

Born Ruffians rough up Chicago

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On January 16, Lincoln Hall, I got to see one of my favorite contemporary bands, Born Ruffians.

If you haven't heard their music before I suggest you change that immediately; pick up their first album Red, Yellow & Blue and listen to it a dozen times, because it is fantastic and gives me hope for the future of songwriting. With all its screechy choruses and beautifully upbeat guitar riffs, it's also a sure remedy for the winter doldrums.

Since I've followed the Ruffians for quite a while and seen them perform once before, I certainly had high expectations for this show. The energy and optimism in all their music promises a great concert experience, and thankfully they made good on that promise. They did play a select few songs from Red, Yellow & Blue last night, but they focused mostly on material from their second album, Say It, with a few new tunes for good measure. While these new songs were received well, it was quite apparent that the appeal for the audience was shouting along to every song they knew the

words to; I'm not complaining about that, I was doing the same thing. They just make the kind of songs that are such a powerful combination of weird, catchy, and meaningful that they get hardwired into your brain.

Future Monarchs and Night Moves, the opening bands, clearly had a similar character. Though I had never heard either of them before, it was easy to see the appeal. Night Moves especially had a good set, with a sound like a less obnoxious MGMT with a better guitarist. Though they perhaps were a little too generous with the vocal reverb at points, the singer has a strong enough voice to assure you that it's not done out of desire to compensate.

Perhaps a bit less energetic than the last time I saw them perform, Born Ruffians were otherwise on the top of their game last night. Even the new songs were polished, and the singer Luke Lalonde hit all the high notes that make their wordless choruses oh-so-adorable. The audience, which was generally younger than I expected, responded in turn with enthusiasm and lots of off-key singing along and clapping, which I'm beginning to think are just trademarks of their shows. Though these things could be annoying to some, it's hard not to get on the same level when Born Ruffians are playing.



Photo courtesy of musicsnitch.com

Mag Mile's Parade of Lights radiates tradition

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A few weeks ago I went to see the Magnificent Mile Lights Parade. For those of you unfamiliar with the tradition, the city closes down Mag Mile and the parade heads south from Oak Street, down the southbound lane; and as the lead float bearing Minney and Mickey Mouse passes each block, a brief ceremony is conducted by the two Grand Mice, culminating in a countdown from five and the lighting of all the trees on the block. It's magical. And I'm not even being sarcastic.

At twenty-three-years old I found

the whole spectacle to be nothing short of wonderful, in the most literal sense of the word: wonder-full. But the wonder had nothing to do with the trees suddenly lighting up.

The wonder for me lied in the complete experience: to walk across the shut-down main street amidst thousands of people; to look up at the apartments and restaurants and clothing stores and to see people doing nothing but eagerly watching the procession; to be there and feel that energy and excitement—the marching bands, the gymnasts—that was the true magic, the true mystique of the evening.

So often, community events come across to me as trite and contrived: contemporary

speeches are watered down rhetoric meant to incite some lost communal passion, and festivals revolve around overpriced food and petty amusements. What is there that truly brings a community together for the sake of community? All the examples I can think of center around some aspect of personal gain, either of food or entertainment.

Perhaps I'm overlooking some factor of entertainment (there are, I think, other attractions coinciding with the Parade), but I see the Parade of Lights as a wonderful exception to this (admittedly cynical) thesis.

There, I felt a true community spirit moving among thousands of strangers. There,

thousands of families stood in the cold for no practical reason, for no personal gain. And the mystical part of this isn't that they attended for the community, necessarily, but that such an occasion as a parade—and this one, of lights—even exists, would even attract a crowd.

The significance of the Parade of Lights is, today, the tradition of it, and tradition bespeaks community: our tradition. And while, say, the Food Festival or the countless neighborhood festivals will all draw crowds for fancy hot dogs, craft beers, and live music, none achieve the mystical quality of the Parade of Lights, that gathers a community of people together around light.



Images courtesy of arcchicago.blogspot.com, chicagotribune.com, & partyearth.com

Movie Review: Action flick isn't Schwarzenegger's 'Last Stand'

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I absolutely love Arnold Schwarzenegger and had been eagerly anticipating his return to the big screen. Unfortunately, "The Last Stand" was not quite the thrilling return I'd hoped for.

The movie takes place in a small town in southern California where Schwarzenegger's character has moved to be the town Sheriff following a dark event causing him to leave the narcotics division of the LAPD.

If this seems like an excessive amount of detail, I assure you it's only par for the course. Every character involved seems to have years of back story. Don't worry about trying to catch up though; every time anyone opens their mouth they helpfully tell you what everyone's been up to for the last ten years.

The true star of the movie, however, isn't Arnold or even the cartel drug lord trying

to escape America and a death sentence by crossing the border in the sleepy little town under Schwarzenegger's protection; the real star is a "super car" stolen by the drug lord, Cortez.

If you can't guess from the fawning done by the characters that you're supposed to be impressed by this car, it should become clearer during the many slow motion scenes of its amazing ability to go very fast. Cortez and the "super car" spend most of the movie outrunning a FBI Agent. The special effects are spent largely on the cars, leaving the fight scenes gloriously filled with plastic limbs and red paint.

The movie ends in the typical show-down between the slick foreigner and the [inexplicably Austrian] hometown boy. Cortez makes a point to address Schwarzenegger's age repeatedly, as if that negates the fact that he's still the size of a Buick. Despite the slapstick and townspeople who act as if they're waiting on a laugh track, Schwarzenegger still has an ability to make you root for him in the end.

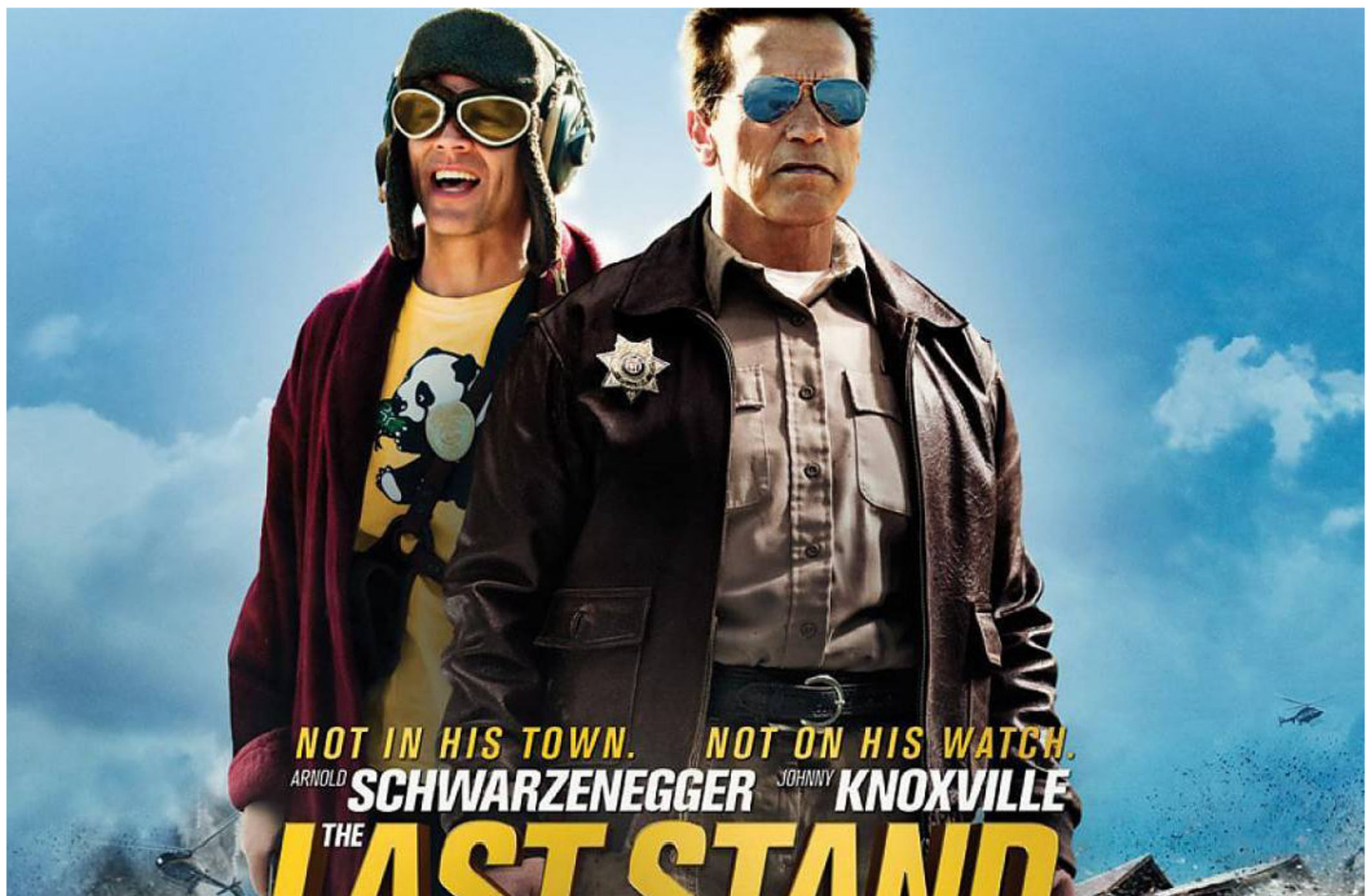


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