

'Bicycle Days' chronicles passage into adulthood

By Eric K. Gabrielle
 ■ Independent Florida Alligator
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John Burnham Schwartz, 24, has quietly but forcefully appeared on the literary scene with his first novel, "Bicycle Days." Schwartz graduated from Harvard in 1987, specializing in East Asian studies while intending to become

an investment banker. As he completed a summer internship in Japan, he reconsidered.

On the advice of friends, he submitted "Bicycle Days" to a publisher. The result is an impressive and highly enjoyable glimpse into the life of Alec Stern, a young Yale graduate working in the Tokyo office of an American computer company.

Schwartz's novel is in the category of *bildungsroman*; it's an examination of the personal and psychological growth of the protagonist. Alec's experiences are chronicled in a series of vignettes that portray the life and times of a young man coming to terms with himself and his surroundings. The book also illustrates the conflicts that arise when this process occurs in an unfamiliar society.

"Bicycle Days" is delightful and fulfilling both as an exercise in character development and as a vision of contemporary Japan. The vivid and brief chapters motivate the reader to continue and eventually make you regret nearing the end of the book. The range of Alec's unusual experiences are compelling and evoke interest in where he, and Schwartz, will be going next.

Gorky Park

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albums in Russia, the group is now making inroads in America.

After gaining the attention of Bon Jovi manager Doc McGhee, Gorky Park contributed a song to the Make a Difference Foundation album, the recording of August's Moscow Peace Festival. This led to a deal with PolyGram records.

Gorky Park's American debut is surprisingly good — a solid pop metal record among the dozens of mediocre ones in the recent leather explosion.

Its single, "Bang," rocks hard as the singer, Nikolai, belts out unintelligible stories of Russian gangs. We even get some Russian radio broadcasts in the background of the catchy "Hit Me with the News."

French rock

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M.K.B., who are also on the Bondage label, sound sort of like a continental version of Big Black. Songs like "Toulouse" and "1989" feel like boiling lead in your bowels.

These two records can be ordered directly from their label in Paris (Bondage Productions, 17 rue de Montreuil 75011 Paris, France).

Magic man

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Bond-type fantasy using wine, roses and candles to complete the illusion.

"This is my favorite act, the one I use for competitions," Helfand said. "But I adapt my show for each particular audience."

Helfand performs locally for several elementary schools, day-care centers and children's birthday parties. He stresses safety during his Halloween performances while keeping it enjoyable for the youngsters.

He also teaches children's classes for the local park and recreation department.

Besides entertaining children, Helfand performs at private parties, nightclubs and conventions — as many as 250 shows one summer.

He stimulates his creativity by reading old magic books from the '30s and '40s and updating and renovating old ideas.

"Books are my main aid, they teach you a lot of the fundamentals. You can never read enough in this field."

Helfand also learns from his fellow magicians. He belongs to both the Fort Worth and Dallas magic clubs.

"It's like a fraternity in a sense," he said. "You have a brotherhood of magicians in every city."

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1. Husker Du and the Time both came from which city? a) Boston, b) New York, c) Athens, Georgia, d) Minneapolis

2. "Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me" was an album by: a) Echo and the Bunnymen, b) Love and Rockets, c) The Cure, d) The Pixies

3. The rock movie "The Last Waltz" featured which group? a) The Who, b) The Rolling Stones, c) The Jefferson Starship, d) The Band

4. Aerosmith in recent years toured with which group? a) Guns & Roses, b) Slayer, c) Metallica, d) Living Color

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