

Arts and Entertainment

Indie heroes The Hold Steady rock Lulu's

by Zach Kelly

The popularity of "categorizing" bands has seemed to reach a fever pitch of late. Of course, it's pretty clear that it's nearly impossible to talk about the majority of bands or artists that have surfaced over the past 30 years without referencing an influence or genre niche. For better or for worse (depending on the band), it's always going to be the fine print at the bottom of the notoriety contract.

Brooklyn by way of Minneapolis' own The Hold Steady, the very same The Hold Steady that has been garnering murderous (and warranted) acclaim for their third LP *Boys And Girls In America* (No. 8 on Rolling Stone's top albums of 2006) and recently blew the house down at Lulu's Nightspot in March, has been knighted "the world's best bar band."

Sure, the five piece certainly has a penchant for big, 70s FM riffs and songs about "massive nights" and, um, drinking. However, people who allow their friends to package the band in casual conversation probably only bothered to read the 98-word Rolling Stone blurb.

The Hold Steady has been one of the best

American bands to appear since its first LP, *Almost Killed Me*, debuted in 2004. Its synthesis of barroom blast and anthem adoration gives front man Craig Finn's sharp, literary narratives sprinkled with heartbreak-prom wisdom a run for their money. This is no easy task, considering Finn's infallibly witty prose, melancholic musings and his revolving cast of dreamers, drinkers and pill poppers that make Holden Caulfield look like Richie from *Happy Days*.

Thankfully, Happy Valley was not ungrateful for their presence at Lulu's last month. Giddy boys and girls filled up the (surprisingly large) venue just in time to catch opener and Bucks County, Pennsylvania natives, Illinois.

Illinois is a band to watch in the upcoming months, with an excellent EP titled *What The Hell Do I Know?* that was released in March and a solid response from the South By Southwest crowds in Austin nipping at their heels.

Illinois does the kind of thing that drunken college kids and slack-jawed fan boys salivate over equally: fuzzed out head-nod-

see **Steady**, pg. 20



Photo courtesy of Villagevoice.com

The Hold Steady, which played State College recently, is planning to release an acoustic EP in the upcoming months.

State College favorites Til December try to make it big

by Jeffrey Carton

Hard rockers Til December played 189 shows in 2006. It was a slow year. On a chilled Friday night in February, I sat in a hotel room with bassist Jeremy Morral and guitarist Jamie Edge before their live performance at the Arena Bar and Grill. We were not on a tour bus sipping champagne and talking about gold records, or a sold out world tour. Instead, they traveled here by van.

The other half of the band, Tony Esposito (drums) and Matt "Goody" Goodreau, (vocals) was not able to make it to the interview because they were busy setting up equipment and preparing the merchandise table. Northern Pennsylvania's hardest working rock band has played bars to large concert hall theaters in search of the holy grail of music: a record contract.

"A lot of people tell us we're making a lot of money now, so getting a record deal now isn't worth it," said bassist Morral, who also

adds unique background vocals to the band's melodies. "But I totally disagree. When you've been doing it as long as we have, I want to sign with a major label just to say that we made it."

"I want to sign with a major label just to say that we made it."

--Jeremy Morral

Til December formed in Wellsboro, Pennsylvania in 1996. In addition to the bar circuit, the band has landed large concert hall tour dates with national acts like Velvet Revolver and Disturbed in the past through Jagermeister, which frequently sponsors hard rock and metal bands. Til December will be opening for Stone Sour and Shadows Fall on April 4 and 6 in New York and Boston, respectively. With a three-song sampler ready to be pressed, the band hopes

this tour will land them their big break.

"It's not the like the old days where some guy pulls up in a Cadillac, smoking a cigar and says, 'Hey, you guys are great. Sign a record deal.'" said Morral, who emphasized not trying to sell the band off of a full-length album. "If you can't make three songs sound good, people aren't gonna come out to hear you live."

Til December has played explosive recurring gigs in State College at the Saloon and the Arena Bar and Grill, and has included a variety of pop songs to the performance, adding its own spin along the way. Band members have torn through anthems like "Walk" by the legendary metal band Pantera, only to segue into "Margaritaville" by Jimmy Buffet.

But Til December doesn't change its sound just so audiences can sing along to their favorite songs as they were originally recorded. The band adds a heavy edge to covers it plays, which allows the audience to hear songs from a different perspective.

Lead vocalist Goodreau can sing a cover song in its original key and switch to heavy growls for the next chorus.

"We started out as a mosh-type band where it was all about being as heavy as you could, but we've always had hooks that are catchy," said guitarist Edge of the band's evolution.

In 1998, Til December (then known as Backstreet Law) independently released their first record, *Hockey Helmet*. Eight years and three more independent records later, the band decided to take a big risk. In 2006, the band changed its name from Backstreet Law to Til December.

After throwing around the name change for a few years, the band made the switch, which turned out to be a success as their loyal fans were not deterred from coming out to see the band's incredible live set.

"I think of our fan base as a close knit

see **December**, pg. 20

PSU Student Film Festival moves to the State Theatre

by Jeffrey Carton

The Penn State Student Film Festival is moving off campus and into town for the first time in its history, taking up residence at the State Theatre Saturday, April 28.

"This is an event for the public in the public," said Richie Sherman, the advisor for the student film organization, who sponsors the event.

Unlike Schwaab Auditorium, where the film festival has called home for over a decade, the State Theatre provides an elegant reception room where filmmakers can interact with friends, family and community after the show.

The event, which plays out in front of a packed house every year, will be held on a Saturday, which is good news for alumni. In the past, the film fest has always taken place on a weekday, making it almost impossible for out-of-town alumni to get to the event.

"The alumni get to see student work at the finished stage and keep in touch with PSU in a real way," remarked Sherman.

New additions to the festival this year also include live entertainment. The Bullet

"As a filmmaker, your senior film is more than just your senior project, it's your resumé."

--Jason Brewer

Parade will play for thirty minutes prior to the show and during intermission. A DVD of all the films showcased will also be for sale after the show, in addition to SFO tee shirts.

"Overall, the student film organization is extremely excited to hold this year's student film festival at the State Theatre," said the club's president and senior film student, Lindsay Myers. "As a student-run festival that really tries to bring student-made art to the community as easily as possible, it's fitting to work with another organization that has also developed through grassroots community efforts."

While Steven Spielberg may not be knocking down the doors of film students in search of the next great director, the harsh



Photo by Alli Harvey

The Penn State Student Film Festival will be held on a Saturday at the State Theatre this year, making it easier for alumni and local residents to attend the event.

reality of the movie world has not swayed students from taking their films beyond Happy Valley. Penn State alum Jason Brewer has showcased his short-form claymation western/musical, *The Ghost of Sam Peckinpah* at festivals around the country including the Phoenix, Garden State, and the Gem City Film Festival in Florida, where his film took home the award for "best animated short."

"As a filmmaker, your senior film is more than your senior project, it's your resumé for the future," said Brewer. "*The Ghost of Sam Peckinpah* probably won't get us a deal, but it's going to make it a lot easier to fund an animation feature we have in the works." Brewer started Brolik Productions in 1996 while he was still a student. His production company, located in Philadelphia, specializes in film/video, web design, and audio.

Throughout the year, the student film

organization hosts students of all majors in a weekly meeting to watch and discuss films and take trips to New York City. In the past, the SFO has visited NBC Studios and Engel Entertainment, a documentary company in Manhattan. The club is also active in helping underclassmen get their feet wet by helping film students to engineering majors who are curious about getting involved in filmmaking without even taking a production class.

As the semester winds down, the SFO accepts submissions for the film fest, (open to all students). Then five undisclosed judges from a variety of backgrounds pick the top films. The student film organization has bought out half the seats to accommodate the casts and crews of the selected films for the fest, leaving the remainder available for the community.

Tickets are \$7 and available only at the State Theatre.

The Next Stage
presents

"A triumph of love, against the backdrop
of World War II and personal tragedy--"

Lanford Wilson's Talley's Folly

with Wil Hutton and Elaine Meder-Wilgus

Directed by Susan Riddiford Shedd

"The courtship dance of an unlikely pair — a German-Jewish accountant from St. Louis and the activist daughter of a conservative Southern Presbyterian family. Matt tells us to expect a waltz, but he and Sally need every highly charged minute to bear the music and learn the dance."

Friday, April 6th 8:00	Friday, April 13th 8:00
Saturday, April 7th 3:00 & 8:00	Saturday, April 14th 8:00
Sunday, April 8th 3:00	Sunday, April 15th 3:00

AT STATE COLLEGE FRIENDS SCHOOL 1900 UNIVERSITY DR. EXTENSION
\$12 GENERAL ADMISSION \$10 SENIORS AND STUDENTS
CALL 404-2649 OR 360-0556 FOR RESERVATIONS

from *Steady*, pg. 18

ders (like the crowd favorite “Nosebleed”), keyboard (and sometimes strangely workable banjo) spiked indie balladry and, you know, yelling through a telephone into the microphone.

The Hold Steady seemed to take notice, as rumors floated around that the band is considering taking Illinois out on a North American jaunt this summer, despite this being the first show the two had ever played together.

After the rousing Illinois set, the mighty The Hold Steady took the stage and furiously launched into their killer new single, “Stuck Between Stations.”

It would be fair to say that The Hold Steady emotes like a bar band, cracking jokes with each other and the crowd, inciting frantic clap-alongs and flagrant, but welcome, guitar solos.

Finn is the perfect fit as ring-leader, communicating compellingly with an odd sign-language that at times even syncs with the lyrics, further reinforcing the notion that even the fiction behind the songs clearly came from somewhere.

It’s pieces of what would seem to be otherwise toss-away nostalgia like this that reminds us all of our favorite writers and girlfriends and drugs and parties; not just the ones that the band has been telling us about all night.

He tends to sing a little ahead of or behind where the lyrics should actually fall rhythmically, perhaps to prevent lethargic audience sing-along participation, but even more likely because of his unmistakably authentic drunken-poet exuberance.

The audience got its chance to sing along, however, crowing to favorites such as “Hot Soft Light,” “You Can Make Him Like You” and their break-through hit of sorts from their second LP *Separation Sunday*, “Your Little Hoodrat Friend.” But this connection with the listener is part of the irony-free fun at a The Hold Steady show, and part of the reason why they’re so important right now.

The band runs on all cylinders too, not because of veteran showmanship or hard work ethic (though both may be true), but because it’s easy to see how much damn fun these guys are having. Guitarist Tad Kubler

revels in the big six-string bombast of bygone eras with exciting, yet never overwhelming finger work while the Salvador Dali mustachioed keyboardist Franz Nicolay unapologetically breaks out the kick-and-spin dance moves to bassist Galen Polivka and drummer Bobby Drake’s tight, electrocution-inducing rhythms.

The night’s highlight came, surprisingly, from “First Night,” a ballad-turned-romantically-reaffirming-rock-and-roll-anthem that left the entire hall swaying, following Finn endearingly while repeating “Boys and Girls in America” over and over until the song faded away. It’s pieces of what would seem to be otherwise toss-away nostalgia like this that reminds us all of our favorite writers and girlfriends and drugs and parties; not just the ones that the band has been telling us about all night.

They closed out the night with the won-

derful “Southtown Girls” and a “thank you”-riddled encore, eliciting a great deal of noise from the sweat-stained boys and girls in America at front of the stage.

It wouldn’t be a surprise to see the Hold Steady gain mainstream acceptance as their indie peers such as Modest Mouse and the Arcade Fire have done recently. With a brief trip back to Europe, the band will later join the likes of the White Stripes, Wilco and swarms of people who oddly resemble any one of the many characters in a Hold Steady song this summer in Manchester, Tennessee at the Bonnaroo music festival.

Title pigeonholing aside, it’s fairly obvious that The Hold Steady doesn’t need your labels, however it’s not enough to say they’re a great band and leave it at that. They’re a personal band above all else, but it was clear during their performance that they’re a band that should be shared.

As Finn states on the first lyric of *Boys And Girls In America*, “There are nights when I think that Sal Paradise was right/ Boys and girls in America/ Have such a sad time together.” Perhaps, but lucky for us, The Hold Steady is far less interested in focusing on the word “sad” than on the word “together.”

from *December*, pg. 18

family,” says Edge. “They were really receptive and told us ‘we like the music, we don’t care what you change your name to.’”

On the rare occasions when the band is not touring, band members relax at their homes, all within a ninety-minute radius of

one another, in northern Pennsylvania.

“It’s hard to play music and make a living,” said Edge, the only married member of the band. “I’d love to have a hit song, and not have to tour twelve months of the year to get the bills played.”

The band does not have to travel far to make records. Morrall records out of the studio in his home in Wellsboro and shares mixing duties with Edge. Goodreau often

finds inspiration for his lyrics from his experiences in the Marine Corp, where he served in Somalia during the U.S. government’s involvement in the mid 1990s. Edge said that the song “Shake” off their record *Hollow* emanated from one of Goodreau’s nightmares.

“[Goodreau] was having a dream that he was back in Somalia and children were being killed,” said Edge. “He got up and started jotting down words.”

Edge cannot deny the rapid decline of the music industry as record sales continue to plummet, but he remains hopeful that Til December will succeed.

“I hear, ‘Maybe you’re better off being

independent,’ but I think all things come around. There will be a resurgence of rock and we’ll be right there,” Edge said with a confident smile. “I’m not saying we’re going to rewrite music or reinvent music, but we definitely deserve a shot to get our music in front of bigger audiences and to expand to the next level.”

Upcoming Tour Dates:

March 31 – Bergi’s - Altoona, PA

April 4 – Roseland Ballroom - New York, NY

April 6 – The Avalon - Boston, Mass.

April 13 – The Arena – State College

April 17 – Cell Block – State College



Photo courtesy of Til December

Til December will be opening for Stone Sour and Shadows Fall April 4 and 6 in New York and Boston.

Nnittany office
equipment, inc.

OPoffice[®]
plus

Serving Central PA since 1956 with
Quality Brand Name Office Furniture & Supplies
SHARP Copiers & Fax
Professional Sales and Service

1207 S. Atherton Street, State College, PA 16801
814-238-0568 • FAX 238-4157 • 800-525-3807