

## STREET SCENE

## Music has always played an instrumental role in my life

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA  
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I can still picture it. On a warm July night, I gathered with a small collection of close friends in a cozy living room to relive memories of the past. The melodic tones of James Taylor echoed in the background while our conversation turned — as it inevitably would — to musical preferences.

We each took turns admitting what the first album we ever purchased was. The answers gave tell-tale insight into the pasts and personalities of everyone present.

Some seemed to have impeccable musical taste from the formative years, naming Beatles albums with a sense of pride. Others revealed answers where their hands cupped over their faces, giggling furiously.

As my turn came around the circle, I cringed on the inside and admitted that my first purchase was "Hunting High and Low," by the Norway-based trio known as a-ha. I was 8 years old when I got the cassette and I played the

single "Take on Me" until it wore out. Music, whatever the variety, has always played a role in my life. "Take on Me" was only the first song on the soundtrack that makes up my life.

## New position

Just weeks after that conversation I landed a new position at the Observer & Eccentric newspapers. I am the newest addition to the entertainment staff. Coming from a position I enjoyed as staff writer for the Clarkston Eccentric where I wrote about police, local government and suburban life, the transition has been a big one. But I am more than up to the challenge of covering popular music in the Detroit area.

My friends responded to my new job with a mixture of cheers and congratulations — most of it came from my musician friends hoping for future coverage. But anyone who has known me for any length of time quickly recognized that an opportunity such as this is something of a dream-come-true.

As the youngest of three daughters, I was stumped into

the world of popular music with the help of my sisters. My eldest sister, Paula, talked me into learning the name of and instrument played by each member of the band Journey in 1982. She tested me with our Atari video game featuring those band members.

My sister Michelle introduced me to the music video by replaying a videotaped copy of Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It" until I knew it by heart. Though I rarely admit it, this was my first taste of popular music.

Just as music has continued to evolve, my listening habits have taken a turn. I grew to appreciate how musicians like Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley revolutionized rock and roll, and how television and film incorporated the sounds and styles of megabands like the Beatles.

## Heavy metal

I experienced a brief period I refer to as "The Heavy Metal Years," which encouraged me to learn to play guitar. As the mid 1990s grunge era came and went, I entered a phase of alter-

native music appreciation. The works of Jack Kerouac drew me into pop and early jazz. And traveling to Great Britain introduced me to the wonderful world of Brit pop. I can't listen to Blur without reliving at least a little bit of life in London.

Now age 22, I consider the world of music to be wide open. Through entertainment journalism, I hope to get a grasp of it and make it accessible to readers who have the same passion. As the Michigan finally winds its way back on the musical map — thanks these days to such acts as The Verve Pipe, Eminem and Kid Rock — I anticipate my work covering popular music will be a wild ride. And I hope to reach out to local musicians and bands who will make the next wave in this sea of musical styles, as well as bring national acts closer to home.

## Keep in touch

If you're a local musician or member of a local band playing in the area, please contact me by e-mail at scasola@oc.ohiocomm.net, by phone at (734) 953-2130, or send press



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM LEAPLEY

information to Stephanie Angelyn Casola c/o The Observer, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

Introducing: Stephanie Angelyn Casola is the new popular music writer for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. She's looking forward to working with local clubs, musicians and bands to cover the popular music beat.

## 'Phantom Menace to Society' misses Second City standards

The Second City Detroit, 2301 Woodward Ave., Detroit presents its 16th original live-comedy revue, "Phantom Menace to Society," 8 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays with additional shows 10:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. The cast performs an improvisational comedy set, free of charge, after every performance (Fridays and Saturdays only after the late shows). Ticket \$10 Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays; \$17.50 Fridays; and \$19.50 Saturdays. To buy tickets call (313) 965-2222.

BY BOB SADLER  
SPECIAL WRITER

The Second City Detroit is celebrating its fifth year in Detroit at the corner of Woodward Ave. and Mopac. The troupe's 16th revue, "Phantom Menace to Society," opened July 15. While there are some bright spots among the two dozen sketches, the show draws more than a passing comparison to the feature film referenced in its title.

This "Phantom Menace" is a slow-developing, erratically written piece with sharp acting performances interspersed with some characters that are annoying.

Opening with "Salvation," a

song and dance number, all six cast members join in a satirical romp about how the construction of Comerica Park and downtown casinos magically trigger a rebirth for all Detroiters. The lyrics may have been funny, but the sound mix from first-time musical director John Edwartowski rendered the vocals too difficult to hear.

The first true laughs of the night are delivered by a fast-moving sketch called "To Serve and Protect" in which Keegan-Michael Key and Marc Warzecha (acting in his second mainstage revue) bring life to police officers faced with four traffic stop scenarios. This sketch is vintage Second City, with its snap-of-finger transitions between four drivers and their varying reactions to similar storylines developing in a parallel universe.

The primary recurring sketch in the show puts a wacky spin on the real-life confrontation between Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer and would-be casino developer Don Barden. Key and Antoine McKay, acting in his second mainstage revue, play the clashing titans with great intensity. Dueling through a succes-

## COMEDY

sion of sporting events, the two produce the best belly laughs of the night in three sketches. Imagine Archer and Barden log rolling in the Detroit River or playing a climactic game of racquetball to the death. The screen "Phantom Menace" duel with Darth Maul facing off with a Jedi duo never had this level of energy.

Margaret Exner, the witty veteran of the cast, acting in her eighth mainstage revue, joins Warzecha for an interesting take on a pair of refugees from Kosovo who land in Detroit and find the similarities with their homeland quite chilling — "NATO's aim was so bad, they hit Detroit, too!" This dark sketch, which also included references to the downtown Hudson's building and the numerous potholes around town, reflects the long-time Second City commitment to humor with a social conscience.

Now in her third show, Nylma Anise Woods distinguishes herself as a student in a classroom learning first aid with a teacher's aide and Reauser-Annie. The voice she gives to the character of Sheila in this sketch, along with her use of movement,

evokes memories of a Second City legend from the Detroit area — Glida Radnor. Woods also gives a strong performance later in the show as a Meijer store trainee opposite McKay as her over-the-top drill sergeant wanna-be boss.

Marc Evan Jackson, who made the transition from musical director to mainstage performer, proves to be a strong supporting performer in a variety of sketches, playing half of a gay couple opposite Warzecha in a variation on the usual breakup. He opens the second act as a guy facing the clash of his role as a parent vs. being "one of the guys."

Warzecha's characters over the course of the night proved to be annoyingly similar (think of Lenny in "Of Mice and Men"), but his highlight of the night was his take as a less-than-intelligent Al Gore preparing for a debate.

For each of the highlights mentioned, there are also a number of sketches that were simply a swing and a miss. Out of 24 sketches, almost half fall flat. That is just too high a percentage for a Second City show.

Overall, for the price, a night at the movies may be time and money better spent.

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