

Pinback appear Wednesday at WOW Hall along with The Advantage and stand-up comic Neal Hamburger.



Hypnotic Abyss

Pinback's tribute to contemporary despair

Abaddon" is a word from the Hebrew meaning "pit of destruction." In the Talmud, it is the name given to Gehenna, a valley in Jerusalem where a cult practiced the burning of children. The word became associated with the fiery pits of hell, a place where the wicked are abandoned and tormented endlessly after death. Not a place you visit willingly. Which is why the title to Pinback's new CD, *Summer In Abaddon*, is so chilling.

Pinback hail from San Diego and are primarily Armistead Burwell Smith IV, who goes by "Zach," and Rob Crow. The band formed as a part-time project in 1998, when Smith's band, 3 Mile Pilot, took an extended hiatus and Crow broke from his bands, Thingy and Heavy Vegetable. Their self-titled debut was released by Ace Fu in 1999 and Pinback has been a fully-realized entity ever since. *Summer In Abaddon* was recorded by the duo throughout 2003 in Zach's home studio and is their first for the Touch and Go label.

At first listen, despair evaporates as mid-tempo tunes blossom, each sounding little different from the next. Then you read the lyrics, and goosebumps return. "This Red Book" states, "If I could reach your throat I could strangle you all. Did I say that out loud?" The track "Blood's On Fire" eulogizes a friend and ends with the lines, "Here's to the pranks we never pulled. And never will."

No matter what conflicting emotions are expressed in the lyrics, the hammer often falls in the last line and we're

left with nothing but bleakness. The opening track, "Non-Photo Blue," is a study in modern futility which ends with the disturbing, "I'm leaving a message stapled on your head." On

"Syracuse," Smith repeats the same two lines over and over while minimalist guitar and drums slither in the background. The song finds its legs after almost two minutes and finishes beautifully as a piano-driven ballad.

Smith and Crow harmonize very well, often to hypnotic effect, and Smith chanting a refrain throughout a song with Crow providing counterpoint. As mentioned, there isn't much to distinguish these songs one from another, but that's not necessarily bad. Pinback seems to have found a comfortable formula with this one, and an unbroken mood is created until the last song, "AFK," the longest at five minutes, when some musical angst begins to appear. Louder singing and a frantic drumbeat insinuate that they haven't found their way out of the abyss just yet. Still, the torment is tepid and the song re-emerges as a lilting groove like the others.

Those who like early, noisier Touch and Go rock will appreciate the last line's reference to Slint's 1991 song "Good Morning,

Captain." "I can't talk to you anymore and I miss you, not in a Slint way, but I miss you." As in the past, the pair continue their inscrutable references to water and sometimes meaningless word play. It's been revealed in past interviews with Pinback that Smith writes melodies first with words that don't make sense but which fit well with the music. That can be seen here, especially on the song "Fortress," with the lines "Safe as a cootie wootie with you, never pretend the chill."

Regardless of what Smith and Crow are crooning, the lyrics percolate gently over disarmingly lively pop music. Guitar and bass melodies masquerade as simple but reveal themselves after a couple of listens as complex and layered. Live, Pinback does not sound as they do on record. On stage, it's more of an interpretation of their recorded works, which frequently feature samples and other sound effects they don't duplicate live. When they write, it's just Crow and Smith. On stage, it could be anything from a three-piece to a five-piece and there's a lot of instrument switching.

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music BY BRETT CAMPBELL



Morality is a tricky thing. Somehow it was supposed to be moral to vote for those who supported an unprovoked attack against another country; tax cuts that robbed our children and grandchildren of health care; jobs and education to pay for second yachts for multimillionaires; policies that poison the air, land and water to benefit a few wealthy corporations; and laws that forbid people who love each other to form a lifetime marriage commitment. The holidays used to be about morality, too, especially helping those who were less fortunate than us. Now they're about who can get the most and biggest toys.

But you can start your holiday season off in the spirit of true morality and enjoy some great music at the same time by attending the third annual benefit concert for famine relief in Southern Africa at Cozmic Pizza on Saturday, Dec. 4, beginning at 7 pm. While we scarf down holiday turkey (or Tofurkey) and dressing, 18 million people in Southern Africa are in desperate need of food assistance, according to the U.N. Benefits from this concert will go to Mercy Corps, the respected Portland-based non-profit organization that has provided almost a billion dollars in assistance to 80 nations. In return, you'll get to hear some of the beautiful music that originated in that area, with performances by Kutsinhira Marimba Youth Ensemble, Vakasara Mbira, Njuzu Mbira, and Kudana Marimba. This lively, joyous music of the metal-keyed marimba and mbira (the so-called thumb piano from Zimbabwe), accompanied by gourd hosho (shakers) and Shona singing and enhanced with coordinated visuals by Phantazmagoria Lights, is guaranteed to inspire dancing and delight here as well as feeding people in need across the oceans.

That's one of a slew of intriguing shows at Cozmic Pizza. On Dec. 3, Vagabond Opera plays eastern European, klezmer and original music, accompanied by the Bohemian belly dancers of Terpsichore's Daughters, in songs about "thieves, Jewish weddings, Parisian tramps and the enigmatic Marlene Deitrich." And on Nov. 26th, Cozmic hosts the Cafe Ramblers turkey review, a post-Thanksgiving family recovery

show with swing jazz, theater, costumes, music.

Famine, war, religious fanaticism, corruption, plague and social turmoil — maybe we haven't come that far from what the historian Barbara Tuchman called "the calamitous 14th century." You can hear songs of "angst, love, and betrayal" from that era on Sunday Dec. 5, also at Cozmic Pizza, when Sospiro, a trio of UO master's students studying early music perform some of the darker songs of the Middle Ages, as well as three new works written especially for the ensemble and premiering at this concert.

Speaking of the UO, holiday sounds, sacred and secular, fill the air at the school's annual holiday choral concert Thursday, Dec. 2 at Beall Concert Hall, featuring the University Singers, Chamber Choir, and Concert Choir. More holiday sounds abound in a free Beall concert on Saturday afternoon, Dec. 4, with the Campus Band and Repertoire Singers. Beall hosts the UO Gospel Choir's ever-popular holiday concert on Dec. 5 — another rollicking show that often sells out. Other recommended UO concerts include the University Percussion Ensemble on Dec. 5 at Beall and the university's Javanese gamelan at DIVA on Dec. 2.

The big holiday concert hereabouts is the Eugene Concert Choir's Old-Fashioned Christmas on Sunday afternoon, Dec. 5 at the Hult Center's Silva Concert Hall. This show sold out last year, so if you want to see and hear Christmas carols and other holiday sounds (including excerpts from Benjamin Britten's *St. Nicolas Cantata*) performed by the city's top choral group, plus Eugene Vocal Arts Ensemble in Renaissance garb, the Oregon Mozart Players, the Don Latarski Band, Darlene Jackson, the Oregon Young Women's Choir, the Oregon Festival Choirs "Lyrica" and "Fiero," and La Vida Royale, get tix PDQ.

Still in her 20s, Jane Monheit might be the next big jazz diva, following Diana Krall, Cassandra Wilson, Diane Reeves and so many others. Her debut album featured jazz deities Ron Carter and Kenny Barron, and along with her sterling solo work, she's appeared on records by Mark O'Connor, Terence Blanchard and more. She has a distinctive way with songs from jazz standards to contemporary pop, and anyone who admires the singers mentioned above should be at her show at the Shedd on Monday, Dec. 6.

Jazz fans might also check out Toby Koenigsberg's trio Dec. 2 at Luna, abetted by the award-winning New York/Portland tenor titan Tim Willcox, playing jazz standards and originals. Finally, you can hear a couple of fine veteran local musicians when flutist Alan McCullough and guitarist Peter Thomas celebrate the release of their new CD, *Discovery*, at the Newman Center (1850 Emerald) on Sunday, Dec. 4. The album includes 16 original compositions influenced by Baroque, Celtic, and Spanish music. **EW**