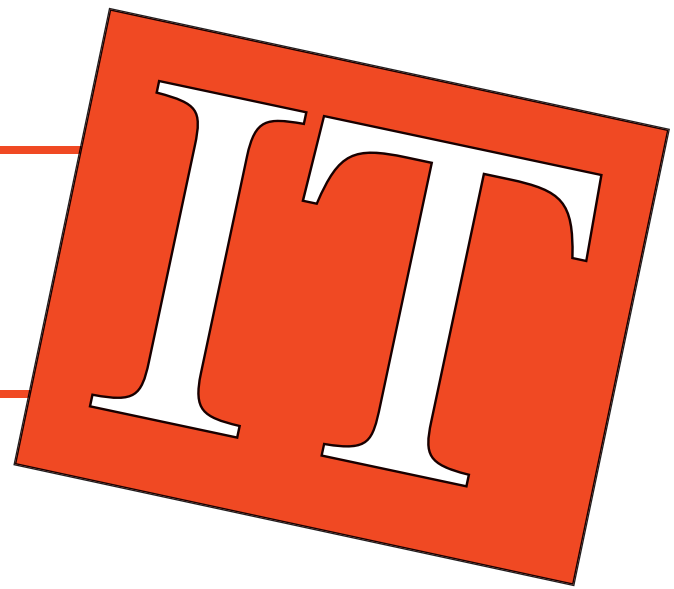


# In Tune

The Daily News

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## Trip to Cairo highlights shift for Amanpour

NEW YORK (AP) — Christiane Amanpour stood on ABC's "This Week" on Sunday in a khaki shirt with a backdrop of Cairo in crisis, rattling off reports from the street in Egypt and noting the presence of flyovers by fighter jets in what she described as eardrum-ripping sound.

With a little imagination, you could see the Amanpour who was, in her heyday at CNN, American television's best-known foreign TV correspondent, rather than the woman who has struggled for footing since taking over ABC's Washington-based Sunday morning show last summer.

"We've all seen dozens of those over the years," said James Goldston, executive producer of "This Week." "It was good to see it again."

Amanpour was on one of the few flights to arrive in Cairo on Saturday, coming in to an airport crowded with people anxious to get out. She described a nighttime journey into the heart of the city being stopped regularly at security checkpoints and passing by armed vigilantes protecting their property from looters.

"While it was tense, it was also friendly," she said. She talked via satellite to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who also appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press" and CBS' "Face the Nation," and the Egyptian ambassador to Washington, "because there are no government officials we can speak to in Cairo." She interviewed Nobel Peace laureate and democracy advocate Mohamed ElBaradei at his home (ElBaradei was also interviewed on "Face the

Nation").

ABC has been working to fix "This Week" on the fly, and the past month has illustrated the new direction.

The Sunday show had been knocking on the door of first place in the Sunday ratings before anchorman George Stephanopoulos departed for "Good Morning America." Jake Tapper filled in as host for several months before Amanpour, in a somewhat surprising move, was selected over him for the permanent role.

Since then, ABC has steadily occupied third in the ratings. Last week, David Gregory's "Meet the Press" had 3.4 million viewers, Bob Schieffer's "Face the Nation" had 3.1 million, Amanpour had 2.6 million and Chris Wallace's "Fox News Sunday" had 1.4 million, the Nielsen Co. said. Goldston conceded the long transition hurt the show's standings with viewers.

"Our challenge is to do the right show for Christiane to showcase our strengths," new ABC News President Ben Sherwood told the media three weeks ago.

For three of the past four weeks, Amanpour has anchored the show from remote locations outside of Washington: Sunday in Egypt, in Tucson, Ariz., on the day after the assassination attempt on Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, and back to Tucson a week later for a town meeting. On Jan. 9 in Tucson, "This Week" had its biggest audience in two years, although that probably had more to do with viewers curious about the shooting than where Amanpour was located.



— Photo Courtesy of Carol Rosegg

"Madagascar Live!" will entertain audiences at the Benedum Center for eight performances over four days, starting Thursday.

## 'Madagascar Live!' roars into Pittsburgh

By JEFFREY SISK  
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Gip Hoppe insists that kids aren't the only ones who'll be enthralled by the sights and sounds of "Madagascar Live!" when it roars into the Benedum Center later this week.

Hoppe, who directs the family-friendly production that opens its four-day, eight performance Pittsburgh run Thursday night, said a stellar cast and dynamite source material make "Madagascar Live!" a treat for audience members of all ages.

The musical is based on the 2005 animated hit film that featured the voices of Ben Stiller, Chris Rock and David Schwimmer.

"First off, 'Madagascar' is funny to adults and children," Hoppe said during a recent telephone interview from York, Pa., where he was putting the "Madagascar Live!" cast and crew through the paces during technical rehearsals. "And our script is pretty witty. When I first saw it, in fact, I laughed my butt off."

"We realize that kids don't drive themselves to the theater. The music is hot and the sets are great. It's like a Broadway show for kids, and I can guarantee parents will enjoy it, too."

And Hoppe should know. In addition to being an award-winning playwright ("Jackie: An American Life"), he's also directed similar live shows for "Dora the Explorer," "Blue's Clues" and "Go, Diego, Go."

"I like to use my imagination on stage," Hoppe said of his directing style. "And I don't think I have to dumb it

down (for younger audiences)."

He's also reaping the rewards of a talented cast portraying lovable characters Alex the Lion, Marty the Zebra, Melman the Giraffe, Gloria the Hippo, King Julien and the Penguins of Madagascar on stage.

"This is without a doubt the best cast I've ever had," Hoppe raved. "They are incredibly talented and very funny. Great singers and dancers."

That cast will bring the original story to life and transport audiences from the Central Park Zoo in New York to the wilds of Madagascar over the course of 90 fun-filled minutes.

In addition to some new musical numbers, the film's wildly popular "Move It, Move It" is prominently featured in the production.

"This is a touring show, but there are some really epic scenes," Hoppe said. "We have jungle scenes, an ocean voyage, Times Square. We don't cheat on anything."

"Madagascar Live!" opened in York last weekend and Pittsburgh is the second stop on a tour that eventually will visit 70 cities.

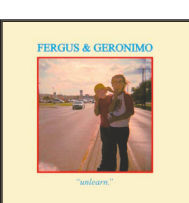
The Benedum performances are set for Thursday and Friday at 7 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday at 11 a.m., 2 and 5 p.m.

Tickets range from \$18 to \$45 with VIP packages priced at \$100.

You can reserve your seats by calling 412-456-6666, visiting [www.pgharts.org](http://www.pgharts.org) or by stopping by the Box Office at Theater Square. Discounted tickets are available for groups of 10 or more by calling 412-471-6930.



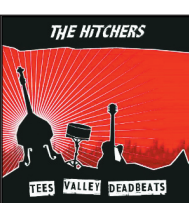
## F&G take time to grow on you; Caroline's latest soars



**FERGUS & GERONIMO, "Unlearn" (Hardly Art) ★★☆☆½** — I confess that I wasn't sure what to make of Texas-based indie rockers Fergus & Geronimo

the first time I gave their "Unlearn" full-length debut a spin. The musical styles are all over the place, with elements of pop, rock, punk, garage and R&B sprinkled into the mix. While the results are a bit uneven, I found F&G growing on me a little more every time I listened.

Their eclectic sound is on full display from the outset with keepers "Girls With English Accents," personal favorite "Wanna Know What I Would Do If I Was You?" and "Powerful Lovin'" showcasing the talents of Jason Kelly and Andrew Savage. After a couple missteps with "Baby Boomer" and "Michael Kelly," the guys regain their stride with standout tracks "Where the Walls Are Made of Grass," "Forced Aloha" and the title track. If you like your music a little different than the mainstream, I'd suggest checking out Fergus & Geronimo. (Jeffrey Sisk)



**THE HITCHERS, "Tees Valley Deadbeats" (Spectra) ★★☆☆** — If you've worn out your copies of "American Idiot," "Dookie," etc. and are craving more of Green

Day's signature pop/punk sound, the Hitchers should be in heavy rotation on your iPod. "Tees Valley Deadbeats," originally released in 2007, is getting another shot at capturing the public's fancy and the 14-track release deserves to be heard.

Two parts Green Day and one part Stray Cats, the Hitchers infuse their punk tunes with some retro rock & roll. Opener "Bop

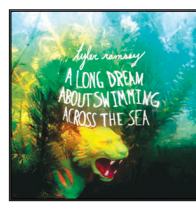
Til U Drop!" is a fantastic jumping off point and the trio additionally hits all the right notes on the manic gem "Berwick Hills 90210," "Rum to Talk to You," "I Might Never," "Weekend," "Baby Bought a Shotgun" and "The Chemist." Good stuff. (JS)



**MATT CUSSON, self-titled (Cuesounds) ★★☆☆** — Another artist with an album getting a deserved reissue is singer/songwriter Matt Cusson, who delivers a platter full

of sweet R&B tunes. Though I'd like to see a bit more variety and/or edge to the music, Cusson's self-titled debut (originally released in 2008) certainly is pleasing to the ears. A former John Lennon Songwriting Contest winner and keyboardist for genre heavyweight Brian McKnight, the Los Angeles-based Cusson is well on his way to making a name for himself.

Songs like "Every Step," "Here's to You and Me," "You Don't Have to Hurry Home" and "One of Those Nights" are dynamite, as is Cusson's lovely duet with Shoshana Bean on "Could." With a little bit of fine-tuning, I'm guessing his next record could be something special.



**TYLER RAMSEY, "A Long Dream About Swimming Across the Sea" (Brown/Fat Possum) ★★☆☆** — The cream of this re-release crop comes courtesy of Tyler

Ramsey, best known as the guitarist for indie rock outfit Band of Horses. "A Long Dream About Swimming Across the Sea," his second full-length, dropped three years ago last month and if anything, the 13-track album packs even more of a punch

now than it did in 2008.

Ramsey is an accomplished songwriter with a warm voice that draws listeners into the music. Originals such as "A Long Dream," "Once In Your Life," "No One Goes Out," "When I Wake" and "Please Stop Time" anchor the 49-minute set, but Ramsey hits an unexpected home run with a faithful, emotion-filled cover of Jackson Browne's "These Days." Great to see a fantastic album get its just due. (JS)

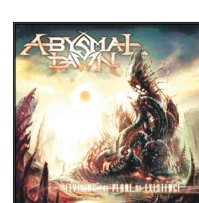


**CAROLINE, "Verdugo Hills" (Temporary Residence) ★★☆☆** — Most people likely know Caroline Lufkin from her work with ambitious musical collective Mice

Parade, but her solo work has been even more arresting. Her debut "Murmurs" dropped five years ago and turned heads, and her beautifully minimalist electronic pop follow-up "Verdugo Hills" should help her capture anyone who spends time with this 10-cut collection.

Those who scolded Lufkin for turning her back on a sure-fire, corporate-processed pop career in her native Japan probably will feel pretty dumb after hearing this, especially when taking on "Swimming," a wonderfully sweet and emotional song that's an early track of the year contender; "Seesaw," which sounds like she smoothed out some of Radiohead's early '00s ideas; "Snow," where the tempo is allowed to pick up and she sets herself free; and crushed closer "Gone," where she mournfully allows, "It hurts me now when you are so far away." Lufkin's voice is a treasure, her expression is ripe with vulnerability, and "Verdugo Hills" is one of January's best records. (Brian Krasman)

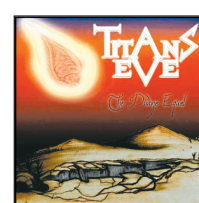
**ABYSSAL DAWN, "Leveling the Plane of Existence" (Relapse) ★★☆☆½**



— There's nothing particularly fancy about Abyssal Dawn, and chances are they won't be remembered as innovators, but this Los Angeles-based death metal squad is as painful

and brutal as any, offering up honest, old-school whippings on their third record.

"Leveling the Plane of Existence" thankfully doesn't incorporate any of the spit-shining and pretty melodies today's young death metal never-wills jam into their music. Instead they go for the jugular on this pulverizing collection that peaks on "Poxilated Ignorance," "In Service of Time," and slow-driving "Perpetual Dormancy." Closer "The Sleeper Awakens" is an unfortunate misstep, but otherwise this delivers. (BK)



**TITANS EVE, "The Divine Equal" (self-released) ★★☆☆½** — Vancouver thrashers Titans Eve aren't in the same mind frame as today's huge wave of throwback acts. Instead,

they take what they learned from their '80s/'90s predecessors and apply their own modern touch, making their debut "The Divine Equal" sound like a very promising first step.

Combining themes from John Milton's "Paradise Lost" and the Book of Genesis, the band applies the material to today's struggles, but they never go over the listener's head.

The music itself sounds like early Shadows Fall, minus the metalcore, and they prove to be a band worth following on "Becoming the Demon"; the speed-meets-classic-metal "Tides of Doom"; and the massively aggressive "Living Lifeless." (BK)