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Crank Up the Hootie and Pass the Deep-Fried Twinkies, It's Almost Time for Seventh Heaven!

Our Guilty Pleasures... Various Weekly writers admit to silly, unfashionable enthusiasms for your amusement.

Music

Scott Dickensheets: Let's talk about "Blinded by the Light": I prefer the Manfred Mann remake to the Springsteen original. This is clearly wrong. Damn it, Scott, you're a Springsteen guy! And the Boss's version, goosed by that jaunty, skittering sax and loose, pumping melody, is more human and danceable. It might be because I don't dance, but I have both CDs and put on Mann's version more often. What I'm saying, I think, is that a self-consciously portentous treatment—the low-rent psychedelia, the overlapping vocals, the showy, acidic guitar break—is the best way to showcase bad Dylan-style lyrics.

Forgive me, Bruce! Will it make things right between us if I say I'm with you on "Spirits in the Night." Mann's version sucked.

Geoff Carter: I don't know if the soundtrack to the 1980 roller-disco epic Xanadu qualifies as a guilty pleasure anymore. We've come so far—through emo and electroclash and that "Badger Snake Mushroom" ditty—that I honestly don't know if the combination of Olivia Newton-John and the Electric Light Orchestra has the capacity to shock and divide as it once did. I'm a little bit pop-country and a little bit watered-down prog-and-roll, and to my mind it doesn't get any better than "All Over the World" and "Magic" and "I'm Alive." I can't do that Cliff Richard number, though, and the Tubes shoulda quit after "White Punks on Dope."

On a related note, I'm hooked on that Bands Reunited show on VH1. Even the episode that featured the reunification of Berlin—a band I never liked—stirred my emotions, and I felt once again like I was 18 years old and had the entire world by the short, spiky and bleach-damaged hair. If Bands Reunited could put Olivia back with Jeff Lynne, I'd be willing to believe in a God—even one that didn't offer the key to my brand new pair of rollerskates, theologically speaking.

Damon Hodge: I wanted to be like Mike. Who didn't back in the early 1980s, when the Gloved One set the choreographed standard for toughness (Beat It) and mack daddyness (Billie Jean)? Even as he's working on his membership into NAMBLA, I still



Photos by Benjamin Purvis

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listen to old-school MJ. Can't help it. Songs like "The Lady in My Life" and "Fun Stuff" harken to less-complicated times, when Michael was proud to be black.

Josh Bell: There are few sins a music critic can commit that are greater than admitting to liking Hootie and the Blowfish. And despite having plenty of potentially shameful CDs in my collection—Twisted Sister, Alanis Morissette, "Weird Al" Yankovic, Evanescence—I really only ever cringe when I come to the two Hootie CDs, right after Hole and a little before Jane's Addiction, sapping any credibility I might have as a music connoisseur. Why do I like them enough to have not one but two of their albums in my possession?

This is all I have to say: Put the 12 million-selling Cracked Rear View in your car stereo, and drive around for 45 minutes, or however long the album runs. You will sing along. I guarantee it. Rear View is everything every critic ever said it was—schmaltzy, overblown, generic, middle-of-the-road—and at the same time it's catchy as a venereal disease. Twelve million Hootie fans were not wrong, even if they don't want to admit it to themselves anymore.

Maria Phelan: Justin Timberlake's Justified and Nelly's Nellyville—both albums belong to my roommate, so I don't have to own up to buying them, but they've been in the CD player since we moved into our apartment six months ago, and I haven't even thought about removing them. I might have accidentally asked for a burned copy of each for my car as well.

Steve Bornfeld: I am not a Madonna fan. This, in fact, is an understatement. (Her butchery and assault on the storied collection of James Bond themes with her rendition of Die Another Day makes me reach for my Walther PPK.) Yet, I am instantly transformed into a weepy, blubbering, pansy-ass mess whenever I catch A League of Their Own on television and stick around for her incredibly evocative, wistfully beautiful end theme, "This Used To Be My Playground." Transported back to the playground of my youth—and the lost innocence accompanying it—I dissolve.

Crying at a movie about girly baseball players.

Weird, Possibly Creepy Behavior

Damon Hodge: Me and flatulence, well, we have a thing going on. See, I've been blessed—or cursed, if you're on my bad side—with the unique ability to toot at the most inconvenient times. In elevators, at church and at work, as a former cubicle-mate can attest.

Josh Bell: June 13, 2004. That's the day when Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen will turn 18, a day that I have circled on the Olsen Twins calendar that hangs in my cubicle. There are also handy websites that count down the months, weeks, days, hours and minutes until the two are legal. And what, really, is the pleasure to be gained from the Olsen Twins? Yes, they're hot, but that's not really the point. Let's be honest: There are plenty of other young female celebrities who are just as hot, if not hotter. The thing about the Olsens is: They're twins. There are two of them, sitting there looking hot on the wall of my cubicle.

More importantly, I remember when they were barely toddlers, hanging out with Bob Saget and John Stamos and Candace Cameron on that bastion of Friday-night family television, Full House. The twins have grown up before our very eyes, and there's something captivating about watching them change from cute, mildly annoying little girls into sexy, mildly annoying young women. The fact that they've somehow built a multibillion-dollar empire on straight-to-video movies that all have the same plot, and



Olsen Twins toothpaste and overalls, might have something to do with it as well. Mostly, though, it's the anticipation, and once that 18th birthday hits, if one or both doesn't head off to do softcore porn, people will seriously lose interest. I've got a Hilary Duff poster ready just in case.

Joe "Can We Call Me Anonymous?" Schoenmann: When does an illicit pleasure stop being guilty? For instance: knocking off work as early as possible.

Pleasure? Yes. Guilty? Well, it used to be.

The thing is, it's so universal here, it's like finally being able to get into a tavern without a fake ID. What's the fun of that? Though there aren't any statistics on "Leaving Work Early Syndrome," you don't need a Ph.D to know what it means that I-15 begins to cram with traffic shortly after 2:30 p.m.—after 1:30 p.m. on Fridays.

Not that, you know, I do any such thing. Not guilty!

Editor's note: We'll be watching, Joe.

Stacy J. Willis: Enough said? Karaoke? How embarrassing is that? Everybody—everybody—hates karaoke. But how is that possible? Years ago, I was two pitchers into the night at a bar of some sort when they broke out the karaoke machine, and this little man sang the Bon Jovi song "Shot through the heart, and you're to blame, darling you give love a bad name," except he couldn't pronounce the R's or L's, so it was, "Shot thwu the hawt, and yu to bwame, dawwin you give wuv a bad name." It was a seminal moment in my love of people who can't sing and the songs that move them to do so anyway. And yes, I, too, am a person who can't sing but who has been known to take a microphone and butcher the best: Patsy Cline's "I Fall To Pieces" is my favorite. Man, you should hear me miss the high notes.

Damon Hodge: One of these eons, the Cincinnati Bengals will win the Super Bowl. Until that time, I'll continue hopelessly defending my faith in what's become the NFL's version of the Bad News Bears. I'm buoyed by the fact that the sun shines on a dog's ass every now and then. We Bengals fans are about due.

Act Your Age!

Josh Bell: I'm sure people are too polite to tell me, but I dress like a 14-year-old. In fact, I still shop for clothes in many of the same places I had my parents take me when I was 14, chief among them mall "alternative" store Hot Topic. When I was a teenager, Hot Topic seemed like a doorway into another world, full of T-shirts advertising bands I'd only vaguely heard of, clerks with multiple piercings and clothes that I wished the girls I went to school with would wear. I don't remember feeling any shame walking into the store with my parents and having them pay the tattooed register jockey for my Metallica and Pearl Jam shirts.

But wearing shirts advertising bands popular from 1994-1996 eventually got old, and returning to Hot Topic as an adult is a scary prospect. Now when I walk into the store I feel like a really out-of-touch guy who just can't move on. Everyone is shorter than me and cooler than me, and I imagine the tattooed register jockey fixing me with a look of contempt as I pay for my Metallica and Audioslave T-shirts. I look at the large display of trucker hats and shudder. Yet I always walk out satisfied with my purchases, somehow confident in my personal style, certain that as long as I'm a self-aware Hot Topic shopper, things will be all right.



Jeffrey M. Anderson: Now, there shouldn't be any guilt associated with a young man's fascination with a video game, but Grand Theft Auto: Vice City is no ordinary game. The orgy of sex, blood, violence and bad '80s music that is Vice City has become the bane of my existence and the answer to all my problems. From writer's block to unyielding sexual frustrations, there's nothing a Vice Citywide crime spree can't cure. And since I've got an X-Box cooking, I can dump my copy of Abbey Road onto the hard drive and listen to the Beatles instead of the goddamn Flock of Seagulls. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've gotta take Ray Liotta (he's the star), a cherry red Ferrari, a hooker and an RPG rocket launcher on a little drive through the lovely streets of Vice City. This game is f--king more addicting than heroin-laced crack.

Martin Stein: You know something's an addiction when, even after you haven't touched the stuff for years, it still calls out to you. Cigarettes are like that, and Lord help me, so are comic books. I used to devour them as a kid, starting off with DC (Superman, Batman, The Brave & The Bold, the JLA, Teen Titans) before maturing a little and moving on to Marvel (X-Men, Spiderman, Fantastic Four, The Hulk). It got to the point where my collection took up three desk drawers, a portion of which paid for a ski trip to Montana.

Today, the monkey is nearly off my back. Sure, I've got a stash hidden in my closet, but I've almost forgotten about it (right-hand shelf, second box from the top). And I can walk right past any comic-book store without hardly a second glance. OK, third glance. Oh, and those aren't comics, thank you very much. Those are graphic novels!



TV and Movies

Scott Dickensheets: Michael Douglas in The American President was the leader I thought I was getting in Bill Clinton: smart, funny, committed to principle, charmingly romantic instead of merely horny. Maybe crushed optimism was why I loved this movie all out of proportion to its quality as a film. Maybe it was his rousing speech at the end, where he diagnoses what's wrong with the modern electoral process. Maybe it was seeing Annette Bening wearing only a shirt. But I watched that movie every chance I got; it was my fantasy Clinton Administration. Now that we're into the Bush Admin, I've moved on to another favorite: the Barry Sonnenfeld dog Big Trouble.

Steve Bornfeld: There are the proud Connery-ites and the passionate Brosnians and even a few scattered Moore-o-philes (Lazenby lovers remain in seclusion), but, despite incredulous looks and hoots of derision, my favorite James Bond is ... Timothy Dalton. ... Yeah, Timothy Dalton. WANNA MAKE SOMETHING OUT OF IT?

To me, the Bond of The Living Daylights (1987) and License to Kill (1989) came the closest to the conception of author Ian Fleming's creation (yes, I read all the novels as a kid). Dalton's Bond was debonair and cosmopolitan (but still rugged) and had a wicked way with macabre one-liners, yet did his job with determination, not a smirk. Most importantly, there was a lot at stake for the character with Dalton, who portrayed 007 more as a man than a myth, as vulnerable as he was violent. That made what happened to him—and the very real possibility that he could get seriously injured (when did you ever feel that way about Moore?)— all the more compelling.

I'll endure the insults. Dalton's my spy guy.

Andy Wang: The most brilliant girl-punk band of the last decade is comprised of, um, Rachael Leigh Cook, Tara Reid and Rosario Dawson. As Josie and the Pussycats, they

didn't write any of their songs. They didn't even sing them or play them. But they didn't need to do any of that, because they were in the best teen movie I've ever seen. I fell in love with these gals, with their doe eyes, with their feistiness, with their sense of justice. Even better, the Pussycats remained so carefree even as they were fighting for their lives, beating down Carson Daly, conquering an evil super-corporation that was trying to brainwash America into buying crap from Target. I plan to watch this movie at least once a year for the rest of my life, and if VH1 ever starts broadcasting it (which seems likely), I'll watch it every single week.

Scott Dickensheets: Given our multichannel cableverse, I'm surprised that I'm so far unable to indulge my most shameful television passion: Tales of the Gold Monkey. Stephen Collins was a poor man's Bogie as a rascal pilot in some prewar tropical backwater. He made it through close calls, carried on a hesitant romance and always wore a dashing leather flight jacket despite the palm latitudes. TV doesn't get any worse than that, I suppose, and no wonder I haven't seen it on cable. Forget I mentioned it.

Steve Bornfeld: I drool for DOOL: Damned if I know why, though. I've been a guilt-stricken fool for DOOL—that's soapy shorthand for NBC's Days of Our Lives—since the late-'80s. It's uber-embarrassing, but I can't help it. Lately, I've put myself through some serious self-loathing—the show's writing as it bungles its "Salem Stalker" serial-murder plot is as amateurish, illogical and plain painful as it's ever been. I've kicked the habit several times, but alas, only temporarily. At least I'm in decent company—Julia Roberts is a confessed Days junkie as well. But please don't tell me the stalker is Marlina. No, not Marlina! OH GOD, NO!

I need help.

Jeffrey M. Anderson: I'm a cartoon junkie, always have been. It started with the Superfriends and achieved obsession with the The Simpsons. You can only imagine the joy the day I discovered Cartoon Network. But the true love came with Adult Swim, the after-11 p.m. programming bloc for grown-ups. Sunday nights has an all-original lineup. Some of it, like Space Ghost and Sealab 2020 are pure genius, while Aquateen Hunger Force might be too wacky even for me. But none of that truly matters because of the Family Guy/Futurama hour during the week. This might be the funniest hour of TV in history, and I need it every friggin night. But the thing is, I don't even have cable! I have to go to friends' houses to watch. And I'm a bloody miserable bastard if I don't get my fix. I swear that the lunacy of these two shows is the only thing that holds the universe together.

Maria Phelan: Nip/Tuck. Nearly every single thing that happened on the show last season was insanely ridiculous, but there I was anyway, every Tuesday at 10 p.m., loyally tuned in to watch plastic surgeons outwit South American drug-lords and crazy, obsessed patients.

Stacy J. Willis: 7th Heaven on WB. One night, a creepy little God-loving orphan climbed into my head and fell in love with the cleanest, preachiast show on TV. If you haven't seen it, and chances are you've avoided it like headcheese, it's about this wholesome minister and his pack of handsome offspring and all of the tragedies they encounter, such as the dangers of smoking. "Shhh," I tell my girlfriend when she tries to speak during daughter Lucy's explanation of why she really, really loves her family. More than once I've been found on the couch, ferklempt, caught in the throes of a Seventh Heaven denouement, wherein the entire family realizes it was affected by son Simon's car accident, and everyone agrees to work to help him as he faces the

biggest crisis of his young life. Awwwww. Vomit! Awwwww.

Steve Bornfeld: Critics sneered. Audiences did not cheer. But Broken Arrow and Swordfish—two John Travolta action flicks in which the ex-Vinnie Barbarino played the gleefully evil baddie and collected nothing but brickbats from the moviegoing public—are among the most compulsively watchable popcorn flicks I've ever seen. (He was also over-the-top enjoyable as the face-switching freako in Face/Off, but at least critics and moviegoers cottoned to that one.)



Roger Ebert once said Travolta was lousy playing the bad guy because "we like John Travolta too much." I may be in the minority here, Rog, but I love Travolta the most when I hate him.

Besides, in Swordfish, Halle Berry exposes her breasts.

And I haven't got one iota of guilt for finding pleasure in that.

Cultural Oddities

Martin Stein: NapkinNights.com. The explanation for this site's name still doesn't make any sense to me: "For the nights when a napkin is all you have to write on ..." Does it mean you've run out of business cards, that your Palm or cell is broken, that you're naked and yet have a pen? It's as perplexing as why there's a sister site in Sacramento. But I dare you to find a spot on the Web where it's easier to lose yourself. A combination photo-post, message board and chat (Honest, boss, I've never tried to get it to work through our firewalls!), there's something here for every surfer—especially since Craig's List has yet to catch on. And nothing is more aggravating than checking each day to see which clubs have been uploaded ... and never finding a picture of myself!

Geez, what do I gotta do? Go out with my pants around my head!

Stacy J. Willis: Las Vegas Weekly. What a find. Sharp, glossy cover, plentiful soft porn and words. Free!

Food

Stacy J. Willis: There are so many reasons to feel guilty about driving through the 24-hour Krispy Kreme in the middle of the night to order a warm ball of sugary fat that you plan to eat: A) 600 grams of the worst kind of dietary badness; B) middle of the night! Straight to the hips; C) it's not even a quaint, locally owned pastry shop, it's a monstrous corporation!

Alas, who cares. I pull up in my car, roll down the window and speak the tawdry words into the night: "One crème-filled, chocolate-covered doughnut, please." I'm salivating by the time I get to the window and the mysterious little man hands me my goods.

Inside the waxy bag, nirvana. And, turns out, nirvana smells like a freshly baked doughnut. Sometimes I just pull over and lick the crème out of the middle immediately. Other times I just nibble the chocolate off the top on the way home. Who knew one doughnut could resolve an entire lifetime's problems?

Maria Phelan: Fried foods. I like vegetables steamed or raw, I really do, but everything's just so much better after a trip to the fryer. Mushrooms, zucchini, pickles, all more satisfying when fried. But the ultimate fried food? The deep fried Twinkie—so wrong, yet disturbingly, even frighteningly, delicious!

Andy Wang: The name, of course, is bullshit. Chopped steak is not chopped and usually not even steak. It's a mound of cheap ground beef, a hamburger patty tenderized into mush, and then fried and smothered in mushroom gravy, fried onions or melted cheese, perhaps to distract you from the low-quality meat you're consuming. If you go to a fancy steak house and order chopped steak, the waiter will look at you like you're insane, but that's only because the waiter is a fraud. Everybody who's honest with themselves will admit a good chopped steak is better than any porterhouse they'll encounter. Fry that sucker up!



Stacy J. Willis: Peanut Butter Cap'n Crunch. By the shovel full. Little sugar balls of ecstasy! I can plow through an entire box of the Cap'n's finest in mere minutes.

Mmmm, pure crap.

I love the sound of it hitting the bowl, clinking like little pebbles of indigestible joy. I even love the Cap'n himself, and the orange box, and the smell: one part peanuttery, one part pet-foodery. If you time the milk-to-mouth process just right, there's a sharp little crunch before they melt in your mouth like peanut goo.

Mmm, peanut goo.

Martin Stein: It was only after my wife kept teasing me that I discovered I'm not alone. She'd rib me in the grocery check-out line, but the man at the till was on my side. She'd tease me when we were out, and my guy friends would tell me to hand some over. I'm talking sour candies: tangerine and citrus Altoids, sour Jelly Bellies, Sweet Tarts. The more it'll make your face screw up, the better it is. Sure, a piece of dark chocolate is nice on occasion; chewing gum can help you pass the time. But nothing beats a small, power-packed nugget that makes you feel like your tongue wants to tear itself out of your mouth and make for the nearest exit. And just when my eyes have stopped tearing and my face has returned to normal, I reach for another one.

Call it the confectionary version of a shot of tequila. If you can get anything this strong into your gullet, you've got true grit.

Maria Phelan: Cool Whip straight from the (preferable extra large) bucket. I'm not sure cool whip is technically even considered a "food item," but I love it anyway. A scoop of Cool Whip on pie, hot chocolate, or ever waffles is fine, but I'd rather skip the middleman and go right for the good stuff. The Reddi-wip aerosol variety, straight from the can, is also good.

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