

Intricate Pinback floors audience

BY ROBBIE MACKEY
STAFF WRITER

How it happens:
Pinback takes the stage quietly. The band sets up and begins playing. After song one, the virgin-viewer's internal monologue goes something like this: "Wait, you mean, all that stuff I thought was guitar on their records was actually bass? Weird." Then, as song two comes to a close: "This one, too? How the hell? This isn't nearly as straightforward as I thought it was when I heard *Blue Screen Life*." Song number three begins, and

halfway through the second chorus: "Look at the hands on that bassist! For the love of Christ, this is damn impressive!" And so on and so forth, until Rob Crow and Armistead Burwell Smith IV, Pinback's principal members, sheepishly wave their post-set goodbyes to a slack-jawed audience. Indeed, it isn't uncommon to find yourself standing next to particularly wide-eyed boys and girls, collecting their chins from the club floor after their first Pinback live experience. The jaw loss is easy to explain, though, as Smith and Crow's music

CONCERT REVIEW

**PINBACK
CAT'S CRADLE
SUNDAY, APRIL 11
★★★★★**

is so deceptively uncomplicated on their newest record that the visually apparent intricacies of Pinback's live performance are absolutely bewildering. And Sunday night at Cat's Cradle, after the gaunt dream rock of *The Eaves* and the static pop of *American Analog Set*, jaws started to plummet. Bashfully, in his vintage Public

Enemy T-shirt, Crow set free the opening sample of "Boo," pinched from 2001's *Blue Screen Life*, as Smith entered in turn with his slap-chording and finger-finagling bass work. The duo, along with a rotating cast of accompaniers, offered up a hefty set of dense pop songs, delicately obscured by their layered vocal interchanges and distinctive bass-driven sound. Whether the soft cotton swabbing of "Loro" or the sly propulsion of "Offline P.K.," each of Pinback's small-scale rock numbers was dutifully held together by eccentricity and experimentalism.

"Grey Machine" was an opus of eerie majesty, while "Tripoli" was a fully sophisticated expanse of upper-register vocal harmonies and purposefully sluggish bass jumps. Very simply, Smith and Crow's songs took on entirely new character live. They were almost audacious in their complexity. Virgin-viewer's final internal monologue: "And to think, I was convinced Pinback played simple little pop ditties." "Damn, my jaw hurts." *Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.*

POP CULTURE

FROM PAGE 5

popular culture at Bowling Green State University. "It reflects what people are interested in. You could learn a lot about American history by knowing what people were

watching." Ray Browne, a retired professor at BGSU and the acknowledged godfather of pop culture studies, said that people have begun to understand societies of the past through their popular culture. "Take the ancient Egyptians," he said. "We've run through the gold masks and treasures, and we're now looking into the lives of who built the Pyramids." Credited with coining the term "pop culture" in the late 1960s, Browne is a pioneer in furthering education about topic — he established the Department of Popular Culture at BGSU in 1973. More than 30 years later, it remains the only such department in the country.

But the trend of incorporating popular culture into academic courses has arrived at UNC. Lawrence Rosenfeld, professor of communication studies, teaches a class using "Buffy the Vampire

Slayer" to study interpersonal relationships. "It's more realistic in its depiction of relationships than most shows on television," he said. But using movies and television programs as a way to gauge society is one thing: Both mediums are still reasonably young and have understandable value in observing and critiquing society. Literature is another beast altogether, and appealing the literary community often requires an effort of mammoth proportions. "The literary world, like all our social worlds, is stratified," said UNC English Professor Robert Cantwell. "Consequently, certain kinds of works are assigned to a certain strata by the literary authorities."

But what now is considered "popular" can become "literary" during the course of time. Nathaniel Hawthorne's gothic romances, for example, achieved their status as literary masterpieces long after their publication. "Contemporary writing is embedded in a literary legacy," Cantwell said. "We seize upon the works that will have the most lasting impact."

Professors are turning toward using contemporary novels to reach their students, an apt strategy for a generation whose culture has become fragmented, a generation that receives most of its news from the Internet and programs such as "The Daily Show." (Pop culture) is held in (disregard) by those who misinterpret literature as something high-sounding," Browne said. "They've always used Shakespeare as the fulcrum where culture bent, but to look at Shakespeare as having never been a part of pop culture is blinding yourself from the obvious."

The blurred line between "high" and "low" art has spread to journalism, as well: Last week, Dan Neil of the *Los Angeles Times* won a Pulitzer Prize for automobile reviews that "blend his technical expertise with offbeat humor and cultural observations." Leslie Wilson, the executive director of Americana: The Institute for the Study of American Popular Culture, said that elitists derive feelings of intellectual superiority by eschewing the study of popular culture in favor of the "high arts."

"Elitists believe that which costs a lot of money to acquire and that which requires education to understand, holds more value than that which is easier to access," she said.

That elitism proved to be the most formidable obstacle when Browne tried to develop a pop culture program at BGSU. Evolving during the late 1960s, it faced opposition from other, more established departments, such as English and history. Even American Studies programs failed to accept it as a valid course of study. "If there's one thing academics can't stand, it's something new," Browne said. Ironically, scholars believe that many American Studies programs are in trouble because they've become so politicized. So in their place, the necessity of popular culture programs has been realized — the field is gaining recognition as the voice of America.

"Popular culture is democracy and capitalism at its finest — it's about making money," Wilson said. "That's why the careful study of pop culture tells us so accurately what the hopes, dreams, needs and desires of the people were in any particular historical moment." Roll over Shakespeare, tell Stephen King the news. *Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.*

DIVERECOMMENDS

"The Boondock Saints" Packed full of Massachusetts mayhem, this grisly flick about two beer-drinking, Irish Catholic vigilantes is a definitive drive-by joy ride, heavy on the pitiless slaughter.

Willem Dafoe plays the cross-dressing detective whose job it is to bring justice to the pious executioners, whom Bostonians have dubbed the Boondock Saints. It's a sheer thriller. Incidentally, it also makes pea coats seem cool.

Duran Duran, *Greatest* You needn't be a new-wave guru to appreciate the genius of this 1980s synth-pop phenomena. "Hungry Like The Wolf," "Girls on Film," "Ordinary World" — all classic.

And though I don't actually "own" this CD, I listened to it in the car on the way back to school last weekend, and it was awesome. Who's hungry? Who's hungry?

"Sealab 2021" Cartoon Network's finest, this faux-retro series is the gem of Adult Swim. Creators Adam Reed and Matt Thompson struck gold when they ripped off artwork from the dopey '70s cartoon Sealab 2020 and paired it with a sharp sense of humor friendly to the college demographic. Best line: "Ahh mercury, sweetest of the transition metals."

"Nine Stories," by J.D. Salinger Salinger is a master of the mundane. He has an uncanny ability to make anything, particularly cigarette smoking and cocktails, seem important. In "Nine Stories," the man who gave us Holden Caulfield uses his characteristically terse prose to explore ideas of death, sex and the family. "A Perfect Day for Banana Fish," haunting as it is, speaks to the magnitude of Salinger's craft, if that even means anything. It's good, all right. What do you want from me?

Dismemberment Plan, *Change* Their name conjures up images of a demonic cult, but, in fact, the members of the Dismemberment Plan can be quite modest. On *Change* the band shows off this softer side, especially on the touching "Ellen and Ben." Though it lacks the craziness of other Dismemberment Plan albums, *Change* cashes in big with earnest lyrics and temperate chords. *Contact Jim Walsh at walshjp@email.unc.edu.*

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