

Frigid Tunes Times

Thursday, May 8th 2008

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Bob Dylan wins pulitzer prize



Bob Dylan (far left) plays with what was called The Never Ending Tour Band on what was called the Never Ending Tour. Photo by Jim Bob

By Hillel Italie-AP

Thanks to Bob Dylan, rock 'n' roll has finally broken through the Pulitzer wall. Dylan, the most acclaimed and influential songwriter of the past half century, who more than anyone brought rock from the streets to the lecture hall, received an honorary Pulitzer Prize on Monday, cited for his "profound impact on popular music and American culture, marked by lyrical compositions of extraordinary poetic power."

It was the first time Pulitzer judges, who have long favored classical music, and, more recently, jazz, awarded an art form once dismissed as

barbaric, even subversive.

"I am in disbelief," Dylan fan and fellow Pulitzer winner Junot Diaz said of Dylan's award.

Diaz's "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao," a tragic but humorous story of desire,

"Rock 'n' roll has finally broken through the Pulitzer wall"

politics and violence among Dominicans at home and in the United States, won the fiction prize. Diaz, 39, worked for more than a decade on his first novel "I spent most of the time on dead-ends and doubts," he told The Associated Press

on Monday and at one point included a section about Dylan.

"Bob Dylan was a problem for me," Diaz, who has also published a story collection, "Drown," said with a laugh. "I had one part that was 40 pages long, the entire chapter was organized around Bob Dylan's lyrics over a two year-period (1967-69). By the end of it, I wanted to throttle my like of Bob Dylan."

The Pulitzer for drama was given to Tracy Letts' "August: Osage County," which, like Diaz's novel, combines comedy and brutality. Letts calls the play "loosely autobiographical," a bruising



Bob Dylan speaks after receiving his Pulitzer Prize. Many fans were happy but left in disbelief at his award. Photo by Greg Anderson

family battle spanning several generations of unhappiness and unfulfilled dreams.

"It's a play I have been working on in my head and on paper for many years now," said Letts, **DYLAN to 3**

Beaner's open mic night provides venue for musicians

By Jeremy Pieper

Walking past Beaner's Central Concert Coffeehouse on Central Avenue Wednesday night, a passerby will hear the low rumble of bass coming from inside.

Taking a step inside, a visitor finds themselves in a small coffee shop with brilliantly colored walls and a well-equipped stage in back, yearning for the next musician.

"Bands play every Friday and Saturday," said Jason

"Open mic night is great. It's great to have new acts seen."

Wussow, owner of Beaner's. "And every Wednesday we have an open mic night."

Wussow explained how other venues in Duluth have live music shows, but they focus primarily on making money from beverage sales.

"We don't make a lot off drinking," said Wussow. "We make it more of a concert than a party." It is this concert feel that many people enjoy.

"It's a pretty intimate room and the musicians are personable," said Laura Griesy, a frequenter of the music scene at Beaner's. "It's a great scene to bring the kids."

With its family-friendly atmosphere and comfortable environment, music proves to be an integral part of the livelihood of this quaint coffee shop.

"It really varies but bands usually play 3-7 days a week," said Wussow. "We sometimes do 7 days a week, but that got to be too much."

For **BEANER'S to 4**

Cloud Cult brings sincerity back to indie rock



Craig Minowa and his band, Cloud Cult, play while painters work on their paintings that are inspired by the music in the background. Photo by Mary Johnson

By Patrick Condon-AP

Three years ago, Cloud Cult skipped out on a scheduled performance at the South by Southwest music festival in Texas a potentially career-making gig for ambitious indie rock bands to open for Ralph Nader at a protest rally.

That decision tells you a lot about Cloud Cult, a ragtag crew of musicians and painters who put more value on their unique brand of DIY environmentalism than on record sales; and who fill their records with painfully sincere songs about grief and loss, and then set them to raging hard rock guitars, soaring strings and weird studio trickery.

Somehow, it all works. While still far off the mainstream radar, Cloud Cult has earned acclaim and a growing audience for their passionate rock. They did show up at this year's recent South by Southwest, and staged several well-attended performances for their sprawling live show (which features two artists painting onstage the entire time). An anticipated new album will be released April 8.

"They're one of those bands, you listen to one of their songs 40 times and you'll hear something new on the 40th time," said Barb Abney, a DJ at Minnesota Public Radio's rock station, The Current, which

has championed the band. "But you know, at the same time, listen to them once and you feel like you know them."

When bandleader Craig Minowa first started writing and recording music 13 years ago in his apartment, he was more worried about getting to know himself.

"It helped me sort things out," said Minowa, 35, during a break from band rehearsals in the basement of his farmhouse near the eastern Minnesota town of Hinckley. "It's an aspect I need to exercise."

The next few years handed Minowa much to sort out. In 2002, just as Cloud Cult was starting to earn notice by college radio DJs and record store regulars, Minowa's 2-year-old son Kaidin died mysteriously in his sleep.

Minowa and his wife, Connie, said doctors were never able to explain exactly what happened to their son.

Craig and Connie, one of the band's on-stage painters, split up for a time. But rather than let tragedy derail his music, Minowa poured his sorrow into Cloud Cult's songs producing a series of albums he now likens to the stages of grief, and offering up an alternative to the glibness and irony that pervades much of indie rock

Take for instance a song like "Your 8th Birthday" off 2007's "The Meaning of 8," in which Minowa imagines his son's 8th birthday party had he not died, and which culminates with Minowa repeatedly crying out his son's name in his high, fragile voice.

"There's not a lot of music out there that deals so sincerely with love and with loss and with hope," said Sarah Young, the band's cellist. "And so I think when people hear it, they can take it into their lives for whatever it is they're having issues with."

Each record hops between genres, incorporating driving rock, symphonic ballads, pulsing dance beats and delicate folk sometimes in the same song. The Arcade Fire and the Flaming Lips are easy comparisons, but Cloud Cult's sound is really all its own.

Big record sales haven't necessarily followed, although "The Meaning of 8" sold 10,000 copies, about 4,000 more than its predecessor, "Advice from the Happy Hippopotamus." Critics have taken notice, with the Denver Post's music writer grouping "The Meaning of 8" alongside huge-selling albums by Green Day, Jay-Z and Radiohead as one of the dozen best pop records released since 2000.

Minowa, the band's singer, songwriter and guitarist, still works his day job as a writer and analyst for the nonprofit Organic Consumers Association. The six other band members—a bassist, drummer, cellist, violinist and the two painters, who are considered full members—earn livings as a pediatric nurse, a grocery clerk, a music school administrator and a bookstore cashier, among other things.

But Minowa has turned down offers from major record labels, insisting it's "complicated" but mainly motivated by his insistence on manufacturing his product in an environmentally sustainable way.

A few years ago, the Minowas established Earthology Records; Cloud Cult is the only artist on the roster. Every week, boxes and boxes of used CD jewel boxes get shipped to the Minowas' farmhouse, which they recycle as packaging for Cloud Cult's back catalog; shrink wrap is made of low-density polyethylene or a biodegradable plastic manufactured from corn.

"Earthology was never set up as a traditional record label, it's more trying to set up models that we can share with other members in the music industry and sort of perpetuate the process," Minowa said. To that end, he said several major record companies and distributors have adopted some of Earthology's practices.

Whether it's music, or environmentalism, Minowa said he's inspired by a desire to "leave the world better than if I wasn't here at all." That's what motivated the band's perhaps most distinctive aspect, the use of painters on stage during live performances.

"As soon as the drums kick in on the first song, that's when we start laying down the paint," Connie Minowa said. While Craig cites the importance of tapping into a wider range of creative expression than a typical rock show, the painters also serve a pragmatic function.

"We have a 15-minute silent auction that happens after the end of the show, where the painting goes to the highest bidder," Connie Minowa said. "It's just another way to support Cloud Cult."

On April 11, the band is to embark on a nationwide tour in support of the new album, "Feel Good Ghosts (Tea-Partying Through Tornadoes)." It's a less emotionally naked album than the previous few, but in its focus on rebirth and new life, no less reflective of where Minowa's life is at.

"I've seen the other side, and I understand it all a little better now, and I'm happy to be where I am, and let's start again," Minowa said. "We want to have a baby again, and we're ready for that. So that's the rebirth process, too."



Cloud Cult with their painters. Craig Minow, the lead singer is third from the left in back. Photo by Jane

DYLAN continued
 reached by the AP in Chicago at the Steppenwolf Theater Company, where "August: Osage County" had its world premiere last summer. "There were just some details from my grandmother, my grandfather's suicide (for example) that I had played over and over in my head for many, many years. I always thought, 'Well, that's the stuff of drama right there.'" Former U.S. poet laureate Robert Hass, already a National Book Award winner for "Time and Materials," won the poetry Pulitzer, as did Philip Schultz's "Failure." "This is the book ... I have always wanted to write," Schultz told the AP. "Everyone is expert on one subject and failure seems to be mine. ... I was born into it. My father went bankrupt when I was 18 and he died soon afterward out of (a) terrible sense of shame. And we lost everything, my mother and I."

Other winners Monday: Daniel Walker Howe, for history, for "What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848"; Saul Friedlander, general nonfiction, for "The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945"; for biography, John Matteson's "Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father." "I wrote my book in a way that is generally accessible to the curious literate reader," Howe said. "And I think that's very important, and I wish more books were written that way."

"It's a special honor because it ties me even more to the country of which I'm now a citizen," said Friedlander, who became a U.S. citizen seven years ago and won the German Booksellers Association's 2007 Peace Prize for his work on documenting the Holocaust. "I am surprised, grateful, overjoyed and a little embarrassed to do this with my first book," said Matteson, a professor of English at John Jay College in New York City who added that his 14-year-old daughter was an inspiration. "Not only did I understand parenting better after writing the book, but being a parent helped me to write the book."

Dylan's victory doesn't mean that the Pulitzers have forgotten classical composers. The competitive prize for music was given to David Lang's "The Little Match Girl Passion," which opened last fall at Carnegie Hall, where Dylan has also performed. "Bob Dylan is the most frequently played artist in my household so the idea that I am honored at the same time as Bob Dylan, that is humbling," Lang told the AP. Long after most of his contemporaries either died, left the business or held on by the ties of nostalgia, Dylan continues to

tour almost continuously and release highly regarded CDs, most recently "Modern Times." Fans, critics and academics have obsessed over his lyrics even digging through his garbage for clues since the mid-1960s, when such protest anthems as "Blowin' in the Wind" made Dylan a poet and prophet for a rebellious generation. His songs include countless biblical references and he has claimed Chekhov, Walt Whitman and Jack Kerouac as influences. His memoir, "Chronicles, Volume One," received a National Book Critics Circle nomination in 2005 and is widely acknowledged as the rare celebrity book that can be treated as literature.

Low's new album boasts some big changes

By Patrick Condon-AP

Low's new album has a dance song.

Once that would have been unimaginable for a trio that, over more than a decade and a half-dozen albums, built cult adoration for its chilly exercises in slow-motion rock.

But longtime fans needn't worry that their favorite mopers

have gone all Justin Timberlake. Even though Low's new album, "Drums and Guns," features the occasional funky beat, it also has a preoccupation with violence and death that's more menacing than anything the band has done.

"All the soldiers, they're all gonna die. And all the little babies, they're all gonna die," Low's leader, Alan Sparhawk,

sings in the album's leadoff track, "Pretty People." Where past Low efforts were hushed and meditative, "Drums and Guns" is edgy and paranoid, with songs like "Murderer" and "Violent Past" accompanied by buzzing guitars, twitchy bass lines and ominous keyboards.

Only Low, long known for challenging the patience of the

casual listener, would drastically remake its sound only to come up with a record that can be more off-putting than ever. But then defying convention comes easily to a band led by a married Mormon couple, who've risen to indie-rock royalty from their unlikely home base in Duluth, at the tip of Lake Superior in northern Minnesota.

"It was kind of an exercise in shedding everything and seeing if it would still be us," Sparhawk said.

Low earned its rock cred in the mid-'90s as a trailblazer of what was dubbed "slowcore." Early in Low's career, audiences would sit cross-legged on nightclub floors during their shows, concentrating intently on the music.

"They're known for conjuring up somber moods, but that to me has always been subordinate to the fact that they're just phenomenal singers and songwriters," said Jonathan Poneman, founder and president of the legendary Seattle-based indie label Sub Pop, which signed Low in 2004.

Another fan is Radiohead lead singer Thom Yorke, who gave Low the opening slot on a 2003 European tour. The group reached perhaps their widest American audience in 2000, when Gap featured their hymn-like recording of "The Little Drummer Boy" in a Christmas TV ad.

Sparhawk and wife Mimi Parker met as fourth-graders in tiny Clearbrook, Minn., and started dating in high school. A friendly record store owner in nearby Bemidji recommended records by bands like The Velvet Underground and Joy Division while most of their classmates were listening to country.

"He knew we were into anything
LOW to 4



Low, who recently released the new album "Drums and Guns" is (from left to right) Alan Sparhawk, Mimi Parker and Matt Livingston.
 Photo by Rick Blick

UMD student becomes idol individual

By Zach Olson

At a glance, Sarah Krueger may seem like an ordinary 21-year-old, but a closer look reveals a unique story of her experience as a musician.

She estimates that she works roughly 15 hours a week at Grandma's Saloon and Grill, and spends six hours a week teaching hip-hop classes at the Madill Center in West Duluth. That doesn't account for the numerous hours spent studying and attending classes at UMD.

Despite having so little free time, Krueger has managed to make room for one of her great passions in life: music.

"I've always sang," said Krueger. "I wanted to go the band route, but I was kind of intimidated because I didn't play an instrument."

She recently was able to make her band aspirations come to fruition. She recalled a time from her freshman year in the dining center when two young men caught her eye.

"One was wearing a Jimi Hendrix t-shirt, and the other had on a Bob Dylan t-shirt, so I sat down at their table," said Krueger. "We got to talking, became friends, and I eventually started singing in their band around January of 2006."

The band is called Heavy J and the Fantastics.

Last semester, Heavy J and the Fantastics played at the Twin's bar every Wednesday night. Along with local shows, the band spent a lot of time traveling and playing at music festivals such as: New Earth Festival in Fall Creek, Wisc; Log

Jam on Lake Mille Laacs; and The Stone Throw in Eau Claire, Wisc.

Aside from the band, Krueger put her individual singing talent to the test in the summer of 2006 when she auditioned for American Idol, Season 6.

"My family had always really wanted me to try out for it."

"My family had always really wanted me to try out for it," said Krueger. "When I saw they were holding auditions



Sarah Krueger, the student from UMD who appeared on American Idol. Photo by Tom Paulson

in Minneapolis, I drove down and just gave it a shot." Krueger fared well in the auditions, nearly making it to the televised portion of the program. "I was officially the first alternate to the top 24 contestants," said Krueger. "If they would have needed me for anything, they would have called me up and flown me out to California."

Krueger describes the entire experience as a good one. At the same time, she says it was difficult,

primarily because of school. "I would have to miss class," said Krueger. "I would miss an entire week sometimes. I would have to fly out to Burbank, Calif., and I couldn't even tell my professors the real reason why. I could only say I needed to miss class due to legally confidential reasons."

Because the show had not completed filming, Krueger had to maintain complete silence until the show was finished and the 2006 winner was announced. With the American Idol

experience behind her, Krueger continues to sing with her band and attend school. She says the band is looking to book more local shows and will continue to travel, making repeat appearances at events like Log Jam and other venues.

As the spring and summer seasons approach, Krueger is excited to hit the stage once again and continues to do what she loves; singing and performing with her close friends and band mates.

slots. A featured act will get a half of an hour," explained Wussow.

Beaner's has made this night easy for bands to attend.

"We went in and were

"Originality is important or really old music."

allowed a 15-minute segment," said Aaron Boothe, singer and songwriter of Thirty-nine Taken. "You just show up and play at your time."

Open mic night also benefits

the audience by introducing them to new and exciting bands in the local area.

"Open mic night is great," said Griesy. "It's great to have new acts seen."

However, Wussow does have one stipulation.

"Originality is important or really old music," he said. If a band is good, Beaner's may actually provide them with more opportunities to play.

"A band that starts playing on Wednesdays can work its way up to Friday and Saturday nights," said Wussow.

LOW continued

weird," Sparhawk recalled.

Sparhawk briefly attended Brigham Young University in Utah, but had trouble fitting in and soon returned to Minnesota. He and Parker ended up in Duluth and have lived there ever since.

For Sparhawk and Parker, the city has been a respite from the music business, a place where they've been able to raise their two young kids in a relatively normal way. Parker may be the only rock drummer in America who serves freshly baked banana bread to visitors.

The two talk somewhat reluctantly about the intersection of their Mormon faith and their rock careers, but Sparhawk said it's never created the conflict some might imagine.

"To me it's given meaning and purpose to what we create," Sparhawk said. "It's given an understanding of where it comes from, and the ability to stay in tune with that and keep those beliefs in harmony with what we're creating."

Sparhawk and Parker formed the band in 1993, with Sparhawk on guitar and Parker on drums. Current bassist Matt Livingston came on board in late 2005, after the departure of longtime bassist Zak Sally.

Sally's departure capped a rough year in the life of the band. Its first Sub Pop release, "The Great Destroyer," earned a lot of attention for a more up-tempo, hard-rock sound, but after just a few weeks on the road supporting the album, Sparhawk posted a letter on the band's Web site announcing that he was being treated for depression and that the tour was off.

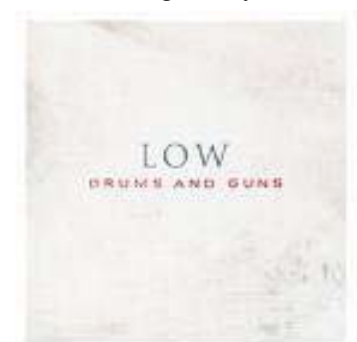
Both Sparhawk and Parker said getting life back to normal has been hard work.

"It's a slow process," Parker said of her husband's recovery. "It's not like going in for surgery and having a doctor fix you up and boom, couple weeks later you're fine. But yeah, it's better."

Sparhawk's personal anguish is all over the lyrics of "The Great Destroyer." The oblique songs on "Drums and Guns" are just as intense but are aimed more outward at "war and killing and poverty and the deterioration of the ecosystem and things like that," Sparhawk said.

Then there's that dance song. Amid all the mayhem and discord, there's "Hatchet" a bouncy ditty with lighthearted (for Low) lyrics comparing a fractured romantic relationship to the late-'60s rivalry between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

"We had this song that we'd tried a few different ways," Sparhawk said. "It just felt like such a happy, funky song and the more we went in that direction, the more it seemed to come alive. We just thought, let's go all the way with this and see if we can get away with it."



Drums and Guns features some new and interesting surprises. The band breaks away from their traditional sound and tries something new. Photo by James Doe

BEANER'S continued

venue known for its music, Beaner's actually caters to the musicians. A recording studio resides under the tables and chairs that customers occupy. This allows Beaner's to record its artists while they play, releasing their music later on CDs. This is a great way for musicians to promote their bands and get their name out to the public.

The open mic night is another promotional tool Beaner's provides for musicians.

"The host gets 2 slots during open mic night, which leaves fourteen more fifteen minute

The coffee shop also has some special events for bands. Every 2 months Beaner's hosts a show featuring 5 bands. During the show each band is given a half hour to perform, giving them ample time to showcase its talent.

"It's an exposure night," said Wusso. "You can tell who everyone came to see."

Playing at Beaner's proved to be a positive experience for Thirty-nine Taken.

"They had their own audio-tech doing mixing so sound was good," said Boothe. "There were a lot of fun people. It



Dan, Phil and Bob play at Beaner's. Beaner's is a great place for artists to get their names out into the community and to play music merely to have fun too. Photo by John Doe