

[flash]

December 2, 2004

A study

on

**Self**

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Photo provided by imdb.com

Tom Hanks voices many characters in 'Polar Express.'

## Expressive characters abound in 'Polar Express'

By Forrest Sanders

Every year around the holidays, Hollywood unleashes a series of holly-jolly Christmas movies on the unsuspecting public, hoping that their audience would adopt at least one of them as a new holiday tradition. We were actually delivered two pretty good ones last year in the form of Will Ferrell's charming *Elf* and the made-for-Scrooges black comedy, *Bad Santa*. Oddly enough, it's a film displaying Hollywood's latest super sophisticated advances in technology that manages to emote the most timeless quality of any Christmas film in years.

Based on the illustrated children's book by Chris Van Allsburg, *Polar Express* is the story of an unnamed boy

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### 'Polar Express'

**Starring** Tom Hanks  
**Rated** G  
**Warner Brothers**  
**Released** Nov. 7

**Rating** ★★★ 1/2  
(out of four stars)

## Wolfe's 'I Am Charlotte Simmons' brings college experiences to life

By Hillary Robson

Tom Wolfe's new novel, *I Am Charlotte Simmons* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$28.95 hardcover; abridged audio starting at \$29.95) is a social commentary on college life in the 21st century. The 676-page novel is an enjoyable, albeit hefty read, that showcases Wolfe's talent for crafting believable characters in an identifiable construct: the social network of the college campus.

*I Am Charlotte Simmons* is set at the fictional Dupont College (which is loosely based on Stanford) and follows the inexperienced, naïve protagonist Charlotte Simmons, who hails from rural Sparta, N.C. She's the most celebrated scholar of her town, and her scholarship to Dupont marks her as someone extraordinary. But Charlotte Simmons is unprepared for a life built around social networks, hooking up, frat parties and vapid roommates.

In her first week on campus, she encounters her anorexic hoity-toity roommate, Beverly; the aura of privilege of the campus athlete basketball star, Jojo Johanssen; the horror of being "sexiled" from her dorm and the allure of Diesel jeans. She's out of her element and feels very much alone as her morality comes face to face with her need for social survival.

Charlotte's first year at the illustrious

Dupont is depicted in Wolfe's coming-of-age novel that brings to life the college campus in the 21st century. While seeking a true intellegencia, she learns of the atrocities of favoritism in courses toward less-than-studious athletes and the dangers of becoming the emotional and physical plaything of debonair Hoyt Thorpe.

Wolfe spent several years researching on college campuses like Penn State, Harvard, Stanford and Yale to get an authentic feel of the Ivy-League environment. He juxtaposes the southern Charlotte beautifully against the northern setting of Dupont, which feels to the reader like an upper-crust, highly prestigious school. In her freshman year the reader sees how Charlotte grows from inexperienced youth to a woman who can hold her own while facing ostracism, bad grades and losing her virginity.

While the subject matter and characters are brought to life in a very real way, at times the reader may feel as though the subject matter has not been presented with true accuracy. Certain aspects of the novel are a bit long winded, and occasionally some situations, such as the frat house environment, are a bit clichéd. Overall, the novel successfully engages the reader in the story of Charlotte Simmons. Wolfe captures the innocence of Charlotte with his eye for detail and rich narrative quality. ★



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## Cool indie-rocker Nick Cave sings the 'blues' on new CD

By Joe Friesinger

Do you like blues? I'm not talking about the commercial and now cliché 12-bar blues, nor of the overly complex "blues" of jazz. I mean the real blues that doesn't conform to certain harmonic progressions and rhythms. If so, check out the double disc, *Abattoir Blues and the Lyre of Orpheus* by Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds.

Cave's voice has a raspy character that gives the impression of being somewhat streetwise. Emotional, and expressive, Cave's raunchy vocals are offset by some minor grooves in the rhythm section and a small choir of soulful female voices.

Aside from having the traditional blues band rhythm

section of drum set, bass and guitar, Nick Cave adds a lighter quality to counteract his gruff voice and distorted guitar. James Johnston brings back elements of the soul band sound with the addition of his organ while Warren Ellis throws off the whole stereotype of a blues band through his violin, mandolin, bouzouki and flute.

So, you may be thinking, "How is this the blues? Bouzouki? Flute? I'll stick to my 12-bar blues, thank you very much."

Well, that's fine, and the 12-bar formula works for guitar solos and driving grooves, but that's not necessarily blues. Blues is more of a state of mind than a set pattern that can

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whose faith is waning in a jolly elf who distributes gifts the whole world round on Christmas night. The boy, seeking answers to his mounting skepticism, lies awake on Christmas Eve listening for the sound of sleigh bells. Instead, he hears the piercing whistle of a steam-driven locomotive; one that's escorting pajama-clad children from their doorways, over cavernous peaks and frozen tundra to the North Pole.

*The Polar Express* is the third collaboration between Oscar-winning actor Tom Hanks and director Robert Zemeckis (the first two being *Forrest Gump* and *Cast Away*) and the first film to utilize motion capture sensors throughout its entirety.

Using the same technology that brought to life Gollum in the *Lord of the Rings* films, Tom Hanks is not only allowed to play the punctilious train conductor we've spotted in the trailers, but also the doubting 8-year-old protagonist, the boy's father,

a mysterious hobo, a Scrooge puppet and Santa Claus himself.

The film is a technical landmark, but then again, Zemeckis has brought us groundbreaking work before. This is, after all, the man who helmed *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* back when the interspersing of animation and live action was a revolutionary concept.

Of course, one of the primary problems that usually befall these page-to-screen adaptations is the way in which directors manage to take a sweet children's story and turn it into a warped, Hollywood monstrosity (yes, I'm talking about you here, *Cat in the Hat*). Rest assured, no childhood memories will be tarnished in a viewing of *The Polar Express*.

As a matter of fact, by incorporating Van Allsburg's original drawings into the film and somehow retaining the warm feeling of its source material, the film is actually a perfect compan-

ion piece to the book.

It's a feat all by itself that Zemeckis and company were able to extend the 29 page story into a feature length film, but the *Polar Express* never feels padded. The film sustains its running time by fleshing out four characters from the book and filling the film with spectacular action sequences such as an out-of-control dash across an expanse of frozen lake and the journey of a ticket in the arctic wind that recalls the drifting feather from the credits of *Forrest Gump*.

Also to the film's credit is that it's a visual masterpiece, all culminating in the arrival at the North Pole (a place that looks like a Norman Rockwell-esque realm complete with 19th century brick factories housing neatly wrapped presents on conveyor belts).

I'm probably not spoiling anything here by letting you know that the locomotive overcomes its obstacles on the harrowing journey, and the boy's faith is rekindled during a personal meeting with jolly old St. Nick.

However, whereas most children's films spout hollow messages of believing in Santa Claus, the *Polar Express* is actually quite sweet and will likely spark a little nostalgia in even the most jaded of older moviegoers.

I recommend *Polar Express* to anyone looking for some sentimental Christmas entertainment (though I'm sure the film will be best enhanced when it's playing in 3D at IMAX this holiday season). Fellow moviegoers, I believe we've just found our new holiday classic. ★

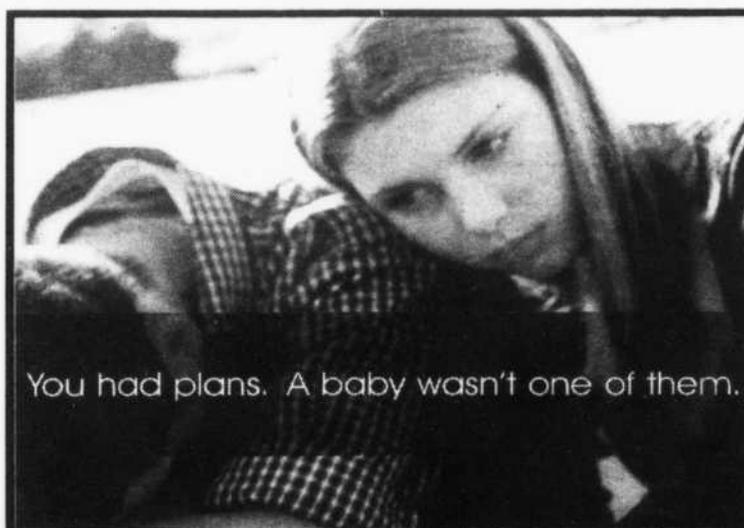
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# A study on Self

**Former Murfreesboroian Matt Mahaffey talks about fame, 'Shrek' and Los Angeles**

Former Murfreesboro superstars Self haven't necessarily garnered stardom on a national level, but anyone who's seen the movie *Shrek* has had their sinfully catchy pop anthem "Stay Home" embedded in their minds.

The story of Self begins with an extremely talented young man named Matt Mahaffey, who grew up in Kingsport, Tenn. listening to the hip sounds of the Beastie Boys and Run-DMC, while playing bluegrass at local square-dances for money. Mahaffey moved to Murfreesboro in 1991 and enrolled in the Recording Industry program at MTSU where he recorded local hip-hop artists for money in his Gracy Hall dorm room.

He soon moved to a house on Leaf Street where he began writing his own music, and Self was born. Though Mahaffey is the genius behind Self, a band had to be formed to play the songs live, which consisted of him, his brother Mike on guitar, Chris James on keyboards, Mac Burrus on bass and Jason Rawlings on drums.

Rick Williams, with the help of Mahaffey and Seth Timbs of Fluid Ounces, soon formed an independent record label called Spongebath Records, often considered the pinnacle of the recent local music scene in Murfreesboro.

Self's first full-length album, *Subliminal Plastic Motives*, was mostly recorded at the Leaf Street house, and was released on Spongebath and immediately picked up by Zoo Entertainment, A.K.A. Volcano.

Quite possibly Self's most impressive accomplishment came in 2000 with the release of their last full-length,

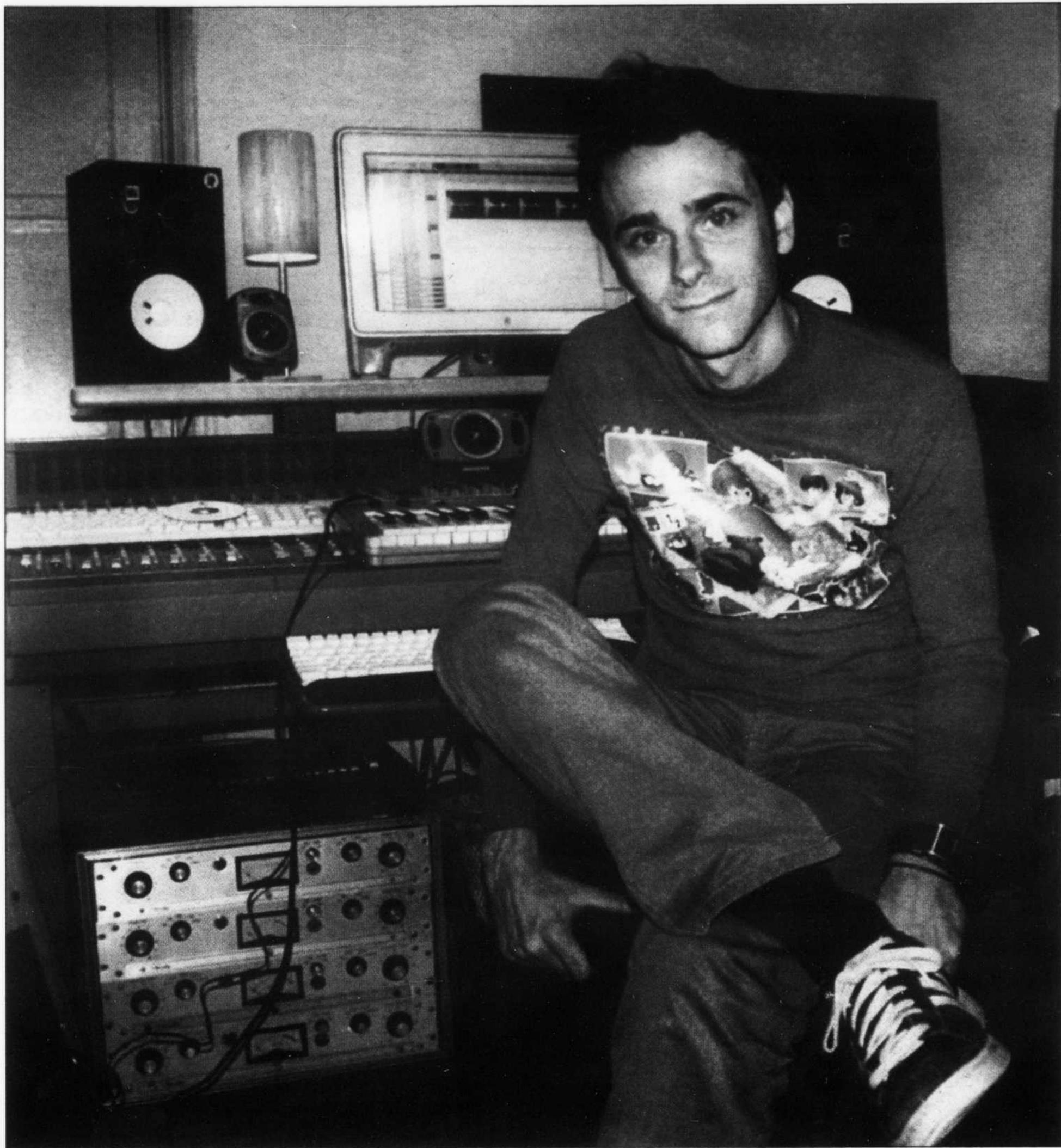
*Gizmodgery*, which was recorded using nothing but toy instruments. It's probably the best example of Matt's never-ending creativity and ingenuity. *Gizmodgery* is a coveted rarity amongst Self fans, sometimes selling on Ebay for as much as \$60.

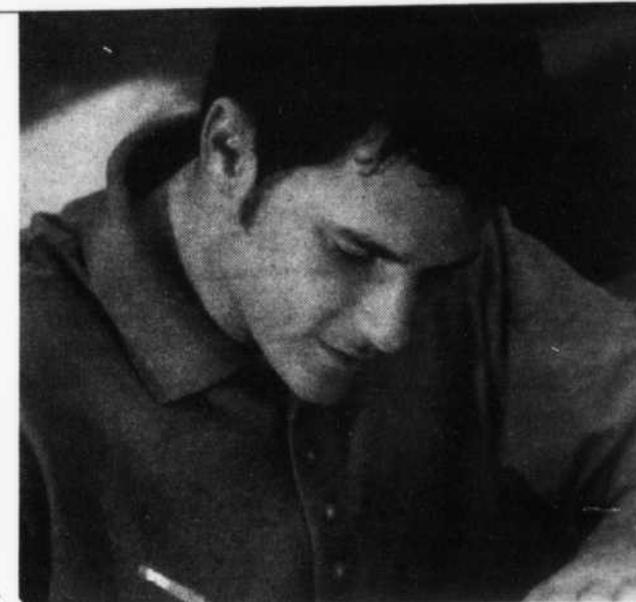
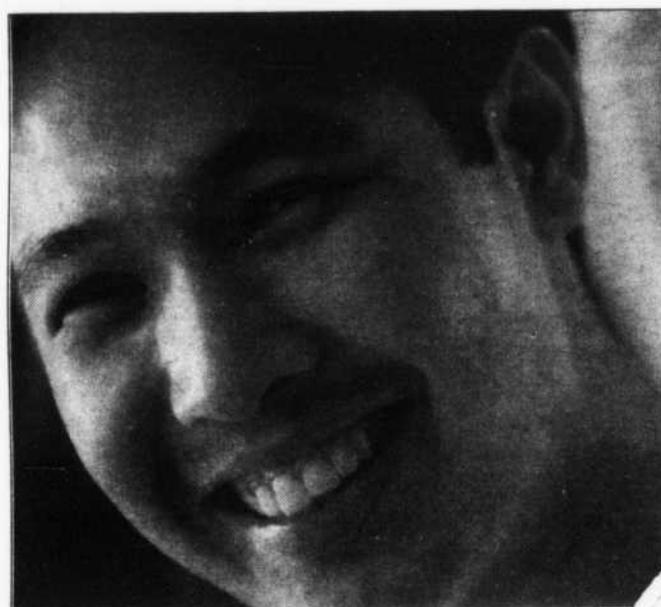
Mahaffey's move to Los Angeles in 2000 began the slow dissolution of Self, along with other members moving to various parts of the country. Matt continued to make a name for himself, however, making ad jingles, the most famous of which is the Expedia.com TV ad jingle. He has also done recent work on the *Shrek 2* DVD, producing the soundtrack for the extra ending, "Far, Far Away Idol," a spoof of *American Idol*.

Self recently completed a new album, *Ornament & Crime*, but unfortunately the album got tied up during a recent buy-out of the label on which it was supposed to be released, Dreamworks. The album is yet to be released, and Mahaffey does not know if it will ever be released.

In the meantime, in the comfort of his new home studio, Mahaffey is working on a new Self record, which he is very excited about, and hopes to release independently in the near future. If that does well, there may be a Self tour following. Mahaffey is also working on a new side project with Jeff Turzo from God Lives Underwater. He is very excited about it, and they're currently beginning the mixing phase of the album, which will be released as soon as humanly possible. ★

Photo and story  
by Steve Cross





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## [flash]

concert calendar

★ – [flash] pick of the week

**Thursday, Dec. 2**

- Entrance, The Cherry Blossoms at The Basement, 9 p.m.
- The Northern Lights, Death Comesto Matteson, Jensen Sportstag and Taylor Hollingsworth at The End, 9 p.m.
- An Evening of Urban Music at The Exit/In, 9 p.m.
- Julie Lee at The Family Wash, 8:30 p.m.
- Old Crow Medicine Show at The Station Inn, 9 p.m.
- Thad Crockell at 3rd and Lindsley, 10 p.m.
- ★ Benita Hill at Ellendales, 6:30 p.m.

**Friday, Dec. 3**

- Old Crow Medicine Show at The Station Inn, 9 p.m.
- Mark Selby at B.B. Kings, 7 p.m.
- The Cave Dwellers with Ben Graves at The Basement, 8 p.m.
- ★ Ghostflower, The Bang Up, The Appgars, The Musical Chairs at The Boro, 9:30 p.m.
- Disciples of Loud at The Exit/In 9 p.m.
- The Damnells with The Shore at Wall Street, 9 p.m.

**Saturday, Dec. 4**

- Mofuka with 7 Day Sun at The Boro, 9:30 p.m.
- The Providers at The Bunganut Pig (Murfreesboro), 9 p.m.
- The Exies at The Exit/In, 9 p.m.
- VCSB at The Gibson Showcase, 9 p.m.
- ★ North Mississippi All-Stars, Rising Star Fife and Drum Band, Kyle Riabko at The Mercy Lounge, 9:30 p.m.
- Old Crow Medicine Show at The Station Inn, 9 p.m.
- Christmas Party featuring AKA Rudie at Windows, 10 p.m.

**Sunday, Dec. 5**

- Hip-Hop Night at The Five Spot, 9 p.m.
- Allison Krauss CD Listening Party at The Lipstick Lounge, 6:30 p.m.
- Jump, Bain Mattox at 3rd and Lindsley, 7 p.m.
- Eddie and Martha Adcock at The Station Inn, 7 p.m.
- Matthew Ryan with Kate York at The Mercy Lounge, 8 p.m.
- ★ Beauty School Dropouts at The Hair of the Dog, 8:30 p.m.

**Benita Hill**

6

- Dusty Giles at 3rd and Lindsley, 6:30 p.m.
- The Time Jumpers at The Station Inn, 9 p.m.

7

- Billy Block's Western Beat featuring The Coalmen, Dave Gibson, Stephen Simmons and Lee Brice at the Exit/In, 9 p.m.

8

- Rollin' In Hay with The Loft at The Exit/In, 8 p.m.
- Spooky Johnson at Wall Street, 9 p.m.

9

- Quarter to Nine at The Boro, 9:30 p.m.
- Grand Revue at 3rd and Lindsley, 10 p.m.

10

- David Olney at Bongo's After Hours Theatre, 9 p.m.
- Afropop Party at The Basement, 9 p.m.

11

- Emma Bunton CD Release Party at The Tribe, 9 p.m.
- Minton Sparks at Bongo's, 7:30 p.m.

12

- Butterfly Boucher at 3rd and Lindsley, 9 p.m.

**WRLT Playlist**

1. **U2** "Vertigo"
2. **John Mellencamp** "Walk Tall"
3. **Steve Earle** "The Revolution..."
4. **Snow Patrol** "Run"
5. **Low Millions** "Eleanor"
6. **Carbon Leaf** "Life Less Ordinary"
7. **Bruce Hornsby** "Gonna Be Some..."
8. **Keane** "Somewhere Only We..."
9. **Crosby & Nash** "Lay Me Down"
10. **Mark Knopfler** "Boom, Like That"

Compiled by WRLT-FM 100.1 music director Keith Coes.

**Grimey's Top Sellers**

1. **Arcade Fire** *Funeral*
2. **The Mosquitos** *Sunshine Barato*
3. **Kings of Leon** *Aha Shake...*
4. **Jem** *Finally Woken*
5. **Luna** *Rendezvous*
6. **Palomar** *Revenge of Palomar*
7. **Rilo Kiley** *Live at Fingerprints*
8. **Wilco** *A Ghost Is Born*
9. **Pavement** *Crooked Rain*
10. **Rufus Wainwright** *Want Two*

Compiled by Grimey's Record Shop owner, Doyle Davis.

**Continued from Cave, page 3**

be taught. Or sometimes, it's a color, sans the letter 's.'

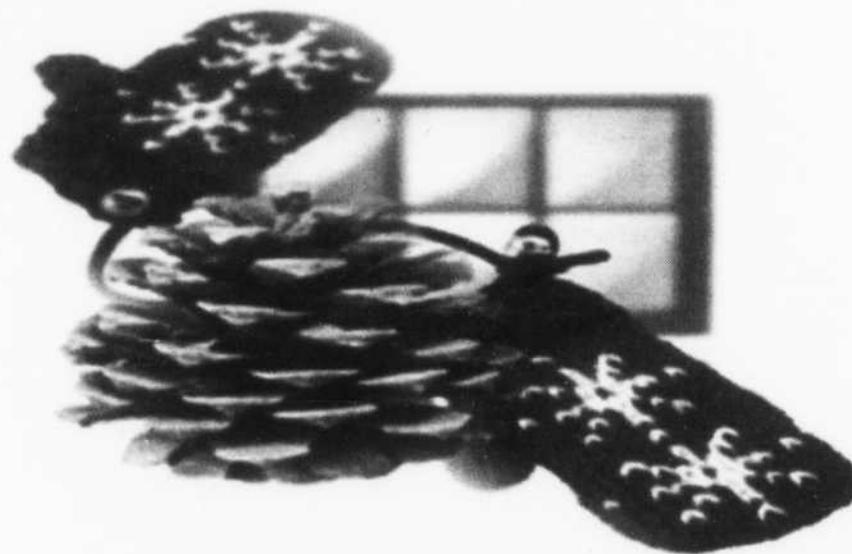
*Abattoir Blues*, which in English means Slaughterhouse Blues, contains a surprising amount of religion-oriented lyrics. On the first track, "Get Ready for Love," Cave sings "Praise Him till you've forgotten what you're praising Him for."

The meter is in three, rather than the pop standard four, which keeps the rhythm driving. Each time it feels like the guitar is going to come to a more complete sounding beat four, a

new measure has started. The final track, "O Children," contains some lyrics reminiscent of a spiritual, such as "Hey little train! We are all jumping on the train that goes to the Kingdom." But it is performed at a slow ballad tempo, in a minor key. At the end, the song speeds up slightly, but still more characteristic of blues than a spiritual.

*Abattoir Blues and the Lyre of Orpheus* are two strong albums by good musicians. If you like gospel and blues, you may want to pick them up.★

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