

COMMENTARY: My Musical Best List

By SHERMAN WILLMOTT

It's been a middling year for Memphis music locally—several good shows and a decent flow of Memphis bands playing with a few records released. Nationally, it's been a banner year: a year ago Craig Brewer had not even finished editing his just filmed *Hustle and Flow*. Since then, he has won awards with *H&F*, picked up national distribution through MTV Paramount, and filmed another one with Memphis area music inextricably linked throughout the movie. There's even a modicum of a buzz around the Memphis film world, primarily due to Brewer's insistence on filming in Memphis. Those films are the most exciting and impacting on the future of Memphis music

Here are the best things to happen to Memphis Music in the last year:

1) Memphis Music in the Movies

Current Memphis music playing on film soundtracks is undeniably the best thing to happen to Memphis music this year. Memphis music is in the films, on the film's tv commercials and websites, on MTV, and being played outside of Memphis. *Hustle and Flow* was a grand slam and Ira Sachs' understated *Forty Shades of Blue*, to a lesser extent, take the Memphis music out of town and into the ears of people all over the world. Next week's *Walk the Line* should continue the emphasis on Memphis music--albeit Joaquin Phoenix' version of Johnny Cash is...well, don't ask me why they would use margarine when they already had pure cream butter.

2) Diversity of Live Music and the Use of Multiple Live Music Sites

Every available live space in town has been used for every kind of music imaginable. Music is constantly flowing here...from Autozone Park with Willie Nelson to Mud Island to the Hi Tone as well as the suburban performing arts theaters. Even Fedex Forum has chilled out on its non-compete clause, cleaned house, and brought in the Rolling Stones & Elton John (does anyone attend things like "Trans-Siberian Orchestra"?). Handy Park and its overdone Pepsi sign pavilion was finally used for music of prominence during the Voodoo Fest. And word is that the Shell will eventually be back in action, ready for the Elvis of the future.

3) WEVL is Back Online

If a Memphis record falls in the forest, who hears it? WEVL is easily Memphis' finest radio station supporting local music. Having the signal stop at the city line has been a disservice to the fans of Memphis music all over the world and prevents the spread of new Memphis music. WEVL's return to internet broadcasting is a welcome relief and a boost for the Memphis musicians working hard to get their music heard beyond Memphis.

4) Cleveland Throws in the Towel

Although, as Yogi said, it ain't over 'til it's over with Gibson Guitars, the Rock 'N Roll Hall of Fame's

announcement that they would be opening a "satellite" exhibit in Memphis should be the final word on the mistake by the lake. It is a sad understatement, to say the least, that Cleveland was the wrong place to build the Rock 'N Roll Hall of Fame. (Give them their props, though...while Mayor Hackett was getting rid of Mid-Town hookers, Cleveland put together a very nice incentive package.) It is a small reward that Cleveland has decided to share their museum's exhibits with the real rock 'n roll hall of fame -- Memphis, Tennessee. As Memphis already has the music traveler wrapped up with Sun Studio, Beale St., Stax Museum, Rock n Soul Museum, and Graceland, this obviously means more for the Rock Hall than it does for Memphis, but we will take the compliment anyway we can get it. Even from Cleveland.

5) Folk Alliance World Headquarters Settles in on South Main

Until this summer, the words Folk Alliance previously meant only one thing to Memphians: big bucks and registers ringing when their convention came to town in 1998. However, this August, the Folk Alliance set up shop in the South Main Arts District. Along with the Blues Foundation, Beale St. Caravan, and LivefromMemphis.com, the Folk Alliance is the kind of genre-specific, grassroots music business that continue to take Memphis to a higher profile in the national industry as well as bringing future music events to town. Welcome, Folksters! We look forward to your conventioners coming to town in 2007!

6) Goner Records Saves the World

This teeny-tiny establishment in Cooper-Young (& its more influential web site) raised over \$14,000 through its various customers and users donations for New Orleans hurricane survivors. That's incredible!

7) Memphis' Soul Still on Fire

Memphix djs have been the centrifugal force for a new generation of Memphis soul fans, and their soul nights at the Hi Tone over the last few years have been inspirational and an exciting way to celebrate Memphis' music roots. Next top-shelf action is November 26 at the Hi Tone.

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