

WILLPOWER AND HUMANISTIC SURGE

A collaborative conversation about everything with Flaming Lips ringleader Wayne Coyne

I've seen The Flaming Lips covered in fake blood with skeletons and Santa Claus and dancing bears and huge balloons. I've seen The Flaming Lips emerge from a UFO on the edge of a cliff. I've seen The Flaming Lips spit out of a florescent flashing womb.

And I've seen the Flaming Lips, sweating in my Cat in the Hat costume, blinded by confetti and realizing the pre-show seizure warning for the light display wasn't a joke. And yet ...

"Every time somebody gives me an inch, I take a fucking mile," says Wayne Coyne, the Flaming Lips ringleader, during the course of a genial phone conversation. "It's that way for all art in a sense," Coyne continues. "It just takes hands on determination."

This is coming from a man three decades deep into a kaleidoscopic array of surreally postmodern musical and visual work that continues to get weirder and louder, chafing on the edge of psychedelic extravagance and anchored solidly in a DIY ethos.

"We have a small, badass crew," Coyne says, and the capabilities and ideas seem as endless as the persistence of memory.

The upcoming June 1 release of a 52-track *Greatest Hits: Vol 1*, which includes a bowlful of previously unreleased material, marks a big undertaking described by Coyne as a reconceptualization of everything the band has done up to this point, organized in a way it was never intended to be. This release follows last year's *Oczy Mlody*, a hauntingly cheerful



WAYNE COYNE (LEFT) AND STEVEN DROZD

float through the synaptic system in typical Lips fashion.

"I don't really know how music works," Coyne says. "It's humbling and embarrassing, but with enough willpower and a humanistic surge you just make it up."

But music, for Coyne, was the catalyst that allowed everything else to come out. Music provided the platform for the props, the sets, the paintings, the sculptures, the drawings, the prints — this whole torrent of creative eccentricity built on no-talent guitars and smoke machines.

"All of it is really personality driven," he says. "Part of you is absolutely too self-conscious, but to do anything you need so much help. Most of the people I know who are doing great are hardworking, beautiful motherfuckers, and that's who I want to work with."

These collaborations, and even the ability to be doing all this work, Coyne explains, come from the projection of

"a character that you go out to play. In time, you become that character. The only way to be authentic is in this fake way, but that becomes you, who you want to be."

For Coyne, this confidence was inspired by coarsely enthusiastic support throughout his youth, drawing and making paintings in the kitchen while his older brothers encouraged him to keep it up. Now he's the de facto art director of a group responsible for abstract sonic parking-lot experiments, a film called *Christmas on Mars*, a now-ubiquitous crowd-surfing hamster ball and a recent panoply of collaborative releases including a *Sgt. Pepper* remake that's freakier, if not farther out, than the original.

And yet ... I'm still not sure what to expect when they come to town. — Patrick Newson

The Flaming Lips play with Blank 9 pm Saturday, June 2, at McDonald Theatre; \$50; VIP package available (with letterpress print!) \$150.

REVIVALS AND ARRIVALS

June brings us Jerome Kern, new music and Nellie McKay

Frat boys and jocks were popular subjects for Jazz Age musicals. Jerome Kern's 1933 *Roberta* wasn't as important or as lucrative as Kern's earlier *Showboat*, but it scored several hit ballads, including the magnificent "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" and "Yesterday," which later became a jazz standard.

As usual, **The Shedd's** thoughtful revival of *Roberta*, opening Friday, June 8, includes a couple of big Kern songs ("Lovely To Look At," "I Won't Dance") added to the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers film two years later.

Lyricist/book writer Otto Harbach's zany excuse for a plot involves a vengeful socialite (also popular as Depression relief), a fratty American college footballer who winds up owning a Parisian dress shop, a clandestine Russian princess and more.

The original Broadway production featured soon-to-be stars Bob Hope and Fred MacMurray, and frequent revivals for stage and screens included many other 20th-century celebs. Directed by **Peg Major**, The Shedd's revival, which runs June 8-17, stars **Dylan Stasack** and **Caitlin Christopher** (who also choreographs) as the central couple.

Another frequent Shedd visitor sings American Songbook standards from her intimate new album, *Sister Orchid*, in a Eugene appearance June 7.

But this time, **Nellie McKay** actually takes the WOW Hall stage. Just 36, the multitalented singer/actor/songwriter/activist has appeared on and off Broadway (the latter in an original musical); created musical tributes to Rachel Carson, Doris Day, Joan Rivers and gender-bending jazz pioneer Billy Tipton; performed in and written music for films; appeared on shows from Mountain Stage to Piano Jazz to Letterman; written for *The Onion* and *The New York Times*; and won awards from PETA and others for her animal rights activism. (She also advocates for human rights, universal health and child care, living wages and other civilized notions.)

Like everything the inventive McKay touches, her nocturnal new album is more than just a retro reverence, nor archly ironic either. Playing all the instruments (piano, ukulele, harmonica, cello and more), she slips her own gently whimsical stamp on standards ("Lazybones," "Where or When," "Willow Weep for Me," et al.) and a few obscurities — what McKay calls "music to be played at the bar at the end of the world."

More standards — from jazz giants like Monk, Ellington, Silver and Metheny — decorate the program on pianist **George Colligan's** trio date at the intimate Broadway House bungalow on Friday, June 1. This time the nationally acclaimed (including a Downbeat award) Portland State prof and frequent New York sideman, who's just released his 28th album as a leader, brings fellow Portlanders **Micah Hummel** on drums and bassist **Eric Gruber**. Email Paul Bodin to reserve seats at pbodin@uoregon.edu.

That same night, just a few blocks away, Eugene composer/pianist Paul Safar and singer Nancy Wood's **Love Truffle** plays jazzy pop from Ellington, Hendrix and more.

Wait, you want new music, you say? Best bet is the free performance Sunday afternoon, June 1, by **Emblems Quintet** at the UO's new Tykeson Rehearsal Hall, 961 E 18th Avenue. The ensemble members hail from the U.S., South Africa, Canada and beyond, and two — Portland oboist **Clarissa Osborn** and Michigan bassoonist/composer **Brandon Scott Rumsey** are UO alumni.

Along with Rumsey's lively, tuneful 2016 *Emblems*, which gave the ensemble its name, the show features a world premiere by emerging composer Nathan Thatcher, a mid-20th-century classic by the pioneering American composer Ruth Crawford Seeger and a playful recent piece by Icelandic composer Finnur Karlsson.

You can hear current UO student musicians strut their stuff at the school's annual Spring Concert at the Hult Center Saturday. The award winning **Chamber Choir** sings music by the late, great Estonian composer Veljo Tormis and other tunes from the Philippines, Haiti, Scotland and even the good ol' USA.

The **UO Wind Ensemble**, **Brass Quintet** and **Orchestra** also play music by Aaron Copland (the rarely heard *Orchestral Variations*), contemporary composers and, on his centennial, the great Leonard Bernstein's glorious *Chichester Psalms* (with the **University Choir**) and a suite from his *Mass*.

That's only one of the UO's many end-of-year concerts happening on and around campus, from the ever-popular gospel concert to flute, percussion, orchestra, jazz and more. — Brett Campbell