

## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

The  
PlaylistWhy the American Dollar  
isn't dead yetBy Justin Pekular  
contributing writer  
jpp5085@psu.edu

The United States economy may be floundering, but the band The American Dollar's recent release *A Memory Stream* released in August is as solid as a rock.

The band was started as a project by two friends, John Emanuele (drum, keyboard, bass, and guitar) and Rich Cupolo (guitar, keyboard, bass, and percussion) in 2005.

As partial as I am towards instrumental music with little or no lyrics, I can still say that this band has surpassed my expectations of what music can be. *A Memory Stream* has pretty much become a pleasant soundtrack to mellow me out no matter what I'm doing.

The music paints a calming portrait in your mind, putting you at ease to think about whatever you may. All of the American Dollar's music is like this; delicate guitar or keyboard melodies blanketed by satisfying beats and splotted with some ambient tones. It's great to listen to whenever I study, walk to class, relax, or even sleep.

Let me get back to the new album. *A Memory Stream*. Generally, the sound and overall feeling of the song reflects an abstract theme from its title. The opening two part song, "The Slow Wait" starts with a very ghostly ambience, then brings in a peaceful sounding keyboard melody. It slowly develops building up with guitars and other mystical tones. The songs climax with a vibrant and smooth guitar solo, quickly drying up all of the progression.

Part two brings in an upbeat

percussion, while the background ambience from the previous song keeps things moving. More and more of these parts develop and it gets very intense, as if "The Slow Wait" is over and something has begun. Try listening to this song as you leave home for class. Oddly enough the progression will get you amped for the day.

You may be thinking this sounds boring, but it really isn't. The reason I like this band so much is because your day gives context to the music. Another awesome song, for any moment is "Starscapes." It's ethereal at first, building the sound-scape for the rest of the song.

Right as you don't expect it, the billowing patterns fade as ambient tones play, and before you're used to this calmness it builds right back up. An intense and catchy drumbeat pops up making you want to tap your toes. I forgot to mention this song is nine minutes long. Things finish up eventually, after the band playfully tweaks their dynamics like you'd never expect.

The American Dollar falls into the somewhat obscure and hidden genre of post-rock. It's almost like a movie's soundtrack, interestingly enough: it's not. I get just as much pleasure out not really paying attention as I do out of focusing intently on a song. There are no words, just rich textures of sound that slowly evolve to keep your interest. If they sound intriguing to you, check out their last.fm or myspace page, all of their songs are free to listen to.

## Forward Hall

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Forward Hall has been featuring many performances lately, as the venue has just come under new management. For a number of months, the venue was having little to no concerts. The venue was recently purchased by Eric Michael Schaufele, who is the owner of Ink Assassins Tattoo

Shop on Peach Street in downtown Erie. Tickets for any upcoming shows can be purchased at the shop.

For more information on upcoming local concerts, visit [www.erieshows.com](http://www.erieshows.com). Also, you can join the "erieshows" Facebook group to receive updates and notifications directly.



MATTHEW SCHWABENBAUER / The Behrend Beacon  
Tommy Rodgers of *Between the Buried and Me* sings at Forward Hall

High school music programs  
lacking in structure

continued from front page.

bunch."

Donch says he has the same problem with unmotivated students, but "[the students] know that if they don't do anything during class, they will get an F." He says despite the number of kids that don't have an interest in music, there are still kids that do want to play. "Some kids will come and get a pass if there is a substitute teacher upstairs, to come down here and play," states Donch. He says he feels he can relate to these students because he felt the same way when he was their age. "I lived for band when I was in high school," Donch states.

According to George W. Bush's policy for NCLB on [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov), schools that show improvement in students performances in math and science will be rewarded with government funds, and those that don't will be penalized. This program is intended to motivate schools to improve on reading, science and math. "If it's not science or math, it's not important," states Ohmer. Donch said Strong

Vincent had to cut two woodshop teachers, one music (Mr. Ohmer), one home economics and one art teacher, all to cut down on funding.

This policy leaves arts programs at a disadvantage. Ohmer says that his schedule is not even done correctly. He reportedly has two classes scheduled during the same time: Music Appreciation and Choir. "You can't split the room in half," he says.

Block scheduling is one thing

According to Donch the teachers were having a difficult time making the transition. The teachers were reportedly told to use different methods of teaching in their lessons such as lectures, student presentation, and group projects but they only stuck to lecturing. This led to restless students, which led to bad behavior and thus led to removal of the blocking schedule.

The only thing fighting for

**"The class is now a dump ground; all except two people are incapable of doing anything. If I can get them to sing middle grade songs, I'm lucky."**

Robert Ohmer, music teacher

that could fix this problem, but it has been done before and there were problems with it, according to Donch. Some students "were lost" because they were having a difficult time sitting for a whole class period listening to a lecture. The blame is not only with the students, however.

music programs in schools is an informal music organization. According to Ohmer, the organization does not currently have anyone in charge. They meet on a regular basis and discuss options for concerts in the spring.

Ohmer and Donch both

attended on Thursday October 7. Donch said the meeting was productive, and they brainstormed ideas about after school music programs for some districts. Donch's personal project is to expand the Erie All City Marching band from three schools to 13. The plan is to go to 13 schools in the district in an attempt to recruit members. Depending on how many people sign up, Donch has several ride options for the students to get to one location. "[The music program] will survive if we can get this project [functioning]," States Donch.

Ohmer has eight years of experience in teaching music. Besides East and Strong Vincent, he has taught at Central High School and Roosevelt Middle School. Ohmer states on the music curriculum's future, "Things can only get better from here, because they can't get any worse." Donch agrees that things are different from how they were, stating, "The music program is changing here and if I don't change with it, I'm going to get lost."

## Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist is strong

By Ryan P. Gallagher  
news editor  
rpg5004@psu.edu

Fusing Michael Cera's (*Superbad*, *Juno*) bone-dry humor with a grungy music scene and a romanticized New York City night, *Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist* records a note of love, haphazard friendship, and ultimate warmth in this latest garage-band-esque enterprise.

Though *Nick and Norah's* is more of a ride along with classic friends and real times, the lack of creative conflict doesn't stomp the genuineness of the characters and story, leaving the audience content at the least. Cera's character, Nick, reminiscent of his character from *Juno* (Best Original Screenplay, 2007) in the ranks of dry humor, soft spoken intelligence, and youthful relationship chaos, is anything but fake and strives for self satisfaction. If Cera's witty deliveries have made you chuckle in the past, this film will likely have the same affect.

Kat Dennings (*Charlie Bartlett*, *40 Year-Old Virgin*) nails the role of the counterpart Norah, who comes off as an enigmatic music adorer and a witty intellectual. Her father is a big-time record producer in the city, something that had essentially constructed her to be who she was throughout the entire film. She loves music, this much is clear. In fact, everyone in the film loves music, but I suppose that's what fueled the plot in a sense.

The story is relatively simple, which is not much of a surprise,

as this type of genre hardly offers variety in the way of conflict and innovation. The film commences with Nick on the phone in his bedroom, leaving a voicemail with his ex-girlfriend Tris (Alexis Dziena) until the message eventually runs long and is cut off and never recorded. It's an extremely comical, hopeless romantic portrayal from Cera,

until his two homosexual band mates, Thom and Dev, arrive at Nick's home convincing him to get out of the house to play a gig that night. After some weak reluctance from Nick, the DJ on the radio in the background, timely announces that the band Where's Fluffy? will be playing a secret show at an undisclosed venue at some point in the night.

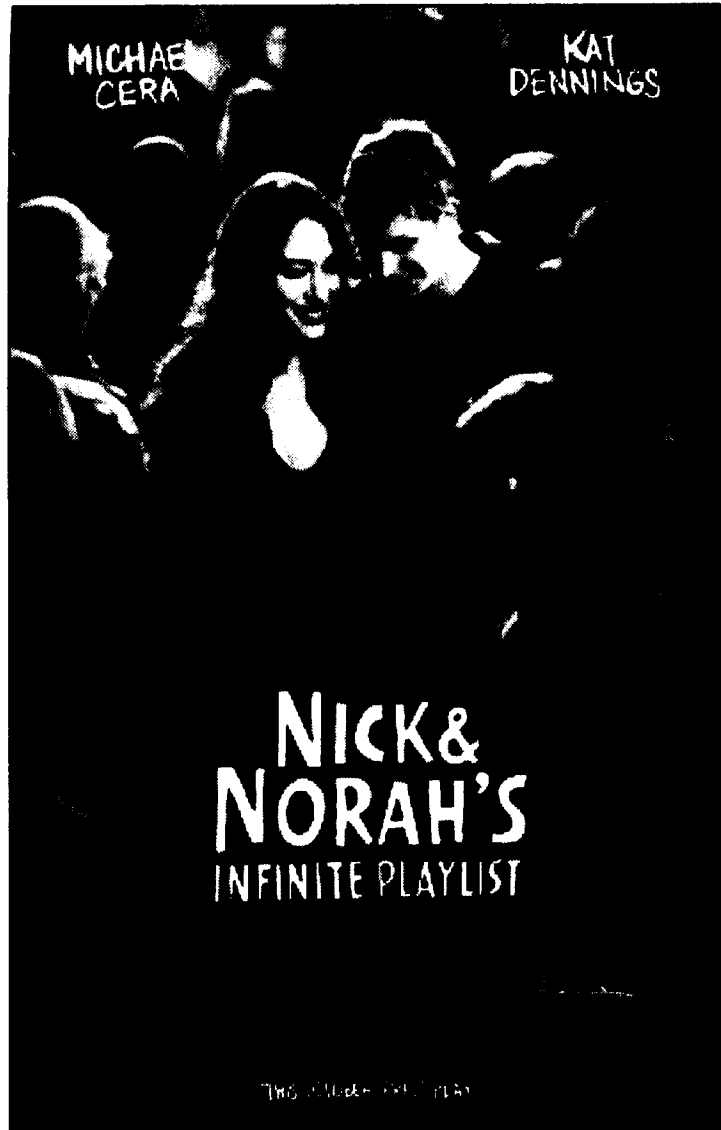
This band being Nick's (and the majority of the cast of characters) all-time favorite group, he decides a night on the town may not be an awful idea.

The story rocks on from there in more ways than one.

After Norah's best friend Caroline has a bit much to drink, the film presents us with several missions in which our characters are chasing. Caroline's situation causes her to stray away from the main group, leaving Norah in a state of panic considering it's the big apple and they've not even graduated high school. Nick's incessant obsessiveness with his ex, constantly interferes with the idea of Nick and Norah becoming anything but two lost musical souls in a hopeless world.

Nothing extraordinary really sparks this film, so I'm not sure why it's so effective. I suppose it is not a movie that everyone should run out to spend eight dollars on. The soundtrack is diverse and flavorful with bands like Modest Mouse, Bishop Allen, Vampire Weekend, Band of Horses, Shout Out Louds, and many others. There always seems to be some form of music going out in the film through it's entirety and that's one of its finer qualities.

Robust with dry humor, various comedic cameos, real music, youthful acting, and a memorable message, this film could amaze or disappoint, depending on your cinematic taste. If the bands on the soundtrack appeal to you and you've taken a fancy to recent films featuring Cera, then I would imagine this would be right up your alley.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO  
Michael Cera and Kat Dennings.

Artistic,  
creative or  
ambitious?

Write for the  
ARTS page of  
*The Behrend  
Beacon*

E-mail Evan  
Koser at  
[emk5110@psu.edu](mailto:emk5110@psu.edu)

Janet Neff Sample Center  
for Manners & Civility



"There is no duty more important than ensuring that our children's rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they grow up in peace."

Kofi Annan