

Stale tale

'SNL' opener unfunny

By Frazier Moore
AP Television Critic

NEW YORK (AP) — Nations come and go. The hundred-dollar bill gets a fresh new look. Then there's "Saturday Night Live," hopelessly stuck in the past.

What about all the grand talk of bringing this 1970s relic into the '90s, of "reinventing" it for the new season?

Sadly, that was "Saturday Night" jive.

That's the disappointing news from NBC's Studio 8H, where "SNL" launched its much-awaited, supposedly do-or-die 21st season Saturday night, with Mariel Hemingway as guest host.

The program served as an apt warm-up for the 1996 presidential campaign: empty promises of change. From the O.J. Simpson sketch where "Judge Ito" orders lawyer "Johnnie Cochran" to declare, "Live from New York ...!" to the self-congratulating group huddle as the final credits roll, Saturday's show was "SNL" business as usual.

After all the hype, was it too much to hope for at least one genuine surprise during the long, long 90 minutes? In retrospect, yes.

If anyone from producer Lorne Michaels on down really believes this is a different show from last April

or April 1976 — they're delusional. Sure, there are new people on board, but the show's the same old heap with just another coat of paint, traveling the same road, stuck in the same ruts.

Of course, this is hardly the first time Michaels has promised great things, then failed to deliver. In fact, year after year he's like Lucy in the "Peanuts" strip, swearing she'll hold the football. The viewer is Charlie Brown, always falling for it.

This time, the only auspicious sign comes from the freshman class of repertory players. Although it's premature to rate the six rookies, one of them, Darrell Hammond, is clearly a welcome addition thanks to his impersonation skills (his was a dead-on Ted Koppel in an otherwise limp "Nightline" send-up).

As for the new crop of writers, they're clearly saving their good stuff for later in the season.

The show's brightest elements? Musical guest Blues Traveler, which traveled in at the last minute to sub for the dropout formerly known as Prince, and Hemingway, who displayed an unexpected gift for comedy. Neither, of course, will be back soon enough.

Who's next week's guest host? Chevy Chase. Now there's a fresh idea!

Music Reviews

"Prize"
Wanderlust
RCA Records
Grade: A+

Sometimes in the music industry, a virtually flawless work emerges from a virtual unknown. That's exactly the case on Wanderlust's debut album "Prize," an album of sheer blissful music.

Wanderlust—if it must be confined to being compared to other bands, for its sound is truly unique—might be compared as such: Take the pop hooks and vocal harmonies of the Beatles, the insightful lyrics of Bob Dylan, and throw in a couple of Rickenbacker guitars (most well-known to be used by the Rembrandts) and you start to get the idea.

Every second of "Prize" is exquisite. A little-known group, Wanderlust truly experienced a Cinderella story (the fairy tale, not the band). When the band members went out to shoot photographs for their demo, they knocked on the door of a house to ask if they could use the porch for pictures.

The house belonged to a man who worked at a recording studio, and at his behest, they sent him their demo tape. He passed it on to his friend, Michael Musmanno, who offered to produce for them.

They recorded four songs for an EP, but before the EP could be pressed, offers came flying in and Wanderlust signed with RCA for a seven-record deal! (More masterpieces are coming!)

RCA told Wanderlust to finish what they had started, and thus "Prize" was born. One track, "Sundial" cuts off suddenly, because it was the end of the tape for the original demo.

The album opens with "Wanna Feel New," a catchy song that sets the pace for most of the album, a sort of laid-back, real-pop-music-by-real-pop-musicians feel to it. Wanderlust could be the guys next door who offer to give you a cup of coffee if you come over and listen to them.

The title track picks up right where "Wanna Feel New" leaves off, swinging in with an edgy-sweet guitar and an inference to Cracker Jack. Who can fail with that, right?



"I Walked" is the third track of the album, as the first single, though just about all the songs on the album could make it as singles. When the chorus snags your ear, you can't change the channel.

Singer/guitarist/songwriter Scott Sax said, "My brother said he felt an overnight walk was one of the most therapeutic things you could do, because you feel yourself pass through all these emotions as yesterday physically fades away, strolling beyond the grayness into a new sun. You evolve and start over just as the day does."

Everyone has (or has had) a friend like the character in "Troubled Man": someone who says love isn't for him and that other things are more important. The song pokes fun at the character, saying such people refuse to listen.

As the slow guitar riff of "Sundial" begins to ebb through the speakers, and the sound of an acoustic guitar rings true in the background, as do a slow jazzy Byrd-like quality, and a gorgeous, almost hypnotic flair to the playing. Sax's vocals ring out, his voice a beacon to all.

"Coffee In The Kitchen" is a personal favorite, with a hook that will sink into you and fail to ever let go. It has that carefree sound to it that will make you smile. "While you're buyin' and sellin' / I'll be on my seventh dream / Screamin' and yellin' / I'll be laughing at the movie screen / Coffee in the kitchen / Sugar and a little cream," the chorus hums.

One might wonder if "Before We Fade" is a confessional, as it comes across as a story one might tell to their best friend. The melody skirts at the darkness, a song for the evening, a tale of lies and dreams.

Rob Bonfiglio, lead guitarist, proves that in his hands, the Rickenbacker guitar is a truly blessed instrument, with notes that slide over you like a lover's touch on a cold night.

Take pause on "Deepest Blue" to sit down and get a cup of coffee or smoke a cigarette, as it's a beautiful contemplative lapse from the rock overtones, as you can imagine someone standing against a flat gray sky, the wind blowing through their hair, as they are trapped in memories of times past.

"Brand New Plan" is like a figurative Gilligan's Island about all the plans people make in life and how so many of them never bear fruit, and the reference to the show isn't exactly masked. It undergoes a transformation from a quiet undertone to the wistful chorus "I always felt like Gilligan/Dreamin' up a brand new plan/Just when everything goes my way/The Professor comes walkin' in/Saying 'Sorry but we're stuck again.'"

When the opening rockish riff of "Stage Name" kicks in, another faster paced song jumps up for attention. The constant beat of the drums, the guitar which comes in waves, and the lyrics which merit a great deal of thought. Again, Wanderlust proves their ability to write catchy choruses.

The closing number of the album is "Flash and Shadow," a soft gentle song which may bring a tear to your eye. The first half is all acoustic and when the electric guitar comes in, the pace of the song isn't hindered in the slightest. It's raining outside. Wanderlust is sitting on the porch, playing as the rain falls down on them.

The lyrics for the song sum up the general feel of Wanderlust. "Everything is flash and shadow/ Everything is black and green/ Everything is chutes and ladders/ Everything's anything in between."

Whatever praise is given this album, nothing can compare to actually hearing it, and meager words can't capture the majestic splendor of Wanderlust's debut album, "Prize." Go buy it. Now. And while you're at it, thank RCA for the next six albums, may they be as good, if not (may miracles never cease) even better.

— Cliff Hicks

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PEOPLE people

Antic nets Grant trivia query

LONDON (AP)—Now you too can score with Hugh Grant.

His escapade with a Hollywood tart will be a question in the 1996 British edition of Trivial Pursuit:

"Which film publicity launch was in its gestation stage when Hugh hooked a hooker?"

Grant was promoting "Nine Months" in July when Los Angeles police arrested him with a prostitute on Sunset Boulevard.

He pleaded no contest and was sentenced to a fine and an AIDS education course.

"It is only in the adult version, not the family version of the game," Brian Highley, who compiles queries for the game, told The People newspaper.

He's invited Grant and his girlfriend, model Elizabeth Hurley, to the new edition's launch.

"I hope he has sufficient sense of humor to come along," Highley said.

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