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Statewide weight-loss
contest under way

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Jobs, rentals & wheels

THE SIDEBAR



Eastern Blok

MSU announces spring performance series

MANKATO — Minnesota State University's Performance Series will host 11 visiting artists this semester. In addition, 12 student ensemble events will be performed during the spring.

Here is an outline of the guest performers:

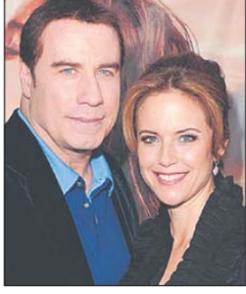
- Jan. 25: The Tex Pistols, Americana roots music.
 - Jan. 30: InPulse a Cappella Vocal Group
 - Feb. 8: Willie Murphy and Pat Hayes, Minneapolis West Bank sound.
 - Feb. 13: The Chiarina Piano Quartet, classical ensemble.
 - Feb. 15: Eastern Blok, world music ensemble.
 - Feb. 17: Scottie Miller, pop pianist.
 - Feb. 20: Karlyn Bond, classical pianist.
 - Feb. 26: Gordon Goodwin and Jazzfest 2011, Goodwin performs with the Jazz Mavericks Big Band.
 - March 17: Carolyn Wilkins, jazz vocalist, pianist.
 - March 20: Craicmore, music of Scotland and Ireland.
 - March 24 : Fared Haque and the Flat Earth Ensemble, folk music of Pakistan and North Western India.
- For more information, visit www.mnsu.edu.

Celeb news

Travolta says baby boy 'new beginning' for family

NEW YORK — John Travolta says their 7-week-old baby boy is "a new beginning" for his family.

The actor and his wife, Kelly Preston, posed with their son, Benjamin, for the cover of the new issue of People magazine.



Travolta says Benjamin has "brought us a new beginning" and "given the house a renewed spirit and purpose."

Travolta and Preston's oldest child, son Jett, died in 2008 at the age of 16.

Benjamin was born in November in Florida. Preston, 48, and Travolta, 56, also have a 10-year-old daughter, Ella Bleu.

— Free Press Staff and news services

Swing's sexier cousin roomful of BLUES

Blues nights at Savoy encourage people to move

By Jake Bohrod
Special to The Free Press

Watching skilled dancers can be as discouraging as it is mesmerizing. The grace with which they move, their intimate understanding of each other, their perfect synchronicity with the music.

This is why you should envy Reid Breitenfeldt and Rebecca Swanson.

"Squeeze a little harder."

"Create more tension."

"Try it again."

"Okay, let's rotate."

Breitenfeldt's instructions mirror those of a personal trainer. It's Wednesday night, and Breitenfeldt and Swanson are directing a small group of slowly scuttling couples during Blues Night at Savoy on South Front Street. It's the culmination of a three-year effort to put dance back on the southern Minnesota map.

"There was a need," said Swanson, a Gustavus graduate in communication studies.

It started with house parties, where the couple would join friends and other dance enthusiasts for entire nights dedicated to blues and swing. If houses weren't available, they would find someone's cramped apartment; the last resort, said Swanson, was her miniature dorm room.

Once they realized the house parties weren't working, the two found a permanent location at Savoy, where blues bands familiar with the couple's dancing skills would ask for them by name. And while swing dancing had a foothold with the student crowd — both Minnesota State University and Gustavus have swing clubs — Breitenfeldt, a graduate student at MSU,

believed that blues should be their

solitary focus.

"It had the potential to appeal to a broader (section) of people," he said. "Blues dancing is kind of (swing's) sexier cousin."

"(It's) the classy bump-and-grind," Swanson added.

Each Blues Night begins with a lesson. Usually it begins with a hug. Successful blues dancing, the two said, relies on the comfort of the couple. Then comes leading, shifting weight, frame exercises and so on.

On this particular night, Breitenfeldt undergoes an experiment. To emphasize trust, he assigns the follower in each couple to close her eyes as her partner guides her around the room. One vindictive leader takes pleasure in scooting his partner around the entire restaurant, narrowly missing the corners of tables and the legs of stools.

That man is Dale Jordan. "I knew how to jitterbug, but I didn't know exactly what that was," Jordan said of his knowledge of dance previous to becoming more involved.

The electrical engineer (who, as a side note, also ran against state Rep. Kathy Brynaert in the 2008 election) said at first most of his dancing experience came through the MSU and Gustavus swing clubs. Now, events such as Blues Night give him the opportunity to branch out.

"If a person wanted to dance every night of the week you could almost get away with it," he said.

When Breitenfeldt switched the leaders, Jordan's partner returned the favor.

Since many of their participants are from one of the area universities' clubs, much of the couple's lessons work to undo some of the prescriptions of swing dancing.



Submitted photo

Reid Breitenfeldt and Rebecca Swanson teach blues dancing at Savoy. They describe blues dancing as swing's "sexier cousin."

"Swing is one of the safer dances," Breitenfeldt explained, while blues demands a higher level of intimacy. "It takes more time to loosen up," Swanson said.

The main difference between the two styles, of course, is the music. Breitenfeldt described it as "sexier, more emotional music" that translates to a sexier, more emotional dance. And while swing has a virtual manual on applicable moves, blues consists of more "organic" movement. This places a difficult task on the instructor, who must somehow teach feeling, and accounts for the couple's sometimes repeated beginner lessons.

"Advanced lessons are kind of your own thing," Swanson said.

In trying to build a local dance following, the two advocate the effects dance can have on other aspects of participants' lives.

"The thing that's nice about blues dancing is it's very adaptive," Breitenfeldt said.

Nearly any genre of music can be paired with blues dancing, giving one versed in its crowd-gathering capabilities an upper hand at social events.

"It's totally built my confidence," Swanson said, recalling her now faded reluctance to approach new dancers.

And while it's frustrating for them to see the limited options for Mankato dancers, it only encourages them to keep supporting what they love. And besides, it's fun.

"It makes me so happy," Swanson said.

If You Go

What
Blues Night
When
Every Wednesday:
blues dance lessons
start at 9 p.m., free
dance at 10 p.m.
Where
Savoy on South
Front Street
Cost
Free

'The Green Hornet:' An epic miscalculation

By Roger Moore
McClatchy-Tribune News Service

Film Review

Perhaps "The Green Hornet" is director Michel Gondry's mocking wink at the Hollywood of masked heroes and the fanboys who made it that way.

A violent, clumsy, jokey, badly-plotted and miscast mess, "Hornet" almost makes sense, taken on those terms. Gondry is, after all, the director of "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind." "Green Hornet" is certainly not like any other masked hero movie, unless you remember "The Spirit" or "Kick-Ass" and the good and very, very bad parts of both of those.

It has all the superhero movie ingredients — rich, bored crime-fighting anti-hero, his sidekick, a cooler-than-cool car, and a supposedly super villain. But

Gondry, working from a miss or near-miss script by Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg, turns this film of the radio and then 1960s TV series into an epic miscalculation.

A slimmed-down Rogen stars as playboy Britt Reid, who tries to ignore everybody's words of condolence at his crusading publisher dad's funeral. "You have some mighty big shoes to fill." Dad (Tom Wilkinson) was always a humorless martinet to Britt. "Trying doesn't matter if you always fail," that was his motto.

But Britt finds himself impressed by the chauffeur who makes his morning espresso, a gadget freak and martial arts master whose name he never learned. It's Kato (Jay Chou), by the way. "I was born in Shanghai,"

Kato says through Chou's nearly impenetrable accent.

"Love Japan," the big dumb lug Britt answers.

Kato gives Britt a sense of purpose. He customizes Britt's father's favorite old Chrysler into Black Beauty, an armed-and-pimped-to-the-max muscle car. They set out to play some superhero pranks, which Britt pushes the unhappy editor (Edward James Olmos) of dad's old newspaper to publicize as the crimes of "The Green Hornet." He'll be not a hero, but a villain vying for control of the underworld. That'll fool everybody. So will that little mask and fedora Britt dons. Kato will be his sidekick — "I'm Indy, you're Short Round."

Their foe? A crime lord, Chudnofsky (Christoph Waltz), whose name is so unpronounceable that everyone makes a joke of it. Chudnofsky packs a double-

'The Green Hornet'

Industry rating
PG-13 for sequences of violent action, language, sensuality, drug content.
Running time
1 hour 54 minutes
Rated
One and a half stars out of four
Local theater info
Stadium Cinema 6 hotline
phone number: 625-3456.



The Associated Press

Seth Rogen (left) and Jay Chou are shown in a scene from "The Green Hornet."

barreled pistol which he uses with little provocation, and frets over the fact that he's not scary enough.

Waltz is so incompetent in this part that his Oscar is looking more "Inglorious" than ever. He is Steven Seagal-bad in this part. Inept, tin-eared, lost.

Chou's English is so tortured that when he tells Britt that his father was "a complex man," it sounds

like "compact man." Slo-mo "bullet time" action beats during his fights make him come off better than most of his co-stars. The homoerotic Chou-Rogen buddy banter doesn't put either of them in a good light.

Rogen is quick with the profane one-liner or the Kato compliments — "You're a human Swiss Army knife!" He lands some laughs, but his role in botching this spins out of his lim-

ited vocabulary and even more limited skills as a screenwriter.

Cameron Diaz makes a glorified cameo as the office assistant who researches social ills the Hornet and Kato set out to solve. And look for Edward Furlong as a strung-out villainous underling. They, at least, have parts too small to share the blame that this soon-to-be-infamous flop will be warrant.