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ANN ARBOR'S ALTERNATIVE NEWSMONTHLY

# Global Warming:

# You're in the Driver's Seat

by Jeff Alson

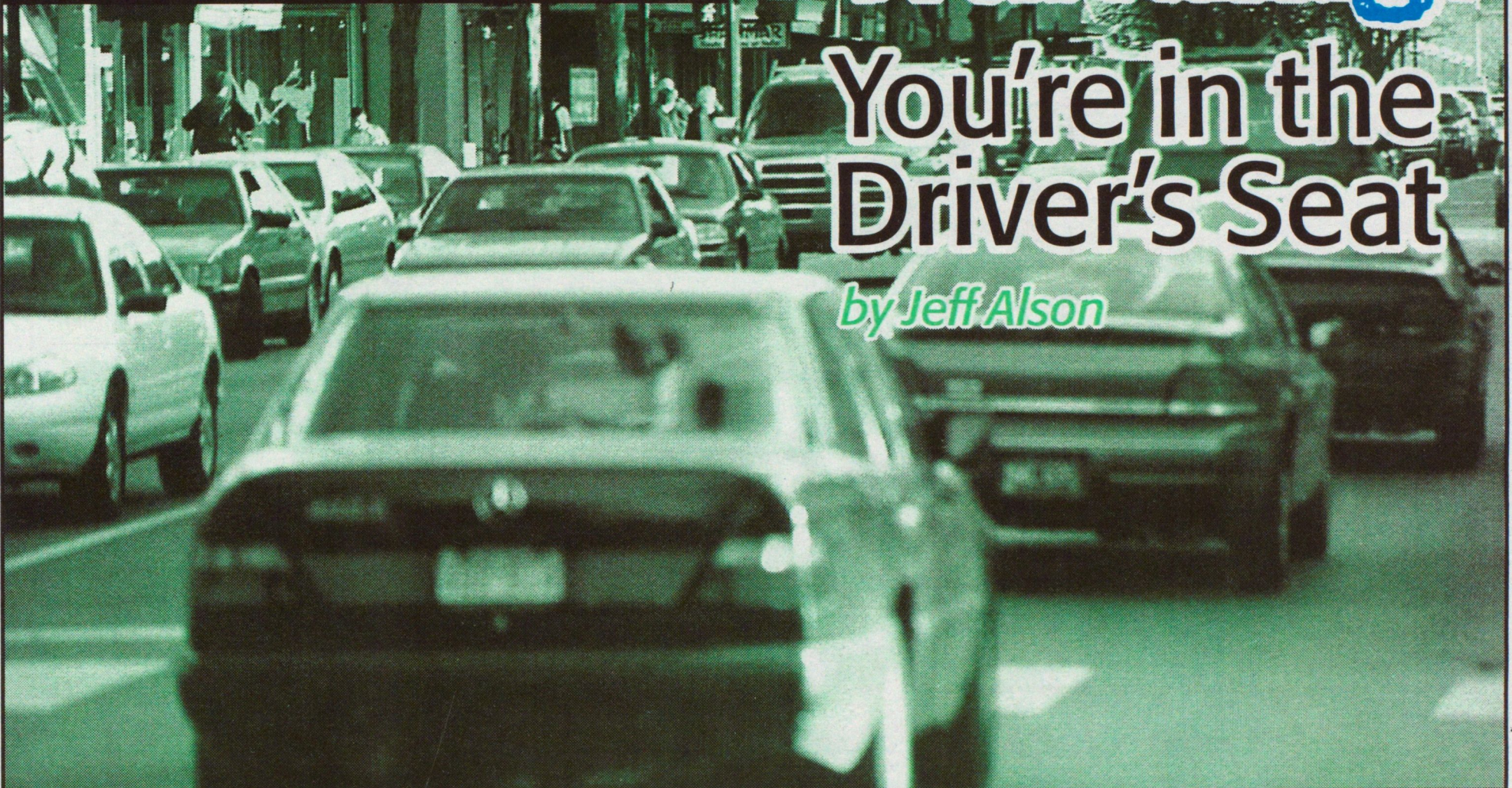


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TOP PHOTO: Downtown Ann Arbor during a weekday rush hour. Photo by Ted Sylvester

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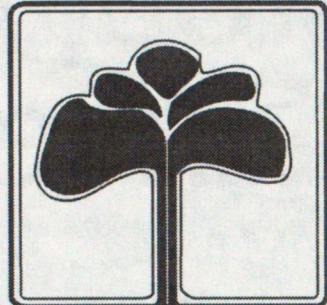
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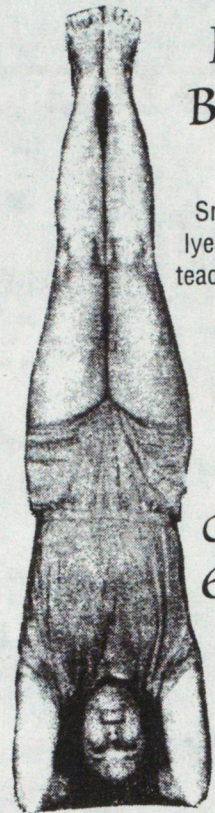
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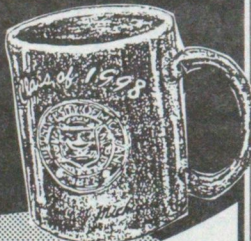
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# THIS MODERN WORLD by TOM TOMORROW

## LETTERS

**AGENDA wants to know what you think! Send letters to: Editor, AGENDA, 220 South Main St., Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Please include your address and phone number (not for publication). AGENDA reserves the right to edit (for length) or reject any letter.**

### SCOUTING SHOULD PROMOTE BROTHERHOOD NOT BIAS

As a former Boy Scout, Scout Committeeman, Cub Master, Assistant Scoutmaster and Scoutmaster, I am very concerned with the apparent undemocratic, authoritarian, prejudicial and biased approach currently being used by the scouting movement administration to deny membership to homosexuals and/or others. It seems to me to encourage actions and beliefs contrary to the best concepts of the scouting movement as I knew it from back in the 1930s until now.

I am a 72-year-old educator, social service worker, labor leader and activist who has tried to live a life quite often centered on such great scouting principles as "doing a good deed daily" and being concerned about the welfare of others. As a U.S. Navy veteran during World War II, I was, and am still also concerned about any trend that pushes us in the direction of dictatorship, authoritarianism or exclusiveness.

I remember how Adolph Hitler started first with sending Jews to concentration camps and then homosexuals, Blacks, Communists and Socialists or Social Democrats, then Catholics, mentally ill, disabled etc., before doing the same thing with

many Lutherans and other Protestants who had learned the old Christian and Jewish concept of loving one's fellow man as indicated by the Christian Golden Rule. Or as Rabbi Hillel, who many think was Jesus' teacher, said "Do NOT do unto others what you would not want done to you."

I have the feeling that this is partially the result of two factors in our current society. The Christian Right extremists who put personal behavior or "bedroom snooping" above the needs and concerns of fellow citizens and human beings is one factor. Instead of encouraging youth to be considerate of others such as doing a good deed or helping the poor, disabled etc., they would want to be exclusive and only have the scouts be a private-style club for those who—like the Hitler Youth of the '30s and '40s—made obedience into a way of life that discriminates and breeds hatred as their goal.

The other factor is a group allied to the Christian Coalition. It is the wealthy selfish corporate and business leaders who have an undue, usually overly strong financial influence in the Republican Party and over a few mostly Southern Democrats. They, like the Christian Coalition, either purposely or accidentally seem to try to distract the public—especially the voters from being concerned about problems related to welfare, homelessness, healthcare, disabled people, children, working mothers and the poor. They seem more interested in spending millions looking into the bedroom behavior of the President and other officials.

Of course it is important to note that not all wealthy individuals are more interested in using bedroom behavior to distract from having to solve the problems facing the lower and middle classes. Wealthy folks like the Kennedy clan in Massachusetts, former Senator Metzenbaum of Ohio, the Rockefellers of West Virginia etc. are concerned with helping others and still manage to hold on to some wealth.

I am Jewish and not a homosexual but like any other decent human being I must be concerned about homosexual children. I believe it was a Lutheran German minister who noted that he did not complain or do anything about it when Hitler went after the Jews and later the Blacks, Catholics, homosexuals, and the mentally ill, so when it came time for Hitler to go after him there was no one left who could complain.

Follow the Boy Scout concept of doing a good deed every day (at least) and urge the scouting administration to put good deeds, brotherhood and fellowship above bias, exclusiveness and prejudice. There are too many real problems to face today to waste our time on others' bedroom preferences.

**Stanley Borenstein  
ANN ARBOR**

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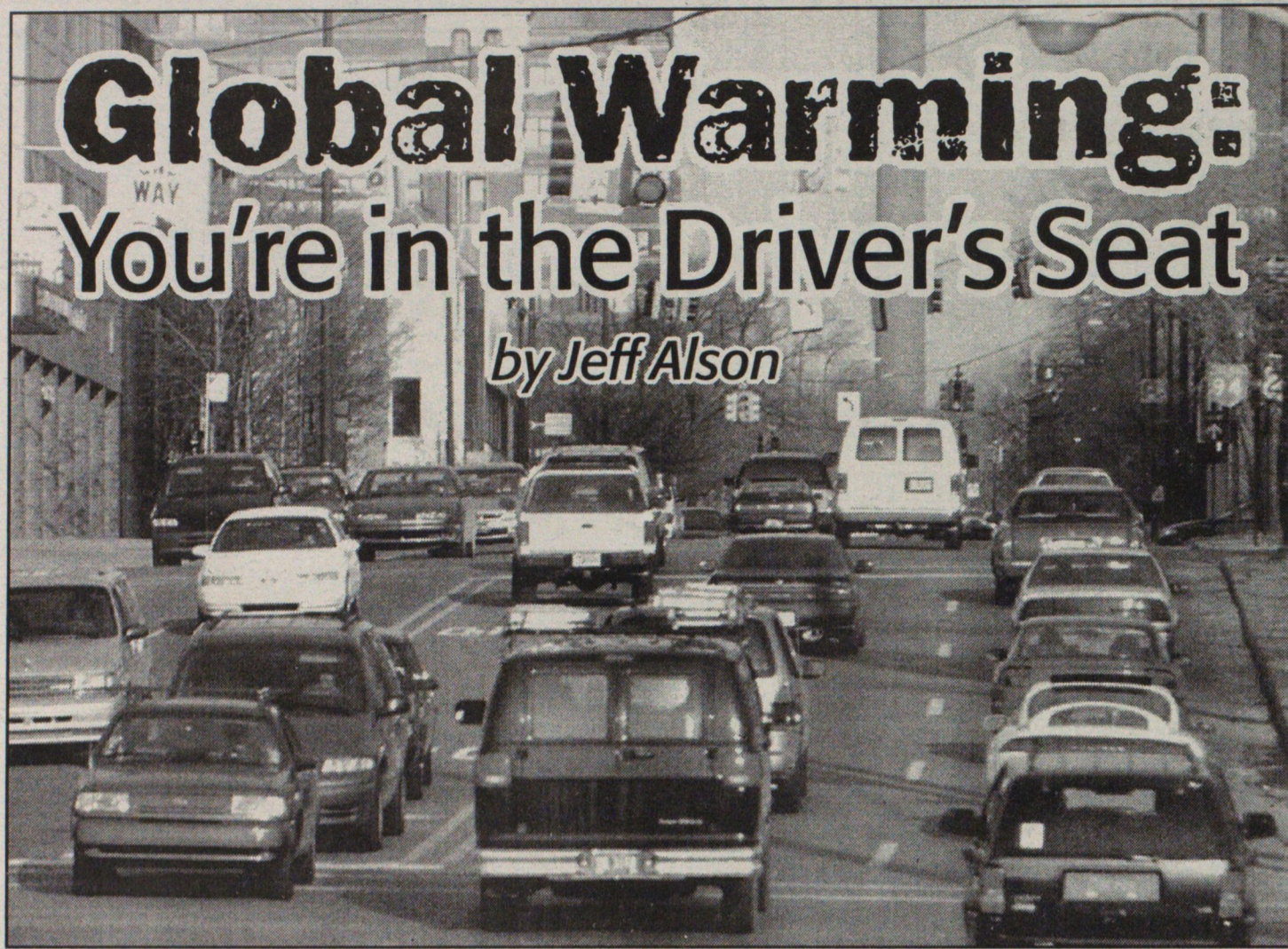


Photo by Ted Sylvester

# Global Warming: You're in the Driver's Seat

by Jeff Alson

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Jeff Alson is a Senior Policy Analyst for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is a national expert on transportation and climate issues. The views in this article are his own and do not necessarily represent those of the EPA.

**F**orget El Nino. Sure, it has been the primary cause of a lot of disruptive weather and human suffering this winter. But El Nino will come and go, and its consequences are fairly predictable. Most important, there is nothing that we can do about it.

All the attention to El Nino is obscuring the much more important weather story: Global Warming. Most scientists now agree that the atmospheric buildup of carbon and other pollution threatens to seriously disrupt the world's climate and represents the greatest single global environmental threat of the new millennium. Global warming could be like having El Ninos everywhere, every day.

Unlike El Nino, you *can* do something about global warming. While we can blame the dinosaurs for the carbon in the ground, it is people like us who are responsible for spewing it into the atmosphere. And we Americans create far more carbon pollution than any other country on earth.

While none of us can unilaterally stop global warming, we must begin to take personal responsibility for our actions. The most effective steps most of us can take to reduce the threat of global warming are to buy vehicles with higher miles per gallon ratings and to drive our vehicles fewer miles. To paraphrase Pogo: "I have met the enemy, and it is my car."

## The Scientists' Wake Up Call

The scientists say that we should now be extremely worried about global warming (also commonly referred to as the greenhouse effect or climate change). They have long known that human activities are increasing the atmospheric concentrations of certain gases, most notably carbon dioxide but also methane, nitrous oxide, and certain man-made gases that trap heat that the earth would otherwise radiate to space. For example, average carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere have increased from 280 parts per million in the 1700s to 360 parts per million today. But, until recently, scientists were uncertain about whether this would cause global warming.

Scientists now express much greater confidence in their ability to link increased levels of greenhouse gases, rising temperatures, and environmental catastrophe. In January 1996, the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, composed of 2,500 of the world's foremost climate experts, concluded that the "balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate." This sent shock waves around the world.

The U.N. scientists projected that, unless something is done to reduce future levels of greenhouse emissions, global temperatures could grow by 2 to 6 degrees Fahrenheit over the next century, a rate of increase never before seen on earth. The frightening consequences could include sea level rises up to 4 feet, severe flooding, exploding rates of tropical diseases such as malaria and dengue fever, much greater weather variability, huge changes in agricultural production, and species extinction.

The bottom line is that we are undertaking a massive real-time experiment with the earth's atmosphere. Of course, the consequences of global warming may be better or worse than scientists project. But by the time we know with certainty, it will likely be far too late to do anything about it. The combination of potential catastrophe and scientific uncertainty makes global warming a particularly difficult issue for a world and a nation that typically act on environmental problems only when they are readily apparent.

## The International Community Responds

The world community responded to the scientists' call to action at the historic U.N. meeting on global warming in Kyoto, Japan in December, 1997. For the first time, industrialized countries agreed to legally binding greenhouse gas emission targets. The industrialized countries committed to reduce aggregate greenhouse emissions by an average of 5% below 1990 levels by the 2008-2012 period, and the U.S. agreed to a 7% reduction. This may not sound like much, but it represents a 30% reduction from projected U.S. emission levels based on continued economic growth.

Nevertheless, the Kyoto agreement must be viewed as a very modest *beginning* to combat global warming. The treaty agreed to by President Clinton and other world leaders must still be ratified by individual countries. The U.S. political debate over global warming will be highly contentious because every citizen and business in the country will likely be affected in some way. The Republican congressional leadership and most large cor-

porations have already strongly opposed the Kyoto treaty, despite a recent Harris poll finding that 74% of the American public supports it.

Even more important, the Kyoto treaty establishes only moderate pollution limits and only for the industrialized countries. This is entirely appropriate since these nations currently emit the majority of greenhouse emissions and many times more on a per capita basis than the developing countries. Ultimately, we will need much greater reductions from the industrialized world, as well as commitments from the developing countries to restrain their pollution growth. For example, scientists project that we would need to instantaneously reduce carbon emissions by 50-70% if we wanted to stabilize atmospheric carbon levels at today's

levels, and even larger emission reductions if we assume some future growth in the developing world. A comprehensive global warming agreement including both the industrialized and developing countries will surely take many years to negotiate.

## The Long-Term Implications for U.S. Society

The U.S. must lead any meaningful international effort to halt global warming. We must take responsibility for the simple fact that we are, *by far*, the world's biggest polluter. With less than 5% of the world's population, we emit about 25% of the world's greenhouse emissions. On a per capita basis, Americans emit two to three times more carbon than Japan and most European countries, and 10 to 20 times more carbon than most developing countries (see chart below). Fairness demands the U.S. reduce greenhouse emissions more than any other country.

As the richest and most technologically advanced country, the U.S. must demonstrate a new economic model based on environmental sustainability. The present American economic model is built on the inefficient use of cheap fossil fuels (oil, coal, and natural gas) which produce high carbon pollution. The surest recipe for global warming is for countries like China and India to develop their economies along the same lines. But why wouldn't they try to copy us unless we help show them a better way?

Transforming the U.S. economy into a model of energy efficiency will require changes throughout society. Individuals will have to change the way they live their daily lives, corporations will have to change the way they do business, and government will have to pass new laws and regulations to help make it all happen.

## Don't Mess With My Car!

Carbon pollution is the main culprit in global warming. Total U.S. carbon emissions are about equally split between polluting activities over

which individuals have considerable direct control, like our cars and houses, and polluting activities they cannot directly control, such as factories, office buildings, and airplanes. Cars and houses are each responsible for about one-fifth of the total carbon pollution in the United States. Since people change cars much more frequently and houses last far longer, it is much easier for individuals to significantly reduce the greenhouse emissions from their

## "We're Number One!"

PER CAPITA CARBON DIOXIDE EMISSIONS (in tons)

1	United States	21
2	Canada	15
3	Russia	12
4	Germany	10
5	Great Britain	9
6	Japan	9
7	Ukraine	8
8	South Korea	8
9	Italy	7
10	Mexico	4
11	China	3
12	India	1

cars than from their houses.

You may not be surprised to know that cars are not just cars anymore! Twenty years ago, everybody drove cars except for people who needed a pickup truck or full-size van to haul cargo. Today, conventional cars represent only one-half of all new vehicle sales in the U.S. People buy and drive pickup trucks, minivans, and large sport utility vehicles to do the same things as cars: to commute, to go to the store, to take the kids to school. Conventional cars now represent less than half of the U.S. vehicle sales for "car companies" such as Ford and Chrysler. In this article, "car" will be used to represent any type of personal vehicle.

Cars are big carbon polluters in the U.S. for two simple reasons. One, Americans love to drive big and fast vehicles that travel fewer miles per gallon (mpg) than vehicles anywhere else in the world. Two, we have become dependent on lifestyles in which we drive our vehicles more miles per year than drivers anywhere else in the world.

The main reason we drive low mpg cars so many miles is the very low price of gasoline. The simple facts are that Americans currently pay less for gasoline, adjusted for inflation, than at any time in our country's history, and gasoline is cheaper here than in any other industrialized country. Think about it, gasoline costs a little over \$1 a gallon, while milk and soft drinks cost \$2-3 per gallon, orange juice costs \$4-5 a gallon, and other liquid consumer products such as anti-freeze, dish soap, and mouthwash cost as much as \$10 per gallon. Because of much higher gasoline taxes to discourage excess consumption, people in Japan and Europe pay \$3-5 per gallon for gasoline.

It is one of the great American paradoxes that we love to complain about the price of gasoline. Many people seem to gauge the health of the national economy on whether gasoline price is up or down, any proposal to raise the gasoline tax a nickel a gallon causes political uproar, and friends boast that they drive across town to save a few cents per gallon. My all-time favorite was waking up one morning to National Public Radio and hearing "You would have to drive to Georgia to get the lowest gasoline price in the U.S.!" You can bet that NPR would never waste time reporting where milk or bread was cheapest. (Do they actually think that someone in Chicago is going to drive to Georgia so they can save a dollar at the pump?)

Of course, in terms of our personal budgets and collective standard of living, low gasoline prices are wonderful. Who doesn't enjoy seeing the price of gasoline, or anything else for that matter, drop?

But while cheap gasoline is good for our pocketbooks, it is also taking us on a ride toward global warming. There is very little economic motivation to care about how much gasoline we use. If gasoline were more expensive, more people would buy fuel efficient cars and we would have lower carbon pollution. If gasoline were more expensive, more people would live closer to work and we would have lower carbon pollution.

## 5 Things You Can Do (to be a Greener Driver)

- 1 Buy a Vehicle with Higher MPG.
- 2 Drive Fewer Miles.
- 3 Perform Regular Maintenance on Your Vehicle.
- 4 Drive Smart: Minimize Idling, Speeding, Fast Starts & Stops.
- 5 Vote Green: Support Green Governmental Policies.

Very few people think about mpg when they purchase a new vehicle. Most people are willing to spend money on power, size, utility, and luxury, but are not willing to pay for higher mpg. Surveys by the car companies show that it is the 20th most important attribute, next to "quality of the air conditioning system!" Car companies can only sell what people will buy, and so they are building more huge, low-mpg sport utility vehicles and fewer small, high-mpg cars. Over the last 10 years, the average horsepower level for new vehicles has increased by almost 50% and average weight has increased by nearly 15%. Accordingly, average mpg has declined slightly.

We constantly find ways to drive our gas guzzling vehicles more miles. Total U.S. miles traveled exploded since the end of World War II, doubling from 1950 to 1970, and again from 1970 to 1990. And why not, the gasoline cost of travel for the average car owner is now about 5 cents per mile. Adjusted for inflation, this is one-half of what American drivers paid in 1970 before that decade's oil price shocks and only one-third of the peak gasoline cost per mile in 1980-81.

At a nickel per mile, the gasoline cost of travel is so small as to be irrelevant unless you are low income or drive very high annual mileage. When was the last time you cancelled a trip because you could not afford the cost of the gasoline to get there? A European official put it another way in a recent speech, "America is the only country in the world where people drive to a health club in order to ride an exercise bicycle!"

Buying gas guzzlers and driving them long distances are leading us toward global warming. What do we do? One strategy would be for government to take the lead. In fact, sooner or later government will have to be part of a broad societal solution, because there are just too many people and corporations that won't change their behavior until bribed or forced to do so.

There are many government policies that could slow the vehicle contribution to global warming: higher gasoline taxes, increased corporate average fuel economy standards for the car companies, more funding for breakthrough automotive and renewable fuels technologies, and more comprehensive transit systems, to

name just a few. Providing consumers with a major federal income-tax credit for the purchase of extremely high mpg vehicles was one idea I proposed to White House policy makers last fall. Recently, President Clinton proposed to Congress that such a tax break be offered beginning in 2000. Ideally, government at all levels would send complementary signals to manufacturers and consumers alike promoting lower gasoline consumption and carbon pollution.

Unfortunately, all of the govern-

### **Cars are important to us and to our lifestyles ... and by making smart decisions and choices, you can retain the mobility you need while reducing your car's contribution to global warming.**

ment policies that could make a real difference are politically controversial for one reason or another: they cost money, they require government mandates on the private sector, or, as in the case of higher gasoline taxes, they are very unpopular with voters. There is simply no way that government is going to "mess with peoples' cars" unless and until there is much greater public concern about global warming.

So, if government isn't going to try to reduce the car's contribution to global warming anytime soon, what can be done on an individual level?

#### **Your Choices Matter**

If you are concerned about the threat of global warming and want to do your part to maintain a healthy environment for your children and grandchildren, there are things that you can do *now* that don't require the government to get its act together first. The easiest actions relate to your car and how you use it.

One option is to get rid of your car. This is somewhat more realistic in Ann Arbor than in most places, with its compact and lively downtown, excellent transit system, access to Amtrak, network of bike paths, and proximity to the resources and events at the University of Michi-

gan. If you are single, go to school or work downtown, and have a simple lifestyle, it may be possible to go without a car.

But is dumping your car realistic if you have a family and are already feeling strapped for time trying to juggle the demands of jobs, schools, day care, shopping, and family outings? For better or worse, the American lifestyle is built around the unprecedented mobility of the car and the automotive genie is not likely to go back into the bottle anytime soon. It is crazy to expect more than a tiny minority of Americans to completely give up their personal vehicles.

No, cars are important to us and to our lifestyles. But by making smart decisions and choices, you can retain the mobility you need while reducing your car's contribution to global warming.

The two most important choices that you can make are the mpg of your vehicle and how many miles you drive your vehicle. There are other actions that you can take to minimize your car's carbon emissions, and which also protect your investment in your car: regular tune-ups, inflating your tires properly, and minimizing idling, high speeds, and "jack rabbit" stops and starts. But the most important factors, by far, are your vehicle's mpg and how many miles you drive.

course. If your family drives a total of 45,000 miles per year with a large car and a sport utility vehicle that each averages only 15 mpg, your annual vehicle carbon dioxide emissions are 30 tons. On the other hand, if your family drives only 15,000 miles per year with two small cars that average 30 mpg, your family's vehicles only emit 5 tons. The vehicles in the first family are responsible for 6 times more carbon dioxide than the vehicles in the second family!

The above equation can also help you understand the carbon dioxide consequences of specific decisions. Let's say you are in the market for a new vehicle. You have decided on a particular car model, but you have a decision to make. You can buy the "base" version with a smaller engine and manual transmission that gets about 25 mpg, or you can pay extra for the "performance" version with a larger engine and automatic transmission that gets about 20 mpg. Now, 5 mpg may not sound like a lot, but if you drive 14,000 miles per year, the 20 mpg vehicle will emit about 1.5 tons more carbon dioxide than the 25 mpg vehicle each and every year. If you own the vehicle for ten years, that is a difference of 15 tons!

More remarkably, if you drive a large sport utility vehicle that only gets 12 mpg, you will emit 7 tons of carbon dioxide more per year, or 70 tons more over a 10-year period, than a neighbor who drives a 30 mpg car!

Or, let's say you are deciding to buy or rent one of two houses. One house is 5 miles from your job and the other is 15 miles from your job. If you move into the second house, you will drive 20 miles extra each day, or about 5,000 additional miles a year, and if you drive an 18 mpg vehicle you will emit almost 3 tons more carbon dioxide each year.

In a more extreme example, if you commute 25 miles each way over a 20-year period, you would emit 100 more tons of carbon dioxide than a work colleague who commutes only 5 miles!

I am not suggesting that, if you purchase a large sport utility vehicle or commute a long distance, you don't care about the environment in general or global warming in particular. The decisions about what type of vehicle to buy or where to live are complex and involve many important factors unrelated to the environment. But you should recognize that you do have choices, and that your decisions have environmental consequences.

The next time you buy a vehicle, try to buy one that has the highest mpg possible for the utility that you really need (many people spend thousands of dollars to get 4-wheel drive or towing capability that they rarely use). The next time you move to a different residence, try to live as close to your job as possible. These are the most important actions you can take to reduce the threat of global warming. They really do matter. ■

How can you tell how much carbon dioxide pollution your vehicles are throwing into the atmosphere? Pretty easily, as it turns out. You can approximate the total carbon dioxide emissions per year from your family vehicles with the following simple equation:

$$\frac{\text{Total Miles Driven Per Year} [\text{divided by}] \text{Average MPG} [\text{divided by}] 100 [\text{equals}] \text{Total Carbon Dioxide Emissions in Tons}}$$

How can you tell if you emit more or less pollution than other families? A "typical" family with two adults would, on average, drive about 25,000 miles per year and their vehicles would average about 18 mpg. Plugging these numbers into the above equation shows that this typical family's vehicles emit about 14 tons of carbon dioxide each year. If you are in a family with two adults and your vehicles emit more than 14 tons per year, then your vehicles emit more carbon dioxide than those of most other families. If your family vehicles emit less than 14 tons per year, then your family emits less carbon dioxide pollution than average.

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the visions of Gustav Mahler

by arwulf arwulf

**M**usic is the healing force of the universe, said Albert Ayler. All music is relative, say I. Free Jazz transcends all preconceived limitations. Ayler, like Rahsaan Roland Kirk, speaks to who I was long before I ever heard either of them. A child is a receptor of past and present relative to future. The wonderment of being alive and sentient is an eternal nowaday celebration. And there is no separation. I am a child as Darius Milhaud is a child. Young Anton Webern is old Webern and therein lies innocence. Soft spoken as the gentle poet Hildegard Jone, whose words Webern set to music. Moments of silence pregnant as with a thousand bells.

Benevolence. Empathy. Sanctity. Silence. I probably am not supposed to cry at chamber recitals. But I do. My mother cried at a street parade. We're not supposed to be that honest in public but who's going to replace my stopper. It's out for a reason. Schoenberg's dark changes upon Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* grabbed me round the ventricles and I did sob with it. That's the child receptor in fluxus. A full-grown blubberpuss.

Everything genuinely planted has the sublimity of the painted desert. Mahler speaks to an enormous span of time relative to the bloodline. Hearing his pictures I feel the great oil pastel presence of the places my people have been. Living in this land is very confusing. One must honor the land beneath the feet and the other land whence came the blood. That's a lot at once. European classical and chamber music is for me a sincere and constantly replenishing ritual of ancestor reverence. All music has this potential inside of it. A sensitive heart will embrace the radial weave. Heart is a melody of time, said Pharoah Sanders.

Gustav Mahler's child-self is alarmingly capable of joining the boy that I am; we share chocolates while the fiddle plays a tone above the rest of the viols. The E-flat clarinet cuts a terrible magnetic waltz in the shadow of the buildings I was frightened away from as a boy. Little stick figure pacing off some innocence as the adults collide and spin themselves round in desperation.

Gustav was able to do wonderful things with children's lyrics: *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Youth's Magic Horn), a giant compendium of verses intended for early 19th Century Germanic kiddies, became a sourcebook for his contribution to the German Lieder tradition. It's amazing what bizarre and often creepy things are described in these little nursery rhymes: Cuckoo is dead, cuckoo is dead; he ran into a willow and busted his head. The

donkey won first prize for singing nicely. St. Anthony of Padua preached a sermon to the fish because nobody came to church; the fish listened carefully, then swam away and forgot all about it. The geese wrote a little song and if you ask them they'll honk it to you. Then there's the child who starves to death while the adults are harvesting wheat, grinding flour, mixing dough, baking bread. By the time the loaf comes out of the oven, the kid has perished from malnutrition.

Then there's the young men going off to fight battles. I grew up watching the Vietnam war on television, worrying that my older brother might have to move to Canada, and marching my little twelve-year-old self through the streets to protest it. Few songs resonate inside of me as does *Revelge* which means "Reveille." Here's a battlefield strewn with the mutilated corpses of soldiers. Suddenly, their skeletons stand up in response to the rhythms generated by the skeleton of the drummer, who executes great drumrolls and paradiddles, leading his comrades in a macabre procession. They march into the village and stand at attention within sight of the drummer's sweetheart's window. Gustav Mahler set this little nightmare to music. It blows my mind every time without fail.

Some of the lieder are simple and warm. Or innocently melancholy. *Lieder eines Fahrenden Gesellen* (Songs of a Wayfarer) is a perfect four-part cycle, elements of which show up in the First Symphony. Symphonic vision constitutes the panorama of Gustav's world view, his *Weltanschauung*. "Maler" means "painter," appropriately enough, as his symphonies are a series of landscapes. That's my impression as I am so often transported there. Hooray for a world which can never be trapped in a sound bite. For a reality far too complex and wonderful to ever be rendered into copy, floppy, headline or punchline.

Symphony No. 3 takes in the rocks on the mountain, the flowers in the field, the animals in the forest, the enigmas of humanity, the mystery of midnight, a burst of morning bells and the immensity of love, of spiritual rebirth. Lindsay Forbes, my partner in this life and in all the lives to come, had a succinct comment about this composer: *His mythology is with the Earth*. We understand the word "mythology" to mean "mythos"—the world view as a metaphorical construct; one's own pantheon of spirituality. We do not subscribe to the Christian usage of "myth" which implies a false or outmoded belief. That usage belongs to the Inquisition and to the Crusades.

Mahler's mythology is with

the Earth. And with the "Eternal Feminine." I do not care about certain definitions of that phrase, either. My personal interpretation is that "Eternal Feminine" describes a universe which is female. Everyone must find their own meaning, and this is what it means to me. The context of a Goddess whose cycles of life and death are older than the human race and will certainly outlive us. All hail the Eternal Feminine. For a clear picture of this miracle, see the opening of Symphony no. 8, where an impossible multitude of voices sing *Veni Creator Spiritus* which I translate as "All Hail the Creative Spirit." See also the end of the 8th, whereupon *Mater Gloriosa* appears as "Mother, Queen of All, Eternal Womanhead" ready to "lead us on high."

What is music if it is not for each of us to realize in our own way, deep within ourselves? I share this with you because to me it is precious as breathing and allowing the mind to move of its own accord through the void, away from noise and trouble, beyond a culture cruelly distorted by reckless marketing. The Goddess cannot be marketed. An understanding of the Eternal Feminine can only occur when the petty machinations of grabby human torque cease to distract us from sincere contemplation and gratitude.

Much has been made of Mahler's preoccupation with death. It is best to try and see his maturity as reflective upon all points of the circle of being. This does include changes from one life unto the next. The later Symphonies do draw upon more wistful imagery. The poems of Friedrich Rückert are infused throughout this period with Gustav's own changes. One reason I study German and Austrian Lieder so closely is the presence of the poets who inspired the songs. Hugo Wolf's infatuation with Eduard Mörike and Joseph Eichendorff will probably occupy me for the rest of this lifetime.

*Das Lied von der Erde* (The Song of the Earth) was among Mahler's last achievements. The texts derive from German translations of French interpretations of ancient Chinese poetry. Permutation is the music of Evolution. An oboe is Baltic amber in Mahler's hands. A dream of vinegar, red and clear. Tell me how you feel. What is your name? Take time to listen.

Suggestion: For a clear and concise discussion of this and any other music in the Classical or Chamber realm, visit Jim Leonard at SKR Classical at 539 E. Liberty in downtown Ann Arbor. He will be happy to give you perhaps a more studied and informed viewpoint. I am proud and happy that as different as Jim and I might be, we share an endless respect for Gustav Mahler.



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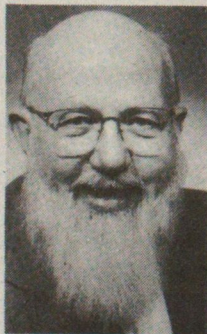
In previous columns I've offered suggestions on "How to Choose a Realtor.®" Now some thoughts on how not to choose an agent.

"I know someone who sells real estate" — a family friend, or the spouse of a co-worker. My advice: Don't rush in. You should evaluate each agent with the same objectivity. Ask yourself if you would feel comfortable dropping the person if things don't work out. Would social politics interfere?

"I found mine in the Yellow Pages." Be careful. Most realty companies are one-person firms that are not really set up to sell homes. Instead, they manage rentals, oversee investment properties, or handle office or industrial space. If you ask these firms, "Can you sell my house?" they're likely to say, "Yes, of course!" That's because they might passively earn a commission, simply by listing the home for sale. Later you might learn that they haven't sold a house in years or that an agent isn't available weekends or evenings, when buyers are most free to look at homes.

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*Bob Hefner*

# LOCAL MUSIC

## Poignant Plecostomus Jesus, freaks.

By Neil Dixon Smith

**N**iceness in '98, first report. Five things for you to not bitch about:

**1. Dancehall** is all around. With nearly-once-a-month live shows at the Majestic featuring top Jamaican artists, and the emergence of **DJ Billy the Kid** (Zuma Hi Fi) with the Black Lion Sound System, hosting excellent parties at the **Heidelberg** and around Detroit, you now have the chance to catch the hottest sounds coming off the planet today. Guaranteed best buys for your entertainment dollar.

**2. Prism Productions** has been getting in the business of booking tours for local bands (Morsel currently, more in the future).

**3. Aurora.**

**4. Intelligent satire** as entertainment showing signs of life, gaining ground on ironic kitsch.

**5. Poignant Plecostomus**, a band that's been really getting it together of late, will be the stage band for the **Ann Arbor Civic Theater's** production of **Jesus Christ Superstar**, going up in May. Two reasons why this is good news. First, for the musical itself, having a "band" take the chair over a jazz-school/session-player pick-up band will surely add a psychological depth to its personality. Rather than being asked to play the charts straight, they've been encouraged to learn the music in their own way, maintaining the proper keys and melodies, but with their feel, sense of texture, etc. And what a psychology they are getting... for the Plecostomus boys are freaks to a religious degree. In long standing (and long suffering) Ann Arbor style, they live their band.

Secondly, we will all have the perhaps historic opportunity to witness how doing this show will affect and transform their own music after it closes. As Plecostomus retreats this month from the local stages to bear down in rehearsal, it will undoubtedly mean the end of a chapter in their story, so I thought this would be a good time to catch up.

If you don't know, I'll say it, and without wincing. Poignant Plecostomus is a fusion band. Though I suppose it's inescapable that a five-piece instrumental band featuring an electric violin with its Rhodes piano, electric guitar, drum and bass, could be called anything but a fusion band (I mean, what else could they be?). But while past press treatments have tended to (not inaccurately) point to influences such as the Mahavishnu orchestra and Herbie Hancock to describe their sound, to understand them I think it's more interesting to regard them as local flavor.

Poignant Plecostomus formed as a light idea about two and a half years ago. This was at a time when the concept of "acid jazz" had settled into the imaginations of musicians and DJs alike as a good thing. Solidly conservative funk drum and bass patterns, muted

tonal colors, and modal improvisations that stressed environmental maintenance over mountain climbing — an integrated space where jazzers, hippies and rock hipsters could live unafraid of the influences of spontaneity, weed and drum machines. So Plecostomus were five friends, four of whom grew up in Ann Arbor, who got together to make people dance while they jammed at parties, pretty much for the hell of it.

Months pass. Schools end. Crises resolve. The music deepens. Months pass. It becomes evident that playing music is about all that makes sense, so Plecostomus decides to become a band. To take a step forward with their collective disregard of formalized style and the music industry as stimulus, commit themselves to the lifestyle, gig a lot, rehearse more, and make music to challenge and entertain each other, figuring that someone's gotta love it as long as they do.

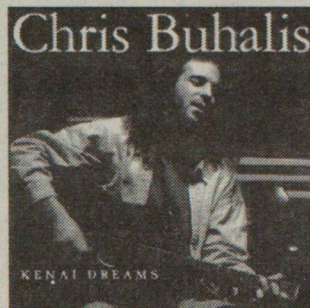
Here's what I'm hearin': from those '70s jazz/funk fusion records, Plecostomus learned that what's interesting is not the long complicated solos, but the atmospheres that the bands would create behind them. With long melodies woven through, that atmosphere, confident, is maintained and given a mood, a point of departure from which a story may begin. And from there it may go in any direction, as they have been equally informed by old-school Morsel and the late Jaks, who built their reputations on thwarting pop expectations with radical disruptions of mood and meter. Whereas those bands went for violent thunderstorms and violent impulses as reactions to the post-industrial world, Plecostomus's changes are more about the epic adventure of living on the outside of it all, in humor, and in compassion.

Which to me makes them the perfect band to rock the disciples. With each new jam they've written since their initial burst, the palette of styles and emotions touched broadens and strengthens, and as recent shows with avant-motherfucker Frank Pahl and Armenian Kanunist Ari Topouzian would attest, the boys are developing into that rare status of band-that-can-do-anything.

So with all that history, all of that work on their sound, outside, in self-imposed exile from the context of expectations, they must now drop it all for a while to learn "Heaven On Their Minds," costume designers and hair stylists not necessary. How will the show affect them? They'll get tighter. ■

# Michigan Homegrown

REVIEWS by William Shea



Chris Buhalis • Kenai Dreams • Thursday Records

Ann Arbor's Thursday Records has taken to recording and promoting some of our stronger local talents. Chris Buhalis is such an artist. The craftsmanship, musicianship and talent of this rootsy balladeer in his latest recording, *Kenai Dreams*, jumps right in your face. Each of the 12 songs are strong in their own right, but the opening "Kenai Dreams" is a marvelously constructed bit of folksy balladry. Jeff Plankenhorn's dobro fits fine with Buhalis' baritone. Even the croaking vocalizing of famed Townes Van Zant cannot injure this fine example of musical imagery presented by Buhalis.

Not only are the music and production very good on this recording throughout, but Buhalis' lyrics are compelling and often downright great. For instance on "Time" he sings: "time runs like water/going through my kitchen/running down my drain/I should've seen it coming/love's just a running/being chased by pain." Even when not filled with interesting allusions, Buhalis' lyrics are pointed and poignant. On "Employee 1209," a pro-union song, Buhalis' character declares, "because there's a wrong and then there's a right/and when it's wrong you fight/and there's no time in this old world to sit and cry."

*Kenai Dreams* is highly recommended.

Adam Druckman • Deserve You • Turnabout Records

The latest by Adam Druckman (another local), *Deserve You*, shows a musician enamored with a great turn of phrase. His lyrics are often piercing, witty, and heart-wrenching and are the strength of this work.

Generally employing a full electric ensemble, Druckman's music is edgy. Sometimes,

where the production frames his thin tenor perfectly, the listener assumes that a tune is going in a folk direction replete with a soft acoustic accompaniment. Then, all of a sudden, the sound becomes hard, electric, screaming. The transition from soft folk to a harder edge makes for some interesting musical switches. Just when a musical phrase could get hackneyed — images jump in your face, forcing you to pay attention to the catchy word play and interesting double entendre (e.g., the line "I don't deserve you anymore" could mean I'm not good enough to deserve you or I'm too good to deserve you. It's a great play on words which strengthens the overall effect of this recording.)

Perhaps the strongest piece on this recording is "Kathy (At The Bar)." The singer hears from a friend about his ex-lover and her new man. The singer frets and wonders about what she is wearing but doesn't want to know because if it's better than what she wore with him, he'd know for sure that it's all over ("Did she show me her very best?"). What a great scenario reflecting the full emotional range we often feel but can't put into words.

Although Druckman's singing is not especially strong, the emotion he squeezes from the rather flat nasal tones add power and emphasis to his lyrical points of view. The yodel effect on "Paperdoll" is wonderful — full of angst and pain — a perfect synthesis of the

emotion and music found in the tune. It offers a certain authenticity, like much of the material on this recording, that is compelling and worth a listen.

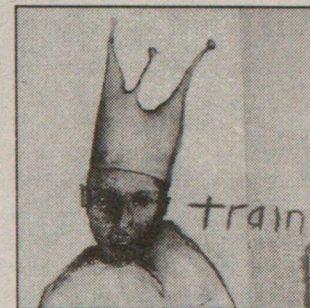
Amón • Amón • Joe Slanga Records

Lansing-based Amón offers a striking recording. Singing in an appealing tenor and accompanying himself primarily on guitar, Amón plays slow personal ballads that offer enough musical and lyrical interest to warrant a second listen. Three cuts stand out: a soulful blues number entitled "Hard Times"; the poetic and provocative "All In This Place"; and the compelling "Closer Than My Heart." All three show Amón to be a skilled guitarist and a talented vocalist. With a supportive ensemble and a touch of electric guitar, this nascent artist could have even greater appeal. He visits Ann Arbor often. Check him out.

Train • Train • Aware Records

The connection with Michigan of this California band is Aware Records. Now based in Chicago, this company started out in East Lansing producing compilations of independent artists from around the country. Their five CDs are available at local stores, and by and large, they all offer good samples of strong acts.

This CD, featuring Train, a great pop/rock group from California, is first-rate. Consisting of Jimmy Stafford and Rob Hotchkiss on guitars; Scott Underwood, drums; Charlie



Colin, bass; it is the strong emotive vocals of Pat Monahan that more or less define the group. At times his vocals are soaring, other times strident, but always in control, even during the strongest screams and the quietest whispers. This fellow can flat out sing.

The instrumental accompaniment is likewise strong. With a hint of country, a lot of rock, with a twist of jam-rock, their music is as catchy as any pop music. But by using two guitarists their music is heavy enough to keep the tunes satisfying for the most rigid of head-bangers. Two cuts in particular are great — "Meet Virginia" and "Free." The production throughout is top-notch and stands up to constant listening. Pick this one up today. ■

Comments? Questions? Tapes, CDs, etc., may be sent to: AGENDA, ATTN: Music Dept., 220 S. Main St., Ann Arbor, MI 48104



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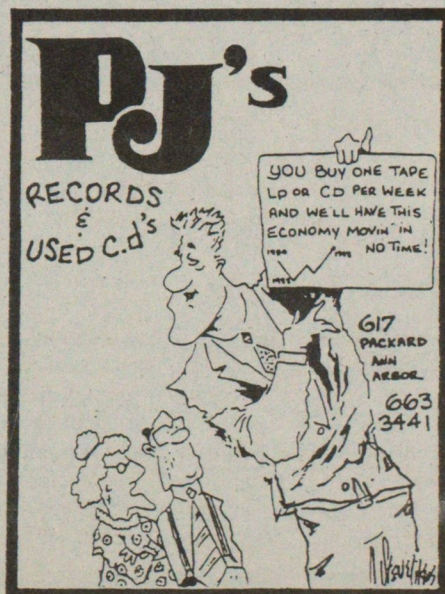
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## FOOD: Stef & The Chef

**I**n our culture, eating out is usually a social event. Few things can be as awkward and embarrassing as going to a restaurant by yourself, sitting alone while you wait for your order, and wondering who is looking and feeling sorry for you. I (Stef) enjoy doing things by myself, but one ill-fated trip alone to the Olive Garden — with the hostess's incredulous "Just one for dinner?" and a table in the center of a bustling dining room — reminded me that you have to be either thick-skinned (which I'm not) or selective about which restaurants are good for a meal by yourself.

Fortunately, there are several good choices in Ann Arbor, especially student-frequented locations near the University of Michigan campus, where eating alone while reading, writing, or just looking pensive is a common sight. Some of Stef and the Chef's favorites (when we're not together, of course) include **The Burro** (619 E. William), **Dinersty** (241 E. Liberty), **The Fleetwood** (300 S. Ashley), or any of the local cafes.

But if you're looking for easy parking and a more substantial lunch or dinner, you might want to get away from downtown and head out to 3035 Washtenaw Ave. for **The Star Buffet**. If you like Chinese cuisine, this is a great stop for the single diner (as well as for parties of any size).

At the Star Buffet, you pay a set price for the buffet when you enter, pick your own table, and then help yourself to all you can eat of long rows of Chinese entrees, salads, soups, and more. Self-serve desserts, hot tea, and



soda are included in the price. You grab your own plates, silverware, chopsticks, and fortune cookies. Staff only come to your table to bus dirty dishes as you bring newly laden ones back to your seat.

If you're alone, this set-up allows you to avoid the uncomfortable moments waiting to order and waiting to be served, and you don't have to talk to anyone if you don't feel like it. No one cares why you're there, what you eat, or how long you stay.

Admittedly, these characteristics that make the Star Buffet feel welcoming when you're alone can also make it seem a little lonely. In addition, the restaurant is a huge open room with a high ceiling; we've never been there when it was more than half-full, so it always feels kinda empty and cold. And the pumped in muzak love songs don't help the atmosphere any.

But people come here to chow down, not to be wooed. And you get more than what you pay for, in quality as well as quantity. Lunch is \$5.55 on weekdays and \$6.55 on weekends,

and dinner, which starts at 4:30 pm, is \$7.99 (and offers additional selections, including Alaskan crab legs). Or you can take out a carton of the buffet for under \$4 a pound.

Most of the items are surprisingly good for a buffet, and some dishes are excellent. A few of the best options are the all-vegetarian Eggplant in Garlic Sauce (breaded sliced eggplant without a hint of bitterness in a sweet and hot brown sauce); a peppery cold salad of cabbage, carrots, and green peppers (like a fresher, crunchier version of kim chi); and the sesame roll (a bite-size dessert of sweet bean paste in a fried dough ball, rolled in sesame seeds).

Buffets allow you to eat food in any order you want, so you might want to start with the sesame rolls. But if you'd prefer to begin with soup, the hot-and-sour is full of mushrooms and tofu in a broth that is just the right thickness. We wouldn't recommend the egg drop, however, which is bland and sticky. The choice of appetizers is overwhelming; you could easily fill up

on pork dumplings, breaded chicken strips with do-it-yourself sweet-and-sour sauce, spring rolls, salty chicken on a stick, and more. Two that we prefer are the fried scallops — juicy and flavorful — and the fried won-ton with a rich crab and cheese filling. Opposite the appetizers is a wall of cold dishes with little relation to Chinese cuisine but including a simple build-your-own salad bar, refreshing orange slices, and shrimp cocktail (at dinner time).

When you go back for the entrees, take a peak at everything before you start loading up your plate, but beware of your eyes being bigger than your stomach. There are classics like Pepper Steak, Moo Goo Gai Pan, and Vegetable Lo Mein which are all adequately prepared. Better options include the Tofu Homestyle with carrots and green peppers and large pieces of chewy, soft tofu; Chicken, Pepper, and Peanuts with zucchini and bamboo shoots chopped small in a tasty brown sauce; Mongolian Pork with onions that bite back; and Chicken with Garlic Sauce. Star Buffet seems to do best with vegetable dishes; don't miss the sauteed string beans or the bok choy stir-fry. One disappointing dish is the General Tso's Chicken with a heavy sauce and too much dough around the pieces of meat. But the great thing about a quality buffet is you can skip anything you don't like — or can't eat — and still have plenty of pleasing choices.

Of course, a meal at The Star can suffer from the laws of buffet dining. At any moment, some dishes will be fresh from the kitchen and steaming in the chafing dish while others have become stale and sticky or are currently unavailable. For example, the last time we were there, the Singapore

rice noodles were down to about 20 strands, glued to the bottom of the pan. Tricks to avoid this downfall are to go right when they open (11:15 am) or to go at peak meal times when the most people are there to keep the kitchen hopping.

Another problem with the buffet approach is that the level of spicing seems geared toward the least adventurous palate; many of the sauces end up tasting similar. The assumption seems to be that "heat" can be added as desired, and hot mustard and pepper sauce are available for this purpose. Another challenge for a Chinese buffet is the rice, a food which doesn't keep well long after cooking. Star Buffet has white and fried rice available in large rice cookers, but the consistency has never been quite right when we've eaten there. Finally, the staff don't always clear away dirty plates as fast as you can pile them up on your table.

But don't sweat the details. Relax and pig out. And after you've conquered the entrees, you might want a bowl of soft-serve chocolate or vanilla ice cream, a piece of coconut pound cake, fried sugar rolls (donut holes that melt in your mouth when warm), or, well, another sesame roll.

So whether you're eating alone or with a gaggle of friends or family, the Star Buffet welcomes you to be yourself. Enjoy eating without restraint, try dishes you've never ordered off a menu before, and don't worry if you're a little thin-skinned. Nobody here minds a bit.

**Stef is a freelance writer who loves to eat and drink. The Chef is a local professional chef who spends his life in restaurants of all kinds.**



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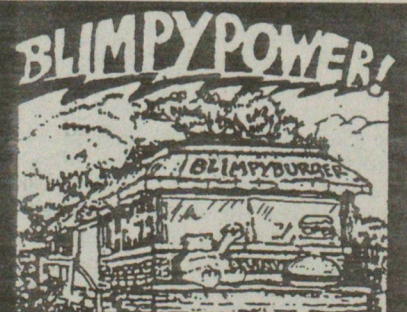
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# SCREEN SCENE

By John Carlos Cantú

## PRIMARY COLORS

[1998. Directed by Mike Nichols. Cast: John Travolta, Emma Thompson, Kathy Bates. Universal Pictures. 140 mins.]



The vaguely uncomfortable feeling one might get while watching Mike Nichols' *Primary Colors* is simple to pinpoint: If Jack Stanton didn't exist, we'd have to invent him.

Stanton, as near-vacantly portrayed by John Travolta, is a southern governor running for president during the 1992 primary campaign season. He has a twinkle in his eyes that seemingly inhabits his every thought. His slightly sweet drawl oozes with sincerity at every corner. And his puffy body language fueled by a baker's dozen of Krispy Kreme donuts expansively reaches out with a convincing sincerity indicating that he knows our pain.

It's not inconceivable that if Travolta were running for president as Jack Stanton — on Jack Stanton's platform using Jack Stanton's conceits — he'd win election to the White House. At the very least, it'd be a tight race.

For Jack Stanton captures Nichols' imagination in *Primary Colors* as much as he captures the attention of the other characters in this tasty roman à clef based on the 1992 Democratic presidential campaign. By carefully modulating Travolta's appearance in the film — only initially giving us teasing glimpses of the candidate and then allowing him to increasingly dominate the movie as the plot gains momentum — Nichols builds an almost irresistible charisma in his lead character.

Yet Travolta also has a few tricks up his sleeve in this film. He plays Stanton as a post-modernist cipher. As much pure surface as any telegenic simulacra inhabiting the netherworld of present day telecommunications, Jack Stanton is the stuff presidential dreams are made of. He's our very own personal presidential candidate complete with an uncanny empathy that seemingly leaps effortlessly from his consciousness to ours.

## THE FULL MONTY

[1997. Directed by Peter Cattaneo. Cast: Robert Carlyle, Tom Wilkinson, Mark Addy. Searchlight Pictures/Fox Home Video. 90 mins.]



Granted, some movies' leading men are gems in the rough. But only a very few films have taken the idea of exposing its actors' family jewels as its central premise.

*The Full Monty* is the best of this rarely used (much less seen) topic. Peter Cattaneo's first directorial effort deliberately tugs at the average man's sensitive spot by focusing attention on what most guys would be unwilling to consider as a source of much humor. It's from this clever premise that the film hilariously succeeds.

Gaz (Robert Carlyle) and his friend Dave (Mark Addy) are a couple of unemployed Sheffield, England steelworkers. After so many rejections from their local unemployment agency — and an eye-opening side-long glance of an adult x-rated all male dance revue — the two mugs decide what's good for the physically sculpted goose is equally good for their nearly cooked ... and, well, not-quite-so physically sculpted geese.

Recruiting their former factory foreman, starchy middle-class Gerald (Tom Wilkinson), and adding another trio of unlikely exotic dancers by audition, these two near-losers hatch a scheme to do a local one-night stand featuring their barest essentials. And it's a good thing, too, because all six of these would-be flamingos are victims of the harsh economic laws of 1990s British diminishing returns.

## RATING KEY

- ★ Acting
- ✿ Cinematography
- ☞ Direction
- ✂ Editing
- ☞ Narrative
- 🎧 Sound
- ⊠ Special Effects

When a symbol appears following a title, it implies that the corresponding category is a strength of the movie.

Jack Stanton is more than merely a great communicator. We've already had one of those in this era. Stanton is, instead, the talking head as tribal interlocutor. And as evinced by Travolta's remarkably relaxed, almost hypnotic performance, this might be exactly the president we deserve at this time.

Emma Thompson as Susan, Stanton's wife and chief advisor, is his more stable, rational, and increasingly frustrated side. Adrian Lester, as Henry Burton (a stand in for the supposedly politically innocent George Stephanopoulos), is the naive outsider who gradually learns the ways of the political world. Billy Bob Thornton's James Carville look-alike Richard Jemmons is wild and wily as Stanton's chief field operative. And Kathy Bates shines as the master political fixer Libby Holden. Each of these indispensable sorcerer's apprentices prove to be the mettle Stanton needs to shine above the crowd.

Part visionary, part weasel, and all intuitive pragmatist, Jack Stanton's true (and equally important, *not* so true) colors paint the other hues of Mike Nichols' political rainbow in *Primary Colors*. Every movement needs a voice and Stanton's sometimes unctuous, but never false confidence fills the yearning of the people in this questionably fictional America.

Nichols' latest film is supposedly a comedy. And it does have a few funny moments. But there are also times when what it has to say about us as a nation — and the political leadership that arises from within our society — is no laughing matter. *Primary Colors* is one of those peculiar instances where fiction as fact gets outstripped by the sheer weight of history itself.

It takes a certain kind of cock-eyed nerve to find laughter in the plight of six desperately unemployed middle-aged men. Men who are not only so nearly beyond the age of useful re-education, but almost beyond the point of gainful social rehabilitation.

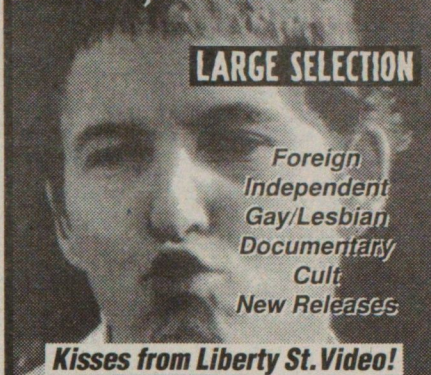
It's this sheer sense of desperation that hurtles the film forward with a good-natured scruffy gusto. The only thing Gaz wants is to earn enough filthy lucre to pay child support and get a reasonable say in raising his son. His best friend Mark only wants to make his way honorably. Ex-foreman Gerald, the eldest and ostensibly most responsible of the three, is also their social conscience.

Cattaneo and screenwriter Simon Beaufoy stack the film's deck solidly in their favor by stereotyping each man and lampooning each man's weakness until a heroic fleshy overcoming of the will triumphs over their initial shortcomings.

But the film wouldn't work nearly as well as it does if it didn't have a likable enough ringleader at its heart. And Carlyle's Gaz more than holds his own in this likable ensemble piece. Like his prior layabout — the alcoholic psychopathic Begbie in *Trainspotting* — Carlyle's proletarian looks and hardscrabble manner holds the film's center together. There's been something memorable recently about working-class types getting knocked down and getting back up again that fits right into the spirit of *The Full Monty*. The film is living proof that the rules of the masculine game are changing as we move towards the next century ... but the average man's resilience is not. The British have long extolled the stiff upper-lip. With *The Full Monty* they may aim below the belt, but they also come up swinging.

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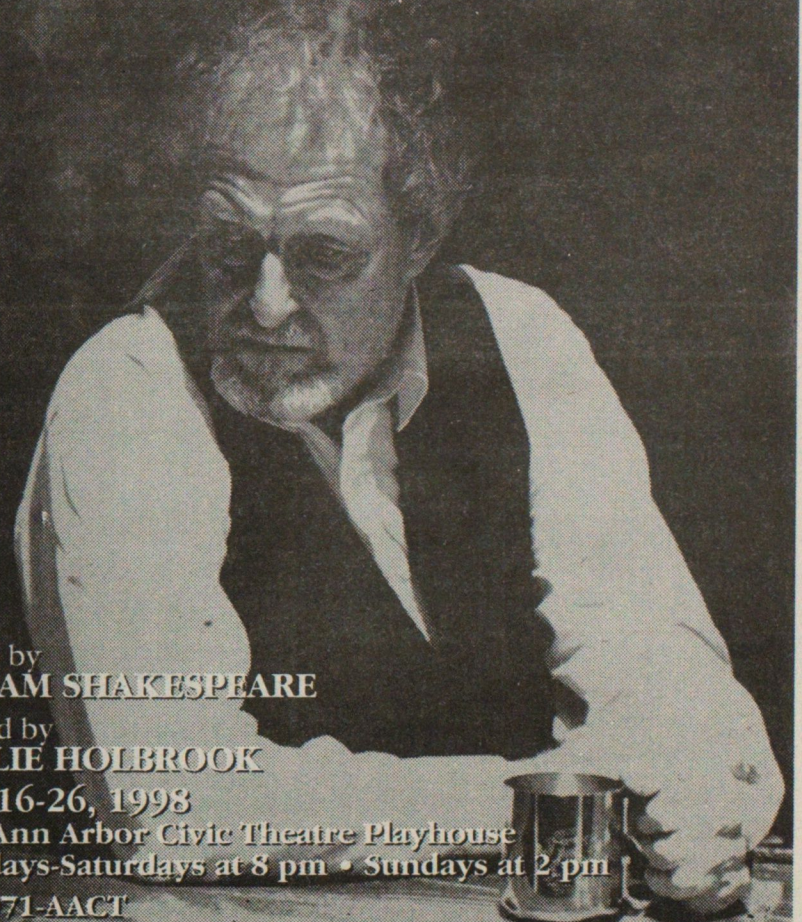
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# THE MERCHANT OF VENICE



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Directed by  
**NATALIE HOLBROOK**

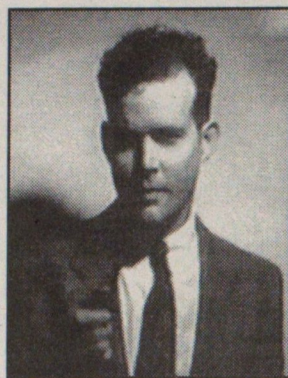
April 16-26, 1998  
at the Ann Arbor Civic Theatre Playhouse  
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**FICTION**

**GIRLFRIEND IN A COMA**

By Douglas Coupland  
ReganBooks, 284 pages  
\$24Hardback

By Michael C. Anderson  
Community Relations Director at  
Little Professor Book Co. &  
Adjunct English Lecturer at EMU



**D**ouglas Coupland, who gave us the novel and the expression, *Generation X*, a few years ago returns with his third novel, a fantasy called *Girlfriend in a Coma*. In 1979, high school senior Karen Ann McNeil loses her virginity with her boyfriend, Richard, goes to a stoner party with him and their four best friends, takes two valium and some vodka on an empty stomach, and falls into a coma. Coupland does a good job of showing Richard and his friends in their initial panic and shock, as doctors and police and parents take over and it becomes evident that Karen just isn't waking up.

In other circumstances, this might have been rather dramatic stuff, and I suspect it's no accident that the victim shares a name with the late Karen Ann Quinlan, a real coma victim whose story lurked in the national media

for years. But readers won't be moved by this Karen's tragedy because of the introduction given to us by a ghost named Jared, a friend of our group of friends, who died of leukemia a year before. He says that this story will lead to the end of the world, which he describes as "Dreary and quiet and the air always smells like there's a tire fire half a mile upwind."

Jared's introduction is written with a kind of whimsy that suggests that Coupland has been reading Kurt Vonnegut (*Galapagos* comes to mind), and the fantasy elements are a preemptive strike against any feelings of compassion Karen's plight might otherwise engender. We read on because the story promises to be strange rather than realistic.

What follows, though, is

entirely realistic as Karen's five friends go on with their lives. We know that stranger things will follow, however, and they do. After 18 years (Don't worry — I'm not giving anything away that isn't on the dust jacket of the novel), Karen wakes up.

This is my first encounter with Coupland's work. As I understand it, his fame rests on his ability to capture the concerns and attitudes of modern young adults. What I came away liking about this book is that after many passages that seem to reinforce the most troubling (and annoying) beliefs of his readers, he then turns around and takes us to task for them.

Consider: After Karen falls into her coma, Richard and the rest never seem to successfully navigate life. Some develop drug problems; one burns out after years as a model; another drops out to travel and "find himself"; Richard develops a drinking problem; all of them have cramped emotional lives. The blame for their ennui is placed not on Karen, but on the times themselves. One of them puts it this way:

If you look at the world as a whole, we have to admit life's good here where we live. But in an evil *Twilight*

*Zone* kind of way there's nothing else to choose. In the old days there was always a bohemia or a creative underworld to join if the mainstream life wasn't your bag — or a life of crime, or even religion. And now there's only the system. All other options have evaporated .... There's no way out now.

When Karen miraculously awakens, she has no memory of the interceding years and thus sees our world through the eyes of a teenager from 1979. She too finds the modern world to be disappointing:

There's a *hardness* I'm seeing in modern people. Those little moments of goofiness that used to make the days pass seem to have gone ... Husbands and wives both work. Kids are farmed out to schools and video games. ... [people are] isolated. People work much more, only to go home and surf the Internet and send e-mail rather than calling ... or visiting each other. They work, watch TV, and sleep. I see these things. The whole world is about work: *work work work get get get ...*

Now I may be wrong, but I suspect that certain readers embrace Coupland precisely because of such passages: they find there an accurate description of their own view of the modern world, a view that for

**CRIME FICTION**

**DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS**

By Kent Harrington  
Dennis McMillan Publications  
244 pages, \$30

By Jamie Agnew  
Owner of Aunt Agatha's  
Book Store

**T**here's something about Kent Harrington's new novel *Día de los Muertos* that makes me want to describe it by referring to other authors or unlikely combinations thereof — how about *Under the Volcano* as written by David Goodis, or maybe Jerzi Kosinsky with plot by Dashiell Hammett? It's one of those reviewer's games that

many excuses apathy and easy cynicism as a response. Why not? After all, there's "No way out." I imagine these readers complacently thinking "Tell it like it is, Doug!" as they sip their double cappuccinos and read along.

But I myself am not one of those readers, and just as I'm wanting to slap these self-pitying fictional characters for their myopia ... Coupland does it for me by bringing about the end of the world. I hear the distant echo of a par-

could go on quite a while — I'd also have to mention James M. Cain, Jim Thompson, B. Traven, Dorothy Hughes, Nathaniel West and Ambrose Bierce just to begin with. That's not a negative, it's all good stuff, and maybe in the post-modern world the only way to get down is to mixmaster great old riffs with new technologies, different emphases and ever more explicit sex and violence.

*Día de los Muertos* even has what Richard Wilbur called our century's most characteristic subject, the disintegration of personality. It begins with Vincent Calhoun, "the reptile from the desert," a gambler who feverishly (literally — he has Dengue fever) reels down

(continued, next page)

ent saying "I'll give you something to cry ABOUT!" as our heroes find themselves the only survivors of an overnight plague. What happens next, well, that would be telling.

*Girlfriend in a Coma* has an ending that's a little too pat for my taste, but that's often the case with fairy tales, which is finally what this is. I happen to like fairy tales, particularly when, as happens here, they take a thematic turn that surprises me. Tell it like it is, Doug. ■

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## PEACE & JUSTICE

Send items for the MAY Peace & Justice Calendar by  
APRIL 15 to: AGENDA, 220 S. Main St., Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

**Amnesty International Community Group** meets at 7 pm on the second Sunday (April 12) and fourth Sunday (April 26) of every month at the Guild House, 802 Monroe St. 662-5189

**Amnesty International Group 61** meets at 7:30 pm on the second Tuesday (April 14) of every month at the Mich. Union Welker Room. 668-0660

**Ann Arbor Tenants Union** hosts "Tenant Talk," a half-hour radio show which discusses issues of concern to local renters. Every Tuesday, 6-6:30 pm, WCBN 88.3 FM. 763-3500

**Citizens' Resistance at Fermi Two (CRAFT)** meets on the second Tue. (April 14) of every month at 7 pm at St. Mary's Conference Center, 502 W. Elm, Monroe. 734-457-0359

**Gray Panthers of Huron Valley** holds their regular membership meeting on Saturday, April 4. A video will be shown of a recent talk in Ann Arbor by award-winning journalist Suzanne Gordon, author of *Life Support in an Era of Corporate Health Care*. Gray Panthers is an intergenerational group dedicated to improving life for people of all ages. Refreshments. All invited. 10 am-12:30 pm, A2 Senior Center, 1320 Baldwin. 663-6248

**Guild House** hosts "Sexuality and Spirituality: Exploring the Connections," a discussion group for lesbians, bisexual and transgender folks facilitated by members of the community every Thursday, 7-8 pm at 802 Monroe St. 662-5189

**Interfaith Council for Peace & Justice**

• Fri., April 3: Disarmament Working Group meeting. Topic: Raise awareness of U.S. weapons of mass destruction: biological, chemical and nuclear. Noon, ICPJ office, Memorial Church, 730 Tappan. 663-1870

• Sat., April 4: 1998 Unity Rally for Racial Justice: Community-wide event on the 30th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Storytelling and songs by Pat Vereen-Dixon at 6:30 pm at Wheeler Park on Depot St.; candlelit procession through downtown, leaving Wheeler Park by 7 pm; gathering at First United Methodist Church, 120 S. State at 7:30 pm for a program including Dr. King's "Beyond Vietnam" speech, local musicians Rhonda Williams, Paul Tinkerhess, Skip Turner and speaker Mattie Jones. Bring a candle, turn on porchlights in support. Free vans from Michigan Union, 5:40-6:30 pm. 663-1870

• Sun., April 5: Middle East Task Force meeting. Topic: Ending sanctions on Iraq. 1:30 pm, ICPJ office, Memorial Church, 730 Tappan. 663-1870

• Thu., April 9: Racial & Economic Justice Task Force meeting. Topic: Bringing the "Peace Factory" interactive experience for children to A2 in May, 12-1:30 pm, ICPJ office, Memorial Church, 730 Tappan. 663-1870

• Tue., April 14: "Ann Arbor's Newest Sister Church in Nicaragua." Slide show and talk by Susan King, Ann Arbor Hunger Coalition Coordinator, and others from the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation's March delegation to Catarina, Nicaragua. 7:30 pm, First Baptist Church, Memorial Lounge, 512 E. Huron. 663-1870

• Wed., April 15: Ann Arbor-Juigalpa Sister City Committee meeting. Topic: Lending project in Juigalpa, Nicaragua. 7:30 pm, Guild House, 802 Monroe. 663-1870

• Fri., April 17: Disarmament Working Group meeting. Topic: Educational efforts in congregations about nuclear weapons. ICPJ office, Memorial Church, 730 Tappan. 663-1870

• Tue., April 21: Nonviolent Action for Racial Justice Coalition meeting. Topic: Follow-up on the April 4 Unity Rally for Racial Justice. 7 pm, A2 Community Center, 625 N. Main. 663-1870

• Thu., April 23: Racial & Economic Justice Task Force meeting. Topic: Bringing the "Peace Factory" interactive experience for children to A2 in May. Noon-1:30 pm, ICPJ office, Memorial Church, 730 Tappan. 663-1870

• Sat., April 25: Close the School of the Americas Send-off. Vans and carpools leave for Washington DC for SOA Watch rally at the White House and vigil at the Capitol to close the U.S. Army school responsible for teaching death squad tactics and torture techniques to Latin American soldiers. Call for time and location. 663-1870

**Peace InSight** will hold a video planning meeting at 8 pm on Tue., April 7 at Espresso Royale Caffe, 214 S. Main. Are you interested in peace, social justice, and other politically progressive ideas? Are you involved in video production (or would like to be)? Drop by the meeting or call and leave a message for Cindy at 761-7749.

Peace InSight's programs are cablecast on Cable Channel 9, Community Television Network:

• "Live Call-In." Hosted by Thom Saffold, Pres. of the Interfaith Council for

Peace & Justice. 9 pm on 2 Thu., recablecast at 5 pm on 6 Mon.

• "Indonesia & East Timor: Tyranny & Resistance." Video of speakers: Nina Maria da Costa, a refugee from East Timor and advocate in Australia, and Jeff Ballinger, founder of Press for Change. 7 pm on 7 Tue., 6 pm on 10 Fri., and 2 pm on 12 Sun.

• "PREVENT Teach-In: Oppose Sanctions Against Iraq." Exerpts from the Feb 7 rally and Teach-In about the current state of the Iraqi people and the possibility of Gulf War II. 7 pm on 14 Tue., 6 pm on 17 Fri., and 2 pm on 19 Sun.

• "The Nation's Public Schools—How Good (or Bad) are They?" Video of panel discussion. 7 pm on 21 Tue., 6 pm on 24 Fri., and 2 pm on 26 Sun.

• "The U.N., Sustainable Development/Elimination of Landmines." Oct. 21, 1997 talk by Professor Michael Russell Rip, MSU. 7 pm on 28 Tue., 6 pm on Fri. May 1, and 2 pm on Sun., May 3.

**SAFE House** presents "Being An Ally: What Men Can Do To Stop Domestic Violence," as part of a series of seminars held on the second Tuesday (April 14) of each month from noon-2 pm at SAFE House, 4100 Clark Rd. 973-0242

**20/20 Vision** meets on the first Saturday of every other month at 310 S. Ashley from 9:30-11 am. Their next meeting will be on May 2. 20/20 Vision is a non-profit, grassroots peace/environmental organization which sends postcards each month to subscribers detailing one action they can do that month to save the earth or promote peace. 332-1106

**U-M Campaign to Ban Land Mines** presents a talk by Paul Piatti of the Vietnam Veterans' Federation of America (VVA) on the large number of land mines around the world, the impact they have on civilian populations, and the status of the Ottawa treaty to ban land mines. Tue., April 7, 7:30 pm, Anderson Room D, Mich. Union. 763-1869

**Welfare Rights Union** works through education, advocacy and action on poverty issues. Office hours are on Fridays, 10:30 am-noon. 973-3031

**WalkieTalkie**, a free weekly email calendar of political and service events involving over 80 student and community groups, seeks your news and information and your interest and curiosity. Contact: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~lormand/wt>

**The Ypsilanti Campaign for Equality** exists specifically to support and defend the city of Ypsilanti's nondiscrimination ordinance which was passed by City Council in Dec., 1997, but which now faces a public vote due to a petition drive conducted by the anti-gay group COST. Call for April activities. 480-7698

zations. One group not endorsing the Turn-Off is the National Association of Broadcasters, whose spokesman Dennis Wharton said "it is questionable whether Americans will want to stop watching compelling programming."

Boycotting TV is very easy. Just turn it off and leave it off. To make things easier you may want to place the remote control in an inconvenient location and place a large towel over the TV set. When the urge to watch comes up, TV-Free America suggests the following: visit the library and check out a book, go to a museum, listen to the radio, climb a tree, fly a kite, go for a bicycle ride, go bird watching, start a garden, enjoy silence, fix something, bake cookies or bread (share with a neighbor), write a letter to the President or a member of Congress, visit a friend or relative, watch the night sky or play with children. The range of activities is almost endless when in the words of one person, "you are not sitting for hours staring at a piece of furniture known as the TV set."

For more information on National TV Turn-Off Week and TV Free America write the organization at 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 3A, Washington, D.C. 20009 or call 202/887-0436. A TV Turn-Off Week kit is \$10 and a subscription to "The TV-Free American" is \$20/year.

—ROBERT KRZEWINSKI

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## Lesbian Health: Thinking about Parenting

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Admission is FREE and open to all.

Tuesday • April 14

## The New Baby: Preparing Yourself & Everyone Else

7-9pm • Michigan League, Kalamazoo Room U-M Central Campus

**Possible topics featured:** Telling your boss/co-workers; preparing your home; Lamaze; childbirth, or adoption preparation courses; the birth itself and the hospital experience; what to expect from your family.

**Panelists:** Women will share stories of their experiences of the birth and adoption processes.

Tuesday • April 21

## Lesbian Families: The Joys and the Challenges

7-9pm • Michigan League, Koessler Room U-M Central Campus

**Topics featured:** Childcare; school; talking to your kids; talking to other parents; creating a positive environment.

**Panelists:** Several women will share their stories, as will some of their teen children if available.

Tuesday • April 28

## Legal Issues: What Lesbian Families Need to Know

7-9pm • Michigan League, Kalamazoo Room U-M Central Campus

**Possible topics featured:** Adoption and foster care; partner adoption; custody; wills; rights.

**Panelists:** Adoption counselor, attorneys, and women who have navigated the system share stories and offer advice.

Pre-registration is NOT necessary. These events are FREE — bring your friends. Refreshments will be served. For more information, please call the Women's Health Resource Center at the University of Michigan Medical Center: (734) 936-8886 or check out our web page at: [www.med.umich.edu/whrc](http://www.med.umich.edu/whrc)

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## BOYCOTT UPDATE

### National TV Turn-Off Week, April 22-28

Imagine having a very loud neighbor who follows you into your house, talking nonstop, saying all the things you don't want your kids to hear. Picture this person sitting at dinner with you, showing pictures of corpses and rapists while you're trying to get your children to eat vegetables. Around 8 pm, he starts telling jokes about orgasms and condoms. And this neighbor, who never listens to anyone, spends lots of time trying to sell you something. Most people would kick the guy out in real life, but when the "neighbor" is TV, he is invited in almost every day.

The dominance of TV in our society is, to say the least, overwhelming. Studies by the A.C. Nielson Company indicate that over 98% of U.S. households have at least one TV, with 66% having three or more sets. The TV is on for an average of over seven hours a day in many homes with Americans collectively watching over one billion hours a year. More critical evaluations by the American Psychological Association indicate that by the time a person completes high school they have seen 200,000 violent acts and 8,000 murders through spending 1,500 hours a year in front of the tube (compared to an average of 900 hours a year in school).

According to the Washington Post, 13% of the population can name at least three Supreme Court Justices but nearly 60% can name all the Three Stooges.

For a number of years now, an organization called TV-Free America (TVFA) has called for a complete "boycott" of television for one full week a year, with the dates of this year's National TV Turn-Off being April 22-28. The event helps move beyond the old discussions about program content. It instead focuses on what TV viewing displaces: creativity, productivity, healthy physical activity, civic engagement, reading, thinking and doing. Indeed, many people participating in the boycott have found that after giving up TV for a week, it was easier to turn the set off throughout the year which led to a more constructive, rewarding and healthy lifestyle.

Since its inception, National TV Turn-Off Week has attracted over eight million people and the campaign has drawn the endorsements of the American Medical Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Federation of Teachers, Children's Defense Fund, Literacy Volunteers of America, Presidents Council on Physical Fitness, the YMCA and at least 36 other prominent national organi-











**Dessert Fest: Ahava—Jewish Lesbian Gay Collective** 8 pm, call for place. 769-0500

**John Renbourne & Battlefield Band: The Ark** 8 pm, 316 S. Main. Call for price. 761-1451

**University Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Choir and University Choir: U-M School of Music** 8 pm, Hill Aud. Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 2 "Resurrection," directed by Kenneth Kiesler. 764-0594

**Live Music: Tuesdays in Leonardo's** 9-11 pm, Pierpont Commons (lower level), N. Campus. Caribbean music with "Panchita." 764-7544.

**Poignant Plecostomus: The Bird of Paradise** 9 pm (see 7 Tue)

**Meeting: Sappho Gamma Phi** 9 pm (see 7 Tue)

**"Get Curious w/Safety Girl & Butch Curious": CTV Channel 9** 9 pm (see 9 Thu)

## 22 Wednesday

**Earth Day Benefit for the Environmental Fund for Michigan: Whole Foods Market** 9 am-9 pm, 2398 E. Stadium. Five percent of each purchase on this day will benefit the Environmental Fund for Michigan. 971-3366

**Living With HIV: HARC** call for time (see 1 Wed)

**Brown Bag Lunch: A2 Parks and Recreation** noon-1 pm (see 1 Wed)

**"Book of Days": Purple Rose Theatre Company** 3 & 8 pm (see 2 Thu)

**Venus: Women's Center** 5:30 pm (see 1 Wed)

**Gay Radio Hour: WCBN 88.3 FM** 6 pm (see 1 Wed)

**Free HIV/AIDS Testing: HARC** 6-9 pm (see 1 Wed)

**Open Class in Wicca: Magical Education Council of A2** 7 pm (see 8 Wed)

**Adult Support Group: Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Washtenaw County** 7:30-9 pm, St. Clare/Temple Beth Emeth Building, 2309 Packard. Support group for

relatives with family members with mental illness. 994-6611

**Shamanic Journeys: Magical Ed. Council of A2** 7:30 pm (see 8 Wed)

**Loudon Wainwright III: The Ark** 8 pm, 316 S. Main. \$15. 761-1451

**East Quad Group: LGBTA** 9 pm (see 1 Wed)

**Ron Brooks Trio: The Bird of Paradise** 9 pm-1 am (see 1 Wed)

**Solar: Blind Pig** 9:30 pm (see 1 Wed)

## 23 Thursday

**Hits of the 1940's: U-M Gifts of Art** 12:10 pm, U-M Hospital Lobby, Floor 1. Performance by the group "Jazz Elegance." 936-ARTS

**Art Start: A2 Art Center** 4-5:15 pm, Bryant Community Center, 3 W. Eden Ct. Multi-arts experience for children in grades 3-5; Thursdays thru June 4, fee. Register 994-2722

**Credit Education Workshop: A2 Parks and Recreation** 5:30-9 pm, Bryant Community Center, 3 W. Eden Ct. Learn basic budgeting and bill paying, how and why to save and how to be creditworthy, \$15. Register 994-2722

**Sisters of Sappho: LGBTRC** 5:30 pm (see 2 Thu)

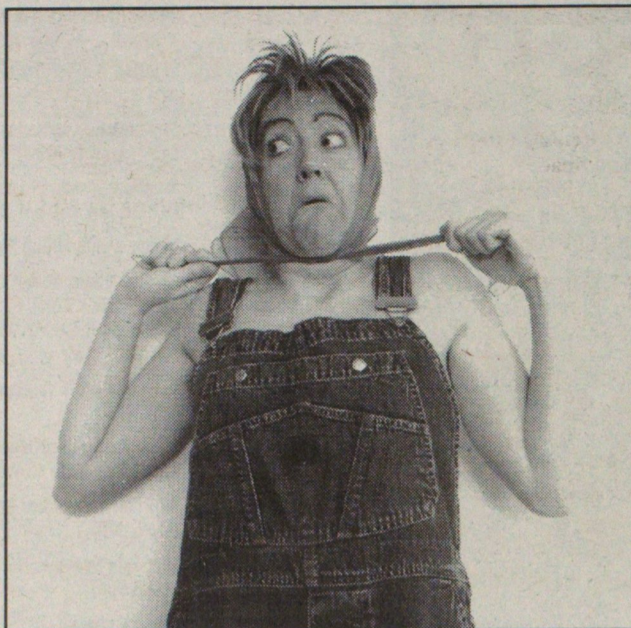
**"How to" Handle the Legal Vultures: Center for Empowerment and Economic Development** 6-8 pm, 2002 Hogback Rd, Suite 12. Learn how to avoid the legal pitfalls in business. 677-1400

**Frontrunners/Walkers** 6:15 pm & 6:35 pm (see 2 Thu)

**Meeting: Southeast Michigan Naturists/Michigan Nude Beach Advocates** 7-8 pm, Gypsy Cafe, 214 N. Fourth Ave. Monthly meeting. 475-9198

**Intro to Aromatherapy: Whole Foods Market** 7-8:30 pm, Tappan Middle School. How essential oils are created and used to enhance health and well-being, presented by Linda Greene. Register 971-3366

**"Face the Music": WCBN 88.3 FM** 7-8 pm (see 2 Thu)



**HILARY RAMSDEN in Walk & Squawk Performance Project's "How Could You Stoop SoLo?" will be at the Performance Network 23 Thu thru 26 Sun (see 26 Thu).**

**"Sexuality & Spirituality": LGBTA** 7 pm (see 2 Thu)

**Women's Basketball: LGBTA** 7 pm (see 2 Thu)

**Acoustic Jam: Oz's Music** 7:30-9:30 pm, 1920 Packard. With host Michael Northrup. Perform or listen. 662-8283

**Ray Wylie Hubbard: The Ark** 8 pm, 316 S. Main. Texas songwriter, author of "Up Against the Wall, Redneck Mother," \$12. 761-1451

**"Luz y Norte"—The Harp Concert: University Musical Society** 8 pm, Mendelssohn Theatre. Spanish guitar and harp with dancers and percussion, \$15-\$25. 764-2538

**"How Could You Stoop SoLo?": Walk & Squawk Performance Project** 8 pm, Performance Network, 408 W. Washington. Solo theatre pieces performed by Hilary Ramsden, \$15/\$12 students & seniors. Thu is pay-what-you-can day. 668-3023

**Paul Klinger's E-Z Street Swinglet: Bird of Paradise** 5-8 pm (see 3 Fri)

**Women of Color Support Group: LGBTA** 7 pm (see 3 Fri)

**RFD Boys: The Ark** 8 pm, 316 S. Main. Bluegrass, \$12. 761-1451

**Shawn Colvin: Michigan Theater** 8 pm, 603 E. Liberty. With Loudon Wainwright III, \$25. 99-MUSIC

**Multi-Performance Kaleidoscope: Fourth Avenue Gallery** 8 pm, 210 S. Fourth Ave. With Joi Price & Kevin Bowers, Bob Skon, Steve Shariff, Rick Stachura and an Open Mike hosted by MerGin. 327-2041

**Marsalis/Stravinsky: University Musical Society** 8 pm, Rackham Aud. World premiere concert, \$25-\$40. 764-2538

**A2 Dance Works Performance: U-M School of Music** 8 pm, Betty Pease Studio Theatre, 1310 N. University. Faculty choreography is performed by students and guests. 764-0594

**"The Cashier": Ypsilanti Players** 8 pm (see 17 Fri)

**"Book of Days": Purple Rose Theatre Company** 8 pm (see 2 Thu)

**"How Could You Stoop SoLo?": Walk & Squawk Performance Project** 8 pm (see 23 Thu)

**"The Merchant of Venice": A2 Civic Theatre** 8 pm (see 16 Thu)

**Salero de Espana: Espresso Royale Cafe** 9-11 pm, 214 S. Main. Flamenco music and dance. 668-1838

## 25 Saturday

**Frontrunners/Walkers** 9 am (see 4 Sat)

**Huron River Clean-Up: A2 Parks and Recreation** 9 am-noon (see 11 Sat)

**Neighborhood Health Screenings: Mobile Health Unit of St. Joseph Mercy Hospital** 10 am-1 pm, Bryant Community Center, 3 W. Eden Ct. Free health screenings. 994-2722

**Home Buyer's Seminar: Bryant Community Center** 10 am-noon, 3 W. Eden Ct. Learn modified guidelines, smaller down

payments, and other less-restrictive terms for home ownership, \$15. 994-2722

**Free HIV/AIDS Testing: HARC** 10 am-2 pm (see 4 Sat)

**23rd Anniversary: Ypsilanti Food Coop** 11 am-1 pm, 312 N. River St., Ypsi. Special coop orientation and tour as part of month-long anniversary celebration. 483-1520

**Jobs in Tree Care: A2 Parks and Recreation** noon-1:30 pm, Bryant Community Center, 3 W. Eden Ct. Join forestry professionals for an informal session on jobs in tree care. 994-2722

**Bird Feeding & Watching: A2 Parks and Recreation** 1-2:30 pm, Leslie Science Center, 1831 Traver Rd. Slide show and discussion, followed by a bird hike, \$4/\$15 families. Register 662-7802

**Creative Expression Group: LGBTA** 1 pm (see 4 Sat)

**23rd Anniversary: Ypsilanti Food Coop** 2 pm, 312 N. River St., Ypsi. April door prize drawing. (734) 483-1520

**"Book of Days": Purple Rose Theatre Company** 3 & 8 pm (see 2 Thu)

**Afro-Cuban Dance Workshop: Danis Perez Prades "La Mora"** 6-9 pm (see 18 Sat)

**Cheryl Wheeler: The Ark** 7:30 & 9:30 pm, 316 S. Main. Singer/songwriter, \$12.50. 761-1451

**Sit-In With Sam & Adult Pre-Concert Lecture: Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra** 7 pm, Michigan Theater. Discussion about Bright Sheng's "China Dreams" with Maestro Wong and Bright Sheng; for middle and high school students, \$5-\$10 (incl. 7:30 pm concert), free to concert-ticket holders. 994-4801

**Season Finale: Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra** 8 pm, Michigan Theater, 603 Liberty. Includes Bright Sheng's "China Dreams and Strauss' "Four Last Songs," \$16-\$29. 994-4801

**Morcheeba: Majestic** 8 pm, 4140 Woodward, Detroit. \$10. 99-MUSIC

**Shell: Fourth Avenue Gallery** 8 pm, 210 S. Fourth Ave. With Lance Lou Long, \$5/seniors free. 327-2041

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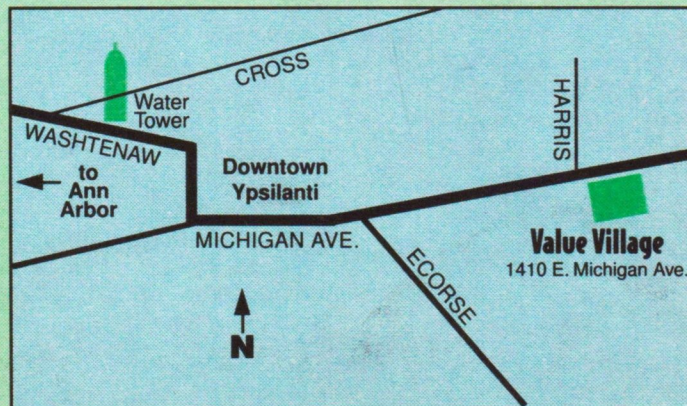
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