

Author reveals secrets behind writing method

INTERVIEW BY CHRIS BONING
Staff Reporter

From the publishing house that released the popular PostSecret books comes a work of fiction that deals with secrets in a very different way. "The Safety of Secrets," the second book by author Delauné Michel, explores the relationship between two women, Fiona and Patricia, whose friendship was forged on a secret from their childhood that continues to haunt them as adults. Loyalty and betrayal are the main themes at play, in addition to the question of whether Patricia and Fiona's relationship can persist even after their secret is revealed. The Index recently had an opportunity to talk to Ms. Michel about her book and her thoughts on its themes and her own friendships.

"A secret can be the one thing that binds us together and exactly the thing that tears two people apart."

Delauné Michel

Chris Boning: First of all, who are your favorite writers?

Delauné Michel: The top of my list in terms of being the most influential is Chekhov, Anton Chekhov — not only his plays, but his short fiction. I think in terms of really any kind of fiction writing ... reading Chekhov is a great education because [with] any theatrical piece one has to be very lean and spare, and one has to be all about the action moving forward, and Chekhov was really a master in writing a sentence that on the surface is what the character is saying but also has so many layers of intentions and information about what is going on in that character's life and relationships. ... I love Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Willa Cather. I love Mona Simpson, Catherine Harrison. I love P.D. James and Michael Connelly and Raymond Chandler ... Richard Price and Richard Ford. ... There's so many.

CB: It sounds like you're very well-read.

DM: I love to read, and I am pretty much self-educated, so reading was how I learned how to write, basically.

CB: When you say you're self-educated, does that mean just as far as your writing career is concerned or in general?

DM: I didn't go to college. I finished high school at the end of 11th grade. I did study acting in New York for three years and trained as an actor. I didn't go to college, much less go through an M.F.A. program, so yes, I am very much self-educated as a writer and in terms of the liberal arts education that I have through my own studying and reading.

CB: What's your writing process like?

DM: I start out by writing an outline of the book. I write a history of the characters, starting with their birth. Not all the characters, but the main characters because I need to know who these people are and at any given point in their lives what they were doing. ... I write an outline and then three pages long-hand, and then I transfer that into the computer and when I do that I do my first edit. Then the next day, I will read the three pages I put to the computer and do another polish/edit on them. Then I write my three pages long-hand and put those into the computer. And the next day read those again, so it's kind of like a leapfrogging thing, ... but in the beginning, it's very much [the] long-hand is the characters' voices. ... The characters pretty much dictate the novel to me. I feel like I'm taking dictation from them.

CB: What inspired "The Safety of Secrets"?

DM: I had finished my first novel, "The Aftermath of Dreaming," which is about a young woman in a relation-

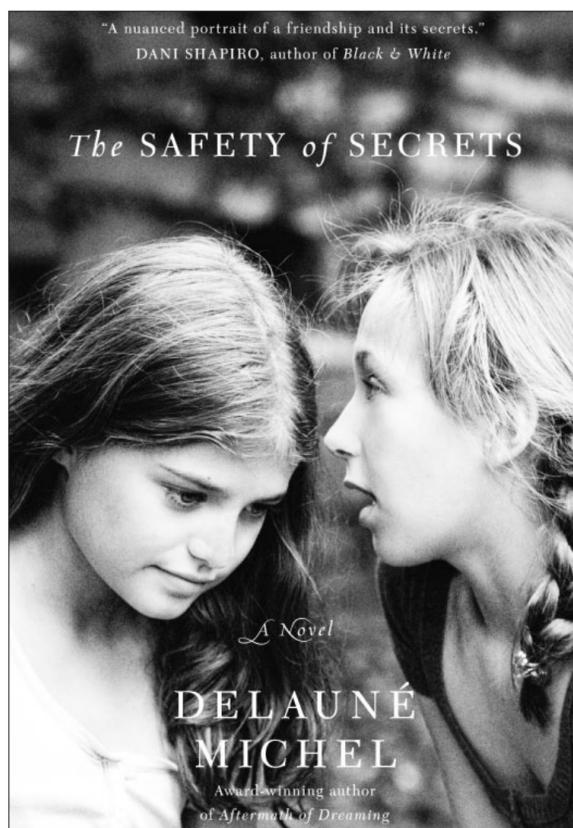
ship with a man much older than her, and while I enjoyed exploring that topic, I was ready to leave behind that area of relationships for a while and move into another area. And for me, another area that is extremely important is my friendships with women. They really are the bedrock of my life, and when I thought about friendships with women, it made me think about the issues of loyalty and betrayal, and about the one thing [that connects] both of those. I realized it was a secret. A secret can be the one thing that binds us closer together and exactly the thing that tears two people apart, so I thought that was interesting. I decided to look at friendship that has secrets from its past and really a glue holding them together, and I wanted to look at, would that friendship survive if that secret was let loose in the world?

CB: Are there any characters in the book you personally identify with?

DM: I would probably say more Fiona. She is a fictive character, but I did give her pretty much [the bulk] of my acting career because it worked well for what I wanted her career to be like, and it was kind of fun getting to set up the situations in Hollywood, which are so vastly important when someone is in them, but looking back it's all kind of funny and ridiculous ... But, finally, she's a fictive character. It is fiction, [and] all of the tragedies and things that happen to her are not things I experienced at all. But in terms of a voice and an outlook at the world in terms of being from the South and living in Los Angeles and having a kind of fish-out-of-water, Southern mentality in L.A. — that's very much me.

CB: Which part was most difficult to write?

DM: I would think Fiona's husband [Neil], frankly. It's an important relationship, but just looking at it technically, the character really is just there to support her and to be a foil. You immediately see the triangle



Courtesy of HarperCollins Publishers

that happens in terms of loyalty and betrayal with Fiona telling Patricia before she tells Neil, ... but he's not a huge character like Zane. He ... doesn't change much, so with a character like that I think the trap one can fall into is the kind of being bland on the page, and I hope I didn't fall into that. ... The other ones were so real to me, and their voices were so loud, it was more a matter of getting them to shut up than making sure they were being heard.

CB: What do you want people to take away from this book?

DM: I hope that it will allow them to look at their own friendships and their lives and to look at their relationship with loyalty and betrayal. I think that whole triangle thing that happens — which I think is just fas-

inating — I don't know anyone, at least women, who have not fallen into that. We have our best friends, and suddenly we have a partner and then there is that whole funny thing of, "Where do my loyalties lie?" ... I don't think men go through that. And talking to other women who have read the book, they have said that back to me.

CB: What are you working on next?

DM: I am working on my third book, and at this point I'll only say that it's set entirely in south Louisiana. I'm leaving L.A. behind for now. It's interesting not to write about that city, [and] I think [after] writing two books based there, I was ready to move away from there for a bit in my imagination.

Koza Band to bring back low-key beats

INTERVIEW BY ALEX BOLES
Features Editor

A new artist is on the horizon to drown out today's melodramatic pop.

The Chris Koza Band offers the musical genius of Ben Folds with the creativity of Bright Eyes all into one with their latest album, "The Dark, Delirious Morning" released April 15, 2008.

The album consists of 12 solid tracks that could easily be mood-setting study music or the perfect soundtrack to fall asleep to. The music is subtle enough to where even the upbeat songs are calming.

The Kirksville Arts Association offers Summer on the Square, which includes free concerts on Friday nights, and this Friday features the Chris Koza Band. The Index was able to talk with Koza to find out about the inner workings of this musician.

Alex Boles: How old are you?
Chris Koza: Do you want my real age or my Hollywood age? I'm 29.

AB: Who are your influences?

CK: I love Beck and Paul Simon and David Bowie. Those are probably the three biggest ones. I think they all have such a unique approach to the crafting of a song and there's a strong emotional component to what they do. I think all three of them have put out works in the past that are timeless. I think they're good.

AB: Have you played in Kirksville before or other small towns?

CK: Kirksville is very tiny. I've been there a couple times. We played at the Dukum Up.



Courtesy of Chris Koza

AB: Are you looking forward to playing in Kirksville again?

CK: Absolutely. Every time we've been there it's been a great show. ... I like the city. It's nice. It's cool. It's like a little snow globe.

AB: Where is your favorite place to play?

CK: Well, I love playing Minneapolis, Minnesota, because that's where we're based out of. Some other cities that have been good are Yakima, Washington and Monterey, California. Those are two of my favorite ones outside of Minneapolis.

AB: When did you start your career

as a musician?

CK: I started writing songs using my own name about four years ago, and that's sort of when we started thinking about touring and getting outside of Minneapolis and touring with shows. So we've been touring a little bit over the last couple years but we've been touring a lot more over the last year. We've been on a couple national tours and right now we're on a two and a half week tour from Portland and back.

AB: Who are your band mates and how do you know them?

CK: I met them all out in Min-

neapolis. We all met about 10 years ago. We've played in different sorts of bands — different sort of music for about five or six years and then we started doing my solo stuff and they were just the logical people to have play, because we knew each other and I appreciate their musicianship and they're all very good.

AB: Do you play any instruments?

CK: Oh yeah. I play the acoustic guitar. I play piano, I play bass, little synthesizers, I can play the ocarina. Yeah.

AB: What's your favorite instrument to play?

CK: My favorite to play is probably the piano, but what I perform most is the guitar.

AB: If you could record with anyone, who would it be and why?

CK: I would love to do a show with My Morning Jacket. They're such a great live band and their recording is very interesting.

AB: What were your hobbies in high school?

CK: In high school I played magic cards, and I was in the theater productions. I was a drama geek and played magic cards. That's what I did.

AB: Where do you see yourself in five years?

CK: I'd love to be playing a show on a giant stage in Barcelona, but I don't know where I'll be. I see myself — I'd love to see myself very happy and satisfied in life. Making music and whatever else comes I will deal with it.

AB: When you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up?

CK: I guess when I was in high school I wanted to be a musician, songwriter and stuff. I guess when I was young I wanted to be what everyone wanted to be — an astronaut or a basketball player. I thought it would be great to design Lego sets. I wanted to create better things that you can do with Legos. I wanted to be a comic book artist, too.

AB: Who is your biggest inspiration that keeps you going?

CK: I guess it's my friends and family. They're all really supportive. I can't say that there is one person in particular. It's more of a ... it takes a village.

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