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May 3, 2012

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The Daily Mississippian, "May 3, 2012" (2012). *Daily Mississippian (all digitized issues)*. 804.
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THE GROOVE

EDITION



MISSISSIPPI GIRL AMERICAN IDOL

MICHAEL BECKER/FOX | The Daily Mississippian

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COLUMN

Weekly Top Zen: Meekly Stopped



BY ANDY PAUL
@anandypaul

Hey, come on in. Take a seat on the sofa. How was school today? That's good to know. Keep up the hard work. I just know it will pay off in the end. So ... listen. We need to talk about something. This has been in the works for a long time, and there really is no other way around it. I'm not going to sugarcoat this for

you because you are old enough to handle it by now. The Daily Mississippian and I are separating.

Now now, there is no need to panic. Dry your eyes, child. I think deep down in your heart you knew this was inevitable. Sometimes relationships just hit roadblocks around which they simply cannot maneuver. Like graduations. Or affairs with other publications such as literary journals and online magazines.

Listen, this is nobody's fault. It's especially not your own. Well, maybe it's your fault just a little bit. After all, you did kind of put pressure on me to turn

out a column once a week for a good three years or so. A man can only take so much before he simply freaks out and starts looking at independent blogs late at night while his Daily Mississippian is out being printed by some grimy press assistant. But that's neither here nor there. The point is, I'm leaving.

Yes, it's been a wonderful run. But like Kanye West's tweets, Sarah Palin's relevancy and my countless, tired, filler jokes about them, all good things must come to an end. I'm reaching the end of the line, and I don't think I'm adequate enough to watch over the column I've come to call

home.

Maybe I'm just tired of the charade. Week after week, it's the same old thing. The spark has gone out from our relationship. You never even write me hate letters anymore to see how I'm doing and wish me the worst. Maybe if you just stepped up your commitment a tad, this wouldn't have happened. I could stick around for a second senior year — a victory lap — and we could try and make this work. I'd come home from a long day in the classroom, and you'd be there with a nice, big dinner waiting for me.

Wait. I need to stop this. I'm

getting carried away with myself. This is nobody's fault but my own. I entered into this relationship knowing the risks. I knew it wasn't going to be forever. I've enjoyed being around both you and The Daily Mississippian. It has been a wonderful run, one which has hopefully entertained you while developing my skills as a writer. I wish nothing but the best for both you and the newspaper of which I've grown so fond. I hope that someday a new, more responsible and caring writer will come along and give you that which I never could: A sense of decency, integrity and tact. Thank you, and so long.

MOVIE COLUMN

It's finally here: The summer movie line-up



BY JOSH PRESLEY
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Oh, boy, it's finally here. The summer movie season officially kicks off tomorrow with "The Avengers," and I can finally stop scraping the bottom of the barrel for stuff to review. It couldn't come at a more perfect time either. The movie all of us geeks have been chomping at the bits for will arrive, and on the last day of classes, no less. Yeah, I'm pretty excited. I stop short of going all-caps, though. Wouldn't want to overdo it.

So let's talk about what's coming out this summer or, as it shall now be known: the "Dear God, Why Has 'Think Like A Man' Been Number One At The Box Office For Two Weeks? Can We Please Never Have That Happen Again?" summer.

First up in the DGWHT-LAMBNOATBOFTWCWP-NHTHA summer is the aforementioned "Avengers." Movie fans have been waiting for years to see "Earth's Mightiest Heroes" team up on the big screen, even before the after-credits teaser in the first "Iron Man." Marvel has slowly been building to this over the past few years, using "Iron Man," "Iron Man 2," "The Incredible Hulk," "Thor" and "Captain America, The First Avenger," to build their cinematic universe. It's already been

released overseas and is getting rave reviews and breaking box office records. Expect a similar reaction when it's released here, and also expect to see me there shortly after my last class Friday afternoon. Don't try to, like, talk to me or anything, though.

After that is Tim Burton's vampire movie, "Dark Shadows," starring, you guessed it, Johnny Depp. I didn't care anything about this until I saw the trailer a month or so back, and it actually seems as though it will be pretty entertaining. After that is "Men in Black III" because the world has been clamoring for a third "Men in Black" movie. That was sarcasm. I know it can be difficult to tell in print.

Next up is "Snow White and the Huntsmen," starring Bella and Thor. I wonder how Kristen

Stewart will react to being near someone so masculine, for once. I bet she stammers and blinks a lot.

The movie I am most excited for this summer is Ridley Scott's "Prometheus." I like the fact that so much about this movie remains a mystery despite the fact that they release a new trailer or viral video for it roughly every other day. I'm very much looking forward to Scott's return to sci-fi, and this quasi-"Alien" prequel looks like it will be a glorious return, indeed.

Then you've got "Rock of Ages," which I'll not be seeing unless held at gunpoint, "Brave," "Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter," "GI Joe: Retaliation," which might be fun (I didn't hate the first one as much as a lot of people did), and then

there's "The Amazing Spider-Man." Yes, I do think it's stupid that they're already making a "Spider-Man" reboot, but I'm perfectly willing to give it a shot. It can't be worse than "Spider-Man 3."

I'm sure all those movies will be fun, but we'll really just be marking time until "The Dark Knight Rises," which is supposedly the final installment in the current Batman franchise. I'm oddly not as excited about this one as I am "Prometheus" and "The Avengers," but that may change as it draws nearer. I think it's because, at least so far, TDKR has been significantly less hyped than previous Bat-movies and the other big releases this summer. This is a great idea because it's pretty well-hyped anyway just by being a new Batman movie, and too much hype can ruin a film.

A few more big movies come out after this, but I'd be lying if I said I was excited about any of them. Check back with The DM over the summer, and if you're lucky you'll get to see what I thought of some of these movies. And, I swear, if you talk during "The Avengers" or bring a crying baby, I will sigh loudly and say nothing.

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CAR COLUMN

Test Drive: 2012 Dodge Challenger SRT8 Yellow Jacket



BY MATTHEW BISHOP
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In the two years that we have been doing test drives, we have done almost every modern pony car, ranging from a base V-6 Mustang, to the Camaro SS, to the venerable Mustang BOSS 302. One vital car that we were missing, though, was the Challenger. Well, we finally got a hold of one, and it's the bad-ass of the Challenger line-up, the SRT8 392.

Better yet, it has the special edition Yellow Jacket package, which comes with the school bus-yellow paint, blacked-out grille, exclusive 20-inch aluminum wheels with painted black inserts, retro-looking vinyl stripe down the side with "Yellow Jacket" written in it, paddle shifters for the automatic transmission and a two-mode active suspension system.

To give you a little background, 392 means 392 cubic inches (6.4 liters), which is the displacement of the engine, and it's good for 470 horsepower and 470 pounds per foot of torque that peaks at 4,200 rpm and has a redline of 6,400 rpm. Now, Chrysler has used the 392 moniker before, al-

beit never in a Challenger.

It was used on the Chrysler 300 letter series that raced in the Grand National series back in the 1950s. It is a good-sounding number, especially when written above the word "Hemi." So when somebody rolls up next to you at a red light and sees the red numbers "392" on your fender, they know you mean business.

This leads me to the most important factor to muscle car buyers: Performance. The SRT 392 hits 60 mph in 4.6 seconds with the quarter mile in 13 seconds flat at 112 mph. These are fast numbers, but it is only on par with the cheaper Camaro SS and Mustang GT, despite the fact that it has a more than 50-horsepower advantage. This can mostly be attributed to its hefty, two-plus-ton weight and the sluggish 5-speed automatic transmission.

But to be fair, equipped with the Tremec six-speed manual transmission and optional Goodyear Eagle F1 Supercar tires, you could shave a tenth or two off the 0-60 time and get the quarter mile in less than 13 seconds.

Its weight is an advantage in respect to ride quality, however, as it is, by far, the smoothest and most comfortable ride of any muscle car ever. But this doesn't equate to sloppy handling like most smooth-riding cars, thanks to the new two-mode adaptive



SUSIE HOLT | The Daily Mississippian

suspension system, which, when in sport mode, manages body roll and provides excellent feedback from the steering.

Now to the optional five-speed automatic transmission with which our test car was equipped. I'll start with the good things: It held the gears all the way to redline in manual mode, and it had cool-looking chrome, T-shaped handles.

For the bad, it had lazy shift times in automatic mode and is slow to downshift and would seem more at home in a Cadillac DTS than a 470-horsepower muscle car. So if you want the real muscle car experience or sub-five-second 0-60 times, then manual mode is a must. Or you could just save a thousand bucks and get

the manual. Oh, and leave it out in the hot, Mississippi sun long enough without a sunshade, and you'll have the stylized "M" from Mopar branded on your hand from the chrome shift handle.

Being a big displacement, V-8 usually doesn't equate to good fuel economy, but the cylinder deactivation feature on the automatic cars helps ease the pain a little bit and returns an EPA-rated 14 mpg in the city and 23 mpg on the highway. But this still isn't good enough for the muscle-car-hating EPA, and they will still charge you a \$1,000 gas guzzler tax.

The base price of a Challenger SRT8 392 is \$43,995. Add in the Yellow Jacket package (\$1,495), Mopar interior appearance group (\$945), 18-speaker Harmon

Kardon sound system (\$1,995), 5-speed automatic (\$995), navigation (\$545), Goodyear all-season tires (\$150) and the aforementioned gas guzzler tax (\$1,000), and the as-tested price comes to \$54,040. If you have to have the Yellow Jacket package, hurry, as they are slated to only make 1,000 of them in 2012.

Dollar for dollar, the Challenger SRT8 392 may not be the best value for strictly performance, as there are cheaper, higher-performing cars, like the Mustang BOSS 302. But a car with 470 horsepower, a ride that won't send you to the chiropractor and an appearance that garnishes stares at every corner, will always be a blast to drive and own, and you can't go wrong with that.

COLUMN

Well, if it sucks, it sucks.

BY MALLORY SIMERVILLE
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A majority of the people who have picked up The Grove Edition this semester were either confused, thrilled or had no idea what it was or why it existed. And as the editor and semi-creator of the Grove Edition, I have felt confused, thrilled and had no idea what was going on at various points during the semester.

As I sat on my couch and prepared to write this farewell column, it was somewhat difficult to think of bright and shining moments. This year has been hard; it's been filled with hard work, little hours of sleep and plenty of editing, reading and thinking of headlines. What was simply an idea became a reality for The DM staff as I transitioned from city news editor to lifestyles, and during that transition, The Grove Edition was born.

I hope after a semester of publishing, the Grove Edition has become a joy to pick up. Thursdays are now my favorite days of the week, and not just because they have become my Fridays. I have loved reading each article and column and working with reporters, and I hope that mentality will continue to exist. The Grove

Edition should represent the art and works of the students at Ole Miss. We hope, and I hope, that it becomes a representation and outlet for creativity.

Without the staff and a group of people who went with my crazy ideas and ridiculous plans, The Grove Edition would not have existed, especially if Victoria Boatman and I had not stayed up all night before the first one was published.

How could I have survived without the many meals my BFF, Adam Blackwell, supplied? Or therapy Tuesdays with Lauren Smith and Kelsey Dockery? Or the beau-

tiful decorations supplied by my Young Life girls? Or the pseudo-version of me that my roommates made to have someone who was actually home? Or without the InDesign extraordinaire Darren Sanefski?

Bottom line, I couldn't.

And to this day, I still don't understand how Cain Madden trusted me with the amount of responsibilities he did, Or how Jacob Batte and I survived fall semester as news editors.

And to the other Jacob, my Jacob, your patience amazes me, especially with the amount of ranting and exhaustion you dealt with. Thank you for lov-

ing me so well, just as Christ has loved us. And I am sorry that every time you visited Oxford this year, we spent a majority of our time in the Student Media Center. I owe you a million Ajax dinners.

But as this year comes to a close, I wish Kristen Stephens,

the new lifestyles editor, patience, superhuman strength and a great sense of humor.

It's been real, DM. Realer than I ever imagined.

In farewell, I leave the staff and the readers with my recently infamous statement, "Well, if it sucks, it sucks."

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From Russia with Flair

BY EVERETT BEXLEY
elbexley@olemiss.edu

Junior art majors Kate Butko and Daria Katrich are not strangers to constant stares. Everything about the two Russian exchange students seems to grab attention.

Their fashion is often the first thing to catch an eye. Leather shorts, cat-eye sunglasses and vintage accessories are all staples in their daily uniform. Exotic accents only heighten their striking impression. To Butko, 20, and Katrich, 21, being unique is nothing to be afraid of.

"I see people staring at us all the time, probably because of what we wear and how we talk," Butko said. "But being different makes me feel good."

Beyond the clothes and accents, Butko and Katrich said they are more normal than the average on-looker would think.

"So many students come from so many places, but we're all basically young people with an interest in life," Katrich said. "Yes, we have different ways of expressing ourselves, but there is still a common denominator inside us all."

The two Moscow natives said they are pursuing creative ca-

reers. Back home, Butko styles photo shoots for Russian photographer Daria Zaytseva and owns an online watch store, Milkwatch.ru. She also operates a personal blog, thekatemind.com. Katrich's goal is to own an art gallery or become a curator.

They both said their biggest challenge in America has been forming meaningful connections.

"As an exchange student, I try to be friendly to everyone here," Butko said. "Yet some people seem uninterested in getting to know us and other foreigners. It's sad because we have so much to share with one another. I guess I want more from people than they're willing to give."

Katrich expressed a similar sentiment.

"The American attitude seems polite and easygoing. It's easy to have conversations with almost anyone here," Katrich said.

"But I also feel like people need to open themselves up more. They come to conclusions about us too quickly. We're not all in the Mafia, and we don't all carry bottles of vodka in our pockets."

Despite these difficulties, the two students said they still managed to find the good in Ole

Miss.

"I really love the professors here," Butko said. "They make learning personal, which is something Russia doesn't always offer."

One such professor is Kori Forrest, whom Katrich and Butko had as an instructor for Religion 101.

"Professor Forrest truly seems to love her subject," Butko said. "She reminds me of Indiana Jones, except as a woman."

Forrest said the high regards are mutual.

"Kate and Daria have an incredible work ethic — not to mention they're such cool dressers," Forrest said. "They're not afraid to be different."

Forrest agreed that Ole Miss students, both foreign and domestic, should get to know more about each other.

"(Exchange students) can teach us how many different ways there are of looking at the world," Forrest said. "We should learn that they're humans, too. We have more in common than we think."

As Butko and Katrich prepare for their return to Russia, they look back on the last five months and what they have given them.

"When I think of places like



Phillip Waller | The Daily Mississippian

Daria Katrich (left) and Kate Butko (right) pose outside in the Grove.

Rowan Oak, the campus and the balcony at Square Books, it feels like a beautiful movie or novel," Butko said. "I'm thankful to this town for making me feel artistic."

"Oxford has such a special atmosphere," Katrich said. "Its history and character are mysterious to me. I think you need to live here for a long time to

truly find the soul of the city."

Butko and Katrich are two of approximately 800 international students who enrolled at the University of Mississippi during the spring semester, which accounts for approximately four percent of the student population, according to the University's Office of International Programs.

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Photo Essay: 2012 Double Decker Arts Festival

By Austin McAfee

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Weekend Wanderer: Vision Quest at Nanih Waiya

BY MADISON RUTHVEN
mdruthre@olemiss.edu

The subject of this week's article is a bit out of the ordinary. The plan was, in a nutshell, to travel to what used to be Nanih Waiya State Park and have a vision quest in an all-but-uncharted sacred cave that belongs to the Choctaw Nation. I'll be the first to admit that I know next to nothing about vision quests, but according to Wikipedia, a vision quest is a turning point in life taken to find oneself and one's intended spiritual and life direction. Given that I am one-sixty-fourth Choctaw on my father's side, I feel like I have every right to experience this sanctified rite of passage for myself, and, yes, I do indeed see how that may or may not make any sense whatsoever.

Regardless of my entitlement, my professional team of investigative journalists (whomever I could convince to come) and I departed for Winston County. After a two-hour drive and some directions from a friendly local, we found the Nanih Waiya ceremonial mound. Derived from the Choctaw word meaning "leaning hill," the mound is 25 feet high, 218 feet long and 140 feet wide. While the actual date of origin is unknown, pottery shards found on the surface of the mound date as far back as 100 B.C. to 400 A.D. The cultural significance of the mound is widely acknowledged, but the legends surrounding it have been somewhat obscured by time. The legend I personally believe, for no reason at all, is that Aba Iki, or "The Father Above," brought the Choctaw tribe forth from the nearby caves. Because the Choctaw

folk were still wet, and Aba Iki is such a swell guy, he laid them on the Mother Mound to dry, and the Choctaw tribe was born.

In the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, the Choctaw Nation was forced to cede much of its land to the U.S. government. The property eventually became a state park, failed to generate revenue, fell into a state of disrepair and in 2008 was given back to the Choctaw, like a stolen toy that an elementary school bully finally got tired of playing with. Anyway, that's entirely enough history for now.

While we were surveying the surrounding land from the top of the mound, an adorable black and brown Dachshund (That's a Wiener dog. You should get out more.) materialized, seemingly from nowhere. I promptly named him Cody, and we proceeded to lavish him with love and fierce cuddles. He accompanied us in our exploration of the mound and the nearby swamp, until he found a decomposing deer carcass to wallow in. We didn't cuddle him much after that. As would later be apparent, Cody was the closest thing to a spirit animal we would find on our vision quest.

We continued our journey, leaving the mound to search for the caves. I had only vague directions by word of mouth as to where the caves were, and finding any mention of them on the Internet is all but futile.

Therefore, we engaged in the tried and true method of finding a friendly-looking local and asking for more directions. Nobody knows an area better than a local. After a short drive down the dusty roads of Winston County, we came across our sign. And a locked gate. I



Madison Ruthven | The Daily Mississippian

Weekend Wanderer, Madison Ruthven, and friends enjoy wilderness nightlife by the light of a fire.

looked that gate straight in its smug, judgmental face and, with the fire of combat glinting in my eyes, I whispered softly, threateningly, "Go ahead, bro. Take a swing." Needless to say, the gate was beside itself with fear, completely unhinged. After that little confrontation, we were on foot, and my friends all hated me a little more because nobody appreciates a good pun these days.

The trek to our destination consisted of a mile and a half of dirt roads. We began our search for the caves, which took us through a labyrinth of trails meandering through swampy terrain. At one point, while keeping my eyes trained on the surrounding marshy banks, I heard a member of my team exclaim, "Did you just step over a snake!?" I had, indeed. It was a water moccasin, to be exact. Also known as the cotton mouth, it is a dangerously poisonous snake native to Mississippi. I would like to take this opportunity to refute, once and for all, the old Southern adage, "If it was a snake, it would have

bitten you." I stepped over a snake, and to this day I remain bite-less.

We searched the grounds for the better part of two hours, ultimately in vain. We trudged back to the car in defeat. While we were discussing how to salvage our vision quest, a dark truck sped down the dirt road and came to a stop beside us, towing behind it a cloud of dust. Out of the truck emerged two cowboys. Like, real cowboys. As in, they proceeded to herd cows. Only in Winston County. Anyway, we asked them for any information they had on the caves. They informed us that the caves were all but extinct.

The main cave apparently collapsed after the state tried to build a pavilion over the top of it. The second, smaller cave had also given way, leaving only the third cave, which was about two feet in diameter on the surface. It led to a slightly larger cavern, which was not even big enough to stand upright in. As disappointed as we were, there was nothing to do but move on. We couldn't have a vision quest

in a cave that doesn't exist. After a short period of debate and confusion, we unanimously voted for, "Screw it, let's just go camping."

Two hours later, we found ourselves in Morton at Roosevelt State Park, a park none of us had ever been to before or knew anything about. We had an hour to make camp, which we did. We met a pair of middle-aged disc golf enthusiasts, had a drink or maybe slightly more, then rendezvoused at their camp for grilled venison and barbecue. Even though we started our day expecting to be somewhere entirely different, we still had a great road trip, made some new friends and had a wonderful time.

Sure, it would have been great if the caves still existed and we had gone ahead with our vision quest as planned, but there's something to be said for playing it completely by ear.

When things get confusing and the plan gets shot to hell, there's nothing to fall back on except improvisation. Well, our plan did indeed get shot to hell, and we did indeed improvise, and it turned out as good or better than the plan would have. Maybe, just maybe, it wasn't the kind of vision quest we were looking for, but the kind we needed.

Madison Ruthven writes for the Daily Mississippian and kicks boring in the face for fun. Ask him how at mdruthven@live.com

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Double Decker Festival records another success

BY ALEX DEJOY
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Each year, students, parents, locals and people from across the South head to Oxford for a weekend filled with entertainment, and The Double Decker Festival packed people onto the Square this past Friday and Saturday in honor of local art and tradition.

With an estimated 55,000 people in attendance throughout the course of the weekend, stores and restaurants were packed, and parking was hard to come by. No one seemed to mind, though. With the sun shining down and a weekend of beautiful weather, Double Decker was the perfect excuse for a walk to the Square.

The festival gives locally-owned Oxford businesses the chance to welcome more people than normal into their stores, and many clothing stores offer discounts to customers.

"It fills our hotels, drives people into our restaurants and shops and leaves a big impact

on our economy," Mary-Kathryn Herrington, the director of tourism for Oxford, said.

The weekend kicked off Friday night with performances at the Caterpillar Main Stage by Charlie Mars, Deer Tick and Iron and Wine. Restaurants and bars around the Square also benefited from the influx of people Friday night, and additional security measures were put in place to keep crowds under control.

This year, Double Decker also recognized the 175th anniversary of the town of Oxford, a celebration that will continue until July 4.

Herrington said the 175th anniversary added more sponsorships, which allowed for a bigger budget for musical talent and more banners to hang around town advertising the event.

The premier sponsors of this year's festival were C Spire Wireless, Baptist Hospital, Regions Bank and the University of Mississippi.

Saturday morning, the day

began with the Double Decker spring run and the Double Decker road race. The overall winners of the spring run 10k were Barnabas Kirui in the male division and Sheryl Chatfield in the female division.

The Square attracted many visitors on Saturday. Local restaurants set up food booths on the Square; there were 22 in total. Restaurants located on the Square were also open for business to provide more food options.

Throughout the day, bands played on the Caterpillar Main Stage, as well as on the Oxford American Magazine's 20th Anniversary Stage, which showcased bands local to the Oxford area.

"I am a huge activist for the local music scene in Oxford, and I was very excited about the addition of the local music stage," Caroline Hourin, a public relations and promotion volunteer for this year's festival, said. "I think it's great to have famous acts travel to Oxford to perform for Double Decker,

but it's nice to continue to support our local musicians. There was always a full crowd at the Oxford American Magazine stage, too."

Fourteen acts performed over the course of the day: Rooster Blues, Star and Micey, Grace ASkew, Jimbo Mathus & Tri-State Coalition, George McConnell and the Nonchalants, Patterson Hood, Funky Meters, Mavis Staples, Elemovements, Machine Gun Kelley and the G-Men, Kenny Brown, Minor Adjustments, Rocket 88 and Young Buffalo.

People crowded the stages and balconies around the Square to listen to the acts perform during the day and into the night.

The layout of the stages was different this year, allowing for a better flow of traffic.

"We're always looking at how to improve logistics and behind-the-scenes stuff, but overall we were very pleased with how the event went," Herrington said.

Throughout the surrounding area of the Square, approxi-

mately 165 art vendor booths filled with vendors from across Mississippi and the tri-state area were set up.

"My favorite part about Double Decker was all of the booths set up," Helaina Craig, a biochemistry junior, said. "It gave me a chance to see some pieces that you wouldn't normally see around town."

Each booth provided different styles of art ranging from higher-priced items to lower-priced items. There were items for people of all ages, and each booth attracted the attention of festival visitors.

People piled into the Square to catch a glimpse of the items for sale, catch a quick bite to eat and simply enjoy the city of Oxford.

"I don't think I have a favorite part of the festival; the combination of everything is what it is really about," Hourin said. "The art, food and music come together beautifully to provide an enjoying cultural experience for all who attend. It's all smiles at Double Decker."



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Mississippi native Skylar Laine lights up the American Idol stage

BY MEGAN MASSEY
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“What are you going to sing for us?”
“Pistol Annie’s ‘Hell on Heels.’”

And so our journey with Brandon native Skylar Laine begins. As soon as she burst into song in her American Idol audition, the judges, along with Americans across the country, were smitten. It was an easy decision for the judges — Skylar was Hollywood-bound. She made it through week after week and has now found her way into the top 5, securing a spot in the American Idol tour that begins after the season ends.

Every time she steps on the stage, the room lights up and ignites with energy, but the American Idol stage is not the first that she’s encountered. Mary Harden, Skylar’s mother, said Skylar started singing “as soon as she could talk.” At age six, she traveled with her mom to New York to audition for the national tours of “Annie” and “Les Miserables.” She had parts in both shows and traveled the U.S. and Canada performing. After the national tours, she toured for two years with the international tour of “Les Miserables.” Skylar also performed in countless local theater productions in Jackson, as well as taking home the trophy from a number of talent shows.

It has become clear on American Idol that country music is her specialty, which, according to Mrs. Harden, is no surprise. Skylar’s “Papaw,” who in her Idol audition described her voice as sounding like a “little meadowlark,” and her father intro-

duced her to country music at a young age and instilled in her a love of old country artists like Jimmie Rodgers and Hank Williams Sr. As she’s grown, she has held on to that love of country music, adding a few new country artists to her lists of favorites like Jason Aldean, Brantley Gilbert and Miranda Lambert. She’s even performed a few of her favorite artists’ songs on the show, like Lambert’s “Gunpowder and Lead” and Aldean’s “Tattoos on This Town.”

Her journey to American Idol was long, but fairly smooth. She received an audition pass in Meridian, which guaranteed her a spot in the actual auditions and kept her from having to wait in the long lines we have all seen on the audition episodes of Idol. She made the first cut, which her mother said was easily the hardest, and went through three more before she auditioned in front of the celebrity panel judges we see on TV — Steven Tyler, Jennifer Lopez and Randy Jackson.

Since that audition, her schedule has become increasingly more demanding. After she received her “golden ticket,” she spent two weeks between Los Angeles and Las Vegas. After she made it into the top 42, she moved on to Burbank to rehearse for the “Sing for Your Life” round. From there, she returned to Vegas where she survived the cut to make it into the top 24. She turned 18 in February and flew back to LA not long after to begin preparing for the live shows.

The live shows are a rush. Contestants receive their “challenge” 10 days before the live performance, but it’s not un-

common for the producers to change the challenge at the last minute, which often results in song changes that have to be made in five minutes or less. Their weeks, weekends included, are filled with rehearsals, interviews and Ford video shoots.

Her mom described Skylar’s life as being in a “bubble” since she’s been on the show. She lives in a mansion with the other contestants and lives and breathes American Idol; it’s all her schedule allows. But her mom also believes that in a way, her tours as a child with “Annie” and “Les Miserables” gave her a point of reference for what her American Idol life would be like, just on a smaller scale. Mrs. Harden said Skylar is someone who is level-headed and doesn’t give into “extreme emotions,” a trait that would not fit well in the “go, go, go” lifestyle that comes with being a contestant on the show.

Before her life was changed forever, Skylar was just an ordinary, teenage Mississippi girl. She enjoyed hunting, going to the reservoir and hanging out with friends. She excelled academically, graduating a year early from high school and getting a scholarship for Hinds Community College’s two-year nursing program. She was accepted in the RN program in October, which means that, as of July, she probably would have been an Ole Miss nursing student. But, needless to say, her plans were altered.

Mrs. Harden said now that Skylar’s career plans have changed due to her success on American Idol, “the Lord has another path for her future.”

Skylar and her family have



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been very appreciative of the support that she has received from her home state. Skylar has deep roots here at Ole Miss. Her dad is a 1974 Ole Miss graduate and was a trainer on the football team. Her dad also taught her and her sister, Blair, who is

a first-year law student on campus, all about Ole Miss football, the Grove and Hotty Toddy. Her uncle is the assistant bursar, and on the American Idol website, she made it official that her favorite football team is the Ole Miss Rebels.

“The main thing that Skylar and our entire family would like for everyone at Ole Miss and in Mississippi to know is how incredibly blessed we feel to call Mississippi our home,” her mom said. “My husband has said that the people in Mississippi support their own, and we have, through this experience, come to realize just how true that statement is. It is unbelievable and incredible how much love and support that we have felt on this journey. I stop several times every day to say, ‘Thank you, Lord.’ We have been blessed beyond measure.”

And Mississippi couldn’t be more proud of Skylar.

As soon as she finished her rendition of “Hell on Heels,” Jennifer Lopez said, “Well, we know exactly who she is, and that’s part of what I love about her.” That’s part of what we love about her, too. She’s a dedicated performer who is appreciative of her supporters and hasn’t forgotten the people who have helped her get where she is.

Keep up with Skylar by watching American Idol on Wednesday and Thursday nights at 7 on FOX.

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