

## 'Next big thing' fails to electrify

By JEFF RANDALL  
Music Critic

Ever since rock 'n' roll first reared its head, those who have taken on the task of chronicling its existence have been on a never-ending quest to determine the "next big thing."

And ever since last August, the "next big thing" has been proclaimed far and wide to be the techno/electronic/trip-hop revolution. Artists such as Tricky, Prodigy, the Chemical Brothers and Underworld were supposed to hit America's radio stations with a force that would rival the post-grunge scene's dominance of the past few years.

It didn't happen.

Sure, the war's not over yet. But the Chemical Brothers' "Dig Your Own Hole" and Tricky's "Pre-Millennium Tension" were the premier electronic music releases of the past few months, and — although they both ranked among the best releases of this past school year — neither album sold enough copies to be considered a major breakthrough. Sure, Prodigy's "much-anticipated" release is still in the works, and this summer's edition of Lollapalooza will feature Tricky's wiggling stage antics, so electronic music may still be able to fight its way to the top of the record charts. But don't bet on it.

### Sense of style

As much as we hate to admit it, Americans just aren't as refined in their artistic taste as their European counterparts. We still love the guitar-bass-drum combo that started somewhere around Buddy Holly and has never stopped rolling. We still like the verse-chorus-verse-chorus song pattern that makes everything nice and neatly packaged into three-minute radio-friendly snippets. For God's sake, we even have the audacity to still like words in our songs.

Electronic music rarely works within any of these primitive boundaries. And even though this form of music is the only truly original sonic art being practiced right now — with the possible exception of a few groundbreaking hip-hop artists — that doesn't necessarily mean it will be appreciated by general audiences.

Free-form explorations of sound don't sound too good when you're on your way to the beach. Orchestrated strings piled beneath sirens and screams are too difficult for FM disc jockeys to queue up.

And if you think that just because U2 is doing it, it's going to be huge, think again. "Discotheque," the band's techno-laden first single from "POP," was a virtual bomb. But "Staring at the Sun," one of the album's few non-electronic tracks, has hit the charts like a bat wielded by Ken Griffey Jr. That's right, even Bono and the Edge have realized that they can't shove this music down mainstream America's throat.

So until we as a nation change our tastes or this music willingly molds itself into an Americanized product, the world of electronica will be relegated to dark and smoky dance clubs, late-night slots on MTV, the rare teenager's bedroom and — even worse — Europe.

### Status quo

As for the rest of the music world, things stuck pretty much to the status quo.

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In news that transcended the record charts, rappers Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls (a.k.a. the Notorious B.I.G.) were gunned down in separate and officially unrelated incidents. Marilyn Manson (the band) was unceremoniously protested in nearly every city through which it toured, and Manson (the man) subsequently garnered more television air time than President Clinton. Marion "Suge" Knight, the co-founder and CEO of Death Row Records, was sentenced to a lengthy jail term for violating his parole. Elvis remained dead. Unfortunately for us all, Michael Bolton and John Tesh stayed alive.

And what about the music?

It was yet another college-rock-gone-mainstream year, as R.E.M., U2 and Nirvana hit the scene with new albums.

R.E.M.'s "New Adventures in Hi-Fi," an album recorded in spurts during the band's "Monster" tour, proved that this more-than-a-decade-old band still has enough creative juice to keep itself going, at least until the century winds out.

Nirvana's "From the Muddy Banks of the Wishkah," a collection of live tracks, briefly renewed interest in the band that changed the face of music and in its departed lead singer, Kurt Cobain.

But the most stunning return to the charts was that of U2. "POP" easily could have been a retreaded journey through the musical motifs of this bigger-than-big band's past. But instead, U2 reinvented themselves yet again as the flag-bearers of a new musical outlook, one rife with electronic influence and replete with good songwriting.

### From the unknown

Other albums by less popular but equally — if not exceedingly — talented bands also made their way into stores this past year.

Pavement returned from the lackluster response to their last album, "Wowee Zowee," with the outstanding "Brighten the Corners," a collection of guitar-and-fuzz-driven tunes that by no means followed musical convention, but still managed to sound like some of the best pop music ever written.

The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, one of America's most divisive love-'em-or-hate-'em bands, upped their blues and punk rock ante with "Now I Got Worry." Spencer's harsh vocals combined with Russell Simins' fierce beats and a full-on guitar hit would have made for the usual Spencer release, but extensive post-production and mixing turned "Worry" into deconstruction rock. And it didn't sound too bad, either.

Please see TUNES on 13

## Concerts



MATT MILLER/DN

PAUL STANLEY, lead singer of KISS, performs in Omaha last fall. KISS was just one of many concerts that came to the Lincoln-Omaha area this past year.

## Movies spring back from bad fall

By GERRY BELTZ  
Film Critic

A summer of impossible missions, nutty professors and world-crushing aliens defeated by a cable repairman's laptop computer would be a tough act to follow.

Hollywood couldn't even keep up, let alone follow.

There were a few better-than-average flicks during the semester time, such as "Ransom," "Daylight" and "William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet," but nothing outstanding.

There were, however, quite a few flicks that just sucked sheep snot. "A Very Brady Sequel," "The Crow 2" and "The Island of Dr. Moreau" all fared very poorly at the box office.

As usual, with the close of the year came the creamier crop of movies. The crew of the Enterprise showed us resistance was not futile, Tom Cruise and Cuba Gooding Jr. showed us the money and Michael Jordan shot some mean hoops with some Looney cartoon characters.

Also in 1996 was the resurgence of a film genre almost forgotten: the horror film. Wes Craven's "Scream" was a surprise-hit nationwide, and with the early '97 hit "The Relic," new

life was breathed into a formerly lifeless and overused body of film.

Overall, though, the latter part of 1996 was very blah, cinematically speaking.

On the other hand, movie theaters were ordering extra popcorn for 1997. The long-anticipated re-issue of the "Star Wars" trilogy to the big screen cast the chances of success for most other films to the wayside.

Never-before-seen footage, cleaned-up special effects and soundtrack, plus two generations of fans made the trilogy a success before the first ticket was sold.

Still, even with the Force guiding this triumvirate classic to the top money-grossing spot, a few films did manage to come through between January and March.

The positive shock wave of the out-of-nowhere hit "Jerry Maguire" was still being felt everywhere, Howard Stern made a big splash with his "Private Parts" and the first-of-two volcano-based flicks — "Dante's Peak" — erupted to great financial success.

At the end of January, Lincoln moviegoers were shelling out a little more money to see a movie; evening ticket prices went up to \$6 each, while the StarShip 9 admission prices rose a quarter to \$1.75 a seat.

Construction also began on the all-new East Park 6 Theaters, which will include stadium seating, all-digital sound and bigger auditoriums. Completion of the complex has been forecasted for October.

Over spring break, the annual Academy Awards celebration was held, and was largely run over with independent and little-seen films such as "The English Patient," "Sling Blade" and "Fargo." The lion's share of awards went to "The English Patient," including Best Picture and Best Director.

Other classic films followed the trail blazed by the re-release of "Star Wars." "The Godfather" is already in limited release, with "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," "Saturday Night Fever" and "Dirty Dancing" waiting on the sidelines.

The last couple of months have seen the release of a few more box-office winners. "Anaconda" swallowed load after load of money, "Grosse Pointe Blank" hit the dark-comedy bull's eye and "Volcano" burned up the box office.

All in all, last semester really bit the li'l smokie for movies, but this season has really picked up the pace and brought the movie scene back up to speed.