con-

nection between player and spectator that very nearly matches the circumstances under which the original actors performed the plays. As their motto proclaims, “We do it with the lights on.”

“Shenandoah Shakespeare has an excellent reputation,” Tulbert says. “Their performances are always wildly popular with students.” As a group of actors who themselves are not too long out of the University setting, the players of SSE bring a fresh look and energetic spirit to these centuries-old works.

“Many times we see students in the spring semester of their senior year attending their first Center Stage production and they leave saying, ‘Oh my God, I find this right when I’m leaving!’” Tulbert says. “In the semester, no time could be better to experience the excellent productions of Center Stage.



Cassandra Wilson

Grammy-winning jazz vocalist Cassandra Wilson will grace Stewart Theatre with her intoxicating voice on March 31. Tulbert declares that she is “one of the great Jazz and Blues singers” of the era. Wilson’s voice recreates the smoky Jazz dives of the early 20th century, yet she infuses her music with modern confidence and a yearning, explorative mood. Accompanied mostly by a low-key guitar and soft percussion, Wilson’s deep, earthy voice resurrects the passion of Jazz great Sarah Vaughn as she tackles covers as diverse as Bob Dylan, Sting and Willie Nelson in addition to her soulful originals. Her dramatic, daring vocals will provide a stunning and intimate show, which Tulbert predicts will sell out early.



Shenandoah Shakespeare Express

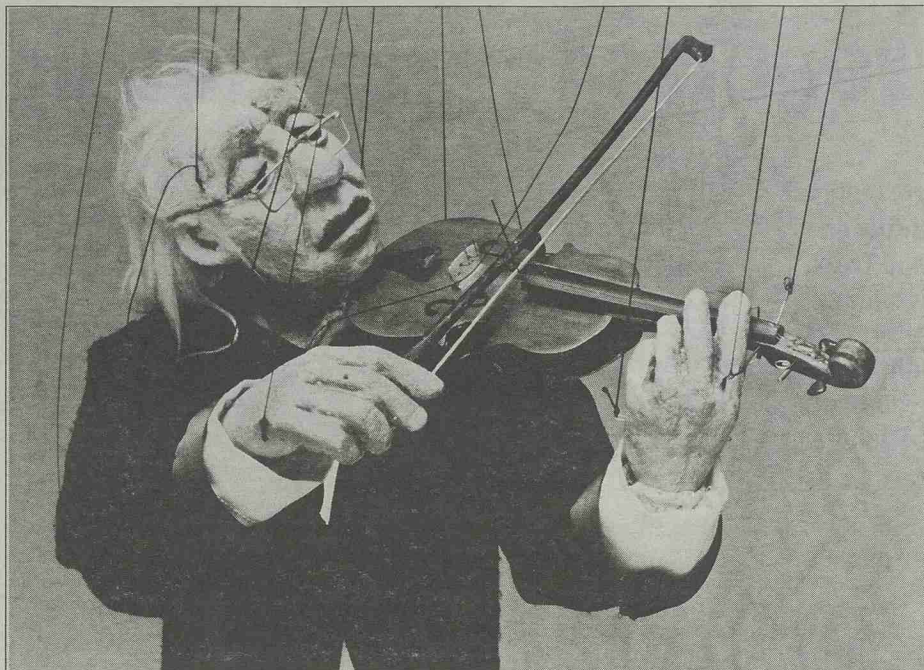
March 1 and 2 will see the troupe perform two of Shakespeare’s classics: *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure*.

In a twist of comedy and corrupted power, *Measure for Measure* follows a young nun-to-be, Isabella, in her decision to either preserve her chastity or save her brother’s life. Suddenly embarking to Poland, the Duke of Vienna leaves control of the city in the hands of Angelo, a deputy official. With his newfound power, Angelo institutes a series of strict laws against licentious behavior; unfortunately, these laws promptly indict Isabella’s brother, Claudio. To rescue her brother from prison — and an impending death sentence — Isabella must choose whether or not to submit to Angelo’s unsavory demands. During this time, the Duke has remained in the city to observe Angelo’s behavior, disguised as a friar. The plight of Isabella moves him to intervene — and several plots, in true Shakespearean style, unfold to save the innocent Isabella and her ill-fated brother.

One of Shakespeare’s most popular comedies, *Twelfth Night*, toys with perceptions of love and gender in a farcical romp of confusion and seduction. Following a shipwreck in which she lost her brother, Viola disguises herself as a man to serve the Duke of Illyria, who for some time has been attempting to woo Lady Olivia. The Duke sends Cesario — the disguised Viola — to Olivia in another attempt to win the Lady’s love, but by that time Viola has herself fallen for the Duke. Olivia, on meeting Cesario/Viola, feels a sudden affection — not for the Duke, but for Cesario. When Sebastian, the supposed-drowned twin brother of Viola, arrives in the court of Illyria, the convoluted love connections can only increase.

Stewart Theatre will house both Shakespearean performances.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CENTER STAGE



Cashore Marionettes

Puppets? To entertain a college campus? Although the idea of the Cashore Marionettes might recall childhood memories of *Pinochio*, Tulbert asserts that "people don't need to think this is a show for kids; this is a show for grown-ups."

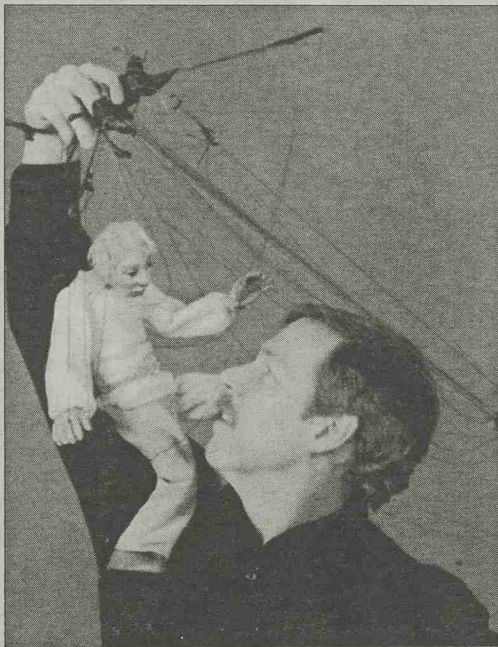
For starters, none of Cashore's creations are simplistic in the least: the Cashore Marionettes boast a violinist doll, which can truly play his instrument, a horse with flickering ears and lifelike prancing hooves, and an amazing elephant with motile ears, trunk and tail. Every puppet takes about 6 months to perfect, since control mechanisms are unique for each creation. Precise detail on the dolls also encompasses a great deal of time, considering the beautiful facial expressions and flowing hair that

distinguish them.

Instead of following the adventures of one character, the show depicts "a series of vignettes, short sketches that focus on one of these characters," says Tulbert. Each vignette explores a unique situation and array of emotions, though nothing is spoken. The entire performance is set to selections of classical music.

Although the stage configuration of Stewart Theatre caters in a great degree to intimate performances, Center Stage will only sell tickets for half of the auditorium on each of the two nights in order to ensure better viewing of the puppets.

Exquisite marionettes, flawless movement and an expressive background of classical music make this series of vignettes a show worth seeing, regardless of age.



David Sedaris and Sarah Vowell

Center Stage usually books acts on their rise to stardom, but on April 7, the series will offer the well-known comic writers David Sedaris and Sarah Vowell.

Catapulted into fame via National Public Radio, Raleigh native David Sedaris has since written several bestselling books of sardonic social critique, including *Me Talk Pretty One Day*, *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim* and *Naked*. His comic finesse and satiric view of everyday events earned him *Time*'s "Humorist of the Year" award in 2001 and two 2005 Grammy nominations for Best Spoken Word album and Best Comedy Album.

Fellow veteran of NPR — her monologues and documentaries are prominent elements of radio show *This American Life* — Sarah Vowell has made a name for herself by writing witty essays on topics as varied as pop culture, presidential assassinations and quirks within her own family. Her novels *Take the Cannoli: Stories from the New World*, *The Partly Cloudy Patriot* and *Assassination Vacation* feature these essays, as well as full-length non-fiction. She has appeared numerous times on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Late Show with Conan O'Brien* and delivers the voice of Violet in the Pixar film *The Incredibles*.

Vowell's wry sense of humor will join that of Sedaris to entertain an NCSU audience with a veritable tennis match of tag-team comedy. Held in the McKimmon Center, this will be a show not to miss — but probably will, since tickets for the performance were sold out months in advance.



Triangle readies for **root** music

Nathan Asher & The Infantry builds its fan base around politically enriched lyrics. The Prayers and Tears of Arthur Digby Sellers is helmed by a painstaking songwriter. The young bands are from two different ends of the musical spectrum but are ready to storm the Triangle



With guitar in hand, Perry Wright (facing the dog), of The Prayers and Tears of Arthur Digby Sellers, will release *The Mother of Love Emulates the Shapes of Cynthia* on March 1. The album is Wright's full-length debut and features his sister, Dale Baker of Silence None the Richer and Lalitree Danielle (the wife of The Mountain Goats' John Danielle).

PHOTO COURTESY/ARTHUR DIGBY SELLERS



Since the band's inception, Nathan Asher & The Infantry has been on a quick rise to success in the Triangle. The band's politically charged debut album has earned quite a bit of controversy and the group recently released a music video for the song "The Last Election" — perhaps the album's most stand out of tracks. The video is spans over 60 years of history in 5-1/2 minutes, captured through archived documentary footage and still shots.

PHOTO COURTESY/NATHAN ASHER

BY GRAYSON CURRIN



Nathan Asher's politically motivated lyrics have quickly concentered Asher a place in the Triangle's music scene. Performing at Martin Street Music Hall on February 12, Asher always seems to know the right way to rile up a crowd.

TAYLOR TEMPLETON/TECHNICIAN

Tonight at sound check, they look so polar. Nathan Asher stands stage right, chopping at a maroon electric guitar and writhing with every word he sings. Almost intuitively, his eyes close, hitting the song's charging crescendos like an emphatic Springsteen at the very apex of fervency. He plays the part of a blue-collar rocker, plugging away in tattered corduroys and a grey T-shirt. Veins emerge on his forehead and neck, and the stage lights reflect from the sweat *already* covering his face and smoothly shaven head. Perry Wright is three feet away, glancing right to register Nathan's entry into each verse and chorus of Asher's liberator's anthem, "They Won't Find Me." In a tweed, brown sports coat and a collared, plaid button-up, he looks like an academic, a nascent philosophy professor new to campus and still adjusting. Asher's emblazoned confidence is conspicuously absent. Even without an audience, Wright isn't able to relax enough to close his eyes. He stares into the lights instead, fumbling for (and eventually finding) a coat pocket for a bottle of water. Without an acoustic guitar, Wright is fidgeting, nervously grabbing clumps of the silt blonde hair that falls just short of his brow.

"Can I use that shaker tonight?" Wright (quite seriously) jokes as he walks offstage. Minutes later, he's still so uneasy about the new room that he can't find his water until he's reminded twice that he (eventually) put it in his pocket.

It's not that Wright is necessarily not confident. He's been on stage many times before at the helm of one of Chapel Hill's best bands, The Prayers and Tears of Arthur Digby Sellers. He's not really scared of this new place. And it's certainly not that he's nonsensical. In fact, one discovers within 60 seconds of conversation that Wright is one of the most insightful and eloquent people in memory.

It's just that — beside the effusive, emotional and impassioned Asher — Wright is a bird of a different feather. His logic is Asher's rhetoric, and Asher's assuredness is Wright's analysis.

While Nathan Asher formed the hard-hitting Infantry a year ago and scrapped for a reputation by immediately headlining bills in the city's largest clubs and crafting homemade billboards on Hillsborough Street, Perry Wright and his collective of friends made plans for a meticulous debut — staking new territory at the intersection of college luminaries like Radiohead and Bright Eyes.

But that difference highlights a handful of essential similarities between two of this area's most inventive and important songwriters. In each approach, there is in unmistakable ambition: not for stardom or fame or even for making music a full-time, sustainable career, but more for the chance to make a lasting, valid piece of art.

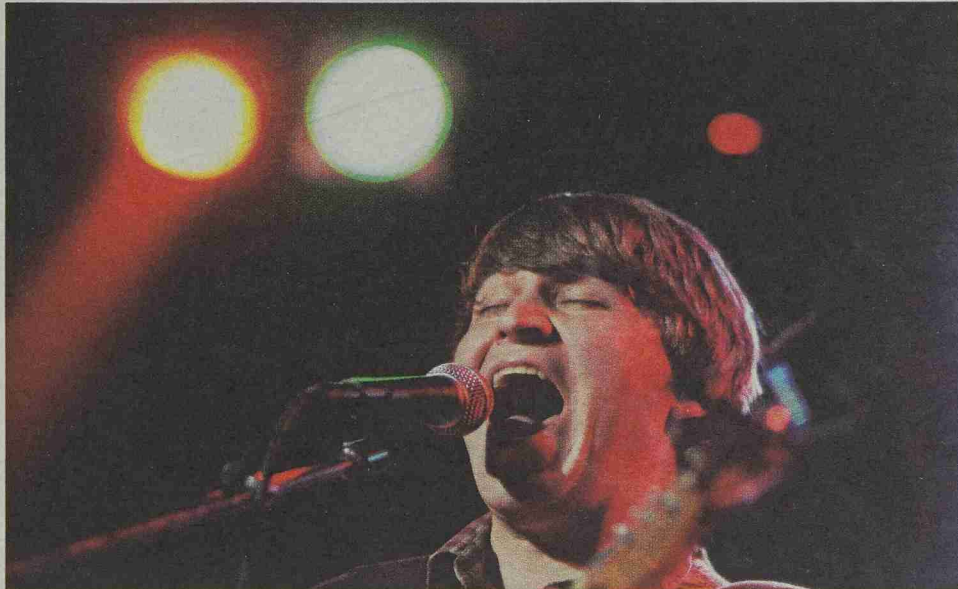
In a period of just-over-six months, both have succeeded. Asher and his five-piece backing Infantry is one of the most consistent draws in the Triangle, sometimes drawing 300 people for a show a mere 15 months after forming in his parent's basement. Sometimes overbearing and always intense, Nathan Asher & The Infantry is a charged, well-oiled machine capable of ingraining impressions. The band's live shows are the stuff of legend, two-and-a-half-hour marathons of Asher's incisive songwriting and drill-calling backed by the march of a mighty band — be it, The or E-Street.

Fans knew the words to "The Last Election" — the band's left-leaning theme song strung up on presidential and pop culture indictments — before the group had recorded it. But recording eventually came with Steven Heller, the Grammy-winning, Asheville-based producer for Bluegrass pillar Doc Watson. The band's debut punches with the same unabashed, unadulterated and unpolished power of its live show.

"The live show for me is a purist form. It's really [expletive] human because you don't have anything to fall back on in front of these people," Asher says, admitting that the concert hall is his band's pedestal. "With the live show, you're there. It's physical. You're tired."

Drummer Daniel Abbate cites Carter Beauford and John Bonham as parallel influences, and the evidence pours from the stick-splitting polyrhythm that cracks from the kind of biceps that people speak of in measurements. The rest of the band — bassist Nick Abbate; keyboardist Lawson Bennett, guitarist Chris Serino and a sometimes nomadic harmonica player named Turner Brandon — is the trick, made-for-vinyl glue filling the cracks between Abbate's snare whips and Asher's raspy dictums.

Those maxims mark him as a rare find: Asher answers Dylan in "They Won't Find Me," painting a picture of a pedestrian suburban poet looking for something a little different. "Turn up the Faders" finds the poet hunkered in the city, using "liquor as a tourniquet" as he plays "dumb in the club." Questions of conformity give rise to a thirst for salvation and redemption, Asher hammering "With the skin of your people between your teeth / And a blood on the street



Perry Wright, lead singer of The Prayers and Tears of Arthur Digby Sellers, leads the band during its opening performance for Nathan Asher & The Infantry on February 12 at Martin Street Music Hall.

TAYLOR TEMPLETON/TECHNICIAN

that needs release," during the opening bars of the martial "The Hag is Waving You."

On stage and in writing, Asher seems to be at the edge of a constant quest for answers and truth. A recently released music video for "The Last Election" portrays Asher and his band mates trying to reconcile their future with a world's troubled past; 60 years of archival footage pit the struggles of blue-collar guys in a white-noise world.

The troubles of politicians and society plague him, but his anecdote is the quest itself — the girls, the busts, the failures and the victories.

"Nathan isn't a protest singer," Wright says, making much the same observation. "For me, he does more than that. It's not that obvious. He's just always going for something more."

The same applies to Wright himself. Since 2001, working with a loose collective of musicians and artists, and releasing work under the Bu Hanan Records imprint has hunkered Wright down in Chapel Hill. For Wright, it's been a hermeneutic experience, one friend's ideas dramatically influencing his own.

Fourteen people contributed to *The Mother of Love Emulates the Shapes of Cynthia*, Wright's full-length debut. That list includes his sister Erin (a songwriter herself), Dale Baker of Sixpence None the Richer fame and Lalitree Darnielle (the wife of The Mountain Goats' John Darnielle). Alex Lazara — one-third of the label's other flagship act, The Go Machine — co-wrote and produced the effort.

"Every good decision on this record reflects Alex Lazara, who really is a genius," Wright says, dismissing his own contribution to his own band.

To an extent, Wright is on key. Lazara's input is inestimable. The slow trickles of found sound creeping behind many of the album's best cuts and the record's perfectly calculated crescendos reveal Lazara as a

producer with an ambition matched by both vision and talent. But Wright's own works are hard to dismiss; the painstaking songwriting — methodically constructed to steer clear of verse-chorus-verse ease and a to-b narration.

"A lot of times, I read critics and journalists talking about an artist coming of age in their work, finally reaching that point," Asher says about Wright, who sits across the table swirling a piece of Woody's deep-fried cheesecake in caramel and chocolate.

"Perry had a burned copy of the album in his car one day right after they mastered it, and — as soon as I heard it — I knew that had happened for him in a big way."

Wright's only previous release, 2002's *Psalterie* EP, was nearly song-driven to a fault, relying only on the rising tide and devastating crash of each song to carry the listener. At once transforming and overbearing, it revealed a songwriter capable of alarming self-reflection and social reckoning.

But this is a perfectly crafted, concept-guided album from start to finish. Wright hems the tides here, bidding his time in slow, Low-like dirges ("The Slow Decay of Some Radio Afterglows") before unleashing the same floodgates he named for *Psalterie*'s most compelling moments. "You will be lifted up into the glorious heights / into a gracious night," he howls above a raging organ and a distorted three-chord guitar snarl during the cathartic "Raise Up, You Celestial Choirs."

Here, things push to a dynamic limit, circumscribed through circuits, glitches, starts, stops and — ultimately — grand statement. Wright's songwriting is on a plane all its own, teasing ontological lessons from fossils of the weak flying *Archaeopteryx*, cheap-motel love affairs and marriages doped on doubt and dishonesty.

He unravels as a heartbreaking, self-destructive mess in spots, only to be both redeemed and redeeming.

That journey is a landmark for Wright, and — for the rest of us — it's one of the best local albums to emerge in years.

Asher has been expecting this kind of statement from Wright for years. They first met in 2002, each rehearsing to strangers at open-mic nights in Raleigh and Chapel Hill.

"You would hear 20 people at one open-mic night, and something had to draw you in to really pay attention to anybody else," Asher remembers. "For a lot of reasons, I would really focus in on him when he played."

The same holds true for Wright. "I understood from the beginning that Nathan was grounded in his own sense of music and that he had a tradition, that being the American Folk tradition," Wright answers. "That's completely different from my own tradition, and it always intrigued me."

The two became quick friends, and — over the years — have debated philosophy, music and religion at late-night taverns and on beatnik trips north. Wright is the son of a Presbyterian minister. Asher struggles daily with a commitment to Judaism. Wright introduced Asher to Bright Eyes, and Asher took Wright to his first (and only) dance club.

Tonight, in the traditionally Rock-friendly Raleigh, Wright takes the stage before Asher, presenting his Indie-leaning fare to a lukewarm crowd. On March 4, Asher & The Infantry will repay the favor at Local 506, opening for Wright at a massive, cover-free CD Release party behind *The Mother of Love Emulates the Shapes of Cynthia*. Asher's reception in Chapel Hill — known nationally for a degree of Indie-Rock-induced jadedness — is always questionable.

But the common quest behind each songwriter's shared goal transcends any town boundaries or bends — polarity, hair length and clenched eyes be damned.



A recently established organization at N.C. State allows those that are interested in Hip-Hop and the culture to meet each other and collaborate on projects or just talk about the music. Influential MC and N.C. State student Alex Thompson started the Hip-Hop Organization — or H2O — to unite those people with similar tastes. Anthony "Mic Savvy" Parham is a graduate from Old Dominion but is a member of the group. He, along with DJ Merlin, and several break dancers, freestylers and beatboxers performed Feb. 23 at The Brewery.

The United States of Hip-Hop

As Hip-Hop has continued to evolve into an industry revolving around bling and the exploitation of women, some artists have stayed true to the genre's modest roots as a voice for a subculture.

BY JOEL DEBERRY

Over the past three years, Hip-Hop has reinvented itself. Everyone besides inner-city youth who had no interest in an Elvis, a Renoir or even the Contemporary Soul artists of their parents' audiophile — like any abstract art form — all but stigmatized its acceptance.

Inner-city kids — particularly African American kids — knew no great cause in the late '70s and early '80s, aside from survival and perhaps a foggy dream of an education that would yield a better life. Numerous "hush" programs and a gradual removal of its leaders marginalized the Civil Rights Movement of the prior decades. Remember MLK? Remember Bobby Kennedy?

All that said, a musical — your parents would probably disagree — subculture emerged from these impoverished boroughs. A subculture that would indirectly fuse Europe-attributed vocal representation

(poetry) and the percussion-heavy styling of African tribalism. These two dashing ideologies, married to cries of social inequality and a subsequent need for up-tempo artistic freedom, gave birth to Hip-Hop.

But after two decades of purposeful art via the new, abrasive, yet endearing mode of Hip-Hop music, the content has inherently changed and become simply a platform for monotony, greed and pseudo-beef.

Often deemed an elder statesman for Hip-Hop, Tupac Shakur could justifiably gripe about the imbalance of power in America, and then glorify his mother in spite of her drug habits. Public Enemy brazenly exposed nearly every facet of hierarchical power abuse — be it the government, the prison system or law enforcement in general — all in terms of the racism that continued to pervade through our culture.

That is no longer Hip-Hop. Now people consider that "hating." Now that is "imposing your agenda," or, simply, "bitching." Forgive the cliché, but finding a mainstream artist with a well thought out statement

that the artist reflected upon with social significance — or any significance, for that matter — is a difficult task. Now it is heresy to make a Rap record that doesn't subjugate women in Victorian (see "cave-man") terms, or boast your ability to rent a car that you probably aren't licensed to drive. And this is formulaic, it seems.

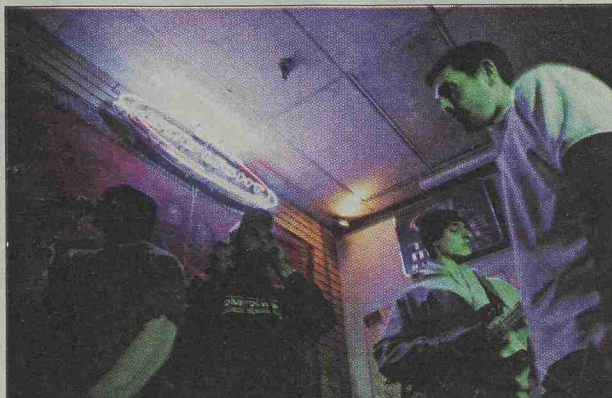
Busta Rhymes once claimed, "I make sure everything remains raw." But in almost a decade's time, he has begun to contribute to an overcooked entree of static flows and even more content that is static.

That's not to say that there aren't such artists, because there are. However, the artists that earn the most capital are the ones who perpetuate every unfavorable social stereotype. And there's no need to name drop, because fans of the genre can very well distinguish the different camps. Though, one name needs to be dropped, and that name is in the form of an N.C. State campus club — the newborn Hip-Hop Organization, or, in its simplest, most liquid form, "H2O."

Last Friday, H2O held its first public event, dubbed the "Spring Semester Jump Off," in the small courtyard near NCSU's tri-towers just outside the Free Expression Tunnel.

On a blustery afternoon, founders and members of the club set up a makeshift stage for live performances, which would carry on until 7 p.m., as temperatures dipped below 40 degrees. With vocal performances from Raleigh's Inflowential, Lazarus, and even the local blazing virtuoso Median, the show's fluidity transcended the powers of Old Man Winter.

The free show wasn't limited to verbal showcases, however. Graffiti artists took over the Free Expression Tunnel; DJ Ill Digitz (freshman James Meyer) operated the vinyl — scratching and mixing — with ultimate fluency; a local tandem gave an inspiring spoken-word ode to Hip-Hop; and volunteer break



Inflowential, a Hip-Hop quartet composed of N.C. State students, rocks the crowded confines of Rukus Pizza Feb. 12.

CHRIS REYNOLDS/TECHNICIAN

dancers worked a taped-down sheet of linoleum with glowing dexterity.

What?! No booty contests? No car show? Who had the most headrests, and thus, the most television monitors? Which artist got the most respectable applause?

Are these not the elements that comprise Hip-Hop? Where in the hell was the beef? Someone *has* to be feuding with someone else, right?

Wrong. Taylor Burgess — Tab One — of Inflowen-

tial refers to modern Hip-Hop as "watered down" and often "fake." Most Hip-Hop purists would agree. If any great truth can be arrived about the current state of Hip-Hop, it would be its new affinity for material wealth and negligence for humankind as a whole.

While Hip-Hop was born in a righteous, raw, philanthropic bed aimed at social equality and mutual fun, it seems to have digressed into a personal soapbox for winners of new wealth and self-gratification. Artists whose aim is to right a wrong and remain

below the proverbial radar. Artists who don't boast bullet wounds or rims the size of Ford Fiestas seem to go unnoticed on the grand scale.

Perhaps this scenario is a reflection of our capitalist society, and its victory over interpersonal contributions to a collective mental and spiritual well-being. But that's another story.

It's no surprise that Hip-Hop has gotten a bad rap, Inflowential MC and H2O founder, Alex Thompson — aka Charlie Smarts — states. Sure, everyone wants to see his or her peers succeed, but when the art you subscribe to is altered in a way that places emphasis on material gain, that art is cheapened.

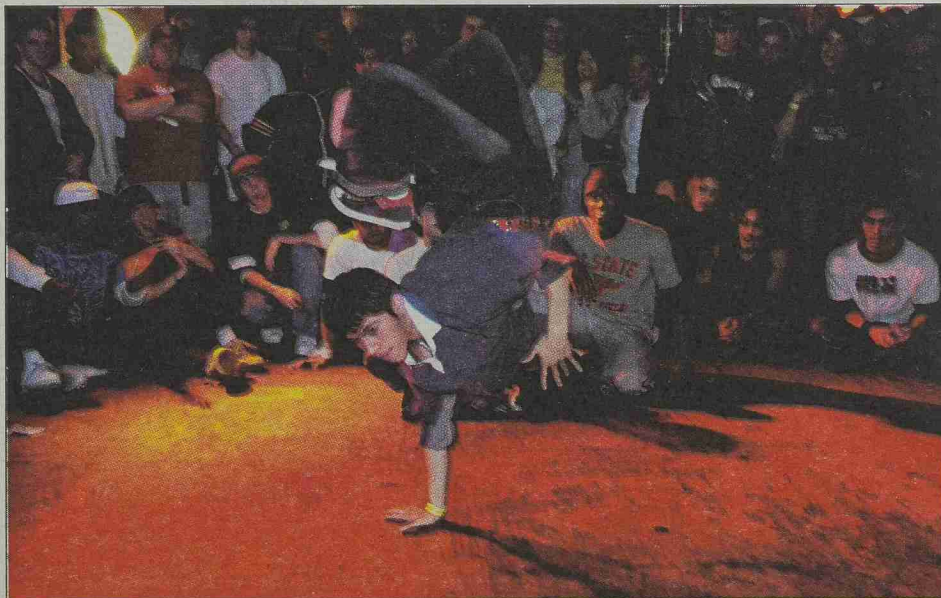
"It ain't all got to be about blunts and 40s," Thompson says.

More than a decade ago, successful albums carried titles such as, *Mecca* and *The Soul Brother*, and *It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. Today, the common theme of the "art" is entitled *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*.

So where does Hip-Hop go from here? Most would say that it's at the top of its game. And most would be right, if the 'top' was in the context of money earned and spent.

If that's the case, Hunter S. Thompson is at the top of his game today, because his book sales have skyrocketed since his suicide earlier this week. Perhaps the larger material theme is that an entity is at its peak in its death. Elliot Smith suddenly became a cult success in his death. Johnny Cash's albums flew from the shelves. Ray Charles just won eight Grammys.

I don't buy into this, though. Hip-Hop needs to return to its rhetorical birthplace — a place of fun, social awareness and art. Hopefully, H2O's attempts to rediscover the Hip-Hop culture will spread to neighboring campuses and, eventually, back into mainstream music.



TAYLOR TEMPLETON/TECHNICIAN

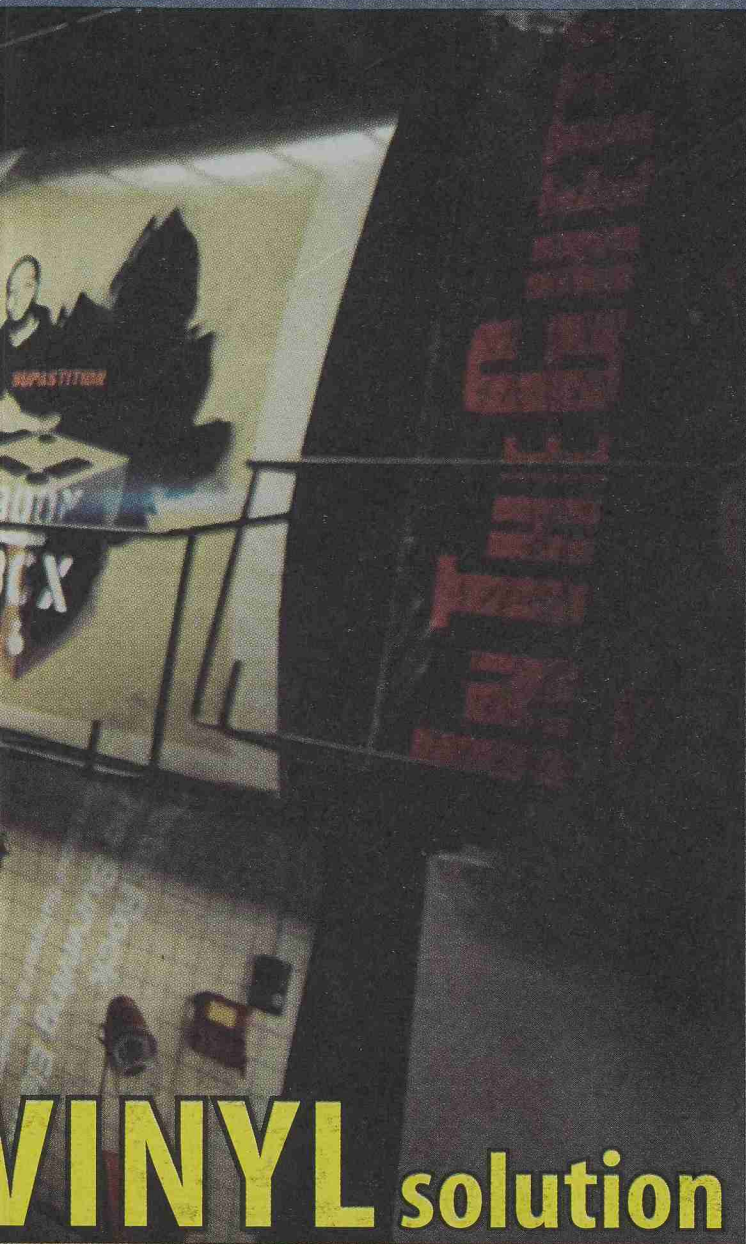
As part of Mic Savvy and DJ Merlin's — better known as S&M — Hip-Hop showcase on Feb. 23, numerous people showed to showoff their break dancing skills. The break dancing was part of a 2-2 B-Boy competition for a \$200 cash prize. Break dancing is one of the many parts of Hip-Hop culture that the N.C. State organization, H2O, includes.

COVERED



Jason "Mezz" Kenaghy (left), Brian "Fuji" Fujimoto (right) and Robert Mooney (not pictured) are co-owners of Four Four Records on Hillsborough Street.

TAYLOR TEMPLETON/TECHNICIAN



Since its move to Hillsborough Street from downtown, Four Four Records has expanded its customer base to include many students — while keeping its normal customers, such as DJ Shadow

BY CHRIS BEYERL/DJS

Behind everything we see and take for granted on Hillsborough Street — the place you get a haircut and buy textbooks — something has been growing.

I've always been partial to records. That may be what drew me to becoming a DJ. There's something about a record — its size, its artwork — that seems to convey the majesty of music. A record can be held with two hands and three records can be squeezed under an arm. A CD has to be in one hand and three can fit in a back pocket. That sort doesn't seem to do justice to something as profound as music.

I had lived here over a year but we'd heard about Four Four Records. But at that time it was in a small bedroom-sized store in downtown Raleigh. Finding the place, though, was like finding a new friend. As a bedroom DJ — making mix tapes and spinning for friends — it gets lonely when you don't really get to get out and talk to people who are into the same things. And DJs have their own language, so when you find someone who can talk that language, there's that instant connection.

Four Four Records began as a drunken conversation downtown at 5 Star between three DJs: Weilin Mooney and Fu. In 2001 they opened their store selling mostly Hip-Hop with a little bit of everything else.

When the Triangle Transit Authority told them their store was soon to become a train station, they moved to Hillsborough Street, in an old T-shirt printing office.

"It has its pros and cons," Jason "Machin" Cieraghy says of the move, "we have more space here but the old store had a window and here we don't get to see the light of day."

"But here we have a bathroom," Bryan "Pat" Pajimov says with a smile referring to the bathroom they call the Teravondome — a name that refers to a giant poster of Public Enemy's *Jive as a Black Planet* that hangs on the wall.

"At the old store I had three bins on the payroll," Fu says. "Troy's, Johnny and Joe Wee — taking out the trash, sweeping up the store, getting me food — I miss those guys."

They're frequented mostly by local DJs, with more and more students since they moved close to campus.

As they don't do much advertising, most of their business comes from word-of-mouth, with the occasional stapling up of flyers or shows. A sandwich board sits outside the door sometimes and a little two-foot-by-one-foot sticker sits above the building's name plate.

Featured records adorn the walls signed by big name Hip-Hop artists from all over the country.

VINYL solution



Fuj describes Four Four Records as, "Old-school Atari flavor with a little Xbox spice."

TAYLOR TEMPLETON/TECHNICIAN

A giant DJ Shadow poster, signed by the man himself, sits by the register. Non-stop Hip-Hop plays through the speakers.

"It's old-school Atari flavor with a little Xbox spice," is how Fuj defines Four Four. Talking about the mixture of old and new stacked from floor to ceiling on the walls and in the bins — the used records in crates lining the floor.

Helping Fuj up the stairs with boxes of records, following the pipes overhead as I go up the stairs — round the corner — Four Four feels like the definition of underground.

"Mooney's house, Merlin's house, my storage unit — we're overrun with records," Fuj says with a laugh.

Opening the boxes of records fresh off the UPS truck, Indian-style on the floor, Fuj rips into the boxes like a kid at Christmas time.

"It's the best job I've ever had. I listen to music, spin records, meet interesting people all day and to have that be your job — it's like a childhood dream," Fuj explains.

Owning a record store won't make you rich. The

trio gets wealth from the business in other ways. "It feels good, especially when people appreciate it — say, 'Thanks for being here,'" Merlin says. Both Merlin and Mooney have other jobs.

"We do ok, but obviously since we had to get day jobs, it's not making us enough to live off of," Merlin admits. "We like being here, we like providing records for people, every now and then we all get a dinner out of it... it's pretty much out of the love that we do it. DJing is how I pay my rent — how I put food on the table."

As the only major source for Hip-Hop in the area, they've got their fingers on the pulse of triangle Hip-Hop. "I hear of new groups all the time, Raleigh's got a decent underground scene," Merlin says. "There are more and more Hip-Hop nights going down. Justus League and Little Brother are blowin' up." He is optimistic for area DJs as well, such as WKNC's DJ Forge, Away Team and others.

Merlin hands me some mixtapes of local DJ Ill Digitz, which haven't left the CD player of my car in three days. You may have seen him at the Wave of

Relief fundraiser for tsunamis victims or H2O's Spring Semester Jump Off last Friday. Ill Digitz — James Meyer — a freshman in business management has been DJing for three years, "I've been going to Four Four since I started DJing," Meyer says. "It's where I go to get all my records — we're all good friends."

"It's my favorite store in the world," Meyer says matter-of-factly.

DJ Spunky, a WKNC regular, echoes Meyer's sentiment, though her record buying is limited to her college-student budget. "Local record stores are always awesome," she says, "but the Four Four guys are great."

In the distant future, Fuj says he'd like to one day see the store three times the size of what it is now. But for now what he'd really like to do is a mixtape with State's own Julius Hodge. "We want to do a mixtape — and we want Julius Hodge to host it," he says emphatically, "So from me to Hodge; please come host our mixtape."

Just thinking about it, Fuj gets more and more excited, saying, "We'll do any kind of mixtape he wants,

we just want him to host it." On the subject of basketball, he declares, "Free mixtapes to the basketball team if they beat the hell out of Carolina."

Merlin has been working on his own productions and hopes to release some soon through their own label one day.

They want to do some B-Boy competitions maybe in the summer time, and put on some shows. In the mean time, they're increasing their selection.

Anyone can stuff a store full of records, but when they really care, something unique is created. Four Four is like a public service — a little Red Cross of music retail — surrounded by the bling and over-marketing of a lot of today's Hip-Hop. Three guys keeping it real for the rest of the sinners — not in it for the money — who will say, "What's up?" when you come in the door.

When I realize that over an hour has gone by talking to these guys and I've flipped through all the bins, it's back down the stairs and to the clamor of Hillsborough Street. Four Four is a real record store owned by real people.



Bassist Wally Neil, lead singer Graham Fontaine, drummer Jeremy Bryan, and guitarist Willy Wilcox make up The Know — a '70s-style Rock band complete with shaggy mop-tops.
CHRIS REYNOLDS/TECHNICIAN

The Know preps for a revolution

Armed with '70s-style Rock and shaggy mop-tops, Raleigh-based The Know took the helm of antiquated Rock in The Triangle in less than four months.

BY JOSH EURE

The Triangle continues to harbor talent on all musical fronts, leaving no genre passed over. From Hip-Hop to Metal, Pop-Punk to Alternative, local venues have nurtured the sounds we crave and have given us almost constant access to them

— often encouraging regrettable fads. Musical trends, whims and rages have always found support in our backyard where a diverse fan-base dictates a patchwork landscape of local music.

One such trend that continues to thrive is the movement to revive antiquated music and titles. The Strokes, The Vines, The Hives and now Raleigh's very own The Know.

Though the fashion of rekindling '70s-style musical themes was an intriguing concept, it displayed little in the way of creativity. Fortunately, for Triangle scene enthusiasts, this banal classification excludes The Know.

While on the surface, the members appear to be card-carrying members of the shaggy-mopped guild of rockers in body-hugging denim, they are, in fact, a group of notable musicians with a very different approach to their auditory conceptions.

Guitarist Willy Wilcox, bassist Wally Neil and drummer Jeremy Bryan found vocalist and



The Know performs at Martin Street Music Hall with other Triangle bands on Feb. 12.
TAYLOR TEMPLETON/TECHNICIAN

guitarist Graham Fontaine through an online ad only four months ago. However, that has not stopped the group's immediate leap into the local Rock gamut.

"We've only been together four months, but we're serious about our music," Fontaine says.

The band recently finished an 8-track EP with engineer and producer Matt Horton of

Raleigh's PostPro — three of which can be found on The Know's website (theknowrocks.com). Two videos from a recent show are also available. Renowned venues such as the Lincoln Theatre have already hosted the quintet and it will be rocking downtown at Martin Street Music Hall on St. Patrick's Day.

With traditional Rock 'N' Roll as the engine, The Know's catchy, eccentric Pop-Grunge resonance is redefining the movement The Strokes pioneered, and further ensconcing the name in the Triangle scene. Inspired by such innovative acts as Led Zeppelin and The Beatles, The Know has rapidly molded a collection of songs that are not only haunting in their innocence, but seem to be aurally questing for a ripening experience.

"We're called The Know; as in the carnal sense of the word," Fontaine says.

"We just want to enjoy writing, recording and performing what will hopefully help provide a soundtrack to a revolution," Fontaine says about the band's agenda — lyrically and otherwise.

While the band is hardly poised to achieve such a task presently, with its unique blend of '70s-style Rock and poignant melodies, The Know is undoubtedly on track for a modicum of success at least. A revolution? Who knows?

Back to the basics

Comprised of entirely N.C. State students, Brooks Wood Band is earning a strong following in the Triangle and is preparing for a professionally recorded LP.



Performing at Ruckus Pizza and Bar in Mission Valley on Feb. 12, Brooks Wood Band always proves to be quite an audience draw.
CHRIS REYNOLDS/TECHNICIAN

BY KELLY REID

With a highly competitive, capitalistic society, it's not surprising that the music of today has become a means of gaining wealth and exploiting one's narcissistic facade of creative individualism. This transformation of music from an art form into a lifeless industry has lowered the quality of music and skewed the vision of what it actually is to be a musician. Yet in Raleigh, there are four guys who stick to the basics. Fueled with a love for music, the Brooks Wood Band is creating that toe-tapping, make you want to dance, feel good music and spreading it around the Triangle.

Formerly a solo act, the Brooks Wood Band has been a working group of four since the closing months of 2004. Composed of Paul Sheeran on electric guitar, Miah Wander on bass, Danny Shampine on drums and Brooks Wood with lead vocals and acoustic back up, these N.C. State students are quickly building a large fan base and playing their exuberant tunes every chance they get. They've played shows at the Flying Saucer, Lincoln Theater, Ruckus, Berkeley Cafe and The Brewery, along with a benefit in Chapel Hill for the Children of Fallen Soldiers Fund.

Brooks Wood has been playing solo since he was 15 years old. Growing up in Eastern North Carolina, on the farm he would listen to old Country music with his dad. His stronger musical influences come from the early music of the Allman Brothers, the acoustic-soul sound of Gavin DeGraw and Jackson Browne — Browne being most influential on Wood's lyrics.

Wood continued to write and perform his songs but

he knew something was missing. "I'd known it be a lot more fun," Wood said. "And at the same time, there's a lot of songs I had in my head or I had written little ditties that would only sound good with a band."

Near the end of the spring semester of 2004, mutual friend and bassist, Miah Wander introduced Wood to drummer Danny Shampine. Wood contacted Shampine online about starting up a band.

At first skeptical, Shampine questioned who this random guy was, but upon hearing Wood's recording his views changed.

"He had a link in his profile for [Wood's song] 'Made for Two' and in the first 10 seconds I was like, 'Holy s***, I'll be in his band!'" Shampine said of his first encounter with Wood. During the summer, the two played with other musicians, but nothing ever clicked. When Wander returned from his study abroad in New Zealand, he joined in on the group, and they all knew the chemistry was right.

Wood and Sheeran both had a music theory class together, and by the end of December 2004 Sheeran completed the group with his electric guitar sound that puts a comfortable edge to the sound of Brooks Wood Band.

Sheeran has been involved with music since he was 6 years old. After playing piano and saxophone, he ventured into exploring music with the guitar.

"I was about 15 and picked up my dad's acoustic and never really stopped playing after that," Sheeran said. "I begged my parents for about 300 bucks and bought someone's old electric guitar and crappy little amplifier."

It was from here that he transformed his love for

Rock music and Stevie Ray Vaughn's infamous guitar composition into what he plays today. Sheeran keeps a calm, collective presence on stage but transforms the lyrics into instinctive melodies. How they combine their thoughts is what makes the group stand out.

"It's not like there is [a] formula for writing a song," Wander points out. Although there may not be a set of instructions, these four guys have produced some impressive tunes.

"I think it's different every time. Just this last time, Danny called us and had an idea to do a song in a certain timing and so we sat down and just kind of crunched until we came up with a chord sequence that worked," Sheeran said of the band's approach to writing music.

When it comes to creating their songs, it is a collaborative effort across the board.

"[Miah and Brooks] kind of come up with the chord structures for songs and the ideas behind the songs," Sheeran said. "Me and Danny end up being the ones who embellish them."

Wander matches rhythms on his bass with the kick-drum beat Shampine provides from the drums. "It's really cool when you get a team together, everybody's on the same page and working for the same purpose," Wander said.

Beyond assembling songs, Brooks Wood Band has a chemistry that carries over to the stage.

"What really amazes me is the reaction we're getting from everything," Wander humbly said. The group has earned the recognition and transposed their love for music into a life that fills the audience. "We have the coolest fans," Wander said. "There is always so many



Playing solo since he was 15 years old, Brooks Wood made the leap to joining a band in late 2004. Now called Brooks Wood Band, the members are planning on entering the studio in March to record a professional album.

CHRIS REYNOLDS/TECHNICIAN

people out there smiling and having a good time. That's why I love playing shows."

This universal connection between writing songs, their performances and the crowd response is providing growth and new experiences.

The group gets most gigs by sending out their four-song demo to venues and other bands. With success fresh in the air, the band is set to record professionally an album with Saul Johnson of Underground Sound in Greensboro.

"I'm very astounded by how much progress we've made," Wood said.

Brooks Wood Band is a group of musicians with an accessible sound. "That's always the word we've used: accessible. Accessible but at the same time not boring."



BY JAKE SEATON

With a P-Wing at their disposal, Nintendo flew members of the collegiate press from all over Mario World over the treacherous mountains of Tiny-Huge Island, the seas of Jolly Roger Bay, the deserts of Shifting Sand Land and the slopes of Cool, Cool Mountain to Wet-Dry World and inevitably Princess Peach's castle to collect six gold coins.

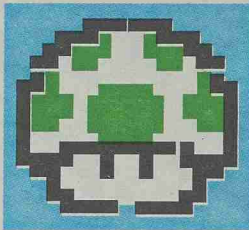
The members, who remained oblivious to what new challenges would come next, battled Goombas, quicksand and the ruthless Bob-Ombs to bring back to their respective castles, the knowledge of what Nintendo has coming for the New Year. Hazy Maze Cave trapped some in an endless loop while others roamed aimlessly around The Dark World.

The timeless prize for such an effort was a chance to run through a maze of nameless white pills and fruit, trying to avoid ghosts and gobbling the horse-size pills to become the hunter rather than the hunted.

As dramatic as that may sound — and believe me, it was — Mario World was ol' U.S. of A while Tiny-Huge Island was merely the Smokey Mountains. Jolly Roger Bay was just The Great Lakes and Shifting Sand Land was the Midwest; Cool, Cool Mountain was the mountains of St. Helen. The final destination, Wet-Dry World, is home of Nintendo's headquarters in Washington state and Princess Peach's castle was the Westin Hotel in Seattle — where Nintendo gave 30 college journalists the chance to play

innovation's little tricks

Nintendo has a few secrets up its sleeves and the company doesn't want to tell Sony.



games that are set to be released in 2005.

The part about the battles was totally true though, honestly. The Goombas were Russian prostitutes who tried to guide those lost in the Seattle night (The Dark World) to the nearest dive bar. The quick sand was a group of women who sucked the scribes into their stories of lost love, endless travels and misplaced youth — not to mention problems with the Russian mafia. Bob-Omb's were similar to quick sand, except they were strangers who looked for the nearest should to cry on.

Some journalists read the free map wrong and thought five blocks meant five miles and were lost on the Seattle Monorail (Hazy Maze Cave), and the endless maze of white pills was a utopia of almost 20 GameCubes set up with the latest Nintendo software, and an equal number of DS's and Game Boy Advance SP's with new titles as well.

For collegiate journalists who make their precious pennies by enriching their lives with the enjoyment of free Nintendo games, this was the Chocolate Factory of their dreams. Willie Wonka guided the 30 Charlies from one game to the next, teasing their sweet tooth for self-entertainment with an entire day of game play and gaming knowledge.



'It wasn't just about green or red blood'

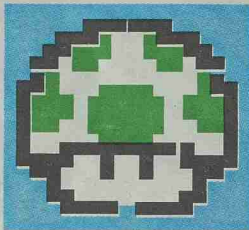
The theme for *Nintendo* is a return to innovation. Those that grew up playing NES can testify to the company's attempts at innovation: the Power Glove, Zapper, Satellite, Robot Operating Buddy, Advantage and Power Pad were all Nintendo's stabs at trying something a little bit different.

After NES, much of that innovation cooled down, and that goes across the board for consoles. There were bigger problems to face that steered Nintendo away from the philosophy of innovation — that was video game violence, a medium the movie industry had faced many years before.

"As a younger industry, the video gaming industry, especially back during [those days], was under a lot more fire and a lot more political pressure than the movie industry. Movies have been around a lot longer time, it's a more accepted medium. With older generations, because they saw [the change in gaming violence], some of the older generations of people in Congress have never played a video game," Tom Harlin, manager of public relations for Nintendo of America, said.

"When they hear about violence in a video game they say, 'We've better do something about it immediately.' So, that is how the video game industry has changed, but at one point in time — when *Mortal Kombat* came out — that was a hot political topic that wasn't just about age, it wasn't just about green or red blood. It was about where the industry was going and whether the industry would sustain that kind of reputation that turned off millions of parents across the United States," he continued.

It was Nintendo, however, that was at the forefront of creating an association that can self-regulate



every single product that the ratings board (ESRB, Electronic Software Ratings Board) rates. In July 2003, the U.S. Computer and Video Game Industry Trade Group retired the IDSA (Interactive Digital Software Association) name and reformed it as the Entertainment Software Association (ESA).

"We don't know who the raters are; we don't ever get to meet them. They are doctors, they are educators, they are parents, they are a ratings board that we don't have any sway with — they will look at your game and they will send it back and say the ratings is going to be 'X.' And we, from whatever marketing point-of-view, think that doesn't work, we say, 'OK, we want this to be a Teen rated game. What do we have to do? And they will say, 'If you want it to be that, then you've got to do this,'" Perrin Kaplan, vice president of marketing and corporate affairs for Nintendo of America, said.

Outside of its wars with ratings boards, Congress and parental lawsuits, Nintendo was fighting a battle it was not accustomed to... a console war.

Since the company's inception, it had faced little to no competition in regards to 8-bit video game systems — Mario quickly wiped away any chances of a viable competitor in the 8-bit market. However, come 1991, as Nintendo readied itself to make the leap to 16-bit consoles, there was already a leader in the industry that had been thriving since 1989.

Sega released its 16-bit Genesis system in August 1989, but as Nintendo prepared to release Super Nintendo (SNES), the company began packaging its Genesis systems with some quick competition for Mario through Sonic the Hedgehog. Ultimately, it was not the battle between the red-capped Italian and the blue-backed rodent that claimed the fate of one of the two companies' 16-bit system; it all came down to performance.

"[Sega was] really our first viable competitor and it was the first time that Nintendo realized, number one, we've made a mark on something that was a permanent form of entertainment and it was going to be around for a long time and we sort of didn't think anyone could job us permanently, but they gave a good run for our money but they ultimately went out of business doing it," Kaplan said.

But through this new enemy, Nintendo found an ally. Sega and Nintendo worked closely together to battle the pending lawsuits regarding video game violence.

"Our senior vice president at the time had to go in front of Congress to testify about [video game violence]. And another individual, who had been heading marketing and had been removed from Nintendo and picked up by Sega, was called to be on that same panel," Kaplan said. "It was an easier and more glorious day for [Nintendo] because the whole slew of congressional members who were grilling them, it was really focused on Sega."

"Having to fight things on that battlefield, Nintendo was able to be part of convincing Congress that we don't need government regulation — that was the start of, what is now known as the ESA, formally IDSA. Nintendo and Sega actually were two of the companies that were the very start of it — creating an association where we self-regulate every single product that is rated," she continued.



"Whoever is your enemy can become your friend and we now work very closely with Sega. We have many people who have been in-and-out of companies and are fond of both associates. It's interesting that we were the first one and many people said, 'Oh no, that can't happen,' and [Nintendo did get competition] — many people can make good video games," Kaplan added.

As Nintendo and Sega played Pick-Up Sticks with Congress, a new enemy brewed in the background. Sony was planning the launch of its 32-bit PlayStation console.

Only a year after the launch of PlayStation, Nintendo released its 64-bit console aptly named Nintendo 64. As these two systems fought in the console wars — as Sega had once done with Nintendo — Sega's attempts at a 32-bit system — Saturn — and finally Dreamcast, marked the end of the hedgehog-led company's push in the great console wars of the 90s.

One of the reason's Dreamcast failed to capitalize was due to great customer anticipation for Sony's PlayStation 2 (PS2), Microsoft's Xbox and the Nintendo GameCube. But this was a territory in which even Nintendo had trouble competing.

According to sales figures provided by Kaplan, Nintendo sold 2.3 million units of the GameCube in the U.S. in 2004, while PS2 and Xbox sold 4.6 million and 4 million respectively.

Though it seems Microsoft and Sony are now the forerunners in the console arena, Nintendo still adorns the crown of King of Handhelds. The company has sold 7.6 million units of the Game Boy Advance in the U.S. this past fiscal year and it sold 27 million Game Boy Advance units since the system's launch in 2001.



'To do things portable is natural, these days'

"A lot of people don't realize that [the Game Boy is the top selling video game system], and one of our struggles with working with media is that they are continuing to write about console system and we say, 'Hey wait a minute, if you look at every dollar we spent, a third of it — at least — is going to handheld.' The reason why we have a great challenge in getting coverage for that field is because we don't have a competitor. Now suddenly, with Sony coming in, everybody is writing about handhelds," Kaplan said about the press coverage of handheld systems and games.

As Nintendo is still the leader in regards to portable video gaming systems — and has been since Game Boy launched in 1989 — Sony is taking a big risk in entering a world in which it has no prior experience. Come March, Sony will release the PSP handheld system and is shaking a few leaves at Nintendo in the progress.

"Although Sony is coming out with the PSP, we've had nine contenders try to topple our handheld area and we've beaten nine contenders. Sony is the definitely the most viable of the [contenders] because of their brand image, but we have watched them, too, struggle to figure out how to put together a product that is a reasonable price point, a product that works,



that is compelling. It's surely a beautiful product, but beyond playing the games, we're not sure what else that's going to do for the consumer and we will have to wait and see," Kaplan said.

Before Sony, Nintendo competition consisted of one real threat and that was their console rival Sega. Sega released Game Gear in the U.S. in 1990 with everything the Game Boy did not have: a color, backlit screen, and 4-channel surround sound. The problem, however, was the systems size, weight and battery life, which were all incomparable to Game Boy.

"Sega gave it a really good shot [with Game Gear], but the thing was bigger than my purse. I think the batteries were D, or took six AA batteries that lasted five hours. It weighed more than my baby. If you took it on a car ride, the color screen would fizzle out in no time. It was a great idea, but the technology wasn't really there yet so it fizzled out... But, [Sega] gave it a good run," Kaplan said.

Since Game Gear's demise in 1997, Nintendo once again largely remained free of a handheld. However, with the growth in popularity of iPods, PDAs and cell phones, the call for more portable items is increasing.

According to Kaplan, "A lot of the world is going portable and to do things portable is natural, these days." This may pose a problem for Nintendo due to Sony's interest in the market, but with the release of the DS, there is still hope for the little company that could.

Nintendo created the DS as part of its move towards innovation. The portable includes two screens — one of which is touch sensitive — a microphone, wireless Internet capabilities, a faster processor, 3-D graphic rendering, wireless game sharing, stereo sound, a rechargeable battery and dual slots for backward compatibility. With these advanced features and the system set at a higher price point, the DS is geared for the matured gamer.

"[Nintendo holds] the philosophy of remaining a mass-market product for consumers. That means the price point has to be within a mass-market range. The fact that the PSP is going to be \$250 puts it out of reach for a lot of people. At \$149, having PictoChat embedded into [DS] and being with a *Metroid* demo included in the package, that is a pretty sweet deal for that price and that keeps it in the mass-market realm," Kaplan said in regards to the PSP's price point in comparison to DS's.

"That's something, as a company, we work very hard to do: Nintendo is very skilled at getting the price of components down," she continued.

Since the Nintendo did develop the system with older gamers in mind, the company has no fears of pushing out its own Game Boy Advance from the market. It continues to be a top selling handheld and Nintendo has no plans to stop making games for it. With that in mind, it helps consumers with the prospect of purchasing a DS since the system can run a GBA game.

"The Game Boys Advance SP and the DS are really two different price points, and two different systems. They can survive simultaneously in the marketplace, which obviously they are — Game Boy Advance SP continues to sell very well. You don't want one to cannibalize the other; we realize they can sell simultaneously," Kaplan said of the prospect of a GBA v. DS war.



A recently established organization at N.C. State allows those that are interested in Hip-Hop and the culture to meet each other and collaborate on projects or just talk about the music. Influential MC and N.C. State student Alex Thompson started the Hip-Hop Organization—or H2O—to unite those people with similar tastes. Anthony “Mic Savvy” Parham is a graduate from Old Dominion but is a member of the group. He, along with DJ Merlin, and several break dancers, freestylers and beatboxers performed Feb. 23 at The Brewery.

The United States of Hip-Hop

As Hip-Hop has continued to evolve into an industry revolving around bling and the exploitation of women, some artists have stayed true to the genre's modest roots as a voice for a subculture.

BY JOEL DEBERRY

Over the past three years, Hip-Hop has reinvented itself. Everyone besides inner-city youth who had no interest in an Elvis, a Renoir or even the Contemporary Soul artists of their parents' audiophile — like any abstract art form — all but stigmatized its acceptance.

Inner-city kids — particularly African American kids — knew no great cause in the late '70s and early '80s, aside from survival and perhaps a foggy dream of an education that would yield a better life. Numerous “hush” programs and a gradual removal of its leaders marginalized the Civil Rights Movement of the prior decades. Remember MLK? Remember Bobby Kennedy?

All that said, a musical — your parents would probably disagree — subculture emerged from these impoverished boroughs. A subculture that would indirectly fuse Europe-attributed vocal representation

(poetry) and the percussion-heavy styling of African tribalism. These two clashing ideologies, married to cries of social inequality and a subsequent need for up-tempo artistic freedom, gave birth to Hip-Hop.

But after two decades of purposeful art via the new, abrasive, yet endearing mode of Hip-Hop music, the content has inherently changed and become simply a platform for monotony, greed and pseudo-beef.

Often deemed an elder statesman for Hip-Hop, Tupac Shakur could justifiably gripe about the imbalance of power in America, and then glorify his mother in spite of her drug habits. Public Enemy brazenly exposed nearly every facet of hierarchical power abuse — be it the government, the prison system or law enforcement in general — all in terms of the racism that continued to pervade through our culture.

That is no longer Hip-Hop. Now people consider that “hating.” Now that is “imposing your agenda,” or, simply, “bitching.” Forgive the cliché, but finding a mainstream artist with a well thought out statement

The entertainment industry is going after the software makers of Grokster and KaZaA. But is that the best way to curb piracy?

BEN MCNEELY

It's Saturday night in the dorms. Three college buddies get together and decide to go to a movie. They go to the theater, pick out a movie and walk up to the ticket window.

"\$8, please," the ticket worker says.

"But we're college kids," they reply and pull out their student IDs.

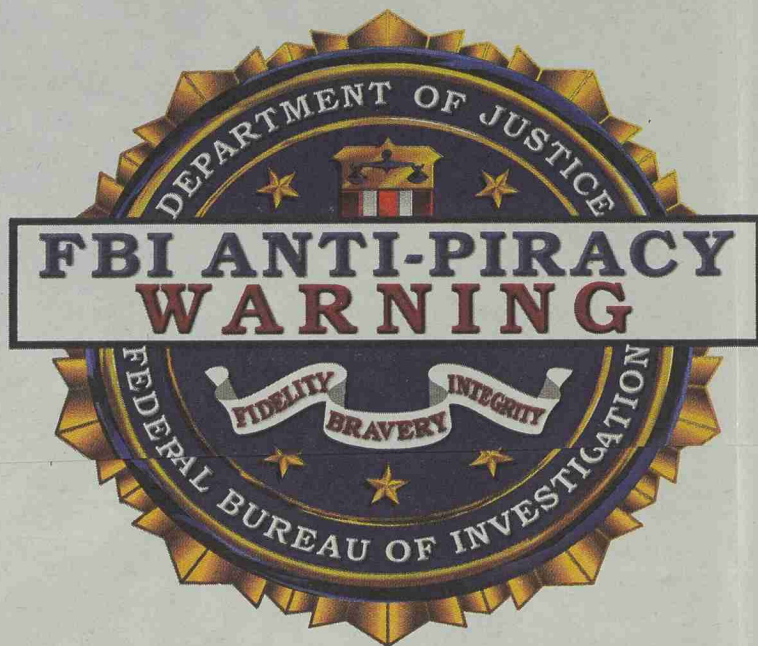
"In that case, \$6.50," the ticket worker replies.

They pull out their pockets to find a handful of change, and walk away with their heads sagging, sulking all the way back to the dorm.

Another Saturday night spent sequestered inside.

But one of the buddies has a bright idea: they can download the movie online.

Brilliant!



Getting around the pirates

They fire up BitTorrent, type in the name of the film they want and watch the progress bar grow and grow like Pinocchio's nose at a short-fiction writing contest. Soon, after the microwave popcorn has been popped, they are enjoying the film they should have paid \$8 to see.

They got it for free.

Two days later, an e-mail appears in the inbox from the campus-wide network administrator. "It has come

track IP addresses that download certain tagged movie and music files got his IP address and sent ResNet notification.

"ResNet e-mailed me, asking which one of us [his roommate or him] downloaded the file. I replied back, saying that I did it, that I deleted the file and all my file-sharing software and that I was sorry," Carey says. "They considered the matter closed."

The press reported the stories; students threatened

ments in *MGM v. Grokster*, otherwise known as the Grokster case. Twenty-eight of the world's largest entertainment companies are suing the parent companies of Morpheus, KaZaA and Grokster, claiming their products allow users to infringe copyrights by illegally sharing music, movies and software over the Internet.

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals says that peer-to-peer software is capable of uses that do not break the law and ruled the software companies can continue

"Organizations need to protect intellectual property as much as possible because it is the source of competitive edge needed to be in a market." — Arman Assa

to our attention that someone at this IP address has illegally downloaded copyrighted material," the e-mail reads.

Oh, s****.

John Carey, a sophomore in history, got caught.

"I downloaded an illegal copy of *The Grudge* using KaZaA," Carey says. "I used KaZaA to download MP3s, but never downloaded new stuff."

Carey says a company hired by the movie industry to

bring lawsuits levied against them by the entertainment industry for illegally downloading music and movies. Thanks to the Digital Millennium Copyright Protection Act, lawsuits can be made against offenders in record time.

Now, the entertainment industry is claiming that the makers of peer-to-peer networking software programs should be responsible for how users use their products.

On March 20, the Supreme Court will hear argu-

to develop the software because it is being used for legal purposes. With Chief Justice William Rehnquist's center chair empty and with no idea when the seat will fill again, the entertainment industry and the software makers will square off in front of the Supreme Eight.

But how far will legal methods be effective for the entertainment industry?

Arman Assa, a master's student in business management and president of PackMUG, the Macintosh Users

'I think the music and movie industry has a right to protect intellectual property as much as possible, but the fact that people have to resort to downloading products means these companies are not catering to their customer base.' — Arman Assa

up, says it could hurt the industry. Organizations need to protect intellectual property such as possible because it is the source of competitive edge needed to be in a market," Assa says. "They go after users and enablers, but when you do too much of that, you'll have a backlash. You don't want to offer 18-19-year-olds that are your main customer base. From a special relations standpoint, it creates a negative perception with the customer base."

As an alternative to the lawsuits, the entertainment industry is trying to innovate new ways to enable the technology and allow users to download copyrighted material legally.



w business models'

The silhouetted figures dance around on the television screen to U2's newest single, "Vertigo." The advertisement is for a special edition iPod — black face with d'flywheel — that has the band member's signatures printed on the back.

It is clear that Apple Computer has taken the online music business by storm. iTunes Music Store sold 250 million songs in January and has a 75 percent digital music market share, according to Digital Tech Consult. The iPod, Apple's iconic hard-drive based music player, has a 90 percent market share over rivals like Rio Creative Technology.

After the success Apple has had, it became clear to entertainment industry to think about new strategies in combating illegal downloading. If they [the entertainment industry] are going after people, in the long term, they are going to have to win the race that," Assa says. "They have to ask themselves, 'Can we get around this problem by being innovative?'"

One possible solution to curb illegal downloading on college campuses is collaborating with universities to offer legal online downloading programs. The UNC system is currently administering a pilot program with Rhapsody, Cdgix, Rhapsody and Ruckus — all online music services.

The idea is simple: students choose to open a free account with one of these services and can download the music they want and keep it on their computer for the duration of the free trial — in this case, until the end of the academic year. But the user doesn't actually own the music files. The services use what is called "tethered streaming," where the actual file is leveraged to a users computer.

If the user wants the actual file, they will have to pay for it, which, for most online music stores, is around \$10 a song.

J. Attarian, supervisor for Communication Technology Student Services, says the music industry is trying to work with universities to develop new business models and to develop ways to upset illegal downloading.

The universities want to know two things: one, to what the response will be from the students and, two, to see what the legal downloading traffic will do through their gateways," Attarian says.

The UNC system sent out mass e-mails to students at UNC-Chapel Hill and N.C. State, inviting them to join the pilot program. So far, the response has been

lukewarm.

"Out of the 7,000 students that are on campus, about 1,500 have signed up for the pilot program and are using the services," Attarian says. "That's not that many. At UNC, they have 700 more people signed up than we do."

Despite the low numbers, Attarian hopes students will provide meaningful feedback.

"We are making available to students an alternative. The University hopes students would use legal means, but most people are still going to go for free downloads. This is something they have to address," Attarian says.



Legal Recourse

At the same time, the entertainment industry is also pursuing every legal means possible to protect its copyright — including going to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The court is down one member since Chief Justice Rehnquist is battling thyroid cancer. There has been

"There are lawful uses for P2P programs. That is why N.C. State has not banned it from its networks, but if it is found out that someone is using it for unlawful use, we will stop it." — David Drooz

speculation as to if or when he will return to the bench this session, or if he will step down at the end of the term.

Until then, the opposing parties will have to convince the majority of the sitting eight justices.

The case, MGM v. Grokster, centers around an area of copyright law called contributory infringement.

"Someone is guilty of contributory infringement when they facilitate the copyright infringement of a third party, such as creating the tool that allows that tool to be used for illegal purposes," David Drooz, associate university general counsel, says. "It's sort of like aiding and abetting in criminal law."

Drooz says that file-sharing services that use centralized servers to store and swap files are "clearly in viola-

tion of the law."

"Peer-to-peer programs don't have a central directory to pull from, so the question is whether or not the software being used for illegal downloading is in violation of copyright law," Drooz says.

The Supreme Court ruled on contributory infringement back in 1984 when it handed down the Betamax decision.

The court ruled in Sony v. Universal Studios that Sony, maker of the Betamax video machine, could not control how its customers used the products. Once the company sold a Betamax machine, it no longer had any legal liability.

Drooz says the software companies — the makers of KaZaA, Grokster and Morpheus — are relying on the court upholding this precedent.

"Their position is much like the Betamax case. The Supreme Court held if a device has a substantial non-infringement use, selling it doesn't make you guilty of contributory infringement, just because customers may use it for illegal purposes," Drooz says.

But Assa argues that P2P programs aren't like the Sony Betamax machine, and the makers should not enjoy such protection.

"P2P networking tools are a different medium from VCRs. [The makers of] Morpheus and KaZaA don't sell products, per se," Assa says. "They can control what their users can or cannot access. They should be held accountable for any illegal activity done on their network."

Since users must sign into a P2P program with a username and password, the software companies can control what users can see and download.

"They can control who is on the network and can check what is going on that network... they connect people to different computers on the network. When

you perform a search, they build a list of what people have on their computers and keep a cache of lists to speed up the searches," Assa says. "When they have that degree of control, they should exercise it over their users to control illegal activity."

"Just because they say it was OK with Sony Betamax, it doesn't mean it is right with KaZaA," Assa says.

Traditionally, the court does not overturn itself except in warranted cases. Technology has changed in the last 20 years. But that is not stopping the entertainment industry from exhausting every legal resource.

Drooz tells of "political threats" coming from the entertainment industry, where it would lobby for Congress to pass a law that made Internet service providers liable for their users' activities. If — and that is a big if — that happens, the University would have to monitor every piece of information that goes across its network. That is impossible, according to Drooz. Also, the users would have no guarantee of privacy on the network. But Drooz says that is a remote possibility.

"That's a far-fetched extreme, I don't see us really

getting there," Drooz says



No easy answers

John Carey says he believes the entertainment industry is doing the right thing by going after users that illegally download.

"Hell yeah, it's stealing and I think they [the entertainment industry] are doing the right thing. I think if they can scare enough people, they can cut downloading down drastically," Carey says.

"I feel it is against law, but if there is not an easy way of getting caught, then people are still going to do it. If there is a more efficient system of getting caught, then people would not do it as much."

Assa attributes rising prices for movies and music as a cause for illegal downloading.

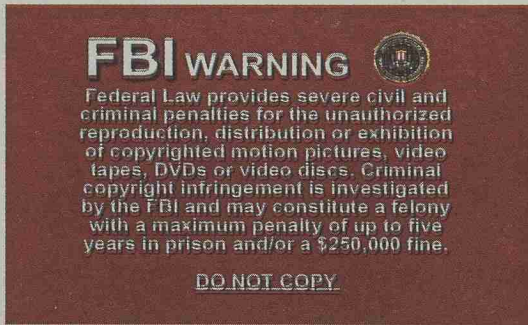
"I think the music and movie industry has a right to protect intellectual property as much as possible, but the fact that people have to resort to downloading products means these companies are not catering to their customer base," Assa says. "When you go and pay \$12 for a CD, that is a rip-off."

"Record companies are partly to blame for not paying attention to their customer base and young people — supposedly their biggest customer base," Assa says.

As for legal recourse, the entertainment industry should leave universities out of the fray.

"There are lawful uses for P2P programs. That is why N.C. State has not banned it from its networks, but if it is found out that someone is using it for unlawful use, we will stop it," Drooz says.

"Our position is that it is an issue between the entertainment industry and people doing copying. The University should not be put in middle because we do not support or condone any act."



The FBI gave Hollywood film studios, music companies and software makers permission to use its name and logo on DVDs, CDs and other digital media in February 2004. This was done in hopes of deterring consumers from illegally reproducing copyrighted material.

IMAGES COURTESY OF FBI

Surprise, surprise

BY TIM COFFIELD

A friend of mine — a laid-back guy — once found a roofing nail in his \$5 hot beef hoagie from Lil Dino's. Actually, he found the nail in his mouth — the nail having originated from the sandwich. It was buried within the tender folds of Dino beef material, unrevealed to my friend calmly masticating his lunch until it made a nearly irreparable impact on some of his gum tissue.

Hold that image.

Now, rewind a decade, or more, back to the early-mid '90s and that golden five or seven year stretch between the end of Warrant and the beginning of Nickelback that was the best in music history: All good guitar Rock gives voice, loud voice, to the oily desperation of its fanbase, which is kids. Unlike Hip-Hop, which is centered both sonically and topically on I, rock focuses on you. It often takes the second person tense, and even when it

doesn't, it still kind of does.

In this sense, Rock was at its healthiest from about 1991 to 1996.

I'm biased, of course, but that's the point. You might argue I call these years the best simply because they coincided with a certain time in my own life, but you'd be wrong. I was just lucky.

The first cassettes I ever owned were Beck's *Mellowgold* and Hootie & the Blowfish, *Cracked Rear View*.

In middle school, I harnessed the powers of Hootie to seduce women over the telephone. I'd look up the phone number for whatever hot tamale I chose to conquer,

call, and hold the receiver up to my boombox blasting "Only Wanna Be with You," after which I'd murmur sweet nothings until the dial tone cut me off.

I also remember lying on the carpet in my room, clutching my old kiddie blanket while sucking on an unlit Newport, listening to "Loser" about 4000 times in a row. That song really resonated with me. The chorus, half of which was in Spanish, lent Beck's theme a globally transcendent quality.

Hey, it said, having trouble quitting your security blanky habit for cigarettes? You ain't the only one!

Mellowgold was also my first experience with a hidden track, an unlisted mishmash of weird noise he'd tucked at the end of the cassette's B-side. And this brings us back to the nail in my friend's mouth, and to the piercing knowledge that the artist gave you something you didn't buy.

The discovery of this secret music sent my imagination reeling. This Beck guy, I decided, was a singer dedicated to his fans. The truest of rockers. I pictured him, longhaired, scraggly and smelling like menthol, slipping into the studio late at night, perhaps through the chimney or the ventilation pipes, long after the dictatorial business-types had gone home to their stucco mansions, and recording the track in secret, for me, his target audience. I thought it was the coolest thing.

Inspired, I purchased more cassettes. And when I ran out of money, I would shoplift them. Because it wasn't about the money! That was the whole message!

And everyone, it seemed, was sending it. The hidden song, a trick that goes back at least as far as the Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's *Lonely Hearts Club Band*, reached its zenith there in the early '90s. Sponge, Tool, Blind Melon and Nine Inch Nails all included full-length unlisted tracks. As did Soundgarden, Oasis and even Hootie. Cracker's *Kerosene Hat* had three.

Radiohead did an alternate take of "Creep," as did the Meat Puppets with their "Lake of Fire." Pearl Jam capitalized on play-through tech with an intro for *Ten's* opener, "Once," tacked to the album's end. Green Day lamented like heartbroken seventh graders, singing "All by myself! I was thinking of you." Nirvana's "Endless Nameless" even made the radio.

Then there were the bands, many of which may have had cards in the official Juarez Cartel Rolodex, which used the extra minutes to get extra funky.

The Crash Test Dummies and Silverchair stuck unlisted classical piano numbers onto their albums. The Spin Doctors remade "I (That's the Way) I Like It" with freakin' Biz Markie. Stone Temple Pilot's *Purple* showcased a baritone hobo named Dick, Alice in Chains' *Sap* featured a duet of feedback and human flatulence, and the Stone Roses piled several minutes of really crappy Folk/Jazz pure into *Second Coming*.

And my favorite: the Supersuckers, clearly with the economics of jukeboxes in mind, included a repeat of the entire album as the unlisted track on 1994's *La Mano Cornuda*.

In retrospect, the appeal I found in hidden songs — none of which were particularly good music — seems easily explained away with some smart-sounding phraseology. We could, after all, link those nameless mysteries to something our therapists would really sink their teeth into, something like the elusive nature of personal identity at puberty.

But isn't made-to-sell psychobabble like that every bit as detached and impersonal as the music biz that the hidden song was designed to resist in the first place? I think so.

Those songs were gifts, simple as that. Quirky little thank yous from the rockers to the kids, tucked away like Easter eggs. The appreciation went both ways.

At least that's how it seemed to me. And really, wasn't that the point?

Contact tcoffie@ncsu.edu



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