

STITCHING A NATION TOGETHER

AIDS

Brazos valley families contributing 11 panels to national AIDS quilt

By Margaret Claughton
THE BATTALION

Through painstaking stitches and seams, families and friends everywhere sew with a common purpose. They weave together their memories of loved ones lost — lost to one of the country's leading killers, the AIDS virus.

They make panels 6 feet by 3 feet, painfully mirroring the measurements of a grave. These panels eventually form an AIDS quilt that depicts their pain, love, admiration and devastation. A quilt that threads together symbols of many lives, all taken by a single disease.

Families all across the nation have created the national AIDS quilt which is now comprised of 27,730 panels, according to the Houston NAMES Project.

Since AIDS affects every corner of the country, even the Brazos Valley will soon be a part of this national memorial. Tonight, 11 Brazos Valley families will share with the community the panels they plan to contribute to the national quilt at 7 p.m. in the MSC Forsythe Gallery.

Each panel is personally made by families from the Brazos Valley area and represents a loved one lost to AIDS.

"All the panels vary," said Suzy Griswold, volunteer coordinator for AIDS Services of Brazos Valley. "Each one is special. These families put a lot of love into them."

The exhibit is part of World AIDS Day 1994 and will follow a candlelight vigil dedicated to those who have died from AIDS.

Brian Thurston, program director for AIDS Services of Brazos Valley (ASBV), designed a panel in memory of a homeless man he worked with at the center.

Thurston said he and the staff became particularly attached to the man, Robert Mullins, because of his incessant will to keep fighting.

"This particular individual was extraordinary," Thurston said. "He had such a difficult life. He was homeless and brain damaged, but he never gave up, he always fought."

Using Thurston's design and the help of staff members at the ASBV, they sewed a panel in

honor of Mullins after his death in 1993.

"He was such an independent spirit," Thurston said. "Most of the others we work with had families to take them one. He didn't have anyone to take a quilt."

Although the panel is a loving tribute to the person lost, Thurston said making the quilt was therapeutic for the staff.

"I have to admit, a lot of it was for us," he said. "It is a healing process, a process of grief."

Thurston said seeing the quilt drives home the devastating effect AIDS has on American families.

"If you understand what one panel meant to you and then see 20 or 100 others, it's compounded," he said. "You see the loss of what is going on with this disease — how young people get cut down."

Sharon Drumheller, assistant health education coordinator for Student Health Services, said the quilt has an intense way of getting through to people.

"It alone is a really powerful message to send," she said. "It brings it home with a more personal touch that perfectly normal American families are affected."

Drumheller said this kind of personal touch may be the only way to get through to people who still don't believe AIDS is a problem. In addition, it may open the minds of those who condemn people with AIDS.

"It's a way to really foster understanding and empathy," she said. "It's not a disease that requires us to banish. People with AIDS need care, not to be ostracized."

The AIDS quilt was started by a man named Cleve Jones in 1984. Jones had AIDS and led a group in San Francisco that initially pasted-together papers with names of those who died from the disease. This reminded him of a quilt and in 1986 the group began sewing. The first quilt was displayed in 1987 and had only 1,920 panels.

Today, the national quilt is too large to be displayed in one place. The sewn memorial has grown to be as big as 11 football fields and weighs more than 32 tons.

And with Brazos Valley's addition, the quilt will number 27,741 panels and growing.

They Might Be Giants

Band to rocket into Rudder Monday

By Rob Clark
THE BATTALION

They Might Be Giants, performing Monday in Rudder Auditorium at 7 p.m., just might be the most interesting band to grace the Texas A&M campus in years. And guitarist John Flansburgh proved to live up to this title in a phone interview.

When Flansburgh first heard of the A&M gig, he said he was impressed with the University's size. "Big, very big," he said.

"My uncle lives in that area and I've been told many times of how many people are there. A really big campus. F—kin' huge."

But Flansburgh and longtime chum/lead singer John Linnell won't be the only giants to take Rudder by storm Monday. For the band's latest album "John Henry," the duo decided to expand to a full band.

"It was something that started as kind of an experiment," Flansburgh said. "We've always played a bunch of different instruments in the show. And for a little while, I was actually playing the drums on a few songs in the show and it was strange because I'm a really bad drummer. But it was going over really well."

But after inviting guest drummers and bass players on stage during select performances, the idea of expansion became a realistic one.

"It sort of made us realize people dig the sound of the live drums and there's just something very exciting about a live rhythm section," he said.

Flansburgh said the rhythm section has electrified the band.

"The best explanation I can give is we've tied a giant booster rocket onto the They Might Be Giants space capsule. We haven't changed our direction, but we're seriously changing our velocity."

Direction has always been one of the most intriguing aspects of the band. The quirky rhyme schemes, creative topics and unusual instrumentation make the Giants like no other.

But many times the band is accused of being too bizarre and weird. Flansburgh said this is an unfair label.

"I never really thought our music to be so strange," he said. "I think people make a big deal out of our songs being so strange, but I think it's very easy to understand what a lot of our songs are about. Even 'Particle Man' — I don't think it's any weirder than a Dr. Seuss story. A lot of our songs are



Clockwise from top: Tony Maimone, John Flansburgh, John Linnell and Brian Doherty of They Might Be Giants.

about hating your job, feeling frustrated with the world.

"I don't know, what are Nine Inch Nails songs about? Why are we the weirdos?"

One of the quirkiest of Giants songs occur at the end of their "Apollo 18" album — a series of 10-15 second songs with lyrics ranging from "I'm having a heart attack" to "What's that blue thing doing here?"

Flansburgh said while the mini-songs seem random, there was a clear idea behind them.

"It was kind of inspired by the collection of songs that you see advertised on late-night TV," he said. "A lot of time it will be like a collection of songs from the '40s and '50s, a set of songs you've never heard. So it's like a stream of unrelated musical blasts."

The Giants began in the mid-'80s as a local band in New York. Since getting their first record deal in 1986, things have moved pretty fast.

"I have to say the biggest transition, the biggest challenge was going from being a local band that basically had to beg for a gig to being essentially a national touring act. And that kind of happened in pretty quick succession."

The success of their first hit single and video "Don't Lets

Start" greatly increased the band's exposure.

"We were on tour when the video started getting played and the size of our audience just doubled in a week," Flansburgh said. "It was pretty good because 10 people looks a lot better than five."

As Flansburgh reminisced about his days in New York with Linnell, begging for gigs, he said he never expected to achieve such success.

"Bands like us usually don't get a big audience," he said. "I feel very lucky and happy that we've been able to get the kind of exposure that we have."

The legions of fans that follow the band have a true dedication to the music, Flansburgh said.

"I feel like when people have the opportunity to really check it out and hear a whole record of ours, they become initiated into something that if they like it, they're going to like it for a while," he said.

As for Monday's performance, Flansburgh said he wanted a house full of A&M students.

"I want to see them all," he said. "I want people stacked three-high in that auditorium. We're going to tear the roof off the place."

"Bring your earplugs and your crash helmets."

Student finds strength in the sound of music

By Haley Stavino
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M student is spreading her message of love and hope with her own album that showcases her gifted voice.

Toni Ruffino, a junior speech communications major with a minor in music, has dreamed of singing ever since she was young.

She said that she puts God, her family and her close friends first and her music second.

"The people close to me are my supporters and inspiration for singing," Ruffino said.

"What has started out as a dream has now become a reality for Ruffino.

But it wasn't always a smooth road.

In junior high, she began to have problems with her throat when she sang. Ruffino was told that she needed to have an operation on her vocal chords that could keep her from ever singing again.

"At this point, I left my life up to God," Ruffino said. "I truly believe God worked through the doctor's hands."

But the risk paid off, and with a successful operation, her voice was good as new.

Ruffino said music is the heartbeat of her life and she is thankful that everything turned out the way it did.

Besides singing around town at churches in Bryan-College Station, she has started singing in Hearne, Caldwell, Belton and Houston.

She also enjoys singing at weddings, banquets and for groups such as Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

"I like to sing at a different church every Sunday," Ruffino said.

At a convention in 1993, Ruffino met Jeff Nelson, a Christian record producer, and he asked her to sing for him.

Stunned by her performance, Nelson told Ruffino a future

singing career was a real possibility.

Making an album was the first step. Entitled "Only For You," the album was released Nov. 11, and is available at Brazos Valley Christian Book Store and Scripture Haven.

One Houston radio station, KSBJ, plays Ruffino's music on the air.

Nelson produced the album, and Ruffino wrote three of the songs and co-wrote two others.

She hopes within two years she will make another album.

"People tell me that they love the album," Ruffino said. "I hope the next one will please people just as much."

Earlier this month, Ruffino won grand prize in the National Association of Christian Artist and Song Writers Annual Seminar.

"I was shocked to find out that I made the semifinals, much less to win first place," Ruffino said.

Ruffino won free production at Rivendell Studios for recording of the same song she sang in the competition. The award also included production of a music video.

But despite such success, Ruffino said she avoids music hype, and concentrates on continuing to travel with her message.

"If God opens the door worldwide, I walk through it," she said.

Pastor Lonnie Green from the Church of the Nazarene in Bryan, said they have been blessed to have Ruffino sing for the church.

"Toni's music is very inspirational and has an impact on everybody in the room," Green said.

Through her music, Ruffino said she hopes to reach as many people as possible.

Father Mike Sis of Saint Mary's



Toni Ruffino sings in the All Faith's Chapel. Blake Griggs / THE BATTALION

Catholic Church said he thinks Ruffino's music inspires her fellow students because of her own struggles in life.

"She is a person of prayer, not a performer," Sis said. "Her lyrics

are powerful (and) touch the heart."

Ruffino said she tries to write from the heart about her experiences so her songs will be easy to relate to.



Frank Black

Frank Black set to open for TMGB

By Rob Clark
THE BATTALION

Hot off the success of his second solo album "Teenager of the Year," Frank Black will perform at Rudder Auditorium Monday night as the opening act for They Might Be Giants.

Black is perhaps best known for his role in The Pixies, a post-modern alternative group that scored with albums like "Tromp Le Monde" and "Bossanova." The sound of The Pixies has been described as "sardonic nursery rhymes" and "a rock 'n' roll corollary of a David Lynch movie."

But Black isn't the only success story spawned from The Pixies. Former Pixie Kim Deal left the group to start up The Breeders, who scored with "Cannonball" last year.

Black's solo songs include "Whatever Happened to Pong?," "Speedy Marie" and "Headache."

In his self-penned biography press release, Black said "I declare to all of you to look up and behold that pie in the sky. Hope you like the record."