

same. Then, you turn on the TV and get three networks telling you the same exact thing at the same exact time. Only the messengers are different. If that's not state-controlled press, what is? A few publications, like *Mother Jones*, *The Village Voice* and *The Progressive*, offer dissenting views, but I can't always relate to them. So, I started my newsletter to air my feelings."

Goldstein's newsletter fits nicely into a 'zine offshoot called "personal 'zines" or "perzines." Keeping track of a mostly unrecognized trend and its burgeoning offshoots is a monumental task, to say the least. Fortunately, the small press editors have *Factsheet Five*. Published eight times a year by Mike Gunderloy, *FF* regularly reviews as many 'zines as is humanly possible. Gunderloy, who recently sold *FF* to kindred spirit Hudson Luce, told *The Village Voice*, "How many are out there that we don't know about? I'm sure there are hundreds." So, 'zine editors read *FF* religiously to stay in touch with new publications—always on the lookout for "subscription swaps."

A testimonial: "In 1989, I mailed the first issue to 35 people, mostly friends and family," laughs Jennifer Payne, a Connecticut resident and editor of the perzine, *The Latest News*. "Today, there are almost 150

readers from all over the country. *TLN* began as a way to keep in touch with a few friends and family. Thanks to *Factsheet Five*, it developed from a one-page 'letter' to a full-blown national newsletter."

Along with *FF*, there is *Laughing Bear*, a newsletter dedicated to advising small press editors. Tom Per-

Young and unknown writers, previously unable to penetrate the mainstream press force field now have an outlet for their offbeat dissertations.

son, the creator of *LB*, discusses practical how-to information for burgeoning publishers and offers space to promote 'zine news and updates. While many 'zine editors are happy to stay small, some are more ambitious.

"Our goal," declares *Aquarian Alternatives'* Art Rosenblum, "is to build a whole new worldwide society based on small communities, safe energy and abolition of all military systems—in short, the 'rulership of Love,' which some guy referred to as 'the kingdom of God' and got mistreated for that. Eventually, it must come, since no other system can long endure because the nature of the universe is love."

Mark Hand, creator of *Incite Information*, had a more pragmatic motivation. "I started *Incite Information* because I wanted to have sole control over the editorial content, design, direction, etc., of a publication." Clearly, editors like Hand don't start 'zines to follow someone else's agenda, but they often are open to freelance contributors. "I try to publish almost all the material sent to me that is well written, coherent and well argued," states Hand. "However, I do have certain standards and will turn down a submission that I find objectionable. For the most part, I evaluate articles on a case-by-case basis."

Small-ternative press: Just as 'zine editors are proliferating, 'zine contributors are coming out of the woodwork. Young and unknown writers, previously unable to penetrate the mainstream press force field, now have an outlet for their—shall we say offbeat—dissertations. Steve Slack is the founder of *Zeitgeist*, a 'zine "for those of us who are just a little different," which is based in Kalispell, Mont. "I started *ZG* because I was turned on by such groovy rags as Kyle Hogg's *Bold Print*, David Greismann's *Abbey*, and the whole concept of the small press. I decided I wanted to be a bridge between aspiring authors and the general public. I want to publish authors who are writing the truth, so that those

who seek it shall find. No shit. I hope to promote alternative viewpoints of a topic, to provide food for thought, to promote personal responsibility and global consciousness. I'd also like to break even financially while doing all of the above. Pray for me, eh?"

In the past, especially the turbulent '60s, new ideas were welcome, and fervent debate was not only desired, it was expected. Today, popular forums for dissent are scarce, and the small press movement has boldly stepped up to fill the void.

"The small press explosion is a boon to the First Amendment crowd," says Francis Forlenza, a controversial artist and dedicated 'zine reader. "I think it's interesting that many of these publications print poetry. For a while, it seemed that no one bothered with poetry as a form of expression. With all these 'zines, poetry will be the sushi of the '90s."

In some ways, the 'zines have replaced the dog-eared notebook that so many of us have scribbled our deepest thoughts in. We dabbled in prose but shunned attention, fearing rejection. Now, with a sense of community, many of us are exposing what's in our souls and finding that many others share the same concerns for our future.

"Today, we are constantly being fed images of the past," Goldstein adds. "It's like a conspiracy of time. The powers that be have convinced the American people that in order to gain pleasure, we must hark back to better times. That's why there's such an explosion of 'retro' trends. We are encouraged to relive the past, and our icons are dead. Whether it's JFK, James Dean, Elvis Presley, Jim Morrison or Marilyn Monroe, the young people are too busy daydreaming about what was done then to concentrate on what can be done

now."

With the return of *The Addams Family*, *Batman* and *The Brady Bunch*, it's obvious that Goldstein is on to something. In fact, he is trying to start an East Coast chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Time, a West Coast organization attempting to annihilate the current trend toward "retro-culture."

'Zine and herd: A quick glance through *Factsheet Five* will give a nice cross section of the subjects that warrant their own publication. *90's Penguins* is the 'zine that asks, "If the universe is expanding, why does real estate keep going up?" The 'zine for the "sexually adventurous of any gender" is called *Vanilla Milkshake*. Others have more clearly self-defining titles: *Vampire Archives*, *Politically Incorrect*, *Naughty Naked Dreamgirls* and *The Elena Rosa Veiga Torres Newsletter for This World and Beyond*. The last is the creation of Josh Abelson and is a perzine completely dedicated to pining over a lost girlfriend who is a foreign exchange student now back in Spain. Josh also publishes *Cramped*, a music 'zine.

"The mainstream media is basically all bullshit," Abelson states. "People are definitely getting fed up with being handed the same crap over and over again by a media controlled by a powerful few." Hence, Josh started publishing his views as a high school senior.

"Looking back now," Josh relates how *The Elena Rosa, etc.* (try initialing that one) 'zine got its start. "I'm not sure why I wrote the thing. I am an extremely private person, but something snapped in me. I guess something has to, at some point in a person's life." Judging by the 'zine trend, a lot of creative types

are in agreement.

Norman Isbell of Oceanside, Calif., created *The American Citizen* in 1985 after encountering government pressure to close his financial-planning company. "The IRS decided that we were helping too many people avoid excess taxes through tax-sheltered investments." Government harassment increased, he says, when an investigation failed to turn up any improprieties on Isbell's part. Their tactics progressed from a smear campaign to surgical break-ins during which client lists were stolen.

"Due to the Gestapo-like tactics of the criminal element in government (CEG)," Isbell recalls, "we lost almost all our clients." This led to Isbell's journey of education. His study of law was enlightening. "I found that the IRS has no jurisdiction over the lives of sovereign citizens. They can only exercise their power when jurisdiction is waived by the citizen. For example, when you sign the application form for a driver's license—originally intended to license interstate commerce drivers only—you also state that you will automatically accept any government notice delivered to you, even if this notice is fraudulent. *The American Citizen* is a publication dedicated to bringing knowledge like this to the American people."

Almost free and easy: Isbell is encouraged by the rise of alternative 'zines. "The editors of these underground publications will not toe the line and be intimidated. I find this exceedingly refreshing, and it proves that the spirit of our Founding Fathers lives on. As this phenomenon of alternative publications grows, it is my hope that they will become the major media and the CEG will be losing the battle."

Not all 'zine editors concur. Steve Slack of *Zeitgeist* feels that the trend toward small publications is not necessarily a direct result of the shortcomings of today's media. "I think it is a result of American free-spirited stubbornness, a technological and informational explosion, and the sheer number of different, interesting, literate subcultures within this great nation of ours."

Paul Goldstein sees it differently. "You can try to create a network of like-minded individuals. You can try to create a new standard for normality. I think the only way all these little publications will change anything is if they make that happen. The system hates community."

Community is precisely what the 'zine movement is offering. Isolated individuals get the opportunity to interact. This has led to the startling discovery of just how many people are thinking similar thoughts. World-changing views have previously sprung up from such humble, grass-roots beginnings. What ultimately results from the 'zine explosion is still open to conjecture. For now, it's encouraging just to know that others are thinking, questioning, creating and challenging. ■

Mickey Z. is an editor and poet living in New York.

In their own write

As you might expect, the editors of the 'zines featured here welcome any and all correspondence.

• *Incite Information*

Mark Hand, 1507 E. Franklin St., #530, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

• *The Stranger*

P.O. Box 31848, Seattle, WA 98103-1848.

• *Goldstein: A Newsletter About Me, Paul*

Paul Goldstein, P.O. Box 9103, L.I.C., NY 11103.

• *Aquarian Alternatives*

Art Rosenblum, 5620 Morton St., Philadelphia, PA 19144.

• *The Elena Rosa Veiga Torres Newsletter for This World and Beyond* and *Cramped*

Josh Abelson, Pitzer Box #008, 1050 N. Mills Ave., Claremont, CA 91711.

• *The American Citizen*

Norman Isbell, 3915 Mission Ave., #7-410, Oceanside, CA 92056.

• *Zeitgeist*

Steve Slack, P.O. Box 1006, Kalispell, MT 59903.

• *The Latest News*

Jennifer A. Payne, P.O. Box 245, Clinton, CT 06413.

• *Laughing Bear*

Tom Person, P.O. Box 36159, Denver, CO 80236.

• *Factsheet Five*

Hudson Luce, P.O. Box 1163, Cincinnati, OH 45201-1163.

• *End Game*

Mickey Z., P.O. Box 9103, L.I.C., NY 11103.

-M.Z.



By Mark G. Judge

DUST OFF THOSE BARF BAGS—it's grammy time again. Despite erstwhile alternative act R.E.M. garnering seven nominations—for *Out of Time*, their dumbest album to date—the grammy nomination process has offered up another crop of uninspiring artists whose selections are based solely on sales. This is an

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industry that would genuflect before Saddam Hussein if he moved a few units of product.

Of course, occasionally a corporate superstar stumbles on something aesthetically pleasing and even worthy of praise, but for the most part, this year's ceremony will be all Axl Rose's psycho blabbering and Michael Bolton's sadistic hog-calling. (Why don't they just join forces so we can hate them at the same time? Guns 'n' Bozo, anyone?)

Therefore, just as I did in this space last year, I present my own awards—the LAMAs (Little America Music Awards). These are the albums I spin while the grammies are on (I turn the sound down on the television) and are, in my opinion, the best releases of 1991. One note: Compilations, even brilliant ones like Bob Dylan's *The Bootleg Series*, Ray Charles' *The Birth of Soul* and the Pet Shop Boys' *Discography*, are not eligible.

#10. The Wonder Stuff—*Never Loved Elvis*. An ebullient, veddy English album that crosses the angry guitar chops of the Clash with the fiddles and Beautiful Boozer defiance of the Pogues, *Never Loved Elvis* wins this year's award for Best Album Title. (Just don't play Memphis!) Surprisingly sophisticated, *Never Loved Elvis* is a cavalcade of drunks ("The Size of a Cow"), transvestites ("Welcome to the Cheap Seats") and dead-beats ("Caught in My Shadow") that singer/guitarist Miles Hunt infuses with cheeky pathos.

#9. Metallica—*Metallica*. The four weeks this album spent at No. 1 was the second biggest shock of the year, right behind Nirvana's (continuing) chart domination. Mistakenly relegated to Spinal Tap status by Metal-hating alternative-radio types, leader James Hetfield's industrial tales of terror and abuse are truly hair-raising. Though occasionally short on melody, *Metallica* is a high-octane, head-bangin' steamroller.

#8. Kirsty MacColl—*Electric Landlady*. Eclectic landlady is more like it. MacColl is married to Big Time producer Steve Lillywhite, but charges of nepotism die fast after one spin of this multicultural, dance-pop Latin hodge-podge. Guests include the Pogues, Electronic's Johnny Marr and perennial popster Marshall Crenshaw, but the star is plainly Kirsty, who's narrow vocal range is more than made up for by her



Matthew Sweet and Robyn Hitchcock: two winners who won't be grabbing any Grammys.

Some 'unsound' advice for enduring the Grammy Awards

songwriting talent and easy hopscotching of musical styles.

#7. Robyn Hitchcock and the Egyptians—*Perspex Island*. The blessings the pop muse withholds from most performers—intelligence, wit, whimsy—nearly became a curse of abundance for Robyn Hitchcock. He almost forgot the cardinal rule of pop—keep it simple—before breaking through with the basic pop pleasures of *Perspex Island*. Straightforward, charged with guitar-driven hooks and just smart enough, this is the sound of indie-pop breaking

through to the top 40 with its boots on.

#6. Electronic—*Electronic*. America never quite got this. In the States,

Judge's edict: Turn down the sound on the TV and spin your own winners.

dance music is banished to the r&b or disco bins; but in England it's considered a legitimate, even vital, genre. This coupling of New Order's Bernard Sumner and former Smiths guitarist Johnny Marr was the towering, everything-but-the-kitchen-sink dance-pop record of the year, and its icy synthesizer bleeps and grunts ironically boasted more subtlety and genuine feeling than a hundred so-called "real" bands. I guess it's all in the groove.

#5. Straitjacket Fits—*Melt*. This Australian quartet knocked Nirvana

it of my top 10 this year. Maybe getting old—and, don't get me wrong, Nirvana's nuclear-powered breakthrough, *Nevermind*, is a great record—but I found the brittle despair coursing through *Melt* the more affecting low-light of the year. It's the eatles semi-coherent, gorgeously morose and crawling through the wreckage of suicides, rainy nights and broken hearts with hushed melodies that dissolve into brilliant hooks and contorted, squealing guitars. Or something like that. Achieving an almost otherworldly dislocation, *Melt* is eerie and uplifting.

#4. Shudder to Think—*Funeral at the Movies*. People will accuse me of caving in to hometown pressure (Shudder are from Washington, D.C.), but these four guys could be from Saskatchewan and I'd still say they were the find of the year. And when every band is trying to emulate this ready mix of churning guitars and androgynous, cascading vocals in a few years, just remember you heard it here first.

#3. Billy Bragg—*Don't Try This at Home*. As with my Shudder to Think pick, on this one I'll be accused of harboring personal bias for reasons that have nothing to do with reality. Sure, I like Uncle Bill's politics, but if he worked for Pat Buchanan, he'd still write a fetching love song. The politics just make it that much sweeter.

#2. Matthew Sweet—*Girlfriend*. There's been a lot of talk about guitars in this year's round-up, so it's only fitting that *Girlfriend*, the most impressive guitar-driven pop album of the year, is near the top of the list. The heroes—aside from Sweet, of course, who could write pop songs in his sleep—are guitarists Robert Quine and Richard Lloyd (the former a rising star, the latter a former member of seminal underground group Television), who pump Sweet's catchy little tunes up with bone-crunching riffs, punk aggression and a real blues sensibility.

#1. Van Morrison—*Hymns to the Silence*. I might catch hell for this. The argument—which I've made several times—is that pop is supposed to be for the kids, man. That it's supposed to be transient and catchy and thumb its nose at the hoary bastards that pollute the lite rock stations, and that the older guys should step down before becoming caricatures of themselves, which Van Morrison was dangerously close to doing. Instead of sliding into parody, he made a monkey out of his critics. *Hymns* is beyond pop, and truly astounding in its breadth and ambition. Every musical style is represented on these two discs: blues, jazz, gospel, rock, pop. Sadly, *Time* magazine was the only media to recognize this as a masterpiece. I'm adding *In These Times* to the list. ■

Mark G. Judge is broke. If *ITT* doesn't pay him soon, he'll have to sell his records.