

Cowboy myth makes the label hard to wear

By Marja Mills
Tribune staff reporter

Never mind that cowboys as we think of them are Hollywood, not history.

Never mind that the closest President George W. Bush — a former oil executive and a product of Ivy League schools — gets to roaming the Wild West is tooling around his high-security Texas ranch in his pickup, “a windshield cowboy,” as he calls himself.

What much of the world sees in the U.S. president — and what he seems to deliberately project at times — is the image of a plain-speaking cowboy, a lone figure from the Old West striding boldly across the global stage, talking tough and, now, violently laying down the law.

As myths go, the cowboy's is as vivid as they come, and serves as what some have called a political inkblot. The cowboy image reflects back much of the good and bad that people see in American culture.

But the cowboys most people picture are not the real deal. They are mythical, the larger-than-life characters depicted by Gary Cooper in “High Noon,” Alan Ladd in “Shane,” Clint Eastwood in the Italian-made “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly,” John Wayne in anything.

“The [fictional] cowboy itself is as much a European figure as an American one,” Stanford University linguist Geoffrey Nunberg pointed out.

“Part of the question going on now is, how civilized is the world we're living in?” said Louis Warren, a professor of Western U.S. history at the University of California, Davis. “How much is this a world in which the United Nations and [weapons] inspectors can enforce standards on villains, and how much is this a world in which we have to resort to massive violence to fix it?”

Warren, who is researching a book about fron-

PLEASE SEE **COWBOY**, PAGE 4

Women of '24' keep the clock tick-tick-ticking

By Alan G. Artner
Tribune art critic

Terrorism is supposed to be a man's game, but the women of “24,” the hour-by-hour TV thriller that is scheduled to come off hiatus Tuesday (8 p.m., WFLD-Ch. 32), are the people to watch.

While Jack Bauer, former head of the Los Angeles Counter Terrorist Unit (CTU), and David Palmer, the first black president of the United States, are ostensibly the show's chief characters, they mainly react to situations put in motion by women around them.

Final seconds of the last episode had Bauer and Palmer independently watching the mushroom cloud from a nuclear bomb terrorists had planned to detonate over Los Angeles. In the previous 15 hours, Bauer tracked, seized and transported the bomb, which could not be defused, to the desert. Palmer discovered in his administration a tie to the terrorists and confessed that the consequences — imminent attack on three Middle Eastern countries known to support terrorism — had mastered him.

Both are momentarily powerless, a condition seldom seen among the show's women, who make up as vivid a gallery of helpmates and femmes fatales — and sometimes both at once — as found in the male paranoia of late 19th Century poetry and painting.

Only the development of George Mason, the special agent in charge of CTU, is equally engrossing.

PLEASE SEE **'24'**, PAGE 4

VIDEO GAME REVIEW

‘Legend of Zelda’ Links with its glorious past

By Levi Buchanan
Special to the Tribune

Maybe it's the pink gown or the doe eyes, but Princess Zelda just can't keep from getting kidnapped. The courageous Link, the princess' eternal savior and deliverer, is back in action, this time on the Nintendo GameCube in “Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker” (\$49.99), which arrives in stores on Tuesday.

The “Zelda” franchise is one of Nintendo's biggest sellers — more than 36 million “Zelda” games have been sold worldwide. And even though the GameCube is sitting in third place in America, demand for Link's exploits has not waned. More than 560,000 eager gamers have preordered “Wind Waker” (that's more

than preordered Rockstar's blockbuster “Grand Theft Auto: Vice City”), thanks not only to strong anticipation of another quality Nintendo production, but also to a brilliant pre-order program that offered the Nintendo 64 classic “Zelda: Ocarina of Time” to those who put money down.

“Ocarina of Time,” the N64 masterpiece that re-defined action-adventure games and sits atop many gaming publications' “best ever” lists, is the benchmark by which most gamers will measure “Wind Waker.” And few will be disappointed, since “Wind Waker” is every bit the genius success of “Ocarina,” and further testament to Nintendo's ability to produce better video games than any other software house in operation, even the mighty SEGA.

Yet “Wind Waker” represents a departure of sorts for the series, particularly in the visual department. Shigeru Miyamoto, the man whose imagination has pro-

PLEASE SEE **ZELDA**, PAGE 6



In the real Old West, the job of cowboy was essentially low-paid, seasonal migrant work under difficult conditions.



Tribune photos by Stacey Wescott

Sideman John Cook gets an unexpected chance to solo at a South by Southwest club gig, but stardom does not follow.

Cook's tour

The formula for aspiring rock bands: Get in the van. Sleep on the floor. Insist on a sound check. Try to be as great as Celine Dion.



Vintage western mannequins add atmosphere, but Cook's bed is still a sofa in a stranger's house.

By John Cook
Tribune staff reporter

Every March for the past 17 years, thousands of aspiring musicians — rock band, folk singers, hip-hop acts, purveyors of experimental art-noise and everything in between — have converged on the sleepy town of Austin, Texas, in search of fame and fortune. This year I was one of them.

The occasion was the annual South by Southwest Music and Media Conference, by far the music industry's largest and most visible showcase for new talent. For five days and nights each March, swarms of record company executives, radio programmers, music critics and booking agents — in other words, people who can make your band famous — roam the streets of Austin, slipping in and out of more than 50 participating nightclubs to catch shows by bands looking for their big break.

I was there with Cameron McGill, a 26-year-old Chicago singer/songwriter with a booming voice and a notebook full of earnest, pretty songs about his ex-girlfriends (think Jeff Buckley or Ryan Adams). Cameron asked me to play lap steel guitar with him in a showcase gig that he and his band, Cameron McGill and the Shames, had landed.

We packed up our gear in a rented U-Haul trailer, hitched it to the back of Cameron's van and, on the morning of Tuesday, March 11, pointed it toward

Austin and stepped on the gas. Here-with, a diary:

Wednesday, March 12; 5 a.m.

The first rule of rock music is Get in the Van. Though it is possible to achieve some measure of local fame without hitting the road (and the rare band like XTC can reach international success without leaving home much), touring is a requirement for almost anyone who is serious about making a living by playing music. Touring isn't so bad if you're Willie Nelson — it basically means hanging out in a really nice bus. If you're a nobody, it's not always so fun.

Among the inconveniences of life on the road is being jolted awake at 5 a.m. because Chad the violin player can't drive. Though he volunteered for the overnight shift on our 22-hour trek to Austin (“I'm a great late-night driver”), he soon began drifting outside the highway lines and drastically overcorrect-

PLEASE SEE **COOK**, PAGE 6

The best way to get signed [by a major label] is to get popular enough on your own, and sell enough records on your own, that you don't need to sign. It's like some sort of Zen koan.



The heroic Link is back to save the day in Nintendo's “Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker,” a wonderfully crafted game.

INSIDE TEMPO



ETHICS

Rescuing a hidden gem

To save a rare volume is good, but keeping it secret isn't. **PAGE 2**

MUSIC

Another voice

Israeli singer Chava Alberstein still hopes, and sings, for peace. **PAGE 3**

COOK: Heading south by Southwest

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ing to get back on the road, earning him the nickname Swervy McSwerverson. After a few episodes of sheer terror, we make a band decision to stop and get some rest at a creepy, deserted gas station southwest of Dallas.

**Wednesday, March 12;
5:45 a.m.**

We are awakened by Cameron's cell phone. It is good news, perhaps the best news one can get at quarter to six in the morning while sleeping in a van at a gas station outside Dallas—we've miraculously landed a free hotel room in Austin. We are tired, haggard, dirty and had been planning to crash at the drummer's friend's house. Sleeping on dirty floors is a staple of rock band life, and it is one reason so many musicians hate cats—they've spent too many nights bedded down in cat hair with their head next to a litter box.

The call is from Jeff McClusky's personal assistant. McClusky, a powerful music promoter based in Chicago, has taken an interest in Cameron's career, and they've been talking recently about the possibility of McClusky signing on as Cameron's manager. More important, McClusky had booked a room at the Four Seasons Hotel in Austin but didn't need it the whole time. He offered us the room, gratis, for two of the three nights we were staying in town. Managers rock.

Wednesday, March 12; 1 p.m.

South by Southwest is really two different events. At night there are the shows—six acts a night, from 8 p.m. until 2 a.m. at every club, most of which are clustered on one major strip downtown. Every band member gets into all the shows for free, so the streets are literally crawling with exquisitely unkempt groups of twentyish kids who look as if they've spent the last 22 hours, or 22 days for that matter, in a van.

But they're happy to be there. "I can't believe it," Paul Murphy of the Australian rock band



Tribune photos by Stacey Wescott
John Cook (with glasses) and Cameron McGill (in baseball cap) wait for their demo to be listened to by rock panelists.

Youth Group, which showcased at the festival, told me (his band flew 13 hours from Sydney to Los Angeles and then drove 16 hours to Austin). "I've never experienced this many bands in one town, with so many types of music, but all sharing the same philosophy. Which is rock 'n' roll."

During the day, South By Southwest is a conference at the Austin Convention Center, an event that isn't rock 'n' roll so much as C-SPAN with better hair. There are how-to panels, designed to help bands learn the ins and outs of the music business from the experts, with topics such as "Auditing and Accounting: Getting the Numbers Right," and "Which Publishing Deal to Sign, and When"; there are also the big-picture panels on government and media ownership and the music industry and the war. We will soon discover that the panels are for losers.

But before we do, Cameron and I stop at a session on how to find a manager. The panel features two managers, and the audience consists of a bunch of eager, desperate musicians asking questions such as, "How can I get a manager?" and "What do I do if no one wants to be my manager?" and "Will you be my manager?"

Bonnie Simmons, a deejay and owner of an artist management firm, answers one such question this way: "Work really, really hard on your own. It's just like working for a big company. You start at the bottom and work your way up."

She seems to fail to realize that everyone in the room is

there because they *don't* want to work for a big company.

Wednesday, March 12; 11 p.m.

I am standing outside BD Riley's, the club we'll be playing at tonight, waiting for the rest of the band, when the bar's owner approaches me with a frantic look on her face. She recognizes me as a band member.

"Do you play music?"
Why, yes. Yes I do.
"Can you fill a half-hour? Our next act is a no-show."

If life were a VH1 biopic, this would be the part where the humble lap steel player/reporter, who just happens to also be a singer/songwriter and guitar player in his own country-rock band, rises to the challenge, takes the stage and reduces an audience of powerful major label executives to tears with his heart-breaking songs. Within months he moves to Los Angeles and begins making a record with Brian Wilson.

Instead, this is the part where I grab Cameron's guitar and amplifier from the back room and take the stage as roughly 25 percent of the club—nary an industry executive among them—walks out the door. Another 25 percent leave as soon as I start playing. I haven't had nearly as much beer as I'm accustomed to drinking before going on stage. Totally unprepared, I muddle my way through.

After the mercifully brief set, a young woman from Chicago approaches me.

"I really liked your songs," she says. "I could tell that most people here weren't into it, but I was."



Violinist Chad Gifford practices in the hallway outside the electrical room where Cook (center) and McGill rehearse before going on stage at BD Riley's.

Thanks.
Thursday, March 13; 1 a.m.

It's showtime for Cameron. We wait for Kelly Kessler and the Wichita Shut-Ins featuring Lawrence Peters, a Chicago old-time country band with a musical saw player, to finish up, and then frantically get our gear on stage and set up. (Unlike anywhere else on the planet, at South by Southwest, musicians are actually expected to start their shows on time.)

We're off. We're playing well. Cameron is, as usual, a great presence on stage, communicating well with the audience and singing forcefully. And the audience, which has thinned out considerably, seems to enjoy it.

The sound, though, is abominable, which is a common complaint from bands that play South by Southwest. Because each club is trying to get as many as six bands on and off the stage each night, few get to sound check. And many, like BD Riley's, which doesn't normally book bands, don't have a lot of experience making rock bands sound good. It's a galling thing: You get your big chance to play a killer set in front of all the major labels, and the microphone feeds back the whole time.

Still, the audience cheers, Cameron sells a few CDs.

No recording contracts are presented to us.

Thursday, March 13; 1:30 p.m.

Cameron and I take in another panel at the conference. This one features major label A and R guys. "A and R" stands for artists and repertoire; they're the people who get paid by the labels to find the Limp Bizkits and Creeds and offer them record deals. They are angry people, probably because everyone they don't sign hates them.

Again, the questions from the audience of musicians run the gamut from "How do I get signed to a major label?" to "Why haven't I been getting offers from major labels?" to "Will you sign me to your major label?"

The answers are, respectively: You probably can't. Because you're lazy. No. The upshot of the panel is that if you sign to a major label, it ought to be because you want to be Celine Dion. And the best way to get

signed is to get popular enough on your own, and sell enough records on your own, that you don't need to sign. It's like some sort of Zen koan.

But bands like Anchondo, a ska outfit from Omaha, still try the quickie route at the conference.

"If I see a badge around someone's neck," George "Big G" Keele, Anchondo's guitar player, told me, "I say, 'I've got to get these people to [our] show. I just grab them and give them a 20-second spiel.'" (Generally speaking, a badge denotes industry or press status at the conference.)

The badge-wearers, though, don't always react well to spiels. David Wolter, an A and R rep for Virgin records and one of the panelists, eyes me warily when I approach. He clearly isn't thrilled to be the object of so many marketing pitches.

"I get a lot of 'My band is better than that band,'" he told me. "People come up to me while I'm waiting at the hotel desk and give me CDs. But then again, sometimes I'm accosted on the streets of New York City, where I live, while I'm walking with my wife."

Friday, March 14; 2 a.m.

We're at the Four Seasons Hotel bar, hanging out with a few musicians. The Four Seasons bar is the industry hotspot for the festival—it's where the label guys take the lucky bands to talk them up and do business. The tableau is hysterical—industry folks from New York and Los Angeles wearing black turtlenecks and blazers, drinking Scotch with unshaven, smelly, hipsters who've been on the road for weeks. Floating among them are beautiful young women decked out in their best Saturday night clothes, looking to meet future rock stars.

I proudly report to Cameron that I got to meet Peter Buck, the guitar player for R.E.M., at a show tonight. Cameron tops me: At a Jeff McClusky event earlier in the evening, Liz Phair spotted him and asked to meet him. (Buck beats Phair, but Phair asking to meet you beats awkwardly approaching Buck and babbling like a 13-year-old until he walks away.) She told him she'd come to see us play at a loft

party tomorrow.

Friday, March 14; 4 p.m.

We show up at the loft party. We realize too late that the city is buzzing during the day with private parties that give some of the bands more opportunities to play while they're in town. It's what everybody else has been doing while we've been going to panels.

We're supposed to play a round of tunes with a couple of other singer-songwriters in someone's house—she has a portrait of herself with Aerosmith's Steven Tyler on the wall.

It goes poorly from the start. By the time Cameron gets to play a few songs, the crowd has thinned out. Liz Phair never showed.

Saturday, March 15; 10 a.m.

We're up and packed and ready to hit the road back to Chicago. I don't bother taking a shower because, well, who am I trying to impress? I'll be in a van for the next 22 hours anyway.

Driving back, we come to the conclusion that, though it was immensely fun, South by Southwest was pretty much a bust as far as being catapulted to fame goes. Chad, who was laid off from his sales job shortly before we left for Austin, sums it up on the drive back during a pit stop at a What-a-Burger in Greenville, Texas: "I don't know what screwed my self-esteem worse—South by Southwest, or losing my job."

It was certainly fun to see so many great bands, but it was depressing to watch the industry work, and see so many bands who don't want to be Celine Dion and yet still haven't thought through why they're pining for a major label deal. And we're not rock stars yet.

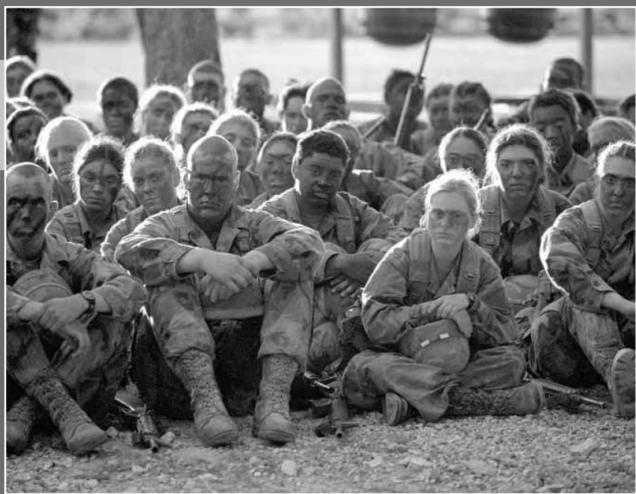
Monday, March 17; 3 p.m.

We're back to civilian life, at our jobs.

A Liz Phair fan Web site has posted an interview with the artist discussing her experience at South by Southwest. Among the favorite bands she saw in Austin, she lists one that she wanted to see, but missed: Cameron McGill.

Maybe next year, Liz.

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beyond words

ZELDA: Animations extremely smooth

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duced most of Nintendo's hits, decided to pull back from the CG-realistic graphics of an early "Zelda" demo in favor of a cel-shaded approach that renders Link as more of a stylized cartoon. First screenings of the switch lit up Internet message boards with arguments deriding the decision, claiming it was just another example of Nintendo catering to its "kiddie" image.

But to play "Wind Waker" is to understand the change, because it is one of the most beautiful

video games ever created—it is indeed the living cartoon that many designers have striven to achieve. The level of detail is extraordinary, from the seagulls that follow your boat on the high seas to the way facial expressions change in various circumstances. Watch Link's eyes move as he scans his surroundings, anxiously looking for imminent threats.

Thanks to the versatility of the toon-shading technique, animations are extremely smooth, reminding viewers of the kind of detailed movement found in some of Bugs Bunny's best shorts. And the sunrise after a hard night on rocky waves beneath lightning-filled skies is perhaps one of the most amazing things you will ever see in a video game.

Gamers who have followed Link's many adventures across all of Nintendo's platforms, from the NES to the Game Boy's many iterations and now his first appearance on the GameCube, have developed a close relationship with the series' characters.

The story of "Wind Waker" takes place hundreds of years after "Ocarina of Time," with a new Link. Dedicated fans need not be disappointed, because the story of this new hero chasing evil across the high seas of a Water World-esque realm—without giving away any fun, juicy details—has many clever ties to previous quests.

"Wind Waker" plays exactly as a "Zelda" adventure should. The tight controls follow the "Ocarina of Time" scheme that has become a standard of sorts in the industry. Link's swordplay, however, is far more engaging in "Wind Waker," as Link now has access to several kinds of attacks, such as the ability to disarm opponents or reveal weak spots. Link also retains all

of his classic weapons, such as a boomerang, grappling hook and magic arrows. Link's method of transportation—his talking boat (via a gorgeously animated Chinese dragon figurehead)—is also fun to pilot. Put up the sail, use your Wind Waker baton to change the way the winds blows, and enjoy an exciting nautical cruise set against an exquisite soundtrack.

Role-playing games have always included mini-games and side quests, often as an attempt to artificially extend game length.

Not so in "Wind Waker." Side quests include hunting down giant squid, collecting treasure maps, battling pirate ships and taking photographs so an artist can carve collectible statues. These mini-games are so deliriously fun, gamers will find themselves distracted from the main quest.

"Wind Waker" was crafted under the watchful eye of producer Miyamoto, but much of the credit for this incredible title belongs to director Eiji Aonuma, a rising star in Nintendo's development community. (Aonuma directed the last N64 "Zelda" adventure, the darkly intriguing "Majora's Mask.")

With games such as "Super Mario Sunshine," "Animal Crossing," "Metroid Prime" and now "Wind Waker," Nintendo's third-place position in America is inconceivable to anybody who values good gaming. February sales for the GameCube systems were way up in anticipation of the next "Zelda," and it's likely that "Wind Waker" will be a serious hardware mover throughout 2003. Those who still reject the new art direction are missing out on what could easily be the best game of the year, because Nintendo has delivered yet another trademark triumph.

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