

FADER

THE FADER MAGAZINE
JAN/FEB 2008

51

THE
NOW
ISSUE

SECRET WEAPON
KERI HILSON
HITS CENTER STAGE

+
PRIZEFIGHTER
SANTOGOLD
ENTERS THE RING

PLUS
TIMBALAND 2.0
SEBASTIEN TELLIER
BLACK KIDS
TEYANA TAYLOR

NUMBER 51 JAN/FEB 08 THEFADER.COM

GIRL TALK

FADER

THE FADER MAGAZINE
JAN/FEB 2008

51

THE
NOW
ISSUE

PRIZEFIGHTER
SANTOGOLD
ENTERS THE RING

+
SECRET WEAPON
KERI HILSON
HITS CENTER STAGE

PLUS
MEXICO CITY ROCK
PAPER ROUTE RAP
HEARTLAND PSYCHEDELICS

A FAMILY AFFAIR

The Brothers Hangauer and the comeback saga of
Lawrence, Kansas

STORY T COLE RACHEL PHOTOGRAPHY THEO RIGBY





SCENES FROM BULL HOUSE.



ABOVE: BRENDAN HANGAUER AT BULL HOUSE. RIGHT: ZACH HANGAUER AT RANGE LIFE HQ.

The limo will be there to pick you up in five minutes. Sit tight. These are the first words Zach Hangauer—founder and ringleader of fledgling indie label Range Life—says to me upon my arrival in Lawrence, Kansas. I am standing in my room at what appears to be the world's most desolate Econo Lodge. The parking lot is empty and there don't appear to be any other guests on my floor of the motel. The place would be spooky were it not for the throbbing sounds of Rich Boy's

"Throw Some D's" seeping through the floor of my room. It's been nearly a decade since I spent time in Lawrence as a grad student. Listening to the phantom party taking place somewhere below me, it suddenly dawns on me just how long I've been away. Ten years is a long time. People move away and start new lives, venues close down, bands break up, and apparently kids start throwing sick parties at the Econo Lodge.

Lawrence is, in almost every way, the prototypical college town. Like a less celebrated cousin to Austin or Chapel Hill, it contains the requisite number of crusty record stores, rock venues, coffee shops and smoky dives, all of them cozied up next to the equally requisite number of frat-friendly sports bars and Urban Outfitters. For over three decades the town has played host to an industrious music scene and served as a liberal anomaly in the hyper-conservative landscape of Kansas, home to professional gay-hater Reverend Fred Phelps and an ongoing battle over teaching evolution in public



schools. Once upon a time the town was mostly known for a thriving folk and bluegrass scene—and for being the longtime home and final resting place of William S Burroughs.

Like smaller college towns of the same ilk—Bloomington, Eugene, Denton, Omaha—Lawrence is the kind of liberal enclave that belies most of what surrounds it. Even though the community here is clearly supported by the university, much of what happens here remains oddly disconnected. In fact, downtown Lawrence and the areas outlining the KU campus are like a little city within the city. It might have been the first place where I hung out at a straight rock & roll bar with my boyfriend and no one seemed to care, but it's still the only place where I was ever called a faggot on the street. A short ten minute drive out of town will find you shooting across the rolling flint hills of Kansas or, in other words, on the fast track to the middle of nowhere. Despite the liberal bubble surrounding the music scene—and the incubator for freakiness that the town often proves to be for young, fucked-up kids—a simple drive in any direction will reveal enough right wing bumper stickers to remind you that you have not actually crossed over the rainbow. This is still Kansas, Dorothy.



“WE OPENED FOR THE ANNIVERSARY ONCE BUT I COULDN’T ACTUALLY STAY TO WATCH THEM BECAUSE IT

While folk music and spooky alt-country remain mainstays, Lawrence proved fertile ground throughout the '90s for producing jittery indie rock bands like Butterglory and the Vitreous Humor. Still, the most visible period in Lawrence music history was the late-'90s, which saw the speedy rise of the Get Up Kids and the Anniversary on a then-unknown label called Vagrant. At a moment when it seemed like the national success of those acts would finally bring some overdue attention to the local scene, things dramatically fell apart. The Anniversary split after serious Fleetwood Mac-style band drama caused them to part ways acrimoniously with their label, the Get Ups, and, eventually, each other. The Get Up Kids would soldier on for a few years before quietly running out of steam as their heir apparent, a one-man band called Dashboard Confessional, would go on to write the next tear-stained chapter in the great book of emo. Even though all those involved would go on to pursue other projects—the New Amsterdams, the Only Children, White Flight, Spoon—it felt like the music scene in Lawrence had slowly had all the air let out of its tires.

Now that a few years have passed, a new batch of bands are hoping they can pump them back up. Given unlimited access to random—and usually free—practice spaces, bands can spend hours chasing the perfect synth noise or guitar squall, while the dirt cheap rents in town and profundity of easy-to-quit-easy-to-get jobs make it convenient for bands that spend huge amounts of time on the road. The relative ease of living here allows local faves to evolve at their own languid pace, but it's also that same lack of urgency that keeps them from becoming successful outside the scene. Tired of working in a vacuum and having seen firsthand an older generation of local bands fizzle out, a more media-savvy group of Kansas artists would rather try to kickstart their own musical collective than wait for interested outsiders to come knocking.

“You’ve come to visit at a very exciting time for us,” explains Hangauer. “You’re also experiencing us at our most not-having-our-shit-togetherness. I hope you don’t mind.” Having launched Range Life in 2005, Hangauer quickly turned what was originally conceived as a rather low-key project among friends into an obsessive, all-consuming endeavor. Hangauer drifted through his twenties living in various cities around the country and “not really knowing what was up,” when he ditched LA to come back to Kansas and start releasing music. “It was this dream I think we all sort of had, but I knew I could make it actually happen,” he says. “I just wanted to curate all this talent around me.”

In two years, Range Life has assembled a roster of seven bands, four of which have actually put out records. Given that most of the bands share members, are side projects, or have rotating lineups, untangling the web of connections between the artists is no simple feat. Fourth of July makes hooky guitar pop and features the three younger Hangauer siblings. Suzannah Johannes channels Astrud Gilberto and writes songs that could be early Belle & Sebastian outtakes. Dri (real name Adrienne Verhoeven) makes what she describes as “dance music for stoners”—old school soul mixed with big beats and hints of reggae. White Flight, currently the most high profile act on the label, makes 21st Century psychedelic music that sounds like it was pureed through an electronic blender. This particular week, Hangauer has arranged a listening party, an album release show for Dri and put together a basement shindig at the Taproom (a favorite local dive) with a performance by Patrick and Kelly Hangauer’s instrumental side project, Save the Whales.

For a brand new label, Range Life already has a shockingly strong roster. Years of playing live have turned Fourth of July into a tight live act, bolstered by Brendan Hangauer’s knack for writing tight, sing-a-long pop songs. The

SMOKE BREAK OUTSIDE THE TAPROOM, A TOWN FAVORITE.



WAS A SCHOOL NIGHT. DAD WAS WAITING IN THE CAR JUST OUTSIDE THE CLUB. I WAS LIKE, 15.” —KELLY HANGAUER

sonic mindbend of White Flight—which encompasses everything from crunchy guitars, vintage synths, schizo hip-hop beats and (literally) bells and whistles—might be the most left-leaning offering on the label, but the Range Life’s true secret weapons could very well be the ladies. At Tuesday night’s showcase, both Dri and Suzanne Johannes are standouts. The smooth party jams on Dri’s *Smoke Rings* (bolstered by a live backing band and a scratch-happy DJ) have an unexpected kick when played live. Johannes, on the other hand, mesmerizes the crowd with a restrained set that sees the industrial designer-turned-accidental musician singing and playing guitar while seated at the side of the stage. Given the polish of her bittersweet songs and her crisp delivery, it’s hard to believe that she never really intended to be a musician at all. “I was trying to move to Sweden to further study industrial design,” says Johannes. “I started talking to Zach at this festival here in Lawrence...and he immediately asked me to come over and start rehearsing songs with him. Like, the very next day.”

On my third night in town I am having a leisurely sitdown meal with the entire Hangauer family—parents Zack and Susan, brothers Zach, Brendan, Patrick and Kelly, sister Dana, and five-year-old nephew Dorian. Having been graciously seated at the head of the table, it quickly becomes apparent that the tightness of this particular family is not to be underestimated. Patrick Hangauer, the brother most likely to be mistaken for a young Gregg Allman, holds his mom’s hand at the table while she tells a story. Father Zack requests that at least one of his favorite Fourth of July songs be played at the show later. Everyone seems concerned that I’ve had enough to eat and drink.

“That’s how we do things around here,” says Kelly Hangauer. At 20 years old, he is the youngest and most soft-spoken brother. “Mom and dad used

to drive me to play shows with the band and then pick me up afterwards. We opened for the Anniversary once but I couldn’t actually stay to watch them because it was a school night. Dad was waiting in the car just outside the club. I was like, 15.”

While tightly knit, the Hangauer clan no longer shares the same roof. Sitting in the shadows of the University of Kansas football stadium is the notorious Bull House, a dumpy rental property in the grand college town tradition. Famous for being a roaring party spot, there is a cracked, marble-eyed, concrete bull sculpture standing crookedly in the front yard of the house, which is home to the three younger Hangauer brothers—Brendan, Patrick and Kelly. Despite its dubious reputation, Bull House is suited to the brothers’ needs: it’s cheap, roomy and it allows for loud practice sessions. It also has a built-in source of income—with a busy stadium across the street, the Hangauers charge a fee to football fans wanting to park in the weedy lot also known as their front yard. “Not only can we make our rent that way, it’s another excuse to sit out by the bull and drink beer,” says Patrick Hangauer. We’re picking up epic mounds of beer cans and fast food containers scattered across the front yard from last week’s football game while keeping our eyes open for Brendan’s lost cat. “Basically, my goal at this point is to work as little as possible, make music and be Zach’s intern,” he says.

I met Justin Roelofs in 1997 at the first out of town show that the Anniversary ever played (a nearly disastrous gig at a closet-sized bar in Wichita, Kansas). At the time, he was a sweetly goofy English major at KU who loved to talk about records and books. I lost touch with Roelofs not long after the Anniversary officially split but eventually started hearing stories that he had lost his shit

DRI’S RECORD RELEASE AT THE JACKPOT.



KIDS DANCING DURING DRI'S SET AT THE JACKPOT.

and split for South America (a notion solidified by an interview with Roelofs on the website Lawrence.com in which he basically tried to debunk the notion of time). Over a year later, a copy of White Flight's debut record showed up in my Brooklyn mailbox, along with a little note from Zach Hangauer. I couldn't believe this was the same person I had known.

Given his experiences over the past few years, it's not surprising that the most fascinating, integral person in the Range Life menagerie is also the one who isn't ever around. According to varying accounts, Roelofs' trip to South America—coupled with the collapse of his band, a series of fractured personal relationships and a dalliance with mushrooms—sparked a transformation. While the former Anniversary frontman always maintained a reputation as a funny character, few would have predicted that he would eventually morph into a barefooted, crystal-packing gypsy. Even fewer would have predicted that he would make a record as sonically and cosmically adventurous as his White Flight debut. Psychedelic in the truest sense of the word, White Flight is a pastiche of sampled beats, chants, layered sounds and fractured pop songs. It caught the interest of bands like Sonic Youth and generated interest from indies in the UK, but just as the record was beginning to take on a strange life of its own, Roelofs was nowhere to be found, having indefinitely decamped to Guatemala. With no tour support and only a few cryptic bits of press from Roelofs himself, there was little anyone could do to promote the record further.

"We sort of botched that whole thing," says Hangauer. "We tried to do it first as a digital download, but nobody knew who we were. With the next White Flight record, we hope to do things right...and Justin swears that he'll tour this time." Tentatively scheduled for an early 2008 release, the new White Flight album, *White Ark*, might officially put Range Life on the map. Working with beats courtesy of Ratatat, much of the new record was recorded during Roelofs' recent two-week stint back in Kansas while visiting his family. Early mixes of the new material find the new record pushing the sound of the first album in a more electronic-driven direction. At the moment, however,

**"JUST STAYING AT THE MAGIC LAKE ATITLAN,
STARING AT A HUGE VOLCANO
RIGHT NOW. I LOVE YOU!"**

—JUSTIN ROELOFS

Roelofs is once again living in Guatemala ("Just staying at the magic lake Atitlan, staring at a huge volcano right now. I love you!" he says via email), but everyone in Lawrence seems confident that he'll come back—both physically and, perhaps, emotionally—at some point. According to Brendan Hangauer, Roelofs has mellowed considerably since his initial hippie rebirth. "He was on a pretty intense trip there for a while," he says, "but I think he's ready to start playing shows now. Plus, I think he misses all of us."

On my last night in Lawrence I stop by Jenkins Liquor store to visit Brendan Hangauer. Both he and his brother Patrick work at the store and the place has become a defacto hangout spot for friends. Over the course of an hour, Dri stops by, just off a waitressing shift, as does Fourth of July guitarist Steve Swyers. Talk turns quickly to gathering spots. Since the Bull House doesn't have heat and no one has a show to play, everyone reconvenes at the Replay Lounge, a mainstay of Lawrence nightlife even back when I lived there (I got a black eye there during a Trail of Dead show). As an unknown band blasts away inside, the group moves outdoors to the patio where at least half of the Range Life inner circle is present. Looking around the patio, Brendan Hangauer points out a variety of other local musicians—a guy who plays in Appleseed Cast, a former member of Kill Creek. Someone recounts the story of seeing a very dramatic Glenn Danzig play a show earlier that night, while someone else recounts running into Tegan and Sara on the street the day before.

Just as I prepare to say my goodbyes and head back to the Econo Lodge for the last time, two people dressed head to toe in bright red outfits stroll out on the patio while loudly banging a gong and aggressively yelling at various bar patrons. While it's hard to tell if the two are doing some kind of planned performance art or are simply just drunk, no one at the bar appears particularly surprised by the goings on. As the two gong-bangers noisily head back into the bar, Brendan Hangauer leans over and says, "Maybe Range Life should sign those guys too." **F**