

Music Required: search for the best musical study buddy

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A&E EDITOR

Over the course of my college career, the list of conditional requirements for successful studying has been whittled down to one essential precondition; I need to have music playing.

The man to the left of me on the bus may be telling the woman to the right of me how he could tell she was Scorpio from the type of shoes she's wearing in a doomed attempt to ask her out; but if I have my headphones, I'm in the zone, and the only thing occupying my thoughts is whatever biology content I've just reviewed with my flashcards.

Now, like many things in life, my music requirement is simple. I don't have many qualifications on the type of music that needs to be playing, but, in general, it has to be something that I don't know very well. If it has words, I can't know them or I will find them distracting and my studying will be less focused.

Enter two new apps on my iPhone:

SoundCloud and 8tracks. SoundCloud was originally intended to allow musicians to share recordings with each other, but it eventually allowed for artists to publish and distribute their music.

Contrastingly, 8tracks was intended more for listeners than artists. Listeners are able to create their own mixes, which must be a minimum of 8 tracks long, and then tag them with genre descriptions, names of artists found on the mix, or a psychologically descriptive term (e.g. sad, lonely, should find a therapist).

I've been an 8tracks user since this past August. I like the way in which it harkens back to the age of mix tapes/cd mixes and allows access to sets of music that has already been curated by someone that isn't me. In some ways, listening to an 8tracks mix is like listening to those "iTunes Essential" mixes; only 8tracks mixes are less pretentious and free.

That being said, there are several caveats for this review that I feel I need to mention. A large number of the 8tracks members seem to be either (a) high school girls or (b) people whose musical taste corresponds with that of high school girls. I'm talking about One

Direction and Justin Bieber mixes that have the tag "good music." I think that the lack of an "I only like those bands in an ironic way" facade shows the true naiveté of this kind of 8tracks user. Another issue with 8tracks I have is the same as the one I have with other music social networks: you are limited in the number of tracks that you can skip per hour. This problem is remedied by starting another mix, and then you are able skip music again.

I'm not married to any one format of listening to music. So when a friend asked if I had a SoundCloud account because he was looking for new music and wanted to check out my liked tracks, I decided to start one. I'm slightly less satisfied with SoundCloud than I expected to be, given that it lacks some of the problems that I listed above.

For starters, the lack of mixes and thus the inability to select a cover photo from tumblr or to share your emotions with an Internet community seems to dissuade the teen crowd from congregating in this corner of the Internet.

I think in general the idea is that you are supposed to find artist profiles on Sound-

Cloud and then "listen to their stream," but it seems that most users are people like me and my friends; not artists, just 20-somethings looking for new music.

This brings me to my problem with SoundCloud: specifically, my ability to listen to music while studying. There is a search tool on SoundCloud that allows users to search through sounds or people; thus, I can find friends and look at their liked tracks, or I can search for a specific song that I want to listen to, but the format of SoundCloud is such that I can't just press play once and be done. I can listen to all of the tracks that one particular friend liked, but the tracks are generally dissimilar and thus distracting to my studying. Unlike 8tracks in which I select a mix and then start studying, with SoundCloud I need to continually return and find a new track to listen to or a new friend's liked tracks.

In summary, I think that SoundCloud is useful if you have a particular song stuck in your head, but you can use YouTube for that. I will be sticking with 8tracks for now. SoundCloud 1/5 Stars; 8tracks 4/5 stars.

Movie Review:

'Beautiful Creatures' is a 'Twilight' knockoff, in the South

Melanie Decelles

TECHNEWS WRITER

"Beautiful Creatures" is reverse "Twilight." We meet a young man who has absolutely no distinguishing characteristics to his personality, but he reads a lot, so we can assume he's deep. He meets our young, supernatural protagonist who reads a lot as well, which implies she's brilliant. They fall in love but are pulled apart due to supernatural reasons involving a very involved supernatural

family.

Did I forget to mention this all takes place in the South? The accents are thicker than butter. The first time someone speaks, I promise someone in the theater will start to laugh.

If you do decide to see this movie though, you will be treated to some of the best insults to ever cross the Mason Dixon line. At one point someone is threatened that his hat will be stolen so that it can be put on a cat. Yeah.

The story follows Ethan Wate who

is the brilliant under-stimulated boy drowning in his oppressively small town. He is saved however by the arrival of Lena Duchannes, who moves to town to live with her reclusive, local, oddball uncle. Where "Twilight" just heavily implies a life of mediocrity would've swallowed Bella Swan up without Edward Cullen to give her the exciting life she deserves, "Beautiful Creatures" isn't that subtle.

When Ethan Wate is tricked into looking at his own future things turn unreasonably dark. He sees that, despite his plans to get as far away from his town as possible,

he never actually manages to leave, and then leads the most depressing version of small-town life possible, ending in his suicide.

While some might laud the gender switch on a wonderfully misogynistic tale, that doesn't seem to be enough to improve the premise of stories like these. A high school romance where one person literally saves the other from depression and an unlive, purgatory-like existence will always be a deeply creepy weight to put on a relationship that, if I recall correctly, consists mostly of hormones..

'The Motherf***er with the Hat' delivers powerful, moving experience

August Lysy

TECHNEWS WRITER

"The Motherf***er with the Hat" [sic], written by Stephen Adley Guirgis and currently showing at Steppenwolf Theatre, is a comedic drama that powerfully communicates the devastation relationships are exposed to when hampered by addiction and codependency. What's more, it conveys how the road to the freedom of healthy independence is a road sometimes walked alone.

The play centers on Jackie (John Ortiz), a recovering alcoholic and drug user with a violent past who was just released from a stint in jail. With his newfound freedom, he has acquired a job at an apartment building and is working to maintain his sobriety with the support of his AA sponsor Ralph D (Jimmy Smits).

However, when he discovers an unclaimed man's hat in his long-time girlfriend's

apartment (Veronica, played by Sandra Delgado), his confidence falters and his progress begins a spiraling descent, as he barely manages to stay sober.

This brief synopsis barely clips the tip of the iceberg for a play so poetically profound in its message. In addition to the cast above, the viewer is also graced by the talents of Gary Perez and Sandra Marquez, who play Jackie's Cousin Julio and Ralph D's wife Victoria, respectively. These two characters, while equally holding their own in terms of rich emotional depth, also allow the viewer to experience Jackie and Ralph D in a different, illuminative light; calling into question the former's toughness and the latter's good nature.

Altogether, the actors were compelling in their characters, but the way in which Smits and Perez embody the idiosyncrasies of their characters and how Marquez so intensely expresses her character's anguish are the true highlights of the ensemble.

In addition to the acting, Todd

Rosenthal's set design and Guirgis' dialogue both deserve distinguished mention. From the moment one enters the sanctum of the theatre, the imaginative set—with its missing fire-escape stairs and askew billboard structure—captures the viewer's eye and communicates the other-worldliness of the play's poetic delivery.

The blend of realism and surrealism is also mirrored in the dialogue. Often the viewer finds the characters speaking in uncharacteristic ways: moving from profuse profanity to poetic enlightenment within the same sentence. The embellishment of language elevates the characters from their reality and allows them to transcend their circumstances and utter profound truths in the grace and conciseness of poetry.

The language, just like the surrounding set, is captivating in its incongruity and in how it ennobles the characters themselves, presenting them not as mere two-dimensional caricatures of "addicts," but allowing them to

voice transcendent understanding of their existences even while they remain imprisoned by their crippling choices.

This dialogue seems to communicate right over the fourth-wall to the viewer, interspersing beams of truth through the murky language of confused lives. This play delivers not only entertainment but also many poignant truths of the human condition. That is the true aim of theater: not just to entertain, but to elevate and inspire. This play, bearing to us the reflection of our own debilitated society, shows us a lot from which we could learn. The question, then, is not whether you should see it, but will you?

Featuring a superb all-Latino cast and the direction of Tony Award-winning director Anna D. Shapiro, "The Motherf***er with the Hat" is playing at Steppenwolf Theatre (steps from the Red Line North-Clybourn stop) now through March 3, 2013. Tickets are \$15 dollars with student identification (without seat restrictions, as far as I know).

App Review:

RedEye Chicago: more than a CTA tracker

Swasti Khuntia

LAYOUT EDITOR

If you are a Chicagoan using a smart phone, then the RedEye app must not be something new for you. No, we aren't talking about an app that removes red eye from a picture, but we are talking about the RedEye app that has features from the useful: CTA Bus and Train Trackers, RedEye news, to the playful: CTA Missed Connections and restaurant guide. Most of us would have seen the RedEye newspaper stand at almost every corner of the

city. Well, the app is the mobile version of the newspaper, along with CTA bus and train trackers, and other miscellaneous stuff.

I've been using the app on my Android phone for a long time, and I have a mixed reaction for this app. This is the ultimate app for those like me, (since I have a U-Pass) who really get around, and need to access CTA train and bus tracker times to navigate the city.

I can even access taxi companies, like Blue Diamond, Blue Ribbon, Checker, Chicago Carriage Cab, Yellow Cab, and Flash Cab to navigate around the city.

Finding a restaurant or bar near current location or CTA stop is an added advantage. Like Craigslist, you have an option of posting a missed connection for someone who caught your attention during the commute. Now, coming to the negative perspective, sometimes the bus times are wrong, but I can deal with that.

The real problem is that at some instance when I open the app and it says, "Unfortunately, the RedEye has stopped." Then it asks if I want to report it or ignore. I've reported it many times and nothing has changed. I hope they fix it in their next upgrade! Apart

from that, timings are accurate and the app is fast; however the latest version constantly uses GPS and is draining battery life. Being an Android user, it's very bad. I would suggest that they have an interactive system map in their next upgrade.

Either way, this app is fine, and I recommend it, since it's pretty easy to use and I can check out today's top stories in news and entertainment.

Got an app on your phone that you think other students should try? Send an email to ae@technewsit.com and we will review it!