

diversions

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thursday, march 27, 2008



from magazines...

BY JAMIE WILLIAMS
ASSISTANT DIVERSIONS EDITOR

It wasn't until December of 1987, when R.E.M. appeared on the cover of Rolling Stone, that the band truly began its meteoric rise to superstardom.

Twenty years ago, that was the pinnacle, the top of the music world.

But times have changed.

The Internet is the new home of music criticism, providing anyone with an open forum for his or her ideas.

The blogosphere makes music and opinion readily available to interested readers and seekers long before major publications catch up.

And everyone is adjusting — the fans, the writers, even the bands.

R.E.M.'s newest record, *Accelerate*, which hits shelves Tuesday, began streaming this week on Facebook's iLike application, weeks after songs and a video appeared on various Internet music blogs.

So, in effect, everything one would need to know about the record was available about a month before the official release date and three weeks before any magazines would run a review.

Heather Browne, who operates *Fuelfriends.blogspot.com*, said that while the world as we have known it is certainly changing, the state of criticism is just fine.

"I think the blogs certainly represent a democratization of the music press, because anyone can start one, and the Internet really gives everyone an equal opportunity for success," Browne said.

It is that reality that represents the current climate of music publication — the rapid rise in popularity and scope of the music blog, paired with the decline in readership and relevance of traditional print magazines.

This already has produced casualties. Magazines *Harp* and *No Depression* both folded in the past month.

The (Raleigh) News & Observer music critic David Menconi had a byline in all but one issue of *No Depression*, starting with a profile of the iconic Raleigh alt-country band *Whiskeytown* in the first issue.

"I work in one failing industry covering another," Menconi said.

With the Internet providing anyone the opportunity to publish opinions, he said the traditional role of the professional critic is shifting, not disappearing.

"Our role is certainly changing. Our gatekeeper function is as important as ever.

"Chances are, a band coming up is going to catch the eye of a blogger long before it makes it into a magazine or daily newspaper."

For Justin Gage, who started *Aquariumdrunkard.com* three years ago to keep friends updated on what he was listening to, finding new music is one of the best parts of his job.

"I typically write about stuff I find that excites me, stuff that I like."

Gage said the more personal feel of blogs gives them an advantage over the rotating bylines of magazines.

"It's the type of thing where after you read a particular blog for a while, you start to mirror its tastes and it sort of becomes, like, the cool older brother who used to recommend tunes."

Many point to the hosting of free MP3 files as an important aspect of the popularity of blogs. While it is common practice for blogs to post a song or two from a particular band, Browne said she would never post illegally-leaked songs and tends to post live or out of print material.

"I think it really increases interest in the music, and I don't think it's a negative at all."

"If you post a few songs and talk very highly of them, I think it only increases the likelihood that someone will buy the full album or go see a band live."

And while some local bands have seen their songs posted to prominent blogs, Menconi said the very nature of blogs makes that exposure more of a "flash in the pan" than placement in print.

"The blogosphere is all about turnover. It is structured so that something can really explode overnight but, in a lot of cases, will be forgotten about the next day."

"I like it, but I'm a little hesitant about where it is taking us. But it's pretty hard to say that without sounding like an old man."

He pointed to Chapel Hill's *Violet Vector* and the *Lovely Lovelies*, whose song "Can You Dig It?" was named top song of 2007 by *Idolator.com*, as an example.

"I don't really know how big of a boost it was for them. It's exciting, but they haven't parlayed it into radio play or a big record deal or anything."

Browne said she is excited about what she perceives as a leveling of the playing field between the two media.

"There is an awesome trend of print media looking at blogs as their peers and linking to them on their own sites."

Menconi, though, points to a generational divide in how readers want their music news presented, one that parallels the way they want to listen.

"It really is a generational thing. People of a certain age just have an attachment to the physical product, like a magazine or a CD."

"To my 12 year-old, a CD is just something you rip onto the iPod and put on the shelf forever."

Contact the Diversions Editor at dive@unc.edu.

to music blogs

Pete Yorn wants you to use him (and keep on using him until you use him up), and to that end he's crooning along with Mexican electronica/rock band **Kinky**, covering Bill Withers' soulful classic.

Use Me (Bill Withers cover) - Pete Yorn & Kinky

This comes from the new release from producer **Robin Danar**, which features a bunch of other artists: Inara George, Paul Buchanan (The Blue Nile), Jesca Hoop, Gary Jules and The Section Quartet, Lisa Loeb and Steve Reynolds, Jim Bianco

- Madonna featuring Justin Timberlake and Timbaland - 4 Minutes
- Justice - Never Be Alone (Exclusive)
- Simian Mobile Disco - It's The Beat (The Teenagers Remix)
- Radiohead - How Can You Be Sure?
- Crystal Castles - Tell Me What To Swallow
- Crazy Town - Butterfly (Dj Vini Remix)
- Goldfrapp - Happiness (Metronomy Remix Feat The Teenagers)
- Tilly and the Wall - Beat Control

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CANDYLAND Violet Vector & the Lovely Lovelies bring syrupy '60s pop on their debut EP.

CONCERT PHOTOS Vicarious experiences of last week's shows with reviews, too.

DIVEBLOG Stay tuned to the blog for super-radical updates fairly frequently.



concerts

ON FIRE

A photo of New Jersey chanteuse (and former N.C. resident) Nicole Atkins from a Saturday night show at Local 506.

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music

SIMPLE CHARM

Former Moldy Peach Adam Green releases an LP heavy on charm and quirky songwriting 'personality.

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movies

HORRORS HIT HOME

The gripping emotion of "Stop Loss" stresses the realities of young soldiers returning home from war.

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Q&A

SURE AS NIGHT IS DARK

Chapel Hill's heaviest duo, The Curtains of Night, chats with Dive about the joys of high volume rock, nighttime and this town.

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