

Mike's mixes music, movies

By KAREN SHIMKO
Collegian Arts Writer

With multiple music stores punctuating the State College landscape, some might argue that buying tunes from a video store is like buying pizza from McDonald's.

Mike's Video II, 210 Calder Way, opened this past Monday, and will hold its grand opening today.

With a new store comes a new emphasis — music. According to Derek Canova, assistant manager of the "new" Mike's, the expanded store is giving music a shot because of high sales at another Mike's locale on North Atherton Street.

In an attempt to bring in the music clientele, Mike's will be having a CD sale until mid-November. Some other local musical merchants aren't impressed.

"Well, we have been selling music for 10 years and we know what we are doing and they probably don't," said Ken Kubala, manager of City Lights, 316 E. College Ave.

"By selling both you obviously would be meeting several needs. But by specializing, the advantage is that your energies are not spread," said Sean McDonnell, a salesclerk at Blue Train, 418 E. College Ave., referring to the dou-

ble-focus of Mike's.

Deborah Sitrin (senior-comparative literature) isn't sure that Mike's is the place for music.

"I would use it for videos, but I would buy CDs anywhere," said Sitrin.

The new Calder Way location is a more centralized spot than Mike's old storefront at 228 W. College Ave. Canova said it allows the store to be closer to students and also provides more parking.

"I think it's very nice and I'm glad they moved one of these downtown," said Nikki Takei, a Boalsburg resident. "Mostly I like that you can rent at one store and return it to another."

"I like the store because Blockbuster and A-Z Video are too far so this is more convenient and it has more (video) selection than McLanahans," said Laura Heckman (sophomore-biology).

But even though Mike's is now closer to where people traffic, some loyal music customers are happy where they are.

"I would stay where I am because they have more of a selection to me," Jodi Sahakian said, referring to City Lights.

But others say that trying a new store depends on the all-important dollar.

"I try new stores all the time and

I go where it is cheapest," said Tracy Weiss (junior-hotel restaurant and institutional management).

Tanya Rodriguez agrees. "I like new stores just because of the prices," Rodriguez (junior-human development and family studies). "The one thing I like is the wide range of Latino music that I found at Mike's."

For some consumers, the video selection meshes well with the music.

"It's convenient this way but the selection could be more," said Eric Council (senior-engineering).

Charlie Allen agrees. "I came to rent a movie and just started looking at the CDs," said Allen (senior-business logistics).

Blockbuster Video, 1101 N. Atherton St., which sells top 20 music along with video rentals, said music and movies mix well.

"It could be an impulse buy, but it's a test that has been successful," said Wally Knief, corporate communication manager of Blockbuster.

"We have people that come for both. I just think that there is a lot to look at," said Nina Klein, manager of Vibes Music, 226 E. College Ave. But unlike Mike's and Blockbuster, Vibes sells videos and does not rent them out.



Collegian Photo/Caroline Root

Area resident Josh Jacob browses the CDs at the 'new' Mike's Video and Music, 210 Calder Way, Monday afternoon. The store has recently expanded its focus by adding music-related items to its already established video business.

Fests turn town into State Skallege

Editor's note: This is the first in a two-part series on local ska shows. This package focuses on this weekend's activities.

By JAKE STUIVER
Collegian Arts Writer

It doesn't matter if your address is in State Ska-lege or University Skank — for the next several weeks, this town will be overrun by the happiest vibes this Valley has ever experienced.

Five different ska-fests will be held during the next three weeks, and at this rate, more could crop up any minute.

Washington, D.C.'s The Pietasters will headline the first ska show at 6:30 p.m. today in the HUB Ballroom. The opening bands will be Boston-based Thumper and locals The Ska Blazers.

"We usually have one ska show every year," Asylum President Dan Cardonick said. "Each year we'll try to get a different ska band."

"Ska is an up-and-coming genre of music. More people are discov-

ering it, and it's being listened to more," Cardonick said.

Ska music is a melding of old rhythm and blues soul, jazz, and early rock 'n' roll, incorporating strong vibes of reggae.

It usually includes a horn section, and has recently been combined with more high-paced, adrenaline-fueled styles such as punk.

Ska lyrics tend to revolve around romance and politics. Its uplifting sound is usually appropriate for a high-spirited atmosphere.

"Ska shows are a lot of fun," said Jae Sung Lee (junior-chemical engineering). "The Toasters are probably the best in concert."

"It's really taking off," said Pietasters frontman Steven Jackson. "There are just hundreds and hundreds of bands popping up," he said, explaining that in the past year he has seen seven or eight ska bands form in Washington, D.C.

Jackson elaborated on the roots, styles, and criteria of ska music.

"To me, it's best when it recog-

nizes the roots of the music, when it doesn't take itself too seriously, and when the musicians are good," Jackson said. "Personally, I like more traditional ska."

According to Jackson, traditional ska was first defined in 1963 by the work of The Skatelites, who are considered to be the first ska band.

Musicians in Jamaica were picking up rhythm and blues radio broadcasts from New Orleans, Jackson said.

The musicians were influenced by the jazz music they heard, and the singing styles of soul artists. They combined this with early forms of rock before reggae.

By 1965, ska musicians had slowed their style down a bit, and it was called rocksteady. Then it became reggae, Jackson said.

"I think it's getting hard to say it has to be a certain kind of way," Jackson said. "It keeps changing with the times."

"I think ska is the next form of music to blow up," said Ryan Scofield (junior-chemical engineering).

"Ska has been in the underground for so long," Scofield said. "It seems like whenever (music) comes out of the underground into the mainstream, it gets ruined. I'm afraid that will happen to ska," he said, pointing out that Rancid's first new single was ska.

In sync with Jackson's preference for the conventional ska, as opposed to the punk-fused styles of The Mighty Mighty Bosstones and Rancid, The Pietasters have a very simple, soulful sound.

Their performance here will be something of an anniversary for them, because they will have been together five years on Halloween.

"We've gotten good reception, good reviews, and a lot of good feedback," he said.

But as much as The Pietasters contain all the ingredients of an up-and-coming success, they haven't let it go to their heads.

"Our personal views are to make sure that everybody's having as much fun as we're having up on stage, and we're having a blast. We're a bunch of goofballs, basically," he said.

The multitude of skactivity planned for the next couple of weeks may seem a bit out of season, since ska music is more of a joyous, summer-sunplash mood-monger than of a winter-chill or Halloween scare. The show promoters, however, are adapting the vibe to the climate.

"I think any time of year anyone can just skank away to ska," Cardonick said.

Crowbar will hold a "Skalloween" show Oct. 31. On Nov. 8, The Blue Meanies, Mephiskapheles, and West Coast ska band Let's Go Bowling will perform at Crowbar.

Other shows include a Nov. 3 appearance of former Happy Valley homies Ruder Than You at Café 210 West, 210 W. College Ave., and a Nov. 11 presentation by WEHR-FM of Mephiskapheles, The Blue Meanies and Springheeled Jack, tentatively slated for Le Club in East.

"I'm happy (the shows) are happening," Scofield said. "The college campus is the perfect place for ska to sink its feet into."

Pietaster's 'oolooloo' serves up great ska

By JAKE STUIVER
Collegian Arts Writer

It is practically impossible to make a bad ska album.

In a genre whose basic criteria consists of intertwining reggae and rock, sounding soulful and content, and providing background music for fun times, it's hard to leave fans displeased.

The main criticism ska music generally receives is that a lot of it sounds the same, and it is often difficult to discern between a ska band that is talented and one that is not.

That is why The Pietasters' current album, *oolooloo*, is such a masterpiece.

Most groups attempting to transcend the sometimes limiting generic boundaries approach their challenge by fusing even more unconventional elements into the style. The Mighty Mighty Bosstones are a more popular ska band than the Crazy 8's, not because they are necessarily more proficient musicians, but because they incorporate punk/hardcore and pop rock into traditional ska, making it more interesting.

They do not make better ska, they just create more diverse music.

The Pietasters, on the other hand, are great for no reason other than that they have a superior skank. *Oolooloo* is jam-packed with some of the catchiest, most moving, well-rounded ska songs. This band really knows how to make a diverse album without compromising its style.

All of the songs here are gems, but the shining diamond comes right at the beginning, with "Something Better," a mellow, soothing reggae number that immediately introduces the elements that make the group unique.

Right away, the most noticeable element is the superb brass



Ska act blazes onto regional scene

By JOSHUA KADERLAN
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State College and ska music. Not exactly the first combination that springs to mind. But that's beginning to change — and the Ska Blazers are part of the reason why.

Ska is definitely growing in popularity in State College, said Kyle Lohrke (senior-science), the band's keyboardist. The band played at Crowbar, 420 E. College Ave., during the summer and drew about 200 people, he added.

Actually, calling the Blazers a local act is kind of a stretch, since only two band members out of nine live here. State College is one of the towns they frequent, though, and they'll only become more visible after they open The Pietasters' show at 6:30 p.m. today at the HUB Ballroom.

This isn't the first time the two bands have played together — in fact, the first show the Blazers ever played was with the Pietasters, Lohrke said.

"We're playing with bands we

"We found a music . . . that we were all equipped to play in our musical backgrounds."

— Kevin Finnegan
Ska Blazers' saxophonist

really admire," said Kevin Finnegan (senior-chemical engineering), one of the Blazers' saxophonists, adding that most ska groups lack a pompous attitude.

Not only do the band members get along with one another.

"These guys are my best friends," Lohrke said, adding that the band members met in high school in Hazleton. "You know what they're going to do before they do it. . . . It's just like a big party — 'cause if I wasn't onstage with them, I'd probably be in the crowd with them."

Even their musical style springs from their friendship. The reason they started playing ska was because Brian Potash, the lead singer, got the other band mem-

bers interested, Finnegan said.

"We found a music . . . that we were all equipped to play in our musical backgrounds," he added.

That musical background comes into play when the band is writing their songs.

"Usually the horns get something going or the rhythm section gets something going. . . . Everyone has creative input," Lohrke said.

But even though the guys in the band are friends, they still face challenges — mostly in getting together to practice and play. In addition to State College, various band members live in Philadelphia, Bloomsburg, West Chester, Lehigh and Kutztown.

"It's a big pain," Lohrke said. "It's a lot of travelling."

appreciated when it's not being listened to.

In theory and in thought, most of the songs on this album should technically rock, especially within the zones of appeal most often treated by the likes of Green Day or Elastica.

In other words, it's got that poppy-punky feel that's usually so hard not to like. Maybe it's the constant overload of gunk-punk that makes the Dance Hall Crashers sound so boring and repetitive. The ska-element brings a new dimension to it, but not enough to make this album more interesting to listen to than it is to write about.

—by Jake Stuver



Dance Hall Crasher's 'Lockjaw' a bit stiff

And now for something completely different . . . it's Belinda Carlisle and the Waiters!

Yes, folks, in one of the latest developments in ska-fusion, The Go-Gos have allied themselves with both members of Rancid and the Melody Makers, and in a skambined effort, created *Lockjaw*.

OK, so the Dance Hall Crashers doesn't really include members of those other bands, but listening to their new album can be as deceiving as reading the first two paragraphs of this review.

Normally, a mixture like this would be considered fun and exciting.

Lockjaw, however, is somewhat lacking in that department. It's true that all of the songs on the



Great cast does not patch 'Quilt's' flaws

By TODD RITTER
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In my apartment, on my bed, is a quilt made by my grandmother. Every time I use the quilt, I know that something of herself went into its making. But I didn't get this feeling from *How to Make an American Quilt*, a new film about a group of women and their encounters in love, marriage and motherhood.

The trouble with the film is that the women who created it, director Jocelyn Moorhouse and the phenomenal cast of actresses, haven't put any of themselves into the film. The result is a film that, although well-acted and impeccably executed, fails to arouse any true emotions.

Quilt tells the plight of Finn (Winona Ryder), a graduate student who goes to live with her grandmother in order to finish her thesis for her master's degree. Finn is engaged to a lovable guy but fear of commitment has given her cold feet. So she turns to her grandmother's quilting group for advice. They tell their stories, both poignant and uplifting.

There's Sophie (Lois Smith as the old Sophie, Samantha Mathis as the young), a woman of beauty and promise who, after her husband of 15 years leaves her, is left bereft and bitter. There's Anna, played by Maya Angelou, the descendant of slaves, who finds true love in the birth of her daughter. These and other stories are interwoven within the main plot of the film. It's an American *Joy Luck Club*, but, unlike that powerful 1993 film, *Quilt* doesn't generate much emotional catharsis.

The main problem with *Quilt* is the framing device of the story. In *The Joy Luck Club*, the women gathered for a friend's going-away party, who was leaving for China to meet the sisters she never knew. In *Quilt*, it's just Ryder waffling about whether or not to marry.

The stories the women tell are tepid. Only Sophie's has any weight to it. The others are trivial compared to the devastating stories told in *The Joy Luck Club*.

How to Make an American Quilt does have several things in its favor, however. The amazing cast features Anne Bancroft, Alfre Woodard, Ellen Burstyn, Dermot Mulroney and, all too briefly, Claire Danes. The film takes this impressive roster and proceeds to waste every single one of them. Still, even with their small parts, Angelou, Woodard and Danes manage to impress.

The film looks great, with beautiful cinematography by Janusz Kaminski. Moorhouse's direction is deft and technically proficient, but it never rises to the great emotional height that this type of material needs.

When I look at my quilt, the one my grandmother made, I know there is love there. It is part of my grandmother's history and now part of mine. When I saw *How to Make an American Quilt*, I didn't see anything but a well-made film that is devoid of meaning because it is devoid of true feeling.