



THE COBRA'S NOSE

Vol. 25

If you were me you would understand what you just said.

14 Dec. 2000

The Cobra's HoHoHo...

"I'm expanding **The Cobra's Nose** this month and I need filler—give me a Christmas memory," is what I've been saying to people the past couple of weeks. Well, not to Mr Enigma, because he would just tell me it's way too long already, but other people, and this is what I've been hearing from most (but not all, as you shall see) of them: "Oh, I don't have any Christmas memories."

At first this struck me as odd. Christmas memories are something I assumed everybody would have ready and be willing to share, but when I started digging around in my own brain for memories to share my brain put up a mighty resistance. Then when the first few were knocked loose, I understood why I had buried them in the first place. It's not like I had this tragic upbringing and Christmas heralded extra beatings and meals of rotten fruit and freezing to death whilst watching my last match sputter out, but I did note a correlation between efforts to make the holiday Memorable, or even worse, *Meaningful* (are you with me? Isn't Meaningful just the *worst?*), and instances of guilt, friction, and despair. The terrible thing is all this negativity was the result of noble intentions and thoughtful planning, whereas the joys (and there were plenty, they just took a while to surface) were the mundane and accidental result of simply being near the people I love when they aren't driving me insane.

These reflections have brought me to a shocking conclusion: the spiritual approach to Christmas is a fraud and a dangerous lie, commercialism is the answer. I know this seems to fly in the face of every classic x-mas movie and TV special you've ever seen, but let's take a close look at them.

- * *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*: Written as an effort to move more Montgomery Ward product, this is the story of a freak who was mocked and ridiculed until he found a way to niche market his defect.
- * *A Charlie Brown Christmas*: Originally conceived as a means of selling Coca-Cola, you'll notice the most miserable character (Charlie Brown) is the one who gripes about materialism, the most venal character (Snoopy) is the most content, the most joyous moment in the show (the seemingly impromptu dance at the school) has nothing to do with Christmas, and that scrawny little tree looks way better once it is covered with stolen decorations.
- * *It's a Wonderful Life*: The answer to life's problems is money, and the villain ends up richer at the end than he was at the beginning.
- * *A Christmas Carol*: Ebenezer Scrooge's selfish withdrawal from the economy is criticized by supernatural forces. Once he loosens up those purse strings and starts buying things, everything is fine.

The list just goes on and on. Even if Christmas doesn't "come from the store," a lot of neat stuff does and I think we can learn from that stuff. If you shop with an eye to browse, and to enjoy the lights and sounds, and can walk away when the crowds get to be a hassle, you will have a nice time. Since it's a light hearted adventure, there is no pressure to do anything memorable or meaningful, or to make an account of time spent. If, on the other hand, you go with a list, and a bunch of people who drive you crazy after a short time, and a lot of unrealistic expectations of what cost, the experience will be a hellish nightmare. It's your choice, of course, but I plan to embark on the next few weeks with one eye on the spectacles and finds, and the other on the EXIT sign.

Sharon C. McGovern
Editor/Publisher/Christmas Cobra



William Wegman: "Dusted"

DISCLAIMER

I was the recipient of some rather alarming news this week. To wit, The Pill is onto **The Cobra's Web Site** and is doing her darndest to convince her Überboss that he should give a rat's behind. Fortunately, that is uphill work for most people and her chances at success are minimal. Still, I was disturbed enough to run my dilemma past a few of my loyal subscribers.

St. Janet of the TP was unfazed: "You're still going to write about her and call her 'The Pill,' aren't you?"

Maestro Toe was triumphant: "Didn't I tell you this was going to happen? Didn't I predict this *months* and *months* ago?"

Tiger was a bastard: "I would have fired you on the spot, but Cosmodemonic doesn't seem to mind you wasting their time and money."

Yeah, yeah, yeah. The Man was the only one with calm, reasoned advice. "Just put up a disclaimer on your site that says it's a work of fiction and nobody should think otherwise," he said. "You know, like at the end of a movie."

I thought it was a brilliant suggestion and I acted on it at once—go and see. And furthermore, I will do it again, right here in print:

THE COBRA'S NOSE AND ALL AFFILIATED PRODUCTS, SITES, AND SERVICES ARE BASED UPON IMAGINARY CHARACTERS AND EVENTS; EXCEPT FOR MR ENIGMA WHO ONLY THINKS HE IS FICTIONAL. IF YOU SEE YOURSELF REPRESENTED IN THE GUISE OF THE PILL, SAY, OR THE PAIN, GOD HELP YOU BUT DO NOT BOTHER ME ABOUT IT.

Of course this means that many of you are now fictional too, and there are philosophical complications to that but only if you go looking for them...so don't, okay? ☹

Three Movies with a Really Good Beat that I Could Dance To

I don't know how to explain it, other than, perhaps, Libra perversity, but growing up I would either have two friends who hated each other, or two friends who liked each other but my parents disapproved of one or both. So for years I embarked on a fruitless and depressing campaign to make everybody I like like everybody else I like, or at least to make the people I like dislike the people I dislike. For my efforts, all I can say is that people seem to like me less and it serves me right. So instead, I've tried to make the people I like to like the same things that I like. After all, could I ever really love and respect somebody who isn't a Beatles fan? I don't know, I just don't know—sorry Mom.

In *High Fidelity*, the third best movie I saw this year, John Cusack's character Rob expressed the importance of discerning a potential hook-up's cultural preferences because while humans' natures seem to change between nightfall and breakfast, their tastes do not. Think about it—you don't want to be with a big Oliver Stone (or insert your own personal antichrist here) fan for or in twenty years; but a Who fan? There's a keeper, someone you can relate to forever. Likewise, the pallid cipher and the corpulent blowhard who started working part time for Rob and ended up spending all day every day in his shop arguing about music and making variously themed lists of pop songs are connected by nothing but their militant passion for music that explains and justifies everything else in their lives. They might not agree with each other, but they sure as hell aren't going to sell a rare album to an unworthy supplicant. They pay an exacting price for their exacting standards, sabotaging relationships with rampant snobbery and nitpicking:

Rob: Liking both Marvin Gaye and Art Garfunkel is like supporting both the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Laura (his perfect match, if he'd let her be): No, it's really not, Rob. You know why? Because Marvin Gaye and Art Garfunkel make pop records.

Rob: Made! Made! Marvin Gaye was shot by his father!



High Fidelity: The corpulent blowhard, the pallid cipher, Rob, and a compatible hook-up

That's why, according to *HF*, making a mix tape for somebody (like my glamorous brother Pat and the estimable Aureng Zebe recently did for me) denotes a high degree of personal investment and regard. A mix tape should not pander to the recipient's prejudices, though they should be a consideration, because the whole point is to introduce somebody to something new, or illumine something familial in an unfamiliar context. It should lure a person away from their preconceptions; and let me tell you, it takes faith to listen to Bell & Sebastian or The Passengers until finally you feel a switch flip in your brain and you say, "Oh..." or to listen to Magi's *The Harder They Come* soundtrack thinking you hate reggae and learning you only hate Bob Marley. Or, if you are Rob, learning to tolerate—if not appreciate—different songs and underwear that isn't lingerie *because* they are not his, but hers.



American Psycho: Worshipping a false sun

American Psycho, the second best movie I saw this year, is a worst case scenario of what would have happened to the guys in *High Fidelity* had they failed to get over themselves. If you look past the conspicuous trappings of wealth, and it's no easy task, the nightmare yuppies collecting Armani suits, women, and dinner reservations at the most exclusive restaurants are not that different from Rob and his music bullies with their record collections arranged just so. They are all rotted through with vanity, but whereas the guys in *HF* have retained, and are redeemed by, an almost adolescent awe of women and art, those in *AP* are too rich to value anything that can be bought, too jaded to see worth in the parade of secretaries, doped up debutants and prostitutes that are their only female contact, and so alienated from normal human contact that one of them mistakes attempted murder with a homoerotic caress. They are also practically indistinguishable even amongst themselves—no wonder an inferior business card can trigger an identity crisis. Patrick Bateman, however, is different, special in his own mind, because while his peers in mergers and acquisitions make puns about being in "murders and executions," he really means it.

Like Rob in *HF*, Patrick Bateman is the first person narrator in *American Psycho*, and equally fastidious in his dissection of popular music. But whereas Rob uses his lists of songs to reflect his moods ("Do I listen to pop music because I'm miserable? Or am I miserable because I listen to pop music?") and continually vaunt his pop culture erudition, Patrick is only interested in success—Robert Palmer, Chris DeBurgh, Phil Collins. "Do you like Huey Lewis and the News?" he asks a drunken colleague as he preps him for slaughter. "I think their undisputed masterpiece is 'Hip to be Square.'" The song's so catchy most people probably don't listen to the lyrics. But they should, because it's not just about the pleasures of conformity and the importance of trends—it's also a personal statement about the band itself." So Patrick has aggrandizing tendencies, toward material goods and kitsch, and certainly toward himself. In the end, the viewer is convinced that he is evil, but he has been so unreliable that *how* evil is difficult to gauge. Okay, maybe he did manage to dispose of the body in the Jean-Paul Gaultier bag, but ones he left hanging like slabs of beef in a Francis Bacon painting even exist? Even his teary confession is passed off as a prank, somebody else's prank as a matter of fact, as nobody in his social circle could credit Patrick Bateman with being so inventive. Patrick prides himself on having only the appearance of humanity, flesh and blood with a drum machine heart beat and a calculator brain—but maybe he's just a little nerd who was impressed with *Helter Skelter* at a tender age. (cont. on page 7)

Christmas Myth Buster



Perhaps you once forwarded to me an alarming e-mail and I replied the story was a hoax. I don't do that any more because you (well, Jana and Pat) told me I was being a big fat killjoy. But if you hear a tale that sounds fishy (like that gruesome lobster thing), you can check it out at the Urban Legends Website—www.snopes.com. The authors, Barbara and David P. Mikkelsen, have scrupulously researched a wide variety of topics, and keep a "Currently Circulating" file open so you can quickly determine the veracity of the FW:'s you get. You don't have to be a drag about it like me, but you can sit back and cluck over the ignorance of your friends and family.

These are some of my favorite entries for Christmas:

- * **The Suicide Rate Increases at Christmastime:** False. I first heard this factoid in the movie *Gremlins* and saw no reason to doubt it, but in fact the suicide rate in the US dips most significantly two weeks before the 25th, and is still lower than average on that day. New Year's is a big killer, though.
- * **A Man Dressed as Santa Goes Down the Chimney to Surprise His Family and is Suffocated:** Also from *Gremlins*, also false. Or at least, completely undocumented by a credible source if it is true.
- * **Poinsettias are Poisonous to Humans:** Sure, if you are a 50 lb. child who eats five or six hundred of the leaves. Otherwise, they are perfectly safe for consumption if you are into bitter, nasty greens like brussle sprouts (so you might want to keep Audrey X at a distance from you holiday decorations).
- * **A Japanese Christmas Display Featured Santa Nailed to a Cross:** Almost certainly false. However, the Mikkelsens made note of the following holiday practices, "...a custom of young couples exchanging presents of expensive jewelry, heading out to high-priced hotels, and being directed by scantily-clad female elves to rooms complete with Christmas trees, where the lovebirds spend their Christmas Eve in romantic bliss," and the following "rather curious blendings: Colonel Sanders dressed in a Santa suit (as KFC tried strenuously to promote fried chicken as the 'traditional' Christmas meal), nuns singing advertising jingles to the tune of Christmas carols, Christmas cards featuring a ghoulish Santa in a graveyard accompanied by the Virgin Mary on broomstick, elves plastered on sake, and a Christmas revue featuring 'stripping nuns and three lecherous Wise Men.'"

I'm telling you, this is one great site. 323

Cookin' with Cobra



For the Holidays

Though too late for those of you who used canned cranberry jelly for Thanksgiving, let me offer you my cherished recipe for Cobra Cranberry Sauce. It was passed to me from my blessed mother who got it from the back of the Ocean Spray bag. Years passed before I realized it was there, and even after that I kept forgetting until the bag is in the trash covered with goo. But "Who needs it!" I cried, and soon so will you.

First, buy two bags of cranberries. I've only seen them in one size, so there shouldn't be an issue there. You'll want two because once you are finished everybody will want your sauce. If they do not see the truth of this immediately, insist upon it. Okay, one is probably enough. Anyway, I recommend shopping at Fry's because they usually carry the berries during the holidays and don't you dare ask if I mean Fry's Electronics. If you even had that thought, slap yourself hard.

While you are at Fry's, YES THE GROCERY STORE, go to the canned fruit section and select a can (Campbell's Soup can size, no, not like the silk screens—would you please be serious for just one minute, *please*) of whatever appeals to you. I recommend something mellow, like pears, though if you ask my scintillating Auntie Jan—who is something of a culinary overachiever—nothing less than hand picked oranges will do. The wisdom of my selection will become apparent momentarily, however.

Also, make sure you have plenty of sugar on hand, or live near a place where you can steal lots of those little packets. The Author's Café is a good place, they have a whole unprotected bucket of them. Oh, and paper towels.

When I get home after all that shopping, I usually take a nice long nap in preparation for the arduous cooking ahead and maybe you should, too. Wake up, and find something good on TV. Go to your "stove" and put paper towels all around and under your large back burner, as close as you can without the danger that they will be ignited by the heat of the burner. Pat laughed and laughed when he saw me doing this, and I thought that was a little out of line considering he set a burner pan afire making Pasta-Roni a couple weeks ago. (cont. on page 5)



Where is Your Head, Cobra?

To get into the mood to write about the k.d. lang concert I put *Ingénue* on the cd player; but the mood it put me into—the mood it always puts me into—is just to sit and listen. After four spins through resulted in one sentence, I put The Clash in so I could get something done. lang invites languor. “We’re going deep into romance,” she said as the stage lights dimmed from sunrise pink to aqua green and the opening bars of “Wash Me Clean” played; “and not coming up for a long time.” The audience was mesmerized—that’s what *Ingénue* does to a person. In the concert that romance turned out to be a vacation fling that co-existed with parties and swimming. Not for nothing is her latest album called *Invincible Summer*.

But first, some news from our invincible autumn.

My favorite item, and this surprised me because I thought it would have been all the rain we’ve been getting, is Great-Great-Aunt Mary’s one hundredth birthday party which was held the day of the concert. Mom used to take me to see Aunt Mary when she lived in a trailer in Mesa several years back, and her grasp of my identity was shaky even then. Now it’s just gone. Even giving her one of my Cobra Cards didn’t help, though she stared at the snake for a long time. Besides, I can’t claim my memory of obscure relatives is anything to shout about; I must have asked Mom “Which one is Dorothy?” ten times. The thing is, Aunt Mary is one of the nicest people on earth. Aunt Evelyn gives her a run for her money, but Aunt Mary has seniority so I have to rule for her. She is one of the few who makes me rethink my position on letting old people stray out of their homes—no small feat considering I worked at a Dunkin’ Donuts one winter.

The last time a family event/ concert convergence occurred was when my Great Uncle Max’s funeral fell on the day of the Nine Inch Nails show a few months ago. Although I’ve come to appreciate funerals as an opportunity to visit with far flung friends and relatives (those of you who know them—or are them—understand why that’s a treat), their primary function is to acknowledge somebody is irrevocably gone. Birthday anniversaries are also reminders of mortality, especially when you get to a venerable age like 100 or 32, and we celebrate because we know that life is fragile and fleeting. And if funerals and birthdays are not as dissimilar as we like to suppose, neither are Nine Inch Nails and k.d. lang. Each have a fatalism that could produce a line like “Sour the fruit of neglect/ The core of my doubt/ Deprived are the veins you infect/ With or without;” but where NIN leaves the tang of wormwood, a k.d. lang concert is redolent of birthday cake—all you can eat.

That’s why her music endures. The reason her shows are wonderful is because she is a wonderful performer, but I’ll get to that in a minute.

Several weeks ago, my magnanimous Auntie Jan awakened me from my late afternoon, post-*Blind Date* nap. I recall being disappointed in the episode, which ended with necking in the hot tub rather than hissing in the cab, and baffled by Aunt Jan’s question, “Do you like k.d. lang?”

Of course I like k.d. lang, but what does that have to do with anything? I’m pretty slow on the uptake, but I liked where this was going. It seems she had courted eternal damnation in scoring concert tickets at a funeral from a friend who is also lang’s manager. Thank you, Aunt! She took me home from Aunt Mary’s birthday party because when I asked if she would give me a ride to the show she said there was no way she was driving into Scottsdale to get me, and that was fine because she always has plenty of news and stories to tell me. At her house, we met a friend of Ron and Kelley’s named Helen, who by the way worked with David Maletta in the AZ Courts—but I’m not supposed to write about him any more, so scratch that. Together, we went to a place called “A League of Their Own” in the Arizona Center, just across the street from the concert venue. Although this place was suggested as sort of a lark, I think I can safely pronounce it the best lesbian sports bar ever. It is beautiful—quiet, with lots of dark wood furniture, a lounge with HDTV and overstuffed chairs and couches, a two page wine list, and a good variety of appetizers. Sure, sports played on the televisions, but the volume was way down so they were easy to tune out; and Aunt Jan was obliged to terrify a slow moving waitress, but she had it coming. At 8pm, the place emptied out and a loose knit gang of women made its way to the Web Theater.

I could have told Pat, who was running late, that we would be sitting with two womyn with close cropped blond hair, jeans, and v-neck sweaters over white t-shirts. They were friends of Rocky’s who already had tickets for the show but Aunt Jan said hers might be better, so they swapped with two other womyn with close cropped blond hair, jeans, and v-neck sweaters over white t-shirts who ended up sitting directly behind Aunt Jan and Helen and talked through the opening band’s entire set. (cont. on page 8)

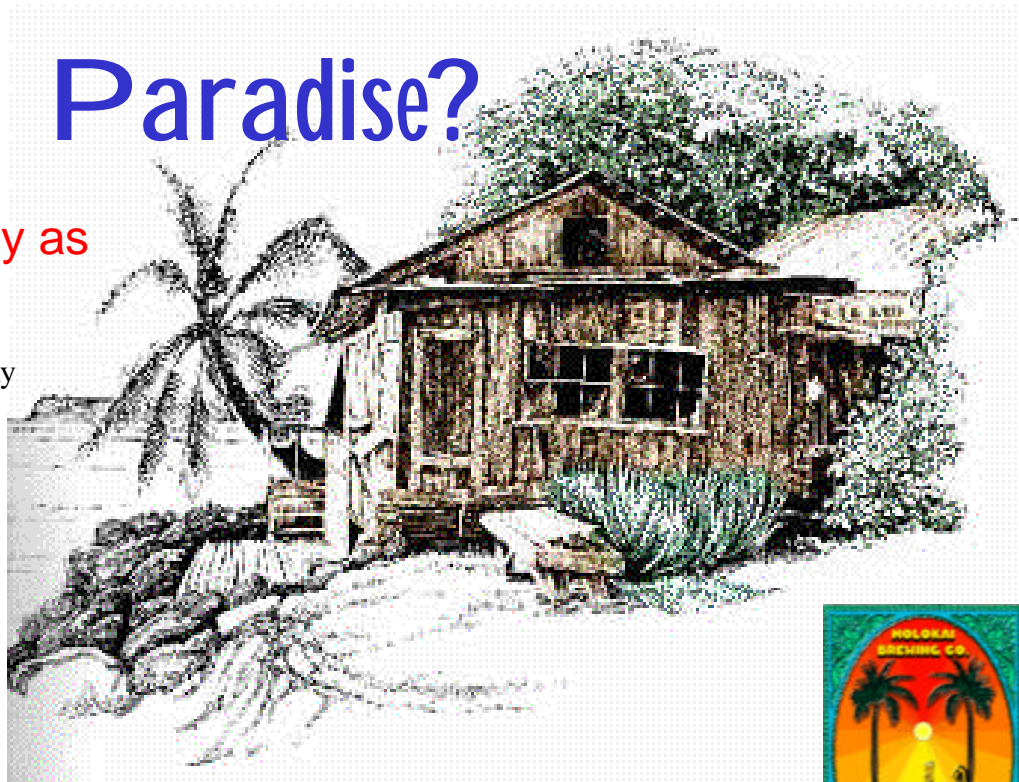


Dreaming of Life in a Tropical Paradise?

It's not as far away as you might think!

The Molokai Brewing Company is looking for able bodied chefs to, you know, cook. So if you have professional kitchen experience and a desire to spend time on a sparsely inhabited Hawaiian island (no, not the one with the lepers), please contact William & Sue Zierle, care of this newsletter. Believe me, they could even teach

this Cobra a thing or two about cookin', heh heh. Maybe you are in need of a job, or would like a jumping off point to, say, Costa Rica, or want to chuck everything and give the tropics a try, or just really, really like beer, this could be the sound of the gentle lapping of opportunity on the white sand beaches of your future. Can't you hear it lapping? www.molokaibrewing.com



(cont. from page 3) You will want to use the back burner because a future step, "Boil the hell out of the sauce" is extremely messy, and if you use a front burner that mess might extend to your kitchen floor. I don't know about you, but Cobra prefers not to bend or stoop.

Get a pot that looks like it could contain your bag of cranberries and can of fruit. My pots are always a little small (but then, I use two bags of cranberries), and this may have something to do with the fabulous success of my sauce or it may not. The only time I had a pot of adequate size with a lid was when circumstances forced me to cook at my splendiferous Aunt Carolyn's house a couple years back. It turns out that when you cook Cobra's Cranberry Sauce with a lid, it takes forever for the mixture to boil down. In fact, she had to show me this trick with some sort of corn powder to thicken it up or else I'd be boiling maybe to this very day. So—no lid, roomy pot optional.

Pour the can of fruit in the pot, plus a cup of sugar (that would be two cans and two cups if you have two bags of cranberries, by the way), or however much sugar looks right (I usually don't have any fancy schmancy measuring tools on hand). Don't put the sugar away yet, you may want more. If you opted for the handpicked oranges, you will have to put water in the mix—one cup per bag or whatever looks right. The instructions on the bag say you should let this combination come to a boil before you add the cranberries, but I always forget and put them in right away. That calls for more stirring, but otherwise seems to work out alright. If you can't fit all the cranberries in at once, that's okay—they'll fit later. Oh, and remove the bright pink ones, they are bitter. Throw in some cinnamon and allspice if you have it, but if you don't don't sweat it. If you use the pellet form of allspice, be sure to warn people about it before they eat the sauce, you do not want anyone to bite down on one of those hard little things, let me tell you what.

Boil the hell out of the sauce. Be warned, the cranberries become very volatile at this point and may explode! But hey, what is life, or cooking for that matter, without a little risk? Stir and stir and stir so the sauce won't burn onto the pan. This is a lengthy portion of the recipe, so feel free to take frequent TV breaks. Add the cranberries that didn't fit before as room in the pot permits.

When what is in your pot looks like cranberry sauce except hot, you are done. Chill and serve most for later, but you will probably not be able to resist eating some hot. Try not to burn your tongue. 🌺🌺🌺

Christmas Memories



A few pages ago, I mentioned fishing around for Christmas memories (if you didn't get asked, don't feel neglected—I wasn't particularly vigorous). Aureng Zebe's mom used to give her kids their favorite breakfast cereal as gifts so she wouldn't have to cook on Christmas morning. He asked if I remembered what brand he preferred, and answered himself, "Buckwheats! Buckwheats! They don't make it anymore!" Ah, the raw and festering wounds of the Season! But if any of you happen to have a box or bag of Buckwheats sitting in your twenty year food supply and want to make somebody you don't know very happy, please sent it to Mr. Zebe care of this newsletter.

St. Janet of the TP e-mailed the following tale:

I can't remember the specifics. My brother and I were talking about Christmas and all the great things Santa was going to bring us and how much fun it was going to be. I think we were at the dinner table. And my dad just looked at us and said something like, "didn't you hear?" We said no and he said that Santa has been killed in an accident and they had cancelled Christmas that year. We had no idea who this mysterious "they" was who cancelled Christmas, but—hey, Dad said it was cancelled so in our house that meant it was cancelled. I think my brother asked something about school vacation and was that cancelled also. Me, I just sat there while visions of no presents filled my head. He let us believe him for several days. Finally, my mom told us that Dad was just being silly and that Santa wasn't really dead.

This sounds like something Pat would pull. A couple of weeks ago, he told his daughter that the adults were broke (this is true) and had voted to eliminate x-mas festivities and gifts for children. She demanded to know why one of the presents under the metal sculpted plant we're using as a Christmas tree has a tag that reads, "To Sophia From Aunt Sharon," so I told her I'd just really, really misspelled "Grandma."

Finally, my sister Lauren began, "It was special, a year when we were very poor..." then she remembered who she was talking to and desisted. But seriously folks, it sounded like a fine story...FOR ME TO POOP ON! I meant to say, "For the *Ensign*." She had another from a couple of years back when her son, Alex, misunderstanding the function of "Christmas

Eve" was dismayed to find no presents under the tree on the morning of said bogus, pseudo-holiday. He awoke his parents with the forlorn news, "Somebody passed us by."

The Arredondos and their gang throw things. I was just talking to my blessed Auntie Jan and she reminisced about an orgy of pear throwing, the clean-up of which lasted years, and in fact, was only resolved with the complete remodel of her house. Last year, Rocky packed his gifts in foam balls, and they threw them with more violence than anybody had thought possible. But the regular Christmas even is Citrus Bowl, held after dark at Marcos de Niza, where they all went to high school. "Anybody else would think their house was being overrun by commandos," mused my fabulous aunt, re the prep. "I just say, 'Hi, Mark.'" So, they make their way to the schoolyards and lock themselves in to prevent anybody from escaping before every bit of their boxes of citrus has been pulverized against a participant. It sounds like quite and even and I never plan to come closer than two miles from it.

You know what? Kids really do make the holidays special. 202



Up Yours!

(cont. from page 2) The movie that embraces both the worship of music and the occasional inhumanity of its devotees and practitioners, is the best movie I've seen so far this year—*Almost Famous*.

And if I might just interject, this has been a pretty damn sad year for movies. Much as I liked *High Fidelity* and *American Psycho*, I did sort of hope they would be bumped down on the list. Maybe they still will be—I've got my fingers crossed for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Quills*, and *You Can Count on Me*, and hopefully something will come out of nowhere and be amazing like *The Thin Red Line* was. As it is, the only unqualified success I saw this year was *Almost Famous*. I'll let you know if it gets any company.

Cameron Crowe, who wrote and directed *Almost Famous*, as well as *Say Anything...*, *Singles*, and *Jerry McGuire*, understands about music. Even if you didn't know that he started touring with rock bands and writing for *Rolling Stone* as a whist in his early teens, you could tell from that moment in *Say Anything...* where John Cusack turns up a song on the radio and tells his date, "I have this album." He's trying to impress the most impressive girl in his school, and you might not think this is the way to go about it as she gives a demure, "Hmmm," but for music lovers of a certain order, it's a compulsion. And if you share that compulsion, you will have an appreciation for the parting gift Anita Miller leaves her brother William—all of her record albums. A handwritten note on one of them says, "If you listen to *Tommy* with a candle burning you will see your entire future." *Almost Famous*, better than any movie since *Quadrophenia* and before that *A Hard Day's Night*, celebrates the transportative power of music.



Almost Famous: "If you listen to *Tommy* with a candle burning you will see your entire future."

And not just cliquey *Rolling Stone*/Lester Bangs approved pop. In fact the movie starts with, of all things, a Christmas carol sung by Alvin and the Chipmunks, and goes on to include selections by David Bowie (covering The Velvet Underground), Simon and Garfunkle, Rod Stewart, The Who, The Seeds, The Beach Boys, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Yes, and on and on. The movie is a Cameron Crowe mix tape. Already irresistible songs are impeccably placed and give both movie and music resonance. For instance, sixteen year old Penny Lane thinks of herself and her gang as muses—Band Aids, not a pack of sleazy groupies. They follow the movie's fictional band Stillwater because they genuinely love their music and feel they have a contribution to make to it. After a concert, Penny dances amid the trash on an arena floor like it is a field of starlit poppies while the Cat Stevens song "The Wind" plays. "I let my music take me where my heart wants to go," it says, aptly summing up the Band Aid philosophy, and continues, "I swam upon the devil's lake, but...I'll never make the same mistake" to foreshadow how misplaced her trust and optimism will prove to be. Even more astonishing is how Crowe manages to invoke fan-feeling for tunes I've never particularly liked; e.g. Elton John's trite life-on-the-road-wah ballad "Tiny Dancer," which when sung by the characters after a nasty blow-up becomes an anthem—a statement of common commitment to music to the music that propels them, and a moving song in it's own right.



Band Aids—yours for a case of Heineken



The Uncool



Separation, Initiation, Return

In fact, a major theme of *Almost Famous* is the power of music to move a person, not only emotionally but physically. Stillwater is not only on tour, they are at a transitional point in their career represented by their switch from tour bus to private jet. The Band Aids follow them because they love music and their access to its creators, but they allow themselves to become as commodified as the latest hit single and traded to the roadies of another band for a case of Heineken. Anita finds fuel for rebellion and escape from her mother in her record albums ("This song [Simon and Garfunkle's 'America'] explains why I am leaving home to become a stewardess"), and passes them on to her brother (who belatedly learns that puberty is even farther off than he had been led to believe) for the same purpose. William meets his mentor Lester Bangs when Bangs visits Southern California on a radio tour, and William is assigned to follow the band and write them up for *Rolling Stone Magazine*.

The movie also eloquently expresses the idea of home, both literal and musical. When Stillwater's plane nearly crashes, they return to the bus—their old home. After a suicide attempt, Penny Lane heads home. When the band members discredit William's article and send his career into a tail spin, his sister finds him in an airport and takes him home. When William needs council and advice from Lester Bangs, he finds him at home. Even the remaining Band Aids regroup and complain about the new girls who "never use birth control and eat all the steak." But in music, they all share a spiritual home, where, as Penny tells William, "if you ever get lonely you can just go to the record store and visit your friends." It may not be normal or even healthy, and those who don't understand it probably never will. William's mother isn't far off the mark when she laments rock stars have kidnapped her son.

Above all, the passion music inspires is not cool, maybe not even for its creators. Presentation is everything, and its jealous regard is what separates vainglorious Stillwater (and vain, murderous Patrick Bateman, for that matter) from the guys in the record store in *High Fidelity* and the reporters and groupies in *Almost Famous*, and from some of us. Ultimately though, that's not a bad thing. All three of these movies show that the further the characters get from cool, the closer they are to joy, enthusiasm, generosity, and sincerity. Or as Lester Bangs (in reality, one of rock's foremost critics and an intimate of Crowe's) says in *Almost Famous*, "The only true currency in this bankrupt world is what you share with someone else when you're uncool."

So this winter, please try to find *Almost Famous* in the theaters before it leaves, wrap up, and stay uncool. 🎧🎵🎵🎵

(cont. from page 4) That band was called Yve-Adam and they were inspirational in conventional ways. The singer, Yve, was kind of an interesting Bauhaus blend, wearing Daniel Ash's clothes, performing Peter Murphy's moves, and hair a modified David J. If Adam had shorter hair, he could have made a passable Kevin Haskins, but I don't suppose that's either here or there.

k.d. lang's stage was very simple (though Pat, who showed up midway through Yve-Adam, wondered why the drum kit had a sneeze guard), with four musicians on the floor, three more on a riser, and plenty of room for her to move around. She was so relaxed and unselfconscious in front of her frankly worshipful audience and so comfortable with her band and backup singers that we could have been watching her goof off in her living room. Her interactions with the crowd were spontaneous and witty. When she predicted her latest single would zoom past Brittany Spears on the charts, there was an angry yell: "Brittany Spears can go to hell!" lang grinned and purred, "I'll tell her."


A high point in the evening came with the first encore, when k.d. lang, who had been attired in faded jeans and an unraveling orange overshirt, reappeared in a big yellow satin dress with matching a polka dotted shawl that kept slipping off her shoulder to reveal the tattoo of an anchor on her upper arm. Bubbles floated up from both sides of the stage as she swooped around singing "Miss Chatelaine," and the gigantic brown beehive wig stayed atop her head just well enough to justify her joke about the occasional convenience of a strap-on. But I have to say, if she doesn't resemble Kyle MacLachlan as closely as I had thought, she doesn't make a particularly convincing drag queen either.

There was a second encore, because she had yet to sing "Constant Craving." She also had yet to sing "Big Boned Gal," "Luck in My Eyes," and "Pullin' Back the Reigns," but we had to leave anyway, through the crush of short haired, jeans and sweater clad womyn and the occasional man. Aunt Jan told us lang was in a different creative space. That would explain why her torch songs didn't sing like they do on her albums, she seemed too happy to make us sad. But we agreed over the jumbo, garlic flavored potato chips at A League of Their Own, that was something we could live with. Life needs birthdays and funerals, art needs k.d. langs and Nine Inch Nails, families need Aunt Marys and Evelyns and, well, the rest of us. "Love, Force of death and birth/ Still lies naked when next to the truth/ So spins the earth." ♪ ♪ ♪




End Noel... By the time this newsletter reaches most of you, Christmas will be less than two short weeks away (but still plenty of time to get a holiday card and mail it to me—so far, only Barbara S., the Family Bogart, and my mechanic Bruce are safe from my what?!-no-card-wrath; oh, and St. Janet of the TP and Auntie Jan because they gave me stamps), and New Year's one tiny little week after that. Frankly, I'm not ready for it. St. J sent me a list of resolutions from her office. Hers was not to impregnate a chad, and her co-worker's was "to be more tolerant of chicks in the workplace even though they are unnatural and an offence against nature." I've tried to think of something to be resolute about, but nothing's come up so I guess I'll go with that chad thing, too. If you have a resolution that you'd like to commit to in print, send it to me and I'll run it next month if I remember.

Cobra Headquarters

 **Sharon C. McGovern,**
Cobra-in-Chief
3600 N. Hayden, #2803
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

 (480) GAY KATS

 shmcgovern@ikon.com
thecobrasnose@yahoo.com
ladycobra@uswest.net

 www.thecobrasnose.com

Use them.

Last month's "Cookin' with Cobra...and Friends" drew the following from Scott, "'hummus' is not new. It's gross, but not new. Give me a rich greasy pesto cheesy spinach dip any day of the week." By my count, his preferred recipe has four ingredients (pesto, cheese, spinach, and dip) in its title alone, thus disqualifying it from future inclusion in "Cookin' with Cobra."

Now, let me end the last **Cobra** of the year with the words of Emily Dickenson, poem 930:

**Two Seasons, it is said, exist—
The Summer of the Just,
And this of Ours, diversified
With Prospect, and with Frost—**

I don't know what they mean, but you can sing them to the tune of "The Yellow Rose of Texas," and I think we should live by them in 2001. Good luck to Mr Enigma as he graduates to the land of Myth and Legend. Merry, merry.