

## ENTERTAINMENT

## LOOK BACK: Highlights from Melissa Merli on the week that was

## Binging on 'Doc Now!'

I binge-watched this past week all seven episodes of IFC's "Documentary Now!" — affectionate spoofs of famous documentaries with superb art direction, production and acting, mainly by comedians Fred Armisen and Bill Hader. In the last two episodes on the faux '70s soft-rock band Blue Jean Committee, Danville native Irving Azoff parodies himself as '70s super-agent Alvin Izoff! Sustained chuckles throughout. But a friend criticizes "Doc Now!" for not identifying the docs parodied, saying the show demeans the documentary form and history and blurs fact and fiction. OK, but ... I can't wait until the next season!

## Wallace talk was interesting

I'm not an expert on David Foster Wallace. But I felt I knew enough that I would be bored at a talk Wednesday at the Urbana Free Library about him. But Charles Harris and Robert McLaughlin, who were his colleagues in ISU's English department, gave the 50 or so people there interesting anecdotes and unpretentious insights to DFW and his work, particularly his hefty masterpiece "Infinite Jest." In fact, Harris and McLaughlin's talk made me want to crack open the copy of "Jest" I have on my bedside table. DFW, who died in '08, might just have a lot to teach me about ethics, irony and depression.

## A jewel of a show

Run the Jewels, the Pymalion Fest headline act, is a big deal. So I sent two rap-loving emissaries — nephew Nic Hatfield and buddy Dan Busey — to the concert that kicked off the duo's U.S. tour after Europe. "The turnout was large and excited to see Run the Jewels," Busey said. "Almost as excited as Mike and El-P were to be back in the States. Everybody had a fun time at a rap show in downtown Champaign. No gunfire, just a lot of happy fans." Run the Jewels works because El-P and Killer Mike, together since '13, are committed completely to the act and genuinely enjoy each other, Busey said.

## Ask 'Mimi'

Each week, Merli answers three arts and entertainment questions



## How did the Viktor Krauss (right) concert go last Sunday at the Allerton Music Barn?

The concert sold out, though I spotted a few empty seats behind view-obstructing columns. Before the show, Krauss told listeners he hoped they didn't find his music "scary." A few folks left during the break — maybe they had expected country or bluegrass or wanted to gaze at the lunar eclipse/red moon rising?

Krauss, on upright bass, and a guitarist and drummer played his atmospheric original music from his two albums. Another concert-goer and I tried to find words to describe his music but were unable to come up with a really accurate term. He has compared it to movie music without the movie, and that is apt. At the end, Krauss looked pleased with the standing O and the reception given him and his mates overall, and I drove home feeling quite satisfied.

## Did the Art Theater Co-op receive an award?

More like recognition. It's now listed as one of 23 Sundance Institute Art House Project theaters. Among others are the Amherst (Mass.) Cinema, Belcourt Theatre in Nashville and the Music Box Theatre in Chicago.

"We're thrilled to be included; that's an amazing list of theaters," said Austin McCann, the Art's general manager.

The theaters applied for the recognition. To be chosen, they had to meet standards



Melissa Merli/The News-Gazette

regarding quality programming, community involvement, a strong financial base and recognition from others.

## How was SITI Company's "Steel Hammer" last week at Krannert Center?

Younger people seemed to enjoy it, whooping as the two-hour, no-intermission show, with music by Pulitzer Prize-winner Julia Wolfe, ended. Several adults who go to a lot of shows, though, felt "Steel Hammer" was too long and its text, written by four playwrights, too repetitive.

"Overall, much music was beautiful; some narratives were powerful," said one of those concert-goers, Norma Marder. "But the piece couldn't sustain itself at

that length. Were the collaborators deaf to redundancies? Structurally, it climaxed at 'then Polly drove steel just like a man' — instruments playing full blast, actors moving as a tight, single organism — yes! '...like a man!' We're all John Henry! Done! And then, oh Lordy, it started all over again and inched toward a lyrical end. Punishing!"

Later I heard that SITI director Anne Bogart was aiming for a long, repetitious show, likely to drive home the point folklore hero John Henry and others who do slave labor after being arrested on trumped-up charges did hard, repetitious, punishing work.

Have a question for 'Mimi'? We'd love to hear from you. Please email your question to [mmerli@news-gazette.com](mailto:mmerli@news-gazette.com).

## LOOK AHEAD: Top picks for the week to come

## Parkland exhibition on birds

I couldn't help but think of the "Portlandia" episode "Put a Bird on It" when I checked out the exhibition "Ornithology: Works by Barbara Kendrick and Monique Luchetti" on view through Nov. 7 at the Gertz Gallery at Parkland College. However, I really like Kendrick's surrealist collages that include birds and bird parts and parakeets among dendrites and Luchetti's large-scale drawings of birds from museum ornithology collections. Her drawings include information about each bird, bringing to mind loss and humans' proclivities to collect, classify and catalog species we ultimately destroy.

## Free film festival

If you're a fan of indie film, head to the Art Theater Co-op today. The New Art Film Festival will screen 38 shorts and two previews by regional filmmakers from 5 to 11 p.m. Organizer Jason Pankoke says they run the gamut "from drama to comedy, from scientifically plausible to exuberantly fantastic, from straightforward as they come to subversive as you might fear." And you're not out any pocket change if you go because admission is free! The fest is presented by C-U Confidential and sponsored by The Art, ThirdSide and Shatterglass Studios. View [newartfilmfestival.com/naff-schedule/](http://newartfilmfestival.com/naff-schedule/).

## Reiss has promising future

Kenna Mae Reiss is one of the most talented singer-songwriters in C-U. So check her out before she moves to New Orleans at her "Blue Darlin'" CD-release parties at 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. Saturday at The Iron Post, 120 S. Race St., U. The Superior State band will join her, and she will be selling new merchandise in addition to her new recording. Reiss really has a knack for writing original lyrics, based on her life experiences, and her voice has good dynamic range. As a Unity High student, she sang in a cappella and chorus groups. She also has a poised stage presence. No way but up for her!