

The Behrend Beacon

Experienced musical cast strengthens 'Little Shop'

preview by Daniel J. Stasiewski managing editor

Dr. Christine Mangone sums up her experience thus far with four words. "It's an amazing cast."

Mangone, the production's director and a lecturer in theater, is currently working with 13 members of the campus community to bring to life the musical tale of a young man who uses an alien plant to get the attention of his dream girl.

"The show requires such hard work and the entire cast has risen to the occasion," said Mangone.

The hardworking cast features veterans of community theater companies, choir groups and high school drama clubs. Most notable are the show's star-crossed lovers, Seymour and Audrey, played by Behrend Drama Club president Steve O'Donnell, HSTBA 06, and Beth Bohun, COMBA 04, respectively.

O'Donnell said he has been doing musical theater since he was 14 years old, but the role of Seymour, the young man who finds the plant, is an important one in his acting history.

"This is by far the biggest role I've had in my whole life," said O'Donnell. The number of songs and the amount of stage time is the most he's ever taken on.

O'Donnell isn't unfamiliar with the Studio Theatre. The thespian has participated in the One Act Plays and Improv Nights as part of the Behrend Drama Club, and has acted in Romulus Linney's two-part play "Sand Mountain" for previous Studio Theatre director Tony Elliot.

Bohun, who stars opposite O'Donnell as Seymour's love interest, Audrey, is an experienced performer as well. An Erie Playhouse player, Bohun says her voice is what makes her a star.

"Apparently I'm a pretty good singer from feedback I've received," said Bohun.

Apparently both O'Donnell and Bohun are both pretty good singers. Fellow cast mate and another seasoned performer, Jenna Gregory, DUS 02, said she was nearly brought to tears when she first heard O'Donnell and Bohun's version of the production's most popular song, "Suddenly Seymour." Gregory plays Patricia Martin, a role she describes as small.

But the other members of the cast don't write-off Gregory's role, or any other role for that matter. When it comes to doing a production as elaborate as "Little Shop of Horrors," the entire cast must work together to make the show a success.

Take "the trio," for example. Tamarra McDowell, ED 04; Deniys Franklin, BCBUS 04; and Tanaz Balaporia, DUS 02, play the roles of Ronette, Crystal and Chiffon, respectively. The three performers participate in practically every one of the show's musical numbers and have developed a strong friendship because of that. The trio believes no one would ever guess they weren't always as close as they are today.

Jet takes retro to new level with 'Get Born'

by Greg Smith contributing writer

Amid the resurgence of retro-styled, neo-garage bands like The Strokes and The Vines there has been serious doubt as to whether these bands will have any real lasting impact on the world of music.

Unlike boy bands and other assorted Top 40 music, these grungy rockers play their own instruments and write their own tunes, but cynics out there still stand tall and say, "Rock is Dead." Are these bands anything more than a passing fad?

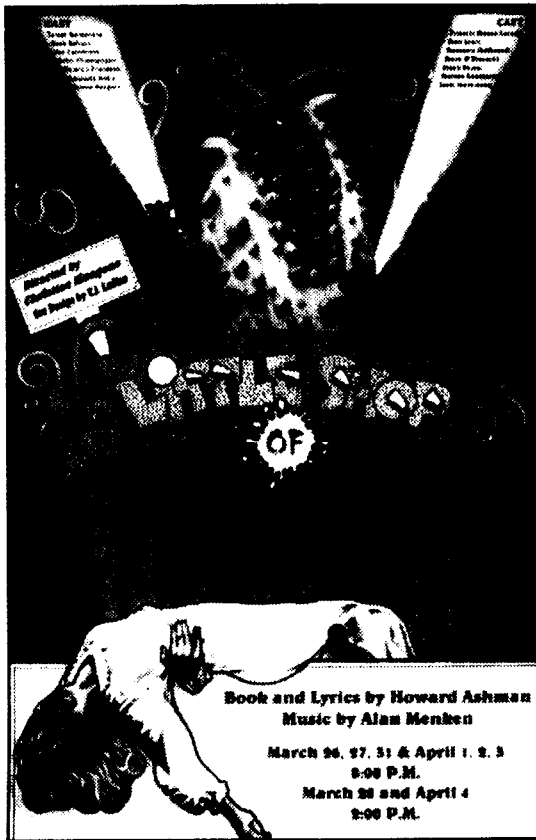
If the new Aussie rock band Jet can somehow be representative of this throwback genre, lets hope it sticks around for a while.

The four-piece, Melbourne-bred band mixes it up on its major-label debut "Get Born." Jet wields rock guitar power and vocals that can make your throat hurt just by listening to half of the album's tracks. The other half supplies musical ease that is delivered quite successfully. The result: a roller coaster of power and emotion, evoking some of the great rock bands of years passed.

Like some tried and true British bands from rock 'n' roll's glory days (AC/DC and The Kinks, to name a couple), Jet consists of a set of brothers, Nic (guitar and vocals) and Chris Cester (drums and vocals). Backed up by guitarist Cameron Muncy and bassist Mark Wilson, Jet is the most promising of the retro bands to emerge so far. Why, you may ask? The answer lies in the band member's upbringing, when they were steeped in rock 'n' roll music from the beginning, ignoring popular phases like grunge.

"I couldn't stand the stuff (grunge)," said Nic, on the band's Web site. "To me that was real slit your wrists music. It didn't relate to this idea of rock 'n' roll I had in my head. These guys (grunge bands) were taking music somewhere I didn't want to go."

Jet wears its influences openly and proudly on its collective sleeve, bringing out Rolling Stones and



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Despite the trio's special bond, the entire cast has developed a relationship all its own.

"We're just play off of each other, giving each other compliments all the time," said Francis Hayes, CMDIS 04, who plays the shop owner Mr. Mushnick.

Mangone, who doesn't perform in the production, sees it from a different, but more enthusiastic perspective.

"We have so much work to do but I'm happy with the work the actors and musicians are doing," said Mangone. "They've really taken ownership of it."

Mangone also said the cast is so great that her role as music director and director wasn't as difficult as it could have been. During practices, some students played the piano in Mangone's place and Dr. John Champagne, Associate Professor of English, took on the role of vocal coach.

Champagne also plays the sadistic dentist, Orin Scrivello, D.D.S., a role that was performed by Steve Martin in the 1986 film version of the stage musical.

If "Little Shop of Horrors" is a success, Mangone hopes that she will be able to obtain funding for a musical director for future productions.

Right now, however, Mangone is concerned with telling the story like it was meant to be told, as a simple relationship between two people that goes wrong. That, according to Mangone, is "the soul" of the production.

"Little Shop of Horrors" was performed on March 26, 27 and 31 and April 1-3 at 8 p.m. in the Studio Theatre. Additional performances will be on March 28 and April 4 at 2 p.m.

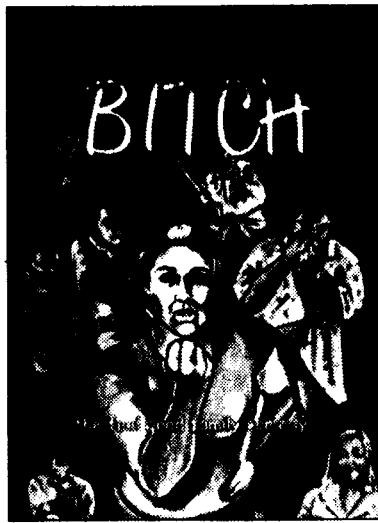
Faces-styled rhythms and riffs on "Get Born." The album opens with a bang in "Last Chance" and is followed up by the radio-friendly "Are You Gonna Be My Girl," which, unless you've been hidden away for the last three months, you've probably heard once or twice (the song gained airplay on a TV spot for Apple's iPod). Such a hit certainly came as a surprise to the band, they wrote the tune "Radio Song" about the thought that Jet would probably never get much mainstream recognition. But with all the airplay and a recent spot on "Saturday Night Live," Jet is, dare I say, flying high.

The album's ninth track, "Cold Hard Bitch," is yet another reminder the Aussie boys can rock with anyone on the scene today. But in sharp contrast to the loud guitars, Jet showcases a couple of beautiful, mellow tracks on the album, featuring Nic Cester's wonderful easy voice, a surprising alternative to his otherwise blazing vocal efforts. "Look What You've Done" and "Come Around Again" show the second dimension of the band, but perhaps the standout track on the album is "Move On," which evokes The Stones' best melodic efforts, tossing in Keith Richards-like riffs near the end of the song for a fantastic climax. Overall, "Get Born" is an extremely solid effort, and one of my personal favorite releases of 2003.

The band continues to gain notoriety throughout the world for its energetic first album, even receiving an offer from The Rolling Stones to open the Australian leg of their tour. With "Get Born," Jet proves that they have the potential to be more than just a passing fad. Maybe rock ain't dead just yet.

Greg Smith is a regular contributor to the Behrend Beacon. His music reviews and commentary have appeared in the arts and entertainment section since the fall of 2003. This article appeared in the Jan. 23 issue.

EVENT SPOTLIGHT



SCREEN VISIONS INDEPENDENT FILM SERIES Presents

WHY WE HAD TO KILL BITCH

featuring a Q&A session with director JP Nickel

Shot subjectively, the film follows the character Kevin as he uses his digital camcorder to capture a day with his friend Eugene for a film class. Eugene is, to put it nicely, a big loser who is still lamenting over the breakup with his ex, simply called "Bitch." During the day Eugene falls for a new, perfect girl, loses her, and has tries to get her back.

The catch is Kevin has always filmed his friends, so the narrative is supported by flashbacks of Eugene's life with Bitch, a grand-jury testimony and "the incident."

WINNER

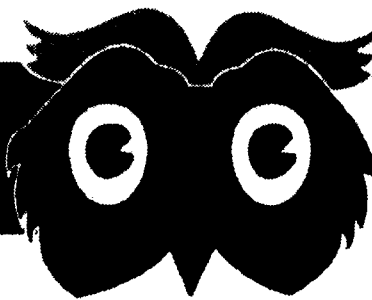
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