The act of probing deserted buildings thriving globally, dying locally

BY SHEENA GOODYEAR

Urban exploration is abandoned

Just through the broken window on the back of the abandoned General Hospital near Quidi Vidi Lake lies a kicked-in door with the word "Hell" spray-painted across it in black.

This is the message that greets local urban explorers—people who investigate abandoned buildings and off-limits areas in the urban sprawl.

Built in 1851 on the site of an old military hospital, the General Hospital used to be the main health care facility for the city. It was erected by the same workers responsible for the Roman Catholic Basilica, the Colonial Building, and the Anglican Cathedral.

The hospital saw its last patients in 1978, and demolition of the building began in 1997. Many of the old wards have already been torn down. This small section is all that remains.

There is darkness in every direction, though occasionally small beams of light seep through cracks in the dirty brick walls.

A long hallway extends from the door, with dark, damp, dirty rooms on each side. Most of the rooms have huge holes in the walls. Flashlights show wires hanging from the ceilings in spider web formations. It has been years since any power surged through them. In some places, the floor is soft with rain and rot. It sinks with every step.

Fluffy pink insulation spills out of cracks and corners. The air is thick with dust and asbestos.

One large room at the end of the hall boasts big open windows where light shines through, and hundreds of ominous looking pigeons swarm in the surrounding trees. Now and then, one of the birds will swoop in and flatter around the ceiling. Pigeon corpses, droppings, and feathers are everywhere.

A rickety staircase full of rusty nails leads to the second floor, which looks a lot like the first floor except filled with a reddish hue from the orange, plastic paper that covers the windows. Another set of stairs to the third floor is boarded off to prevent people from falling.

And there have been people around recently—though they seem to have been partiers, not urban explorers.

One dead rat has been stepped on so many times it looks like a flattened cartoon character. Beer bottle glass and cigarette butts litter the wooden floors.

Also, one room is covered with graffiti, including a poorly drawn eye in a triangle, with the words "This is the fucking cradle of civilization." In the same room, a make-shift Christmas tree is propped up on a metal pole.

A security guard is stationed nearby to keep people from breaking in to drink or hang out. Real urban exploration is another dying art in Newfoundland and Labrador.

There was group called the Newfoundland and Labrador Exploration Society. They have a website called "Forgotten Newfoundland" which boasts photographs and panoramic shots of many abandoned locations in the province, including the General Hospital before demolition began.

But nobody responds to the e-mail listed on the site. Friends of urban explorers say that most of them have given up the activity or moved away.

While urban exploration seems to be fading in the province, it thrives globally, with websites and magazines popping up all around the world for people who love gazing into the past.

Sylvain Margaine is a 30-year-old French urban explorer who currently lives in Belgium. He has been exploring abandoned sites since he was a child.

"I'm exploring as far as I remember, as my father took me to abandoned factories when I was a child," he said.

Since then, he's done everything from urban exploration to Belgian asylums.

One key element to a successful urban exploration adventure is to bring along people you can trust, says Margaine.

"We did some tunnels under a Brussels train station recently at night. Then the lights turned on and workers came in our direction. I was glad to be with my friend because I know he would not panic or run away, so each one of us had on one side of the tunnel very silently, and we could see each other and communicate by signs," he said. "Try to imagine the same situation with somebody you don't know very well."

Also, try not to get caught—like the time Margaine climbed a building in Brussels called the Palais des Congres.

"This was previously not explored, I am sure. Entrance was tricky. But we had been seen while entering. A guy called the cops," he said. "We had some time to take some shots inside, but also from the roofs, and three police cars were waiting for us meanwhile. We managed to escape through another exit. [I am] quite proud of this one—good story to tell when I have grandchildren."

Margaine discovered that the thing he always loved to do was to be discovered, and be global phenomenon about 10 years ago while browsing online.

Now he runs his own urban exploration website called Forbidden Places, where he posts photographs of the locations he discovers. His discovery is the most important element for Margaine.

"In urban exploration, you have exploration," said Margaine. "This is discovery by your own skills of new places. But many explorers do not share my view. Going into abandoned places would be enough for them."

Not for Margaine. If someone has already been there, he says you don't get "the full story."

"It starts by hearing about a place by talking with people, reading in a newspaper, on the Web, or by driving and finding it by chance," he explained. "Then you have to figure out by yourself if it is doable, and how. Then you have to do it."

"When I see reports on local forums about people that go into an abandoned factory to photograph it, I don't want to go there anymore, except if the place is really worth the trip, visually speaking I mean."

It's hard to say what's left to be discovered in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Newfoundland Urban Exploration Society has been to such places as the Argenta Naval Base, the Cape Spear Military Bunkers, the Bellhaven Orphanage, and the Broomberry drive-in theatre.

One thing is for sure—as time goes on, most of these places will be torn down forever, just like General Hospital.

To see local photography of abandoned and off-limits areas, check out Forgotten Newfoundland at www.ofclab.com/ForbiddenPlaces/nl.html. To see Margaine's photographs of urban exploration, visit Forbidden Places at www.forsiden-places.be.
MUN denies it owes thousands in unpaid water bills

**BY BRAD AYERS**

An agreement between Memorial University and the provincial government has gone awry, supposedly leaving the university $810,000 in debt to the city over unpaid water bills.

The city of St. John's has threatened to get a credit agency involved. But MUN VP of Administration and Finance Kent Decker says the university is exempt from water tax.

"Back in 1999 the province and the department of municipal affairs in government, reached an agreement with the city of St. John's regarding the flow of money into the city through various boards and agencies the province funds to get money to the city," MUN, due to the large student population it draws to St. John's, is one of the sources of cash flow.

"What the government did in 1999, it started to give the university money which would then be taken and given to the city for disclosure. We were told after the fact that this agreement had been reached, at the time it was a little over $210,000 in the budget to be paid back to the city of St. John's, which we've done all along."

As the cost of supplying water went up, the city asked the university, along with the rest of the commercial sector, for more money.

For the fiscal years 2005/2006 and 2006/2007, the money budgeted to MUN was not enough to foot the bill. This is where the supposedly owed money comes from.

Decker says the university advised the city to talk to the provincial government and see if they could change the amount paid through the university.

Meanwhile, the city is pushing MUN to pay the difference not covered by the grant in previous years.

"The university now receives $50,000 annually to pay the water bill."

The situation is leaving the Aquarena at the largest inconvenience, as the city is withholding grants until the bills are paid.

Anne Richardson, Director of The Works, MUN's recreation complex, says the city owes them $400,000 in grant money, which would normally go to the pool's overall operational funds.

Negotiations to resolve this dispute are ongoing between the city, the university, and the provincial government.

"It's important to realize that we receive most of our money from the government, and from students in the form of tuition. We can't justify taking that amount of money and using it for a purpose that isn't designated," said Decker.

"We can't just take our operating budget, which is there for the provision of services to students and education, and give it to the city when we're not required to do that. It would be inappropriate."

More students to cash in on student loans

$4 million investment opens student loan eligibility

**BY SHEENA GOODYEAR**

If you couldn’t get a student loan because your parents make too much money, try again. New initiatives announced by the provincial government on May 18 will make more students eligible for loans.

Also, about 1,200 students who already have loans will be getting more money.

Starting this year, the provincial government will use a new formula to calculate parental income.

Before, students whose parents made a combined income of $104,750 could not qualify for a loan. Now, the cut-off is $140,000.

Also, parents with an income of less that $49,000 will not have to contribute to their children's education at all. This is up from $58,780.

These investments will cost the provincial government $4 million over the next two years.

Minister of Education Joan Burke says this decision comes on the heels of the federal budget, which made similar changes.

"We didn't want to set up a situation where students in Newfoundland and Labrador may have different parameters between the provincial and the federal contributions. And we also wanted to make sure that students in Newfoundland and Labrador were treated on par with students in other parts of Canada," said Burke.

Also, Burke says these changes go hand-in-hand with the provincial budget's education initiatives – like maintaining the tuition freeze, lowering interest on student loans by 2.5 per cent, and offering up to 750 in needs-based grants to students with loans.

The interest cut applies to students already in repayment.

For people who receive the maximum student loan, they'll save about $5,500 in interest payments. And you know, if you've got two people that become a couple and they both have maximum student loans, that's $11,000 that will be back in their pockets."

Student lobby groups have been the biggest push factor in implementing these changes, says Burke.

"We got to give real credit to the student leaders because they took everything so seriously, they did a very good piece of analytical work, and they basically felt that if we’re going to address student debt, that the up front needs-based grants – which were eliminated by the previous administration – were the way the way to go."

Most of all, Burke says lowering student debt is a key to the province’s future.

"We want to keep our young people here. If these are initiatives that make it more palatable for our young people to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador, then that’s where we need to go,“ she said.

"I can’t see how we can go wrong by investing in education. We invest in our young people and they get more skills and more knowledge. Whether they move away up front and come back down the road, or never leave us, that’s what we need. We need our brightest and our best and we need to make sure they are well educated and they’ve got the skills to bring us, as a province, into the future."
Opposition says Memorial was asked to lead controversial deal

BY KATIE HYSLOP

Memorial University was originally poised to be a key player in the development of the controversial provincial fibre optic link between Newfoundland and the mainland. But, like every aspect of the fibre optic project, government and opposition can’t agree on what role the university was supposed to play.

Optic fibres are tiny pieces of glass or plastic that transmit data at the speed of light. A fibre optic link to the mainland would create a more stable connection between Newfoundland and the rest of the country.

According to Opposition Minister Kelvin Parsons, Persona Communications CEO Dean MacDonald approached the provincial government in May 2005 to create a second fibre optic link with funding from the federal government. When federal funds did not come through, Parsons believes government looked to MUN and the College of the North Atlantic (CNA) to develop the deal, in order to avoid the Public Tender Act.

The Public Tender Act sets guidelines for government entities when tendering goods and services over $10,000 and capital projects over $20,000. It is designed to give companies an equal chance to get government work.

The Act stipulates that entities must hold public openings and offer contracts on the open market.

“Government would float this $15 million over to MUN and [CNA], have MUN and [CNA] do the proposal and you wouldn’t have to go through a request for proposals and the Public Tendering Act,” said Parsons.

“But people in MUN and [CNA] . . . started asking questions and said No, no, no, no, even if you’re doing it through MUN and [CNA], you still need to go through a request for proposals, you still need to do public tendering.”

Parsons claimed the deal was taken off the table by June 2005 and was all but dead when a fire broke out at the Atlantic Aviation Centre on Allandale Road on October 20, 2005.

The fire damaged a power cable, cutting off cell phone, landlines, internet access, and 911 emergency for over 50,000 people on the Avalon Peninsula for over five hours.

Five days later, according to Parsons, government announced that they would be putting $15 million into a fibre optic link that they would share with Persona Communications, Rogers Communications, and Manitoba Telecom Services.

“Seem like all of sudden this proposal that started to be with government and the federal government shifted to a provincial contribution, shifted to a MUN and [CNA] deal, fell off the table totally, was being negotiated, but was basically dead from July of ’05 on up through October ’06. The fire took place and all of sudden, bang! the government decided within five days of the Alant fire that all of a sudden this was doable,” said Parsons.

“Forty-eight hours after the government approved this and announced it, they turned around and sent a letter back to MUN and [CNA] and said, ’Thank you very much but we’re not interested in doing this proposal with you anymore, anyway.’”

Not so, according to Innovation, Trade, and Development Minister Trevor Taylor. He says that government was aware that MUN and CNA’s research link bandwidth needs were not being met, and that’s why they originally approached the post-secondary institutions to develop the project.

Currently, MUN has a high speed link from Bell Aliant bought by CANARIE, an internet development agency and creator of CANet 4, a network that connects universities, research centers, hospitals, schools, colleges, and government research labs nationwide.

“We looked at it from that perspective — was there a way to provide the funding to MUN and [CNA] to invest in the fibre optic link, and the fibre strands that they required and develop their own network to access the national network?” said Taylor.

“Once we started exploring that and started talking about it a little more in-depth with people here in our own department, and in other agencies of government . . . we basically concluded that it was better if we went directly into it ourselves because the health institutions and other educational institutions besides [CNA] and MUN and a whole variety of other government departments and agencies could benefit from government having it’s own network.”

Taylor maintains government decided to handle the project itself in September 2006, and that it had nothing to do with the fire at Bell Aliant.

“MUN VP of Administration and Finance Kent Decker admits that MUN was initially surprised by government’s proposal that MUN and CNA lead the project.

“It wasn’t something that we were expecting, and it was something in the vein of ‘We’ve got this project out there, we believe it has an education component and we’d like to explore what’s the potential of Memorial being a lead on the project,’ ” said Decker.

“I think government came to the realization after talking about it last summer that it really was a broader project than just education. A lot of fibre optic development activity would benefit from this rather than just Memorial and its research.”

Although no longer involved in the deal, MUN President Arif Meisen expressed the university’s support for the second link in a letter to Minister Taylor.

Despite not being involved in the funding or development of the project, Decker, Taylor, and Parsons agree that MUN still stands to benefit from a second fibre optic link.

“It will ensure that there is a second link, and it will ensure there’s some competition. So I imagine the costs of these research links in the future will be impacted by the fact that there are a few more companies involved,” said Decker.

Taylor hopes the link will be up and running by December of this year, for the private sector, with government and its institutions being able to access the link by early 2008. The delay, according to Taylor, is on account of an upcoming request for proposals from the private sector for a company that would manage this link.

“It’s got to be very comprehensive, it’s got to incorporate the needs of MUN and [CNA], the needs of our government institutions, and our various offices and the like through out Newfoundland and Labrador,” he said.

The Auditor General is conducting an investigation into the project after requests from the opposition that there be a public inquiry.

Because of relations between Premier Danny Williams and Persona CEO MacDonald, and Rogers VP Kent Marshall, opposition has accused the government of cronyism — the practice of favouring friends.

“These are not just business associates, there are personal friends of his. And this raises the specter of a conflict of interest,” said Parsons. “There’s a right way to do stuff and a wrong way, and this is not the right way.”

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SUNRIDGE PLACE
Torbay Rd./McDonald Drive
NL needs more muffin top

I would be excited to see bands like Staind and Finger Eleven play in Bay Roberts on June 18 – that is, if I was an angst-ridden 16 year-old who was angry at her mother. I would even be excited if Nickelback is headlining the show – if I was my mother.

We all put away our nudie al CDs at about the same time we threw out our pleather pants. And while Nickelback may still top the charts, they are pretty much Canada's biggest musical joke. (I say this with the full authority of an iPod toting, blazer wearing, pretentious college student.)

Yet, it's the same old story. Washed up or irrelevant bands come to Newfoundland, and everyone acts like we should be grateful that these celebrities show enough benevolence to grace us with their presence. People were beside themselves in 2005 with Pearl Jam and Collective Soul selflessly allowed us to pay too much money to see them. Now, people treat the Bay Roberts show like it was benefit concert to help stop out-migration. But this is no charity event. Bands come here because it costs them next to nothing to put on a show, they are guaranteed to sell every ticket, and they get to feel like royalty. Newfoundland is like an imaginary Wonderland where they actually matter.

On Seinfeld, when Elaine's boss opened a store to sell muffin tops, he donated the stumps to the homeless. But even the needy had too much dignity to eat the pastry castaways. Meanwhile, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians gobble up every sugary scrap that gets tossed their way while the rest of North America gets wholesome, delicious muffins. We deserve better. We need to start holding out for the muffin top, and I don't mean that fluffy area that spells out over your low-rise pants.

This summer, don't fork over $45.40 to see a band whose CD you normally wouldn't consider downloading illegally, let alone buying. Instead, enjoy some of the fantastic and underrated music the local scene has to offer, or wait for the White Stripes muffin basket in July.

Sheena Goodayr

Dirty words to impress your friends and family

BY JOEY D'AMATO BASHA
TYRANNOSAURIUS SEX

Slang seems to be on such a fast track lately. Staying in touch with all the new, radical internet abbreviations and inventive firebombisms can be such a daunting task that I bet you've never really stopped to wonder whether or not a New York City steam taxi actually came from Cleveland.

The interesting thing is that really dirty euphemisms have a way of being candid and secretive, yet at the same time they get right to the point. Kind of like Pig Latin, only the same could apply to an indigenous culture. I am in considerable debt to my friends, who seem to be representative of the most politically incorrect human beings on earth.

If you manage to use one of these dirty words on your significant other, you'll be excited that she or he is willing to put up with you. If you manage to use one of these dirty words in front of your parents, that's not cool. If you manage to use one of these dirty words in front of your children, that's fine. But if it's good, rock on.

What do you think of GGRAFFITI?

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### Crossword

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<td>9. “Yeah right!”</td>
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<td>14. Blurb biography, upon death</td>
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<td>23. Veronica Lodge has one</td>
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<td>25. Massive mythical bird</td>
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<td>26. First law - heat is work and work is heat</td>
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<td>31. To bond or fasten</td>
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<td>56. Inertial Navigation System</td>
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<td>61. Their revenge involves</td>
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<td>62. Grassy, treeless plain in Latin America</td>
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<td>63. Worker for the weekend, and beyond</td>
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<td>64. Liquor with that pine fresh scent</td>
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<td>65. Bottomless gulf or pit</td>
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<td>67. Down</td>
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<td>1. Bursts</td>
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<td>2. Slender woodwind instrument with a very deep sound</td>
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<td>3. A streak or stripe on the skin as a result of whipping</td>
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<td>4. Russian grasslands</td>
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<td>5. Arial photograph made into a map</td>
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<td>6.Several Swedish disco stars</td>
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<td>7. Worker for the weekend, and beyond</td>
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<td>8. A popular form of sex with the kids these days</td>
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<td>9. Bicycle-like public transport as a result of whipping</td>
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<td>10. To draw out and twist yarn</td>
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**Ewe of A**

By Norman Lau (CUP)

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**SAFETY FIRST**

- **Get it Right**
  - **Before**
  - **After**

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**Riverheights** By Tyler Clarke (CUP)

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**MISSING WOMAN**

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Pirates play politics

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End

Starring: Johnny Depp, Orlando Bloom, Keira Knightley

Walt Disney Pictures
68 mins
PG

BY GAVIN CHIBBS

As children, we stock up on romantic misconceptions about things that, to our surprise, are discarded later in life. Koala bears will tear your face off if you try to cuddle them; Christopher Columbus brought genocide and disease to America; and radiation and toxic ooze will not make you better, no matter what Dr. Seuss says. The actual truth is more likely of the three to stand out in the fantasy world in which the film takes place, and there is a lot more to the story than just a few jokes.

But if the portrayal of pirates in Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End is the third installment in Disney's popular Pirates of the Caribbean series, with director Gore Verbinski (The Grudge, The Weather Man) picking up where he left off with Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest.

Captain Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp) has died and gone to the afterlife that is Davy Jones' locker, and the only man with the knowledge to bring him back from the dead is his freshly-resurrected rival, Captain Barbossa (Geoffrey Rush). With Barbossa at the wheel, and with a little reluctant help from Singapore pirate Captain Sao Feng (Chow Yun-Fat), troubled lovers Will Turner (Orlando Bloom) and Elizabeth Swann (Keira Knightley) set sail with the crew in search of Sparrow.

As the East India Trading Company, headed by Lord Cutler Beckett (Tom Hollander) gains possession of Davy Jones' (Bill Nighy) heart, the other characters need to find Sparrow before things get more urgent. With the heart in his possession, Beckett has total control over Jones, his crew, and his infamous supernatural ship, The Flying Dutchman. With the ghostly ship heading his armada, Beckett plans to snuff out piracy once and for all.

At World's End is packed full of deals to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be settled, secrets to be revealed, and backstabbing to be 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Dolores O’Riordan
Are You Listening?
Sanctuary
Records
Group
Pop

BY BRAD AYERS

The leading lady of The Cranberries is back with a quirky and eclectic album, which was a pleasant surprise for me. As a Cranberries fan, I was a little afraid she would go the route of sellout solo projects and be either too poppy or too sappy, but O’Riordan has remained true to her roots and her haunting vocal style. This album manages to show a mature O’Riordan that isn’t old. It isn’t as edgy or heavy as much of the music The Cranberries are known for, yet many of their softer songs, like “Linger,” would not be out of place on this disc. It is impressive how her voice adapts from her past work with The Cranberries to this completely different sound. But this is her solo project, so any unfair expectations from her Cranberries experience will stop now. O’Riordan wrote all the songs, and she had a hand in producing them as well. They are written well and passionate. There is some rage, some angst, some yearning, and some happiness – a little of everything. The opening track and lead single “Ordinary Day” is a little more melodic than the rest of the disc. But the album gets better quickly with all the following tunes. It is powered by guitar riffs and intense, intelligent, modest, kind, and decent human being with a multi-octave range and emotional sensitivity. And his song lyrics are terrifyingly depressing most of the time.

You can tell that Send Away the Tigers is a true step forward for the band because they wrote “I’m Just a Patsy,” which is a love song that doesn’t end in heartbreak, suicide, or psychological torture. Though there are also some references to the Kennedy assassination, that’s just part of the Manics’ quirky, morbid charm. “Imperial Bodybags” is an excellent punkish song about soldiers killed in the war in Iraq. It’s the best blatant political song they’ve written since they wrote about committing necrophilic acts with Ronald Reagan’s corpse. Ah, the good old days.

There are mildly pretentious self-referential nods to the Manics’ past throughout the album, but such nostalgic jokes are not so obnoxious that they detract from a newcomer’s enjoyment of the music. And they add a sly wink for fans like me.

Send Away the Tigers is one of the best straight rock albums to come out of Britain this year.

The Tigers feature a consistent focus on the top-quality guitar work, with all the songs benefiting from Bradfield’s virtuosic talents. His solos can make you want to moan in your bedroom, especially on songs like “Rendition” and the single “Your Love Alone Is Not Enough.” And he sings with the same range and force that he has since the band started in 1989. Despite the group’s longevity, the Manics are not really known in North America, so this is the best way I can think of to describe their sound. Start from Guns N’ Roses’ Appetite for Destruction, then imagine that Axl Rose was a well-read, abrasive sounds of “A.D.D (Attention Deficit Disorder)” study for that big midterm with the material – it would be very difficult to along in no time. Closing by return, the album ends with the track “Born to Party” – a sing along anthem with a simple and infectious anthem with a simple and infectious

The leading lady of The Cranberries

Coughing, Aging and the Memory

If you are over 18 years old and a native speaker of English, you may be eligible to participate.

Each experiment lasts approximately 1 hour. You will receive $7.50 for each hour of participation.

Each study begins with the following:

- We will ask you some basic demographic questions about your age and general health
- We will ask you some memory questions

Municipal Waste
The Art of Partying
Earache Records
Rock

BY ADAM RIGID

Send Away the Tigers is the Manic Street Preachers’ eighth album, and it’s one of their best. I say this as a huge Manics fan, but also as someone who isn’t as edgy or heavy as much of the music The Cranberries are known for, yet many of their softer songs,” Linger,” would not be out of place on this disc. It is impressive how her voice adapts from her past work with The Cranberries to this completely different sound. But this is her solo project, so any unfair expectations from her Cranberries experience will stop now. O’Riordan wrote all the songs, and she had a hand in producing them as well. They are written well and passionate. There is some rage, some angst, some yearning, and some happiness – a little of everything. The opening track and lead single “Ordinary Day” is a little more melodic than the rest of the disc. But the album gets better quickly with all the following tunes. It is powered by guitar riffs and intense, intelligent, modest, kind, and decent human being with a multi-octave range and emotional sensitivity. And his song lyrics are terrifyingly depressing most of the time.

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Send Away the Tigers is one of the best straight rock albums to come out of Britain this year.
Similar anti-vandalism measures ineffective in New York City

BY JEN BASHA, KERI BRENN AND SHALANDA PHILLIPS

As an initiative of their new graffiti task force, the city of St. John’s is offering $500 rewards for individuals who help police apprehend graffitists, and putting $20,000 towards graffiti removal. Meanwhile, the city’s graffitists are feeling the chill.

While city officials such as Deputy Mayor Dennis O’keefe call graffiti “garbage,” police are encouraging property owners to put the three Rs of the graffiti task force to good use: report, reward, and remove.

But one St. John’s graffiti artist is arguing that what the city really needs is more legal walls, or designated areas for graffitists to hone their craft. He says that the task force will likely be ineffective young people about the consequences of committing acts of graffiti.

One New York police brochure called “Combating Graffiti” reads, “Graffiti has erupted into a nationwide epidemic costing billions of dollars a year… [It] has also been related to drug and gang violence, as well as the occult.”

However, the New York Daily News reported that one year after the task force was implemented, 162 New York City subway cars – over triple the number reported in 2004 – were defaced.

In 2009, local artist Montgomery Hall, with the support of the City of St. John’s and utility holding company Fortis, initiated the opening of the city’s first legal wall in Sebastian Court.

“Due to the biggest reward was when we were actually out there painting and people from the dockyard came over and thanked us for cleaning the place up, making a change, and giving them something new to look at,” said Hall on the Creative City Network of Canada website.

“I think a lot of people would normally go through that park early in the morning with a can of spray paint,” said O’keefe. “But I think one St. John’s graffiti task force will likely be ineffective in New

Local graffiti group AVC tags this Water Street wall.

not walk through this walkway because it was so dingy and it looked so bad. Now, because of what we have done, it has now opened up and a lot more people travel through this back lane.”

While the debate as to whether graffiti beautifies or defiles urban space ensues, O’keefe says the safety of graffitists also a concern of task force, as artists can be injured in while attempting to tag danger.

“Graffiti is garbage. …I fail to see how anyone can describe graffiti as beautiful.”

The bulk of graffiti in St. John’s is “a blight on the urban landscape,” according to Deputy Mayor Dennis O’keefe.

O’keefe wants the city kept clean and beautiful, with the newly minted task force coming down hard on graffitists.

“Police are encouraging property owners to put the three Rs of the graffiti task force to good use: report, reward, and remove.

“Art by graffitist known as Dr. West covers this wall behind Junctions downtown.

“Graffiti hurts, says deputy mayor

The problem goes deeper than that, says O’keefe.

“One of the main fears of the police is that in the process of putting graffiti in hazardous areas somebody is going to take a fall and we’re going to have a tragedy,” he said.

The city is contributing half of the funds for a $1.5 million project to overhaul the midstream area of popular graffiti site, Bowering Park.

“On the one hand we have a band of individuals who feel they can go through that park early in the morning with a can of spray paint,” said O’keefe. “On the other hand you have people in the city who are paying their taxes to develop a recreational area forever for people of all ages to enjoy, from children to seniors.”

An artist’s perspective

But it’s not all bad news for graffitists. The city has designated legal walls for young bombers or taggers to cut their teeth on – one in Sebastian Court and another hiding somewhere in an overpass on Pitts Memorial Drive.

“Take New York,” he said, referring to their police department’s similar anti-vandalism initiatives. “Beautiful work is being buffed [graffiti speak for erasure] and it isn’t doing any good. A freshly cleaned wall is every painter’s wet dream.”

Although the short lifespan of most graffiti is a downside accepted in the culture, the longevity of pieces is even shorter due to the lack of legal space in St. John’s.

“Graffiti in hazardous areas some body is going to take a fall and we’re going to have a tragedy,” he said.

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O’keefe wants the city kept clean and beautiful, with the newly minted task force coming down hard on graffitists.

“The ultimate goal is the elimination of graffiti from public and private property throughout the city,” O’keefe said.

“It’s important that we realize there’s a difference between urban art and graffiti. Art is something that can enhance a neighborhood. Graffiti is garbage… I fail to see how anyone can describe graffiti as beautiful.”

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“These aren’t enough,” says one graffitist, who uses the codename Odie.

Odie is one of the leading members of the local graffiti club, AVC.

“What we do takes time and skill. One way or another, it is going to be seen,” he said.

Odie and his friends have been working together for close to five years now, and proud of their improvements in the pictures.

Art by graffitist known as Dr. West covers this wall behind Junctions downtown.

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