

# Smithsonian spurs thought for reviewer

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Staff Reviewer

Kirkville is the new home for the Smithsonian Institution — or at least an exhibit from the Smithsonian.

The Kirksville Arts Association is hosting "New Harmonies," a traveling collection put together by the Smithsonian Institution. The exhibit examines America's musical heritage, looking at disparate cultures and the traditions that inform contemporary music. The Kirksville Arts Association and the Adair County Historical Society also assembled a portion of the gallery focusing on prominent local musicians.

The Smithsonian section provides a broad overview of American roots music, which is helpfully demarcated as referring to the "roots of popular music or rock and roll." The exhibit splits up roots music into five categories: country, blues, sacred, dance and revival.

Obviously these are five enormous categories that could not possibly reflect the complex history of American popular music, but the displays are targeted toward a general audience, apparently designed to educate and stimulate the most casual and uninformed observer.

The country and blues sections are predictably segregated. Country music's history begins with Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family, moving on to the important figures of early radio and the Grand Ole Opry.

A particularly insightful comparison between the citified Western swing movement and bluegrass's explicit traditionalism was thought provoking, but the display was otherwise overly simple. An informational placard on the marginal Chet Atkins explained he created the "Nashville Sound" without defining what that meant. Elsewhere,

information on the Grand Ole Opry seemed to imply that comedian Minnie Pearl was a musician. Such minor oversights are unavoidable in such a small, accessible exhibit.

The blues exhibit gave a brief summary of the genre, beginning with its roots at the end of the 19th century in the Mississippi Delta, on to the famous rural bluesmen of the early 20th century and ending with the urban electric blues of the '50s and '60s. The brief biographical sketches of blues giants provide a fine entry point to learn more about the music, and the chronological arrangement preserves a sense of continuity.

The sacred section of the show skews mostly toward black gospel groups like the Fisk Jubilee singers. It also gives important recognition to traditional Native American music — although it has had little effect on contemporary rock and pop, it is still important to recognize.

The dance portion is a bit of a hodgepodge in which the curators throw zydeco, tejano, polka and klezmer together with a tenuous unifying theme. The lack of cohesion doesn't really matter because most people probably know very little about these relatively obscure strands of American music.

The final part of the exhibit is the revival section, which focuses primarily on the New York folk revival of the early '60s. In addition to early revivalists like Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, much attention is given to Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and the pop-folk group Peter, Paul and Mary. The exhibit ends with a nod toward contemporary roots musicians like Keb' Mo', Allison Krauss and Los Lobos. It also highlights several current festivals that celebrate roots music.

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Krista Goodman/Index

The Kirksville Arts Association's New Harmonies Exhibit focuses on five categories of music: country, blues, sacred, dance and revival.

Aside from the occasional generalities inherent in overview, the only big problem with the exhibit is the lack of original artifacts. In lieu of paraphernalia or instruments played by famous musicians, the gallery features several hands-on facsimiles of banjos, spoons and diddley bows that will appeal to children rather than music enthusiasts.

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displays that highlight Northeast Missouri's own history are the most interesting part of the gallery.

From local fiddlers and farriers to national stars, Kirksville and the surrounding cities have had their fair share of talented musicians. In addition to Rhonda Vincent and her famous family, Northeast Missouri has produced country star Rusty Draper, gospel composer Doris Akers and two opera stars. With original artifacts and lovely images

coordinated by local artist Suzanne Beaky, the local displays outdo the Smithsonian.

But, of course, it's all great. I managed to spend a couple hours wandering around the gallery. The exhibit definitely is worth your time, and the volunteers for the Kirksville Arts Association are incredibly helpful.

The "New Harmonies" exhibit runs until Saturday, May 2, at the Kirksville Arts Association at 117 S. Franklin St.

## Objectivism is no excuse for apathy

Ayn Rand wants us all to be selfish jerks.

In various novels and treatises on philosophy, economics (market collapses that make our current conundrum look tame) and human nature, Rand pushes her own brand of clean living: objectivism. The philosophy rests on the concept that a person's moral purpose in life is the achievement of his or her own happiness — in Rand's words, "rational selfishness" or "ethical egoism" — and that this ultimate morality only is achievable with absolute respect for individual rights (where her true love, laissez-faire capitalism, comes in).

To explain these ideas in novel form, Rand's protagonists tend to be mysterious, misunderstood (male) geniuses who are hugely talented architects, scientists or business owners constrained by big government's insistence that everyone should profit from the superior skills of a few. And if these characters' personalities weren't enough to convey objectivism symbolically, Rand also made them chatty — a character's

40-page monologue-manifesto in "Atlas Shrugged" conveys the entire philosophy.

This is a shaky understanding, I admit, but in an effort to be concise, let's just say if you're stupid, lazy, indecisive, compassionate, weak, unhappy or generally just standing in the way of people who are not those things, Rand probably wouldn't like you.

I'm all for compensating talent, but I can't endorse the robotic self-interest Rand preaches. Still, for all her ethical eccentricities, I can agree with Rand on one virtue: personal responsibility.

Now, living responsibly is a two-fold effort involving both personal endeavors and social consciousness. Focus solely on taking charge of your own life situations and you run the risk of developing an ego of Randian proportions. At the same time, positive changes in other-focused issues can't be made without first achieving positive personal change.

The first obstacle to personal responsibility is the excuse. You missed that 9 a.m. class because your alarm clock didn't ring? Re-

ally? Because it might have been that you set it incorrectly at 5 a.m. after you finally quit drinking, Facebooking or cramming for a test. I scored poorly on the GRE because the practice CD they sent didn't work, so I just didn't study. Right. There are countless other resources I could have used.

Personal responsibility means owning my actions and their consequences — even the unintentional results. For personal responsibility to triumph it must conquer its arch-foe, apathy. Imagine some sort of epic cartoon battle — capes, laser-beam eyes and all — except apathy is a little pudgy from all the time he spends lazing about, not caring.

So far, Rand and I are on the same page. But she's OK with stopping at personal fulfillment: I'm happy and successful, so mission accomplished. We're trashing the earth and fighting unjust wars, and the pope is telling people condom use aggravates AIDS. Not my problem.

So apathy wins. Where is our generation's motivation to enact change, to take charge of our lives now and our

opportunities in the future? Sometimes, being the best you can be isn't enough. Social responsibility demands we make sure others have the same chance at greatness. This starts with access to food, shelter, a clean environment and accurate information and education.

Those things aren't going to happen while we're sitting on our couches playing video games and reading FML posts. Living room advocacy only goes so far toward creating a sustainable planet, a literate population or a peaceful society.

Find something to do with yourself outside yourself and act on it. Whatever you believe, BELIEVE it. Whatever you care about, CARE. Don't fall into the false comfort of personal fulfillment. Ethical egoism, rational selfishness: These are Rand's excuses to make a lot of money, lead a hedonistic life, tread on weaker people and not lose sleep about it.

We don't get a free pass on making the world a better place just because we didn't hear the alarm. It's ringing. Wake up.

Peace  
mind



Design by Antonette Bedesie/Index

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