

# AROUNDTOWN

## U2's concert is out of this world

by Naomi Prale  
Sports Editor

U2's much anticipated 360 Degrees tour kicked off with a bang on September 12-13 at Soldier Field as 60,000+ fans filled the lakefront stadium.

The band emerged amid fog on a circular "spaceship" stage planted on the field—appropriate considering that critics of the stadium have suggested that the renovated field looks like an alien craft were set atop its aging façade.

Opening up with the song "Breathe" off their most recent album *No Line on the Horizon*, the band continued with three more songs from that album, using an incredible sound system that allowed this reviewer to hear each nuance clearly even from her nosebleed seats.

U2 was interactive with the audience as the band encouraged fans to sing along and chant lyrics to hit songs such as "Beautiful Day" and "Elevation." Yet the band was subtle because it asked the audience to sing along while not breaking the beat and tone of the music.

The highlights of the evening were the revivals of classics such as "Where the Streets Have No Name" and "City of Blinding Lights" that sounded refreshed and would have raised the roof if Soldier Field had a roof to raise.

Bassist Adam Clayton and drummer Larry Mullen amped up dance beats. It is apt to say that the rhythm section ruled on this evening.

U2's new hit, "I'll Go Crazy if I Don't Go Crazy Tonight" got a new arrangement that allowed it to transcend the rather pedestrian studio version.

As might be expected from one of rock's more activist bands, the concert also had a political side to it as Bono dedicated songs to oppressed leaders and countries across the world. "Walk On" was dedicated to jailed Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. During the song around 50 people walked onto the circular stage around the main stage holding up masks with photos of Kyi to their faces. Before the performance of "One," a video of Archbishop Desmond Tutu played, in which the South African icon talked about sending aid to Africa. These weren't the only political moments of the evening, and rather than take away from music, the political additions made the songs seem more meaningful.

The "spaceship" motif that towered above the main stage like Godzilla looked like a giant claw that appeared to have lights along the side that provided even more of an outer space theme. The spectacular setting thoroughly enhanced the music that filled the air.

The band played a total of 23 songs for about two hours, and near the end of the show again became very interactive with the audience,

asking them during "With or Without you" to use their cell phones to "turn this place into the Milky Way," with which the crowd gleefully complied, turning the stadium into outer space as thousands of fans whipped out their cell phones and swayed to the music. The soft melody made this a true-crowd pleaser as the venue fell quiet as fans listened intently.

The band finished with "Moment of Surrender," one of the better songs from *No Line on the Horizon*, and surrender the audience did to the entrancing guitar work of the Edge.

Opening act Snow Patrol held its own with the headliners in a 40-minute set that consisted of songs from various albums: "Chocolate," "Chasing Cars" and "Eyes Open" were particular gems that the crowd cheered, as each song appeared more well put together than the last, improving in harmony, volume, and heartfelt emotion. The band closed with "Hands Open," making the crowd go wild at the lyrics that say, "Chicago bursts to life and your sweet smile remembers you."



All in all, the only downside to the night was the inevitable, intense, bottleneck traffic coming out of the stadium, a downside of Soldier Field that Bears fans know all too well.

Stadium concerts tend to fall short due to the horrid sounds and nosebleed seats, but this wasn't the case. U2 truly provided an over-the-top concert, one that has brought back the stadium concert with a vengeance.



## Herz's page turner places reader in Harlem

by Sarah Espinosa  
Photo Editor

In novels, films and television programs, New York often is portrayed as a glamorous city, filled with high fashion, hip cocktail lounges and beautiful architecture.

What one might not see in Woody Allen's love letters to the Big Apple or the glitzy world of *Sex and the City* is the other side of New York, the grittier underbelly.

In *The Last Block in Harlem*, by Christopher Herz, the author tells the tale of his life in one of Manhattan's historically tough neighborhoods and how one man took steps toward changing his direction and environment.

The book has reader flipping page after page at all hours trying to get to the next passage. With deep description and detail, one can visualize every scene that chronicles the struggles and obstacles Herz's first person protagonist comes across to build his writing career.

The narrator first starts a job in advertising; he grew up watching his mother stretch a dollar as far as she could and did not want to live that life. Herz writes that although anyone on the outside looking in would think the protagonist had "made it," that is not the way he felt.

The connections between author and protagonist suggest that the novel hits close to home. According to *Publisher's Weekly*, "Herz quit his advertising job to walk the streets of Manhattan literally selling copies of *The Last Block in Harlem*."

Herz printed about 1,100 copies which he and his wife carried up to their fourth-story walkup in what Herz describes as the last neighborhood in Harlem untouched by gentrification. Every day, he takes 10 copies out to the streets and does not come home until he sells all of them.

In fact, this reviewer became aware of the book when Herz sent an email to *West Word*, offering to send the book for review.

The narrator starts off the book explaining his past instead of just jumping right into the present. After quitting his job, he proposes to his girlfriend, and once they get married, the

story follows the narrator's navigation of his marriage and the neighborhood in which he lives. His wife Namuna is the light and love of his life. He believes she is an amazing, intelligent woman who helps guide him and always carries advice. In the book the two face some struggles but they can handle anything, and the love they share helps to keep this book going.

The novel is full of charming nuances, such as when Herz writes about how different things are from when the narrator was a kid. He talks about how hip hop has changed and how all rappers

care about now is money and girls, unlike the more politically oriented DJs of his youth.

Each chapter in *The Last Block in Harlem* tells a heartfelt story of its own. It has its own unique plot and adds or subtracts a character each time. Herz has a knack for keeping the reader interested in a way that not many writers can, making him/her want to continue the book for a variety of reasons.

Equally adept at storytelling, diction, syntax and dialogue, Herz never lets the reader lose attention for a moment, and the realistic tone of the novel

transports the reader to Harlem and allows him/her to experience the famous and sometimes infamous neighborhood like a resident.

*The Last Block in Harlem* is a great read one that this reviewer hopes will be successful enough that Herz will be able to end his daily sidewalk salesmanship.

The book is available through Herz's own publishing house, Canal Publishing, at [www.canalpublishing.com](http://www.canalpublishing.com).

*The Last Block in Harlem*



## Animal Crackers' humor steals show

by Hillary Lindwall  
Managing Editor

In 1928, the comedy team the Marx Brothers starred in a Broadway musical called *Animal Crackers*. Because of the musical's success, it was brought to the silver screen in 1930, becoming one of the Marx Brothers' most beloved films.

Opening on Sept. 18, *Animal Crackers* was once again converted to a stage musical, playing at the Goodman Theater in downtown Chicago.

Directed by Paul Kalina, the story begins at a party at the home of Mrs. Rittenhouse (Ora Jones) for Captain Jeffrey T. Spaulding (Joey Slotnick, reprising the Groucho Marx role), who had just returned from an African exhibition.

During the party, a valuable painting is stolen by members of the party who attempt to replace it with another painting. Other characters include The Professor (a silent Molly Brennan in the old Harpo Marx role) and Emanuel Ravelli (Jonathan Brody, channeling Chico Marx).

*Animal Crackers* is full of slapstick, visual and auditory humor. Although the play is about the stolen painting, it is not a mystery. The audience knows who stole the painting and why.

In the tradition of the Marx Brothers, most of the musical numbers, including the legendary "Hooray for Captain Spaulding," are hilarious.

The music for the show was provided by six musicians who were positioned in the

center of the stage. This was a very interesting arrangement because musicians are usually positioned in the orchestra pit. At times the musicians were even part of the show. Ravelli, who was supposed to be a musician who was to provide music for the party, even took over the piano and sung songs while he played. The center of the stage rotated, making it easy for Ravelli to become the center of attention during his solos.

In addition to the 1930s music, the show featured an impressive array of vaudeville-style dances, soft-tap tap dances and swing dances. The dancers were all very talented, making these sections of the show enjoyable. Furthermore, the show opens with a vaudeville-style song and dance overture, which is not part of the story, but which sets the tone for the show. Act II also starts this way.

While most of the play was entertaining and funny, there were a few parts that were rather boring. There were too many love songs, which almost took away from the comedy with their serious subject matter. There were also a few rather boring musical interludes, such as when the Professor plays a harp that was actually a ballet dancer. These sections of the play did not seem to fit with the rest of the musical and noticeable number of audience members were absent at the beginning of the

second act.

Slotnick stole the show, mimicking Groucho Marx, as he broke down the fourth wall, speaking directly to the audience. Some of the funniest jokes were told this way.

Overall, the play was entertaining, boasting funny jokes and (mostly) good songs and dance numbers. *Animal Crackers* is a fun, amusing musical that anyone could enjoy, whether (s)he is familiar with the Marx Brothers or not.





# AROUNDTOWN

## Comedy *Play the Game* lacks new plot

**W** Rexly Penaflorida II  
Editor in Chief

A Niles West alumnus, director Marc Fienberg brings his second film, which he also wrote and produced, to the big screen. *Play the Game* is a story about finding true love no matter how old you are. The film evokes laughs from start to finish and shows that one does not need tricks or lines to fall in love.

The story centers on David Mitchell (Paul Campbell) and his Grandpa Joe (television icon Andy Griffith). Mitchell is a car salesman who lures people into buying cars that they do not need. He also uses his skills as a salesman to get women. At the beginning of the story, he visits his Grandpa Joe, who has become very depressed since the death of his

wife. Mitchell tries to make his grandfather feel better, but Joe says that his wife told him to find another woman after she died. Mitchell agrees to help out his Grandpa Joe in his endeavor and gives him tips on how to meet women. As Joe tries to win over women, Mitchell has his own love life to manage. While playing football,

he meets Julie Larabee (Marla Sokoloff). He is attracted to her and tries to find out her daily routine in order to try make her want him.

Meanwhile Joe falls for another woman in his retirement home. Rose, played by *Everybody Loves Raymond* alumna Doris Roberts, is very sweet toward him but she is already going out with someone else. Joerebounds to involve himself in a relationship with a woman named Edna (Liz Sheridan) who

wants a lot of things from Joe.

Both men try hard to fall in love, but both hit the wall eventually. Mitchell and Julie get into an argument and Joe and Edna also have complications. However, the story turns around and both men get the women that they had always wanted.

Despite its premise, the film is more comedy than romance. Some of the scenes in the movie are genuinely funny. For example, when Mitchell starts teaching his Grandpa Joe how to get women, he brings Joe to a club. The only problem is, all the people in the club are the same age as Mitchell, so Joe feels out of place.

However, there are scenes in this movie that even a high school student would not want to see. A great example of that would be when Edna and Joe have their first dinner together and then some. Keep in mind that both of these characters are in their 70s.

Fienberg did a good job of directing the film and writing the script. There are moments where the viewer can really sense the emotion of the character. The character's feelings are then reflected on the viewer, who can then get a real sense of the current situation that the character is in.

The score is also great. Some of the songs in the movie are from Grandpa Joe's time and

others are from this era. Most of the songs are acoustic or soft rock.

The audience at Crown Theaters in Village Crossing was an interesting mix of senior citizens, who came in large groups to watch the film, and bemused teenagers who seemed out of place among the octogenarians.

The one thing that this reviewer did not like about the movie was that the story did not seem original. This reviewer was reminded too much of the Will Smith vehicle *Hitch*. Both movies had the same story line and the same types of characters.

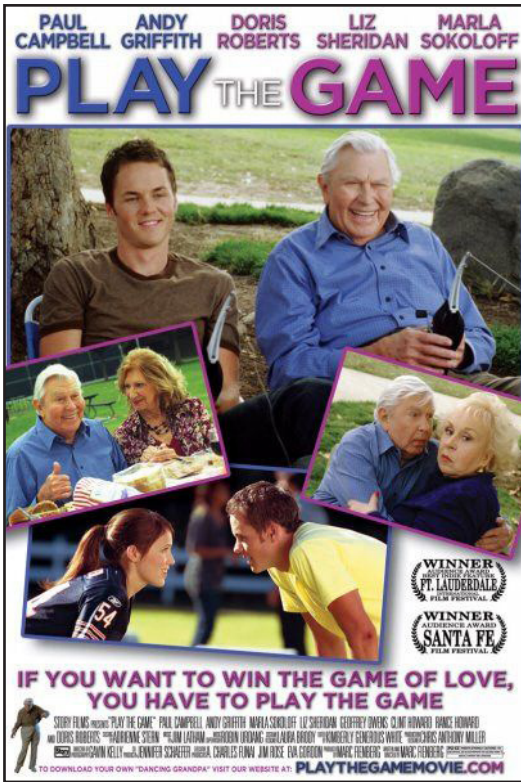
Despite the lack of originality, the movie was enjoyable, and it was cool to watch a film produced by someone who once roamed these very halls. While it functions nicely as a family movie, couples also would enjoy watching it on a date.

*Play the Game* skillfully examines love from both ends of the age spectrum, and it is well worth the price of admission.

*Play the Game*



Marc Fienberg



## Howie Day's album proves to be mediocre

**W** Hillary Lindwall  
Managing Editor

Many may remember Howie Day from his hit single "Collide," which was released in 2003. Expecting the same type of acoustic album, this reviewer was surprised to hear that Day has drastically changed his song style in his newest album, *Sound the Alarm*.

Beginning as a solo artist in the 1990s, Day became known for accompanying himself. After releasing two other albums, *Australia* and *Stop All the World Now*, both to limited success, it seems as though Day decided that adding other accompaniment would be advantageous. *Sound the Alarm* definitely accomplishes this goal with the addition of drums, electric guitar, synthesizers and even horns at times.

From the first song on the album, "So Stung," it becomes obvious that Day has changed his style. The track begins very mysteriously with a very quiet synthesizer riff that almost sounds like wind. When other instruments can be heard, the song picks up a little, and the sound is translated from mysterious to sad.

Adding instrumentation is one thing; completely changing styles and feelings is quite another, and Day has done a 180-degree turn-around in emotions. On his other albums, Day expressed contentment, maybe even happiness. However, on *Sound the Alarm*, Day provides a steady diet of sad love songs that left his reviewer somewhat depressed.

One of the saddest songs on the album is "Everybody Loves to Love a Lie." In the song, Day sings lines such as "Late again and he won't stop calling / Such a victim of their romance / Struck down by a strange and cold addiction / He never had a chance." These lyrics seem very morose.

A possible reason for Day's shift to a more

depressive mode might either be the cause or effect of several criminal charges the singer/songwriter has faced since 2004. According to [www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com), Day was arrested in Wisconsin after he supposedly locked a woman in a bathroom and broke the cell phone of another woman after one of them "allegedly refused his sexual advances." According to [www.msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.com), Day was arrested again in 2005 for "rowdy behavior on a Boston-bound flight after he became intoxicated from a mix of alcohol and a sleeping pill."

Whatever Day's depression were the chicken or the egg, his emotional fragility is clearly manifested in this new direction.

While many of the songs are sad, one of the best tracks on the album is the upbeat "Be There." This song is fast-moving yet relaxing and has a catchy melody. The song is like a flashback to his past acoustic self. Along with his prominent voice, electric guitars,

drums, and synthesizers can be heard. This might well be the only happy song on the album, which is an obvious reason why this song was anticipated as a favorite before the album was released.

Overall, the album is just okay. *Sound the Alarm* boasts distinguishable and catchy melodies, but all of the songs sound similar. The entire album has a lazy quality, as if its mopey creator couldn't summon up any excitement about his creation. While it is up to the individual listener to decide how to view the new Day that has dawned, this reviewer finds the shift in direction confusing and disconcerting.

*Howie Day*



*Sound the Alarm*

## Uncommon Ground offers organic food

**W** Zoe Ljubic  
Editor in Chief

For those who eschew fast food in favor of healthier, organic and vegetarian cuisine, Edgewater's new Uncommon Ground restaurant welcomes diners who want something out of the ordinary.

The second installment in the local small chain (the other restaurant is located at the corner of Clark and Grace streets in the shadow of Wrigley Field), the restaurant offers ample seating, both indoors and outdoors and exudes a peaceful atmosphere.



Like its Wrigleyville cousin, the Edgewater Uncommon Ground is divided up into three large sections, including a bar and lounge area, dining room and a miniature stage. Plus, the back parking lot features a handful of tables and chairs for patrons to dine *al fresco* during warm weather.

Upon entering the restaurant, patrons are greeted by an urban setting with the dim lighting, exposed brick walls and vibrant works of art. The large sections filled with table settings allow patrons to be quickly seated and

order their meals.

Uncommon Ground set apart three different menus from which patrons may choose depending on the time they decide to dine. The dinner menu for Uncommon Ground offers a variety of vegetarian plates, meat delicacies, salads, pastas, pizzas and additional side items.

The small platters, or appetizers, consist of salads, dips and meat portions. This reviewer chose the baked artichoke, goat cheese and pesto dip (\$10). This famous small platter is served with extra virgin olive oil and French *crostini* on the side. Served warm, the dip was cooked to perfection, serving as a tasty spread on the French toast points.

The Sunshine Salad (\$7) and chicken and sauerkraut soup (\$3.50) arrived next. The salad contains organic greens, seasonal farmers' market vegetables, sunflower seeds, avocado and sprouts and is tossed with a light apple cider vinaigrette. The fresh vegetables add a refreshing touch to the artichoke dip. One might notice the vegetables were grown in the garden outside.

The chicken sauerkraut soup was served warm in a cup and features large chunks of broiled chicken and sauerkraut blended together in a tangy sauce.

At last, the crispy gunthorp farm chicken breast (\$19) arrived. This entrée is served in a summer succotash sauce, including bacon, heirloom tomatoes, corn puree and cheddar cheese. The large portion looks as if it can easily serve two people, however, the delicious chicken and side dishes demand that the patron finish the entire plate. This dish is highly recommended.

Those who have a sweet tooth for moist, freshly baked desserts will enjoy the seedling farm apple crisp (\$7) and s'mores tart (\$7). Both are served warm with just the right amount of sugar to satisfy sugar lovers' cravings.

Chicagoans who seek a night out in Chicago in a comfortable urban setting, while enjoying a well prepared organic meal, should check out Uncommon Ground, located at 1401 W. Devon Ave. in Edgewater for a great night out with a few friends.

For information or reservations, call (773) 465-9801 or visit [www.uncommonground.com](http://www.uncommonground.com).

*Uncommon Ground*



1401 W. Devon Ave.



# WestWord

## Actors in *Stranger Than Paradise* brighten the colorless screen

Fifth in a series

**W Naomi Prale**  
Sports Editor

*Stranger Than Paradise*, indie film maven Jim Jarmusch's 1984 exercise in mundanity, is one of those "little" movies that never make the Cineplex but which charm the art house aficionados who ferret them out.

Willie (Lounge Lizards' saxophonist John Lurie, who also did the film's jazzy score), a 30-something Hungarian-American who lives in New York, makes a life off cheating at cards and betting on horse races. Willie has spent his time perfecting his New York accent ever since he came to the states 10 years before, and he is not exactly thrilled when he finds out that his 16-year-old cousin from Budapest, Eva (Eszter Balint), will spend 10 days with him before moving in with his Aunt Lottie (Cecillia Stark).

Willie makes it clear at first that he does not want Eva there, but that seems to be all right with her because she dislikes him as well. He despises her curious nature and taste in music—she plays "Screamin'" Jay Hawkins' "I Put a Spell on You" so much that the song becomes another character in the film.

Willie's friend Eddie (Richard Edson) hangs around a bit too, and occasionally (and creepily) eyeballs Eva. Eva is a bit mopey until she shoplifts food and cigarettes, and then Willie begins to see her in a different light. He goes so far to show his affection that he buys Eva a dress, for which she does not care.

Eva eventually leaves for Ohio and Aunt Lottie, and Willie continues to live his humdrum life.

At this point, the screen fills with large letters: ONE YEAR LATER. Eddie and Willie have not changed. They come into a lot of money cheating at gambling and decide to go see Eva. It is freezing in Cleveland, and Willie and Eddie appear to be just as bored as they were in New York. The humorous Aunt Lottie welcomes the duo into her home. Eva works at a hot dog stand and is happy to see them. Desiring adventure, the three of them spontaneously decide to drive down to Florida in an attempt to welcome warm weather. However, the Florida they find is not unlike what they had seen in Cleveland, minus the snow. Wherever Willie, Eddie and Eva go, the landscape looks the same.

Soon, however, everything starts to go sour in Florida, and after some hilarious drama, the movie finds the miraculous ending that it all the characters desperately need.

The movie was filmed in scattershot, minimalist fashion, with no segues. Each scene ends theatrically fading to black. This clever (and low budget) approach mirrors the film's characters, who fade in and out of one another's lives at random.

Considering that *Stranger Than Paradise* was made in 1984, it seems to be a reaction against pop culture values of the time both in terms of content and style. The characters are not filled with Reagan era optimism, and visually the movie is the antithesis of MTV. It is not loud

and colorful, as *Stranger Than Paradise* is filmed in black and white and features minimal dialogue and music. The movie is also slow-paced and utterly lacking in the trademark action sequences of that time.

The acting is surprisingly good, considering that only Edson was a working actor, and the characters never stray from their monotonous characteristics, contributing to the deadpan style and reinforcing a sense taken that the characters are not played by actors, but are actual people whose lives are being filmed.

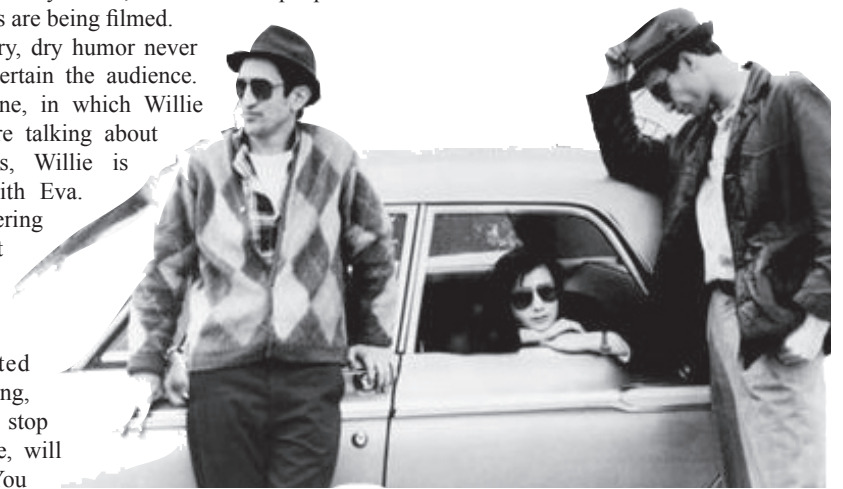
The wry, dry humor never fails to entertain the audience. In one scene, in which Willie and Eva are talking about TV dinners, Willie is annoyed with Eva, whose pestering him about the origins of his

prefabricated meat, saying, "Eva, stop bugging me, will you? You know, this is the way we eat in America. I got my meat, I got my potatoes, I got my vegetables, I got my dessert, and I don't even have to wash the dishes." The humor is subtle as it usually comes out in the middle of sparse dialogue, but it is

still enjoyable and genuinely funny.

Stark, in particular, almost steals the spotlight at a few moments as the eccentric Aunt Lottie, but Jarmusch makes sure that the film is too integrated for any one person to walk away with it.

Overall, the film is thoroughly enjoyable, with a sense of black humor throughout the film that, combined with the sincere acting, makes *Stranger Than Paradise* a true cult classic.



*Stranger Than Paradise*



Jim Jarmusch

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