

Theurgic Seed breaks through the music lull

■ A Eugene band has set out to break as many rules as possible and make music with meaning

By Rebecca Wilson
Oregon Daily Emerald

Listening to music in the new millennium isn't as fun as it used to be. Garage bands from Tucson to Tallahassee vie for space in indie record stores; homogenized pop/rock/country saturates the airwaves. If one word can be used to describe the vast majority of new music, that word is boring.

For example, in this very issue, Pulse music critic Dave Depper laments, "My heart yearns for a new revolution in sound; for a new band that breaks all of the rules; for someone to come out of the woodwork and knock the current state of music upside-down!"

Though Depper's revolution may be a long time in coming, Eugene has at least one band making a conscious effort to break as many rules as they can.

The band is Theurgic Seed, and the music they play is of a variety all its own, explained frontman Jair. "We sometimes get asked what genre of music we play," he said, "and my answer is: genre. We play genre."

Jair, who sings and plays guitar,

creates his music along with drummer James West, bass player Corey Vance, drummer Needlebreaker, Scotty Perey on rhodes and Kevin Murphy on mandolin, with appearances by a variety of other musicians playing a variety of instruments. Their self-titled single also features Danielle Opal and Lewis Pollard on backup vocals. Last year, Theurgic Seed played at the Hult Center with a 15-piece orchestra and Abhiman Kaushal, who is sitar master Ravi Shankar's tabla player.

The band members' diverse musical backgrounds contribute to the band's varied style. Jair, who is a classically trained musician, cites a wide variety of jazz and world music as his biggest influences. Among the band's collective favorite albums are: "The Bends" by Radiohead, "Synchronicity" by The Police, "In Celebration" by Ravi Shankar and "Birds of Fire" by Mahavishnu Orchestra. But "we're not trying to be a melting pot because that's how things have been lost," Jair said.

Jair said that much of the band's music is created by improvisation, but not always.

"Lyrics and forms are pre-conceived by Jair," said West. "The songs have plenty of time to evolve. There is more of a one-ness."

Recording engineer Bill Barnett worked with Theurgic Seed on the single. He described the collabora-

tion as "kind of an intense thought process. You have to be willing to be ready for anything and get out every mic you have. Jair has got a real broad vision for the music."

One of the band's goals is to find a harmonious relationship with technology, Jair said. The band's Web site, www.imaginify.com, has RealPlayer audio files and MP3 files that can be downloaded for free. The self-titled single is multimedia, as well.

The Web site also features an environmental gallery with links to other sites concerning organic gardening, dolphins and solar power.

Theurgic Seed tries to infuse everything they do with meaning, West said.

"As musicians, we are responsible for performing content that has meaning," Jair said.

Even the band's name has a philosophical meaning. Jair stumbled across the word "theurgic" while flipping through the dictionary one day. According to Merriam-Webster's Online, "theurgic" means "the art or technique of compelling or persuading a god or beneficent or supernatural power to do or refrain from something."

"Seed" refers to creative energy. In short, the band's name means magical creative energy ... or something like that.

Jair is hesitant to label or define anything about his band. He said he



Courtesy Imaginify Records

The album features two melodic songs. The cover art is by local graffiti artist, Frustr8ed.

feels uncomfortable with social constructs, which is part of the reason for his monosyllabic name. "Institutions ... tend to separate people," he said. "They break people's free spirited-ness and lay them into a concrete path."

And when Theurgic Seed aren't saving the world and countering the social machine, they blend harmonious, genre-defining melodies,

which can be loosely defined as rock.

"We don't have any intention of fading," Jair said. "Music has become an experience now."

Theurgic Seed's albums can be found at Face the Music. To find out more about the band, the musicians and the mission, check out www.imaginify.com.

Academy Award nominations contain a few surprises

By David Germain
The Associated Press

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — "Gladiator," Hollywood's high-tech return to the glories of Rome, led Academy Award contenders Tuesday with 12 nominations, including best picture, actor and director.

"Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," the Mandarin-language martial arts epic, was close behind with 10 nominations, including best picture and best director. The other best-picture nominees were the French romance "Chocolat," the legal drama "Erin Brockovich" and the gritty drug-war saga "Traffic."

Steven Soderbergh had two directing nominations, for "Erin Brockovich" and "Traffic." That's the first time that's happened since 1938, when director Michael Curtiz was nominated for both "Angels With Dirty Faces" and "Four Daughters." (Curtiz lost to Frank Capra, who directed "You Can't Take It With You.")

The other director nominees were Stephen Daldry for "Billy Elliot," Ang Lee for "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and Ridley Scott for "Gladiator."

After directing several English-language movies, Lee said he was delighted to see Western audiences embrace "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon."

"This was supposed to be my homecoming project," said the Taiwanese-born Lee. "I'm really taking to heart how this film is performing in America."

"Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" is only the third film to earn both best-picture and foreign-language film nominations. The others

were "Life Is Beautiful" in 1998 and "Z" in 1969. Last weekend, "Crouching Tiger" hit \$60 million and passed "Life Is Beautiful" as the domestic box-office champ among foreign-language films.

Besides best picture, "Gladiator," the first Roman spectacle since the genre fell out of favor in the 1960s, grabbed nominations for actor Russell Crowe and supporting actor Joaquin Phoenix. Hans Zimmer's score was nominated, and the computer wizardry Scott's crew used to recreate ancient Rome was named for visual effects.

David Franzoni, one of the producers on "Gladiator," said that since the movie was a big commercial success and came out way back in May, he worried it might get overlooked come awards season.

"We had concerns people might write it off as a blockbuster or might not remember it," said Franzoni, who also shared an original screenplay nomination for "Gladiator." "But they remembered it, and that's a testament to the brilliant direction" by Scott.

Along with Crowe, the actor nominees were Javier Bardem for "Before Night Falls," a film biography of Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas; Tom Hanks as a man stranded on an island in "Cast Away"; Ed Harris for "Pollock," a film biography of abstract painter Jackson Pollock; and Geoffrey Rush as the asylum-bound Marquis de Sade in "Quills."

Hanks has won two Oscars, and Rush has one.

Best actress nominees were Joan Allen as a vice presidential nominee in "The Contender"; Juliette

Binoche as an itinerant chocolatier in "Chocolat"; Ellen Burstyn as a diet-pill addict in "Requiem for a Dream"; Laura Linney as a sister coping with her prodigal brother in "You Can Count On Me" and Julia Roberts as a tart-tongued legal aide in "Erin Brockovich."

“Almost Famous,” which had emerged as a solid candidate for a best-picture nomination, was shut out in that category, and director Cameron Crowe also failed to get a nod.

Binoche and Burstyn are past Oscar winners.

"A year ago, if someone told me I'd be getting this, I wouldn't believe it," said Linney, a first-time nominee. "This is a huge, huge thing for me. I just feel so damn good."

Burstyn won the best-actress Oscar for 1974 for "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore," and she was nominated four other times, the last in 1980 for "Resurrection."

"It's been awhile," Burstyn said. "My Oscar is getting kind of tarnished. I looked at it a couple of years ago and thought I really needed a new one."

Snubbed for a best-actress nomination was Icelandic pop singer Bjork, who made her film debut in the dark musical "Dancer in the

Dark." Bjork did score a nomination for best song, "I've Seen It All," which she co-wrote.

The best song category was heavy on big names, including Bob Dylan for "Things Have Changed" from "Wonder Boys." The nominees also included Sting and David Hartley for "My Funny Friend and Me" from "The Emperor's New Groove," and Randy Newman for "A Fool in Love" from "Meet the Parents." Also nominated was "A Love Before Time" from "Crouching Tiger."

Besides Phoenix, supporting-actor slots went to Jeff Bridges as a flamboyant president in "The Contender"; Willem Dafoe as the undead Nosferatu in "Shadow of the Vampire"; Benicio Del Toro as a Mexican drug cop in "Traffic"; and Albert Finney as a pugnacious attorney in "Erin Brockovich."

For supporting actress, the nominees were Judi Dench as a cranky grandmother in "Chocolat"; Marcia Gay Harden as the painter's wife in "Pollock"; Kate Hudson as a '70s rock disciple and Frances McDormand as an obsessive mother in "Almost Famous," and Julie Walters as a disillusioned ballet teacher in "Billy Elliot."

Dench and McDormand both have won Oscars.

"Almost Famous," which had emerged as a solid candidate for a best-picture nomination, was shut out in that category, and director Cameron Crowe also failed to get a nod. Besides its two supporting-actress nominations, the movie earned a nomination for Crowe's original screenplay and for film

editing.

Miramax, always a scrappy Oscar campaigner, pulled out a best-picture nomination for "Chocolat," considered something of a long shot. Miramax's past Oscar successes include "The English Patient," "Shakespeare in Love," "Life Is Beautiful" and last year's "The Cider House Rules."

Along with "Crouching Tiger," nominees for best foreign language film were "Amores Perros" from Mexico, "Divided We Fall" from the Czech Republic, "Everybody Famous" from Belgium and "The Taste of Others" from France.

Nominees in most of the 23 categories are chosen by specific branches of the 5,300-member academy, such as actors, directors and film editors. Contenders in some categories, including documentaries and foreign-language films, are selected by committees.

All academy members can vote for best-picture nominees. The full academy also is eligible to vote in all categories for the awards themselves.

The Oscars will be presented March 25 in a live broadcast on ABC-TV from the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles.

Steve Martin will be host for the ceremony, taking over from Billy Crystal, who has been master of ceremonies for seven of the last eight Oscar shows.

Dino De Laurentiis, whose credits include "Hannibal" and "Serpico," will receive the Irving G. Thalberg award, presented to producers whose work reflects "consistently high quality."



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