

## STUDENT LIFE

## No zombies, no problem Indies Rule, Majors Drool: Music in 2004



CAPCOM ENTERTAINMENT

Capcom's 'Resident Evil 4' is noted to be better than the priors with better visuals and lack of zombies.

Review by Aaron J. Amendola  
staff writer

Documenting the voyages made into the world of Resident Evil and its mythology, with the series' eight or so installments, would take some time. Through the adventures of the S.T.A.R.S. members encountering the undead in Raccoon City and beyond, players have delved into adventures that are routinely exciting, shocking, and ultimately, frighteningly stirring.

Having one of the industry's biggest fan-followings, the developmental teams at Capcom faced the challenge of creating a new and enjoyable chapter in the book of Resident Evil all while taking a stab (no pun intended) at keeping the gameplay nice and refreshing.

Resident Evil 4 had two things going for it when it was announced. It was to be exclusive to the Nintendo Gamecube console and also feature Leon S. Kennedy, a fan favorite to the series (mine included), in the lead role prominently.

In late 2003, Capcom unexpectedly decided to scrap all plans they had for the game and start anew, reportedly taking the series in "a brave new direction."

Having said that, it is clear what Capcom had at stake here. The margin for error could have been enormous, but Capcom came through in spades. On Jan. 11, I received a call from my local Gamestop saying my copy had come in. Having reserved the game roughly a year and a half in advance, I was more than ready to dish out another round of zombie-mutilation.

Treating the game like some sort of nudie mag, I snuck the game downstairs to my basement and undressed it, poking through the game's manual, fascinated with the game's amazing new graphics. "Brave new direction" indeed. Without hesitation, I booted her up.

I had tried dearly to ignore any information or media on the game and went in totally unaware, just eager to team up with Leon Kennedy again to blast me some zombies. There was only one problem, however.

There are no zombies in this game.

Only two minutes into the game and here I was, jaw unhinged, rapid-firing questions in my head receiving no an-

swers. Instead of zombies, I was shooting at (and brutally slaughtering) what seemed to be crazed Spanish villagers.

Nevermind that I couldn't decipher the language they were vehemently shooting out at me, these suckers had grabbed their torches and pitchforks determined to create gaping holes in Mr. Kennedy and I didn't let them.

Ten minutes later I had infiltrated a Spanish village viciously slaying anyone who dare get in my path. As a swarm of insane villagers encircled me, I was beginning to taste defeat. Then, a clock tower bell began to toll, making all the villagers stop dead in their tracks, dropping their weapons. One by one they walked slowly past me and into an old church, leaving me to wonder: "What the %\$^# just happened?"

That's how it begins. RE4 dangles the bait above your head and you've got no choice but to bite. It turns out a lot has happened since the outbreak at Raccoon City. Leon has joined the secret service and has been assigned the job of finding and recovering the president's kidnapped daughter, Ashley Graham. All evidence points to this small Spanish village inhabited by people exuding zombies-like symptoms, yet, they're NOT zombies. How could this be though? A Resident Evil game without any zombies? Yes, shocking but true.

In a way, Capcom has performed the unthinkable. It is as if the game's director took the previous games and tossed them into a burning trash can. Not only are there no zombies, but the series' staple camera and control scheme are nowhere to be found.

Adapting an entirely new-yet-innovative engine to the game is quite possibly the best thing that Capcom has never done until now. The new engine adopts an entirely new perspective on the action, placing the camera behind Leon, with him occupying the left side of the screen. It takes a little getting used to, but within seconds, the controls will feel as familiar as riding a bike.

The game's strongest points come in with the story and graphics. Having dismissed zombies, the plot had to be something plausible-yet-freakish enough to exist within the spectrum of Resident Evil.

RE4 introduces some unforgettable

characters like Luis Sera, a defect from the "non-zombie" camp and a rather intimidating fellow simply named "the village chief" whose main goal in the game is to make your life a living hell. All of the new characters contribute greatly to the game's innovative new storyline in their own way, whether it is beneficial or sacrificial to themselves and others. However, to say any more would spoil far too much of the story.

RE4's brilliant visuals lend a hand in creating an immense atmosphere filled with dread, terror and the lurking suspicion that anything could happen at any time. The grim, visceral imagery compiled by the game's dark foreboding settings often tries upstaging the game's sound which is equally impressive. Don't be surprised if, during the heat of battle, you stop a moment to admire an enemy only to have your head lobbed off by a chainsaw. In a game like this though, even the decapitations look stellar.

It's been a terribly long time coming. Four years ago, I dreamed of such a game to capture the sheer horrific nature that the now-classic Resident Evil games brought into gamers' lives. The game runs about 17-20 hours in the length department, which is a good long time for any game nowadays, let alone a survival horror game.

One of the biggest highlights has to be the simply inspired boss battles. Yes, battles. In lesser games, you encounter bosses and fight them, but every boss character you see in RE4 is a full-fledged war. Creating new exciting villainous foes for Leon to take down must have seriously been on Capcom's to-do list. With some of his enemies being even more interesting than those seen in last year's epic "Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater," there's never a dull moment.

All in all, this was just the kick in the pants all of us gamers need. RE4 reinvigorated my love for the series just as the flame was dwindling out. So much so, I bought the first RE game ever made for the original Playstation and I gave it a good long play through. Resident Evil has come a long way, sometimes taking two steps forward and one step back, but RE4 is definitely a step in the right direction as far as I am concerned.

Review by Sean Mihlo  
staff writer

When I first learned that Bright Eyes had topped the Billboard Hot 100 Singles chart in early November 2004 with not just one single, but two, I convinced myself that Hell had finally frozen over. Both singles, which are slated to be released on two different, full-length albums later this month, made history by sliding in to the 1 and 2 slots on the chart, video rotation on MTV or much, if any, radio play. Although this news completely shocked me, it made one thing undoubtedly clear: 2004 was the year of the indie band.

Bright Eyes wasn't the only indie artist to achieve commercial success last year. Franz Ferdinand, who are signed to independent label Domino in the UK, quickly garnered critical and mainstream success with their U.S. debut, self-titled album, which slyly combined the post-punk of Gang of Four and the Blondie-inspired new wave of the late 70s. Modest Mouse, an indie band for more than eight years until signing with Sony in 2000, achieved massive acclaim with their sophomore major-label release, "Good News For People Who Love Bad News." Their first single, "Float On," received tremendous airplay on radio stations and MTV.

Besides the slew of indie releases that received major attention, producer-turned-rapper Kanye West, after surviving a fatal car accident, released his debut album, "The College Dropout," and instant fame followed. Country legend Loretta Lynn abruptly jumped back into the music scene, at the age of 70, with her Jack White-produced LP, "Van Lear Rose." Pop-punk pioneers Green Day returned after a four year absence with their politically-packed, punk rock opera, "American Idiot." While most of these aforementioned albums topped many "best of" lists this past year, I decided to compile three of my favorite albums that were released without much, if any, mainstream recognition in 2004.

3. Paying homage to their musical roots in New York City, Le Tigre creates a polished, but musically darker sound for their major-label debut. Dubbed "electronic political punk," the band continues to mix scratchy, bouncy synth beats with brash guitars and politically-charged messages, particularly concerning social issues such as sexuality and civil rights. As the band has become progressively older and wiser, their sound has become more mature and less youthful. On previous releases, Le Tigre combined their firm opinions and beliefs with entertainingly prudent lyrics and dancy, Casio beats, but on their first single from "This Island," "New Kicks," their voices aren't to be heard on the track. Instead, the voices heard are of protesters demanding "peace, now!" and "no war!" over distinctive guitar riffs and electronic gurgles. The decision to release this as a

first single is beyond me, but it proves an important point: Le Tigre desire to make change, socially and politically, and they're going to take any necessary steps, at least musically, to do so.

2. It's been four years since Juliana Hatfield has released an album of new material; trust me, it was worth the wait. On "In Exile Deo," Hatfield finally reaches her fullest potential as an artist, an artist who has potentially lived through it all: heartbreak (both personal and public), drug bouts, and record label crises. Although she's known as one of the most important female rock artists to emerge from the 1990s, this record serves as the lovechild of 1995's "Only Everything" and 2000's "Beautiful Creature." Some of the album's finest tracks, including "Jamie's In Town," "Some Rainy Sunday," and "It Should've Been You," show off Hatfield's most inspiring instrument, her voice. On "Tomorrow Never Comes," she incorporates stringed instruments, which directly help to again, establish her voice as powerful yet subtle, resulting in perfect cohesion. "My Enemy," the album's final dosage of pure rock bliss, begins with an encompassing, muffled noise, but mid-way through, the sound returns with vivid vocals and Hatfield's prominent, adolescent tone, ending an album full of personal experience turned into reflection and reaffirmation.

1. M.I.A.'s debut LP, "Arular," will be released this February on XL Recording, but to hold you over until then, mastermind Diplo has created one of the best remix albums in recent memory. M.I.A.'s sound, essentially considered grime, is comprised of hip-hop beats and splashes of electronic tweaks. Her unique voice, which can be contributed to her Sri Lankan heritage, is the most intriguing aspect of the musicality she represents. On "Sunshowers (Diplo Remix)," Diplo mashes the original cut of the song with Salt N Pepa's booty-shaking classic "Push It." Her lyrics are sweet and short, sometimes just resulting in complete contractions; they also contain a political subtleness, as she slips in lines like "You wanna go? / You wanna win a war? / Like PLO I don't surrender." Admittedly, songs containing politically-influenced messages aren't typically welcomed into the mainstream, but M.I.A.'s indecipherable vocals make it hard for anyone to understand watch she's saying anyways. Likewise, "Bucky Done Gun" is a bleacher-stomping, palpating slice of urgency that makes having a heart-attack seem less like a physical detriment and more like a dance craze. Pseudo-keyboard gunshots, along with a pulsating, irregular bass line, provide for a majority of the beat on "Galangaton." Diplo's remix of M.I.A.'s first single. It's obvious with this release that M.I.A. is constructing her own sense of style and music, making this one of the most sought-after and superb records of 2004.

## 'Unique' eighth blackbird opens Music at Noon Series

Review by Sean Mihlo  
staff writer

Avant-garde is a term that is often nonchalantly thrown around in works of musical criticism. When I first listened to eighth blackbird, there was something noticeably different about their music and composition. Now admittedly, my knowledge of classical music is a bit lacking, but I had never listened to anything in that genre as ferocious and unique as eighth blackbird.

Since 1996, eighth blackbird, a sextet comprised of four men and two women, have been commissioning works from the most prominent composers in classical music today.

Essentially regarded as a chamber music group, they tend to smash any previous notions of that classification. At its core, eighth blackbird combines the typical elements of chamber music, violin (Matthew Albert), cello (Nicholas Photinos), and piano (Lisa Kaplan), with the uncommon, such as the flute (Molly Barth) and clarinet (Michael Maccaferri).

Another distinguishing attribute the band possesses is its diverse percussion section, lead by multi-instrumentalist Mat-

thew Duvall.

More than seven years after originating, Eighth Blackbird released their first record, "Thirteen Ways," via Cedille Records in 2001. Featuring various works from accomplished composers, the debut garnered auspicious reviews from the Chicago-Sun Times and Gramophone Magazine, a leading classical music publication. Their sophomore release, "Beginnings," hit CD shelves three years later in May 2004. In the midst of a non-stop touring schedule, the band found the time to record material for a new album, "Fred," that's set to be out by spring of this year.

The eighth blackbird performance, which will take place in the Reed Building on Jan. 27, as a part of Penn State Behrend's Music at Noon Concert Series. We're lucky, as a school and as individual students, to have the opportunity to watch a band that's received numerous awards and critical acclaim for their astonishing and enlightening adventures through the art of music. When I finished listening to cuts from their latest album, I realized that, not only are they original, eighth blackbird represent a new wave of classical and chamber music; their live performance will be one that you simply can't miss.



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eighth blackbird, a classical music sextet, will be performing at Behrend on Jan. 27. The concert is the first of the Music at Noon series this semester.