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Greg Haymes



## Capital holidays

Stuff those stockings with local music

By GREG HAYMES, Staff writer

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The holidays are just around the corner now, and if you're like me, well, maybe it's time to start thinking about starting your Christmas shopping.

Fortunately, there are a bunch of Capital Region musicians who are coming to the rescue with brand new CDs.

At the top of the list is one of my very favorite local combos, the wild and crazy Sgt. Dunbar and the Hobo Banned. A loose collective of musicians -- which means that you never really know for sure how many will show up -- the Hobo Banned absolutely blew me away when I caught them in action in October opening for the Avett Brothers at Revolution Hall.

Main man Alex Munro stood at the microphone playing guitar and singing, while a constant whirlwind of activity swirled around him onstage. There seemed to be about a dozen musicians, and they were playing everything from the French horn to the fiddle to the typewriter. And nearly every musician seemed to switch instruments two or three times -- often all during just one song.

I immediately picked up their CD, "Waiting for the Space Age," which they released earlier in the year, and I've been playing it regularly ever since. Now, however, the Hobo Banned is back with a brand-new disc, "The Thing About Time." That's right, their second full-length CD of the year.

Describing the music is difficult at best. For example, the opening track, "Passing Time," features churning acoustic guitar, tribal percussion and a mariachi horn section. The disc lists seven members this time around, playing such instruments as flugelhorn, trumpet, banjo, saxophone, accordion, euphonium, singing saw, trombone, piano, kazoo, hot water pipes, avant-garde stainless-steel chair and squeaky glass pot top.

This is wonderous stuff, and it's even more fun in person, so get to Valentine's on Saturday night to help the Hobo Banned celebrate their new disc with a serious party.

Like the Hobo Banned, Flame is a big ensemble, and there's always something going onstage when they're in the spotlight. The 11-piece, Johnstown-based group has released its sophomore CD just in time for the holidays, and "Holiday Classics" is a gem. The 14 tunes range from traditional carols ("O Holy Night" and "Silent Night") to pop favorites ("White Christmas" and "Winter Wonderland") to rock-era nuggets like "Jingle Bell Rock" and "Happy Xmas (War Is Over)." And vocalist Michelle King nails 'em all with a rich and very soulful voice.

Listening to this joyous disc, you'd never know that the members of Flame all have physical and/or developmental disabilities, including autism, blindness and Down syndrome. Inspiring and highly recommended. Available at <http://www.flametheband.com>

Latham singer-songwriter Drew Jacobs calls himself an "acoustic humorist." And with such songs as "You Never Heard Me Play My Guitar," "My Bad" and "Fortune Cookie," his new CD, "Easy Listening for the Hard of Hearing," certainly delivers some chuckles. Half of the disc was recorded at Jacobs' home studio, while the other half was recorded live at Cat Trax Studio in Schenectady.

Catch Jacobs playing a free solo show at the Perfect Blend in Delmar on Friday evening.

The new record label Woodstock MusicWorks was launched last month with the release of Mechanical Bull's "A Million Yesterdays." Now the label is back with its sophomore disc, "Light & Blood" by Texas-born, Brooklyn-based singer-songwriter Bret Mosley. There are a baker's dozen of great rootsy tunes here recorded by the rich-voiced, blues-based Mosley. The music is both spare and sparkling.

Mosley hosts a CD release party at the Bearsville Theater tonight. Or tune in to hear him live on "Performance Place" on WAMC (90.3 FM) at 11:25 a.m. today.

Berkshire-based Power-popsters Hector On Stilts are also offering up a new disc. "Fun Size" is a tasty little, four-song CD. It all goes by in just over 12 minutes, but it's so sweet. Catch the band in concert at Ballingers in Albany on Friday, where they'll be playing their CD release party. Maggie Mayday shares the stage.

Rock 'n' ink: If CDs won't fill out your gift-giving list this year, maybe a tattoo will do the trick. The Rat-a-Tat Tattoo & Music Expo takes place this weekend at Northern Lights in Clifton Park with dozens of tattoo artists on hand. In addition, more than a dozen bands will be performing throughout the weekend.

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In the spotlight

Sgt. Dunbar and the Hobo Banned. With Son of Adam and Margan & the Red Lions. 8 p.m. Saturday. Valentine's, 17 New Scotland Ave., Albany. 432-6572.

Drew Jacobs. 7 p.m. Friday. The Perfect Blend, 376 Delaware Ave., Delmar. 439-6537. Free.

Bret Mosley. With Michael Eck. 9 tonight. The Bearsville Theater, 291 Tinker St., Woodstock. (845) 679-4406. \$10.

Hector on Stilts. With Maggie Mayday. 9 p.m. Friday. Ballingers, 42 Howard St., Albany. 598-1800. \$5.

Rat-A-Tat Tattoo & Music Expo featuring Murphy's Law, Brick by Brick, Joe Coffee, more. Noon Saturday and Sunday. Northern Lights, Route 146, Clifton Park. 371-0012. \$15 per day.

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