

Blue Note hosts Parade

BY ZOE MARTIN
Assistant Features Reporter

Despite the valiant efforts of local bars and the recent success of grassroots Facebook contests, Kirksville is not and probably never will be a live music Mecca. But with a half-tank of gas, some extra time and a little planning, Columbia's Blue Note is a not-too-far-away alternative to concert starvation.

Last Friday's acts drove much farther than the several Truman students present in the audience. The opener, Listening Party, hails from British Columbia, and Montreal — that modern-day Florence of the indie-rock Renaissance — claims the headliner, Wolf Parade.

Listening Party consists of three band members — a guitarist/chanter, bassist/chanter and drummer/singer — plus a drum machine and just about every other percussion instrument available, from maracas and tambourines to an African karimba (basically a piece of wood with metal tines attached). Bells were also entrusted to an audience member during one song.

The singer sounded like Bono, and the guitarist vaguely resembled Seth Rogen, but the band's sound was all its own. As evidenced by its instruments, Listening Party's sound was percussion-driven, so much so that

the lyrics to many of the songs were lost in the overall rhythm — not because they were inaudible but because the music spoke for itself. The bassist and guitarist provided backing vocals, crooning and yawping along with the lead singer, who in one song recorded a wordless chorus on a second microphone to loop under his other vocals. Combined, this created a rich and hypnotic vocal feast.

Wolf Parade was greeted by a sizeable crowd, either because it was playing Friday night in a college town or because, as the band acknowledged, this was its first tour in the Midwest. The tour follows its second album, "At Mount Zoomer," a glorious follow-up to 2005's critically lauded "Apologies to the Queen Mary"

(both Sub Pop Records). Modest Mouse's Isaac Brock introduced the band to the label, but although it shares that band's urgency and sonic experimentation, Wolf Parade is hardly a Modest Mouse Jr.

Just as the two lead singers, Dan Boeckner (guitar and vocals) and Spencer Krug (keyboard and vocals), alternated songs, the band pulled equally from its two major works. Boeckner played and sang with a frantic energy, spastically strumming at his guitar when he wasn't barking into the microphone. Krug, who looks a little like a high school math teacher and sipped from a coffee cup while

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Photo courtesy of Sub Pop Records

Wolf Parade — (clockwise from top left) Dan Boeckner, Arlen Thompson, Spencer Krug and Hadji Bakara — performed in Columbia Friday, Nov. 7.

his bandmates chugged beers, belied his benign appearance with passionately cynical lyrics. In "Dear Sons and Daughters of Hungry Ghosts," he spat out lines like "Now we'll say it's in God's hands/But God doesn't always have the best goddamn plans, does he?"

Krug's keyboard added a fun-house aspect to the darkly brooding songs, playing off Boeckner's guitar and Hadji Bakara's synth wizardry on songs like "California Dreamer," which rollercoasters

from the steady, whispering cadence of the verses to the shouting crescendos of the chorus.

Wolf Parade ended its main set with the 11-minute long "Kissing the Beehive" from its latest album. Leaving the stage, the band genuinely seemed surprised by the audience's enthusiastic feedback, and they returned after rowdy calls for an encore with many "Thanks, dudes" and even a polite "You're nice. That's a sweet gesture."

Boeckner and Krug's combined vocals at the end of the first song

of the encore, "It's a Curse," were hard to distinguish over the crashing instruments, but this technicality paled when the audience recognized the opening notes to the next song and exploded with appreciation. Wolf Parade played "I'll Believe in Anything," arguably the band's most popular song, at a frantic pace and ended the 90-minute show with another energetic track, "Fancy Claps," which was met with a lengthy round of standard claps and whistles from the satiated crowd.

Artists serve up weak fare with new albums

BY HARRY BURSON
Reviewer

Another week, another College Music Roundup. This time, we've got an old master reclaiming a lost classic, Hollywood soundtrack favorites trying their luck with a major-label debut and ponderous lit-rockers unloading a slew of new singles.

In 2006, venerated Velvet Underground founder Lou Reed collaborated with director Julian Schnabel, creating a concert film of his controversial 1973 album "Berlin." Reed recently released the CD soundtrack companion, "Berlin: Live at St. Ann's Warehouse."

Joined by a small orchestra, a choir and a band of regulars, Reed performs the entire original "Berlin" album plus a brief encore to a reverent, celebratory audience.

The fact that Reed is revisiting this album perhaps is a cause for celebration, if not at least mild interest. Following the massive success of his 1972 David Bowie-produced album "Transformer" (which included Reed's sole Top 40 hit, "Walk on the Wild Side") Reed created his darkest, most challenging work to date.

"Berlin" is a concept album following two lovers torn apart by drugs, depression and violence, using the city's infamous wall as a metaphor for isolation. Although the album had a few fierce advocates, the majority of the rock press — "Rolling Stone," most famously — panned it mercilessly. Reed's solo career arguably never really recovered as he sank into drug-addled self-parody on his subsequent albums.

The question is, of course, did the album deserve the critical scorn, or is it really a lost classic? The answer lies somewhere in between.

The campy rock-opera leanings of the original album are made somewhat of a liability by producer Bob Ezrin, best known for his work with the self-consciously schlocky Alice Cooper. Additionally, despite the many desperate lyrical passages that populate the songs, the narrative thread is nearly impossible to follow. "Berlin" perhaps is best remembered as the last time Lou Reed really tried.

And that's why the new album can be exciting — it's clear that Reed is invigorated by the material and gives his all with his ragged voice and his singular electric guitar playing, an instrument he didn't touch on the original album.

His stately, aged voice suits the desperation of the songs, here improved by superior



Photo courtesy of the88.net

The 88's (above) new album "Not Only ... But Also" marked the band's major label debut, but it already claims more than 40 music placements in film, television and advertising.

arrangements courtesy of the project's co-producer, arranging ace Hal Wilner.

Reed's renditions of the title track, "Caroline Says II" and the epic closer "Sad Song" are stirring and among the greatest performances of his career.

"Berlin" always has been dense and intrinsically flawed, mired in overblown rock conceits the Velvet Underground so artfully undermined. That said, even divorced from the film's visuals, this album is a far superior, definitive version of the original album. Despite its imperfections, this is a doggedly moving, great album from one of rock 'n' roll's eminent geniuses.

California power pop group the 88 has just released its first major-label album "Not Only ... But Also."

All the press surrounding the 88 makes it clear the band wants you to know how much its music has been used in commercials, on television and in movies. The list is impressive, with about 40 songs used in various ads and shows during the last five

years. The implication here is that because its music is so popular among Hollywood producers, it must be pretty darn catchy.

That is sort of the case, but more importantly it speaks to the inoffensive blandness of the product. Perhaps you remember that Moby also was a choice artist for ad men at the turn of the century.

The group defines its sound as power pop, which is a vague genre classification only applied to white rock ensembles. The "power" of course refers to driving guitars and propulsive drums, while the "pop" refers not to popularity (very few power pop acts get much radio play) but to a band's reliance on hooks and classicist songwriting techniques while shying away from risk-taking production.

From progenitors Big Star to Teenage Fanclub to Fountains of Wayne to OK Go, power pop is a respected genre generating cult bands whose audiences love to complain how their fave group is way catchier than anything on

the radio. Sometimes one of these bands actually manages to sneak a song into the Top 40 ("Stacy's Mom"), but it's usually a fluke.

The 88 would love to follow in this musical tradition, but the band's debut album "Not Only ... But Also" (winner of the Roundup's most forgettable album title of the year award) seriously lacks when it comes to the "power" part of the genre taxonomy.

There are a few attempts on the album at upbeat rock 'n' roll ("Go Go Go" and "Sons and Daughters") but for the most part the band stays in the adult contemporary category with polite, mid-tempo pop songs like "Coming Home" and "It's a Lot" that, well, wouldn't sound out of place in a Target commercial. And according to Wikipedia, "Coming Home" actually is featured in both a Target and Sears commercial.

The band only strengthens its adult contemporary appeal with lead vocalist Adam Merrin's over-emotive vocals.

The songs on "Not Only ... But Also" are not offensive or difficult. In fact they always are affectively pleasant. If you can get past the mannered, dull production I'm sure you eventually will find yourself singing along to the songs here. Just be prepared to share the CD with your mom.

Recognizing the potential death of the album as popular music's main medium, the Decemberists are releasing three double-sided singles in October and November loosely grouped together under the title "Always a Bridesmaid: A Collection of Singles."

For anyone who finds the group's long-winded suites that made up the majority of the band's last album, "The Crane Wife," these singles are for you.

Although still suffering from slightly annoying literary pretensions (Did you know Colin Meloy was a creative writing major?) the first single "Valorie Plame" is the Decemberists' catchiest tune to date. Driven by banjos and tubas reminiscent of the Band, singer Meloy recounts his infatuation with the ousted CIA operative. Not exactly timely, but as Borat would say, very nice!

The other singles are not as great. The band stumbles through a cover of the Velvet Underground's "I'm Sticking With You," recently made famous by the "Juno" soundtrack, and Colin Meloy's voice is grating on quiet numbers like "Raincoat Song." So focus on "Valorie Plame," and even if you've never been a big Decemberists fan, you should give the song a chance.

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Universal produces unoriginal new comedy

BY TYLER GEORGE
Reviewer

From small-time director David Wain comes the new release "Role Models" — Hollywood's latest in comedies chock full of crude humor and gratuitous expletives. The film is a 99-minute reminder of why films that lack a decent plot are still popular: because they're funny.

Danny and Wheeler are representatives for the energy drink Minotaur, a company not unlike Red Bull. Their job is to drive an outlandish looking bull truck from middle school to middle school where Danny (Paul Rudd) delivers a half-hearted, don't-do-drugs-drink-Minotaur speech while Wheeler (Seann William Scott) dances around in a ridiculous

Minotaur mascot costume in the background.

Danny's girlfriend Beth (Elizabeth Banks) declines his desperate proposal and moves out. This terrible day is climaxed by our heroes trying to keep the Minotaurmobile from being towed, resulting in legal trouble and assault charges. Conveniently enough, Beth ends up becoming their legal adviser and gets the two off the hook with 150 hours of community service.

Actress extraordinaire Jane Lynch enters the scene as Gayle Sweeney, the head honcho of Sturdy Wings, a Big Brothers-like program. In order to avoid serving time, Danny and Wheeler have to serve as 'big's to two children.

We first meet Wheeler's little, Ronnie (Bobb'e J. Thompson),

a fatherless, standoffish child with a mouth almost as dirty as

Wheeler's. Next we are introduced to Augie (Christopher Mintz-Plasse), a supergeek from the realm of a Dungeons and Dragons knockoff, L.A.I.R.E., who seems to enjoy keeping to himself. Danny and Wheeler deem themselves doomed but are forced to somehow make things work between them and their new friends or land themselves in jail.

One of the most frustrating

things about this plot is its terrible inevitability. We've all seen this

movie before. It's your basic attempted feel-good movie that results in two very different people — Wheeler and Ronnie or Danny and Augie, take your pick — becoming the best of friends, learning life lessons from each other and all that jazz. The problem is the writers tried to combine vulgar comedy with

a heartwarming story, and the two plots simply don't mix. Teens and adults of immature stock undoubt-

edly will love it, but the message the writers had in mind will not be received at all.

My outstanding acting award this time goes to Jane Lynch. Lynch plays the role of the insecure ex-cokehead den mother of Sturdy Wings. She brightened up the movie quite a bit and made it a lot more bearable with her witty comments and rebuttals to Wheeler and Danny's "B.S." Her smart-aleck remarks and know-it-all personality made the role for her.

The film was not bad, just not as entertaining a comedy as the others so far this year. Overall, if you're looking for a movie with crude humor that does not surpass the maturity level of middle schoolers, "Role Models" is the film for you.

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