

In Tune

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Criss: From 'Glee' guest to heartthrob

NEW YORK (AP) — Darren Criss isn't even officially a full-time cast member on "Glee," yet he's one of the most popular stars on the Fox TV show. The actor made his debut last fall as Blaine Anderson, a gay student at Dalton Academy where Chris Colfer's character, Kurt, transfers after being bullied out.

Criss performed a version of Katy Perry's "Teenage Dream" that quickly became one of the show's most popular performances to date. Viewers were smitten, and the 24-year-old was quickly written into most of the season's episodes.

Now, fans can get an extra dose of Criss on the new album "Glee: The Music Presents The Warblers."

The Associated Press: Your performances are so popular on "Glee." What's it like to be on an album?

Criss: They're all incredible songs, so I really enjoyed them all. I worked super-hard. If people are enjoying them I'm glad because it's not something that I took lightly, so I'm really happy.

AP: What would you like to see on "Glee" that hasn't happened yet?

Criss: I would really love it to start in the summer because I want to see what these kids are up to when they're not in school. ... I just want to see a little bit of summer jobs and it kind of opens up a whole lot of things. I always joke that everyone in "Glee" is like family-less. No one has parents, no one has brothers or sisters ... like any time they have a concert or something,

the parents never come, I guess. No one really cares. No one's driving them home afterward. I don't know how they're getting around. They're like 15, 16 years old (laughs).

AP: When did you realize your first appearance on the show was a big deal?

Criss: I don't watch a lot of TV. I'm really busy so I wasn't really feeling it. I was living in my little ... apartment. It was really dirty. Nothing really manifested itself in an immediate way. I still had laundry to do, bills to pay. ... Any successes it may have garnered it didn't hit me (laughs) at all so

it was this very intangible thing. People were like, "It's doing really well" and I was like, "OK, great."

AP: Are you getting recognized a lot?

Criss: It depends where I go. ... If it happens, I'm happy to address it, because I consider myself very fortunate. You know, at least I didn't release a — that you know of — a sex tape, or I haven't done anything illicitly terrible where you know, I'm sort of cowering in shame. It's something that I'm really proud of and I should be so lucky and if someone wants to talk to me about it, "Hell yeah."

AP: Do you have plans to release a solo album?

Criss: I was kind of at a crossroads right before I started "Glee." I was literally about to throw in the towel with acting because music was proving itself sort of more mentally, spiritually and financially lucrative. I started a theatre company in Chicago, Team StarKid, and my EP "Human" started doing really well and that was gonna be my life. ... "Glee" has both empowered and complicated that whole process. Whatever album I was about to put out got put aside for a little bit. ... It'll happen eventually.

Tanks for coming



The Sharks swim into Pittsburgh's Stage AE on the North Shore Wednesday night in support of punk legends Social Distortion. Tickets are \$30 for the rain-or-shine show and can be purchased at www.ticketmaster.com.

Turnbuckle It's time for the WWE to unify its champions

By GEORGE DISHONG

The time has come for the WWE to have a unification title match between the WWE champion and the World Heavyweight champion. Where's the logic in having two champions in one company?

The reason why they do so is to allow both the "Raw" and "Smackdown" shows to boast having their own champion. The thought of having two champions is so ridiculous that it sounds like something WCW would do during the Vince Russo era.

Everybody knows the WWE championship is the top title. It doesn't matter who the World Heavyweight champion is, he will always be viewed as the second champion. If the WWE were to have a unification match, it would be quite obvious the WWE champion would win.

The WWE championship dates back to 1963. Guys like Buddy Rogers, Bruno Sammartino, Superstar Billy Graham, Bob Backlund and Hulk Hogan have all held the title. The World Heavyweight championship has been around since 2002, and it has nowhere near the same appeal as the WWE title.

The World Heavyweight champion is nothing more than a glorified Intercontinental champion. It would make much more sense if they have only one champion and let him defend his title on both shows. That way the champion could have more guys to work with.

There were rumors of a possible unification title match over the last year, but those rumors have since quieted down. A unification match has been long overdue. Hopefully it happens sooner rather than later.

Around the Ring — Former X Division champion Jay Lethal was released by TNA last month. ... Both Triple H and the Undertaker were fined by the WWE for the chair shot to the head that occurred during their Wrestlemania 27 match. WWE banned chair shots to the head a year ago as part of its concussion program. WWE did not disclose the amount of the fine. ... There has been talk of the Undertaker going to "Raw" once he recovers from his injuries. ... KSWA is hosting a show tonight at the Lawrenceville Moose entitled "Mayhem At The Moose." Visit www.kswa.net for details. ... NWA East's next show is "Unforgiven 5" on May 21. For more information, go to www.nwaeast.org.

Butch, Sundance the inspiration for Vaudevileins' debut



VAUDEVILEINS, self-titled (self-released) ☆☆☆½ — Citing musical influences that include heavyweights Nirvana, Led Zeppelin and the White Stripes, Chicago rockers

Vaudevileins (what's up with the name, fellas?) turned to a classic film for inspiration when crafting their self-titled debut album of proggy pop/rock. Many of the song titles on the 10-track platter are gleaned from "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid," one of frontman Jeff Julian's favorite flicks, though the subject matter of said tunes don't have much to do with the Paul Newman/Robert Redford classic.

Highlights include "Legends," "Bolivia," "The Fall Will Probably Kill You" and "Small Price to Pay for Beauty," though Vaudevileins acquit themselves nicely on "Hello to Australia" and "You're the Brains." Though not especially original, Vaudevileins are a talented young band. (Jeffrey Sisk)



SWINGIN' UTTERS, "Here, Under Protest" (Fat Wreck Chords) ☆☆☆½ — With a career that's well over two decades in duration, nobody would blame San Francisco punk

rockers the Swingin' Utters for resting on their laurels. Yet the guys roar back with a vengeance on "Here, Under Protest," their first full-length since 2004's "Live In A Dive," and one of the best entries on their impressive résumé.

With 14 high-octane tracks clocking in at a brisk 33 minutes, the Utters deliver their streetpunk tunes with reckless abandon. The fellas share the vocals duties throughout, keeping stellar tracks "Brand New Lungs," "Bent Collector of 1,000 Limbs," "Kick It Over," "Heavy Head," "Time on My Own," "Lepers, Thieves and Whores" and "Scary Brittle Frame" sounding fresh. This band hasn't lost a step. (JS)

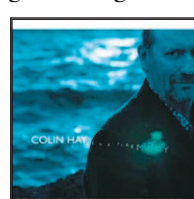


KINA GRANNIS, "Stairwells" (One Haven/The Orchard) ☆☆☆ — If you have satellite radio and listen to the Coffee House station, chances are you've heard a tune or two from

singer/songwriter Kina Grannis. There's a definite audience for her simple brand of pop, though more established artists like Michelle Branch, KT Tunstall and Vanessa Carlton do it better. In hopes of expanding her fan base — she has a loyal following on

YouTube — Grannis has tinkered with last year's "Stairwells" release.

This remastered version of the record includes different cover art and new songs "Gone," "It's Love," "The One You Say Goodnight To" and "Without Me," which replace "Strong Enough," "Together," "Cambridge," "Stay Just a Little" and "Back to Us." It's a slight improvement on the original platter, though still falls short of being an essential purchase. Grannis has a pretty voice and some legitimate song-writing chops, so there's a chance that she'll give us a great album some day. (JS)



COLIN HAY, "Gathering Mercury" (Lazy Eye) ☆☆☆½ — As a child of the 1980s, I was a big fan of Australian pop group Men at Work. Their first two albums — 1982's

"Business as Usual" and 1983's "Cargo" — were pretty close to perfect and spawned a handful of hit singles, but by 1986 the band was history. Frontman Colin Hay has continued to make music over the ensuing decades — much of it quite good — though he's never returned to those levels of popularity.

Hay's latest effort is the rock-solid "Gathering Mercury," a tasty collection of adult contemporary tunes that are enjoyable even though they lack some of the manic energy that characterized Men at Work's best stuff. Tunes such as "Family Man," "Invisible," the title track, "Where the Sky Is Blue" and "A Simple Song" are the highlights of the 10-song release, which includes four bonus "stripped" remixes that, frankly, weren't necessary. It's nice to see that Hay, 57, is still going strong. (JS)



THE SANDWICHES, "Mrs. Jones' Cookies" (Empty Cellar) ☆☆☆ — An all-girl lo-fi trio comprised of former Fresh & Onlys backup singers Grace

Cooper and Heidi Alexander, as well as Pillars of Silence drummer Roxy Brodeur, the Sandwitches have made a name for themselves over the past couple years. The excellent "Mrs. Jones' Cookies" is their sophomore full-length, and the San Francisco-based band has further refined their psych-rock sound.

Cooper and Alexander play off one another vocally throughout, unfurling off-kilter harmonies that, while not exactly soothing, nevertheless command your attention. Among the highlights of the 10-track release are opener "In the Garden,"

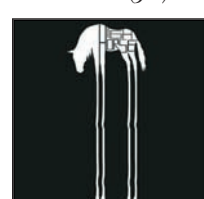
the piercing wail of "Summer of Love," personal favorite "Heaviest Head In the West," "Over the Moon" and "Joe Says." A bit of an acquired taste, these Sandwitches are quite yummy. (JS)



ART OF DYING, "Vices and Virtues" (Reprise) ☆☆☆ — Reports of the death of alternative metal have been greatly exaggerated. Either that, or Canadian export Art of

Dying didn't get the memo. The band's "Vices and Virtues" debut mines much of the territory Creed and Nickelback were exploring a decade ago, though Art of Dying tweak the formula just enough to keep things interesting.

Anthemic rockers "Die Trying" and "You Don't Know Me" lay the foundation for the 11-track release, and the guys show their versatility with the mid-tempo gem "Sorry" and less impressive power ballads "I Will Be There" and "Best I Can." If you're a fan of this kind of music, I'm guessing you'll get a kick out of "Vices and Virtues." (JS)



HIGH HORSE, self-titled (High School Football) ☆☆☆ — Mixing members of the Necronauts (siblings Billy and Dale Goodman) and now-defunct Stereotyperider

(Mike Upsahl) proves a winning combination for High Horse, whose self-titled debut EP of punk-tinged indie rock is 21 minutes of sonic bliss.

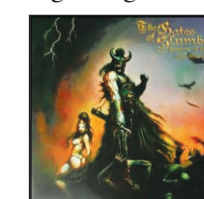
Things get off to a stellar start from the very outset with "Uncomplicated" and "New Friends," and following a minor hiccup with the so-so "You're Nicer In My Dreams," the fellas close things out with a flourish with "Pick Me Up," personal favorite "S****y Things," "Pros and Cons" and "Spools for Fools." This is one of those records you'll enjoy a little more every time you listen. Giddyap! (JS)



PENTAGRAM, "Last Rites" (Metal Blade) ☆☆☆½ — For all intent and purposes, Bobby Liebling should be dead. So should Pentagram, the doom rock band that would have/could have/should have been gigantic stars in the '70s and '80s had it not been for Liebling's drug and legal issues. But here we are, four decades after the Pentagram concept was born, and we have

a strong new album from this band.

Many of these songs are reworked tracks from Liebling's expansive songbook, and only three of the cuts are brand new. That's probably what gives this album such a true vintage feel, and Liebling (as well as returning guitarist Victor Griffin) sounds in command for the most part on "Treat Me Right," "8," and "Windmills and Chimes," a folk-laden ballad that's as dorky as it is cool. It's a miracle this record even happened, and maybe a bigger surprise is that it's so rock solid. Hopefully it's a new beginning that will last. (Brian Krasman)



GATES OF SLUMBER, "The Wretch" (Rise Above/Metal Blade) ☆☆☆ — Indiana doom troops

Gates of Slumber went a slightly different direction on their fifth disc "The Wretch." They reached back to the '70s/'80s pioneers, slowed down their assault and delivered one of the best discs of their career.

From the opening cut "Bastards Born," you can feel a definitive difference in the band from their past two albums. It's still heavy as can be, but it sits in its own smoke and just simmers. There are times when the band pushes the tempo a bit, such as on "To the Rack With Them" and "Coven of Cain," but for the most part, these are thought-out, barbaric journeys on falling-apart tale "Day of Farewell," bluesy and eerie "Castle of the Devil," and epic closer "Iron and Fire." (BK)



WHILE HEAVEN WEPT, "Fear of Infinity" (Nuclear Blast) ☆☆☆ — Two decades into their career, While Heaven Wept are moving up in the world. After the success of 2009's excellent "Vast Oceans Lachrymose," they moved to indie powerhouse Nuclear Blast and put together another power/prog display with "Fear of Infinity."

Unfortunately, some of their fourth full-length "Fear" sounds a little bit rushed, like perhaps they just couldn't wait to get something new into the market. It's not a bad disc by any means, as there's some true emotional value in "Hour of Reprisal," "To Grieve Forever" and closing cut "Finality." But "Destroyer of Solace" does not make best use of talented frontman Rain Irving, and some of the rest of the material just falls a little flat.

WHW can do better, and hopefully they will next time. (BK)