



Student escapes all to sample diverse concert

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When it is the middle of the semester and you are behind in all of your classes and everything else seems to be falling apart, there is nothing better than leaving it all for a few days.

I don't mean taking a nap or going for a walk, but really getting out and going. With that in mind, and in hopes of seeing Public Enemy and Anthrax together in concert, I left town last weekend with two friends.

We were to see the concert in Champaign, Ill., on Saturday night after driving there at a leisurely pace and then spending the day wandering through Chicago. We would return to Lincoln on Sunday, again at a leisurely pace.

Of course, it did not happen like that at all. It was terrible and it was great. I am even further behind in all my classes and other projects than I was before, but I would go again in an instant.

Things got out of hand from the start. Minutes before we left, we found out that we had the concert dates wrong. The bands would play Chicago on Saturday and Champaign on Sunday.

We did not worry; there would be guest passes for us (journalists all) at Saturday night's show. If not, we could always buy from scalpers. The main thing was to get back by Sunday, in time for work and classes.

Before we got out of Lincoln, my ears already hurt from the volume of CDs blaring as I sat in the backseat of a small Bronco, nestled cozily between the two stadium-sized speakers.

I watched the sights and listened to a motley progression of bands: Limbo Maniacs ("The Toilet's Flooded"), Stevie Ray ("Couldn't Stand the Weather"), Primus ("To Defy the Laws of Tradition").

Primus. I had never heard of the band until a few weeks earlier,

then one of the Johns was riding with John Payne. I told me they would be the opening band. Another person I know with the same initials mentioned the band once and the P's had it.

After an hour spent with a Primus CD playing at a particularly loud volume, I felt I knew the band intimately. A second hour with the band's second CD (louder still) and I was converted.

Before long I was numb to the music. In fact, I was numb to everything. It was cold in the truck and, upon waking, I found out that the heater did not work. Moreover, an arctic draft blasted across our feet during the entire trip.

As we crossed the Missouri River, I noticed it was cold and rainy. The entire state of Iowa was cold and rainy. The state of Illinois offered a small reprieve. There it was cold, rainy and under construction throughout.

Somewhere in Iowa, I bought a pair of gloves but lost one of them by the end of the trip. I wanted to buy some extra socks but all the truck stops sold them only by the dozen and I wanted to save my money for the essentials like a concert T-shirt.

By midnight, we were somewhere in Illinois and decided to start calling friends for a place to spend the night. We ended up in one of the coolest apartments in the world, near DePaul University and in one of the coolest neighborhoods in the world.

I could have spent the whole trip wandering through that part of North Central Chicago: endless rows of tall, skinny houses covered with ivy and elaborate exteriors.

There are no yards, but trees appear everywhere, grand arching trees reaching out over all. The streets, though lined with parked cars, are often paved with bricks and cut through the area at all angles, making no city block the same and adding further to the coziness of it all.

After sleeping in late, the three

of us sampled Chicago pizza and found it most filling despite the annoying dance music playing all the while. The two Johns laughed at me because they thought I ate too much: my pizza and half of theirs.

By the time we set out for the Aragon Ballroom, it was dark and cold in a very different neighborhood. Black grills covered the windows and doors of most homes and businesses. Empty lots and broken windows took the place of grand old trees.

Outside the theater, we were accosted by a young man, thirteen at the oldest, demanding money. "Gimme a dollar, honky mother fucker." More expletives followed, backed by the hard stares of his older, bigger friends. We hurried on, my heart pounding more loudly than the bass rumblings from passing cars. His caramel face, already deeply scarred, remained with me.

Inside the ballroom, they had never heard of us. We waited for the Public Enemy guest list to arrive as a steady stream of ticket holders passed by. The concert was sold out and the scalpers were way out of our range, so we waited. The crowd was tense and the divisions clear. The whites had come for Anthrax and the blacks for Public Enemy. Freaks of unknown color had come for Primus.

We heard faint sounds from within and thought a sound check was in progress. But the sounds did not stop, and before long, we knew that the Primus set had ended.

Some white metal fans were ejected and another set ended. Public Enemy's set was done, and the guest list had never come. We got back into the truck, cold and dejected, deciding to crash at a friend's apartment in Oak Park. In the southwestern part of Chicago,

Ernest Hemingway described his home town, Oak Park, as a city of wide lawns and narrow minds. Somewhere in there he neglected to mention the water-filled underpass which nearly flooded the truck

and the prostitutes waiting at the city limits.

Once in Oak Park, we found the friend's apartment easily. It was another neat apartment in another neighborhood, but by the time we got there it was too late to appreciate it.

The next morning, we went out for pancakes and the two Johns laughed at me again because I ate all of my pancakes and most of those ordered by our host.

She cautioned us beforehand that it was a Yuppie pancake place, but we were undeterred. The night before, we had sauntered into Lord Chumley's Pub, hoping for a cheap meal and beer.

Once seated, our mistake became clear: It was a serious Yuppie haven. Most meals were priced more than \$12.95 and had long, funny names. We ordered appetizers and sank an inch or two lower in our seats. Too cold for beer, I asked for a cup of coffee — refillable.

The waitress was quite gracious, not batting an eye at our orders and even bringing a basket of complimentary cheese bread. Most servers would have made snide comments and given cold service, but she betrayed no annoyance.

I stopped in the bathroom before getting on the road again. I looked at the picture of fruits and vegetables above the urinal, then down to make sure my aim was good, then back up again, feeling something was amiss.

And it was. A nipple, right there in the middle of the picture. An entire breast, in fact, offering sharp contrast to the highway fare of generic, lurid condom machines.

After pancakes, we sampled some of the book and record stores of Oak Park, then headed to the visitor center. The whole place was full of Frank Lloyd Wright stuff; Hemingway was almost forgotten.

CONCERT NOTES Getting to Champaign was easy, finding the stadium easier. Things different all along. We get tickets right away

and end up with great seats, right there in front.

Seats got the best way to watch a rap/heavy metal concert, but they afford the opportunity to observe the crowd, a very different one from what we almost experienced in Chicago: much younger, much whiter, much more suburban and safe.

These people moaned and groaned here for a glimpse of the ghetto, transferred from the MTV screen to the stage for a few brief hours, far from the South Side of Chicago.

The opener, Young Black Teenagers, rap through three blasts without a pause: five white guys, three of them rapping, making good noise, opening a concert which will break all rules of color and musical style.

The place is overstaffed: fake smiling caramel-vested young folks every twenty feet here to help us to our seats in a full-empty stadium. And every one of them white. Honkies. Gimme your ticket, honky.

I gave mine. What are you, a student ushering at the stadium to see the show for free? I do that in Lincoln to hear the symphony. Now I hear a new symphony and wonder how many of the honkies around me can hear this, the words behind the beat, the symphony of anger lacking a resolution.

Between bands, music booms out over the audience, music used both as advertisement (very tired of hearing the endless loop ad for Terminator X's new record) and as political foam.

This is serious political re-education before the concert has really begun, telling us the black story, dissing Columbus and the schools but saving get through school, too.

Every voice so far a male voice. Where are the female rappers? Queen Latifah, why did you not replace Catherine at the Aragon Ballroom in Chicago? Thought too soon — almost in response, a woman's voice booms overhead — "That's why I sing the blues" — but

only for two lines.

Primus now done and has stolen the show already. They get my T-shirt dollars, more than the price of a ticket, at that. Primus has that effect upon people. A friend told me that a friend of his was broke and had to sell all of his music, everything but The Grateful Dead and Primus.

Their front man is a wonder. He is fast, unspeakably so. His spindly leg pumps up and down with the music. His hands move in a blur across and around his bass as multisyllabic words pour from his mouth with facile ease.

The band is tight, together. The crowd is moving and hopping in spite of and on top of the caramel brown chairs, not wanting the band to finish.

Terminator X's ad is pouring and pounding out again, filling us with revisionist history put behind dollar signs. Revisionist-political history pouring out, and who is listening?

Two rows down, a 13-year-old white boy flips off his friends behind us, he wearing a fresh Public Enemy t-shirt with the message "Apocalypse 91 — the enemy comes black." The trademark black man in cross hairs appears on the front, but the message is clear: That is honky in those hairs. Peace sells, but who is listening?

Hey white boy, honky nigger, how hard are you, flipping off your friends in the back of the stadium? Do you know the projects white boy? Have you seen the street corners, honky? Ever been with a street corner girl?

A street corner girl, like the one who propositioned us out in the cold Chicago night under a dark light and a darker sidewalk, wearing a short skirt and a long wig?

BOYEEE!!! Public Enemy is done and I scramble to make notes in the dark. Did anyone listen? Here is a black band telling a white audience to make reparations payments

for slavery. The crowd thunders applause, not aware of what they have been hearing.

But who could listen to such a visual band? Public Image, Public Enemy. Visual from the first: four men appear separate from the band, wearing shades, berets and uniforms, giving us the image, the attitude, the enemy.

Then the band: Chuck D in black and black, no pretension. Flavor Flav in pink sweats and hat turned sideways, wearing Pink Panther bedroom slippers and a clock as a necklace, radiating pretension, but carrying it off and giving us his trademark "BOYEEE!!!" And Terminator X, pretentious flashy black, poised and posed above the band, pulling and cutting from a stack of records.

The band is out, and the white crowd rises not to lynch but to listen. But are they listening?

Almost all songs from "Fear of a Black Planet," the whole run-down — 911, who stole the Soul, Revolutionary Generation, Burn Hollywood Burn.

Between the songs, more re-education. Chuck D lays it down about ISU using an Indian as a mascot "out jumping like a fool" on the field every game. The crowd cheers. "But ya'll too young and adolescent to understand that is offensive." The crowd cheers.

Are you listening? White boy, are you listening?

As the crowd tunes in the stadium, the Public Enemy finish, reaching from a rack of about eight albums, the stage is cleared and bare. Two posed guards, no raised fists in the center, but a row of extra monitors spanning the stage.

Anthrax playing now, my legs vibrating with the sound of it. Vocalist all right but like Public Enemy, spends too much time getting the crowd to cheer.

One guitarist a madman, doing a stage-stomp-mosh, his Hare Krishna ponytail flailing about, the other guitarist quiet behind a hanging

mop of hair, bassist loud behind the same, drummer lost behind a cage of drums.

This is the terrordome of the Public Enemy song. The set has just begun and the caramel plastic chairs in the orchestra pit are thrown aside to make room for slamming and moshing as people are passed overhead after diving off the stage. The security folks look nervous and helpless.

The band opens with the ominous ticks of "Persistence of Time" before reaching back to the first album and working their way back up to "Cry for the Indians," appropriate for this campus.

The vocalist dons a headdress and encourages the crowd to make up a war dance and they cheer. Later, all chant together, syllable by syllable, "You're Antisocial." Are you listening?

Like Flavor Flav says in his nasal voice, BOYEEE!!! Anthrax finish, then come back for a rap encore and a metal encore, then again for "Bring Tha Noize" which brings Public Enemy on stage with Anthrax for a crowded finale.

After the show, we stop for food at another convenient store that allows no one inside.

A guy in a Public Enemy T-shirt standing behind us in line tells us he sat by the sound board. "Yeah, and the decibel meter was in the over zone for all of Anthrax man, over 116."

We drive all night and I listen to the Primus CDs again. By the time I take the wheel outside Des Moines, a haze spreads over my eyes and ears.

The final shift is mine, and I watch the sun rise behind me in the mirror and greet a new day with Primus. It is still cold but no longer raining.

Iowa flows past as a flow of coffee and donuts warms me. I cross the Missouri as my first class begins Monday morning and wonder whether anyone is listening to the lecture.

