

tantly, do you have a non-ironic penchant for '70s stoner rock bands such as Wishbone Ash, Foghat and Mountain? If the answers are yes then you are, despite your very best intentions, so cool it hurts to be you. You may, in fact, be Stephen McBean, mid-thirties social worker-turned-leader of Black Mountain (and lascivious side-project Pink Mountaintops), the most successful band to bring the hirsute sounds of East Van Boogie to the world so far. Descended from mildly acclaimed local group Jerk With A Bomb, Black Mountain have a handful of product out on indie label Jagjaguwar, all of which we recommend. Last year they famously, mind-bogglingly, opened for piano-ticklers Coldplay on a leg of that band's world tour. So far, so 2005. But here come all the little Black Mountains: smoking local bands such as Ladyhawk and Pride Tiger, building equally fervent followings for their own brand of East Van Boogie, currently delivering awesome

live shows in tiny halls across the continent—and hey, presto, looks like Vancouver has a scene, and that scene has a beard and is really into the work of Leslie West. —M.M.

BEST PLACE TO KEEP ON SHINING

It might cost you \$20 to get in the door, but according to Shine owner Tim Knight, who begins renovations on the Gastown nightclub in January, you get what you pay for. "Usually after five years a club might start adding ladies night, then comedy night, then two-for-one and it turns into a fucking cheese factory. We're not going to do that," he says of his revamp (plans include black cherry hues, translucent bar counters and a dance pit). "We're not cheap and that's why it's important to give back to the customers, and not let it run into the ground." Over its unusually long history as a hot spot, Shine has proven itself the nightclub of choice for Vancouver's young, urban elite, who line up expectantly on Friday and



Above: Jacob Gleeson and Gareth Moore got stuck with a convenience store—and turned it into an experience. Opposite page (left to right): Would you look at the art on that? Vancouver Art Gallery's Fuse Nights. And Shine's '80s evening shines.

Saturday nights to revel in break beats, hip hop, and big sexy funk. You might also spy an in-town celeb like Johnny Knoxville or Avril Lavigne, though they tend to scoot to the back room and close it off. Right now Thursdays are red-hot with White Lies, an '80s night, with old-school hip hop in the back room and bar. The separate dance rooms are a feature Knight is proud of—but they've since been copied by other local clubs. Hence Knight's renovation plans: "We've got to one up them all again." 364 Water St., 604-408-4321.—E.K.

BEST NON-PERISHABLES

Five blocks off the well-beaten track at Main and 28th lies one of Vancouver's most eclectic "retailing" experiments: the general store/museum/gallery/whatever, St. George Marsh. The place looks like a remnant of small-town Canada, with its odd assortment of stubby pop bottles, licorice pipes, Popeye cigarettes, Thrills gum and musty VHS rentals—everything except perishables like milk, bread and eggs. "It's all stuff we've meticulously collected—there has to be a visual element to it as well, a nostalgia to it," says Jacob Glee-

son who, along with art school pal Gareth Moore, runs the Marsh. Most of the foodstuffs aren't to be consumed (the pop, says Gleeson, "is on the flatter side") and there are no price tags anywhere, making this more personal museum than actual store. The concept didn't come by design. Gleeson and Moore discovered upon signing their lease last summer that the property was zoned to be a convenience store—and whatever else they wanted to do with the space, they had to sell groceries. "Originally we thought of the store in a very conventional way, of what a corner store could be," says Gleeson. But gradually the pair took to reinterpreting the concept, adding in exhibition space for so-called "outsider" artists (people like 93-year-old self-taught painter Red Roney, who lives in a veterans' hospital) on the one open wall, and filling remaining nooks with personal ephemera and kitsch—including a bowling pin painted to look like Marcus Naslund. "I think we're both hoping to keep it going for a couple years," says Gleeson, noting both he and Moore have paying day jobs. "And if there's any way of pass-

AVOID!



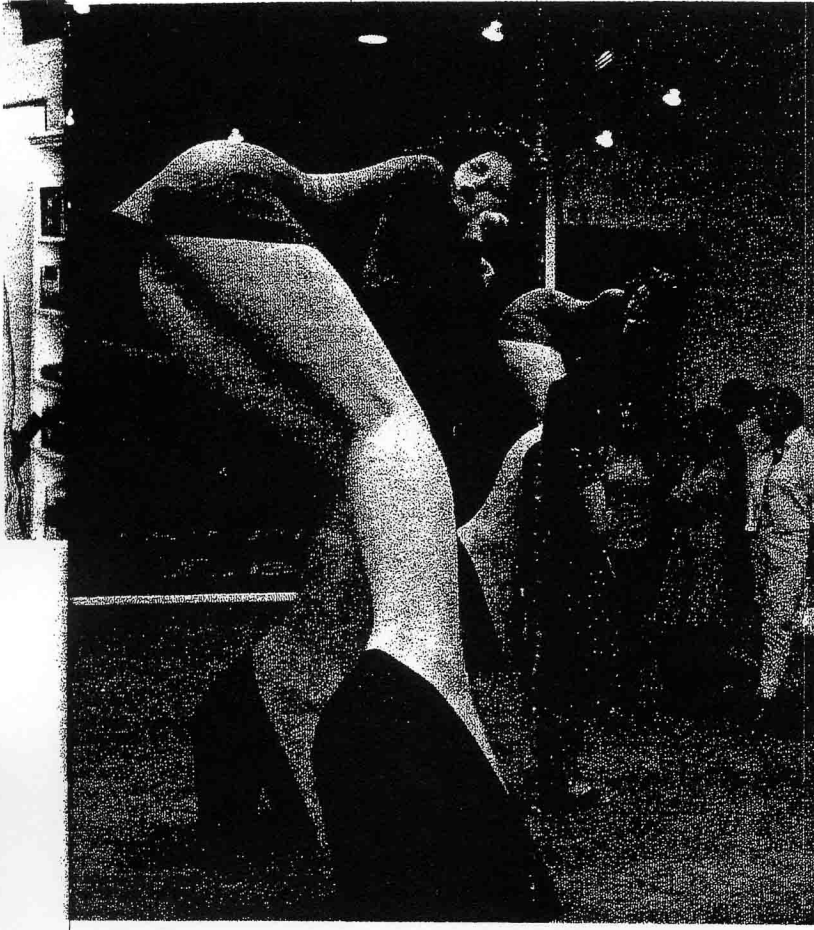
CELEBRITY JOURNALISM

Celebrity journalism is a strange beast. Imagine, for a moment, we did not have film or TV. That we lived in 19th century England, let's say. Would you care what some stage actor in Paris was doing after work? Who he was sleeping with—or more prosaically, how he was dressed? And yet this is the typical fodder for today's celebrity media—the hottest category in all media; in the magazine world alone, between 20 and 30 percent of all North American newsstand sales are

now celebrity titles (though in the States, anyway, that trend seems to be slowing).

A couple years ago, the hot category was shopping mags—but at least with those, there was some utility. Things you could buy. Celebrities have no purpose for us distant plebes—except, perhaps, as some low-grade masturbatory device. Consider the December 19 cover of *Weekly Scoop*—one of three recent Canadian entries into the celeb-mag racket. "Elisha's Secret: Is her engagement to Timberlake's best friend off? Or is she cheating in Toronto?" A fetching picture of the young lady in question accompanies—but I haven't the foggiest idea who she is. Is she so big that, like Madonna, she doesn't need a last name? (Apparently it's Cuthbert—and she's a B-list Canadian actor.) And the fiancée referenced? Since when did being the friend of a celebrity make you a celebrity?

It reminds me of something Bryan Adams once said about Canadian content rules "encouraging mediocrity." Between *Weekly Scoop*, e-Talk Daily and what passes for the "Arts" sections in our local papers, there is enough B-list talent on parade to sink a Celebrity cruise ship. In 2006, let's let it sink—and leave the vapid Hollywood reportage to Hollywood. —M.O'G.



ing the torch, I think we're interested in that." 4393 St. George St. 604-877-0842. —M. O'G.

BEST INDIE JOINT

When the longstanding E&B diner on Kingsway and Victoria changed ownership it was revamped to include a more colourful moniker and the diner's vaulted ceiling back room, once a bedroom for the previous owners, became a new live venue. While the 1,200 square feet is nothing to gawk over, the bands that pack it full of young indie-hipsters in gold shoes and fur stoles every weekend have turned The Candy Bar Bistro into one of the city's biggest underground hot spots. The diner itself has typical '70s-style booths and plastic swivel bar stools, made a little homier with the comfy couches and good-humoured staff. Expect the menu to expand in the New Year and include

higher-end fare—but for those watching their wallets more than their carbs, have no fear: the five buck burger-and-beer special isn't going anywhere. 2066 Kingsway, 604-877-1066. —E.K.

Food & Drink

BEST BUNS

Forget Subway, the Bread Garden or other mass-attack chains for lunch on the fly. Because the banh mi, the Vietnamese equivalent of the submarine sandwich (but much, much better), is now available clear around the town. There are many themes and variations, but constants too: a demi-baguette wrapper that owes much to Vietnam's French colonial past—the best banh mi buns are crisply crunchy on the outside and meltingly soft on the inside—and hot pickled peppers and veg-

etables that lift the experience skyward. Oh yes, they're ridiculously cheap too, sometimes as little as \$2.50 and rarely more than \$4. Au Petit Café at 33rd and Main (4851 Main St., 604-873-3328), where the meatball version is a bestseller, is a favourite (the beef stew is recommended too). At Kingsway Deli (1188 Kingsway, 604-873-6666) the barbecued pork (No. 8) is the sandwich of choice. Across the parking lot from the Kingsway, at the corner of Inverness, compare Tiem Bahn Dong's sweeter version (\$2.75), with paté, cilantro, fish sauce and peppers liberally applied. When downtown, head for Saigon



Ventures (on Burrard near Drake) or One Saigon at 979 Hornby. In Chinatown, on the west side of Main near Georgia, Ba Le offers a shredded chicken sandwich that is delicious. Two of you can eat well for \$5. —J.M.

BEST SOUTHERN INVASION

Fond of Mexican food? Wrong border town, friend. Vancouver has never been a *caliente* spot for the authentic taste of Aztec country, preferring to wallow in the orange cheese and lettuce end of the Latino spectrum. Lately though, things have definitely improved. Leading the small but welcome new wave is Tacos Mexico Rico (440 W. Hastings, 604-688-7426). Actually run by Salvadoran Amparo Ruiz, Tacos

Rico is a find in every sense—tucked away down a little passageway beside Sophia's Books, marked only by a tiny sandwich board on the sidewalk. The décor is unprepossessing, dominated by giant TV screens blaring Mexican TV shows. The food is heaven. These are tacos without the standard family restaurant trappings—just soft corn tortillas with delectably seasoned meat. Try the birria, a seasoned lamb mix that will make you swear off the grated cheddar and iceberg lettuce forever. Burritos are similarly sublime, and the Aztec Soup is savoury and delicious. It's all dirt cheap. If you love Mexican soap operas, bonus.

Down on Victory Square, the Mouse and Bean Café (207 W. Hastings St., 604-633-1781) is also helping take Vancouver beyond plastic-cactus-style Mexican. It's a family operation, run by a Mexico City clan and boasting great value in a compact menu. Huaraches are thick corn tortillas topped with salsa and sometimes meat—they're surprisingly light, with the emphasis on the corn flavour. Tacos here are a little more decadent, deep-fried and served with sour cream.

Other recent options include La Casita (101 W. Cordova St., 604-646-2444). The décor is an improvement on Tacos Ricos—no Mexican TV—but the food, while solid, is not nearly as memorable. Over on West Fourth, Topanga Café (2904 W. Fourth Ave., 604-733-3021) is one of the few long-time stalwarts of the southern genre. Topanga has always pitched itself as Tex-Mex rather than straight Mexican, but it's an appealing option for local avocado addicts. A higher profile version of Tex Mex chow is being dished out at Davie Street's Lolita's, which is stylish, extremely popular and a genuinely fun hang-out; the fish tacos are a tasty treat. But despite all the flash, they still fall behind bare-bones Tacos Ricos in authenticity and taste. —S.B.

Fuse: courtesy Vancouver Art Gallery, Disco Diva: Shalom Ormsby/Stone/Getty Images.