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**BOOK REVIEW****Bird Hysteria**

Americans seem to have the unique capability to panic at the mere mention of impending disaster. In the past 15 years or so, the United States has been “threatened” by such menaces as killer bees, the Ebola virus, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and man-eating sharks. The latest bogeyman appears to be avian influenza, or “bird flu” as the U.S. press has succinctly named it. Newspaper after newspaper has begun to tap into the fear of this coming plague, filling their pages with dire predictions and colorful descriptions of an illness that now appears virtually unstoppable. On the Internet, upstart entrepreneurs are now marketing products to take advantage of these fears, selling such products as “bird-flu masks” and videos that explain how best to avoid catching this killer flu.

Upon first glance, it appears that Mike Davis’s new book, *The Monster at Our Door: The Global Threat of Avian Flu* (New Press), may only serve to stoke these largely irrational worries and give scholarly ammunition to the legions of hucksters trying to profit from an illness that most Americans still know very little about. After all, he has given his book an incredibly ominous title, and he includes his own rather grim prediction regarding global casualties resulting from avian influenza: close to one billion victims. But Davis, who has previously written on the impact of disasters in modern-day Los Angeles and 19th-century developing nations, brings much more than an unneeded sense of hysteria to the table. Instead, he makes it clear that, regardless of potential death tolls, there is both a real and evolving strain of influenza that is baffling scientists, and a global health care system that, because of the forces of a new brand of global capitalism, is in terrible shape to deal with this development (as well as other real illnesses). His work implicitly reminds us that any discussion on avian influenza shouldn’t focus solely on what may happen, but must also pay close attention to what has already occurred.

More specifically, Davis’s brief book shows us how the latest round of globalization has created a virtual breeding ground for sicknesses of all types. Third World urbanization (which has produced overcrowded “megaslums”), a corporation-driven “Livestock Revolution” (which features densely populated super-farms), and overseas tourism have provided the atmosphere and travel routes needed for the spread of infectious disease. At the same time, globalization’s faith in the credo of privatization has created a health-care sector more concerned with the erectile issues of old men than with the development of any sort of viable influenza vaccine, and a set of governments that have little interest in effectively regulating the private sector. One sees many of these factors at play in the Guangdong section of South China, long considered the epicenter of influenza evolution. Guangdong, which Davis labels “a postmodern Manchester,” now produces many of the goods fueling China’s rise in the global economy. Here, population density is incredibly high, and health care is almost nonexistent. Corruption-ridden super-farms—working hand-in-hand with the Chinese government—dot the surrounding landscape, providing citizens with meat and dairy products that have been shown to carry avian influenza by international observers. Regardless of the still-contested future of the bird flu, Davis’s treatment of this dark side of global economic development

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deserves high praise.  
—*Michael Carriere*

### **CD REVIEW**

## **Dutch Courage**

*Chicago (Latest Flame)*

Dutch Courage, a term commonly used to describe a false sense of security due to alcohol, is a fitting moniker for Milwaukee-based songwriter Andy Puechner.

Comparing himself to the likes of Elliott Smith and Nick Drake on his MySpace page was a great idea to get people interested, but when the comparison didn't add up, the project lost some steam for listeners. That's not to say that Puechner's debut E.P. *Chicago* is a bust, but it certainly isn't Bryter Layter, either.

When Puechner is at his best, he's a convincing power pop act with enough quirky hooks to hold attention, such as is the case with "Wicker Park," a roomy tribute to a community on Chicago's West Side. When he's at his worst, he's fumbling through the monotone "Little Black Car," a tune that could have come to life had Puechner just pitched it to Ben Kweller. Most of the time Puechner straddles the fence of mediocrity and success with songs like "Red Letter Day," a subtle croon that shows the holes left by bland production: errors forgivable on a freshman effort, so long as they're not made a habit on subsequent go-arounds.

—*Eric Lewin*

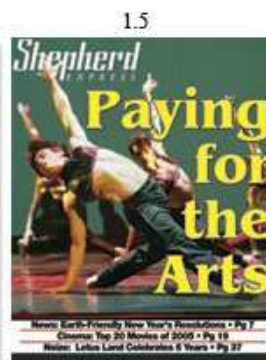
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