

Arts & Entertainment

Blues Guy Ben Arnold Jams at MCCC

By Tara Durkin

It's Monday afternoon, lunchtime in the cafeteria of Montgomery County Community College's Pottstown Campus. A guy in a plaid shirt, jeans and chucks stands on what looks like a portable stage. Ben Arnold picks up his guitar and starts into his set. The crowd isn't paying attention; they're eating lunch, gossiping and frantically trying to get homework done before class. They haven't noticed that the music in the background is happening twenty feet away from them. No one clapped as he finished his first song, but Arnold expected that. He introduced himself to his incidental audience along with a disclaimer. "This is just as awkward for me as it is for you," said Arnold in a voice that reached only the people already paying attention.

The singer-songwriter says he isn't too caught up in the fame and fortune often associated with being a musician. He's been in the game a long time, with an initial record that dropped in the early nineties, and says at this point, he's in it for his love of making music rather than "any big brass ring." That is why he books shows in school cafeterias like the two he played as part of the College's Fall 2008 Music Series Live program. The shows took place Monday Nov. 17 at Pottstown and the following Wednesday at the Blue Bell campus. His audience at Blue Bell, a bustling cafeteria twice the size of Pottstown's, was a little more engaged. Although it started out just as awkwardly, towards the end of

his set, students were dancing and clapping along.

Arnold, usually backed by a band, played solo for both performances. He switched between a guitar and an electric piano, which he says can run him the risk of "sounding either like folk or lounge music when you're playing solo." Students like Binky Patel, 23-year-old computer science major at Blue Bell campus, had no complaints. She enjoyed his music and said he has a "nice voice and is very talented with his instruments." Luis Maradiaga, a criminal justice major at Pottstown, was one of the few West Campus students who took a break from his daily routines to check out the music. Maradiaga, who preferred the piano numbers, said he intends to tell all of his friends to check Arnold out.

Arnold's casual approach towards interacting with the crowd that seemed almost lazy at first, made sense after hearing his self proclaimed "lyrical, soulful pop." The lyrics sell themselves to people willing to listen, and it is these people, Arnold says, he hopes to reach in playing small shows. He found at least a couple of fans while at the college. Avery Kachline, 23-year-old student, compared Arnold's laid back vocal style to Randy Newman and said "you can tell he's playing for himself, not an audience, and he finds his audience through that."

For more information about Ben Arnold, visit www.benarnoldmusic.com or www.myspace.com/benarnoldband.



Photo by Danielle Charlton

Album Review

The Mighty Underdogs: 'Droppin' Science Fiction'

By Aaron Henry, Music Critic

Underdogs -- exceeding expectations. Defying the odds. Succeeding in the face of imminent failure: It's the way of life for many on the underground hip-hop scene. With this theme in mind, some of rap's greatest underdogs joined forces to defy the odds once again: Headnodic (producer/bassist of Crown City Rockers), Lateef the Truth Speaker (one half of Latyrx), and Gift of Gab (emcee of Blackalicious) teamed up with stalwart indie hip-hop label Definitive Jux Records in order to produce "Droppin' Science Fiction," the debut LP from The Mighty Underdogs.

With the pieces of the puzzle in place, it was up to Headnodic, Lateef, and Gift of Gab to out-do themselves once again. In the course of forty-eight minutes and thirty-three seconds, the crew covers everything from gas prices and tragic inner city conditions to saloon showdowns

and lavish international vacations. While the core group of Underdogs is strong, the album is further aided by an all-star supporting cast that includes Julian and Damian Marley, The Perceptionists (Mr. Lif and Akrobatik), Lyrics Born (the other half of Latyrx), Casual of Hieroglyphics, and the metal-faced madman MF DOOM. The end result is a lyrically intense, musically diverse album that takes a mostly relaxed, melodic tone. Key tracks for the skeptics to check include "So Sad," "Ill Vacation," and "Laughing At You," though the entire album is worth a listen front-to-back.

Fans of Crown City Rockers, Latyrx, and Blackalicious should already know what to expect from this album, and this disc should fit in nicely with your collection. If you're unfamiliar with The Mighty Underdogs crew, set aside your doubts for just one moment and give this record a spin. You just might have your expectations shattered.