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THE HISTORY OF WESLEYAN’S MUSIC SCENE:

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The year was 1990. Janet Jackson, MC Hammer, and the New Kids on the Block held top positions on the billboard charts. The internet had yet to be invented and for artists looking to make it in the music industry MTV held the key to success. The alternative music that was once played on college radio stations began to be absorbed and accepted into the corporate world of music television and, consequentially, students at Wesleyan University were searching to reinvent the terms of the counterculture that was and still is so definitive of the student body. The breath of fresh, commercialism-free air came to the students in the form of Phish—a jam band from Vermont that was gaining popularity as a national touring act. A modern anomaly of rock music, Phish achieved stardom and success without the aid of MTV or commercial radio.

In order to spread their music Phish began a cross country tour in 1990, a year that would prove to be one of the most active concert years in the band’s history. On September 16th of that year the band stopped in Middletown, Connecticut to perform a free concert on Wesleyan University’s Foss Hill. The band’s music appealed to the students for myriad reasons. Their music offers an endless amount of variety: jazz, blues, r&b, funk, rock, classical, calypso, and folk. Most of their performances consist of improvisational jam sessions, making each performance exciting and unique. Their lyrics are fantastical and draw on references to cultural icons such as J.R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit, Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Rudyard Kipling’s The Jungle Book, Dr. Seuss, and Sesame Street. In an interview with Rolling Stone Magazine, Phish Drummer Jon Fishman described the band’s style: “We all have a certain desire to honor the roots and traditions of music, but there’s also this persistent desire to find out what else we can do rather than the common forms, the things you always hear.”

The fan base that Phish attracts is often compared to the 1960’s counterculture that found a voice in the Grateful Dead. Like “Dead Heads,” the number of “Phish Heads” grew as a result of live shows. Both of these bands not only defined a musical genre, but a musical community and culture that revolved around their tours. Phish fans set up temporary residencies in parking lots and camping grounds and reinvigorated the hippie culture propagated by the Grateful Dead by selling tie-dye t-shirts, playing hacky sack, dancing around and indulging in psychedelic drugs. For Wesleyan students, Phish represented the possibility that their much loved dogma of the separation of music and conglomerate might sur-
vive the 1990s.

The set list for the Foss Hill concert included hits from their self-titled debut album which was unofficially circulated in 1986, from Trey Anastasio’s senior study at Goddard College entitled The Man Who Stepped into Yesterday (unofficially released in 1987), from their first officially released album Junta (1989), and from their fourth album Lawn Boy which was released 5 days after the Wesleyan concert. Not surprisingly, the recording of the concert, as well as the Grateful Dead concert recording from 1970, are among the few recordings in the music archives that Wesleyan will freely circulate to students and which can be copied without permission. Nearly 20 years after Phish performed at Wesleyan the band still remains a cultural stronghold for students. Soon after the performance their popularity exploded to epic proportions. With five Gold albums, one Platinum album, well-known and thriving side projects, and phenomenal touring career, they continue to prove that MTV and commercial radio play is not necessary for success in the music industry. After a nearly 5 year hiatus which began with the band’s breakup in 1994, the band announced that they would be performing reunion shows in 2009. Their reunion has generated substantial buzz on Wesleyan’s campus—proof that they still are and always will be heroes of our counterculture.

Set List from 9/16/1990:
Dinner and a Movie, Bouncing Around the Room, The Sloth, The Landlady, Reba, Ya Mar, Tube, Tweezer, Paul and Silas, Mike’s Song > I Am Hydrogen > Weekapaug Groove, Magilla, Run Like an Antelope

WESU Middletown: The Sound of Wesleyan
Justin Schwartz

If a Wesleyan student in his dorm room tunes his radio to 88.1 and finds WESU, what kind of music can he expect to hear? WESU is Wesleyan’s local radio station, broadcasting from a dedicated studio at 45 Broad Street. When it was established in 1939, the station transmitted through wires hooked up to water pipes in the maintenance tunnels of Clark Hall. Over the years it has grown in popularity and in transmission range, with plans for a 2009 transmitter upgrade that would give the station one million potential listeners across Connecticut.

To try to answer the matter of the type of music heard on WESU, I interviewed Max Lavine, the station’s Program Director, about his job in determining the content of the station. He emphasized the station’s role as an alternative to commercial radio and the need for shows that are new or unique in some way. Since WESU is a “small, community-based college radio station”, it is in the best interest of the station and its listeners to be playing different music than one would hear on commercial radio. As the Program Director, Lavine is part of a team of people working to ensure that the overall program is as high quality as
According to Lavine, this season’s program had a record number of new applicants, forcing him and his team to make difficult decisions about which shows to put on the program. In making this decision, Lavine took into account the presence of similar shows already on the WESU program, maintaining the continuity of time slots, and meeting WESU’s mission. It is important to note that the fact that station aims to schedule shows that play music less heard on commercial radio does not mean that the music on WESU is homogeneous. On the contrary, Lavine commented on the vast range of creative and unique program ideas that are submitted. One must resist the temptation to generalize the music tastes of Wesleyan – if WESU is any indication, Wesleyan students are passionate about a very wide variety of music.

Lavine clearly enjoys his job of reading program ideas and arranging shows to make WESU as great a listening experience as possible. However, he has one duty as the Program Manager that is much less pleasant – reviewing already existing WESU shows and making the decision to cancel some of them. Lavine evaluates continuing shows as part of the programming process every season, but because of the competitiveness of this season, he reviewed more shows than normal. By going through the playlists of each show, he is able to see whether shows are keeping on track with what they proposed in their applications. He must also evaluate whether shows currently on the air fit with WESU’s goal of having different content than commercial radio. Through this process shows are sometimes dropped for a time slot change or a new show that is “more promising.” Lavine recognizes that these decisions are not easy or fun to make, but they are part of the process of programming for WESU.

WESU is one of the oldest college radio stations in the US, and it is an important part of the culture at Wesleyan. Max Lavine and the team at WESU work to ensure that the programming reflects the diversity and uniqueness of that culture.
The emergence of the Grateful Dead at the forefront of the burgeoning counterculture represented the period’s tumultuous times. The Dead’s consciously eclectic blend of musical styles embodied the clash of cultures which was coming to a head in American society. The music known as acid-rock was genius; the scene was infamous and infatuating. Yet the band was caught between fulfilling the role of cultural leaders and remaining what Jerry Garcia called, “musical workers.” This dilemma would follow the Dead throughout their career.

1970 was a pivotal time for the Dead, as it was for students around the country. They played a free concert at Wesleyan University at a time where activism was bubbling on campuses nationwide, with shocking and devastating results. Wesleyan itself was experiencing a transitional moment. This free concert, a gift from the countercultural icons known as the Grateful Dead, represented a moment in time for university students, especially for Wesleyan students, whose distinct collegiate culture was undergoing an essential transformation.

It was dark times for the nation, but in 1970, it was dark times for the Grateful Dead as well. In early December of ’69, Altamont, a free concert planned by the Rolling Stones, failed wildly. The venue was too small to adequately host the 300,000 person audience. Famously, the Hell’s Angels were hired to do security; it was a poor choice. Inebriated Angels assaulted a number of concertgoers as well as Marty Balin of the Jefferson Airplane. The show ended in the murder of Meredith Hunter. The Grateful Dead, having encouraged the decision, were later criticized for the violence that ensued. In response, they produced one of their few topical songs, “New Speedway Boogie” in only two weeks.

The violence at Altamont foreshadowed a period of declensionism that would color American society in the New Year; it heralded a period of horrendous luck for the Grateful Dead. On January 31st, the Dead played in New Orleans and suffered a major drug bust. The band was arrested. The major effect on the Dead was the loss of Owsley “Bear” Stanley as their audio mixer and LSD chemist. When the band returned from New Orleans somewhat unscathed, their relationship with manager Lenny Hart ended explosively. Confirming their suspicions that Hart had been stealing from the band, they found themselves left penniless. During this heartbreaking trajectory of events, the Dead had no other choice but to continue playing and writing. After three weeks of recording, they produced Workingman’s Dead, a musi-
The band launched a series of shows called “An Evening with the Grateful Dead,” including the free show at Wesleyan. It was May 3rd, 1970. Bob Weir’s childhood friend, John Barlow ’69, had co-written several Dead songs including “I Need a Miracle” and “Hell in a Bucket.” That day, several Black Panthers were on trial in New Haven. One was Bobby Seale, a Party leader and a member of the Chicago Eight. That month, Black Panthers and college students virtually shut down New Haven with protests against Seale’s incarceration. On campus, the concert was controlled by the African-American student community in league with individual Panthers. In the 1960s, Wesleyan began actively recruiting students of color. Many students, faculty members, and professors were active in the civil rights movement. Dr. Martin Luther King visited campus several times. That year, the first female freshmen were admitted to Wesleyan, ushering in coeducation at the University. In 1970, there were 20 million college students across America. The concert went well on May 3rd, but the next day was a dark moment for the nation.

President Nixon illegally ordered troops into Cambodia on May 4th. Peaceful protests erupted at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. Kent’s President authorized the stationed members of the National Guard to disperse the crowds. After one of the troops was injured, the Guards responded by opening fire on the students, killing four (including 2 passerby) and injuring 9 more. As a result, 437 colleges were out on strike within 3 days. On May 8th, construction workers beat antiwar demonstrators on Wall Street, with approval from President Nixon. On May 14th, two black students were killed as a result of protesting in Jackson, Mississippi. As dismayed as the youth nationwide, the Dead played a free show at MIT for the students on strike there.

The Grateful Dead emerged during a time of intense political and social upheaval. Although they were icons of the counterculture, they maintained that their primary purpose was to create and play their music. To contextualize the Dead is to reproduce the tradition of emphasizing the band’s cultural importance. The free show that the Dead played at Wesleyan is emblematic of their relationship with American students during a formidable moment for the nation as a whole.
On May 3rd, 1970, a crowd of 3,500 Wesleyan students, Middletown residents and various fans gathered on Foss Hill for a free, open-air concert by the Grateful Dead. This show would go down in Wesleyan history as one of the greatest concert the campus has ever seen. A medley of seven opening bands from Middletown, New Haven and New Britain played through the afternoon hours, provided by the Better Days Prospecting Company – a traveling commune seeking new recruits from the Wesleyan community. Throughout the day, 1,000 oranges passed through the crowd, courtesy of WestCo dorm, as well as hundreds of balloons and beach balls. As a result of so many acts and such a large crowd, the Dead didn’t take the stage until 9 that night.

The concert, planned by the Social Committee and the College Body Committee, was organized as part of an anti-war protest, on the already highly political Wesleyan campus. Campus activism grew to an all-time high during this period with a surge of anti-racism and Vietnam War demonstrations, forcing the college administration to close the campus down early for the summer of 1970.

The administration and faculty were in support of the Dead concert, however, setting up a first-aid facility in the Nicholson Lounge and posting Wesleyan security guards at the dorms so as to protect against the influx of non-Wesleyan concert-goers. In addition to these security guards, the May 1st, 1970 Argus requested that all students interested in being a Student Marshall for additional event security should arrive to the bandstand on Andrus Field no later than noon on the day of the concert.

The Grateful Dead’s set list was short but memorable, featuring: Me & My Uncle, New Speedway Boogie, Good Lovin’, Dire World, Uncle John’s Band, Turn on Your Lovelight and Workin’ Man Blues. There is a recording of the concert, yet the quality is quite poor, receiving many internet critiques for the “primitive technology” of the Wesleyan sound operators. Mike Dolgushkin, author of Dead Base IV- The Complete Guide to Grateful Dead Song Lists said of the recording, “here’s a tape that’s probably useful for ‘historical value only.’ Not that the band didn’t play well, they certainly did, it’s just that the audience is SO LOUD. This seems to have been some sort of primitive remote broadcast – during Lovelight someone is carrying on a running commentary of what the audience is doing.”

Little did these critics know, the recording is of poor
quality not because of inept sound operators, but because this recording was made by the Sociology Department, as part of a study on the concert’s crowd. Led by Sociology Professor Phillip Ennis, a team of faculty and fifteen students filmed, taped, interviewed and observed the crowd, taking photos from the roof of Judd Hall. The recording was made not for musical documentation, but in order to study the crowd movements in the context of particular music and speeches, explaining the “running commentary” Dolgushkin was so frustrated with. Though the Grateful Dead show in May, 1970 is perhaps the most famous concert in Wesleyan’s history, appearing on the Admissions website, even the Wesleyan Wikipedia entry, the Grateful Dead is by no means the only high-profile concert the campus has seen. Twelve years prior to the Andrus Field show, an equally impressive and much-less well-known concert took place at the Cage – the former Alumni Center, where Usdan Campus Center now stands.

On May 2, 1958, Louis Armstrong and his All-Stars took the stage for a crowd of 1,200 Wesleyan community members, Trinity and Yale students, and other fans. The Wesleyan show was one of the final stops for Satchmo, having appeared in New Haven, Boston and at Tufts University in the days before. In the May 2nd issue of the Argus, Ken Hunter detailed how the Social Committee was selling tickets hoping to cover about $2000 of the expenses and had appropriated an additional $1100 from the social budget to cover the remainder. Tickets were $2.50 per person, or $4 per couple – at the door they would be “$3 stag, $5 drag,” reported the Argus.

The concert became an all-campus, all-night event. The front page of the May 2nd Argus listed the activities at the fraternities that evening: Alpha Delt would host snacks after Armstrong, Beta was holding an after-Armstrong Dance, Eclectic would host a Record Dance after Armstrong and finally, Deke invited all Wesleyan students to an after-Armstrong Beer Party on the front lawn.

Satchmo’s performance was considered a great success; in the May 9th issue of the Argus, Social Committee Chairman Cliff Vermilya said the committee had generated $150 in profit, and was hoping to host two similar concerts the next year. Though many other great concerts would follow in the coming years, these performances by Louis Armstrong and the Grateful Dead gave Wesleyan its prominence on the campus music circuit as an important and respected musical venue.

The Wes-Factor

Sarah Bell

Many of the top liberal arts colleges in the United States are located in New England. These schools are known for their rigorous academics, talented sports teams, diverse student bodies, and wide range of classes. From the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, Wesleyan University was often referred to as the “Singing University” because of its plethora of singing groups. Wesleyan’s musical background continues to play a significant role at the University today. The
school attracts an assortment of music professors and student musicians and encourages free thinking through composition, collaboration, and performing. Although Wesleyan has always had an emphasis on its music program, over the past decade Wesleyan has been especially successful in producing several well-known artists, including MGMT, Santogold, and Tony-Award-Winning composer Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Wesleyan University, Amherst College, and Williams College are three of the most selective small New England liberal arts colleges and are collectively referred to as the “Little Three.” Although Amherst and Williams consistently rank higher in US News and World Report rankings, Wesleyan has had better luck in creating popular musical groups. All three schools have strong music departments, good college radio stations, and are able to attract popular acts, but Williams and Amherst have not produced mainstream artists to the same extent as Wesleyan. The Williams Record student newspaper fills their Arts sections with conversations and reviews of student musical groups, but their campus blog, Eph Blog, does not have much information about upcoming performances. Neither The Amherst Student newspaper nor the Am’erst Blog has much information on their student music groups. Not only does Wesleyan have a student blog that is filled with information on campus events and concerts, but also has an entirely separate blog dedicated to the music scene at Wesleyan. The blog, Aural Wes, is committed to keeping the campus aware of “upcoming shows, concerts, festivals and other student-run music-related events happening on campus.”¹ This demonstrates Wesleyan’s emphasis and commitment to publicizing their musical performances.

Upon further investigation, I found that Middlebury College is the only other top-tier small New England liberal arts school that has an impressive history of producing mainstream artists. Several popular musicians have also graduated from Tufts University outside of Boston, but Tufts is not always considered a small liberal arts college because of its larger student body. Bowdoin College, Colby College, Bates College, Trinity College, and Connecticut College have released limited numbers of talented student musical groups. Williams College and Amherst College also fall into this category of producing few mainstream musicians.

Musicians flourish at Wesleyan for several reasons. First, Wesleyan has an extensive music department with two dozen professors and more than forty music classes offered each semester. Second, Wesleyan offers a variety of unique classes, including Japanese Drumming, Steel Band, and Gamelan. These classes are open to everyone and often fill up with non-music majors. Along with a plethora of class offerings, Wesleyan has access to a recording studio and a computer and experimental music studio. Third, Wesleyan has ten a capella singing groups, more than any other small liberal arts college in New England. Although it is difficult to track down the exact percentage of students involved in musical groups at Wesleyan and other colleges, it seems that Wesleyan has more students involved in some sort of band than many other schools.

Overall, Wesleyan tends to have more success producing popular mainstream musical artists than other small liberal arts colleges in New England. In turn, this success boosts Wesleyan’s music reputation and encourages talented high schoolers to consider attending Wesleyan.
The “It” School: A (Brief and Non-Exhaustive!) Comparative Survey
Katlyn Batuigas

Steve Pristin for the Huffington Post couldn’t have said it better: 2008 was definitely the year of the awesome-ization of Wesleyan, especially in terms of the emergence and commercial success of Wesleyan-affiliated musical acts. Among those who have generated considerable buzz are Santogold, Bear Hands, Boy Crisis and Amazing Baby. And of course, there was a point in time when it seemed like ‘Time To Pretend’ was on the loop everywhere, from frat parties to high school proms to your little siblings’ iPods to Gossip Girl—yeah, MGMT did make it pretty darn big.

Is there something floating about the hallowed hallways of this institution that has somehow, in one way or another, led to this trend? One could spend years studying and living on this campus and still be unable to give a definite answer. Maybe it’s the food we eat here. Or maybe it’s being in the company, day in and day out, of all these scarily intelligent, multi-talented and just plain “weird” kids. It could be something in the air on Foss Hill. Or of course, we could just blame it all on happenstance.

Perhaps it would be helpful for us to take a step out of the bubble and consider a few other colleges whose alumni have successfully broken into the music industry: what do we or do we not have in common? Do these comparisons help explain why Wes is the current “It” school for today’s emerging musical acts?

Everyone is someone in L.A.

We are usually quick to associate Los Angeles with the glitz and glamour of Hollywood, but it is also interesting to note that the University of California—Los Angeles (UCLA) can count many of its alumni as some of the music industry’s most successful recording artists: for example, members of Maroon 5, Linkin Park, Bad Religion, The Doors and Sara Bareilles.

It could be the allure of the City of Angels itself that brings thousands of bright students to UCLA every year. For the more musical-minded, L.A. serves as one of the most important cities not only for the film industry, but for the recording industry as well. The presence of Capitol, A&M Records and Warner Brothers might be attractive for those new bands looking to break into the industry.

One of UCLA’s oldest and biggest traditions, the annual Spring Sing, also serves as a platform for up-and-coming musical groups to showcase their abilities to an audience of over 5,000, which includes a celebrity panel of judges. Past Spring Sing winners include Sara Bareilles, as well as new and on the rise groups JP and the Ambassadors and Lady Danville.
Fearless

We can definitely count Oberlin College among the few schools that wouldn’t be out of place when mentioned in the same breath as Wes. Indeed, many of Oberlin’s defining traits—progressive, liberal, quirky, artsy, to name a few—imply that a large number of students attending either Wes or Oberlin would feel like they would belong in the other school. What could’ve caused the significant presence of Obies among musical acts that have made it in their respective scenes (Liz Phair, Josh Ritter, The Mars Volta, and Yeah Yeah Yeahs, to name a few)?

The most obvious answer would probably be the Conservatory of Music, with an enrollment of about 600 students, a collection of over 1,500 musical instruments available for student use, and more than 500 concerts put on annually. The Conservatory, together with the vast array of opportunities for aspiring musicians to exhibit their talent, definitely adds to the musical activeness of the college campus and so influences not only the conservatory students, but the regular liberal arts students as well.

With Cleveland relatively nearby, many touring artists also make a stop on campus, and bands looking to break out straight from college can also use the city as their base.

Georgia on my mind

To those who are not familiar, the University of Georgia’s reputation precedes itself: a traditional Southern-state school, with athletics and Greek life dominating the campus culture. On the other hand, some of UGA’s graduates have achieved success in genres that can be considered counter-cultural to the more conservative atmosphere: the bands R.E.M., Pylon, Widespread Panic and Danger Mouse of the Gnarls Barkley duo.

As with the previous two schools, UGA’s location has been a great influence on its musical identity; the city of Athens, dubbed the “Liverpool of the South.” serves as a wellspring of talent that has contributed to the alternative rock and New Wave movements.

What makes Wes special?

Relatively easy access to cities with bustling music scenes, venues for students to show their musical creativity, and a large pool of talent to draw on—they seem to be the common factors behind the presence of a substantial number of these schools’ alumni in the music industry. How is Wes different from the rest, then? It could be a number of factors, but for this writer, it’s the intellectual curiosity, the sense of adventure and innovativeness that Wes students possess. Without those, Goldwasser ’05, VanWyngarden ’05, White ’97, et al. couldn’t have gotten to where they are today.

...But that’s just me. I suppose one could still argue in favor of the Foss-Hill-air proposition...
“Bring yourselves, your bee’s, d’s, and a’s and come party with your Wesleyan brothers and sisters.” (Argus, 1979)

Classes are finally over and a week of life-consuming tests and papers loom in the very near future. Squeezed between this end and new beginning lies the ultimate release: Spring Fling. Every year, unless there is rain, students sit on the nature-made bleachers of Foss Hill, imbibe enough PBR to clear out CT Beverage Mart for a few days, and revel in the sweet tunes of some mid-profile bands.

Spring Fling first appeared on the Wesleyan campus in 1975, five years after the infamous and unifying Grateful Dead performance. While bands had been playing on Foss for a number of years, the reading week kick-off was the first full day festival dedicated to music and post-classes celebration. Boasting 30 kegs, since drinking was legal for the 18-plus crowd back then, this was no small-scale “blow-out.” While there was no explicit reason to hold the event, one can assume that the recent coeducational and post-Vietnam War environment lightened the mood on campus. Interestingly, other high profile institutions like UPENN started their Flings during the mid-70s too.

The first Spring Fling hosted Brian Auger and the Oblivion Express as well as the John Payne Quartet. The smooth grooves exhibited on Auger’s tracks “Compared to What” and “Happiness” seem like perfect accompaniments to a sunny spring day. It is not difficult to imagine Wes students getting down to the elongated instrumental solos and putting there 50 cent, all-you-can-drink cups to good use. In the May 14th, 1975 Argus, Mark Ellison wrote, “The experience of Monday afternoon’s concert bears repeating at future dates.”

And Ellison got his wish. Spring Fling has evolved into the biggest and most anticipated event of the school year, perhaps because it is the only time that the entire student body congregates in one place. From the Anonymous Confession Board to the Argus, every one has an opinion about who should perform, and there are always some unsubstantiated rumors about the headliner. Yet, only a select few have the inside scoop on the day’s events, and they keep the performers under wraps until late April.

Who comprises this secret planning committee and what exactly do they do? The Social Committee is an independent, self-selecting subset of the WSA. In 1975, “The Social Committee [was] responsible for mixers, concerts and blow-outs, as well as other social
events.” Over the years, the Committee’s responsibilities have been whittled away to focus solely on Spring Fling. Three years ago, the SC also coordinated Winter Carnival, but decided to allocate all of its funding to the spring show.

In the beginning, Spring Fling was more about the event than the music. The line-up consisted of several out of town bands, and a large number of Wesleyan groups. While these days the event must be shut down before sunset, in the 70s and 80s the party lasted until at least midnight and usually found its way to fraternities after the music died down on the hill. In 1979, Spring Fling was a downright extravaganza, lasting the entire weekend, and even the Wesleyan Jazz Faculty got a turn to entertain the crowds.

While today a diverse line-up is crucial each year, the students in the ‘70s foot stomped to John Cotton’s energetic blues and harmonica playing a couple of times. The 1979 Argus encouraged people to “Get drunk in the morning, and stoned in the afternoon,” because “Cotton’s rowdy antics should break loose a semester of stored up frustrations.” Yet, the lighthearted atmosphere of Spring Fling did not last for long.

The early ‘90s brought intense racism, violence, and anger to the Wesleyan campus. Most Wespeaks and articles were devoted to the protests, sit-ins, and increased tensions. Thus, there is barely any indication of Spring Fling in the archives, and if there is, it’s only a brief mention. There was not even a hint of the George Clinton and P-Funk concert of 1994 until the next year when Colin Duwe, former member of the Social Committee noted, “While this year’s Spring Fling won’t have the unity of last year’s P-Funk performance, it looks like it will at least be as good because of its diversity.” And 1995 truly was a very promising year for Spring Fling, showcasing the eclectic Sun Ra Arkestra and the pioneers of alternative hip-hop, De La Soul.

Unfortunately, the negativity of the early ‘90s prevailed as students started to question the role of every committee and institution on campus. In 1999, the Com-
The Social Committee announced the headliners William Oldham, a folk artist, and Maceo Parker, a funk saxophonist to which the Argus wrote an editorial entitled “Spring Flop.” The editors took issue with the Social Committee’s small representation of the student population (about 9-12 members are on the board each year), and suggested that “Either through student input in boxes like those of the Film Series or the direct election of members of the selection committee, all Wes students should have a say in the selection of bands.” Josh Kagan, then member of the SC, retaliated that “Every year the price of artists goes up. We need more money. The lack of diverse artists reflects that.”

There was another factor out of the SC’s control that plagued Spring Fling: the weather. From 1995-1998, the Fling was held indoors at the skating rink because of inclement weather. If this year’s Girl Talk concert was any indication, having a concert of such magnitude indoors is a total mood killer. Thus, in 1999, the Committee invested in an outdoor tent so that even if it rained, Wes could have its own Woodstock and the sound equipment would remain intact.

Despite these setbacks, great bands continued to play like Yo La Tengo, Toots and the Maytals, Dead Prez, and Biz Markie. Students continued to joke and speculate about the big names. Joke issues of the Argus suggested the Brady Bunch and Poison as headliners, and even that Spring Fling would be moved into Shanklin 107. In 2000, the Social Committee coordinated with ResLife to get more money, which they used for carnival games including a moon bounce, climbing wall, fake tattoos, etc. One can only imagine the drunken fiasco that
ensued on the moon bounce.

Even though Spring Fling seems like a bunch of fun and games, the SC never gets cut even a little slack. In 2001, an editor declared that the SC gets more money than any other student group and is held the least accountable. While this may be true, little does every one know that the SC agonizes over who would best fit the bill every year. As a member of the board for three years, I know we are never out to fulfill our own agendas—we’re just a bunch of students who love various genres of music, have attended many shows, and have experience with concert-planning logistics. The battle is always between getting bigger or lesser known names, having fewer or more acts. Sometimes we run into a situation like 2001 where the Committee hoped to get the Roots, Jill Scott or Outkast, but tour schedules, uncommunicative managers and money got in the way. Last year, Brown got MIA and we did not, but no one knows that we battled for an affordable price for months, until finally we were denied.

We are not Cornell, who gets the likes of Ludacris. We do not have that kind of money, but people still do not set their expectations lower. Bands that were underground even a few months ago, now cost thousands of dollars more than expected due to their rise in popularity on the internet. Yet, we accomplish quite a lot with the minimal funding we do have. Over the past few years, we have hosted TV on the Radio, Project Pat, Deerhunter, The Cool Kids and many others who have blown up since playing on Foss.

Last year, even Zach Fuhrer of the Yale Daily News concurred: “The YCC was given $140,000 dollars for Spring Fling; Wesleyan was given $56,000 for theirs. But Wesleyan is getting a lot more with their dirty liberal arts dollar. Instead of trying to check a whole lot of boxes—like our mix of pop-punk bullshit (Jimmy Eat World), legitimate hip-hop (The Roots), and unattractive/untalented crooning (Sean Kingston) – Wesleyan assembled a line-up, that while not homogenous, works harmoniously together. They aimed to create an event that flows. The Wesleyan line-up includes GZA, The Hold Steady and Cool Kids, plus The Hood Internet spinning between sets. While these names aren’t as recognized commercially as ours, they all are respected for their abilities to perform live.”

Thus, while there are plenty of haters at Wesleyan, other competing universities seem to be jealous of our diverse, interesting and fun line-ups. Anyway, Mark Ellison, the Argus editor in 1975 summarized what Spring Fling should be about the best: “The music was of respectable quality, yet the source of the good time did not come from the stage. It emanated from the crowd itself, focusing on the absolute contentedness of all those who lounged out on the Hill, taking advantage of the Sun King and music to partake in a lazy party like atmosphere with their friends.” So for this year’s Spring Fling we should remember what it’s all about – getting down with your Wesmates in the best outdoor venue possible.
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I had the privilege of interviewing Graham Richman, lead guitarist for Wesleyan’s very own Barefoot Junction, a three-member group who’ve been entertaining crowds since they formed in late 2007. Although the other members, who include bassist Benjie-Messenger Barnes ’09 and drummer Jared Keller ’09, were unable to make it to the interview, Graham was more than willing to lend some of his time and talk about the group. A Music Major and accomplished musician in many respects, Richman has been playing guitar for about eight years and piano for fourteen years.

Adrian Hernandez: First off, the group has very interesting name. How’d you guys go about choosing it and what does it mean?

Graham Richman: Well, Jared and Benjie had already named the group by the time I joined and to be completely honest, I have no idea what it means. I assume it has something to do with the fact that we usually play our shows barefoot.

Adrian Hernandez: How long have you guys been together and how’d you all meet each other?

Graham Richman: We’ve been playing together for about a year and a half to two years. I actually joined the same fraternity that they’re both in, Psi Upsilon, so that’s how we ended up meeting. When I came to campus as a freshman, they knew that I played guitar and invited me to play with them. It was all very laid back at the time but it worked well, so we decided to form a band.

Adrian Hernandez: You guys have an incredibly catchy and funky sound, how does the group classify the type of music it plays?

Graham Richman: I’d say that we’re an improvisational funk band, which is to say that most of music is not written down or really rehearsed. We usually have a very short piece of music that is written as a jump-off point and the rest is improvised.

Adrian Hernandez: What are some of Barefoot Junction’s musical influences?

Graham Richman: In terms of music that we all like and people that have had a big influence on our sound, I’d have to mention Medeski Martin and Wood, Tower of Power, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, Phish…and that’s about as for our shared influences. All of the bands I mentioned have had a tremendous influence on how we play music.

Adrian Hernandez: What are some of your personal influences as a musician?

Graham Richman: I don’t mean to sound cliché, but you know how a lot of people like to say they listen to everything? Well I feel like I really do listen to just about everything.
ADRIAN HERNANDEZ TALKS TO GRAHAM RICHMMAN OF BAREFOOT JUNCTION

GR (Cont): In any genre of music I have artists that I absolutely love. But in terms of artists that have influenced me most as a guitarist, I’d have to say they are Trey Anastasio, Jerry Garcia, Al Di Meola and John McLaughlin.

AH: Does the group have any favorite places or venues that you’ve played in the past?

GR: We’ve played two concerts outdoors, usually in the backyards of senior houses, and I thought that was awesome. People can come and go as they please and I love that type of environment. I also love playing at Psi U, since all I have to do is bring my amp upstairs. Last semester we also had the opportunity to play a show at Public (a local bar in Middletown) and that was a fantastic venue. I do get to play the bar scene too often and everyone there, from the fans to the owners, were very enthusiastic. We had a great turnout from the Wesleyan community and I love that.

AH: Can we expect any upcoming shows from Barefoot Junction?

GR: Yeah, we actually have a few shows coming up that the group’s very excited about. We’re going to be playing at Psi U with Banish the Rabbit, who we’ve played with before and I really admire, on April 4th. There also might be a show in the works on April 20th with Orchestra Fiebre.

AH: I understand that you’re a music major, what exactly is your concentration within the major:

GR: I focus primarily on Jazz and Experimental Music.

AH: How do you feel about the music scene at Wesleyan?

GR: Well, I think that I can speak for the entire band when I say I think that the music scene at Wesleyan is fantastic, especially when compared to the scenes at other colleges and universities. I think that for whatever reason people’s tastes are much more sophisticated here. However, despite the fact that the music tends to be very good and people tend to be very receptive to artistic and sophisticated music, I think that there is a tendency for the genres that are represented to be very narrow. A lot of the music, thought its good, tends to fall within the realm of funk, electronic, rock or indie music in general. It’d be nice to see a wider variety of music.

AH: What are the band’s plans for the future? Are you looking to add members? Are you planning on staying together even after two of the band’s senior graduate?

GR: Unfortunately, after our seniors graduate, Barefoot Junction will cease to exist. When you have an improvisational band and you replace members, the nature of the band changes drastically and it’s no longer the same band. If you’re in a band that isn’t based in improvisation, it’s much easier to add people and continue playing relatively similar music. However, with the type of music that we play, the identity of the band is based on the people, so that’s why were not continuing after Benjie and Jared graduate. However, I’m in the process of putting two other bands together that I plan on playing with and I’m really excited about it. Playing music is what I love to do and I don’t picture myself stopping any time soon.
Earlier this week I had the opportunity to sit down with Ian Johnson of the Wesleyan DJ duo Chrome Punch. Johnson filled me in on an array of topics including how he and his partner Harrison Schaaf came up with the group name to what would be his ideal DJing job. Below is the transcribed interview.

Robert Greene: When did you first start doing music?

Ian Johnson: For me, it really started in about 11th grade. Harrison had been pretty into it already and he was the one that really put me on. He came to school one day with this drum machine that he had just gotten and he was messing around with it at lunch. I asked him what he was doing and he showed me a few things on it and I was absolutely hooked after that. A few weekends later, I went over to his house and he was using this crazy looking program called Reason. After he explained a few things to me, we made our first beat together. After that, it was a wrap. I’ve been hooked on this s** ever since.

RG: Is there anything about L.A. that inspired you to get into music?

IJ: I can’t really say that there was anything in particular that got me started in terms of L.A., but I love my city and I rep it pretty hard [laughs].

RG: What artists, celebrity wise, have you performed with?

IJ: Blue Scholars, 6th Sense, Jelani & Wildebeast, DJ Benzi

RG: How did you and Harrison meet?

IJ: We went to high school together.

RG: What did you do music-wise in high school?

IJ: We all have our humble beginnings. I was on the school radio starting senior year. We (the radio staff) got asked to do the music for our school’s annual Halloween event, so I said sure. I just played music off of my laptop from iTunes, nothing major, but it was such a rush. Just knowing that I was in control of the crowd, that I was the sole reason for their excitement, it was indescribable.
Later that year, I did the annual semi-formal dance too and I got that same feeling again. It was the best semi-formal the school had ever seen, so I was told. That’s when I decided to get serious about this DJing thing. To this day, when we rock a show, I still get that same feeling. That’s what keeps me going.

RG: What equipment do you use?

IJ: I use a black Macbook, running Reason for production and Ableton Live for remixing and DJing.

RG: Describe the process of making a song.

IJ: I usually make remixes, so I wait until I hear a dope song or find a great acapella for inspiration. I may or may not sample the original song, it just depends on what kind of mood I’m in. Then, I chop parts of it up to use in the song. Then I use Reason to make the beats, build some synths, program out some drums, things like that. Then, I use Ableton to chop up the vocals and track everything out. I tinker around with it, adjusting levels, rearranging things until I feel that it’s done. Then I export it as an audio file out Ableton, convert it to an mp3 and boom, there it is.

RG: Do you and Harrison collaborate to make each song?

IJ: Early on, like when we were still in high school, when we were doing more hip-hop type stuff we made a lot of collaboration tracks, but since Wesleyan and since I got into the electronic side of things, I’ve been mostly doing solo tracks. But we did make a Chrome Punch theme song together last year.

RG: What is your favorite genre of music?

IJ: Hip-hop is definitely my first love. I grew up listening to the Fugees, 2Pac, Biggie, A Tribe Called Quest, all that stuff.

RG: Is your music more representative of the music that you like to listen to or what you think the student body at your parties would enjoy?

IJ: I think it is a little bit of both. For me, I’ve always loved hip-hop and that is definitely my favorite genre of music. A lot of the people at our shows and on campus like techno though and I’ve incorporated a good amount of techno into my songs. I always keep an element of hip-hop though, like
when I make a song with a techno beat, I’m gonna have hip-hop vocals and be using hip-hop samples.

**RG:** What type of crowds do you attract at Wesleyan?

**IJ:** Hmm. Primarily we attract the freshmen on campus, usually just pretty mainstream white kids. It might have a lot to do with the venue of Psi U that we are accustomed to using. But I’d say that we appeal to a broad crowd that is not necessarily represented by just the people that show up at our shows. We usually get at least 100-150 per show. I think the craziest and biggest one we’ve done might have been a show we did last year at Psi U, we had it literally packed for a good 2 hours. That or senior cocktails.

**RG:** Have you noticed any changes in the patterns or trends of the type of music that Wesleyan students listen to?

**IJ:** Again, I’d say that techno is getting more popular again. There was a time where I really hated techno but I think that people are getting more into it now and I am too.

**RG:** Have you been in talks with any record companies?

**IJ:** I personally haven’t.

**RG:** If you could play any party, what or who would it be for?

**IJ:** I’d definitely have to say being a tour DJ for someone like Nas or Jay-Z would be amazing and is a dream of mine, but in terms of a party, I might have to go with a party at the Playboy Mansion or something for or with M.I.A. or maybe Crookers or Disco Villains or Soulwax, pretty much anyone in that scene, would be pretty amazing.

**RG:** Where does the name Chrome Punch come from? What does it represent?

**IJ:** Basically, we had the word Chrome and we needed something to go with it. We were sitting in our room thinking “Chrome something.... What other word could we use?” And then our friend Khaleif said “Punch. Chrome Punch.” It just sounded right, you know. So we ran with it.
Due to come out this Friday is the long awaited release of The Corners debut original single “Dear Sun”. The power group recently formed known as The Corners is comprised of Sonya Freeman and Myles Potters, both of whom have long established careers in the music. Luckily, only a few days before the recording at Green Street studios, I was able to ask the duo a few questions about their project.

Alexander Brody: Tell me about how you two meet and decided to team up?

Myles Potters: The first time we ever meet was at an a cappella tryout.

Sonya Freeman: Myles had a reputation for having a perfect pitch so we just had to see what he could do.

AB: A Cappella? Are you currently on other side projects as well?

SF: Well I am a member of Cardinal Sinners, Wesleyan’s oldest all female a cappella group

MP: I’m not really doing any a cappella at the moment but I do have a few other ensembles that I am working with. I am working with Fiebre, Thankful Decease (a Grateful Dead cover band), a funk band which has yet to be named at the moment, as well as a seniors thesis project.

AB: What are your inspirations for “Dear Sun”.

MP: I would say our biggest inspirations would have to come from other indie rock bands like Radiohead and Decemberists. What I was really just thinking when I was writing was “Let’s just have fun with this” so I just put in a few chord progressions that I thought sounded good.

SF: Myles came up with the initial chord progressions and I created a melody that would work with it.

AB: So what was creating the first The Corners single like?
SF: I think it’s really cool combining forces with Myles to produce this song. Collaborating with another person to create a song is a unique experience.

MP: It was hard for me to think globally, trying to get other people to hear the same song that I hear in my head and then sitting back and hearing what other people think of our work.

SF: It took us a while to feel comfortable musically with each. It’s hard to both give and receive criticism about something as personal as this. But we learned how to concede our different preferences to create this song.

AB: So what are we going to be hearing on this track?

SF: We are really trying to bring out the vocal harmonies in this song, but Myles is also playing the guitar, bass, percussions, and we even worked a little synthesizer into this.

AB: Do you have any plans to do any more work as The Corners again?

SF: We both are enthusiastic about creating music and we have similar friends so I think it would be hard for our paths not to cross again.

MP: I definitely enjoyed working on this; however at the moment we have no plans for the final project.
HARRISON SCHAFF:

While most teenage boys become musicians to get girls or for the glamorous rock n’ roll lifestyle, Harrison Schaaf (’11) started making music because he “was interested in how music was made.” While his parents are in the film industry, from age 11 Schaaf began using computer beat mixers, experimenting with different styles and genres from rap to pop, and his now favorite genre, techno. “Most of my favorite songs are just random beats from artists who I don’t even know the names of,” says Schaaf. Known for his mashups of electronic dance beats with modern pop hits, Schaaf makes up half of the DJ duo Chrome Punch. Schaaf, with his partner Ian Johnson (’11), have played many parties on campus and are highly regarded as the best DJ’s on campus. Schaaf also produces many remixes and has collaborated with another up and coming musician at Wesleyan, Khalif Diouf (’11). Most of his music could be played anywhere from small house parties to sweaty clubs in Europe.

As an East Asian studies major, Schaaf is fascinated by Chinese culture, having spent a summer in the country during his teens. “I haven’t taken one music class or history of music class here [at Wesleyan] because is what I do for a release,” reasons Schaaf as to why he did not want to major in Music. He goes on to say, “the best music I have made in the past two years [is] during finals, ’cuz when you are trying to distract yourself from studying you just put your all into it.” However, Schaaf does not stay holed up in his room with his musical creations as his recent performance with Leif at the Eclectic Society’s Valentine’s Day party showcased. He exhibited his down-to-earth, yet passionate, performance style as he pumped up the crowd by waving his arms up and down, letting Khalif take center stage.

Harrison Schaaf’s music can be found at www.myspace.com/harrisonschaafproductions and hypemachine.com.
Two hundred sweaty bodies are swaying left to right, yelling every lyric, while he stands in the center of the crowd with one hand holding the mic and another on his hip. This is no other than Khalif Diouf (’11) who performs under his nickname Leif. His fame has already stretched beyond the Wesleyan campus and across the Atlantic due to his tour with rapper Rye Rye where he stopped in London, Stockholm, and Copenhagen, wrapping up just in time for him to come back for the fall semester. Surprisingly, Diouf has never passed a music theory class and is more interested in studying dance and technology than music. With heavy electronic beats and Diouf’s deep voice rapping softly over tracks titled “Geto Boys,” “Timbs,” and “Black Magic,” his music has sophisticated beats, but his lyrics remain light hearted and fun, making it the perfect party soundtrack. Diouf’s collaborations with Harrison Schaaf (’11) began as two beat makers comparing their art. According to Schaaf their musical relationship was “love at first sight, for sure.” Diouf began rapping for fun over Schaaf’s beats and it was a friend’s manger that discovered him at a party. In a few short months, Diouf found himself performing for crowds in the thousands around the world and back at Wesleyan. But for now, his future as a musician is a mystery even to himself, as he is focusing on school rather than his music.

Leif’s music can be found at www.myspace.com/leif.

While most high school freshmen are worrying about what video games to buy or what they should wear to school the next day, Dan Ferm (’12) and three of his best friends were busy starting their music careers. Along with Cas Kaplan as the lead singer and rhythm guitarist, Justin Danforth (Pitzer College) on lead guitar and Luke Pyenson (Tufts University) as their drummer, Daysleeper emerged from Kaplan’s basement only three short years ago. As the story goes, the band was started by another one of Ferm’s friends, Sam Geiber, then named “Insomnia.” It wasn’t until Geiber and his brother left the band to be replaced by Danforth and Pyenson that they adopted its current name. Counting My Bloody Valentine and Seam among their influences, the band found early success while still in high school, playing high profile clubs such as the Knitting Factory in New York City, the Middle East Club in Boston, and in local churches “as venues,” clarifies Ferm. When he looked at Wesleyan, Ferm wasn’t “really thinking about pursuing music.” He applied Early Decision to Wesleyan for its Film Studies program, and thus far, hasn’t attended one music class. “I don’t want to pursue music but if the opportunity arises, maybe?” muses Ferm. While many have been anticipating a live show on campus, having the band members scattered across the country makes it almost impossible. However, Daysleeper would “love to perform [at Wesleyan] someday” and we would love to have them.

Daysleeper’s music can be found at www.myspace.com/daysleeper.
What do you get when you mix “explosively sexual no-nonsense balls-to-the-wall rockstars” with “raccoons and ejaculate” and “a mutual desire to rock?” Apparently, you get The EBB and The Flow. The group that started as a bunch of college kids jamming and messing around in 2005 has turned into the hip-hop-y, funky, Latin-y, synth-y, big-band-y, ridiculous yet perfect amalgamation that is EF.

The band currently consists of five members: Dave Eastman on guitar, Christian Komecki on drums, Jake Gold on the keyboard, Michael Berger as the group’s MC, and singer Christina Boyd. All five of them were or still are students at Wesleyan University, the alma mater of newly popular musical acts MGMT and Santogold. Although three of EF’s current members have already graduated from Wesleyan, they recall their time spent on campus like it was yesterday.

“We filled the live-band hip-hop void, played good party music...Shows were always packed and anticipated,” says Jake. And according to Michael, there was pretty much nothing else like them on campus. However, feedback from the Wesleyan student body was not always positive. Dave claims that “some people were just closed-minded about it and questioned how we could be doing this as white kids. Mike took a lot of shit and didn’t back down.” Christian too recalls “tons of people hating a bunch of white kids in a rap band. We always felt like we were more than that.” Ultimately, the band learned to use the criticism as a tool for improvement. “It’s very important that you know your place and don’t expect everyone to love you. We are that much more critical because we are used to people jumping on every mistake we make. We anticipate criticism before it happens,” says Christian.

In terms of how EF feels about the recent explosion of Wesleyan bands in the media, all members are certain that it will be an advantage to them. Dave says, “I don’t think the music-buying public is fickle enough to say ‘we’ve had all we can handle from Wesleyan.’” In addition, Michael acknowledges that their music is “very distant” from what other Wes bands like MGMT, Red Wire Black Wire, and Boy Crisis are doing. “People will really not know how to classify us or who to compare us to. They’re just going to hear ballistic lyrics melded with equally as pounding and catchy yet far from annoying music, spiced up with some sweet sumptuous salivating singing. I don’t see us getting pigeonholed as just another Wesleyan band. The fad may even have passed when we drop, but ultimately I feel it can only help us.”

Although The EBB and The Flow has played at
JULIANNE HALL’S INTERVIEW WITH THE EBB AND THE FLOW

well-known venues like Toad’s Place in New Haven and Harper’s Ferry in Boston, they have recently chosen to take a hiatus from live gigs. These days, the band is on the East Coast recording their debut album at Fat Dave’s Place (www.fatdavesplace.com) in Weston, Massachusetts. “Having had tons of fun with the live show, the focus is on making an album we can be proud of,” says Chris-tian. Expect to see their debut, tentatively titled Caged Fury, in the next couple of years, and in the words of Jake Gold, “expect a beast.”

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The Girl Talk Concert: 
My Perspective

by Matt Candal

It seems not too long ago that the campus was a buzz with rumors of a Girl Talk show. I remember being so excited to hear that the University had finally freed up some serious money to book an A-list performer. The fact that this act happened to be Girl Talk, an artist who is renowned for the energy of his live shows, only added to the lofty expectations I had.

As the days passed and the event date drew closer, a friend of my house (Psi Upsilon) as well as co-owner of Visual Effects, (the sound company contracted for the event) asked if I would help him do stage security for the show. The offer was too good: front row seats and a chance to work behind the scenes at a Girl Talk concert. I immediately accepted.

“The Bacon Field House, this is where it’s all going to go down,” I remember thinking to myself as I walked into the gymnasium with the rest of the volunteers. It was only about 2 o’clock in the afternoon and the field house was pretty much barren. It didn’t take long before we were put to work, moving pieces of the stage, microphone stands and subwoofers out of the trucks parked out back. The work was strenuous, but seeing the stage set-up and the massive speakers flanking each side ready to explode with sound was reward enough. Still, as I surveyed the space something seemed off. I thought about how different this room was going to be in a few hours, darkened, and packed with an energetic crowd of dancing students. Try as I might, I couldn’t shake the feeling that something about this situation seemed forced and awkward. I certainly wasn’t ready to chalk the concert up as a failure even before it started however. I remember rationalizing my feeling, telling myself that it was merely the impersonal venue that was putting me off and in the end it wouldn’t matter so much. After all, this was about the music and it shouldn’t matter where the music is played, just as long as it’s appreciated. Convinced by my rationalization, I went back home to take a shower and get ready for the night.

Looking back, I should have realized how underwhelmed I was going to feel after experiencing this show. Right from the start, things did not go well. Greg Gillis was forty minutes late going on. Why no one
thought to book a student band or DJ to open for him was beyond me. Gillis finally emerged from backstage, and for a short time I thought the show was saved. However, this feeling was very short-lived as students began to try to muscle their way past security in order to storm the stage, hoping to get closer to Gillis. I remember thinking that it wasn’t going to be much of a problem and that a few people dancing on stage was completely benign. More and more though, the show stopped being about the music and instead became about finding a way onto the stage. The crowd kept surging forward as people pushed up against each other struggling to make it to the front. I remember extending my arms out trying vainly to suppress the surging crowd. At one point the speaker that I was assigned to protect nearly toppled over. Fortunately, someone tripped a sound cord which cut the music and enabled us to clear the stage. However, even after the music was turned back on, this dangerous trend continued.

Now, I understand that a Girl-Talk show is supposed to be rowdy and energetic, but surely this concert departed from the values which Gillis’s music holds aloft. Girl-Talk is all about sharing and interconnections brought out through upbeat, dance oriented melodies created by sampling a variety of different artists. In the end, my greatest disappointment was that at this concert, the selfishness of a few overshadowed the music which we all came to listen to.

On Thursday, October 25, 2007, the newly renovated Beckham Hall opened its doors to the first concert planned and hosted by a student group. RJD2, the popular hip-hop DJ, was the sole headlining act, selling out tickets well in advance of the night of the show. Psi U took on the responsibility of coordinating and running the event. Many challenges arose out of meeting contract stipulations, dealing with school officials, and running the security at a venue that was still very new. Despite numerous setbacks, many of which the crowd nor RJ ever knew about, the night was a success, and Beckham Hall proved it could house large-scale shows at Wesleyan.

The day of the show, work started at about three o’clock. Ed Dunham, owner of Visual Effects Light and Sound, showed up at the Fayerweather parking lot with his van full of sound equipment. A couple people walked over from Psi U to help unload the equipment. Unfortunately, the freight elevator was locked and we couldn’t find anyone who had a key for it. With some extra help from additional guys who eventually showed up, the group of us carried thousands of pounds of
sound equipment up the staircase to the second floor. Charles Kurose ’10 remembered the hard work that afternoon: “The whole process took over an hour. The main soundboard was over 300 pounds, and it took eight of us to get it up the stairs.”

At about the same time, another group of guys set out to pick up the rest of the provisions of the contract rider. Under the hospitality clause, RJ had requested two quality hot meals, a selection of vegetarian, cheese, and cold cut sandwiches, a fruit platter, six cold cans of soft drinks, preferably Ginger Ale or Coke, two liters of bottled water, cups, utensils, napkins, ice and two cartons of fresh fruit juice, one of which had to be orange juice. He also asked for two large clean towels for on stage during the performance.

At about six o’clock, RJ and his crew were supposed to show up at Wesleyan. Again, at least two of us needed to be there to help them unload any other equipment they needed. Despite RJ being late, we still had two hours until the show was supposed to start. RJ calmly did his sound check, and then took a quick nap in his car. While that was going on, the rest of us started setting up the green room with RJ’s other provisions. RJ never did end up eating any of it and there was a lot of food to bring back to Psi U after the concert. Additionally, tables needed to be prepared for taking tickets, checking WesIDs, and for selling merchandise after the show.

Beckham Hall has an interesting layout with a large open hall on the second floor. We asked the university officials if there was a way to shut down the elevator that ran from a logistically exposed basement level to the main atrium. We wanted to have control over the crowd of people that would be entering through main doors. The solution came when we locked the elevator on the atrium level by putting it on a setting that only allowed the person inside it to operate the buttons. Trying to press the button from outside the elevator on the basement floor would not access it.

At eight, we all met up again for one last meeting with Wesleyan’s Event Staff to go over the logistics of how the night was to be run. One person would stay on stage with RJ. Three people would stand around stage, keeping people from pushing forward, and two would stay by the back exit behind the stage. One person would watch the Green Room. In the front, two people would stay in the lobby with Event Staff to help with ticketing and one more person would be needed to be by the doors as a greeter. For each shift we switched off, and almost everyone had a half hour shift that night.

The doors opened at about 9:30 P.M. The Argus article notes that as RJ started his set, the lights were still on, and people began to look around awkwardly. Furthermore, the projector screen was almost completely washed out because it needed to be dark for it to work. No one knew how to turn the lights off. One Public Safety officer told us that we needed to have physical plant to come over to turn the lights out, but they were not responsive. Therefore, one of the guys ran down the Psi U house and picked up large metal covers from our kitchen. “I was thoroughly disappointed that no facility official knew how to shut off the lights completely, and I was not confident that they cared very much about our request to find out how,” Jeffery Bizinkauskas ’10 recalled, “I can’t remember who decided to get the Chique
Chaque panels to cover them, but I remember saying that whatever we got to cover them had to not start a fire.”
We duct taped them over the lights and everyone was able to dance happily in the dark. Of course, most people didn’t know what had happened, and the Argus believed the lights going out was an act of “either the mercy or will of a higher power,” (Andrea Domanick, RJD2 plays head-bobbing set despite awkward audience, Argus, 11.02.2007 VOL. CXLIII, NO. 16). Ed Dunham noted that in following shows that he has provided with lights and sound, building officials have been much more accommodating by turning out the lights.
Stage security went great throughout the night because we had large wooded barriers. The huge speaker cabinets were placed on a two-foot high stage, which really projected the sound well into the crowd. However, people at times mounted this stage and threatened the safety of both the speakers and crowd, so the people on shift nearest the stage needed to stay vigilant about keeping space between the stage and the crowd.
Because of RJ’s demanding schedule, it was of the utmost importance that most of us stay to help him load his equipment back into their van as quickly as possible. That meant getting the entire crowd out of there. After a little crowd control, we needed to take care of everything that couldn’t be taken care of by Wesleyan’s custodial staff. By 2:30 A.M., Beckham Hall was completely empty.
A few kinks needed to be worked out as the night went along, but the show’s success was based largely on RJD2’s reputation for a good dance party and the early advertising. Lots of problems we experienced with Beckham Hall as a venue have been worked out since, including the situation with the lights. Ultimately, putting on a large-scale show is an incredibly rewarding experience because when people are enjoying themselves it easy to see how the hard work of one group can pay off.
Young DJs and You: Musical Taste Buds  by Adam Fishman

Young disc jockeys seem to be springing up all over the world. These individuals bring new techniques, styles, and vibes to the music scene at clubs, basements, dorm rooms, and college campuses. One DJ in particular, Michael Ullman of our very own Wesleyan University, shows promise as an innovative unifier of both technology and taste. Under the name DJ Bastille, the Los Angeles-based duo consisting of Ullman and his friend Julien Benichou of Oberlin, spins away at the computer until their audience collapses from dehydration and dancing. Like many campus DJs, Bastille promotes himself via friends, LastFM, Facebook, and campus blogs such as Wesleying and AuralWes.

“I actually started as a jazz pianist,” Bastille exclaims, when talking about his musical roots. “My initial influences were John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk, but then I discovered the likes of Daft Punk, Justice and Ratatat.” As a constant lover of music, Ullman decided to try his hand at making his own. When asked how he got into making it, Ullman answered, “I took an interest because it was possible.” Disc jockeys today do not use conventional turntables, especially if they are on a budget. In fact, if the technology were not already at his fingertips, Bastille would only be known as a large building in France that was stormed a few hundred years ago.

With a laptop, technical cunning, and some spare time, Ullman morphed into Bastille, mixing songs with his preferred software, VirtualDJ. This application has a fairly simple, yet astonishingly sophisticated interface which allows for live mixing of the utmost quality. The program seems to be the item of choice among college disc jockeys nowadays. Others use DJay and Traktor DJ Studio, but feedback has been less positive than that of Virtual DJ.

Despite the fact that many student DJs use the same application, there can be a variety of styles when it comes to live performances. This gap is evident when we compare Bastille with other stewards of sound both here at Wesleyan and on campuses across the nation. Many seem to act as “invisible DJs,” Ullman says. “Not that this is a bad thing in any way – it allows for both parties to have a great time. There is no interaction between the [DJ and crowd] with this style, though.” Bastille aims to put on a “show” rather than act as an entertainer, as seen in his recent even, The Masquerave.

Ullman organized a show that combined the major tenets of both a masquerade and a rave, which culminated in dance party bliss. The trademark items of Bastille, Venetian masks, were given out at the door. This creativity is widespread among young people, each with their own unique ideas for having a good time. The originality of young peoples’ style allows for a wide assortment of events and nuances in their music. Three campus DJs (Chrome Punch, Bastille and Sydlexic) were recently featured in a DJ showcase held at Alpha Delt, which exemplified this creativity.

Although originality is a trait highly sought after by major record labels and those who seek to make it in the music world, the constant pressure to be creative is also a major difficulty. With so many new types of

DJ CONTINUED ON PAGE 35

Charlie Kohlhase has been an integral part of Boston’s jazz scene for over 25 years. As an alto, tenor, and baritone saxophonist, Kohlhase has written over 50 compositions and played in dozens of bands. His music spans a broad range of styles with an emphasis on the contemporary and the improvised. His two most recent bands, Explorer’s Club and Saxophone Support Group are charting new territory under Kohlhase’s creative lead.

Born in New Hampshire in 1956, John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and Ornette Coleman influenced Kohlhase to begin lessons with a local saxophone player at the age of 18. Though mostly self-taught, Kohlhase studied with world-renowned artists Stan Strickland and Roswell Rudd before moving to Boston in 1980. In Boston, Kohlhase led his own groups since 1982. His groups, mainly the Charlie Kohlhase Quintet, have toured the country many times over and are prominent in the contemporary American jazz circuit. Kohlhase has played with eminent Wesleyan University Professor Anthony Braxton twice since 2003. Kohlhase teaches at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge, Massachusetts and is extremely active in jazz radio, currently hosting a show entitled “Research and Development” on WMBR, 88.1FM.

Kohlhase is one the most imaginative native artists in the jazz world of today. He calls composition and improvisation the yin and yang of music. His philosophy on composing music is to set up directions in which you can improvise. His compositions are especially good at showcasing each musician and their individual instrument, which gives the show personality. Thus is the reason why his band members, namely Eric Hofbauer who was on guitar, like to play with him. In a recent interview Hofbauer said Kohlhase allows each member to have his or her own input and promotes freedom of expression. His philosophy allows experimentation and his genius turns each composition into a masterpiece.

Kohlhase’s show at Wesleyan on the 22nd was provocative and interesting, combining the use of many different instruments to achieve a fresh, modern sound that hasn’t been heard much in recent jazz. The Explorer’s Quartet is comprised of Eric Hofbauer on the guitar, Mike Connors on the drums, and Jef Charland on the bass. They are a subset of a seven-piece band, which is comprised of
two drummers, a trombone player, a trumpet player, the bassist, the guitarist, and Charlie Kohlhase on the saxophone.

Much of the brilliance of Kohlhase’s work lies within his originality. He started off his performance with a song, composed by him, entitled Jasper Jaguar/Deceptor. Before the start of the song, Kohlhase explained that he had written a series of compositions, the “Superhero Series,” where each song is about a different superhero character that gets into some type of tiff. His humor is also refreshing as his reason for writing this series was that in 2006 the Red Sox were having a bad year so he had a lot more time on his hands than in previous years. His last song, a part of the Superhero Series, illustrates a superhero that tries to save a damsel in distress but ends up getting pummeled by another superhero called Utensor, who uses spoons, forks and melon balers to defeat his foes.

Kohlhase’s music is experimental at times. In one song, his guitarist uses an altoid box as a guitar pick and as a capo. The drummer, Mike Connors, was able to produce a plethora of different sounds using his drums in conjunction with a xylophone, bells, his hands, and at least 12 different types of drumsticks. Kohlhase had a variety of objects, including a liter water bottle, in the horn of his saxophone to fabricate an innovative, at times out of this world, sound.

However, Charlie Kohlhase is not all experimental sound and humor, several of his compositions are extremely moving. His third song, entitled Taconic 2/89, was a more relaxing piece that he wrote while driving upstate from New York City to Bard College on a bleak February afternoon. This piece was extremely soft and melodical but still peculiar, using bells and claps at seemingly odd intervals. At one point, every person in the first three rows of the audience had their eyes closed, feeling the melodies that were flowing from Kohlhase’s quartet.

Charlie Kohlhase’s Explorer’s Quartet’s newest album will be released this spring and is very much anticipated by all who’ve heard or listened to Charlie Kohlhase

(DJ CONTINUED) combinations among DJs, young people move swiftly onward if their artist of choice cannot continuously dazzle them with new techniques. As the advancement of styles is pushed forward by new technologies, listeners feel a sense of “musical A.D.D.”

Technology has the ability to create entirely new genres of music, as seen by the likes of Girl Talk, Ratatat, and other popular artists who combine existing music to form a new entity. These artists, however, must forever remain on their toes about what is hot; not only must they maintain a close watch on where today’s youth is headed, but they must also create the newest fads. T-Pain accomplished this feat with autotune only one year ago, but now it is overused to the point where artists who cannot use it in a different style are practically shunned by listeners. Kanye West’s cd 808s and Heartbreak utilizes it, as does Lil’ Wayne’s newest work, but the music community seems largely turned off by the artists’ inability to bring something new to the world. Today’s young people want leaders, not followers, which is why the rise of young DJs and their new styles is so essential to college life.
Fulfilled Potential: (On Wesleyan Grad Amanda Palmer)

By Bryan Stanley

With all of the talented musicians that come through Wesleyan, the one that comes to my mind first is a singer/songwriter that would rather not be associated with Wesleyan at all. Amanda Palmer grew up the next town over from me in Lexington, Massachusetts. She began playing piano at a young age and eventually began writing songs as well. She only performed once before college, but eventually held more shows. Amanda, as stated earlier, came to Wesleyan university, but did not enjoy her experiences as is evident with her simple statement “I hated college”. Even at one of the most liberal and accepting schools she could not fit in. During her four years here Amanda lived in Eclectic for two of them and still says that “Eclectic always creeps me out... my insecurity was at its peak at Wesleyan.” During her senior year she performed a piece at Eclectic titled “Potential” where she destroyed 1,600 minutes (200 cassettes) of her own recorded music with a hammer. The performance ended with Amanda, naked, covered in blood, screaming about how she has wasted her life.

After graduating from Wesleyan in 1998 Amanda started a short-lived band “Amanda Palmer and the Void” with one of her lovers (Jonah Sacks). The band played one gig, but when the relationship died the band’s collapse followed soon thereafter.

Success came when Amanda was introduced to Brian Viglione on Halloween night in 2000. They instantly had a connection and began making music together. After some time, and debuting as “Out of Arms,” the current name “Dresden Dolls” was settled on.

In February, 2004 the Dresden Dolls made an appearance at an Eclectic Party along with Peelander-Z. Their set was cut short because of a pulled fire alarm. During the set Amanda brought up her bad experiences at Wesleyan when she asked the audience “How many people had a bad time at college?” “I relate to you,” was her response to one of the few who answered.

The set was also interesting because she sang solo for two songs that she wrote during her time at Wesleyan. Songs that were “never heard before and hopefully never heard again.” The first song (Valentine’s) portrayed a melancholy college girl the morning after a party. The second song “The Wesleyan Fight” (which I found the lyrics to...listed below) is a humorous parody of the school fight song.

The Dresden Dolls’ career blew up during this time. They have been voted “Best Band in Boston” by Boston Magazine and their debut album, “The Dresden Dolls,” was cited as one of Rolling Stone’s Critics Top Albums of 2003. Currently, the new Dresden Dolls album “No, Virginia” is ranked #94 on the billboard music charts for top Albums. Amanda Palmer is also working on her first solo album “Who Killed Amanda Palmer” and is collaborating with Ben Folds on the project.

Fulfilled Potential:

By Bryan Stanley

(On Wesleyan Grad Amanda Palmer)
What would Wesleyan be without music? Our lovely campus would be without the structural anomaly that is Crowell Concert Hall, it would be without the crisp lunchtime accompaniment of the South College Bells and it would be without twelve khaki-clad, well-groomed young gentlemen harmonizing in the Chapel. NO, it’s not the church choir, but the Wesleyan Spirits, a dominant and vibrant force within the a cappella scene here in Middletown, Connecticut.

And that’s no easy feat! Traditionally Wesleyan has been recognized as “the Singing College of New England”. During the early half of the 20th century, singing was engrained within the social and cultural fabric of Wesleyan University. Among the small, all-male student body, singing groups were considered an integral aspect of Wesleyan’s social life, with the campus coming together to sing traditional fight songs and celebrate sporting wins over rival Varsity sports teams. However, during the 1960’s, a rather tumultuous time throughout America, priorities amongst the liberal campus changed and a cappella was tossed to the wayside. But the beat goes on and beginning in the 1980’s a cappella, like a tonally gifted phoenix, once again rose from the ashes of melodic obscurity and came to the forefront of Wesleyan’s music scene. Today there are seven a cappella groups on campus; some even dating their inaugural year as far back as 1980.

“Actually the Wesleyan Spirits are the second oldest group on campus, started in 1981. The Cardinal Sinners, the all female group on campus, are one year older,” Allie Levey ’09 informs us, from the comfort of his butterfly chair as he sips on his “Bourbon. Two ice cubes. Neat.” Mr. Levey has been a member of the Wesleyan Spirits, since joining during orientation week of his freshman year.

The Wesleyan Spirits were founded in true college spirit; having been rejected by the now defunct Wesleyan Jibers, founder Charles North ’82, out of a healthy dose of spite and musical ingenuity, decided to start his own group. After a series of auditions, the final six was finalized and the resurgence of all-male a cappella on Wesleyan was solidified. They hit the musical scene in the winter of that year, singing in the Butterfield C lounge for a Valentine’s Day event, and they haven’t looked back since. The Wesleyan Black Book (a compilation of traditional university songs) in hand, the Spirits took the campus by storm and left in their wake a mass of happy listeners and fond memories.

“My most memorable moment is being woken up at 4 a.m. on my fourth day of school here at Wesleyan and meeting Ben (Roberts), Owen (Bennion), Will (Runge) on the Chapel steps,” reminisces Allie about his initiation. Since their beginnings in 1981, the Spirits have had a number of years to cultivate a proper initiation for each year’s incoming class. “Old members sometimes even come back for these orientations. We have very close relationships with our Alumni, plus initiation is fun.”
We probe Allie for details, perhaps the circumstances surrounding the Thong in the Spirits archives located in Olin Library or any number of hilarious polaroids, but he shakes his head. “I really can’t comment…” Allie responds whimsically and takes another sip of his drink.

Though the Spirits initiation is steeped in tradition, Allie is quick to remind us that “we don’t fuck with that nerdy stuff.” What Allie is referring to is the rather questionable reputation that many a cappella groups have as “nerdy, loser, too traditional” musical acts that seem “too tame” in comparison to other vocal acts such as hip hop and spoken word. Though known for their spirited (pun intended) renditions of traditional college and fight songs, as a group the Spirits do not shy away from pop music and even original songs. “We are a talented group of guys. We are bold, courageous, humble, suave, and nerdy, [we] are loose, [we] are angels. And that is talent.”

And talent has taken them far. The Wesleyan Spirits are a staple at nearly every official function on campus, their sweet vocal harmonies ringing in recitals, charity and fund raising events, alumni reunions and even the inauguration of our current University President, Michael Roth. It seems the only event the prolific a cappella group did not perform at was Graduation 2008 where President Obama spoke as Commencement speaker. The clean-cut appearance of the dozen singers suits the many official events hosted on and by Wesleyan as well as any number of Alumni requests over the year. “The Spirits have sung at birthday parties, funerals, and simply at the request of Alumni who want us to show up at their door.”

The Spirits have even gone to Japan! “But that was not at request—it was for one of our bi-annual trips,” Allie proudly points out, even though the trip was before his time. The Spirits have visited New Orleans, Florida, Atlanta and numerous other college campuses to give performances. Some of these events are even recorded and sold as CD’s to help fund future trips and charity performances.

“The Spirits have recorded a number of CD’s. We even have one coming out soon: Black Book CD: The New Release.” Allie adds: “The album is potentially dropping April 2009. If not, then in the fall of 2009. But let’s go with April.”

We know we’ll buy it!
Sex Panther: 
Success after Conflict?

by Jennelle Taylor

When I first heard that the newly formed group Sex Panther would be covering The Eagles’ ‘Take it Easy,’ I was excited for the opportunity to take a behind the scenes look at what goes on in a recording studio. However, the three boys that make up Sex Panther ensured my first experience in a recording studio would be far from what I initially expected.

The Eagles recorded ‘Take it Easy’ with four members, an electric guitar, banjo and a standard recording studio. Sex Panther, in their first attempt at recording music, mixed things up with only three members, an acoustic guitar, a keyboard, a computer for sound effects, and a unique makeshift recording studio. This group of young hopefuls is comprised of Alex Miller of New Rochelle NY, Drew Hudson of Charlotte, North Carolina, and Joey Schindler of Needham, Massachusetts. Miller, perhaps the most tolerable of the group, plays keyboard and sings. Hudson, a 6’4 southern gentleman, plays guitar and sings. Rounding off the group is Schindler, who despite his talent as a vocalist and producer is often unprofessional and at times intolerable in the studio.

I first met with the boys during an early rehearsal of the song. At the time their sound hardly resembled the Eagles’, although not out of an attempt at originality. It was clear that a clash of egos was the hindrance to the group’s development, as Hudson and Schindler were constantly arguing over whose vocals were superior. The boys organized a sing-off to determine who would be the lead singer. This event never took place as ever-composed Miller broke character to exclaim in outrage, “This isn’t why I wanted to join Sex Panther!” At this point, I was beginning to worry whether the group could overcome their squabbles and produce a creditable recording.

Despite my concern, it seemed the group had reconciled when I showed up to the first recording session. Nevertheless, new worries were presented when the band explained to me that they were not using a real recording studio and instead would be recording on Schindler’s
The Future of Radio: 
An Interview with Ed McKeon
by Sarah Orkin

I was lucky enough to sit down with Ed McKeon, a Middletown resident who has been a radio show host for over two decades. In addition to his program on WESU 88.1 FM this past fall, Ed also is the host of Caterwaul, which is broadcasted on WWUH 91.3 FM. He has seen the evolution and decline of radio – specifically in Middletown – throughout the years.

WESU started from humble beginnings as WES, created in 1939 when two residents of Clark Hall took it upon themselves to broadcast music from a phonograph throughout campus. At this time, the transmission signal was AM, but by the 1960’s the FCC granted Wesleyan Radio an FM station. Concurrent with the switchover to FM was the formation of the Wesleyan Broadcast Association (WBA), a non-profit organization that was comprised mainly of WESU members. As a non-profit, WESU could not broadcast advertisements, and instead had to rely on funding from Wesleyan to stay afloat. McKeon shared that in it’s earliest days, AM radio was highly freeform, and DJs played a wide range of eclectic music. The growth of payola in the late fifties served to homogenize the radio music scene, which only re-diversified after the FCC had passed laws against payola practices, allowing the chance for odd songs to gain airtime. As AM radio became increasingly commercialized in the late 1960s, McKeon recalls significant growth in the broadcasting of diverse music by students on FM stations owned by educational institutions (such as WESU 88.1 FM). Because formatting guidelines weren’t in place, he remembers...
that at this time, you were able to hear long tracks without interruption. As a result, longer songs that were commonly heard in that era are now rarely played due to their length. WESU flourished until 1990, when the WBA collapsed and WESU lost its independence and was forced to merge with the public radio station network Pacifica Radio. Although WESU still hosts a variety of DJ’s and plays a unique collection of music, McKeon feels radio’s prime has passed.1

McKeon feels that the widespread use of personal music players such as the iPod, the ability to receive live streaming of songs over the internet, in conjunction with the ability to burn compact discs and file share have all detracted from the popularity of radio. The fact that the satellite radio network Sirius XM may be filing for bankruptcy due to crippling debt is yet another indication that radio is no longer a fixture in American culture. McKeon has said that radio “no longer has very much influence on listeners,” and thereby “lacks the ability to propel musicians to the next level,” although he feels this may not hold true for artists in the rap and hip-hop genres. McKeon noted that radio is no longer a place for music, but for “baby boomers [and] conservative talk shows,” and that the audience of his show Caterwaul on 91.3 FM is now solely older listeners. For these reasons, he foresees the radio becoming obsolete in the future.

What medium does McKeon propose will replace radio for delivering popular music to the masses? His theory predicts that “viral transmission” will soon surpass broadcasting as the primary mode for passing songs and generating interest in artists. In viral transmission, just as the name implies, songs are passed directly from peer-to-peer (P2P), heard via streaming, acquired through means such as Bluetooth or burned CDs and recommended by word of mouth. When asked how singles will gain recognition and sell without the help of widespread broadcasting, McKeon could only offer: “nobody seems to know. [Even] record labels are failing.”

SEX PANTHER, CONTINUED

and arguing after days of experimentation they managed to produce a recording that not only sounds polished but also pays appropriate homage to The Eagles’ original recording. Each member of the band displays his personal talent as a vocalist. Hudson proves an excellent guitarist and Miller an exceptional keyboardist. Schindler also contributes with his superb abilities in operating Garage Band. Regardless of Schindler’s absurdity, I can’t deny his talent as a producer. In the end, Sex Panther impressed me with its unforeseen progress, although the band’s future success remains uncertain.
The Development of Singer/Songwriter Chris Pureka
-Alexa David

Wesleyan alum Chris Pureka is a singer/songwriter who easily captivates listeners with her smoky voice, poetic lyrics, and skillful guitar playing. Known for a stage presence that is both shy and charming, Pureka has garnered a faithful group of fans.

Guitar instructor Sue Burkhart had the pleasure of working with Chris Pureka for the duration of her Wesleyan education. During that time, Burkhart was able to play an active role in Pureka’s early development as an artist.

Burkhart described Pureka as a focused student with a sincere interest in fine-tuning her guitar technique and mastering the major concepts of harmony and musical theory. Despite her inclination to write her own songs, Pureka was always willing to play classical songs to aid in the development her skills. Pureka strove to expand her repertoire of musical knowledge so that she would be able keep her own music varied and unique. She drew inspiration from artists like Ani Difranco and Peter Mulvey, and always requested to learn their songs. She took a strong interest in their use of alternate tuning, which she now frequently applies to her own music.

Burkhart and Pureka did not discuss the stories that inspired her lyrics very often, both because of Pureka’s shyness and her determination to focus on guitar playing. However, Burkhart was, at times, aware of the source of Pureka’s inspiration, laughing (in reference to the song Burning Bridges, which Pureka allegedly wrote about an ex-girlfriend) “It’s just so funny when you know who the song is about!”

During lesson periods, Pureka would frequently work on developing her own songs. Burkhart never hesitated to offer her opinion, but Pureka typically remained steadfast in the direction her songs were taking. She seemed to struggle to “edit and let go of parts of her songs”. Burkhart is now impressed by Pureka’s improvement in this respect, commenting that Pureka has managed to become far more concise with her words while still managing to maintain her poeticism. She is also impressed with Pureka’s clever use of hooks and her ability to “fine tune her music so that people remember it”.

Burkhart claims that she used to “get on [Pureka] about enunciation”, noting that the attractive raspy quality of Pureka’s voice used to get lost amid her mumbled lyrics. Now, Burkhart finds her voice to be both beautiful and distinctive. Burkhart is also glad to see that Pureka is collaborating with other artists. She feels that the addition of other instruments, such as the cello, has really taken her music to a new level and given it a fuller sound.

Burkhart always encouraged Pureka to branch out during her time at Wesleyan. She wanted Chris to play at coffee houses, join bands, and put herself out there, and she did. It is Burkhart’s hope that Pureka will continue to branch out, experiment, and try new things with her music. She feels that Pureka has the potential to incite a new wave of energy in the female singer/songwriter music scene, which in her opinion has lost its spark over the past few years.

Look for Pureka to pay a visit to Wesleyan for a free concert sometime this spring.
Imitation is the highest form of flattery. We’ve all heard this saying over and over again, so much so that the phrase has lost much of its meaning. However, when used in reference to the newly founded rap group “Jermweezy and the Jeffersons”, featuring vocalists Anthony Flores, Jeremy Hudson, Nastassia Williams, and producer Matt Nevin, it is clear that flattery was a goal they had in mind when creating their latest project, a remix of Nat ‘King’ Cole’s “Straighten up and Fly Right”.

Nat ‘King’ Cole was one of the most influential musicians from the early 1940’s until his untimely death at the young age of 45 in 1965. While some might question the remixing of such a classic song as “Straighten up and Fly Right”, when one considers Cole’s history, the decision makes immediate sense. Cole himself was a crossover star, originating in the Jazz world, and shifting to a more pop oriented sound later in his career. After realizing that Cole himself shifted musical genres, it makes sense to take a Cole classic and alter the style in which it is sung, as Cole himself changed his style as his career moved along. What Jermweezy and the Jeffersons is doing is simply moving Cole from his traditional perch in Jazz and Pop music in the 40’s, 50’s, and 60’s to a more modern sound--to the rap music we have grown accustomed to today.

The group did not start off by deciding to remix Nat “King” Cole’s masterpiece. Instead, they decided early on that they wanted to create a rap, and then found the perfect template for their purposes: “Straighten up and Fly Right”. Of course, simply adding their own faster beat and altering a few lyrics here and there wouldn’t have done much to the song’s composition. To truly update the song for today’s climate, more significant changes were in store. The topic of the song altogether had to be changed as well. Whereas Cole’s original version is based on a folk tale and centers on honesty, Jermweezy and the Jeffersons has decided to alter the topic of discussion to a druggie and his dealer, while still keeping the same chorus and general lyrical form. It’s clear at first glance at the new lyrics that the modified version has been revamped for all that the 21st century has to offer, while still keeping true to the catchy origins of the Jazz tune that Cole penned in the 1940’s.

So what’s next for the aspiring young group of artists that comprise Jermweezy and the Jeffersons? They plan on filming a music video of their remixed “Straighten up and Fly Right”. The group sees a video as an interesting challenge for a product of this sort, as Cole himself never got a chance to make music videos of his own pieces. As vocalist Anthony Flores says, they see making a music video as “a great way to pay homage to Cole” as well as express their own artistic talent.

After hearing the group’s plans for now and the beyond, it is hard not to get excited by this rap group’s future, and I for one am excited to see what material they will continue to produce.
In November of 2008, The Guardian cited Das Racist as a fun and funky duo with titles like Pizza Hut and Taco Bell and Chicken and Meat” that comprised a “self-styled “slacker-art-rap Dutchpop world music band with mad street cred.” More importantly they also placed Das Racist on a list of eight Brooklyn bands of the year and named them a band to watch. This blurb was part of a short addendum to a piece on the Wesleyan-born venture, Boy Crisis, a familiar band on campus particularly to the Eclectic set and dubbed by Pitchfork as the “absolute worst band in the world right now… hipster douchebags.” The now somewhat infamous article placed Das Racist (Himanshu Suri and Victor Vazquez) in the company of better-known, more established and signed bands like Chairlift, Tiger City, Apache Beat, Telepathe and Amazing Baby. No doubt this came as a surprise to Himanshu Suri. Likely, less so for Victor who likely rattled the list off to the Guardian, because despite the tight-knit community among these Billyburg-bred bands and the fact that most of them spring from Wesleyan is beyond sheer coincidence. The placement of Das Racist alongside these titans of the burgeoning Brooklyn music scene is somewhat ironic. Das Racist never meant to get famous. At first it’s not
entirely clear that they ever meant to play shows.

The name “Das Racist” speaks directly to the group’s liberal arts education and while inherently political and intentionally ribald manages to be seamlessly tongue-in-cheek. Says Himanshu, “I think being minorities at a liberal arts college and that type of environment had an impact on both the way we view race and our sense of humor, which people often use as a tool to deal with race. I always felt like Wonder Showzen was a television show that captured that type of thing perfectly. When I saw the little kid yelling “THAT’S RACIST” it blew my mind. And then it became a game with Victor and me and Jeremy to take all the seriousness out of making legitimate commentary on race, because that can get very annoying. So when something veering on racially insensitive would pop off in a commercial on television or something it would be like, who could yell “That’s Racist” first. And then we thought it would be a cool name. Das EFX may have been an inspiration.” Their influences extend beyond DAS EFX and Wonder Showzen, Victor cites a laundry list of musical heroes from Black Sabbath and Prince and The Dead Kennedys to Cam’ron and Egyptian Lover and Lee “Scratch” Perry while Himanshu more simply states, “Melanin, New York City, Minorities doing funny “White” voices while telling jokes, Wesleyan, Camu Tao, Paul’s Boutique by Beastie Boys, Talking Heads and MF Doom.” They’re both on the same page about certain things, they hate white rappers Asher Roth and Matisyahu, niche gimmicky artists heavily marketed to white college boys, with the same intensity that they “hate that guy Vince Offer from the ShamWow commercials. They also, despite the political content for their music disdain rappers like Talib Kweli, Sage Francis, Brother Ali and Atmosphere for their watered-down dishonest “conscious rap” and lack of ingenuity.

Freshman year memories recall drunken nights ending with the smoke-filled living room of a house on Warren Street. Through a haze of drugs and alcohol, Himanshu would assume his place on the couch. A keyboard would materialize, along with a mixer and somebody would be channel-surfing on the TV trying to find a late night episode of the Cosby’s, Fresh Prince of Bel-Air or Family Matters or settling for something and while the party continued around the house, a couple of us would huddle around the table; a large, white Beirut table lifted from some jock house, flipped over and used as a notepad, mostly covered in to-do lists, profanities and anatomical renderings. Victor’s presence was infrequent (he was writing a thesis in English) but they often free-styled together. Hima had a rap venture called Country Club with Dylan Rau of Bear Hands that was somewhat earnest, albeit a little ridiculous. “I stack that cake from state to state, I’m on that grind and ain’t that great, I get that guap, I’m wicked hot.” This wasn’t Lil’ Wayne, but it was hilarious and fun and we indulged it because Himanshu was charismatic and adorable and the beats were passably danceable at five in the morning on a Thursday. It established Hima’s flow, a sort of repetitive laid-back, heavily rehearsed, colloquial drawl that drew from the flow of Fat Lip and sounded curiously similar to Charles Hamilton but paraded as a sort of drug-addled slur. As Hima says, “It’s always going to be effortless. That’s how we roll. I’ll freestyle anyone, like, right now, on G Chat. And as for repetition. That’s always going to be there.
too. I personally believe the top five poetic devices of all time are Repetition, Repetition, Repetition, Repetition, and Repetition and shit.” Then they graduated. Victor’s success with Boy Crisis was unexpected but immediate. He was the obvious front-man and when they got signed by B-Unique Records, the home of Har Mar Superstar, Hot Hot Heat, Alkaline Trio, Saves the Day and Aqualung, Victor could quit his day job and started working out of recording spaces in Chelsea. Hima’s climb to success was a little different. Music took a backburner. As he puts it, “I work at an executive search firm devoted to hiring for investment banks and hedge funds. I focus on energy and emerging markets hiring. Why? Because I have college loans to pay and being an artist isn’t a “real job.” Because I like wearing ties. Because I want to buy nice things.” This reveals an inherent truth about Hima who grew up in the middleclass community of Bellerose, Queens which boasts an Indian population of about 10,000 spread over a small residential, primarily Eastern European community; music cannot be his life. As he puts it, when asked how his parents receive his music,” They think it would be better if it made me more money. They’re not opposed to it. I haven’t played any of the actual music for them but they know I make music and don’t really care. They do wish I would dress “nicer” at my shows.” Victor, reared in Alameda, CA on the other hand bemoans his lack of health insurance but feels secure in his artistic pursuits. He claims, when asked about his folks, “They’re both really into Boy Crisis but when I was home for Christmas, my dad was always shouting “das racist” at the television.” His certainty lies squarely on the shoulders of Boy Crisis and the “dwindling” advance they got upon getting signed. He says, “We get the last chunk of it after we deliver the album and then we tour so hopefully we’ll be good for a minute. We’ll definitely be good if we get a good publishing deal and we’ll be really good if we get a “sync” (if they play our shit in a commercial or TV show or movie) but we’ll see.”

Both boys sing the praises of the Brooklyn scene, making reference to the City’s multitude of venues to play at, the openness of the scene and the large audiences they get to play to, Ds Racist doesn’t seem to be taking off as quickly as other Wesleyan bands like MGMT, Bear Hands or Boy Crisis. Hima says, “A lot of people don’t seem to have what I would call a “real job” so they’re around to make music or talk about it pretty often. It would be nice to be signed but it’s not important.” Victor, who’s toured in London has a different take, perhaps because he’s had a taste. He’s “still tripping off the fact that I never run out of money.” He sees himself getting wealthy and famous (“I like doing drugs, having sex and wearing freaky clothes”) but not through Das Racist, because it’s harder for them to be taken seriously. As Hima put it, “We’re never gonna get signed to Def Jam. That’s cool. But Asher Roth is signed. And that dude is wack for writing songs about other rappers, almost all black, being materialist without grasping why that phenomena exists and I’m not fond of things he says like, “You know the worlds gone mad when blacks wear plaids”. I’m also not a fan of his use of “blacks.” It’s like a kid took a Sociology 101 class and wrote raps based on it. We’ve all done that but none of us have gotten signed for it. That’s racist!”
My Morning Jacket is quickly growing in popularity and becoming known as one of the best live bands around. Formed in 1998, the only two original members still in the band are Jim James, the lead guitarist and vocalist, and “Two-Tone” Tommy, the bass guitarist. Still, the band is evolving and gaining recognition. In 2005 they released the album “Z”, which was critically acclaimed, and received a Grammy nomination for best alternative rock album for “Evil Urges” in 2008.

My Morning Jacket performed live at Madison Square Garden on New Year’s Eve of 2008 backed by a horn quartet. The show was covered by CNN as part of their New Year’s special. They played almost a four-hour show with a 20-minute intermission for the countdown for the New Year. During the show they played thirty-six songs including many of their most popular songs including I’m Amazed, Evil Urges, Librarian, and One Big Holiday. They also covered many bands including Kool and the Gang, Marvin Gaye, Dolly Parton, Sam Cooke, and James Brown. The fusion of their music with R&B, country, and early Rock and Roll music showed their ability to successfully push the boundaries of their music.

My Morning Jacket entered the show wearing variations of black suits. Jim James, for instance had a cape and beanie on in addition to his suit and tie. After the intermission however, the whole band went on stage wearing white suits. They started the second half of the show playing Celebration, one of the two songs of Kool and the Gang that they covered. This was probably their best cover of the night. It took the energy the crowd had from the New Year and magnified it tenfold.

The crowds at this show provided almost as much as My Morning Jacket to the mood and charm of the show. They brought a great energy unlike anything else. The isles of Madison Square Garden were always filled with people who were dancing. As the show went on the sold out Garden saw its balcony seats empty as everyone moved up to get closer to the show. Everybody interacted like old friends. Strangers hugging, high fiving and cheering together as some of My Morning Jacket’s favorite songs were played.

The crowd, influenced by the performance of My Morning Jacket, helped to create an incredible atmosphere,
rivaled by few other live rock performances. A performance filled with energy, excitement and a sense of elation.

My Morning Jacket provides a show where you don’t know what to expect, but you know it will be good and can’t wait to see what comes next. They are a band that continues to develop and grow as musicians. My Morning Jacket looks like a band that could be about to hit it big. As their popularity grows and they continue to grow as musicians there is no telling how high the music gods will let them grow. However, no matter how much their music grows, just owning a copy of it will never replace the live performances they give. See them live if you can, their shows are truly unforgettable.

While browsing the “Daily Downloads” section on the NME website today as part of my daily ritual of checking out new music, I came across none other than Bear Hands; one of the bands riding the wave of Wesleyan’s newly-famous music scene. Despite remaining unsigned, Bear Hands is currently on a European tour with Hockey and Passion Pit and they appear to be coming into their own on the indie scene.

With guitarist Ted Feldman (’09) and vocalist/second guitarist Dylan Rou (’07), Wesleyan can lay legitimate claim to Bear Hands, especially given both their propensity to play shows at Eclectic and their history of playing with other Wesleyan bands such as MGMT and Boy Crisis. The band was formed in 2006 and the two other members – bassist Val Loper and drummer TJ Orscher – boast Brooklyn residency. The combination of Brooklyn and Wesleyan ties seems to be a magical formula these days, producing bands such as Amazing Baby, Boy Crisis, Das Racist, and perhaps most notably MGMT.

Bear Hands has a sound that is a little darker than many of their Wesleyan peers; they certainly don’t have the same upbeat synth-pop vibe as MGMT. The four-song Golden EP that has made Bear Hands a band to reckon with is propelled by heavy drums and strong
bass lines. Their airy guitars, which lay melodies over the rhythm section with distorted licks, sometimes evoke synths themselves, although still maintain the depth and drive more often tied to post-punk than synth-pop. Their lyrics are intelligent (when they are comprehensible) and Rou sings with a voice that sounds both pained and hopeful.

Due to their unique style of post-punk heavy rhythms combined with the layering popular indie rock sounds, Bear Hands has made a splash not only in the US but in England as well. Golden was released over the pond this past October and the English music press has welcomed the band with open arms. NME calls Bear Hands “pop monsters” and tell their readers that they are “the group you wish you were in.” England’s Guardian hypes the band as well, raving in particular about “What a Drag,” a single that was released recently and features more of the airy psychedelic sounds as it moves away from the weight of post-punk.

The accolades for Bear Hands have in no way been restricted to the British press. The Alternative Press listed Bear Hands in their top 100 bands of 2008, above such artists as Virgins, Kate Nash, and the Gaslight Anthem and only four spots behind MGMT. Just as exciting for these young musicians, if not more so, is the recommendation given to them by Spin, who calls their music “riveting, devil may care rock” and compares them to indie greats such as Modest Mouse and Ted Leo and the Pharmacists. With such praise coming down from the top of the indie-rock media it is clear that Bear Hands is on the up-and-up.

Bear Hands returns from Europe in March, and soon after Feldman will be able to reclaim his spot from the guitarist standing in for him as he finishes his last year at Wesleyan. You will be able to catch Bear Hands at SXSW in March and then back in Connecticut by the end of the school year. Bear Hands is a band to watch and an addition to Wesleyan’s musical legacy that we can all be proud of – Go Wes!