

DIVERRECOMMENDS

■ "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time," Mark Haddon — Mark Haddon's debut novel will rile readers' sentiment as it follows Christopher, an autistic teenager on the hunt to solve the murder of the neighborhood poodle, Wellington.

Christopher, who has a knack for mathematical equations and number-crunching — think pre-pubescent Rain Man — plunges readers into the inaccessible world of autism. It has the introspectiveness of "Catcher in the Rye" with the childlike innocence of "Forrest Gump."

Throughout the tale of personal struggle, Haddon interweaves much-needed humor. For example, the book starts off in Chapter 2 and ends in Chapter 233. A typical page reads: "And I said," "And she said," "And I said," "And she said," "And I said ..."

The book produces an easy, laid-back read that touches upon profound issues of human capability and introspection. Plus, it won one of those random book awards, which means it has to be good.

■ "The Surreal Life: Season Three" — Am I kidding? With the reality-TV buzz, I have to admit that I like it. This season's characters make "The Surreal Life" bearable, at least for the entertainment of realizing that some ex-celebrities are desperate enough to go on a reality show to make up for all the cash they spent on drugs and hookers.

Among cast members is Jordan Knight, the ex-New Kid on the Block who gained a few pounds from all the exercising he's missing by not dancing that crazy sideways-leg dance the Kids perfected anymore.

Flavor Flav, of the '80s hip-hop group Public Enemy, provides the comedic edge. Basically anything that comes out of his mouth makes good material for AIM away messages: "Flava Flav has shut down." Um, yeah ... what he said.

The guys will like the hottie factor in Ryan Star, from "American Idol," who locks herself in the bathroom claiming that she's not a pop star (Ha ha. Really? Hmm). And who could forget Brigitte Nielsen, Sylvester Stallone's former misus, spicing things up by invoking a European lifestyle and romping around the house in her birthday suit?

Surreal, dude.

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Blood flows like water in gruesome 'Saw'

BY TOM PREVITE
STAFF WRITER

You know you're in for something special when a movie originally rated NC-17 is edited down to R to reduce graphic violence.

Director James Wan's debut movie, "Saw," pushes the boundaries of obscenity in modern cinema to tap into viewers' morbid curiosities. It's a lot like slowing down next to an accident on the highway.

However, a refreshingly original plot keeps this movie closer to "Se7en" than the gory cult masher-flick "House of 1000 Corpses."

Two men, Adam and Dr. Gordon (Leigh Whannell and Cary Elwes), awaken in a locked room with a dead body between them. A serial killer nicknamed "Jigsaw" informs the two that they only have a few hours to find a way out of their prison or die.

Jigsaw, however, isn't your normal serial killer — he never actually kills anyone. His victims do the killing for him.

Amid ultra-fast cuts, shaky camera work and a "Memento"-esque flashback style of progressing events, Wan unfolds a disturbing portrayal of sadism unmatched in modern mainstream cinema. Jigsaw offers escapes for his victims, but all involve monstrous acts that push the boundaries of sanity.

A victim who almost committed suicide with a razor is forced to navigate a room of barbed wire toward the exit. A woman must gouge a key out of her friend's stomach before the device strapped to her head tears her skull apart.

You get the idea.

The sheer gruesome creativity of this movie makes it easy to ignore the gaping plot holes that run rampant during its latter half. You simply sit back, absorb what you're seeing and wait for more depraved stimuli.

"Saw" progresses like a nightmare, building tension and gore without respite. Gone are throw-away joke scenes or comic relief — the only thing that unfolds is the

MOVIE REVIEW

"SAW"
★★★

dark side of human nature. Like in "Se7en," "Saw" has a killer with a moralistic lesson for his victims, ironically stressing the value of life.

This otherwise shining gem of the horror genre is held back by hammy dialogue and average acting. When he isn't screaming or crying, Cary Elwes is slipping out of his embarrassingly bad American accent. The otherwise dependable Danny Glover of "Lethal Weapon" fame lays an egg as Detective David Tapp, a role that should come naturally to him.

However, even with poor acting, "Saw" is a disturbingly entertaining movie that destroys clichés and marks an optimistic turn in an otherwise terrible year for horror films.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.



COURTESY OF LIONS GATE FILMS

Sometimes call waiting just won't do. And sometimes you're Cary Elwes, the star of the lo-fi splatterfest "Saw," a sanguine suspense/horror flick.

Live album revisits '90s hits

BY ANDREW CHAN
STAFF WRITER

Soul Asylum's new live release, *After the Flood: Live from the Grand Forks Prom, June 28, 1998*, arrives with built-in sentimentality.

For those who still remember the band's 1992 breakthrough "Runaway Train" (and its tear-jerking video about missing children), this album attempts to make a case for some of the lives touched by their music.

It's an odd release from a band that has been silent since 1998 and belongs on a VH-1 special rather than in a hall of fame.

After the Flood is a recording of their performance at a high school prom in Grand Forks, N.D., a community that was devastated by a flood. The inspirational context frames the rock band as valiant public servants, and though they had almost reached the end of their popularity by then, the mood of good will elevates them to middle-of-the-road heroism.

The humble, redundant music might not have endured, but some moments are worthy enough to

MUSIC REVIEW

SOUL ASYLUM
AFTER THE FLOOD
★★★

accompany the adolescent longings that climax on prom night.

While grunge and gangsta rap gave '90s pop music an edge, Soul Asylum's earnest lyrics are tender instead of revolutionary and conducive to the embraces of youngsters.

With their fixation on alienation, the songs sometimes sound like cousins of the teen-tragedy fad of the late '50s. Soul Asylum demonstrates how angst transcends generation gaps and how '90s teen music has its roots in the '50s, just as Pearl Jam did when they gruffed up Wayne Cochran's "Last Kiss."

But without the multilayered nostalgia, there's not much here about which to get excited. Songwriter and lead vocalist Dave Pirner hiccups through some catchy melodies such as "Misery" and "We 3," and the band throws in some wimpy but serviceable cover tunes.

The set tries to evoke the con-

fused love-hate sentiment of high school, with Alice Cooper's rebellious "School's Out" balanced by the teacher's pet anthem "To Sir With Love."

The most interesting songs are stabs at shaggy-haired soul. Pirner reinvents Smokey Robinson's "The Tracks of My Tears" as a white boy's puppy love and Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing" as pathetic pubescent lust.

It makes for emotionally relevant music, miles away from the all-night grinding of the trash rap at my prom. The album's sweetest surprise is a take on Dionne Farris' forgotten gem "I Know."

But what's the point of packaging this concert seven years after the event?

This pleasantly unremarkable album gets by on the cute image of a rock band's down-home, Midwest altruism. Age won't alchemize mediocrity, even in the current doldrums of pop music.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Experimental release pushes bold, hip new sonic frontiers

BY ROBBIE MACKEY
STAFF WRITER

Like the ages-old folk music of some distant planet or the futuristic outsider-art of a past that never existed, Cyann & Ben's *Happy Like an Autumn Tree* is fixedly alien upon first listen.

Initially frustrating but ultimately rewarding, the record's calm is unremittingly obscured by experimentalism — passages of familiarity find themselves buried under befuddling veneers. Moments of absolute incongruity and oddity somehow seem old-fashioned and welcoming.

Indeed, the second offering from the French four-piece deals in dreamy avant-pop not incredibly dissimilar to the spacey stylings of the band's over-hyped Gooom debut *Spring*, a critic's darling which saw European release in 2003 and American release earlier this year.

But, on *Happy Like an Autumn Tree*, the quartet's a tad more brusque with the aesthetic that gained them praise last go-round, and that's a good thing.

Here, the dingy calm of *Spring* finds itself pressed against a sense of urgency and paranoia, of gloom and fear, that was only hinted at on the band's debut.

Percussion-heavy and dense at times, *Happy* isn't nearly as hazy and hushed as its predecessor.

"(Close to Discovery)" revels in chaotic, near-free drumming,

MUSIC REVIEW

CYANN & BEN
HAPPY LIKE AN AUTUMN TREE
★★★★

while a stair-step chord progression pounds itself into oblivion. The album opener, "Circle," is a rousing number flanked by wind-whip guitar lines and a backbeat drum track, both evoking the song's title slyly.

But what makes the record such a success is the band's ability to pull in the reins as it did for the bulk of *Spring*. Frighteningly serene, the album-closing "Obsessing and Screaming Voice in a Shell," book-ended by eerie, delay-soaked drums and guitar, is *Happy's* most staggering moment.

It plods, resignedly drifting upward under the strength of arpeggiated musical figures and percussive swells, until it quietly crumbles into a mess of guitar stabs and organ chords.

Like the melancholic rock side of Air, or the more tuneful side of Flying Saucer Attack, *Happy Like an Autumn Tree* is both strange and familiar, both urgent and resigned, both tranquil and foreboding.

And while its musical worth was arguable last year, with the release of *Happy*, Cyann & Ben have undoubtedly arrived.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

STAR SYSTEM

- ★ POOR
- ★★ FAIR
- ★★★ GOOD
- ★★★★ EXCELLENT
- ★★★★★ CLASSIC

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