

AROUNDTOWN

Dirty Dancing musically stuns audience

by **Zoe Ljubic**
Editor in Chief

The Cadillac Palace Theater has taken full advantage of its large and beautiful scenery in the staging of the Broadway-in-Chicago musical *Dirty Dancing*. *Dirty Dancing* involves

energetic dancing, dynamic singing and vital acting that will entertain every theatergoer.

Dirty Dancing is a classic story of two independent young spirits, Frances "Baby" Houseman (Amanda Leigh Cobb) and Johnny Castle (Josef Brown), from two different worlds, who come together in the most challenging and glorious summer of their lives. Cast members perform sensational dance numbers to heart-pounding music to tell the story of the Housemans' summer vacation in 1963.

Dirty Dancing involves an engaging plot of heartbreak and emotion among characters. Although the show features a few cheesy pick-up lines and over-the-top sarcasm, the breathtaking dancing and emotional love ties call for an entertaining show.

The wonderful stage setting and hit songs leave theatergoers satisfied. Choreographed dance numbers impressed audience members, as evidence by the smiles on the faces of most attendees.

Splashes of humor, including a ludicrous hula dance number by Lisa Houseman (Katlyn Carlson), lightened up the sometimes somber mood of the show.

The *Dirty Dancing* cast's performance leaves audience members emotionally attached to characters. It does not surprise this reviewer that during Castle's departure scene, an audience member or two was seen with tears rolling down his/her cheeks.

Extraordinary performances include Penny Johnson's (Britta Lazenga) phenomenal dual dance ensemble with Castle and the breathtaking Houseman/Castle finale to "Time of Your Life." These two ensembles easily draw the attention of audience members with their energetic and well-choreographed dance to strong upbeat music.

Cast members perform many musical dance numbers that involve fast-paced music with sexy dance moves to make *Dirty Dancing* a success. Another upside of the production is the scenery. The simple background quickly adjusts to the correct backdrop of the current scene allowing theatergoers to envision themselves apart of the show.

While some might criticize director James Powell for his slavish devotion to the film, this reviewer found that to be one of the play's strengths.

The only negative aspect of what was an otherwise delightful evening can regard the configuration of the commodious Cadillac Palace. Theatergoers who, like this reviewer, end up sitting in the balcony may have trouble viewing each angle of the stage.

This minor annoyance notwithstanding, *Dirty Dancing* exceeds expectations. Cast members' easy acceptance of one another in conversations and extraordinary dance numbers make *Dirty Dancing* a musical lovers of the theatre do not want to miss.



Dirty Dancing



The Cadillac Palace Theater

Bees does not succeed as a tear-jerker

by **Christine Mahoney**
Copy Editor

The Secret Life of the Bees, adapted to the silver screen by director Gina Prince-Bythewood from the best-selling book by author Sue Monk Kidd, is a tear-jerking story chock-full of syrupy sweet and maudlin moments that alternate in annoying fashion. Although the movie deals with themes of child abuse, racism, death, and acceptance, any lessons to be learned are lost, as the movie leaves the audience with a sickly sweet taste in its collective mouth.

The film is burdened down by melancholy stories that bring characters together. The movie begins by viewing the world through the eyes of a helpless Lily, played by Dakota Fanning, watching a melodramatic fight between her parents. The scene ends with a clap of a gun followed by Fanning's voiceover, which declares, stoically, that at four, she accidentally shot and killed her mother.

The movie jumps 10 years, when an older, headstrong Lily is living with her abusive, drunk father T. Ray, played by Paul Bettany. T. Ray instills in Lily that her mother never loved her and forces her to kneel on dry grits—no, really—when she acts out.

One day, Lily runs away with the African-American housekeeper Rosaleen (Jennifer Hudson), who is beaten and jailed after an argument with a group of white men on her way to register to vote. The two of them wander the countryside to find themselves in a town called Tiburon, where three black women named August (erstwhile rapper Queen Latifah), June (miscast singer Alicia Keys) and May (Sophie Okonedo) befriend them.

The three sisters possess very different personalities. The eldest, August, who tends to the bees, is one of limitless wisdom and generosity. Her motherly persona makes it such that everyone in her presence—including the bees—experiences immediate calm. June, who plays the cello, is the beautiful, intelligent sister, who, at first, is opposed to sheltering the two runaways. May, the youngest of the trio, is the childlike sister who is so profoundly overwhelmed by the world's burdens that her sisters build her a "wailing wall" where she can finish her cries.

As the film limps along, the women's battles become more apparent but the ills of the world are no contest to the strength of the beehive. The film tries desperately to cross-pollinate the importance of female power and insect life in a cumbersome battle that makes the theme of bees all the more unnecessary. Frequently, the audience feels a stinging sense of how much the

film wants to focus on the lives of the women rather than the relevance of bees.

At any rate, the film crawls like a wingless wasp. In spite of the beautiful scenery and lessons to be learned, the movie becomes a trite yawn-worthy, stereotyped chronicle of oppressed blacks determined to break barriers by mothering a needy, color-blind white child, sort of a reverse *Diff'rent Strokes*. Although the subject matter tends to be painful, each bitter moment is drizzled with sweet honey so as not to offend the taste buds. Meant to be sentimental, the dramatic on-cue crying, heartwarming hugs and overtly emotional scenes only serve to make the audience uncomfortable, and Prince-Bythewood and Monk's uninspired screenplay results in unconvincing performances by all the actors.

In the end, the film buzzed around a weak attempt to be a saccharine-sweet and sentimental chick flick that should not have spanned an excruciating 1:50. This reviewer's suggestion is that the next time Keys and Latifah perform together, it should be in concert.

The Secret Life of Bees



Directed By Gina Prince Bythewood



AROUNDTOWN

Bliss entertains teens with chilling novel

W Hillary Lindwall
News/Wire Editor

Upon discovering that *Bliss* is a horror novel about a teenage hippie, a reader may seem skeptical concerning the nature of the story.

Taking place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, this unique topic about which Lauren Myracle writes immediately grasps attention. A prequel to Myracle's book, *Rhymes with Witches*, *Bliss* serves as a chilling depiction of a story that includes secrecy, death, social topics of the time, power struggles and typical teenage issues.

Bliss Inthemorningdew, a teenage hippie who previously lived on a commune, has just moved in with her grandmother in Atlanta, GA. Her hippie parents have left her there in order to explore Canada. Bliss, who has never attended a real school before, is thrust into private school life by her grandmother.

Bliss begins school as a freshman at Crestview

Academy. Soon, she discovers the rumor that a girl killed herself by jumping from the third story window of one of the buildings. Bliss is especially rattled by this story because she has been hearing a bone-chilling voice in her head whenever she has approached the building. Not wanting to make a bad first impression on her newly acquired friends, she decides that telling this secret would not be very wise.

In addition to her new friends, Bliss befriends the loner of her grade, Sandy, because of a good deed that she witnessed her perform. Bliss and Sandy share many ideas that Bliss formed while raised on the commune and quickly become very good friends.

The plot begins to get unnerving when the story of Liliana, the girl who died at Crestview, becomes increasingly vivid. Her fascination with blood and sacrifices creates a chilling portrayal of Liliana's

strange viewpoints.

After Sandy becomes fascinated by the story

of Liliana, she desires to become exactly like her. Bliss sees that this could not possibly turn out well and begins to try to break off her friendship with Sandy because of her obsession.

The climax of the story occurs at the end of the novel at the winter dance, at which Sandy wishes to perform a ritual in which Bliss is sacrificed in order to resurrect Liliana. The denouement is unsettling and includes suspense, horror, action and death.

Myracle chooses to set the book in a unique era, heretofore virtually unexplored in young adult fiction, which immediately causes interest. The novel's verisimilitude is enhanced by the inclusion of actual historical figures and social events of the time such as racism and the Tate-LaBianca murder trials. The Tate-LaBianca murders were one of the most controversial crimes of the 70s. Many people were slaughtered by Charles Manson and his followers, including the pregnant wife of famous, expatriate movie director Roman Polanski.

Between each chapter, there is a black page with a quote from either the *Andy Griffith Show* or a social event or song lyric from the time. Each quote gives an idea of what the next chapter will hold. Myracle uses a lot of 1970s slang throughout the dialogue of the story, such as "groovy" and "far-out." This gives the book a playful spin while also lending an air of authenticity.

Myracle's style is very easy to follow, and her writing flows very well. *Bliss* is a light read, mostly because of the action that occurs and short chapters. Myracle also includes several journal entries between chapters, which add a sense of mystery to the story.

Also, her narrative structure is easy to follow. The reader does not get lost because of a plot that jumps around or occurs at different times. Rather, Myracle creates a rather linear style, which makes *Bliss* a pressure-free, simple read.

Although the book contains many positive elements, many of the main characters are unlikable, making for a less enjoyable read. Also, the ending of the book is very dissatisfying and leaves the reader feeling unfulfilled and depressed.

These drawbacks aside, at 444 pages, *Bliss* is an easy, entertaining diversion. It is a nice change from the typical teen novel. Myracle's quirky style and chilling ideas engage the reader. *Bliss* is a good book for someone who is looking for a deviation from the ordinary and wishes for a suspenseful story full of twists and turns.



Mediocre food of Tapas Las Ramblas falls short

W Naomi Prale
Around Town Editor

For those diners who want to challenge their taste buds with a different kind of cuisine, Andersonville's Tapas Las Ramblas would seem to be the place for adventurous diners.

Upon entering the restaurant, one notices the bright, multicolored walls, which give a friendly impression. The restaurant is dimly lit with Chinese lanterns hanging in the dining room and bar.

Although the restaurant is known for its Spanish *tapas* (small portions akin to appetizers) the atmosphere and décor of the restaurant do not necessarily appear to be Spanish, one of a number of contradictions at Tapas Las Ramblas.

Once settled, it is time to choose from the menu, which has a wide variety of hot and cold *tapas* dishes, salads, paella and dessert. The dishes offered range from seafoods, to meat to vegetarian dishes. Although a bit expensive, Tapas Las Ramblas offers a wide variety of dishes.

The Spanish/Mexican *tapas* did not make a big impression on this reviewer. Cold dishes (*tapas frias*) range \$4-9. Hot dishes (*Tapas Calientes*) range from \$4-10. The limited portions make it a good idea to order a bunch of *tapas* plates, and share the dishes with friends.

The *tortilla espanola con ensalada* (\$5) looks like a slice of pie. It is creamy, with potato and onion in the middle. The somewhat tasty dish is accompanied by flavorful and spicy tomatoes that balance out the cool flavor of the omelet.

The *championones relleno*, (\$6) or stuffed mushroom caps with spinach, garlic and *manchego* cheese give a warm, tasty flavor. The mushrooms arrive in very hot sets of four. Unfortunately, the mushrooms during this visit were extremely bland.

Another hot *tapas*; *solomillo a la plancha* (\$10) contains grilled prime beef tenderloin with a blue cheese sauce. Despite the sauce, the dish lacked favor.

To finish off the meal, the diner can choose from a small variety of desserts, ranging \$4-6. The *peres al vino* (\$6) is a pear completely drenched in a raspberry sauce, with a scoop of vanilla ice cream on the side. The sauce is

extremely sweet, but delicious nonetheless. If one wants a more American dessert, the pumpkin cheesecake (\$6) is an exceptionally sweet dessert that gave the meal a sweet ending. A creamy, soft texture gives the cheesecake a light and comfortable taste.

Dessert was by far the highlight of the meal, ironic considering that the restaurant's ostensible claim to fame is its *tapas*.

This reviewer's server was friendly and constantly checked up on the table making sure everything was in order. All dishes arrived on time and were presented elegantly.

Tapas Las Ramblas was not crowded on this Saturday night, but the restaurant's website, www.tapaslasramblas.com, indicates that it is crowded on some nights and that a reservation



Photo by Naomi Prale

is recommended.

Overall, the restaurant had a comfortable atmosphere with mediocre food, and exceptional desserts.

The restaurant is located at 5101 N. Clark St., a half hour drive from Skokie on a Saturday night. Call (773) 769-9700 for reservations.



Midnight Club takes new twist on racing games

W Rexly Penaflores
Managing Editor

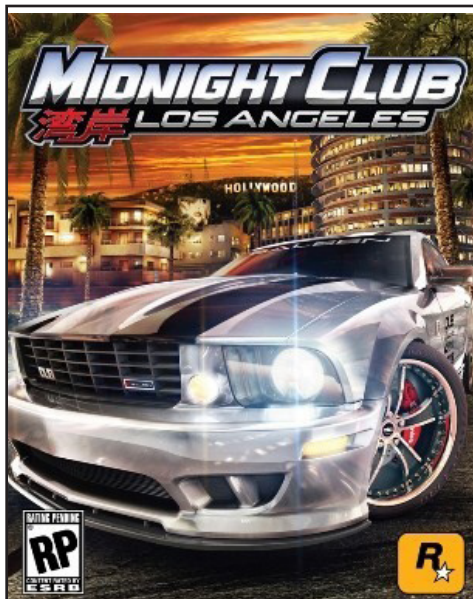
Although Rockstar Games is best known for the disturbingly graphic *Grand Theft Auto* series, the video game manufacturer has released a new, less violent game that targets auto racing fans instead of wannabe thugs. *Midnight Club Los Angeles* brings a new experience to the racing franchise and is sure to keep players up for hours.

The main character is a driver from the Midwest who comes to Los Angeles to race. From that point on, the player competes in a multitude of races to reach the top rank of City Champ.

The game play is something to be admired. The diversity of the races, ranging from a traditional waypoint race to a car delivery contest, keeps the controller in the player's hands. At one time, there can be 10-15 races available, which offers great variety. However, the length of the races is a bit too long, and some races are actually tournaments which consist of three races.

The opponents are relentless. They will do anything to keep the player from finishing in first place. If that were not challenging enough, there are also police looking for illegal street

racing (this *is* a Rockstar game, after all). If the player causes an accident while racing or is seen breaking the law, (s)he has the option of pulling over and getting a ticket or running from the



cops. The latter of the two choices is the harder one because if the player hits a wall or a car, police immediately corner the player so there is no chance of escape.

Midnight Club offers a variety of cars. They fall under the categories of tuners, muscles and exotics. The cars are great, and some cars, such as the Saleen are a must-have, but there are not a lot of cars available. In total, there are only 30 cars available, much fewer than similar games such as *Gran Turismo 5: Prologue*, which has about 60-70 cars.

Compensating for the limited variety, the customizing options are numerous. Everything in each car can be customized. From the doors, to the rims and the seats, the possibilities are endless. Players can even have customized set of vinyls for their cars.

Los Angeles is a big city, and Rockstar Games has done a great job in reproducing the city. Every landmark is where it should be in real life. Even the map in the menu screen shows an accurate, three-dimensional rendering of the the nation's second largest city.

From racing cars to delivering them, *Midnight Club: Los Angeles* is sure to please race-loving gamers.



Bosstones save disappointing concert

Bridget

W Van Der Bosch
Staff Writer

Imagine spending an entire day in a concert hall filled with the faux punks, sporting bright green and red Mohawks, studded belts and two-sizes-too-skinny jeans, sitting and watching the same old no-name bands. That was Riot Fest in a nutshell.

Taking place on the weekend of Oct. 10-12, Riot Fest hit Chicago with a bunch of the biggest names in punk, ska and many other punk sub-genres. Riot Fest consisted of over 30 bands at five different venues. On Sunday, Oct. 12, this reviewer went to Congress Theater at 11:30 a.m. to see the grand finale of the punk mayhem in Chicago.

The first band that caught this reviewer's attention was the ska-punk band Mustard Plug. The obscure band from Detroit rocked the stage and pumped up the crowd for a too-short 30 minutes.

Although scheduled to perform only five songs and although their set was much shorter than most of the other bands, Mustard Plug really got the audience on their feet and played a fast-paced, energetic show. Opening with "Mr. Smiley," a song off their second album, *The Big Daddy Multitude*, band members showed off their skill and emphasized their use of brass to

create a mixture of genres, including punk and jazz. After three high energy numbers from their current CD (*Black and White*), their first since 2002, they finished their set with an old favorite "Beer" off their self-titled sixth disc. Not surprisingly, the crowd went nuts.

Several no-name bands followed, inspiring boredom, before Boston's ska veterans, The Mighty Mighty Bosstones took the stage for an extended set. Best known for "The Impression That I Get," the multiracial band employs elements of both third wave ska (also known as Jamaican ska) and hardcore punk to create a sound all their own. Playing for almost two hours, the band never missed a beat. With both the audience and the band "skanking" (a dance created specifically for ska music), the Bosstones played exciting and upbeat songs such as "Another Drinkin' Song" off *Let's Face It* and "Mr. Moran" and "Sugar Free," from their 2002 album *A Jackknife To A Swan*.

By the end of the Bosstones' set list, almost the entire crowd was dancing—and sweating. Frontman Dickie Barrett ended the set by

saying that this year's Riot Fest had the most "punk" and "hardcore" fans the band had ever seen. With that, they left everyone screaming and cheering. They were the best band of the evening.

After yet another interlude of boring, anonymous, talentless posers, this reviewer hoped that The Casualties would rouse her

to sing along with him.

At Riot Fest however, Herrera was nowhere to be found. The Casualties hit the stage with a different singer fronting the band. Not only was he uncharismatic, he did not even know the correct lyrics to all of the songs. Many were disappointed at the mere fact that The Casualties didn't play some of their most loved songs, such as "On the Front Line," preferring to play new material from an as-yet-unreleased album (perhaps featuring the new lead singer). New music is usually a good thing from The Casualties, but a lot of the fans did not appreciate not knowing any of the songs they played. The Casualties were the biggest disappointment of Riot Fest 2008.

Other bands performing at Riot Fest included the HorrorPops, ALL, Leftover Crack, Violent Thorr, Paint it Black, Teenage Bottlerocket, and many more, nearly all of which were utterly forgettable.

Next year's Riot Fest better be a lot more impressive than this year. Without The Mighty Might Bosstones saving the evening, this concert was one mob short of a riot.



from her torpor. I had seen them many times previously and was very excited because they had an unusual stage presence for a hardcore punk band. Although their music is harsh and the lyrics are political and cynical, the lead singer, Jorge Herrera, had an inviting stage presence. He would always talk to the audience, explaining what the songs The Casualties were singing meant to him and always inviting people



Dream Reapers does not deliver scary horror

W Sarah Espinosa
Sports Editor

Halloween should be a time for terror. A haunted house should be something that would make its visitors run around screaming or jump every left and right turn.

Unfortunately, this reviewer went to Dream Reapers in Melrose Park with such high expectations—and came away disappointed.

A 30-minute drive from Skokie, Dream Reapers is (thankfully) inexpensive, only \$15 per person, excluding the tolls, the only good thing about it.

During an excruciatingly dull 45 minutes to get inside to the haunted house, Dream Reapers does provide entertainment while waiting. A lady in skeleton-like make up locks customers in a coffin for four minutes \$3 for one or \$5 with a friend.

The coffin has a camera inside that allows the other house customers to see the person's reaction on a large television, which lends a

certain voyeuristic appeal.

However, since the coffin was the only diversion at the beginning of the line there is not much else to do. On this balmy evening, patrons' boredom turned their attention to the heat.

It was about 80 degrees inside the air conditioned environment, with only one large fan in the back of the structure. The fact that the haunted house was crammed with approximately 65 sweaty strangers all close together turned out to be the most frightening experience of the evening.

Farther along in the line, there is a place to take a free photo for which one can buy a frame along with other memorabilia at the end of the tour.

Once inside, patrons are forced to watch a five-minute safety procedure video on a large screen. After the safety lesson, one rides in a bumpy and boring elevator to the second floor for the first "fright" of the evening, an unoriginal, cemetery-like room. Moving through the house

one encounters killjoy clowns with gruesome make up that will do little but scream in one's face. In certain rooms the attempt to stimulate horror was pathetic, especially the pink "blood" dripping from the walls, the sweet smell of which made this reviewer suspect that it was food-colored syrup.

Overall, Dream Reapers might entertain and frighten those aged 12 and under, making them hold onto someone while they close their eyes, but for adults and teens, the 15-minute, not-so-haunted house and is not worth the wait nor is it worth the drive.

Nevertheless, those who seek a Halloween diversion other than egging windows might want to check out Dream Reapers, which will still be open tonight and tomorrow night, 7-11 p.m. Dream Reapers is located at 1945 Cornell, Melrose Park.



Photo Courtesy of DreamReapers.com



Foreign Exchange's new album focuses on love and relationships

W Christine Mahoney
Copy Editor

Any Hip-hop junkie longing for a sound other than the formulaic commercial music heard on the radio would greatly appreciate Foreign Exchange's (FE) sophomore effort *Leave it All Behind* (LIAB).

The group was formed when North Carolina-based artist Phonte and Holland-based producer Nicolay came together in 2002 via hip-hop online community, www.okayplayer.com. After exchanging files through e-mail and instant messaging for over a year before meeting, their debut album *Connected* was released in 2004 to the praise of legendary DJs, such as Jazzy Jeff, King Britt and DJ Spinna, for its innovative, seamless blend of hip-hop, R&B and electronica.

LIAB brought FE members much closer in

geography since Nicolay became a resident of North Carolina, but much farther from their hip-hop roots. The duo's sophomore album channels Phonte's R&B crooning alter ego, Percy Miracles, while showcasing Nicolay's genre-defying talent. In comparison to *Connected*, LIAB employs a darker sound and more mature lyrics that lend themselves to Phonte's surprisingly wide range of vocals.

Upon first listen, one who knows (and loves) Phonte's quirky humor, would be disappointed to hear him giving in to a sweeter, sometimes sappy persona. Though the absence of Phonte's comical musings may

dissatisfy some, fans can now gain further introspection to his persona and views of love.

The album walks through different stages of love and relationships—as does any R&B LP—but Phonte still shines through with amusing lyrics on "All or Nothing/ Come Home to You," when he whimpers, "Did you really have to say that you gon' leave me/ Just 'cause I undressed and left my clothes on the floor?"

Although Phonte's singing is quite impressive, the two songs on which he raps leave the audience yearning for more. This is when the audience realizes that his strong suit is



indeed rapping as opposed to singing.

Each song on the album shares a story about different aspects of relationships. Nicolay developed a sound exclusive to FE by incorporating spacey string arrangements, jazz horns and electronica keyboard to provide a dreamy, memory-evoking, laid-back feel.

Overall, the album proves to be a refreshing relief from the whiny vocals and meaningless lyrics coming through the radio waves. In fact, LIAB is just the opposite. Fruitful of real life passion and kick back rhythms LIAB emits a feel good mood and soul. After a listen, one may become hooked on FE, and as for other music, leave it all behind.



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