

The marijuana-music marriage

Weed grows wild atop the Billboard charts

By Rob Clark

The Battalion

Hemp, weed, pot, the chronic, maryjane, cheeba, reefer, grass, bud, dank, blunts. No matter what you call it, marijuana has made a huge comeback in the music industry with numerous artists supporting legalization of the drug.

Jason Mitchell, president of Aggies for Hemp, said musicians have a unique opportunity to get their pro-marijuana messages across.

"Music is sort of a way for some people to get the message out," he said. "It's very easy to spread facts and knowledge about the plant. The more it's said, the less people will be upset when they hear about it."

But any favorable mention of drug use is bound to incur criticism. Dr. Dennis Reardon, coordinator of the Center for Drug Prevention and Education said pro-marijuana artists can have a negative effect on their listeners.

"I think anyone that promotes an illegal drug is irresponsible," he said. "It just doesn't make sense with all the dangers of drug usage."

Kevin Bomar, owner and producer at Airplay Studios in Bryan, said bands that promote marijuana use may have trouble

gaining financial backing.

"A lot of investors have worked very hard to get where they are," he said. "(Marijuana) is not something that appeals to someone who has worked very hard to make their money. If you're smoking pot, you are probably drinking and partying and this is not viewed as a good investment."

Local artist Britt Tucker of House of Usher concedes this point but said his group has not encountered such a problem.

"The people that represent us are not into (marijuana)," Tucker said. "But if you keep plugging (marijuana's benefits) the point eventually gets across."

Rock group Blind Melon has become known for its marijuana use with the legacy of the "Sleepyhouse."

The group's guitarist Christopher Thorn said, "It's just a place we rented in Durham, N.C., and we all went there to get ready to make the record."

And what did the group do during the album's recording?

"A lot of pot smoking," Thorn said.



and concert performances. In fact, the group has a huge marijuana leaf made of bones displayed behind them at their concerts.

This obsession with the drug has propelled the group to huge success, as their second album "Black Sunday," debuted at number one on Billboard's album charts last summer.

Bomar said the success by the top acts causes others to follow in their smoky paths.

"They are the pillars of the industry," he said. "Those people set the tone for what all musicians do."

So for the musicians, is this all for legalization, recreation or what?

In the November 1993 issue of Pulse! magazine, Cypress Hill lead rapper B-Real said, "People think we're just a bunch of potheads and we just want marijuana to be legalized so we can get high, but that's just bullsh-t. There's lots of sh-t marijuana is really good for. It's a really important plant."

But Reardon said using marijuana facts can be a smokescreen for personal highs.

"A lot of groups are pro-legalization and have almost always used the medicinal and educational benefits as justification for legalization," he said. "But it isn't an effective comparison to say it's good for medicine and it's good for recreational drug use as well."

LaLonde said he is in full support of legalization.

"I think it would be great if they could legalize it," he said. "We have a booth touring with us talking about the use of hemp. I think it's cool people are talking about pot and not acting like it's some big dangerous thing."

Tommy Boy Records is joining the musical marijuana phenomenon with the upcoming release of "Big Blunts." The album is a collection of 12 reggae songs that deal with marijuana use. Song titles include, "Herbman Smuggling," "Jamaican Weed" and "Legalize the Herb."

The press release for "Big Blunts" includes a dedication to "all the herbman growers, smugglers, and hustlers."

The best example of marijuana's invasion of the music charts may be the change of philosophy by hardcore rapper Dr. Dre. As a member of N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitudes), Dre used to portray an

anti-drug image.

On N.W.A.'s 1988 hit "Express Yourself," Dre rapped, "I still express, yo, I don't smoke weed or sess, 'cause it only gives a brother brain damage."

But Dre has changed his tune. The title of his hit album, "The Chronic," refers to a strong strain of marijuana.

Marijuana leaves are drawn on the inside cover and on the compact disc itself. Most of the songs on "The Chronic" mention Dre's new-found affection for the drug.

In Dre's video, "Nuthin But a 'G' Thang," several people wear clothing with marijuana leaves drawn on them. But MTV blurred out the designs to prevent the marijuana from being seen.

Rapper Spice 1 disagrees with this censoring policy.

"That's a cool video. They're showing reality," he said. "Marijuana is on the streets. People are scared to believe the truth. Let the kids know that it's out there and let them know that it ain't cool."

Rapper Phife Dawg from A Tribe Called Quest said although he occasionally uses marijuana, he doesn't expect its effect on music to last.

"It's a trend, but it's gonna get played out after a while," he said. "I can't front, I do it every now and then. But too much of it is no good 'cause you want to graduate to the next level and that sh-t ain't cool."



Kyle Burnett/The Battalion

Mick Southerland, bass player for House of Usher, displays a marijuana leaf cutout after performing the band's pro-marijuana song "Legalize It" at a show late last semester.



Kyle Burnett/The Battalion

Patrons at the annual summer alternative music festival Lollapalooza survey a vendor's table which displays hemp information and paraphernalia.

MOVIE REVIEW

KILMER BREATHES LIFE INTO "TOMBSTONE"

By Traci Travis

The Battalion

"Tombstone" Starring Kurt Russell, Val Kilmer, Dana Delany and Sam Elliott Directed by George P. Cosmatos Rated R Playing at Post Oak III

Saddle up your horse and grab a hold of your pistols because, pardner, you're in for a bumpy ride.

"Tombstone" will not only entertain you, it may just make a cowboy out of ya.

George P. Cosmatos, the director of "Tombstone," saw the possibility of creating a Western version of "The Godfather." He envisioned the film as an American saga of the family, the West, and the people who made a living victimizing those around them.

For those of you who prefer easy plots, "Tombstone" is the ultimate in simplicity. If you can follow the gunfire, you can follow the film.

The film takes place in the Western boomtown of Tombstone, Ariz. during a period of time in which crime ruled the streets. Law and order are nowhere to be found — that is, until Wyatt Earp (Kurt Russell) rides into town.

Wyatt Earp, a retired marshall of Dodge City, comes to Tombstone to start a business of his own. However, instead of finding a peaceful start, he is soon forced to take a stand against the lawless criminals who are consuming the town.

Along with his brothers Morgan (Bill Paxton) and Virgil (Sam Elliott), and his faithful yet unpredictable

friend Doc Holliday (Val Kilmer), Wyatt makes an investment in a local saloon. Their new investment quickly turns sour when the local "bad guys," known as The Cowboys, start to become regular customers.

The trouble first begins when one of The Cowboys shoots the town sheriff in the middle of Main Street. Despite threats from the other Cowboys, Wyatt arrests him and throws him in jail. He is soon released and The Cowboys become mortal enemies of Wyatt, his brothers and Doc.

Believe it or not, the film has more to it than just good guys, bad guys and gun fights. The creators did manage to throw a little romance into the story (and I mean little.) Josephine (Dana Delany), a visiting

actress to the town of Tombstone, and Wyatt manage to exchange a few wistful glances. However, this, as well as a majority of the characters, is overshadowed by the outstanding performance of Val Kilmer as Doc Holliday.

Doc has many comical moments within the movie. In one scene, he manages to get into a gun twirling contest with one of the cowboys, known as Ringo (Michael Biehn). After Ringo twirls his pistol, a drunken Doc pulls out a tin cup and shows off with some fancy finger work. Kilmer steals the show.

After the credits roll and the smoke clears, the audience can see that "Tombstone" has earned the reputation of a legend in the Western theater.



(From left) Val Kilmer, Sam Elliott, Kurt Russell and Bill Paxton star in "Tombstone," the story of legendary U.S. Marshall Wyatt Earp.

Bickering networks

Executives vie for bragging rights

The Associated Press

PASADENA, Calif. — Maybe it was the alignment of the planets. Maybe it was the recent chatter about how the networks face an uncertain future in the projected 500-channel universe. But, boy, did TV executives have their knives out at this month's Television Critics Association press tour.

CBS questioned Fox's ability to fill its late-night slot after the Chevy Chase debacle. NBC tweaked CBS' economic savvy for programming to older viewers. Fox and CBS giped at each other over football.

There was relative equanimity among the ABC folks, perhaps because they're feeling comfortably close in the ratings to first-place CBS.

"I'm not trying to be a smart aleck, but CBS seems to have talked more about Fox than they did about what was going on with them," Fox Broadcasting Co. Chairman Lucie Salhany observed at one point.

"About all I can say is, I'm glad that everybody's so concerned about our financial health and whether we're going to be around," CBS Entertainment President Jeff Sagansky said during his turn at bat.

Probably the best excuse for being a tad sensitive belonged to CBS. It's been less than a month since it lost the National Football Conference contract to the deep pockets of Fox Inc. Chairman Rupert Murdoch.

CBS intimated there could be problems for football on the still-young Fox network, which lacks the reach or experience of CBS, and questioned Fox's \$1.6 billion contract with the NFL as

excessive.

Sagansky, savoring the success of "Late Show with David Letterman," also threw in his two bits on the future of late-night at Fox.

"I can't imagine what they could come up with that would get that time period cooking for them," he said.

"You know, I hate to be in the business of answering Jeff Sagansky or (CBS President) Howard Stringer's questions, but I will answer that," Salhany responded later. "We will get back into the late-night business. Definitely."

Warren Littlefield, NBC's programming chief, was happy to share his assessment of the broadcast scene in general.

"One could make the case that Fox may be narrow-casting to a young audience, CBS narrow-casting to an old audience that's almost exclusively 55-plus, and that NBC and ABC are actually broadcasting for all audiences," he said.

The result for NBC, he said, is a younger audience that is more attractive to advertisers. Ad time on "seaQuest DSV," for example, is priced higher than on CBS' competing, older-skewing "Murder, She Wrote," he said — even though "Murder" gets higher ratings.

"In the world of advertising, in the world where we make our money, it's worth more," he said.

Sagansky offered a picturesque comeback several days later.

"All I can say from reading Warren Littlefield's remarks about "seaQuest" and "Murder, She Wrote" is that the guy has swallowed too much sea water," he said.