

Opinions

The Blue Banner

Editorials

Coffee, anyone?

There are numerous snide jokes about there being a Starbucks Coffee shop on every corner. Almost like kudzu on a warm wet day, the notorious coffee chain creeps in and strangles small businesses with commercial ease.

It is almost impossible now to walk down a street in a major city without coming across the purveyors of such drinks as a "skinny half caf double mocha latte."

They have now taken their coffee empire to the next level, opening a new store in the Forbidden City in Beijing.

The corporation now squats in the same area where emperors used to throw extravagant Chinese New Year celebrations.

Many people worry that the ever-increasing commercialism in the Forbidden City is beginning to ruin the integrity of the great city.

Gift shops now line the squares, cleverly hidden behind empirical-era architecture, with Mastercard logos, maps for tourists and other consumer enticements.

Threats have been made to revoke the coffee giant's year lease, not an uncommon practice for the Forbidden City. Recently, Kentucky Fried Chicken was kicked out of their establishment.

Although most feel that the commercial businesses are out of place in the historic city, some merchants feel that the establishment is a good draw for tourists who might prefer coffee over the Chinese tea served in most venues. *Kaching.*

It is a shame that this argument should even be taking place. Societies, even those seeped in cultural heritage, seem unable to resist the all-powerful force of money. Some places on this earth, places of great historical significance like the Forbidden City, should be allowed to keep their heritage intact without the Siren cries of a chain made cappuccino. Is nothing sacred anymore?

Tread carefully

Vincente Fox, Mexico's new president starting Dec. 1, wants America to relax trade borders and allow 250,000 Mexicans to cross the border with temporary work permits every year, according to CNN.

While this sounds like a partial solution to a large illegal immigration problem, it takes jobs away from Americans. Many U.S. corporations have already moved their factories to third world countries because the labor and materials are cheaper. If we continue to give away jobs, where will we be when a recession occurs?

Sure, Mexico is an extremely poor country, and America is very wealthy. However, we already buy 80 percent of Mexico's exports, according to CNN. There needs to be a limit to the amount of aid and back-bending to which we concede.

We already have a substantial export deficit since many countries do not buy our goods, but we buy a large percentage of theirs. Logically, this makes sense because we are the wealthiest nation in the world.

However, this loss eats away at our finances. Inflation is increasing, and history shows that inflation is often followed by recession. Before making a pledge to continue helping less fortunate economies, consider the future.

Also, Fox promises to halt illegal drug trafficking and immigration. However, he also bitterly opposes our practice of having border patrol agents keep Mexican workers out of America, and wants people and goods to flow freely across the border, according to CNN.

How can he expect to decrease the high exportation of illegal drugs into the U.S. if anyone can cross the border? American leaders were correct to meet his ideas with polite skepticism.

While it is excellent that Fox won democratically by a wide margin in a clean election, the possible loss of Americans' jobs and the de-regulation of border laws could be detrimental in the future.

Extreme caution is necessary if Congress decides to re-evaluate these concerns seriously.

Web site for struggling musicians



Andrew Thomasson

Columnist

One of the first things I discovered about Asheville when I moved here a year and a half ago is that it is a veritable haven for musicians. There are all types of musicians here, with people into native Appalachian music all the way to the jazzmen and women to the people into hardcore and thrash metal.

Although my musical tastes run mostly in between these, I have been participating in a project that will give local musicians a forum for selling their music, getting gigs, finding production companies and even advertising for new band members.

The Web site, Musician's Gate, obviously, needs musical submissions by local musicians. Without these, Musician's Gate cannot truly function as the forum for which it was created.

This column is to serve as good public relations for this project, both for musicians looking to get out of the vicious cycle of recording companies ripping them off, and for the general public interested in something new and different in the way of music.

Ashevillians rarely come out with cliché music, and that's one of the things that attracted me to the city: its originality. I am one of those

musicians myself.

When I went to a lecture by Fritjhoff Bergmann earlier this year and heard him mention a Web site being created in the Asheville area as a place for local musicians to sell their music and retain a much larger percentage of the profits, I was immediately interested.

I was obviously interested for selfish reasons, since I wanted a place to share the music I made with a new, worldwide audience. Since I don't have the budget to be making weekend hops over to Paris and Venice, I figured a Web site like this one would be a good way to go.

However, I wanted to do a service to musicians who don't get the publicity and credit they deserve for writing some great stuff that's not just sap-pop mainstream music. This way, I thought, the fans can decide what's good and what sucks, instead of having the recording industry and a gaggle of 13-year-old girls decide.

The site will work like this: if you're searching for a particular band or solo artist, you can enter that name, and you will be taken to their body of work as posted on the site. You can also search by genre, if you are interested in finding some new tunes to groove to by someone

you haven't heard of before.

Once you get to the page where the artist is, you can listen to about a 30 second sample of the song, and then decide if you want to buy the song to have on your computer to do with what you will (besides steal it).

The songs will generally cost about a dollar a download, and will be paid for with an electronic wallet system. Briefly, since I don't understand it too well either, it basically functions with your credit card number or checking account number permanently memorized, and it subtracts the money you spend from those places.

The best part of the deal is that the musician who posts the songs gets 60 percent of the money that is spent on their songs, instead of the 5 percent whole bands take home after production costs, agent costs and other necessities.

After shows, bands can sell compact discs or direct the audience to the site to get their music. The audience can also search for other music, look up the band's upcoming schedule, find biographies on the band or find a bassist for their own band.

Which, by the way, I'm looking for. So, if any of you know any uncommitted bass players or guitarists that are willing to change over, or if you are one yourself, write a letter to *The Blue Banner*,

and the kindly editor-in-chief will forward it to me.

Or, you can e-mail me yourself at blue_spark_band@yahoo.com.

Also on the site will be a "gig help" function, where musicians can post a message like, "We play this kind of music, and anyone interested in booking us can call this phone number."

"I wanted to do a service to musicians who don't get the publicity and credit they deserve for writing some great stuff that's not just sap-pop mainstream music."

In the same place, club owners can advertise, saying things like, "We're looking for a band that plays this kind of music," or, "We need someone to play on this night. First come, first served." Such linkups will be made possible by Musician's Gate.

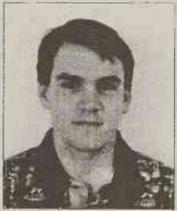
The site is not open for business as of yet. It is expected to open around the first of January, 2001. It needs, however, musicians to post their music on the site for the whole thing to work. If you have recordings you would like to put up for sale, either e-mail me at the above address or call Fred or Charles at (828) 253-2254.

If you're a musician, get in contact with someone I mentioned. If you're a music fan, check the site out now to get a feel for it, and then consume mightily when it opens for business.

Happy Listening, and, since I don't get another column before then, have a rocking month off.

The Musician's Gate Web site is located at www.musiciansgate.net.

Tragedy in strange coincidences



Josh Day

Columnist

Over Thanksgiving break, I learned that my friend and cousin had been clocked out of this life. I write about them not to venerate their memories or alleviate my own sorrow, but to share with you the remarkable circumstances under which both of them died.

Normally I would never waste my column space with stories or trivialities of such a personal, indulgent nature, but I must share this one with you, just so you can marvel at how strange this universe really is.

My friend and cousin are dead for the same reason: they had a hankering for pornography at what turned out to be a very bad time for both of them. My friend was shot in the chest at 4:48 p.m. in a convenience store robbery for the \$40 he carried

in his wallet.

He died three hours later at a New Orleans hospital. I believe the Playboy magazine and bag of Tostitos he was in line to purchase were returned to the store shelves.

My cousin, in no way related to my friend, died later that same evening. According to his mother, who was reading at the time, he was in the living room channel surfing when he came to something he liked so much that he apparently ran up to his bedroom to watch it in privacy.

The show was one of those stripper documentaries that HBO runs from time to time. Oddly enough, I was watching the same thing at the time.

Unfortunately, my cousin never

made it to his bedroom; he tripped on one of the hardwood stairs that led up to his room, and broke his neck on the way down. Apparently, he was in quite a hurry.

Although my cousin's death is partly due to carelessness on his part, both my friend and cousin would be alive now if dirty thoughts hadn't been on their minds at those two crucial points in time.

My friend was a big World Wrestling Federation fan - I had only introduced him to the mayhem of sports entertainment a month before his death, but he took to it like a natural. He had a thing for the sexy, red-haired Lita, the most talented female wrestler in the WWF.

After my friend's death, his brother informed me that he had heard Lita was on the cover of Playboy, he had just turned 18 two weeks ago and was excited about the prospect of finally attaining an adult magazine by way of a legal purchase.

My friend had his information all wrong. It wasn't Lita on the cover of Playboy but Chyna, another talented WWF wrestler. I guess he realized this when he saw the cover,

but he made the decision to purchase the magazine anyway.

I find this the most tragic part - he died to see the wrong naked woman, whom he never even got to see (the minor-repellent shrink wrap was intact when an Emergency Medical Team pulled the magazine from his tightly clamped hands).

Although this wild coincidence would seem more appropriate in a Kurt Vonnegut novel or a Kevin Smith movie, it only goes to show that unbelievable, almost impossible things do happen every day.

My cousin's dead because he got too excited seeing a stripper on TV; my friend's dead because he thought the wrong wrestler was in Playboy.

Stanley Kubrick did a masterful job of linking sex and death in "Eyes Wide Shut," but I doubt he could have ever directed anything like what happened to my cousin and friend.

Playboy has a new meaning for me. For the rest of my life, I don't think I'll ever look at one without remembering this strange Thanksgiving, and the ill-timed deaths of my two friends.

The Blue Banner welcomes your comments, letters and other submissions

The Blue Banner welcomes letters and comments regarding the content or quality of this publication. Letters should not exceed 300 words. Letters for publication must also include the author's signature, class standing and major or other relationship to UNCA.

All submissions are subject to editing for length and content. The deadline for Letters to the Editor is noon on Tuesday. Please send letters to: *The Blue Banner*, Karpen Hall 244, One University Heights, Asheville, N.C. 28804, submit a letter via the *Blue Banner Online*, or e-mail banner@unca.edu.