

French pop bests America's 'dirty' girl singers

Singer Serge Gainsbourg adds a touch of class to the pop scene

By Helen Schumacher
Pulse Columnist

For the past several years music listeners have had to put up with the downward spiraling pop music of Britney Spears and Christina

Aguilera as they compete for the title of "America's Naughtiest." Unfortunately, what these women fail to realize is that more cleavage does not necessarily equal sexier music. What today's pop stars need is a lesson in classy seduction from the

FORGOTTEN ALBUMS

French master Serge Gainsbourg. Gainsbourg's songs are to French pop what lace is to lingerie. In 1997, Polygram released a "best of" album of Gainsbourg work titled "Comic Strip." With the help of ye-ye girls Brigitte Bardot and Jane Birkin, the album is the 1960s at its dirtiest.

ported to a Parisian bachelor pad. Imagine a suite on the top floor of a swanky apartment building. There is gold wallpaper on the walls and a white, bear-skinned rug on the floor. A small fire is burning in the fireplace. Opposite the fireplace is a floor-to-ceiling window, which provides an unobstructed view of the Eiffel Tower. The centerpiece of the room is the largest canopy bed you've ever seen.

The sheets are red satin. In the corner, a debonair Gainsbourg stands behind a marble-topped bar, mixing cocktails, as you stand near the window, smoking a cigarette and admiring the lights of the city. That's what listening to Gainsbourg feels like. With songs about bank robbers

Turn to **FRENCH**, page 8

Graphics, combat make new game quick favorite

A wide array of characters and some impressive move sequences make Soul Calibur II a fun ride

By Travis Willse
Editorial Editor

With eye-candy graphics, comically overstated characters, the perfect tempo for trash-talking and a plot typed by 1,000 monkey copy writers, Soul Calibur II fits seamlessly on the fighting game shelf at the local video game retailer. But, there are plenty of reasons to pull it off the shelf, buy it and slide it into your GameCube, PlayStation 2 or Xbox, and thereupon lay waste to your friends' dignity for weeks.

Most immediately, Joe Newplayer will notice the game's enjoyably sharp learning curve. A greenhorn can sit down on an overstuffed couch, maybe glance at the control setup screen, and button-mash his way into combo or two and, more importantly, some keen-looking moves. But, the game's real appeal is to power players, as mastery of the game is a much (much) taller order.

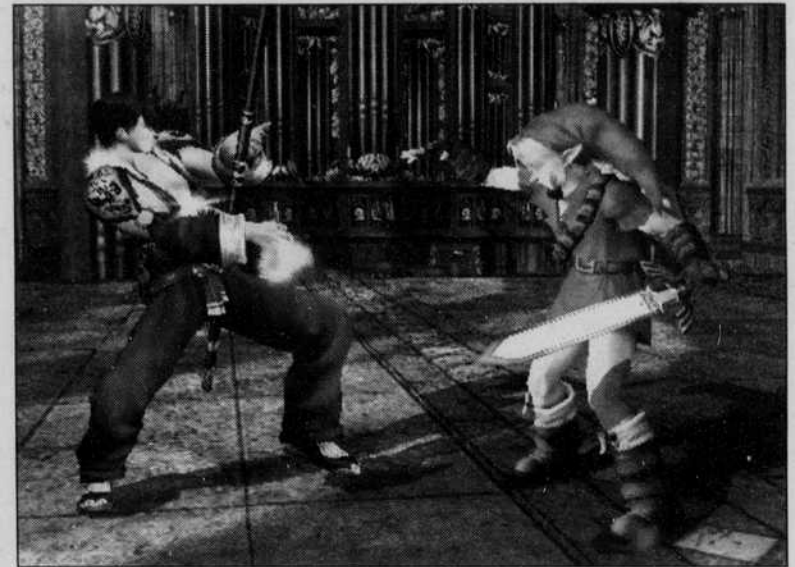
experienced corpus of players, though, players will have to familiarize themselves with at least one of the game's many characters' impressively robust move sets. (Game developer Namco deserves major kudos for doing all this with four basic moves — horizontal attack, vertical attack, kick, and block — while creating a very balanced array of characters). The most difficult part of learning the actual gameplay lies in picking up the nuances of timing — when to block, or more potently, when to throw.

Learning the many characters themselves is something of a cross between watching Mel Brooks' "History of the World — Part I" and browsing a Dadaist art show: Historical stereotypes from the last 2,500 years abound, but don't expect much in the way of plot coherence. (Although, a voice-over tongue-in-cheekly assures players that "Transcending history and the world," the game depicts "a tale of souls and swords eternally retold.") Still, the weak storyline is forgivable since the game's strength lies in — and players will spend most of their time in — the superb (and superbly enjoyable) player-versus-player mode.

plucked from across pseudo-history: Astaroth, a six-foot-four oaf-servant of the Greek war god Ares, wields an ax with a blade the size of a pizza pan; Cervantes de Leon, a dead Spanish pirate, years ago slaughtered his crew and dined on their souls; and Talim, a 15-year-old priestess who wields twin elbow blades, shows up as one of the game's boilerplate young Asian girls.

Each of the three home consoles features a character exclusive to its platform. The GameCube version features Link from Nintendo's ultra-popular Zelda series, the Xbox version includes the classic Todd McFarlane comic book antihero Spawn and gamers who play the PlayStation 2 version will get Heihachi Mishima of Tekken fame.

Even more numerous are the characters' cheesy sound bites. Beginning-of-the-match threats range from Cervantes' bizarrely culinary "You shall be my nourishment!" to Cassandra's junior-high-dance yelp "EEEE! You're definitely not my type" to Yoshimitsu's Kevorkian "I shall assist your suicide!" to Nightmare's downright Schwarzeneggerian "AGHHH! Annihilate!"



Courtesy

Namco's Soul Calibur II features a character exclusive to different gaming systems, including Link for GameCube owners and Spawn for the Xbox version.

largely above-par, the stages themselves leave much to be desired. Most of the arenas have chasms for combatants to cast each other into, and there's some interesting scenery, but there's not much more actual va-

riety than the stage's size and where walls are. (In small stages, ring outs are almost as common as knock-outs). While the stages boast

Turn to **SOUL**, page 8

Thank you to having whole year to give thanks

Thank you, all poets, philosophers and anarchists of the night. Thank you to colorful leaves falling from trees — colors that I dare not name because doing so would diminish the beauty they bestow upon me.

Thank you, breakfasts of granola and green tea, almond milk and corn flakes, gourds of yerba mate. And when necessary, that thick brown cup of coffee giving the quick caffeine

high. Thank you, dinners of red beans and rice, eaten with chips and chop sticks I picked up in San Francisco during my Chinatown trip.

Thank you, sleep — I may only get four hours a night, but whenever you greet me with dreams, my eyes are wide open even as they look idly at peace.

Thank you, cold bicycle rides at night, cold fog and mist that some-



Aaron Shakra

Notebooks of DJ Serpentine

times make poems write themselves, but then disappear by the time I get home — never remembered and when I write them, they never come out the way they were supposed to.

Thank you, barely manageable school schedule, thank you for that Wednesday of tai chi chuan followed by rock climbing on concrete walls with colorful jibs and holds, and that red dragonfly inexplicably en-

graved in the wall as if to remind me there are thousands of other rock faces outside.

Thank you to everyone who avoids using paper cups every time they need a coffee fill up. Thank you, Dumpster diver people, scavenging to reclaim food, then turning it into a meal to feed anyone in need.

Turn to **SHAKRA**, page 8

Cross's behind-the-scenes DVD features Eugeneans

I'm going to make a confession. I have a little crush on David Cross. He's that bald guy from the cult program "Mr. Show," and he's hilarious.

The highlight of my crush was last spring. I was working as an intern for Sub Pop Records in Seattle. The label had previously released a double album of the funny man's work, and it was the night of their 15th anniversary show. While standing near the back of the crowd watching the band Iron and Wine, I noticed a man in

black glasses cracking jokes not more than a few feet in front of me.

I'm easily star-struck, and this time was no exception. I spent the rest of the night charging whiskey and cokes to my boss's tab, trying to work up the courage to introduce myself. During the final band's performance, I found myself standing right next to Cross, but just as I turned to speak to him, he left the show.

My dream of spending the rest of



Helen Schumacher

Notes from the underground

the night doubled over in laughter

was ruined. But at least I had my David Cross story to tell my friends the next day. I just watched Cross's newest release, "Let America Laugh," a behind-the-scenes documentary of one of his comedy tours. The DVD (which starts out like some low-budget porn, but quickly redeems itself when Cross gets kicked out of a club in Nashville, Tenn.) is largely comprised of interviews with inebriated fans — all caught on tape for

the enjoyment of others.

"Let America Laugh" also contains footage from his show at WOW Hall. Eugene's own Frog has a cameo. His appearance is actually one of the highlights of the film. I don't want to give away too much, but let's just say he does more than sell Cross a joke book. Walking past the bookstore hasn't been the same for me since.

Turn to **SCHUMACHER**, page 8

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