

VISUAL ARTS

Typewriter exhibit taps into our not-too-distant past

BY KAREN BJORNLAND
For The Daily Gazette

Tap, tap, tap. The sound is old, yet familiar. Could it really be the clacky-clack of a typewriter? But why would there be an antiquated writing machine at the University at Albany, a global center for nanoscience?

On the second floor of the University Art Museum, follow that tap, tap, tap and what appears is not an old Smith Corona but a larger-than-life film of comedian Michael Winslow, "the man of 10,000 sound effects," mimicking the sounds of typewriters.

In his film, Spanish artist Ignacio Uriarte captures the essence of 32 different typewriters, from horse-and-buggy days into the disco age, through the talents of Winslow, the guy who plays Sgt. "Motor Mouth" Johnson in the "Police Academy" movies and TV shows. "It's a kind of auditory time line," says Corinna Ripps Schaming, the museum's associate director and curator of "Courier."

READING IN DIFFERENT WAY

Glancing at the picture of an orange IBM typewriter on the exhibit's postcard, it's hard to imagine that college students born in the early 1990s would be interested in such primitive communication.



'Courier'

WHERE: University Art Museum, University at Albany
WHEN: Through Dec. 4; museum open 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Friday; noon to 4 p.m. Saturday.
HOW MUCH: Free. (Parking is \$5; free on Saturdays)
MORE INFO: 442-4035 or www.albany.edu/museum

Left: Visitors view and contemplate Daniela Comani's "It Was Me. Diary 1900-1999." In this work, Comani created a "diary" of the 20th century, typing one event for each day of a calendar year.

"They get it. ... it's cross-generational," Ripps Schaming says with assurance. As the mother of two teen daughters, she has traversed from Underworlds to the youthful underworld of texting and IM'ing. Typewriters still appear in movies and TV ("Mad Men"), and the physical act of tapping to communicate, with thumbs or fingers, on a cellphone or iPhone, is still with us.

"Courier" features works by 11 artists from five countries, including the U.S., who "explore the physical, communicative and iconic properties of the typewriter," but there is so much more than that to think about

here, if one slows down enough to experience it. Mostly black-and-white, this is the kind of exhibit that doesn't come to you, so you must go to it.

"There's a lot to read in this show, but it's not meant to be read in a conventional way," explains Ripps Schaming. Remember Ann Hamilton, who created "corpus," an expanse of white paper fragments that fell from the ceiling in the super-sized gallery at MASS MoCA? In "Courier," we see tiny (less-than-6-inch-square) but eloquent Hamilton: a soundless, 13-minute video of a fingertip slowly erasing a single letter of type on a pane of glass,

then retracing that movement, to print the letter again in reverse.

A PLACE TO CHAT

Xu Bing, who was born in China at the end of the Cultural Revolution and now exhibits his artwork around the world, has always been interested in language and culture. For years, he has collected safety manuals from airplanes because he was fascinated by their use of symbols, like stick figures, frowning faces and other icons, that could be universally understood.

See EXHIBIT, page E3



Actor Michael Winslow is seen in Ignacio Uriarte's film "The History of the Typewriter Recited by Michael Winslow." In the 21-minute film, the actor known for a range of sound effects mimics 32 different typewriters.

MUSIC

No exaggeration: Musicians share bizarre stories that would have been naturals for movie spoof

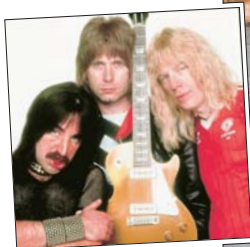
Spinal Tap moments

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY
Gazette Reporter

It's perhaps the most remembered scene in the 1984 mockumentary "This Is Spinal Tap," encapsulating all of the excesses and the humor of being a rock musician.

The fake metal band's guitarist, Nigel Tufnel (Christopher Guest) is explaining to fake filmmaker Marti DiBergi (Rob Reiner) how all of Spinal Tap's amplifiers have custom-designed volume controls that reach the number 11, allowing the band to play louder than other acts. (The band prides itself on being England's loudest band.) DiBergi interrupts Tufnel, asking, "Why don't you just make 10 louder, and make 10 be the top number and make that a little louder?" Tufnel stares blankly for a moment, before answering, in all earnestness: "But, these go to 11."

Since the film's release, generations of musicians — metal or otherwise — have latched onto the over-the-top exploits of Spinal Tap, seeing reflections of their own experiences as musicians in the fake band's on-screen follies. "I saw it in theaters when it first came out, and when I first saw it — there's parts of it that made me shudder," said Kevin McKrell, leader of Saratoga Springs Irish group "The McKrells." "Parts of it were so familiar it made me actually cringe, like when they're playing at the Air Force base — 'Well, I love your music, but not your music; bands of your genre' — that whole sequence is just so



MGM HOME ENTERTAINMENT

Top: From left, Harry Shearer, Christopher Guest and Michael McKean portray members of the spoof British band Spinal Tap, created for Rob Reiner's 1984 mockumentary "This Is Spinal Tap."

BRIAN MCELHINEY/GAZETTE REPORTER

Right: Alta Mira guitarist Hunter Sagehorn, far right, demonstrates his new "amplifier" to his bandmates, from left, Joe Michon-Huneau, Tommy Krebs and August Sagehorn. "But these go to 11."

frightfully familiar. I remember my head going in between my shoulders, almost in my stomach."

GRAINS OF TRUTH

The Spinal Tap phenomenon doesn't stop with the film — actors



Guest, Michael McKean and Harry Shearer have toured the world numerous times as Spinal Tap since the film's release, and have put out two further albums beyond the

original film's soundtrack, with "Back From the Dead" appearing last year. While many of the parodies in "This Is Spinal Tap" — such as exploding drummers — are far-fetched, even

some of the film's wildest moments have grains of truth in them. Incidents such as being billed second to a

See BANDS, page E3

COMING TOMORROW

Capital Region Scrapbook visits 1953 as Schenectady County highway crews prep for the annual battle against winter.



'THE ICE MAN'

Jim Ridenour explains that there's some science that goes into getting the sheets just right at the Schenectady Curling Club. E4

INDEX

Books
Environment
Travel
Week Ahead

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E6
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Bands: Musicians able to laugh about weird moments

Continued from page E1

puppet show, not being able to find the stage when it's time to go perform, or onstage snafus ranging from malfunctioning electronics to "a Stonehenge monument that was in danger of being crushed by a dwarf," ring true for working musicians. Oftentimes, "This is Spinal Tap" wasn't even exaggerating.

"Sooner or later, you're just going to find yourself in some crazy situations, because you're playing different kinds of clubs, you're out late at night," said Jim Ketterer, drummer for local roots rockers the Tern Rounders and jazz group the Arch Stanton Quartet. "Not to mention, people doing this are given license to behave in some truly bizarre ways. You put that all in a mix, and something weird is going to happen sooner rather than later."

What follows are six local musicians' most memorable Spinal Tap moments, from the road, practice spaces, the clubs and the stages.

FLAMING OUT

Rob Skane, guitarist and singer-songwriter:

I was once in a rock band with a drummer who fancied himself as a "McGyver" sort of guy. He was always rigging up these insane contraptions that made no sense at all.

Anyway, this one time he had the brilliant idea to take one of my old, empty 4-by-12 guitar cabinets and build



DEBRA LOCKROW
Rob Skane played in a band that you could say once was "fired from a gig."

himself a little monitor system, so he could hear things better while drumming at our gigs. So, he wired up an old 12-inch, 30-watt guitar speaker of mine and placed it right in the middle of the cabinet. He was really proud of himself.

He brought it to a gig we had — four hours, three sets — and when we set up our P.A. system, he rigged up his speaker directly to the main power amps that were powering our entire P.A. system. So he had about 600 watts of power going into a 30-watt speaker. Not a good idea. In the middle of our first song, me and the bass player are rocking out and then all of a sudden the drummer stopped playing. We turned around to find our drummer's fancy little monitor system IN FLAMES! One of the bouncers tossed a pitcher of water on the cabinet and the fire went out.

However, everyone left the club — you know, because of the fire. Needless to say, the owners of the club were extremely furious; they didn't pay us and the agent that booked that gig for us never booked us again. Drummers...

CLOWN GOES TO TOWN

Melanie Krahrmer, lead vocalist, drummer and flutist of Sirsy:

Sirsy played an outdoor show at a Navy base a few years ago (ah, already the Spinal Tap parallels begin). The show was open to all ages and there were some families and very young children in the audience. We spent most



Sirsy's Melanie Krahrmer recalls a circus atmosphere on a military base.

of our set trying to dodge the occasional volleyball and kickball from the ongoing matches that seemed inappropriately close to the stage.

After our set, a clown took the stage. All activity stopped. People gathered around the stage in utter amazement. The clown made balloon animals and told jokes that would rival a good Zazouka [Joe gum wrapper any day]. The crowd went nuts over this clown. It was as if his balloon giraffes were filled with liquid gold.

After his set, the clown gave us his business card. We still keep it in our van as a humbling (and humorous) reminder of the day we opened for a clown: a clown who's set killed the audience, the same audience who almost killed us during our set.

HE ALMOST MADE IT

Brian Patneaude, saxophonist and composer with the Brian Patneaude Quartet and Alex Torres and His Latin Orchestra:

I was playing a couple of years ago with Alex Torres' band at a show — I think it was at The Linda, and it was a Cinco de Mayo dance party kind of thing. And there were tons of people there. The place was packed.

We got some food before the gig, and then throughout the whole set I was feeling horrible. Every time I took a breath to play my horn, I was feeling really sick to my stomach, to the point where I had to quit playing a couple of times. It was just a horrible feeling.

I made it all the way to the very last song, the last note. And just as I was about to play the last note of our last song, I threw up all over the place. It was pretty funny in retrospect, but at the time it was a disaster.



ANDRZEJ PILARCZYK
Saxophonist Brian Patneaude is just sick — sort of — about one of his Spinal Tap moments.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT & GIMME A BRAKE

Tommy Krebs, drummer for Alta Mira:

Well, the first story that came to mind took place at a small town show a couple years ago. We had been asked by a band to play a show in their hometown about an hour away. The venue turned out to be the local church and when we arrived everyone was very nice and thanked us for coming. We were brought down into the kitchen/pantry room of the church, which was in the basement, and we were told to "make ourselves at home."

I guess we took it a bit too literally and ended up making spaghetti we found in the cupboard. The caretaker of the church was not happy when she found us eating their spaghetti and drinking the church's wine. It was really embarrassing and we all felt pretty bad for misunderstanding but in retrospect it is pretty funny. They never invited us back.

Another scenario took place en route to Boston last year where we were recording our last album. We were driving on the Mass Pike in two cars. I was riding in Joe's [Michon-Huneau, lead vocalist] car and in front of us was Hunter [Sagehorn, guitarist] and August [Sagehorn, bassist].

At some point Joe casually mentioned that his brakes weren't working. After a few carefully executed tests — i.e., stomping on the brake pedal — we concluded Joe had no brakes at all.

For some reason we were really relaxed about the whole thing. We figured we could just coast to a stop when we needed to. We kept driving for a while and just dodged other cars until we saw a rest stop that we coasted into and circled the parking lot until we stopped. Later we found out the brake lines had ruptured and all the fluid had emptied.

SOUND OF SILENCE & DISAPPEARING BASSIST

Dave Graham, guitarist and vocalist with The Blisterz:

Most of our Spinal Tap moments that I can recall have been related to gear failures or breaking equipment... I can recall a few events, one involving my guitar as we started our first number at the inaugural WILDWOODstock event back in 2008. We were the last band on; it had been a long day. I start the opening riff to our tune "Blownaway" and there is no guitar sound! What a train wreck — the band is giving me dirty looks, the crowd is looking puzzled, and I feel like I just jumped in a raging river with no life preserver. After kicking my pedals and yanking the cables, I was able to get some sound and we made it through the tune, albeit quite embarrassingly. In the end, it turned out to be a bad batch cord between two of my guitar pedals.

I can think of one other recent incident when we were playing The Parting Glass Pub in Saratoga for WILDWOODstock

2010. We were about halfway through our set and someone came up to the stage and wanted me to make an announcement that the local authorities were going to start issuing parking tickets for any of the cars parked on the side street next to the venue. I made the quick public service announcement and as I went to start the next song, I looked across the stage and our bass player had mysteriously vanished into thin air, like the infamous Spinal Tap drummers used to.

Glancing around feverishly trying to locate him, I found out that he was outside in the street arguing with a meter maid, and it wasn't Lovely Rita! What do we do now? Time to improvise! I told our drummer that I was going to bust out one of my brand new songs that he hadn't heard yet and kill some time. He jumped right in on it with some nice percussion played with brushes and we kept the train on the tracks and the audience's attention. Sometimes you just have to roll with it.

"WILD" TIMES

Jim Ketterer, drummer with the Tern Rounders and the Arch Stanton Quartet:

Years ago, I was playing with a band called Leaving the Priesthood (that alone sounds right out of "Spinal Tap"), and we were playing at a kind of notorious dive bar, like a speakeasy in Albany, the Palais Royale. A singer was going to sit in with us, and he wanted to sing the song "Born To Be Wild," which is not a song that we particularly knew, but we figured we'd piece it together.

We were going to do an introduction

for it, and we wanted the singer to go backstage and come out, do a dramatic entrance. But since there was no backstage, the only place for him to go was the men's room. As we were playing the introduction, we were just playing it over and over and over again, and the guy was not appearing.

At one point, I happened to look over, and I realize that the door to the men's room is shaking because he's somehow locked in there. Eventually, the singer lays his shoulder into the door, and the entire door bursts off the hinges and into the bar, making for a far more dramatic entrance than we had anticipated. He sings most of the song, and then — the entirety of the band's setup was plugged into one outlet that must have been made in the 1920s or something. So partway through the song, we blew a fuse, and the whole show was over.

Also, we had had a prior experience with the song "Born To Be Wild" before the Palais Royale incident. We were playing a gig near Lake George at a place that was a combination pitch-and-putt golf course and biker bar (really, not making this up). While waiting to play the gig, the band decided to play the course (and there was a keg at each hole). At one hole, one of the bar patrons/golfers asked us pretty aggressively if we could play "Born To Be Wild." When the bass player said we didn't know it, the guy pulled out a knife, held it to his chest and said, "Well, I guess you'd better learn it." We did.

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When drummer Jim Ketterer was a member of Leaving the Priesthood, the song "Born to be Wild" factored into a strange happening — twice. Ketterer now plays with The Tern Rounders and the Arch Stanton Quartet.



Exhibit

Continued from page E1

His "Book From the Ground" has computer stations where visitors can write words and watch them become translated into "airplane symbol speak" on a large screen mounted near the computers.

"Students gravitate to the keyboards and Xu Bing. They come in here and chat," says Rippes Schaming.

An 80-year-old man who visited recently was tickled to see the four 1800s typewriters in the exhibit — a Blickenderfer, a Williams, a Hammond and a Smith Premier — borrowed from James Siena, an artist and collector of typewriters, who wrote an essay for the "Courier" catalog.

'DRAWINGS' AND A 'DIARY'

On the walls of the second-floor, we see works by Lee Etheridge IV, the master of "typewriter drawings," in which repetitive patterns and columns of typed letters and words are dense with markings, not unlike fabric or stitchery. In some of the



This image is from Xu Bing's "Book From the Ground." Computer stations at the exhibit enable visitors to translate words into "airplane symbol speak."

works, Civil War-era song lyrics are typed onto landscapes where soldiers once fought.

"Many of my drawings are experiments in logic where I discover the images upon completion," Etheridge writes on his website. "Often, I set rules for these drawings, and by doing so, create order from randomness."

Next to Etheridge's works on paper, visitors tend to linger before "It was me. Diary 1900-1999" by German artist Daniela Comani.

On a vinyl curtain more than 19 feet tall and 9 feet wide, Comani creates a faux diary of 365 days in the history of the 20th century, and in each one-sentence entry, Comani inserts herself: "Sept. 19: From today on, I have to wear a six-pointed yellow star on the left side of my clothing" and "Aug. 5: I find Marilyn Monroe dead on her bed."

On the first floor, there are a series of images by Leona Christie and Gavin Christie in



Lee Etheridge IV's "near devils den, 2003" features typewriting on a photograph, a process that adds another dimension for the viewer.

which lists of dates and places and events in someone's life are embossed repetitively into paper. Visually, the shape of the letters,

the white-on-white impressions in the paper, are so interesting, it almost wouldn't matter if they weren't in English.

The label offers few clues to the story behind the artwork. But check the label again. The Christie pieces have an audio guide, indicated in red below the title and artists' names. All you have to do is pull out your cellphone and tap in the number on the label. You can also access the audio guides, catalog essays and exhibition list from the museum's website.

"Courier" is the first show at the University Art Museum to use these audio guides, and most of the works have them.

The audio guide reveals that Leona is an associate professor of art at the university who teaches printmaking and digital imaging, and that Gavin is her 39-year-old brother, who lives in Detroit with their parents. Gavin is an autistic savant, and every day, he rides his bicycle through the neighborhood and then goes home and types a list of what he saw and experienced. Prints and animation have been shown at The Drawing Center and the Pierogi Gallery in New York City, and at the New York Video Festival at Lincoln Center.

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