

Dreams Come True in 'Mr. Holland's Opus'

What do you do when your dream conflicts with your reality? Do you risk going for the dream, or do you give it up?

Stephen Herek's latest film, "Mr. Holland's Opus," attempts to answer these questions with a musical perspective.

BRIAN TRUITT
Movie Review
"Mr. Holland's Opus"

Richard Dreyfuss stars as Glenn Holland, a musician who has always dreamed of composing his own symphony but has been forced to spend his life in more mundane ways to make ends meet.

Holland quickly becomes frustrated by his students' lack of willingness to learn.

Although it takes over 30 years, he eventually teaches his students to follow their own dreams and ends up changing many of their lives in the process.

Most of the conflict in the movie centers on music. Holland's wife, Iris, played by Glenn Headly, supports Mr. Holland's dreams but does not realize the strong grip music has on her husband's life.

Dreyfuss gives an excellent performance, bringing both humor and passion to a very complex role.

dream and entire essence is music — with a lesser actor, the character would not have been as real. In fact, Holland could turn out to be Dreyfuss' defining role as an actor; if Dreyfuss does not get an Oscar nod for his portrayal, there is something definitely wrong with Hollywood.

Iris is also an important character, but Headly was perhaps not the right actress for the role. Headley is an emotional roller coaster, bouncing from mood to mood at the tip of a hat.

Two other performers were very good in their roles: Jay Thomas played Bill, the wise-cracking football coach who teaches the band how to march; and Olympia Dukakis played Irene Jacobs, the high school principal who teaches Mr. Holland to imitate his spirit into his students.

winner and probably the most underused performer in the film.

The one disappointing aspect of this movie was the jarring emotional shifting. Both the film's plot and its music evoke a lot of emotion. Unfortunately, the transitions are unnaturally sudden from one high to another low throughout the film.

Jon Spencer: 'We're Our Own Kind of Blues'

BY WENDY MITCHELL
SENIOR WRITER

Jon Spencer, the man who makes women quake even while growling lyrics about bellbottoms, Jehovah's Witnesses or Roy Roger's roast beef sandwiches, is embarrassed, very embarrassed when I suggest he's a sex symbol.

There is a long silence on the telephone, anticipatory on my end, painfully uncomfortable on his.

After a series of "uhs" and long pauses, he laughs nervously and says, "I have a hard time with questions like these."

I wish I could say something really funny or clever.

But I just get kind of embarrassed," he says, not angrily.

Jon Spencer Blues Explosion
Tonight
Ziggy's
Winston-Salem

Talking to this shy, sensitive type, it's easy to forget

that the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion put on the best live show I've ever seen (last fall in New Orleans): a genre-smashing frenzy soaked in equal parts sweat and testosterone.

On a quick nine-date tour of the East Coast, the New York-based Blues Explosion will be at Ziggy's (910-748-1064) in Winston-Salem tonight. Shirk off your responsibilities; the road trip will be worth it.

If you miss them tonight, it could be awhile before your next chance. Spencer and bandmates Judah Bauer (guitar) and Russell Simins (drums) are gearing up to work on their next album, which he predicts will be out in September.

Spencer said the band would record with "true blues musicians" in Mississippi — R.L. Burnside and some Fat Possum recording artists — before heading to the West Coast to record on their own.

This next move deviates from a pattern of increasing hip-hop influence in their music: 1994's *Orange* featured a phone-in rap from Beck on "Flavor" and the looped and sampled "Greyhound."

And then they put some of their hits in the hands of remix artists, including the Beastie Boys' Mike D. and Wu-Tang Clan's Genius for this summer's *Experimental Remixes EP*.

But Spencer predicted the next album won't be all roots. "With 'Greyhound' and the thing Beck did, the stuff that's most hip-hop about that was all stuff that was done in the studio after the songs were written," he said.

"So, I don't know what direction it's going to take yet. I'll have a better idea in a couple of weeks from now. But I guess the songs we've written most recently are kind of maybe a little bit more like the stuff we were writing when we first started, shorter and jumpier."

Spencer said the current tour would feature primarily new, unrecorded material.

Anna ∞ Began in Calculus, Now Major Local Player

BY BRENT SIMEN
STAFF WRITER

It all began innocently enough in a high school classroom far, far away. No doubt inspired by the impenetrable language of mathematics, the seeds were laid for what would later become Anna ∞.

"This entire band is based around calculus, now that I think about it," singer Mitch Bennett said. "Maybe that even explains the name."

Lee Richards, Woody Sullender and, for a short time, Bennett, all shared in the joys of numeric problem-solving before Bennett headed to Plano, Texas for his senior year of high school.

"We used to just skip class and go jam," said Sullender of he and Richards after Bennett's departure.

A year passed before Sullender, the only freshman of Anna's foursome, followed his ex-high school mates to UNC. He then got to know Bennett better and was eventually introduced to Matt Blanchard, who rounds out the band's cast.

In fall 1995, the quartet began to practice, playing together and laying down

some of Bennett's lyrics when they settled on a memorable jam.

"I think our biggest claim to fame is that we're the only band to ever actually get kicked out of a Unitarian church," Richards said, referring to their first practice haven.

"Yeah, Unitarians love pretty much everyone except us, I think," Bennett added.

After several months together, a late November "UNC Battle of the Bands" landed Anna a three-way tie for first and a little more exposure.

With Sullender on guitar, Richards on drums, Blanchard on bass guitar and jack-of-all-trades frontman Bennett providing lead vocals, harmonica, backing guitar, accordionette and appropriately energetic stage antics, Anna ∞ began to hit the local scene.

Their music mostly evolved from multiple jam sessions together, and with influences and roots as varied as simple jazz, Elvis Costello, Jane's Addiction, Kiss and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Anna ∞ is able to create a sound that at the same time embraces and distances themselves from the typical alternative rock scene.

With songs like "Michelle Barber,"



Anna ∞ will appear at the Lizard and Snake Cafe on Feb. 10.

"Someone To Blame," "Bonnie's Bionic Arm" and "There's Something Round About Her, But the Fellas Get Down Around Her," Anna ∞ offers up an intelligent and witty pop-themed alternative sound that is as enjoyable as it is hard to pin down.

"It's alter-ego pop rock," Richards said.

"The underlying theme to all of our music is, of course, that it's fun to dance to and you can have a good time coming out to hear our shows," Bennett said.

Another interesting fact is that Anna ∞ has a homepage on the World Wide Web. Fans and potential listeners can access the

page on their computers (at <http://www.unc.edu/~pinworm>) to check out their music, as well as upcoming show dates.

The group has tentative plans to cut an album in the near future, but right now they are concentrating on their live local performances, which certainly are not in any shortage. Anna ∞ played Cat's Cradle on Jan. 17 and has already headlined Local 506 twice.

Upcoming dates find the band at the Lizard & Snake on Feb. 10 with the Julie Ribbons and opening for The Trout Band at The Cave on Feb. 15.

Some Bright Spots in Depressing Year for Rock Music

BY TODD ITO
STAFF WRITER

Despite a lot of great albums this year in dance music (Aphex Twin, Chemical Brothers), hip-hop (The Roots, The Pharcyde) and jazz (all those Impulse remasterings), I chose to take the easy way out and list my top 10 "rock" releases for 1995. Although it's considered a thin year for music, these 10 records still managed to put a smile on my face and a spring in my step.

1. Charalambides - *Market Square* (Siltbreeze): This minimalist psychedelic trio came out of Texas to release one of the most beautiful and challenging albums of the year.

The singer's lovely voice floats above the deftly played guitars to create an amazing and truly unique sound unmatched by most bands in rock today.

2. Yo La Tengo - *Electro-Pura* (Matador): This trio have been around since the mid '80s and are a true rarity in rock. They actually improve with every album they release. Due to Ira Kaplan's skilled guitar work and his wife Georgia Hubley's gorgeous voices, this disc has rarely left my CD player since its release in May.

3. Thinking Fellers Union Local 282 - *Wormed* (Thwart): This is a reissue of their first cassette from 1988. That this record still sounds amazingly fresh seven years after its initial release is proof enough that the Thinking Fellers are the best rock band in the world at the present time.

4. The Dirty Three - *s/t* (Touch & Go); *Sad & Dangerous* (Poon Village): These two

records by this Australian trio of bass, drums and violin were just released for the first time domestically this year. Each song slowly builds to its often frenzied peak, reminding me at times of both the Velvet Underground and Irish folk music (probably just the violin). They also came to Cat's Cradle last fall to put on one of the best live performances I've seen in my short 19 years on this planet.

5. Tortoise - "Gamera"/"Cliff Sweller Society" (DuoPhonic): This group of Chicago indie rock all-stars followed up their excellent debut album with this import 12-inch on Stereolab's label. "Gamera" starts off with some nice guitar, then the bass comes in, followed by some great funky drums that power the song until its end about 10 minutes later. The B-side is an incredible collage of various one-minute pieces, representing seemingly all of the musical ideas floating around in their collective heads.

6. Stereolab - *Refried Ecstasium* (Switched On, Volume 2) (Drag City): This is their second singles compilation and is probably my favorite Stereolab release to date. They continue on in the same Velvet meets Can vein, but because it is a compilation, this CD is a good deal more varied than their other records. It also features the early Stereolab hit "John Cage Bubblegum," as well as two tracks from a collaboration with Nurse With Wound (!).

7. Magic Hour - *Will They Turn You On or Will They Turn On You* (Twisted Village): This is the second album from this group of former Crystallized Movements guitarists Wayne Rogers and Kate Biggars and the former Galaxie 500 rhythm section of

Naomi Yang and Damon Krukowski. While not as satisfying as 1994's *No Excess Is Absurd*, this album is still quite good. The inclusion of the 20-minute long epic "Passing Words" alone puts this in my top 10.

8. The Raymond Brake - *Piles of Dirty Winters*; "New Wave Dream"/"Secret" (Simple Machines): These Greensboro natives met all the expectations and put out the best local release of 1995. These two records alone did a lot to renew my faith in indie rock. The great Polvo-influenced tunes contained within should garner them some much deserved national attention. You might also want to know that "Secret" is the catchiest song I heard all year.

9. Dump - *I Can Hear Music* (Brinkman): Dump is Yo La Tengo bassist James McNew's solo project, and this is his second full-length album. Although 1994 was the year that lo-fi broke, it was 1995 that saw the release of *I Can Hear Music*, a superbly beautiful lo-fi pop album that kicks the shit out of anything Lou Barlow did this year.

In the past, Dump has covered songs

from people as widely varied as Henry Mancini and Sun Ra, and it keeps the tradition alive with an excellent cover of Fish & Roses' "The Letter" that is even better than the original.

10. Flying Saucer Attack - *Further* (Drag City): I guess this music can best be described as "psychedelic folk music." Underneath all the fuzz and feedback are gently strummed guitars and both of the singers' hushed voices. Flying Saucer Attack broke up recently, but they leave us with *Further*, the best and most focused record of their career.

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