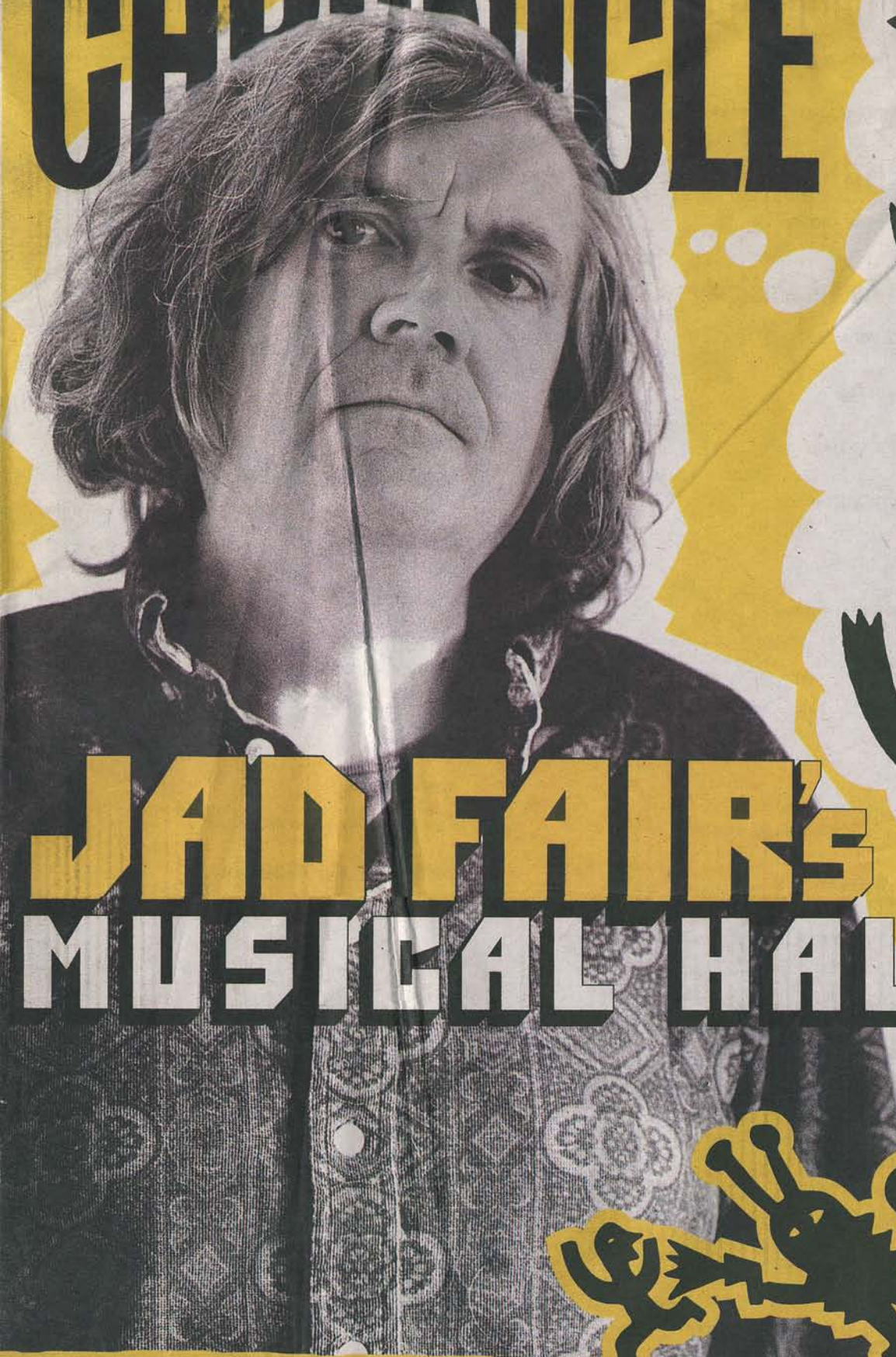


THE AUSTIN

CHRONICLE



JAD FAIR'S MUSICAL HALF-LIFE

BY AUDRA SCHROEDER • P.58



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PRIMARY-ELECTION PREVIEW A 'PORGY AND BESS' FOR AUSTIN PRIMIZIE: PUTTING THE OSTERIA IN AUSTIN 'TEETH' SINKING IN

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'Fritz Haeg: Attack on the Front Lawn' Activism disguised as art

Unless you're a moron, morally blind, or possibly a Republican, it's easy to see, in both the microcosm and the macrocosm, that as a nation and a people we are becoming more and more isolated from one another and from the world. While the party line focuses on diversity and acceptance, anyone who has ever hung around the halls of a high school can tell you that those who differ from the norm are ridiculed and shut out. We don't know our neighbors, and if we do, we probably don't like them. And despite the sniggling innuendos of conservative editorialists, anyone with half a brain and the ability to sense changes in the weather knew the world was getting a lot hotter 10 and even 15 years ago. We're in denial, folks. We have been for a long time, and no landscape is more barren than the landscape of denial.

Thank the powers that be, then, for individuals like Fritz Haeg. An architect/artist/teacher, Haeg began his attack on denial July 4, 2005, by launching his Edible Estates project, replacing a residential front lawn in Salina, Kan., the geographical center of the U.S., with a vegetable garden. Since then, Haeg has done the same in Los Angeles, New Jersey, and London, and this coming March, in conjunction with an exhibition at Arthouse opening this week, Haeg will plant his fifth such garden in front of a residence in the Austin area.

"Why are we attacking lawns?" asks Arthouse curator Elizabeth Dunbar. "Why not? They suck up lots of water, and there's chemical runoff. And there are a host of other issues associated with having a front lawn. For the most part, the lawn is nothing more than a decorative space

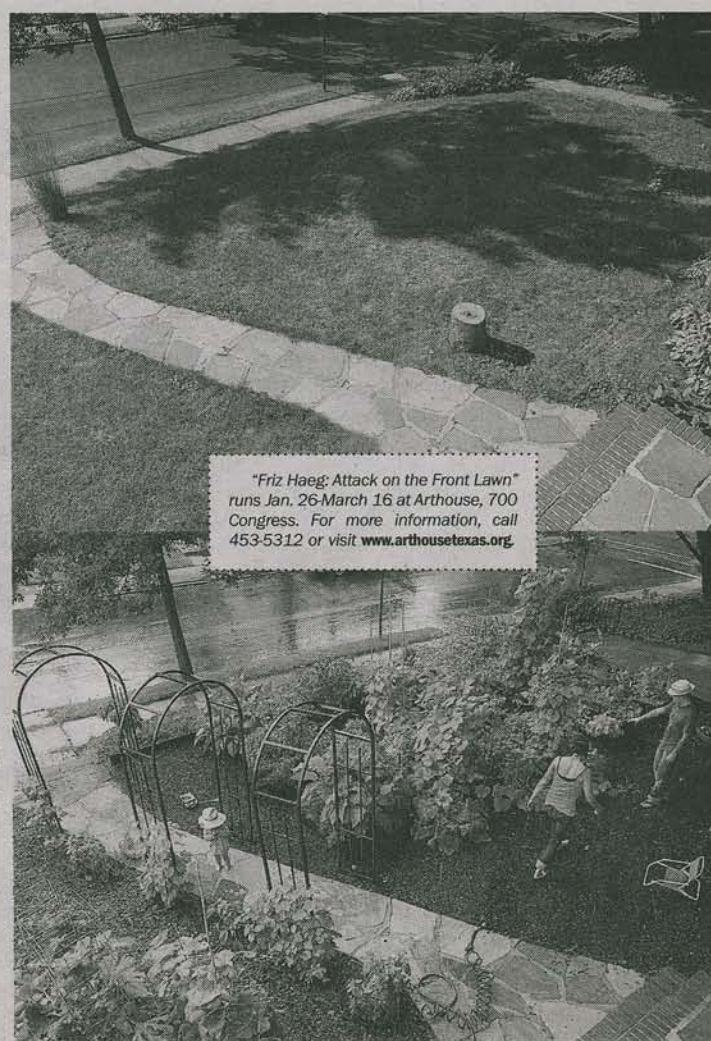
with no real function other than just sitting there and sometimes being pretty. A lot of times it isn't even that.

"Edible gardens weren't really considered something to hide until fairly recently. Fritz is reversing that trend by putting them in the front yard, making them functional, making them aesthetic, and also making them sites of conversation and social interaction. At the same time, he's asking us to think about where our food comes from. Most of our produce is shipped something like 1,500 miles before it gets to us in stores. Fritz wants to inspire people to become more involved in thinking about where their food comes from and considering what kind of environmental and sociological impacts food production has on our world today.

"In a way, Fritz's project is social activism wrapped in the guise of art. I think he really expands the definition of what art can be. Fritz also fits in with many other artists who are working today in what is called relational aesthetics, whose artworks consist of working within communities and involving themselves in facilitating social interactions."

In addition to the Arthouse exhibition, which will feature photographic and video documentation from the Edible Estates project, a series of workshops titled How to Eat Austin will be held every Saturday, 3-5pm, in a large geodesic tent inside Arthouse's main gallery space. The workshops will focus on subjects such as composting, planting, and caring for a garden; cooking the food you grow; and possibilities for selling what you grow. Haeg will attend the workshop on Jan. 26, as well as return to Austin for another of the workshops and, of course, the planting of the garden itself.

— Barry Pineo



'Portrait of Allison' Kid pix

How long has it been since you've seen the world through the eyes of a child? The annual photography exhibition "Portrait of Allison," now in its fifth year, gives you the opportunity to see the world around Allison Elementary School through the eyes — make that the lenses — of the school's fifth- and sixth-grade photography students. The works in the show, which is up for one night only, are available for purchase, with all proceeds going directly to the individual students. Refreshments will be served, and music will be provided by DJ Sugar Bear. "Portrait of Allison" is on view Saturday, Jan. 26, 6-10pm, at the Austin Figurative Gallery, 301 Chicon Unit F. For more information, call 296-6624.

— Robert Faires

see.hear.speak.three They said 'yes and' and had a festival

Anyone paying any attention at all to the Austin comedy scene over the last couple of years couldn't help but notice ColdTowne. In 2006, it won the *Chronicle* "Best of Austin" Readers Poll award for Best Improv Group and in 2007 received the B. Iden Payne Award for Outstanding Improvisational Theatre Ensemble and the "Best of Austin" award for Best Comedy Troupe. While these accomplishments are impressive all on their own, they take on even greater significance when you consider that ColdTowne wasn't anywhere to be found in the Austin area in mid-2005. "We started out in New Orleans," says Michael Jastroch, one of the five people who officially make up ColdTowne, "and we kind of washed up here after the hurricane, which seems to be the story that's going to be perpetually written about us for the rest of our lives, no matter what."

While the ColdTowners, like so many local comedians, started out working wherever they could, they managed to quickly establish themselves in their own venue on Airport Boulevard and 48½ Street, right next to I Luv Video. "Opening our own space was something we all decided we wanted to do when we got here," says Jastroch. "Fortunately, Tami Nelson, who's in the group, lived here for a number of years before she moved to New Orleans, so we had contacts with the people that owned I Luv Video and also Spider House. They helped us out a lot in terms of finding the space and helping promote us. That's one of the reasons we stayed in Austin, because people are so eager to promote the arts. We opened the theatre a little over a year after we moved here, but we were doing events at the Space, that's now the theatre, before that."

One of the events they did was a little festival called see.hear.speak. Says Jastroch: "An underlying rule of improv is to 'yes and' each other. For instance, you say, 'Look; I have an apple,' and I'll say, 'Yes, and the apple is green.' That's one of the fundamental building blocks of an improv scene, which, in a metaphoric sense, translates to the rest of our lives." In the case of see.hear.speak., the ColdTowners yes-anded themselves into a popular comedy festival. "Someone said, 'Hey, let's do a special event,' and then we just kind of kept yes-anding each other and making it into a bigger thing, and eventually see.hear.speak. was born."

The festival, spread across three nights, breaks down into one night of "see" (comedy with video), one of "hear" (comedy with music), and one of "speak" (comedy in a solo format). This year, for the first time, the ColdTowners are flying in acts from around the country, including Jill Bernard, who'll perform in both "hear" and "speak." "In the improv world, Jill is kind of an icon," says Jastroch. "She's teaching a bunch of classes on Saturday [Jan. 26] during the day. Last year, that was a little fantasy dream we had of actually bringing in people we like to perform for an Austin audience. And to be able to actually pull it off this year is really exciting. And we're throwing a fairly large afterparty after 'speak.' Someone yes-anded and got a bunch of sponsors, so we'll have free food and probably some drink specials and all sorts of crazy stuff."

see.hear.speak.three runs Thursday-Saturday, Jan. 24-26, with shows at 8 and 10pm, at ColdTowne Theater, 4803-B Airport. For a complete listing of acts and events, visit www.coldtownetheater.com. And make sure you get your tickets early. Seating is extremely limited.

— B.P.