



Alan Goldsher: *Modest Mouse: A Pretty Good Read* (St. Martin's Press)

As the first person to tackle the story of Modest Mouse in book form, journalist and musician Alan Goldsher has the unenviable task of assembling all of the relevant information in their history and setting down the definitive version of their story to date. All this he does—in addition to providing extensive critical analysis of the music itself—without the participation of the band, resulting in an account that is neither excessively reverent nor overly critical. Given such limitations, Goldsher relies on quotes and articles written about the band over the last ten years, delving into speculation a bit more than he might have otherwise and making a number of lengthy asides into the mythologies of Charlie Parker, Robert Johnson, and the phenomenon of side projects in order to establish context. Most interesting (or scandalous, depending on your point of view) is his suggestion that the more outlandish details of Isaac Brock's backstory could be either greatly embellished or outright falsehoods. Further, Goldsher speculates that Brock's combative and aloof public persona could very well be a clever media manipulation meant to make him seem more interesting than he would be otherwise. Such contentions are easier to swallow given Goldsher's informal and conversational tone, and the reader is left to decide just what account of the band seems most likely. (www.stmartins.com)

7 Blips out of 10

By Matt Fink



Alex Kapranos: *Sound Bites: Eating on Tour With Franz Ferdinand* (Penguin)

You might think of Franz Ferdinand as the future of music. You might think of them as a musical dead end. You might not think of them at all. In any event, if it all ends tomorrow, Alex Kapranos will have left something for posterity in the form of *Sound Bites*, a collection of his musings on cuisine culled from his celebrated column in London's *Guardian* newspaper.

"Sometimes I eat appallingly. Sometimes I eat phenomenally well. I never eat predictably." With this succinct description, Kapranos leads us on a far-flung adventure to gastronomic capitals both well known (Paris, Tokyo, New York) and decidedly off the beaten path (Lisbon, Zagreb, Austin). Tony restaurants with Michelin stars sit side-by-side with street vendors, as they should, since anyone who's ventured outside the States can attest that the best meals can often be had with some local dish of unknown origin wrapped up and carried while seeing the sights.

Those seeking salacious food/groupie anecdotes (a la Motley Crüe and Led Zeppelin) will be sorely disappointed, since sex rarely enters the picture. Indeed, ex-chef Kapranos would probably take more pleasure in deboning a chicken than in boning a...well, you get the picture. But thrills abound, from a nagging peanut allergy to an encounter with the deadly blowfish to a flock of ravenous seagulls in Malibu. To tell more would ruin the sense of discovery in which Kapranos so obviously wants the reader to share. (www.penguin.com)

8 Blips out of 10

By Matthew Christoffersen



Sean Manning (Edited by): *The Show I'll Never Forget* (Da Capo Press)

What a swell idea: Gather some of the finest literary minds in all of magazinedom and bookdom and ask them to dig through their cobwebby brain attics for their most memorable concertgoing experiences. Not only do you hear some great stories, you exhume historic chunks of an America that no longer exists, like a pre-hip Bowery. You get to hang with artists who might have split the coil before you were even born—and what an array of artists haunt these pages! Bill Evans, R.E.M., Nirvana, Queen, Redd Kross, PiL, The Eagles, Radiohead, Nina Simone, and quite possibly—if Gene Santoro's memory is to be trusted (and it kinda sorta can't)—Jimi Hendrix jamming with Buddy Guy at The Scene in New York. At times romantic (Cobain biographer Charles R. Cross retrospectively embraces grunge at the precise moment *Nevermind* conquered the world and a triumphant Nirvana performed before a home crowd at Seattle's Paramount) and deflating (Sigrid Nunez relives Woodstock as sitting atop rain-fed grass, smoking free dope and eating free sandwiches while groups performed miles away as pinpricks of color), *The Show I'll Never Forget* is a fine compendium of memory (or lack thereof), friendship, history, and timeless music. (www.dacapopress.com)

8 Blips out of 10

By Cory Frye



Rob Sheffield: *Love Is a Mix Tape* (Crown)

Hardly the self-indulgent geekfest its title suggests, *Love Is a Mix Tape* offers instead a moving portrait of love and loss, as told by *Rolling Stone* writer and occasional VH1 contributor Rob Sheffield. The book chronicles his nearly eight-year relationship with his late wife Renée, who at the age of 31 suffered a fatal pulmonary embolism in 1997. As expected, talk of music and mix tapes litter the pages, but it's the author's poignant and often sad observations about life as a widower that take center stage, resonating long after his affectionate nods to Hanson and numerous references to Pavement.

When Sheffield, for instance discusses his fascination with Jackie Kennedy, or laments his inability to return the kindness he receives in the wake of his wife's death, he achieves something utterly heartbreaking, yet intelligent, sobering, and often times very funny. Such ability finds him in good company with Nick Hornby (*High Fidelity*). The triumph of the book is that it would make anyone want to fall in love despite demonstrating the inherent potential for loss and suffering. Somewhere out there is your Renée, and they love Big Star, too. (www.crownpublishing.com)

9 Blips out of 10

By Gary Knight



Beavis and Butt-Head: The Mike Judge Collection DVD (MTV/Paramount) Bitter Films Volume One: 1995-2005 DVD (Bitter Films)

Mike Judge and Don Hertzfeldt have been doing animation buffs a favor every year (and providing them with respite from CG talking animal flicks) by presenting the indie animation fest *The Animation Show*, which began its third roadshow across the U.S. this January. The end of 2006 brought us the bread and butter that made these two guys leaders in their field.

Mike Judge's presentation of his insanely popular Beavis and Butt-Head characters is now complete, combining all three volumes of *The Mike Judge Collection* with the hilarious feature film *Beavis and Butt-Head Do America*. That film marked the first time Judge worked on the big screen (his next foray would be cult classic *Office Space*), and the film was also one of the last animated films to be done entirely in traditional (hand-drawn) cel animation before computer animation took over the genre. Many special features and appearances by the iconic characters are to be found on these several discs, and perhaps most importantly, the duo's crude yet insightful commentary on music videos from Helium, Sonic Youth, and Pavement are included here for prosperity.

Don Hertzfeldt, while not as well-known as Judge, is also very popular in the underground animation circuit, where his *Billy's Balloon* and *Rejected* shorts have played at Spike & Mike's Sick and Twisted Animation Festival and various other independent film festivals. Hertzfeldt's work is also hand-drawn, and its minimalist style and gut-busting humor is showcased on his self-released collection, *Bitter Films Volume One: 1995-2005*. This exhaustive set includes deleted sequences, pencil test footage, a 16-page booklet, and commentary from Hertzfeldt and associates. Get your draw on. (www.theanimationshow.com, www.bitterfilms.com)

Beavis and Butt-head: The Mike Judge Collection: 8 Blips out of 10 Bitter Films Volume One: 1995-2005: 9 Blips out of 10

By Nick Hyman



Zach Galifianakis: Live at The Purple Onion DVD (Shout! Factory)

This first solo DVD from ex-VH1 *Late World* host and current Comedian of Comedy Zach Galifianakis is full of piano-laden non sequiturs that should have you hunched over in your living room with laughter. The DVD has the heavily bearded and pleasantly plump comedian performing at San Francisco's The Purple Onion, while intercut with footage of his twin brother Seth being interviewed by ex-*Daily Show* correspondent and current NPR commentator Brian Unger. Galifianakis' wry wit and self-deprecating humor makes you want to hug him. The disc would be better if his video for Anita Baker's "You Bring Me Joy" was also included but you may still be able to find it (as well as Galifianakis and Fiona Apple's video for the latter's song "Not About Love") on his website. (www.zachgalifianakis.com)

8 Blips out of 10

By Nick Hyman



Homicide: Life on the Streets: The Complete Series DVD (A&E)

Having just finished watching the fourth season of *The Wire*, I can safely say that the show is one of the strongest ever created for the television medium. That being said, *The Wire* never would have even existed had it not been for the miracle that was *Homicide: Life on the Streets*. The critically lauded and brilliantly acted police procedural series was based on a nonfiction book by former Baltimore police reporter (and *Wire* creator) David Simon. *Homicide* ran for seven seasons on NBC despite low ratings, and was said by many to be the smartest cop show ever to hit the airwaves (and, like *The Wire*, it

was often known as "the best show nobody's watching"). Focusing heavily on the inner workings of a Baltimore homicide unit, *Homicide* portrayed a stark urban realism that never sugarcoated the intense and intriguing cases found within. The entire series is finally available together inside inspired "file cabinet" packaging, and includes three never-before-released *Law & Order* crossover episodes and the series-capping *Homicide: The Movie*. Essential, influential, and forever ahead of its time. (www.aetv.com)

10 Blips out of 10

By Nick Hyman



The Kids in the Hall: Complete Series Megaset 1989-1994 DVD (A&E)

Some would argue that the best sketch group of all time is Monty Python. However, my taste veers up north to Canada and the hilarious *The Kids in the Hall*. Their series featured the likes of cabbage heads, cancer boys, flying pigs, chicken ladies, head crushers, and of course, Buddy Cole. Dave Foley, Bruce McCulloch, Kevin McDonald, Mark McKinney and Scott Thompson made up the Kids, and all five hysterical seasons are included in this set that will have you laughing for hours. The guys reunite for commentaries on best-of compilations, and the bonus pre-series stage shows are revealing. Unfortunately, the underrated pharmaceutical-themed cinematic romp *Brain Candy* is not included here, which prevents the otherwise excellent set from being definitive. (www.aetv.com)

9 Blips out of 10

By Nick Hyman



Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Two Takes: The Criterion Collection DVD (Criterion)

William Greaves' late-'60s film *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* is a pot-fueled experiment in filmmaking or rather, faux-making. It's about Greaves trying to make a film in NYC's Central Park with a crew of theater folks clashing with film people, and the work ultimately examines what an auteur really is. The drugs bring out philosophical discussions from the crew, whose righteous indignation threatens to take the film away from its director. With so many characters speaking their minds, the fascinating time capsule of a film is reminiscent of Robert Altman's ensemble style, which this film possibly sparked. In typical Criterion fashion, the set includes an entire new film, *Take 2 1/2*, which includes an appearance by co-producer Steve Buscemi and a documentary examining Greaves' career. (www.criterionco.com)

7 Blips out of 10

By Nick Hyman



Twitch City: The Complete Series: DVD and Highway 61: DVD (MVD/VSC/Shadow Shows)

Canadian filmmaker (Last Night)/writer (*The Red Violin*)/actor (*Exotica*) Don McKellar is quite possibly the most underappreciated and practically unknown talents from the Great White North. After a long wait, two of his best projects are finally out on DVD. *Twitch City* is one of the best television shows in the past ten years, and now the adventures of Curtis (played by McKellar), the television addict who can't leave his house, can finally be appreciated in the U.S. by those who missed the series' brief run on Bravo. Costars Molly Parker (*Deadwood*), *Kids in the Hall* alum Mark McKinney, Bruce McCulloch, and Jennifer Jason Leigh should sweeten the deal for the uninitiated.

Bruce McDonald's (*Degrassi: The Next Generation*) quirky road movie *Highway 61* was cowritten by and starred McKellar as Pokey Jones, a barber who travels with a mysterious redhead and a corpse across the aforementioned stretch. Both DVDs include commentary from McKellar, and *Highway 61* includes short films as well. Highly recommended. (www.mvdb2b.com)

Twitch City: The Complete Series: 9 Blips out of 10

Highway 61: 8 Blips out of 10

By Nick Hyman