Diversions

Def Jux hip-hop roster delivers definitive show

BY KEMP BALDWIN

Definitive Jux doesn't mean much to most hip-hop fans. But for the swarms of ticketless

hipsters kicking it outside the sold-out Aesop Rock show, the label means pure hip hop. It's a stamp of verbal dexterity

that attacks listeners with poignan-cy backed by beats that spark gyra-tion with the same frequency as the Neptunes.

What separates those making up the bill – Aesop, Mr. Lif, C-Rayz Walz and DJ Fakts One – from acts such as Jay-Z is that they can't rely on pop culture to spoonfeed an audience for them. Independent hip hop is some-

what comparable to the jam band scene, where grassroots is the way to stardom and the only way to gain support from fans is to rock a show with consistency.

These days, hip-hop shows are notorious for their quality, often stained by either the arrogance of the MC or the constant holler to turn the beats up — in turn drown-ing out the MC's lyrics, which usu-

ally aren't even articulate. So Saturday night, it was refreshing to see the little-known C-Rayz Walz bounce on stage CONCERTREVIEW AESOP ROCK CAT'S CRADLE SATURDAY, NOV. 15 ****

spitting clear verses and getting the crowd pumped for the headliners

He stopped suddenly at the end of a freestyle, smiled deep into the crowd and explained that he was getting drunk off North Kakalak's energy.

Humbled, Walz took a step back into the darkness to compose him-

After Walz, Aesop and Lif stepped on stage as a duo despite the fact that the show was billed as the Bazooka Tooth tour, for Aesop's new joint.

Neither rapper took center stage for too long. They swapped songs, playing off both of their catalogs to create a dynamic and cohesive set

The two rocked the mic like CNN with spine, informing the crowd of the injustices that abound today. With Aesop's help, Lif stormed the war on terror with "Home of the Brave." Concise and effective, Lif need-

ed only three minutes to tackle the subject to the point that his incendiary last words, "You can wave that piece of s--- flag if you dare/But they killed us because we've been killing them for years," sounded like a headline

It's sad that songs like this will never get airplay where they can make a change.

The show's only downfall was Aesop's breakneck speed. His analogies don't slow down for the feeble-minded.

If you haven't spun his records a few times, his linguistic acrobat-ics will leave you sitting on the bench. But at least an eighth of the crowd was mouthing the words to all the songs — all things consid-ered, a few lost souls isn't really a problem.

After bombing the stage all night, Aesop and his four Juxers reetly laid the crowd to rest with "Daylight."

The entire crowd joined in to sing the chorus with such familiarand pitch that it almost soundity ed rehearsed.

This is the bench mark for definitive hip hop.

at artsdesk@unc.edu.

BY PHILIP MCFEE ASSISTANT ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Tobias Wolff has taken care of all the small things.

An esteemed short fiction writer and editor of numerous short story collections, Wolff's name is syn-onymous with the form thanks to often-anthologized stories like the darkly humorous, surreal "Bullet in the Brain."

Factor in the excellent Vietnam retrospective "In Pharaoh's Army" and the big screen-adapted mem-oir "This Boy's Life," and Wolff's

or "This Boy's Life," and Wolft's authoritative reputation is almost complete – almost. This year's "Old School" sees the former UNC Morgan Family Writer-in-Residence making his first attempt at the final logical step in his compositional step in his compositional canon: the novel.

This brief work - at times dark, at others hysterical – packs all the enjoyment of Wolff's short stories, sculpting it around a more protracted story line.

Continuing a stylistic line from his short stories, Wolff offers up fiction with heavy emphasis on char-acterization, as locales take the back seat to odd human subjects. As a tip of the hat to contempo-

rary heavyweights such as Rick Moody's "The Ice Storm" and John Irving's "The World According to Garp," Wolff stages his narrative in New Forder d bearding and head a New England boarding school, described through the sardonic eyes of a teenage boy.

The nameless narrator funnels his literary ambition into school writing contests. The prize? An audience with a visiting author.

BOOKREVIEW **TOBIAS WOLFF OLD SCHOOL** ****

Wolff goes 'Old School' with novel



After several failed attempts, it's announced that Hemingway will the next to come. "I already admired Hemingway above all other writers," the speaker confesses - and his admiration leads him to new levels of ambition and also spurs his troubles

Like that of Irving, Wolff's writ-ing is suffused with hilarious instances of unfortunate circum-stance, occasionally bordering on farce. The setups are varied, but the ironic outcomes are consistent full of black humor that's both

painful and true. In a typically sarcastic turn, the narrator describes a particularly driven classmate as "habitually (keeping) his arms folded across his chest like a Civil War general in

a daguerreotype." Wolff's sharp, observational humor avoids the schlock route of sloppy young academia tales such as "Dead Poets Society." His wit shines through in his pleasantly detached characters.

A large, quirky supporting cast, running the gamut from teachers to Robert Frost, gives the narrator a multitude of possibilities for both stabs and sincere sentiment.

Notable problems only occur in the novel's final third, which falls upon problems with transition. Although the passage of time

and the events within are a bitter-sweet portrayal of lost youthful ambition, the narrative line seems somewhat disjointed.

Wolff, taking the choppiness into account, is known for short stories, and "Old School" is ultimately about creating a satisfactory opus.

"In some murky way I recog-nized my own impatience to tear off the mask, and it spooked me," the narrator claims, reflecting on his own fledgling stories.

Although the entire work might leave something to be desired in continuity, Wolff is effectively tak-ing a step forward in his craft.

A longer work allows him to show more about both himself and the characters he creates

"Old School" might not merit any teary rounds of "O Captain! My Captain!" But it deserves a read. Class is in session.

> Contact the ASE Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Boss's classics shine on hits album

BY MICHAEL PUCCI

D ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR In 1995, Bruce Springsteen released a gravely disappointing, poorly constructed greatest hits album.

Since then, some noteworthy chapters have been added to the Book of Springsteen. A No. 1 album with *The Rising* and two mammoth tours with the E Street Band later, Bruce is once again a hot commodity.

So just in time for the holiday crush, Springsteen adds his name to the popular "Essential" series with this far more satisfying compilation.

You can argue about the omis-sion of some tracks ("I'm on Fire," "Growin' Up," "Prove It All Night") and the curious inclusion of others

MUSICREVIEW **BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN** THE ESSENTIAL BRUCE SPING-STEEN ***

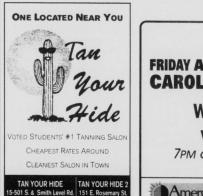
("Nebraska" and "Mary's Place"). But you can't argue with the results — this is Springsteen 101 for those unfamiliar with his truly towering body of work and is just about a perfect representation of it for those who are.

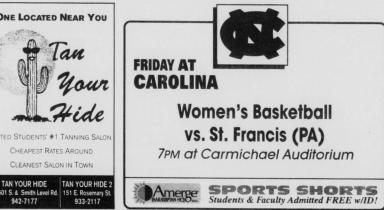
It's fascinating to hear the various stages of Springsteen's career emerge across *Essentials* two discs emerge across *Lissentials* two discs
from the timeless innocence of "Thunder Road" to the pure pop bombast of "Dancing in the Dark" to the social commentary of the

is a third disc of previously unreof it was previously unreleased.

The Essential Bruce Springsteen is no substitute for the albums it draws from – Born to Run and Darkness of the Edge of Town should be in every aspiring rock fan's collection.

at artsdesk@unc.edu.







controversial "American Skin (41 Shots)" and everything in between. Included in the package (and the principal lure for diehard fans) leased songs. But buyer beware on this front — there's a reason most

But if ever you doubt Springsteen's importance in rock 'n' roll, one need not look any further than this.

Contact the ASE Editor

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