

Arts & Entertainment



Get Outta The House

By CAROL F. DAVIS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

It's once again time for the best yard sale around - the **Friends of Sleepy Hollow 11th Annual Garage Sale** will be held on Sunday, May 23, in the beautiful Sleepy Hollow area of Plainfield. This year's sale is bigger than ever, with almost 150 households participating. The event will take place from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m., rain or shine. Proceeds benefit the neighborhood association. You won't leave empty-handed.

On Saturday, May 22, there will be a spring concert, **"O Heaven! O Earth!"** by The Madrigal Singers, at 8 p.m. in First Baptist Church of Westfield, 170 Elm Street. The concert will be directed by Elaine Fiorino, and will include modern composers in a cappella tradition, along with poetry readings by Judy Sullivan accompanying this treasury of Renaissance choral music. The suggested donation is \$10. Call (908) 233-1570 for information.

On Saturday, May 22, from 9:30 a.m. until 1 p.m., the Plainfield Cultural and Heritage Commission will sponsor the first **"Central Jersey History Fair,"** to be held at the Plainfield Public Library, Eighth Street and Park Avenue. There will be exhibits, lectures, and author appearances. You may also purchase the newly published "Encyclopedia of New Jersey," published by Rutgers University Press, while the Friends of the Plainfield Public Library will host a book sale of previously owned historical fiction and nonfiction books. "Drop-In Lectures" will include such topics as "Landscaping Your Historic Home," "Doing Oral History," and "Caring for Historical Clothing Collections." All events are free and indoors. For information, call (908) 757-2305.

Music at Delbarton will present the **Delbarton Schola Cantorum Concert** on Wednesday, May 26, at 7 p.m. This free performance will be held at St. Mary's Abbey, 230 Mendham Road, Route 24, two miles west of the Morristown Green. For information, call (973) 538-3231.

The **New Jersey Ballet** will present two performances this weekend at Kean University, Morris Avenue, Union. On Saturday, May 22, at 8 p.m., watch **"An Evening of Pas de Deux."** Tickets are \$15 - \$25. On Sunday, May 23, bring the kids to see Mark Twain's archetypal American boy, **"Tom Sawyer,"** at 2 p.m. Admission is \$10. For more information or to purchase tickets, call the Box Office at (908) 737-SHOW (7469).

Don Giovanni

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Her voice had a ring to it that occurs when the technique is near perfect. Although Mozart's glorious score was certainly a factor, the emotional power and splendor of Cobb's singing provided me with most of the goose bumps I experienced during the evening.

In the balcony, a 16-voice chorus also contributed as villagers in the first act and voices of doom in the second act. The ensemble singing was generally very good. Each character was able to get his or her point across, despite being in the middle of a textual and musical traffic jam. There were some synchronization mishaps, but in each case Maestro Wroe recovered quickly and minimized their effect.

At 10:30 p.m., a violent thunderstorm ensued, seemingly right over the church, as if the gods themselves had been angered by the rake's behavior. After Don Giovanni refused to repent, the Commendatore's touch of death put him in agony that Volpe acted out, writhing in his tuxedo from stage to pew to floor. The thunder and lightning continued as the character descended into hell, adding a natural realism that no stage illusion could have provided.

When the soloists took their individual bows, the audience showered each of them with enthusiastic and ultimately standing ovations. Volpe took the final solo bow as the lead role. His portrayal of the rake apparently was so convincing that some members of the audience booed in disapproval. He took their rebuke in the spirit it was intended, holding up his hands in mock defense and laughing. This reaction to the reprehensible conduct of the character yielded to more hearty and prolonged applause for the performer, who richly deserved it.

Fine Arts Show

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ment Supervisor Dr. Linda King, should take a hearty bow for all of their efforts and hard work, which obviously paid off.

Latest Coffee with Conscience Concert Features Music Fusion Artist, SONiA

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD— Singer-songwriter SONiA, whose music represents a collage of folk, rock, blues and country, took to the stage of the First United Methodist Church of Westfield on Saturday, May 15, as part of the monthly Coffee with Conscience Concert Series of Westfield.

Chris Chandler, who is also a singer-songwriter and whom Coffee with Conscience producer Ahme Maros referred to as a "spoken word-smith," opened for SONiA.

Although she appeared solo at Coffee with Conscience, SONiA also performs with her sister CINDY in the rock band "disappear," which was formed in the late 80's in their hometown of Baltimore, Md.

Attendees at Saturday night's concert heard selections from SONiA's recently released CD "No Bomb Is Smart," including its title track. The lyrics of "No Bomb Is Smart" as well as SONiA's eight other collaborative or solo CDs are expressive of her passion for the environment, world peace and equality.

"All of my songs are written from my heart and my feelings," said SONiA in a pre-concert interview with *The Westfield Leader* and *Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*. "I write about the things that separate people."

SONiA travels the world to share her message, and has performed in Australia, Canada, Israel, The Netherlands, and Great Britain among many other countries.

"It's important for people of other countries to meet an American one-to-one. I am about peace and democracy for everyone," she said, adding that the world's focus overall has to be for humanity.

"The truth is that we are all different, but we are more alike than we are different," she added. SONiA was part of the celebrity coalition that joined over a million people at the March for Women's Lives in Washington D.C. on April 25, an experience she found "empowering."

As a soloist, SONiA, who claims Bob Dylan as a distant cousin, has appeared on stage with Sarah MacLaughlin, Jewel and the Indigo Girls.

Accompanying her songs with both guitar and harmonica, SONiA calls her music "urban folk" and explains it is a mix of blues and bluegrass.

All net proceeds from SONiA's Coffee with Conscience concert will be donated to the Eric Johnson House of Morristown.

"This concert is about being inclusive and respectful of others," SONiA said. Coffee with Conscience closes another Westfield concert series on June 19 with the appearance of one-woman band Zoe Lewis at the First United Methodist

Church. For more information about the Zoe Lewis concert, visit www.coffeewithconscience.com.

Each Coffee with Conscience concert is broadcasted the following month on TV-36 for residents of Westfield, Scotch Plains, Fanwood and Mountainside. Concerts can be viewed on Fridays at 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. and on Sundays at 7 p.m.

More from the WF Districtwide Art Show

Michelle Helen La Pridwin for *The Leader/The Times*
KUDOS TO THE KIDS... Countless pieces of art featured in the Westfield Districtwide Art Show garnered praise. Some of them, pictured above, included: Devin Klernan's (grade 1) crayon portrait; Steve Fromling's glowing acrylic; Jessica Ropers' (Art 2) India ink and watercolor on Strathmore paper; Robert Bunting's (grade 5) batik/watercolor resist; Jessica Bender's (Art 3) India ink and watercolor on Strathmore, and Philip Kim's (Art 3) mixed media piece.



SONiA



CDC Ends 85th Season With Kiss

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in My Fashion" rationalizes her fascination with other men. Zilg's flirtation, flair, and fancy footwork, and Fiorello's Broadway quality voice in "Bianca" are quite a match.

Inspired acting by Bobby Selig and Dave O'Neil, known only as Gangster I and Gangster II, provide the play's comic relief. The thugs come to collect a debt from Fred Graham, and he uses their muscle to force Lilli to remain in the play until the end of the week.

Both actors, Selig and O'Neil, are leading men quality and know how to milk a line, and punctuate with a look or timed pause. They are a hit with their facial contortions, and Tony Soprano characterizations.

With their number, "Brush Up Your Shakespeare," the audience hoots its ap-

an outstanding job with marvelously talented musicians in the pit. Unfortunately, the theater is just too small for the big sound the eight pieces produce. Their quality is so stellar, that one listens to the lovely flute or sensuous saxophone instead of the vocal line. Microphones did not seem to be working, or were set so low in amplification that they did not accommodate the disparity in volume.

One of the night's best scenes is "Too Damn Hot," which showcases lead dancer Doug McLaughlin. Running almost 10 minutes in length, it requires great dancers/actors who need to utilize an undercurrent of energy and stamina while feigning lethargy. It is a paradoxical challenge for actors; they carry it off with specialty duos, acrobatics, and high-voltage choreography by Alyson Pemoulie.



Susan M. Dougherty for *The Westfield Leader and The Times*
RHYTHM... A talented cast belts out, "Another Op'nin', 'Another Show", the Cole Porter classic from Cranford Dramatic Club's production of *Kiss Me Kate*. The supporting roles and ensemble is packed with talented dancers, actors and singers.

proval at the clever lyrics and ribald gestures. Yes, it is over-the-top in approach, but the silliness works.

Add to the levity classic tunes like "So in Love," "Were Thine That Special Face," and "From This Moment On," and the audience is in Cole Porter heaven. Yet having outstanding songs is not enough to sell a production.

Like parts of a delicate mosaic, all of the pieces need to coordinate and complement each other to make the artwork noteworthy.

Set Designer Marc Chandler's brick faced double-story set is perfect with four dressing rooms adorned with obligatory star designers. His large set piece used for Petruccio's house is functional and efficient, nesting into part of the set when not open.

Music director Jonathan Flowers does

Liz Howard and Jeffrey Fiorello pull together the colorful, inventive costuming.

Moving 20-some people around on the small CDC stage cannot be an easy task, but this cast is not comprised of novices. Peruse the playbill to see that many actors and dancers have come straight from runs as leading characters in other area shows. And they exhibit their talent with side bits and business on stage that helps to define their characters.

Case in point is the theater's Road to Padua where the cast comes down the aisles and continues to do their activities while singing "Cantiamo D'Amore."

All in all, for the closing of the theater's 85th season, they could not have selected a better show to present with a kiss.

The CDC theater is located at 78 Winans Avenue in Cranford.

County Invites Non-Profit Groups to Apply for Funds

COUNTY— The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders invites community arts organizations, schools, libraries, health and social service agencies, and other non-profit organizations that wish to present cultural arts programs next year to apply for funding through the Union County Arts Grant Program. The deadline for proposals is Monday, June 28.

"The purpose of the grant program is to enrich the quality of life in Union County by stimulating and supporting production, presentation and understanding of the arts," said Freeholder Chairman Angel Estrada. "Arts activities taking place between January 1, 2005 and December 31, 2005 are eligible for consideration."

The Arts Grant Program awards grants to organizations that demonstrate a high degree of professionalism in sponsoring or producing arts activities. Special Project and General Operating Support grants

are available.

The Union County Arts Grant Program is administered by the Union County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs, Department of Economic Development. The Division was designated a Major Arts Service Organization by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts for the sixth consecutive year. Funds for this program are made available through the Local Arts Program of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Department of State, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

To request an application and guidelines for the arts grant programs, or for information on other cultural programs and services, contact the Union County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs, 633 Pearl Street, Elizabeth 07202, call (908) 558-2550, e-mail culturalinfo@ucnj.org. Relay users should dial 7-1-1.



On the Beat

WITH KEITH KOPNICKI

The Pixies: Catch the Wave

By KEITH KOPNICKI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

The Pixies, "Wave of Mutillation: Best of The Pixies," 4AD, Out Now

Rating: A

Never heard of the Pixies? Here's the short version. It's 1987. Band blasts onto scene. Band establishes foothold. Then, at the peak of their powers, with a seemingly endless stream of cool tunes and classic albums ahead of them, band breaks up.

Makes no sense, but these things rarely do.

Band members go their separate ways, solo careers are born, fans shed some tears and that's the end of the story, right? Wrong. This story has a happy ending.

Fourteen years after their demise, The Pixies have come back from the dead. Maybe there was some unfinished business to take care of, or maybe the bills just needed paying. The important thing here is the band responsible for alternative music having its own section at Sam Goody is back.

First came a headlining gig earlier this month at Coachella Music Festival in California alongside a band they no doubt influenced, Radiohead. Then came the announcement of a national and European tour and now this, a best-of collection.

Sadly, "Wave of Mutillation: Best of The Pixies" does not offer any new material, but it does serve to highlight, over 23 tracks, the all-too-brief run of one of the most creative, refreshing and, let's be honest, coolest bands of the last 25 years.

The Stones, The Beatles, The Sex Pistols—these were bands that looked

liked they sounded. Not so with The Pixies. How could a band so epic in approach, so truly punk at heart, so twisted, sinister and haunting in sound actually look so... ordinary?

The Pixies, perhaps unknowingly, turned their painfully average appearance into an advantage and, in doing so, launched one of rock's ultimate surprise attacks. Nobody that normal looking could be that good, could they? But they were.

The impossibly silly and maddening lyrics, the sometimes stinging, sometimes crunching, sometimes soaring guitar riffs all combined to define the musical genius that was The Pixies.

Each of their five albums is well represented here. The glorious riffery of "Where is My Mind?" the haunting "Caribou" (This human form/Where I was born/I now repent/Caribooooo) and the berserk "Debaser" highlight an album that accurately chronicles The Pixies' short but productive run.

Bass player Kim Deal's pop/punk purr on "Gigantic" serves to counter-balance the devil-howl of the band's singer/songwriter/guitarist Frank Black on tracks like "Tame" "Planet of Sound" and "U-Mass." But it's when these two voices join forces on "Monkey Gone To Heaven" or "Velouria" that The Pixies really get clicking on all cylinders.

Let's not forget "Here Comes Your Man" either, a song so catchy and damn near perfect it deserves its own exhibition at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

It is truly rare for a band to mix and mash so many disparate styles of popular music but The Pixies did it, and did it well. They improbably combined great 60s-esque melodies, manic punk hystericisms, touches of soft country balladry, rockability and hip surf rock to create a sound that was and is undeniably their own.

Never heard of The Pixies? You've got some catching up to do.



POPCORN™

Van Helsing: Lacks Bite

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
1 POPCORN

This isn't the Van Helsing I know. My version is an old guy, and he doesn't look a bit like Hugh Jackman, the Indy Jones knockoff who plays the title character in this horribly tiring, painfully unimpressive film by director Stephen Sommers.

My Van Helsing wouldn't deign to be the dashing centerpiece for a video game that bears his name, as is the multi-marketing reality here. For, he is the epitome of Old World wisdom and intelligence. He is the esteemed Professor Abraham Van Helsing, significantly portrayed by Edward Van Sloan. He is more or less in the same business as "Van Helsing's" younger, more testosterone-laden version.

While it spans only a few seconds, nothing Jackman's character does in a full two hours and 12 minutes can possibly match the poignant kudos our original vampire vanquisher is accorded in Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931). It happens when, during a mutual test of mental fortitude, the infamous Count himself observes: "Your will is strong... Van Helsing."

It's a bona-fide movie moment, something to be curled on the tongue in appreciation of the imaginative juices it gets sizzling. That's something "Van Helsing" wouldn't know much about. Sommers' film caters to that odd marriage between the silicon chip and the vicariously visceral, laying into audiences with a relentless barrage of computer-generated bedlam.

While the liberal philosophical you might, during this cinematic bombardment, for an instant muse that perhaps some teenage moviegoer 40 years hence will nostalgically reflect on these rantings, you quickly dismiss it. "Nah, this is just garbage."

Which leads us to a question or three. Do great special effects have to appear in a relatively good movie to be eligible for an Oscar? Does the film's screenplay have to have some ebb and flow to it? Need its plot be intriguing to qualify? Must the acting be good? Such may be the conundrum Academy voters face next year.

For despite the agonizing boredom *Van Helsing* inflicts, especially on filmgoers who don't appreciate their entertainment delivered with the same subtlety of fresh concrete being hurled down a chute, the *f/x* quotient is high.

Almost completely dependent on computer-generated backdrops, there is nary an actual set utilized in the telling of this tall tale that takes place in the late 19th century. While strict constructionists, as well as set designers, may rail at the continuing technical innovation, the fictional recreation of Transylvania and its environs is pretty magnificent stuff.

In the midst of the remaining catastrophe, this high-tech humming of the scenery offers little consolation. Still, it's giving credit where credit is due.

Don't ask which monsters and horrors collide as Jackman's Van Helsing is dispatched by a secret religious order—a sort of precursor to the world-saving outfit that employs 007—to eliminate *Dracula* (Richard Roxburgh). Rather, go for the short list. Inquire what evil is excluded. That's the beauty of not having to bother about cohesiveness, continuity or good sense of any sort in your filmmaking. Just throw in everything.

You've heard of *Frankenstein Meets The Wolf Man* (1943) or *Dracula Vs. Frankenstein* (1971)? This one's had them all for the insatiable super-size era. Call it "Dracula Meets Frankenstein, Who Then in Turn Meets the Wolf Man, with a Stop-Off at Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde's."

There may be others, and if their names have been left out, my apologies. Don't come get me. But filmmaker Sommers' large-scale disaster is, due to our survival instinct, eventually numbing. You begin to block things out. The non-stop onslaught of random inanities will do that to you.

You look at your watch and only 30 minutes have passed. "How am I going to do this?" The exit sign beckons. But then

you remember the film critic's oath, a sworn allegiance inspired by the maritime tradition that asserts sea captains must go down with the ship.

Hence an elective stroll to the concession stand, "just to look," is understandable. So is an unnecessary saunter to the restroom. Three or four viewers in my audience pardoned themselves to see if they had left their headlights on. Funny -- it was daytime, and one of them doesn't even have a car.

It matters not. The cacophony and confusion will be there when you get back. You see, it's all about curses set in motion centuries ago, when Count Vladislaus Dracula was first killed. Well, the Count has never quite gotten over that slight, even though he has been given eternal life, if that's what you call it.

Somewhat or another this is connected to these vampire cocoons he's been saving up... thousands of 'em. Boy, if they ever hatch, we're in trouble.

Well, the modern age may foster that trouble. It has to do with this young Dr. Frankenstein (Samuel West) and the so-called monster (Shuler Hensley) he's created... reportedly from left-over body parts. The mere concept alone is enough to make a vampire salivate. There's always a goodly supply of heads, limbs and torsos. Now, maybe there's a way to recycle them all for fun and profit.

The opening scene when Dracula visits Herr Doctor for the purposes of researching this new scientific breakthrough, is stunning. Done in all black and white, part campy and part techno-freak bravado, it never less sings a visual paean to Universal Studios' classic horror films. Too bad it's all downhill from there.

Aside from soon deluging us with all the aforementioned, interrelating ghouls, we are also immediately overwhelmed with the lore that accompanies each of the dramatis personae, mortal or otherwise. But probably the most important, if not at all that interesting, bit of gobbledegook concerns Anna Valerious, Van Helsing's love interest. Played by Kate Beckinsale, Anna's mission, which has to do with saving the souls of her deceased family members, just happens to coincide with his.

Naturally, that doesn't keep the two from bickering and fussing. Still, they fight the good fight against Dracula, which feels a lot more like the Hundred Years War. Because, not unlike the tenacity of the undead Count in question, *Van Helsing* refuses to cease being until practically every special effect ever invented and just about every trite expression ever written are employed. Which is probably all well and good for the young audience who feels that such vehement assault on the senses is the only way to address an increasingly low attention level. The rest of us won't be able to help but wonder if we've left the water running.

Van Helsing, rated PG-13, is a Universal Pictures release directed by Stephen Sommers and stars Hugh Jackman, Kate Beckinsale and Richard Roxburgh. Running time: 132 minutes.

'Festival of Harmony'

To Tune In on Saturday

AREA— The Fourth Annual A Cappella Festival of Harmony, which will be hosted by the Rahway Valley Jerseyaires Chapter of the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America, Inc., will be held on Saturday, May 22, from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. at Rahway High School, 1012 Madison Avenue in Rahway.

For more information and directions, please call Hugh Devine at (609) 799-8170, Joe Weiss at (908) 486-5218, Don Pennell at (973) 324-0957 or Carolyn Schmidt at (908) 647-4363.