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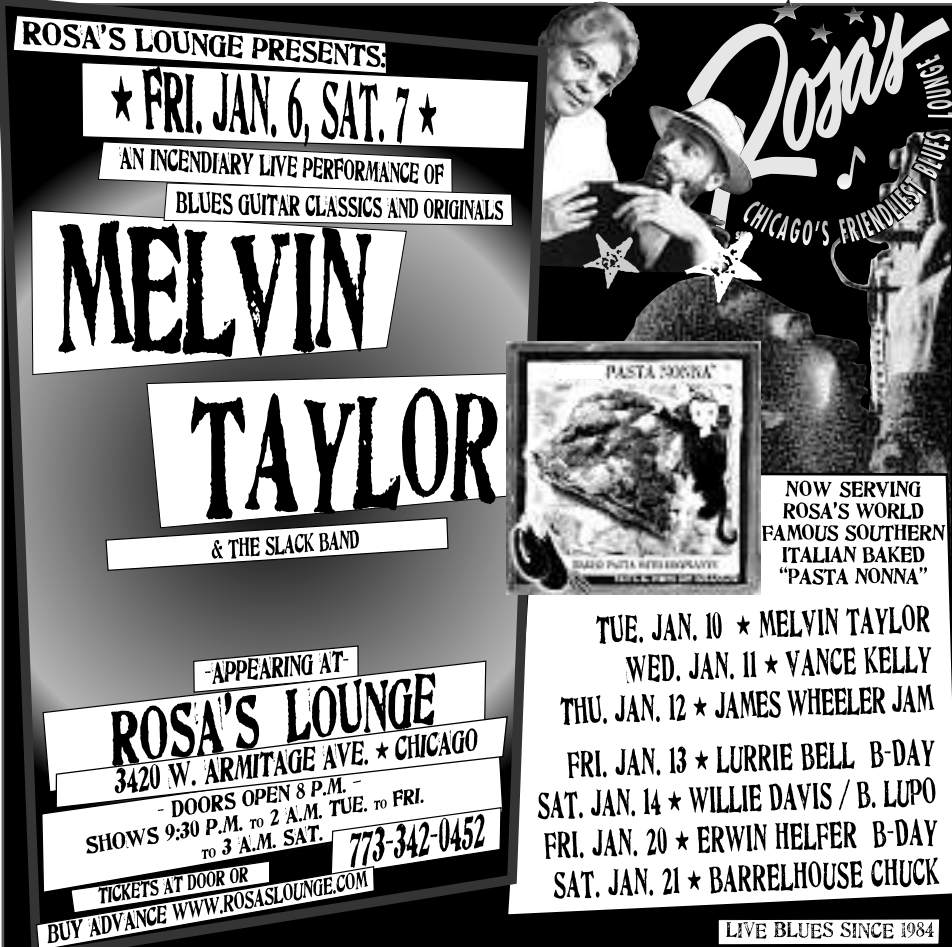
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Soundman Versus Flesh-Eating Bacteria

His next challenge: a six-figure medical bill

By Bob Mehr

Local labels, musicians, and clubs are rallying to the aid of Gary "Elvis" Schepers, who's been at Swedish Covenant Hospital since December 11, fighting an infection in his left foot that at one point threatened to cost him his leg. Schepers, the part-time tuba player for Devil in a Woodpile, has made a living as a soundman since 1987. He's worked steady gigs at Lounge Ax, the Cubby Bear, and the Empty Bottle, among other venues, and toured with local and regional favorites like Uncle Tupelo, Material Issue, and Eleventh Dream Day. But like so many people in the music business, he has no health insurance—and his medical bills, which have already topped six figures, will likely double before he's able to work again.

Led by singer Kelly Hogan and Bloodshot Records owners Nan Warshaw and Rob Miller, Schepers's friends and colleagues are planning a series of benefit concerts to help him defray his expenses. "It seemed obvious to try and do something," says Warshaw. "So we got the word out to bands around town. And I knew Gary had lots of friends, but I had no idea quite how many."

It took just days for organizers to confirm a week of shows, starting with a FitzGerald's date on January 20. "The ease with which it all came together speaks to what and how much the community thinks about Gary," says Miller. "It's just happened so fast and so organically without anyone pushing. I think people recognize that it's not just the musicians but guys like Gary that really make a scene like ours possible."

Born in Oklahoma in 1958 and raised in Sycamore, Illinois, Schepers studied music (and played tuba in the marching band) at the University of Iowa and later Northern Illinois University. He moved to Chicago in the early 80s and began his career as a soundman working for Stan Doty, owner of Pravda Sound, which rented PAs to clubs like Dreamerz and Medusa's. He was at the board for Bloodshot's first showcases at Lounge Ax and the Bottle a decade ago, and most recently he's been freelancing at the Abbey Pub, Schubas, and FitzGerald's. He's also the chief engineer at Humboldt Park's Strobe recording studio and a member of the Prohibition Orchestra, which plays dance tunes published between 1923 and 1934.

Early last month Schepers developed pain and swelling in his foot, and in the wee hours of Sunday, December 11, after working a show at the Abbey, he was worried enough to check himself into the emergency room. "Once they got my shoe off and looked at it, they said, 'Well, you'll be staying here a while,'" he says.

Schepers was diagnosed with a particularly nasty Group A streptococcus—one of the bugs that began making headlines in the 90s as "flesh-eating bacteria." During the course of his treatment doctors also informed him that he had type 2 diabetes. "The fact that I have diabetes, which I did not know, probably contributed to the infection growing faster," he says. "But anyone can get it. It's a variation of the same bacteria that gives you strep throat. It lives on the ground."

Doctors surgically removed dead and gangrenous tissue from Schepers's foot on December 12. While he recovered, his friends spread the word about his predicament and began planning the benefits. Ordinarily it'd be difficult, if not impossible, to book a week of shows on a month's notice, but so far five venues have reshuffled their schedules to make room. "That was really impressive, the way all the clubs came to the table," says Warshaw. "All the clubs are donating 100 percent of the door, some are even giving a percent-



Gary Schepers

age of the bar, and no one is charging overhead expenses, so everything is going right to Gary."

Seven shows have been confirmed: Jay Farrar headlines January 20 at FitzGerald's, on a bill that also includes Robbie Fulks and the Prohibition Orchestra, and the New Duncan Imperials play the Abbey Pub the same day. The Hideout hosts a pair of shows January 22, the first featuring Sally Timms and Jon Langford's kiddie band the Wee Hairy Beasties and the second headlined by Califone. On January 25 Jeff Tweedy plays the Abbey with Devil in a Woodpile, and the next night Martyrs' hosts Kelly Hogan and a few other acts. The week wraps up at Schubas on January 27 with the Bottle Rockets and Tijuana Hercules.

In addition, Freakwater will anchor an afternoon benefit at the Hideout on February 4, and organizers expect bands to keep volunteering throughout the winter as word gets around. Even people unable to perform are pitching in. "Steve Albini got in touch, but his schedule is really crazy," says Warshaw. "So he's going to contribute some items for us to auction off."

Schepers, who's all but bedridden and needs a wheelchair to get around, doesn't expect to attend the concerts. His doctors decline to speculate about when he'll be released. "They're still watching some of the areas of infection that may be eating at the bone," says Schepers. "There is still a question about a couple of toes and if they're going to survive. Every day they don't cut them off I feel more like I'm going to be keeping them."

He's receiving a cocktail of antibiotics through an IV and undergoing regular hyperbaric oxygen treatments to speed healing; a device called a wound vacuum is draining infectious material from the injury. Even after he gets out of the hospital, he'll be unable to walk and need help caring for his foot, so he'll be spending a month—

perhaps several—in an assisted living center. "I'm trying to be philosophical about it," Schepers says. "My job right now is to fill up on antibiotics to kill all the bacteria in my body. Hopefully, I'll get back—on both my feet—as soon as possible."

Kevin Tihista Leaves the Woodshed

Kevin Tihista isn't much for self-promotion—he prefers to hole up at home and write songs. But these days he's maintaining an uncharacteristically high profile: he took a ten-day solo tour of the UK in November and played the Double Door on December 22, and

Kevin Tihista, Andrew Morgan, Tenki
WHEN Thu 1/12, 9 PM
WHERE Schubas, 3159 N. Southport
PRICE \$10
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after he headlines the first night of the Tomorrow Never Knows festival at Schubas on Thursday he has plans for a handful of LA shows in February and a three-week full-band UK tour in April.

Tihista spent much of the past year writing and demoining his fourth full-length, a follow-up to the acclaimed *Wake Up Captain*. It's due in the fall, and he's currently recruiting musicians and hashing out the album's aesthetic with longtime producer Ellis Clark. Tihista's also finalizing the track selection and artwork for a sequel to 2005's *Home Demons Volume 1*, an odds-and-sods collection culled from his hundreds of unreleased songs. Like the first disc, *Home Demons Volume 2* will receive a UK release on Broken Horse and come out domestically on Champaign's Parasol label—the state-side release is tentatively scheduled for mid-2006. And Tihista's cover of the Kinks' "Situation Vacant," which isn't on either comp, will appear on a tribute CD to the group accompanying the March issue of *Mojo*. □

The Treatment

A day-by-day guide to our Critic's Choices and other previews

friday6

KRISTIN SHOUT & SMOKING KITTEN Kristin Shout's a longtime Chicago fixture—she used to book bands at Czar Bar and was part of the team that won the 1991 National Poetry Slam—but she earned her musical chops busking around Europe, picking up the life experiences that give her jazzy country-hybrid songs their cinematic resonance. Her swooping, husky, mutable voice inhabits a creepy world of tornadoes, drugs, criminals, and ambivalent love, and Shout sings like she's been there a long time, familiar with all its dark alleys and hiding places. This show is a release party for the self-released *Thorny Devil*, her first full-length album with her band, Smoking Kitten. Thomas Pace and the Great Crusades open. ▶ 9 PM, Martyrs', 3855 N. Lincoln, 773-404-9494 or 800-594-8499, \$8. —Monica Kendrick

MED, OUTERLIMITZ Veteran SoCal rapper MED (formerly Medaphoar) rounded up some impressive company on his debut album, *Push Comes to Shove* (Stones Throw), and the guests wind up outshining the host. Most of the tracks were produced by Madlib, who brings his trademark mix of clipped, bumping beats, soul and jazz samples, and digitized slicing and dicing; J Dilla, Just Blaze, and Oh No contribute some fine grooves of their own as well. MED's a decent enough MC, but his narrow vocal range and jagged flow are a poor fit for the richly detailed tracks he's working with, and it doesn't help that his subject matter is so ho-hum: his raps are mainly love letters to herb and hip-hop, though his rhymes are often so illogical and convoluted it's tough to figure out what the hell he's saying about them. He'd do better with more minimal production, but the mismatch here isn't enough to sink the tracks—they'd be strong no matter what.

Suicide Prevention (Galapagos4), the debut album by Chicago's **OUTERLIMITZ**, strikes a better balance between words and beats, style and substance. Silence's production is dense and sinister: paranoid bass tones, eerie orchestral samples, dark synth bursts, and stuttering beats that trudge grimly and implacably onward. MCs Qwa (aka Qwazaar of Typical Cats) and Hellsent match the somber tone of the tracks with carefully harnessed anger, swapping lines with ferocious precision.

MED headlines, One.Be.Lo. goes fourth, Outerlimitz are third, Reach & JP are second, and Verbal Kent opens. ▶ 10 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, 773-276-3600 or 866-468-3401, \$14 in advance, \$15 at the door. —Peter Margasak



Pomes

POMES I don't know if this local band took some inspiration from Jack Kerouac's *Pomes All Sizes*, but that's what its name makes me think of—which sets the bar pretty high in my mind for its full-length debut, *At the Adelphi* (Black Dead Roses). I suspect ol' Jack would be bored shitless by the album's stretches of jam-band cruising and college-rock meandering, but the songs improve a great deal whenever Jessie Wehrle pitches in with a full-throated hippie-soul chant, and Paolo Urizar's ringing guitar leads are a fine foil for her—better than Michael Cummins's bored-sounding declamations. Kerouac wrote his fair share of filler too, but he always seemed to want to rise above mediocrity. 7 x 7 and the Brink Band open. ▶ 9:30 PM, Subterranean, 2011 W. North, 773-278-6600 or 800-594-8499, \$7. —Monica Kendrick

RAISE THE RED LANTERN Chicago's Raise the Red Lantern released their debut full-length, *Breathe Fire* (Seventh Rule), this past fall. It's an inventive fusion of up-tempo stoner rock, posthardcore, the avant-rock of Neurosis, and classic Brit metal. Tracks like "Daggers and Men's Smiles" and "Brethren We Built This" surprise with electronic manipulations: they appear without warning yet still sound strangely fitting, carrying things naturalistically beyond the limits of what a live loud rock band can normally do. Wolf & Cub, the Pines, and Raining Bricks open. ▶ 9 PM, Beat Kitchen, 2100 W. Belmont, 773-281-4444, \$7, 18+. —J. Niimi

MELVIN RHYNE TRIO WITH PETER BERNSTEIN Peter Bernstein backed into the jazz mainstream: like many guitarists of his generation (he's 38), he first discovered Jimi Hendrix, then B.B. King, and finally Wes Montgomery, the exemplar of the deceptively continued on page 6