

Four college grads travel, learn in roadtrip film

A road trip serves as the foundation for an insightful documentary on the modern job hunt

By Natasha Chilingirian
Pulse Reporter

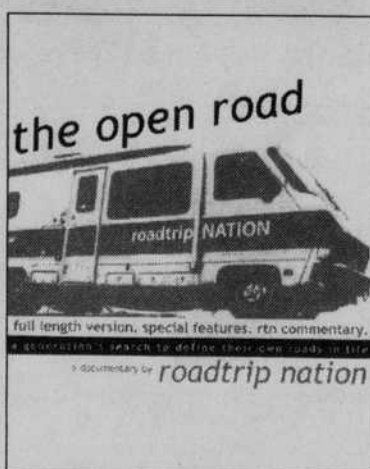
"The Open Road," created by four recent college graduates, is a documentary that asks the number one question on the minds of most college students: "What am I going to do when I graduate?"

The film gives a wise piece of advice for this common conundrum: how to explore the possibilities out there and turn something you love into a career.

The creators of "The Open Road" are also the founders of the individuality-promoting project Roadtrip Nation. In the film, the foursome —

Michael Marriner, Nathan Gebhard, Amanda Gall and Brian McAllister — decide to forgo their original, traditional plans of becoming doctors, teachers and working for family businesses. They beautify an old 1985 RV with a coat of bright green paint and travel 15,000 miles around the nation in search of insight to their futures. This search takes them to college campuses where they talk to students about their future plans, eventually taking them along to interviews with successful people.

On their journey, the road-trippers talk to such professionals as the co-founder of Nantucket Nectars juice, a lobsterman in Maine, Dell CEO Michael Dell and Starbucks chairman and founder Howard Schultz. These honest question-and-answer sessions gave the interviewees a chance to talk about how their career plans changed while in college and what strategies got them to where they are today. The professionals offered an array of advice to college-age people, such as turning a hobby into a career, follow-



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ing your dream even if others criticize you and accepting low pay in the beginning to gain experience. Each interviewee left their mark on the young travelers by signing the ceiling inside their RV.

"The Open Road" functions as a travelogue and a tool for career inspiration. The film showcases beautiful

places, such as Seattle and New York City, and includes segments with the four travelers engaging in enjoyable activities, such as jumping off a dock into water in Maine. By including fun and games, the focus is taken away from the serious topic of the post-college job search, reminding viewers that life isn't all work and no play. The documentary also shows the problems they encounter, such as mechanical problems with their RV and an anthrax scare in Washington, D.C.

This film offers great insight to anyone who is struggling with their future career plans. By giving the lobsterman just as much respect and attention as Schultz, the road-trippers prove that quirky careers can be just as appreciable and rewarding as big-business careers. The variety of people interviewed shows that no interest is too dumb to become a life-long occupation. For example, the vice president of programming for the Cartoon Network said in the film that he chose his career because he loved cartoons and wanted to go

to work wearing jeans.

The only thing missing was a conclusion from the four stars of the film. Gebhard, Marriner, McAllister and Gall never go into how their own career plans evolved during or after the trip, which seemed like a glaring oversight after such a journey.

Roadtrip Nation has released a book by the same name which details the group's fall 2001 road trip and offers advice on finding one's path in life. The Roadtrip Nation founders also run a program, "Behind the Wheel," where they select several college students every year to embark on their own path-finding road trip. A second documentary, "Destination Unknown," was released recently and followed the first "Behind the Wheel" road trip from last summer. Both documentaries are available on DVD. For more information about Roadtrip Nation, visit their Web site at <http://www.roadtripnation.com>

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Milton Mapes' two albums go from bad to boring

The Texas country band makes music for masochists and elevator passengers

By Natasha Chilingirian
Pulse Reporter

Austin, Texas-based country/rock group Milton Mapes went through a dramatic metamorphosis between their first and second albums — from inducing headaches to creating noticeable background music.

Milton Mapes writes songs about the West, and although their lyrics are poetic and show expertise and insight into the Western United States, the music, for the most part, doesn't

seem to match in quality. Their debut album, "The State Line," introduces Greg Vanderpool's gritty voice and the group's uninspiring sounds.

The first track, "Used to be Enough," is a song about an unsatisfying love that tries to be emotional but fails as soon as a percussion instrument sounding like a rattlesnake emerges. But this song sounds heavenly compared to the next track, "Down By You."

"Down By You" can be played at full blast to purposely annoy much-hated neighbors. It is a scratchy, muffled tune with lyrics that are yelled and a droning, deafening guitar playing the same chord over and over.

The remainder of "The State Line" is a little easier on the ears. In "Lubbock," Vanderpool's voice is almost soothing, but the song has about as much variety as the Slim-Fast diet plan. The same guitar/drum melody plays repetitively throughout the track like a broken record, and this sent my level of irritation up the wall.

The mood then turns to slow and soft, except for the second half of "Numbers," which showcases a fast beat that rests on the line between fun



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and annoying. The last track, "Quick-Eyed Love," has fast percussion that, like "Lubbock," is repetitive. Otherwise, the songs are sweet and relaxing. This is the safest way for Milton Mapes to go, because although their slow tunes aren't quite breathtaking, they are much easier to listen to than the rapid, headache-inducing noise in their fast music.

The band seems to have realized

this just in time for their second album, "Westernaire," which is mostly slow and quiet. On the tracks that do speed up a little, the improvement from irritating to catchy is evident.

"Westernaire" boasts creative lyrics about feelings and life in the West, but they are so abstract that they tend to confuse instead of inspire. It's likely that the only person who understands these songs is Vanderpool himself, who writes all music and lyrics for Milton Mapes. The words are like diary entries, free-flowing feelings without any explanation of the related events. The only straightforward song is "A Thousand Songs About California," which is a nice tribute to the state: "Some go for money. Others go for love. / Some wanna be the last ones who can sit and watch the sun go down / So if you make it to those golden mountains / Tell my good friends I'll be seeing them around."

The quiet nature of "Westernaire" is a nice break from "The State Line,"

but each track on the former is indistinguishable from one another. Since the music fails to jump out, the album will best function as background music for a quiet social gathering or as a relaxation tool.

Greg Beets of The Austin Chronicle said the Milton Mapes "plays the kind of music you warm up to gradually." But in my opinion, music should reach out and sweep the listener away the minute it is played. Captivating music normally captivates immediately, and after the first play, Milton Mapes is just noise.

I doubt I'll listen to Milton Mapes again, but if you're willing to wait for weak music to grow on you, there will be an opportunity to give Milton Mapes a chance at a live performance this month. The band will be playing on Jan. 27 starting at 11 p.m. at the Samurai Duck, located at 980 Oak St.

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