

'Prisoner' captivates audiences

By Bill Greenwood

Alpha Psi Omega has provided Rider students with yet another reason to lock themselves inside the Yvonne Theater: *Prisoner of 2nd Avenue*. The play, which tickles the funny bone and tugs at the heartstrings, has a little something for everyone, making it well worth the \$5 price of admission.

The show takes place in late-'60s New York during a massive economic depression. Mel (senior Arnaldo Ortiz) and his wife Edna (senior Rachel Messler) get caught up in the catastrophe when Mel loses his job and the couple's apartment is robbed within the same week. He eventually suffers a nervous breakdown, triggering the return of his distant brothers and sisters, who end up bringing more problems to the table than they solve.

Prisoner of 2nd Avenue's tone is abrasive throughout, with most dialogue consisting of screaming matches between two or more characters. This could have made for an unpleasant experience if not for the excellent cast. Each actor and actress was able to go beyond the anger, digging into his or her character's emotional side while cracking up the audience with spot-on comedic timing.

Ortiz gave a hysterical performance as the 37-year-old, newly unemployed Mel. Whether yelling at Edna for leaving the door to their apartment open, having ice-cold water dumped on him after berating his neighbors or moping around the house while Edna prepares his lunch, Ortiz drew huge laughs from the crowd while expertly capturing his character's high-strung nature. He also nailed Mel's ner-



Photo by Karly Hamburg

Edna (senior Rachel Messler) comforts Mel (senior Arnaldo Ortiz) after they find their apartment robbed. Alpha Psi Omega's *Prisoner of 2nd Avenue* will be performed this Friday and Saturday, Feb. 3 and 4, at 8 p.m. in the Yvonne Theater.

vous breakdown, allowing his character to slowly descend into mania as the outside forces around him applied ever-increasing pressure.

Messler was the real stand-out, however, as Edna. Her pitch-perfect accent and zingy delivery gave her lines an added punch that had audience members shriek-

ing with laughter. Furthermore, Edna's love for and devotion to Mel during both good and bad times provided the play's emotional anchor. Even in the midst of all

the arguing and hard times, the audience was always aware of the couple's powerful connection, making their constant battles much easier to swallow and even enjoy.

The play's set captured the look and feel of the late 1960s, with three couches, a kitchen complete with an old-model refrigerator and counter, a liquor cabinet, a bookshelf stocked with various hardcovers and a back door that opened out onto Mel and Edna's balcony. This door allowed for a variety of innovative sound techniques to come into play, drawing the audience deeper into the show's world. Every time the door was opened, the theater was flooded with ambient street noises, illustrating Mel's frequent complaints about the city's sound level while adding realism to the production.

While *Prisoner of 2nd Avenue* is a success for both Alpha Psi Omega and the show's cast, there were some minor hiccups in Wednesday's opening-night performance. Several cast members tripped up on some of their lines, but were able to recover quickly and keep the dialogue moving naturally. This can probably be chalked up to opening-night jitters, however, and will most likely become a non-issue as the play's run continues.

Prisoner of 2nd Avenue is yet another credit to an already outstanding school year for theater at Rider. The cast is superb, the set eye-catching but realistic and the script humorous yet touching. Mel may ache to find a way out of his big-city problems, but by the end of this show, Rider students will be clamoring for just a little more time inside this *Prisoner's* world.

'Singers' set to honor black history with multicultural jubilee

By Bill Greenwood

The song "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" has a profound connection to the Westminster Jubilee Singers. Also known as "The Negro National Anthem," the traditional hymn is performed at every one of the choir's concerts.

"When the alumni come back, and we don't sing it, they're like, 'What happened to 'Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing?'" said Jubilee Singers President Helen Vassallo. "It's definitely a song that people expect us to sing."

The song will take on an added meaning to each member of the choir when it is performed in the midst of Black History Month during the group's winter concert on Saturday, Feb. 11. During this performance — a "celebration of African-American sacred music," according to founding director and conductor J. Donald Dumpson — the Singers plan to pay tribute to those who made the interracial choir's existence possible.

"If it weren't for heroes like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King [Jr.], we wouldn't even be able to go to the same university, let alone sing with each other," said Vassallo. "It's really something personal for all of us."

In addition to "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," concert-goers can expect to hear excerpts from a piece entitled "Nativity" and a half-spiritual, half-classical selection entitled "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," according to Dumpson and Jubilee Singers Vice President Robert Upshaw Jr. While the performance will feature mostly African-American music, the choir is confident that individuals of all races will be able to take something away from the event.

"The experience is for all; there's no doubt about that," Dumpson said. "We're going to do music that's going to move people from tears to laughter, tears to joy."

Also, to add to the emotional resonance of the material, individual choir members were given a say in the evening's musical selection, according to Upshaw.

"In most choirs, you'll find that the conductor picks out every single piece of music and the choir members have no say in what they're singing," he said. "[Dumpson] makes sure that the choir members get their chance to put in what they're going to sing because he wants to make sure whatever we're singing is what's in our hearts."

"This particular concert will focus on



Photo by Karly Hamburg

The Westminster Jubilee Singers rehearses for its winter concert, which will be held on Saturday, Feb. 11, at 8 p.m., in the Princeton campus' Bristol Chapel.

the students and what they have to say," Dumpson said. "You'll get a chance to hear some of Rider's most talented rising stars."

According to Upshaw, those who

choose to spend their Saturday night with the Singers will also be able to immerse themselves in the raucous and energetic atmosphere of the choir's performances. All it takes, he said, is a gentle nudge from

the group to get the crowd up and moving.

"Most times, we'll get an audience that may not know if it's comfortable to stand up and clap their hands," Upshaw said. "At first, they'll sit there, and you can sense that they're tapping their feet, and you see their heads bobbing. As soon as Professor Dumpson gives them the invitation, they're right up out of their seats and ready to go. They're right in there with us."

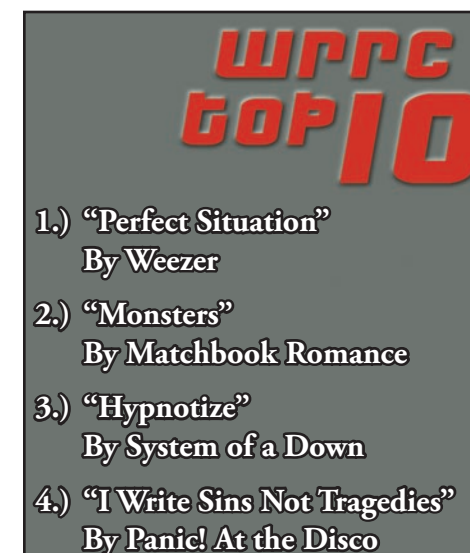
The audience interaction is yet another example of the Singers' attempts to promote unity through its music. Whether Latino, African-American, Caucasian or Asian, the choir hopes to bring its audience together in a common celebration of African-American achievement. Concert-goers may even find themselves identifying with the individual singers themselves.

"I just want the audience to experience the love and the unity that we share amongst ourselves," said Vassallo. "Just in one night, just in one two-hour concert, I want them to experience each member's time spent in Jubilee and really soak up the entire experience and walk out a different person."



Photo copyright Epitaph Records

Matchbook Romance's *Voices* will be released on Tuesday, Feb. 14.



Lush 'Voices' haunts the ears

By Madeleine Johnson

If there was ever an album that offers the perfect soundtrack to play against dramatic readings of Edgar Allan Poe's prose and poetry, New York's Matchbook Romance has most certainly crafted such a collection of songs.

Matchbook Romance's most recent musical endeavor, *Voices*, is a dark, brooding and pseudo-gothic foray into the gloomy catacombs of music's tenebrous realm. The band's attempt to abandon its old pop-punkesque sound in favor of a more beautifully haunting one invokes memories of a more morose and less over-produced Love-era Juliana Theory.

While some bands try to change their sound only to produce a fumbling mess, Matchbook Romance's newer sound is polished, packing an abundance of emotional intensity into a pleasantly psychologically interesting testament to what happens when musical exploration is executed masterfully.

The four-person project that is Matchbook Romance, perhaps trying a skosh too hard to emulate the musical angst of the similarly named My Chemical Romance, crafts a truly disturbing album that alternately threatens the listener, admits defeat, wallows in desperation, and ultimately smacks its audience right between the eyes with more layers than a Tolstoy character and brings more rock than an entire quarry could even hope to supply.

Instead of beginning with a simplistically catchy hook, the album instead opts to caress its audience with a lonely piano and desolately strummed guitar that give way to ghoulish accusations, all of

which build up to create the taunting and mesmerizing first track, "You Can Run, But We'll Find You." As singer/guitarist Andrew Jordan's voice rises from disarmingly lovely vocals into terrifying screams, the song crescendos to make good on its title's promise. The song ends as unassumingly as it begins, offering a promising introduction to a delightfully dark and deliciously threatening album.

The highlight of *Voices* is the haunted carnival of a ditty called "Monsters." The handclaps are jarring, not joyous, and the upbeat nature of this song clashes with the lyrics that paint the horrifying picture of the band being "the monsters under your bed." In an album that takes a few rotations to fully appreciate and a few more listens to become a pleasing addiction, "Monsters" is the song that makes the listener hit the repeat button most often.

While there may be a plethora of tasty treats to be found when one incessantly peruses *Voices*, there are some flaws contained within this darkly enticing album.

There is a point when too much angst is enough. One may be dissuaded by the intimidating lyrics that seem to be flung at the album's audience. And if they're not initially a turn-off, the songs' lyrics can give the listener a serious case of the heebie-jeebies after prolonged exposure. Many of the songs sound blandly alike on the first listen or two, which is why it takes a little bit of effort to appreciate *Voices* as something more than just unsettling background ambience.

All things considered, Matchbook Romance had the fortunate realization that changing an old musical formula can result in a pretty rad album.

Opeth rocks it up and tones it down on new album

By Jordan Blum

Have you ever felt so angry that your face turned red and your thought process was nonexistent? Have you ever felt a vague combination of sorrow, remorse and optimism? If so, you'll find that Opeth's music will successfully capture your mood in its music. This is a band that embraces the contrasts of white and black and light and dark. The group essentially combines death metal with soft rock melody, and it sounds great. Each album is a grand opus of emotion represented by a constant exchange between fierce power and subtle beauty, and *Ghost Reveries* is no different.

The band hails from Stockholm, Sweden and was formed in 1990 by guitarists Peter Lindgren and Mikael Åkerfeldt. Åkerfeldt also serves as the primary songwriter and lead vocalist. Martin Mendez and Martin Lopez serve as bassist and drummer, respectively. In addition, Per Wiberg (the band's touring keyboardist) has become a permanent member of the group. Every Opeth album (with the exception of 2003's *Damnation*) has followed the same structure that makes the

band unique. Åkerfeldt and company shift from growling vocals overlapping harsh chord progressions to soft intertwining melodies accompanied by beautiful singing. They incorporate a touch of progressive rock with changing time signatures.

Ghost Reveries opens with the heart-pounding track "Ghost of Perdition," and does a great job of showing listeners what Opeth is all about. It starts on the death metal side and then shifts to the acoustic melodic side. The album follows this formula much like previous albums have. The majority of the songs are in this scheme while the rest solely exhibit the group's softer side. Overall *Ghost Reveries* sounds like Opeth's other albums, with the exception of *Damnation*.

Complaints about *Ghost Reveries* will change depending on how much of Opeth you like. If you don't like metal or growling vocals, I would suggest that you give *Ghost Reveries* a chance. The changes the band is able to accomplish are amazing and its softer side is a must hear. It is a masterpiece, and I urge anyone who doesn't like the group's heavier material to hear it.



Photo copyright Roadrunner Records

Opeth's album *Ghost Reveries* hit record stores on Aug. 30.

Whether *Ghost Reveries* is for you or not depends on who you are. If you like music at its heaviest and harshest, you'll like it. If you don't, its soft side will astound you. Opeth is a unique band that deserves attention, whether it's for its heavy side, its soft side, or its ability to switch between the two in an effortless but remarkable fashion. Regardless of who you are, you'll find something to like in Opeth and *Ghost Reveries*.