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FIXER: LIVING INSIDE OF THIS SPACE

by Bernadette Giacomazzo, photos by Nelia Wolosky

The pits of New York City have given birth to a series of rock'n'roll bad boys over the years, with the latest spawn being Fixer, a hard-rocking' four piece that recently quaked the walls of the Independent Music Conference kick-off party at Club 218 in Philadelphia. In an exclusive interview, band members Wilson Lihn and Rev. Tim Newton discusses their performance, their future, and how they plan on funding their next album (and other hedonistic habits).

It is a chilly night in northern Philadelphia, and Fixer have just finished unloading their gear in the upstairs lounge where, in a matter of mere moments, they will be playing to an eagerly expectant crowd of independent music fans at the Independent Music Conference's first Promo Party at Club 218.

The band's bassist, Jason "J" Brown, has run back downstairs to try (in vain) to convince the stodgy doorman to allow entry to a 19-year-old fan who drove all the way from Oneonta to see the band play. He offers the explanation of the kid's dedication, his roadie skills, even that "he won't drink, man, I promise, I'll watch him," but Door Cop isn't budging. Brown, after 20 minutes of failure, scoffs and shakes his head before walking off and offering a heartfelt "Sorry, man," to the unlucky fan.

Lead singer Evan Saffer seems eager to indulge in the night's free beer and food, but visibly cringes when he realizes the total carbohydrate value of the night's provisions (it's no wonder - an excess of empty carbohydrates could easily upset the delicate balance of Saffer's supple torso and Romanesque cheekbones - turns out Saffer is half-Italian, and if the rumors are to be believed, he's Italian where it counts) and settles strictly for the "light" version of the beer being offered instead.

The other half of Fixer - guitarist Wilson Lihn and drummer Rev. Tim Newton (who, by the way, really is a Reverend, having been ordained in the Unitarian Church on a random drunken night) - are battling each other in a spirited game of pool, but are frequently interrupted by a Vicodin-fueled barfly - complete with a feather boa - who offers to show them how to play (that the duo have more than a slight working gist of the game is a fact gone unnoticed, apparently). Newton - effusive, gregarious, and easy-going - smiles and slightly indulges her, while Lihn - sharp, witty, and shy (until he gets onstage) - makes a face that is equal parts horror and amusement.

All in all, this is standard pre-show fare for a typical rock band. This, however, is Fixer, and Fixer is not your typical rock band. The foursome - a pair of two sets of old friends (Brown and Saffer were college buddies at New York's prestigious Skidmore College, while Lihn and Newton saw each other through the halls of high school) - was birthed from the slums of the New York City music scene and quickly rose to the top of the game with their brand of rock'n'roll that is equal parts Guns'n'Roses, the Rolling Stones, and Aerosmith, with deep, introspective lyrics that recall Waiting for the Sun-era Doors and Ten-era Pearl Jam. This - combined with their striking, aquiline physical features - has made Fixer the scene's most talked-about buzz band, thereby raising the bar for all those bands that dare come forth in their wake.

A combination like this, however, is much like liquid hydrogen - fiery, but with the potential to be caustically explosive and leave a sonic boom in its wake. So how does Fixer hold it together?

"I think that fundamental respect for each other as people as well as musicians makes a huge difference," opines Newton. "We also just really want it badly. None of us wants to do anything else, and there are no better people to do this with. Like any band, we have our disagreements, but we also have a fundamental respect for each other that keeps them from escalating too much. We'll argue for a bit and be laughing again two minutes later."

"We have the most elusive ingredient of all: a kick-ass front man who's not a psycho asshole," Lihn adds. "We've all gotten progressively more insane since we started, but our working relationship couldn't be better. I think the most important thing in a creative and cumulative entity like a band is to be able to tell someone his idea is shit and then move on with no hard feelings. We can do that with and to each other, and that's actually pretty special.

"I also suspect Evan puts Xanax in our Wheaties," he concludes as my eyes wander back to Miss Happy Pills, who has now taken herself over to the evening's photographer and begins striking various poses. I look back at Lihn and wonder if he's being droll or serious - Saffer seems mis-

chievous enough to drug his band mates if they turn their collective heads long enough, and Miss Happy Pills is a walking testament to the perils of drug abuse - but he only offers a sly half-grin and raised eyebrow.

At first glance, despite his chiseled, quasi-Teutonic good looks, Lihn seems like another member of the shoe-gazing guitar brigade, playing the same tired riffs over and over again.

That assessment couldn't be more wrong.

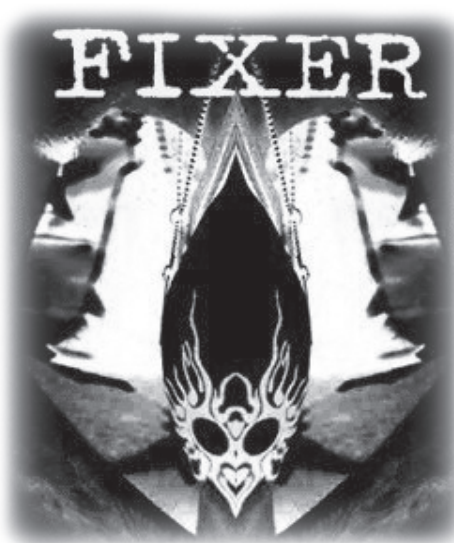
It is now halfway through Fixer's set, and they are blazing through "What It's Like," a wistful ballad that sings of a deep love gone horribly wrong. Saffer is in top form, wailing like Axl Rose (back when Axl was on the right drugs), "There's a part of me that's FREE/and a part that's in-com-PLAAAAAAAAA-eeeeeeeeeeete!" His brow is fraught with tension and pain, and the sweat is pouring down his face in buckets - the near-freezing temperatures outside notwithstanding. He also, amazingly, never sings out of tune, enunciates his words without the weight of an exaggerated New York accent, and sings each lyric flawlessly and without the assistance of a crib sheet. Not one for banal lyrics or deliberate stupidity (you won't hear Saffer singing about inviting you to party with him on the tour bus, or how he feels the sun on his head while stretched upon his bed, or any other tripe best reserved for the annals of a 12-year-old wannabe-cheerleader's LiveJournal), Saffer writes autobiographical, scrupulous lyrics that suggest that Fixer is an outlet for the catharsis of some hard-core, torturous demons that have plagued Saffer from many lifetimes ago.

In the short time that Fixer has been together, they have played over 250 live shows, which have really helped them solidify the general substance of their live performance. A recent review celebrated the fact that the members of Fixer treat each show "like a photo shoot, a CD release party, and New Years' Eve all rolled into one," but even that can't begin to describe the nearly-lethal energy that all four members exude from every duct, every pore, every fiber of their being, every time they take the stage. "Live is just fun, since you get the instant feedback from the crowd," says Newton. "We like to really cut loose."

'Cutting loose,' as one can see from this night, is an understatement: The heat that Saffer is generating has wafted over to his band mates: Brown and Newton are drenched in perspiration (yet staunchly remain fully clothed), while Lihn - who started the set in a button-down corduroy jacket - is clad only in low-slung leather pants that are barely being held up by a hastily-worn belt, accentuating his nimble torso, and shredding away on his Gibson Les Paul with a fury that leaves the average person wondering how he doesn't walk offstage with blistered fingers and bloody knuckles. His face is contorted in expressions that are equal parts orgasm and concentration, and - if you look closely - he is mouthing the chord progressions that he plays alongside Saffer's vocals, though from a distance, it looks as though he is offering a lascivious sexual act to the screaming teenage groupies in the audience who seem more than happy to take him up on the offer.

It seems hard to believe that Saffer, a former model (who has appeared in several fashion magazines) and sometime actor and stand-up comedian, could suffer the pangs of a broken heart and wounded soul, but that's what sets Fixer apart from their predecessors: Mick Jagger and Keith Richards - the duo that Saffer and Lihn are most often compared to - were eager to spend the night together, shove candy bars up your nether regions, blow your nose and blow your mind, and then leave you rolled up in the shag carpet for the police to come get you in the morning. Evan Saffer and Wilson Lihn, on the other hand, are more likely to wrap themselves in the shag carpet and get hauled off to the pokey if that's what it took to keep you from breaking their hearts.

Before you go branding them as "emo," however, bear in mind that this is a rock'n'roll band, and they do have that rock'n'roll cockswagger that has served their progenitors well. Nowhere is this more evident than in Lihn's single-finger salute to the band's detractors: "I think it's pretty simple:



music is subjective. We play what we play, and if you don't like it, fine. But when "it's not my cup of tea" becomes a detailed list of the myriad ways it's more offensive than necrophilia, or worse - Creed - then you can go fuck yourself."

It also bears noting that not all of Fixer's songs focus on Saffer's personal demons. While Saffer is the band's primary lyricist, Fixer's actual process of songwriting is more collaborative. "Each song is approached differently, but generally someone will come in with an idea and we'll all work off of it until it becomes the song. There's no set approach," offers Newton.

The only constant, it seems, is that Saffer throws his heart, soul, and voice into every song. Unlike the erstwhile rockers of the 90's, however - who begged you to suck on their bleeding ring finger as they slowly killed themselves with heroin and heavy hearts - the depth of the lyrics energizes and revitalizes Saffer. He is a transcendental shaman who breaks on through to the other side and, each time he comes back, is forever changed. The ever-swelling audience is fully aware of this apotheosis, and in turn, reward Saffer with the "rock god" crown.

Then there are the Fixer songs that completely deviate from the standard. In the spirit of Steven Tyler and Joe Perry's social commentary, "Janie's Got A Gun," Fixer's "Mary Bell," offers a glimpse into the mind of an 11-year-old Texan girl who went around randomly killing toddlers. Newton informs me that it was Lihn, not Saffer, who wrote the majority of the lyrics and music of this catchy-yet-haunting tune. Rather than downplay the depravity, Lihn - the consummate New Yorker - revels in it, and suggests that there is more to come in this vein. "We're all pretty twisted guys who are interested in appalling things, like a lifetime in the music industry. We also have a gentle song about the child-molesting priest who hanged himself in prison when the scandal was in full bloom. Not sure if that number will see the light of day, but you get the drift."

The audience, however, is too engrossed in the performance to notice the darkness in the lyrics, and by the time "Voodoo Man" (a newer song not yet featured on any Fixer album, and clearly one of Newton's and Saffer's favorites) and the show's closer, "Home Again" (Lihn's favorite), the room is literally pulsating. You get the distinct feeling that if you stand too close to the walls, they will cave where you stand. The modern-day Glimmer Twins got down with their bad selves, too - Saffer leapt off the stage and snake-grinded with a series of screaming teenage groupies, causing the elder women in the crowd to wistfully remember a young Jim Morrison, while Lihn vaulted atop the bar and shredded his guitar with his teeth ... causing the bartender to pray that the club's owner had paid their insurance premiums in full.

The show is over, and the fearless foursome is drenched in sweat, endorphins, and probably other bodily fluids that I don't want to consider. I, for one, am in a state of shock. Though I've seen several rock'n'roll shows over my ten years in the music industry - including several Fixer shows - this was clearly one show that I would not soon forget.

It's hard to reconcile the Wilson Lihn I just saw with the Wilson Lihn I was speaking to earlier in the evening, but Lihn's explanation - complete with a how-could-you-not-know-that look - is simple: "Once we get on stage, all the energy comes out, and I've got a lot of it. I'll climb on anything: bars, banquets, amps, drums, J's johnson, whatever. And then if the ceiling's high enough, I'll jump off. And if it's not, I've got a head wound to show for it. We're entertainers, and I like to entertain. To me that means movement, enthusiasm...shirtlessness..." He trails off, concluding with a mischievous grin.

The three instrumentalists are lugging the gear out to the car (I grab an errant bag or two), while Saffer - in true rock'n'roll form - is off in a random back room, fully engaged in a make out session with two willing (if slightly, uh, generously proportioned) female audience members. Never let it be said that Saffer discriminates! Yet for all the sexual energy that Saffer throws out into the au-

dience - and whatever rabble-rousing might go on after the show - it is a rare, if a ne'er-occurrence, that Saffer goes home with any squealing teenage fans, though not for lack of desire or offers. In other words, don't expect stories of Saffer's sexual prowess - or lack thereof - to turn up on Metal Sludge or Groupie Central.

I ask them a bit more about the future - it is a growing trend amongst bands, both independent and major, to forge cooperative agreements with companies for the benefit of all parties involved. While the hard-nosed independents dub this as "selling out," Newton and Lihn see things differently. "There's nothing wrong with wanting to get your music out to a larger audience. Especially for some artists, whose music doesn't fit the ready-made radio formats out there," says Newton. "To me, selling out is when you play a song that you hate, because you think it will make you more money."

Lihn agrees, and his answer suggests that this may be the new wave of the future in the music industry, in a time when major labels are being crippled by rapidly expanding technology and increased artistic autonomy: "No one batted an eye when iPod ads came out blasting 'Vertigo' with Bono dancing around, and it ended up helping U2 sell piles of records, and Apple sell piles of iPods."

Ever the comedian, Lihn continues, "I'm not so pumped to hear Mixing In With My Blood [the title track of their latest EP] in a Viagra ad." (And yes, I am aware of the pun!) "But co-branding like U2 did with Apple is awesome. I'm psyched for a limited edition Fixer Hummer" - another pun! - "and I'd like to see an Evan doll kick Ken's ass and bang Barbie."

The doors are slammed, Saffer has resurfaced (with a Cheshire Cat grin on his face), and the boys are ready to go. So how, then, do they want you to remember them? "We're a band that hasn't pandered to trends and yet keeps evolving, and that has shelf life," concludes Newton as he hops into the van. "We're not going away."

Rock music fans couldn't be more grateful.

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When someone mentions radio the first thing the average person thinks about is their favorite station and music that is played. Commercial music! They think about clever contests that promise the listeners up to \$1000 if they are the 10th caller or other tantalizing freebies. They know that more than likely they will hear their favorite song at least once every hour. They know exactly what to expect. Couple this with the wave of satellite/pay services like XM radio and Sirius, you now have your hands full. There's a war brewing and it's going to be a doozy. Companies like Clear Channel all but have a monopoly on high ranking stations nationwide that format popular music. As independent musicians the road may seem bleak, but there is light at the end of the tunnel. There are those who have stood up, challenged the system and vowed they would see it through. Who are they and what do they stand for?

One such individual is Pontiac, Michigan's own Uncle P of **localluv radio** (www.localluv.com). Uncle P has made his focus Independent Radio for Indie recording Artists who need that crucial push. Without compromising his Indie principals, he has managed to become an underground hip-hop radio Icon in the Detroit area. He has fought his way up from the bottom of the Indie Radio barrel. He has gone through hell and high water to make a name for himself and localluv radio. Uncle P has come full circle. Without fancy ads, slick contests, giveaways and no major label artists featured on the show, Uncle P has morphed localluv into a movement. Often times P has turned down offers by the major advertising machine because in one way or another he knew that would mean compromising. P is a graduate of the Art Institute of Atlanta with a degree in Music Entertainment Management. His beginnings were humble as he started out as Assistant Station Manager at **WAHS 89.5FM** his High School radio station. During this time Uncle P also manned the helm of turntablist for the Hip-Hop group **Mystique MDs**. Localluv started out as a grand vision of this one man army. In March of 2002 **localluv radio** began broadcasting on **WPON AM** radio in Pontiac, Michigan. In less than one year it grew into a monster. It grew so big that at a Music Conference in Detroit during the Q & A session Uncle P was disallowed to address the Panel because the corporate backed FM radio station that sponsored the event was quoted as saying we can't allow your question because you are the competition. It was obvious then that he was on to something. In 2004 Uncle P's run at the AM station ended after new owner took over. Not one to be deterred P changed with current. Localluv is now poised to be one of the hottest Indie stations on the Net. Instead of 3 hr. daily shows localluv will now be 24 hrs of non-stop Indie Music. The rebirth of localluv has Detroit Indie circles buzzing. Submissions have doubled and P has diversified. Whereas in the past localluv featured Hip-Hop only, P will now feature several genres. The newest being the localluv specialty Indie Rock Show, starting in June. Uncle has spent years building localluv and its outstanding reputation. He is truly an Indie Music trailblazer.
(www.localluv.com)

Decadence Delayed? The Dallas, Texas Music Scene

by Frederick Kristian

As much as I would like to believe that lightning can't strike twice in the same place, something in me says it can and will. I have a firm belief that this new generation of Indie musicians has a fighting chance. After battling bootleggers, file-sharing, and a shrinking economy there is still hope. I live in a fairly well know city called Dallas Texas. It is a city with hopeful, starry-eyed Indie Artists who are certain that Dallas will soon be an Indie music Mecca. However aside from a few artist who have crossed over into mainstream bliss there aren't many artists who get the chance to shine. Yes, Dallas has been the birthing place of major label artists like Pantera, Drowning Pool, Erykah Badu, and more recently the highly acclaimed Polyphonic Spree, but after that who else is there to know? I'll tell you who! There are all the musicians who never get a chance to grace the cover or have a blip in the local trade publications. There are dedicated member of bands who club owners look over so that they can book the band that is managed by one of their beer buddies. In some cases the bookers are the managers and agents of the bands they book. Sound fair enough yet. Yes I know that there are too many bands and too few venues, but I also know that politics aren't limited to just the Mayors office. I know that there are standout performers who can't get an egg out of this hen house we call Dallas. Henhouse, as in birthing place for innovators, daredevils and mavericks. In a city that gave the world Jerry Jones (Dallas Cowboys owner) and Mark Cuban (Dallas Mavericks owner) we know a little bit about Mavericks. There is a plethora of Indie music that could turn Dallas into Mecca. If that is the case then what is the holdup? I have an opinion on why this is. However at this time I would like to save my opinion on that for another article and instead take a look at some of the invisible superstars. Come with me. Let me introduce you.

.....
Deep Rooted

I had the pleasure of meeting and conversing with a firecracker named Susan Crandall. She was all over the place from go. I immediately felt a connection with this person and didn't know why. Turns out she fronts an incredible band called Soultree. Folk meets Rock, marries and adopts Funk best describes the band. Susan's sultry vocals carry you on a raspy Folk joyride. This vixen holds down acoustic guitar and lead vocals duties and she is as slinky as cat. Bass player David Crandall has so much soul that it's almost too funky to be Folk. This man obviously has put in his time in the practice room. Tommy who adds just the right edge with Blues rock guitar licks is the thumb on this golden glove. Rounded out with a phenomenal sticks man, drummer Dan Hale, the quartet puts you in the zone. I recently witnessed this band play live and I was most impressed. I was especially impressed with how well this unit gelled on stage from top to bottom. Even with an absent drummer and stand in percussionist this quartet made good on the term Indie rockers. Their music puts you in a place. At times it's happy, at times it's melancholy, but it is all relevant. The songwriting power is evident as the lyrical content makes one look inward. The songwriting power of Susan is further backed by the silent genius on bass David. He too is a powerhouse songwriter. In a brief conversation the Soultree first lady revealed she wants to rule the Indie world. She is an organizer and promoter. Soultree means business. Comparisons make me nervous so I won't do it in this case because I would not want to misrepresent who and what this band is. Instead I will give you this. With Dallas being the mother of this burgeoning Indie music scene I have only



this to say. Mom you should be proud of the tree you have planted. Strong roots equal a strong foundation. Soultree, happy birthday and welcome to the Indie world.
(www.soultreemusic.com)

.....
Funk's Rebel Prophet

When I first met Ducado for me he was a hard pill to swallow. His look and style reminded me of rockers Prince and Kravitz. Again comparisons aren't my thing, but I needed to put this Artist somewhere. I thought to myself, OK so he's a wannabe. That was until I saw him live and had a chance to talk to him. I quickly found out he is his own man. Quick to admit he is influenced by those who I reluctantly compared him to, he doesn't hold back about who has inspired him. I heard his CD for the first time, the second time I listened to it. Meaning when I gave it a listen the first go round I was critical and I picked apart like I was performing an autopsy. I gave him my opinion and he simply responded you missed it. So breaking all of my rules I listened again and all of sudden I got it. He's not a copy, he's the continuation. I heard truth in his lyrics. I began to see his life. I realized what he had done was fearlessly followed what he loved and believed in, perfectly willing to take the criticism. He was carrying on a legacy that in some ways

has been forgotten, the legacy of the Afro Funk Rocker. In years previous there had been African American artists who got up enough guts to fuse Rock, Funk and R&B. Hendrix, Sly, Rick James, Prince. Then I realized the void has not been filled by a fresh face in quite a while. I asked but why the afro, like Kravitz and Ducado then showed me a high school picture with him wearing that hair and the clothes. The very cool part about that is, it was when Kravitz was still calling himself Romeo Blue and didn't have an Afro. Ducado did the big hair first. He said it's not about an Afro it's about who you are internally and he's not changing who he is just because someone else got famous on the same look. When asked if Ducado VeGA was his legal name he simply responded it is my spiritual name. Hey, cool spiritual name. After our brief conversation he performed and I was floored. He is a one man band literally. It's like watching Dre from Outkast jump from instrument to instrument playing dancing and singing. He is assisted by his invisible Band F.A.B. It was Ducado his tracks and about 6 instruments on stage. I watched him go from Rock to Blues to Latin to Dance to Funk to Rap to Ballads. I knew then he is his own man. His record Prophet Soup is something to experience. It touches on everything from Redemption to the Apocalypse. Ducado is truly a gem. He is the new era of Funky Rock & Roll.
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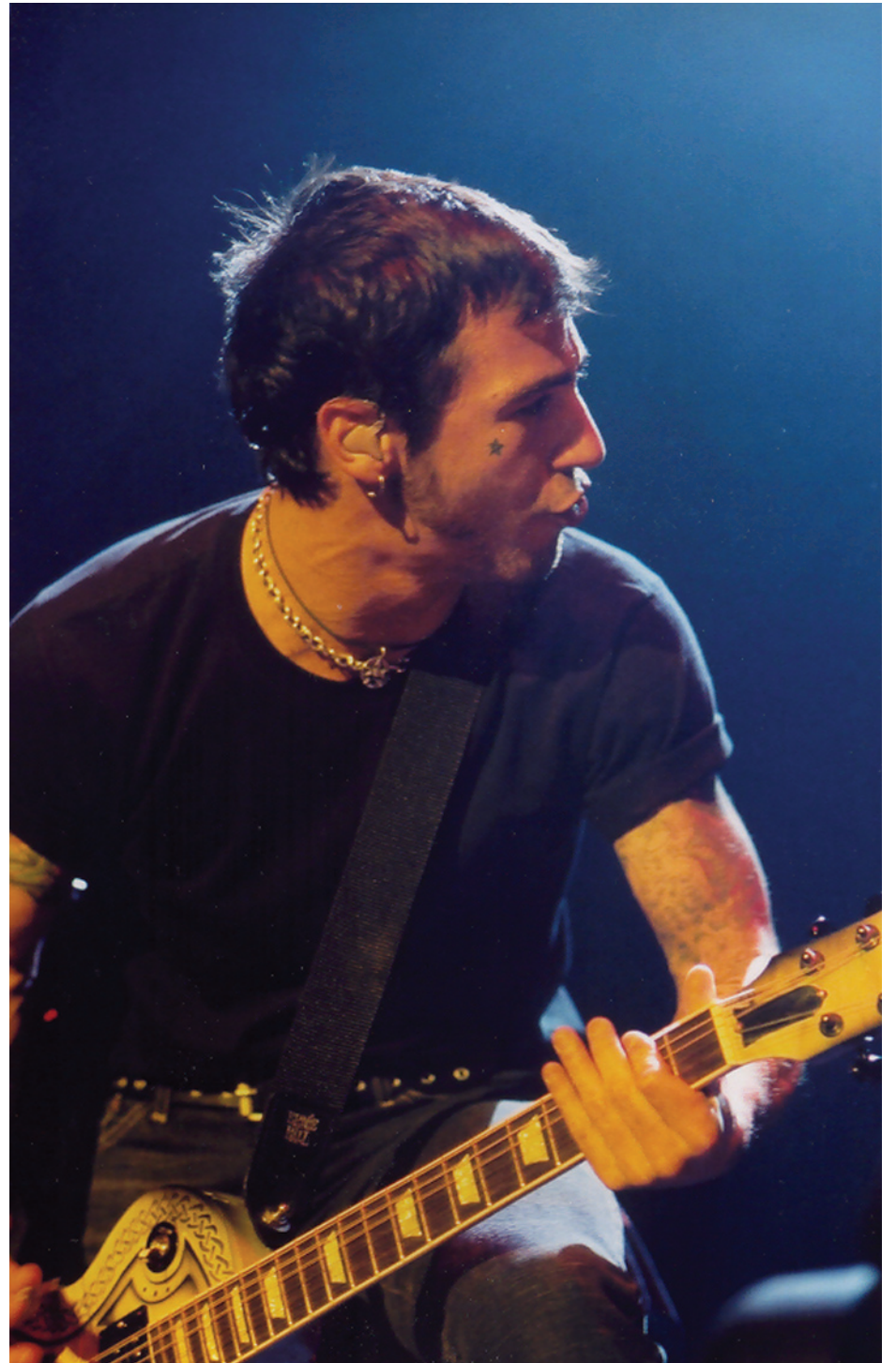
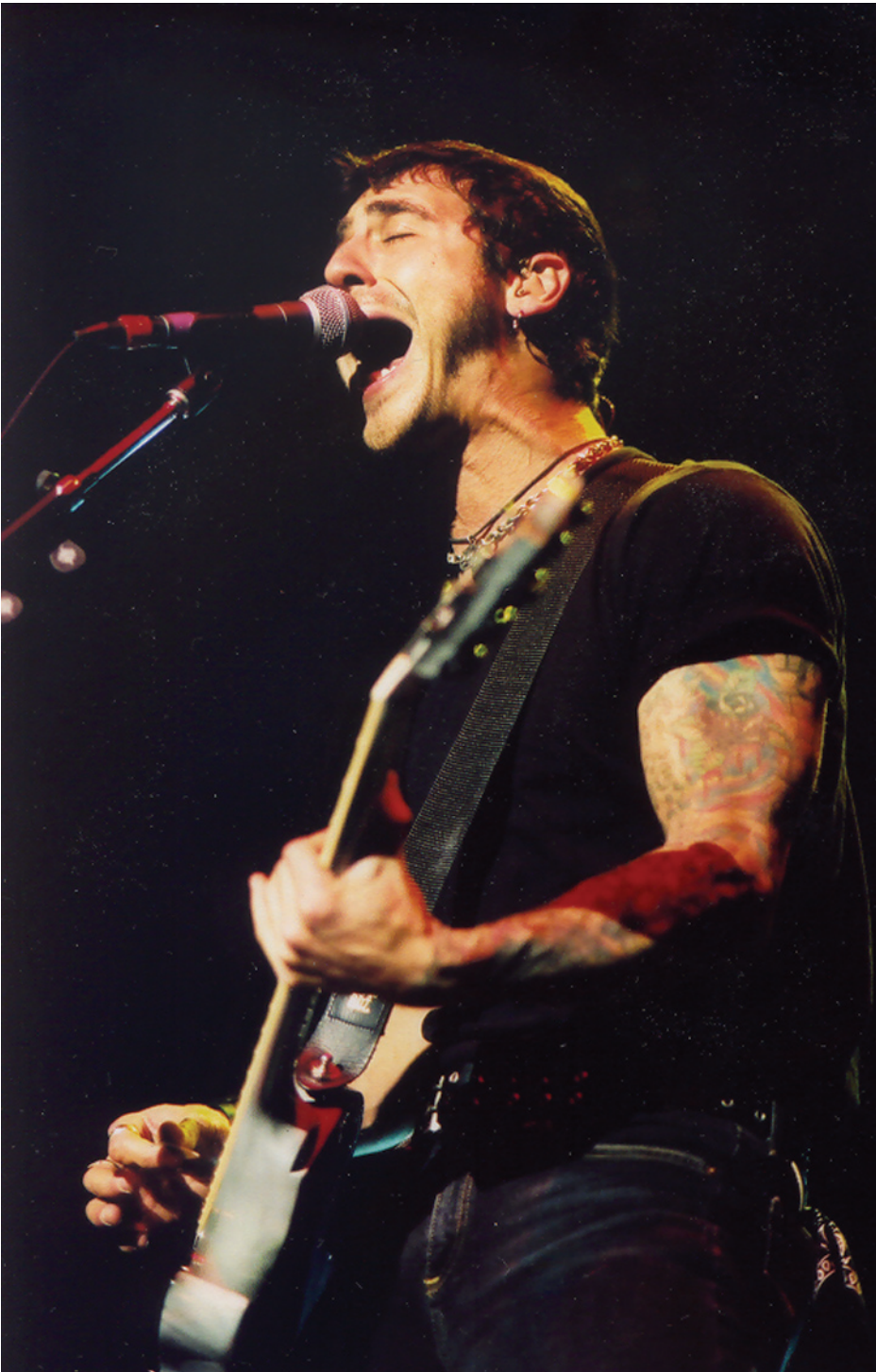
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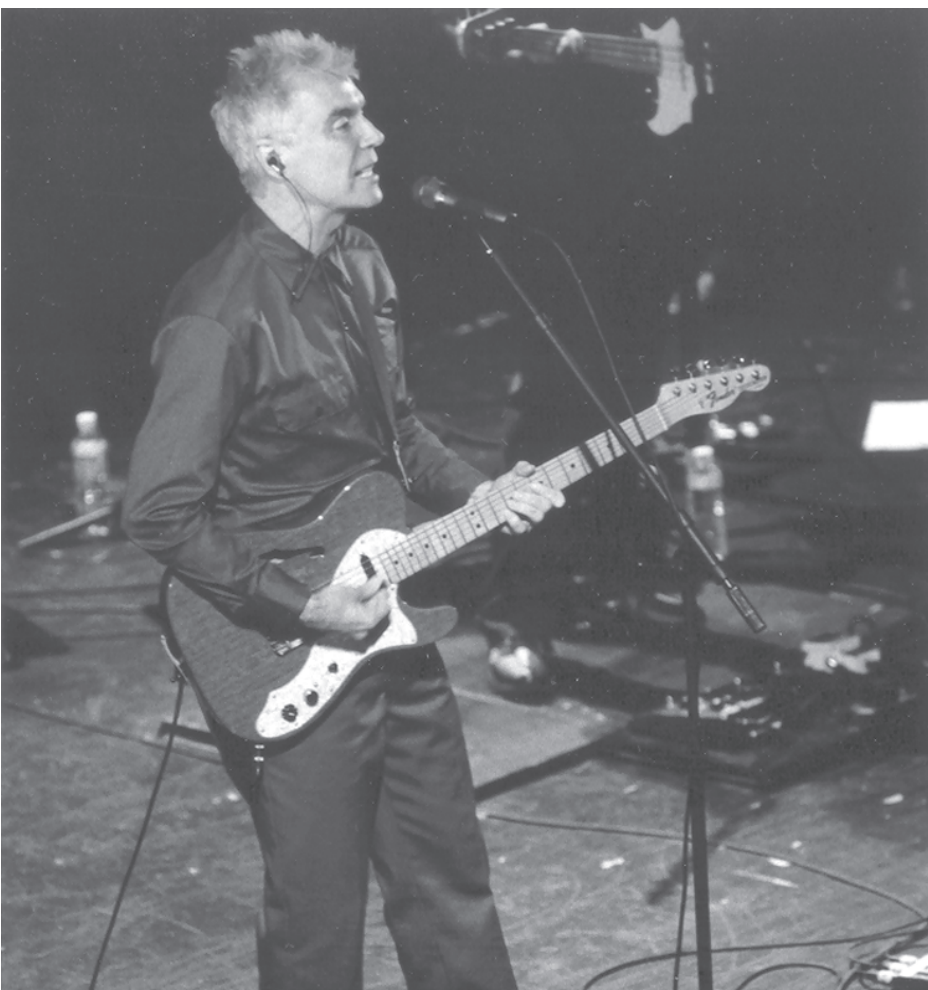
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InterMixx Photog, Dan Hott shoots some big shows...



*Above: Godsmack at Mohegan Sun Arena in Connecticut.
Below: David Byrne at Garde Arts, New London, Connecticut.*



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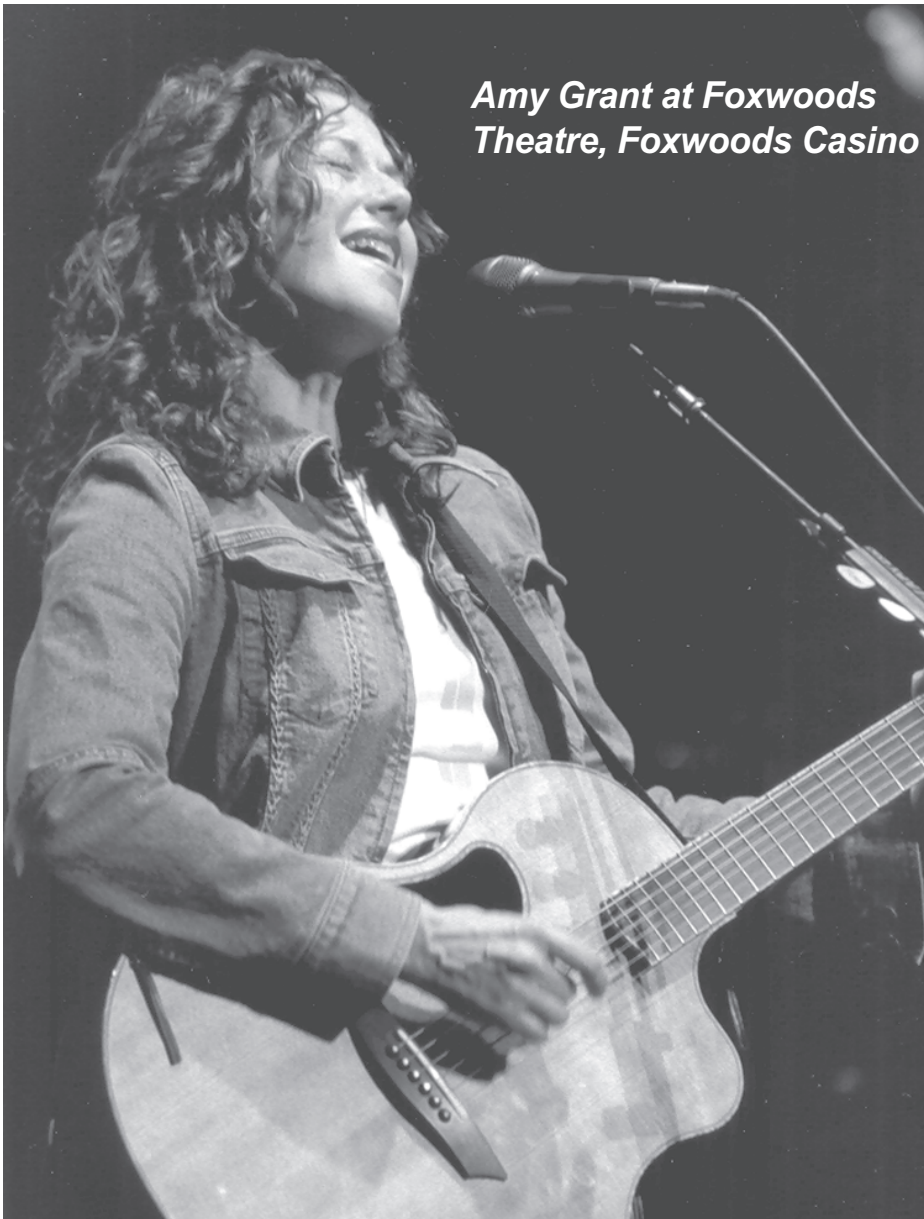
Saturday May 11th
11PM 05 promo Party
Emerald City
160 N. 2nd Street
Philadelphia

June 25 26th
Thirsty Melon
Music Festival
Six Flags
Kentucky Kingdom
Louisville KY

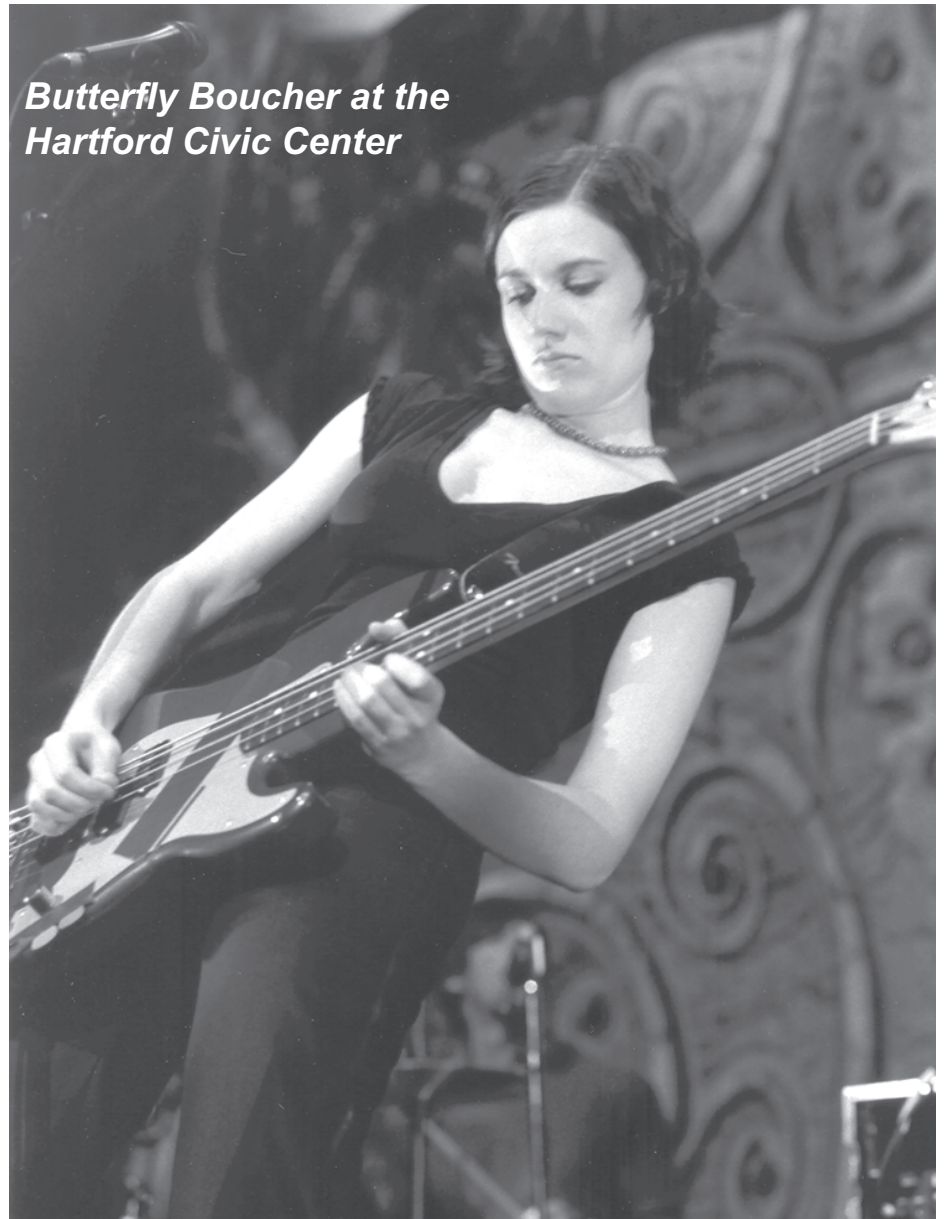
SOON! Every Thursday Night
Bamboo Bernies
16 N White Horse Pike
Lawnside NJ
9 PM
w/ guest band weekly
Jager giveaways
Watch site for details

Mixx Pixx

InterMixx Photog, Dan Hott shoots some big shows...



*Amy Grant at Foxwoods
Theatre, Foxwoods Casino*



*Butterfly Boucher at the
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Above Left: Sarah McLachlan at the Hartford Civic Center.

Above Right: Ian Astbury at the Mohegan Sun Arena.



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WAYNE ANSELL

**Grandall’s voice is comfortable and familiar
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truly soulful performances across genre lines.
The sometimes-jazzy, sometimes-bluesy folk
performances are wrapped around
poignant lyrics and creative instrumentation.**

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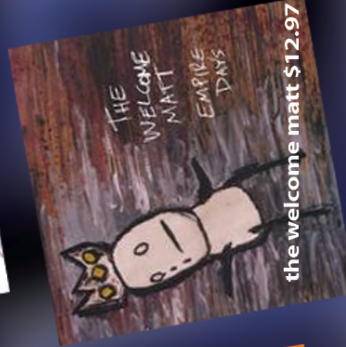
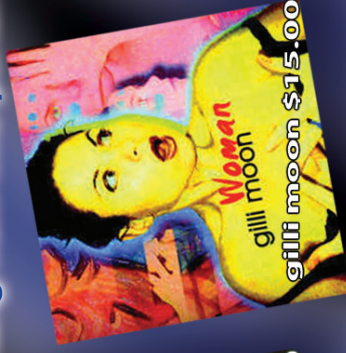
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