

AT THE MOVIES

'DREAMGIRLS'

Full of strong performances and outside musical energy, "Dreamgirls" has all the makings of a big-time holiday hit, and it deserves to become one. As you may know from all the pre-movie hype, Jennifer Hudson is the movie's great discovery.

Hudson, an "American Idol" contestant who didn't win, delivers a knock-out blow as Effie White, the initial lead singer of a group called The Dreamettes.

Rated: PG-13, for language, some sexuality and drug content

'FREEDOM WRITERS'

Hilary Swank stars as an initially naive teacher who attempts to reach recalcitrant inner city kids.

Swank's performance and the movie's capacity to move us compensate for the familiarity of the tale, based on a true story.

Rated: PG-13. Violent content, some thematic material and language

'LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA'

The companion piece to Clint Eastwood's "Flags of Our Fathers" stands as the superior movie, telling the story of this historic battle through the sad, knowing eyes of the Japanese.

Filled with a powerful sense of impending doom, the film shows the devastation from the perspective of a small group of soldiers who never saw the bigger picture, but saw plenty of shocking sights.

Rated: R

'PAN'S LABYRINTH'

Part fairy tale and part horror movie, Pan's Labyrinth obliterates the distinction between reality and fantasy and carries us along in its powerful wake.

The film centers on 11-year-old Ofelia (Ivana Baquero), who is drawn to a fantasy world where the faun Pan and other bizarre creatures reside to help her cope with a fascist stepfather who's stomping out Franco's opponents in a forest outpost.

Rated: R

'THE QUEEN'

Helen Mirren is terrific as the dour Queen Elizabeth II in a Stephen Frears-directed docudrama that looks at the royal response to Princess Diana's death.

Not only does Mirren give an Oscar-caliber performance, but Michael Sheen also does brilliant work as Tony Blair. Frears avoids cheap shots, focusing instead on how enduring societies are able to honor tradition while responding to change, albeit not without plenty of pain, strain and wanton absurdity.

Rated: PG-13, brief strong language



Norah Jones performs on stage during a concert in Paris on Jan. 20. Jones has penned several songs on her new album, *Not Too Late*.

Coming-of-age artistry

Norah Jones tries hand at writing on new CD

By NEKESA MUMBI MOODY
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK

It's not as if Norah Jones had never written a song before.

On her blockbuster debut, *Come Away With Me*, the alluring singer penned three tunes, two of which she wrote all on her own.

But it was her interpretation of others' music that really drew listeners, her breakthrough Grammy-winning song, "Don't Know Why," was written by pal Jesse Harris.

Harris returns on Jones' new CD, *Not Too Late*, but as a guitar player. There was no need for another lyricist: Jones wrote or co-wrote each track on the 13-song CD, and has become a seasoned songwriter in her own right.

"If you asked me (to describe her) four years ago, I would have said, 'Great singer-pianist,'" Harris said recently. "Now you can't really say that she's just that. She's a lot of things now. There's another element that has come in;

there's different sides to her now."

Jones reveals her many facets on *Not Too Late*, her most adventurous — and arguably finest — CD to date. Though she still croons the kind of slow, melodic tunes that turned her into a surprise multiplatinum sensation, the issues behind the songs have become more complex, and in some instances, biting and political.

The album's first track, "Wish I Could," invokes a soldier killed in war; the second assails the captain of a rudderless ship, with allusions to today's commander in chief.

While that song is a bit subdued, "My Dear Country" is defiant and obvious, as she warbles about the past election day: "Who knows maybe it's all a dream, who knows if I'll wake up and scream."

Jones, who turns 28 in March, says the increasingly troublesome political climate and her own maturation have made her more aware of the world around her, and willing to sing about it.

"The most obviously political song on this album kind of sums it up for me. I really try to see both sides of things, and in the end, there are things I see very clearly. ... Right now for me it's just hard to not question what's going on," she says. "I feel like more people need to be inspired, I feel like we need a flame lit

under us right now to find something to hold on to and believe in."

However, *Not Too Late*, is hardly *Living With War*, Neil Young's blistering anti-war musical tirade of last year.

Though the politically tinged songs are the most buzzworthy, they do not define the album.

Instead, the melancholy disc touches on various aspects of lament, from the status of our world to the troubles of a relationship: "Wake Me Up," about a lover's goodbye, sounds like an old-time country heartbreaker, while "Thinking About You," the album's first single, is a wistful remembrance of a past love.

Jones wrote many of the songs with bassist (and boyfriend) Lee Alexander, who was also the album's producer; a few, including the caustic "My Dear Country," she wrote on her own.

Jones' lack of songwriting on her two previous albums led a few critics to label her as just a song interpreter.

But Jones said she never felt particular pressure to prove herself as a songwriter; she wrote more this time around simply because she had more to say.

"I think less than feeling more comfortable is just the fact that I had ideas for songs and I wrote them. I think I was a little self-conscious to write," she said.

TAKE IT HOME ON CD

The Bloody Hollies (Alive)

'WHO TO TRUST, WHO TO KILL, WHO TO LOVE'

The Bloody Hollies can't help themselves on *Who to Trust, Who to Kill, Who to Love*. They've just got to exorcise their demons.

The San Diego-based band originally from Buffalo, N.Y., sounds like it's plowing through an astounding live set on *Who to Trust*, which is partly reflective of the naturalistic production.

Yet the gutsy sound is mostly attributable to remarkable frontman Wesley Doyle.

As the Bloody Hollies vocalist, he blends punk and rock influences and adds a quivering tremolo to amp up the drama. As the group's lead guitarist, Doyle fuses blues and metal into an explosive output, which he occasionally fuels with smoking harmonica.

"I can feel it in my shirt, in my socks, in my shoes/Baby don't you feel it too?/I can feel it! Feel it!" Doyle belts on "C'est la Vie, Ma Cherie," a swampy brew of aural hot flashes and cold chills. And if "baby" doesn't feel it, she must be dead.

The excitable band aggressively shifts around throughout "Who to Trust," but it rarely lets up. Doyle and company detonate with the full-throated opener "Mona" and stay on fire through the building intensity of the finale, "Let's Do It."

The only bump in the road is the Bloody Hollies' tendency to noodle around with tempos to contrive breaks.

Various acts (New West)

'BLACK SNAKE MOAN' SOUNDTRACK

The movie "Black Snake Moan" may not do for blues what "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" did for bluegrass, but it gives star Samuel L. Jackson a potential launching point for a second career as a bluesman.

The new movie from "Hustle & Flow" writer-director Craig Brewer is set to open Feb. 23 and features Jackson as a God-fearing blues performer.

The "Black Snake Moan" soundtrack includes fine contributions from contemporary performers, from the reverberating electricity of "The Losing King" by John Doe (of X) to the studied chaos of the Black Keys' "When the Lights Go Out" to the gritty "Lord Have Mercy on Me" by Outrageous Cherry.

Unfortunately, the North Mississippi Allstars' epic "Mean Ol' Wind Died Down" brings the compilation to a not-so-accessible conclusion, thanks to a protracted indulgence in meandering blues guitar.

• Cakes

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1)

"Ace of Cakes," which debuted in August, is Food Network's first "docu-soap," essentially a reality show with fewer contrivances, said Bob Tuschman, the network's senior vice president for programming.

"Our viewers loved it right off the bat. It quickly became one of our top-five shows," Tuschman said. "Duff, I think, is a pretty unique being. He's a brilliant artist and an incredibly talented cake maker, but he's also very funny, outrageous, and he doesn't care what people think about him."

With a shaved head and a long, rectangular tuft of hair protruding from his chin, Goldman contrasts with Rachael Ray, Paula Deen and the rest of Food Network's folksy, ingratiating stars.

Goldman, 31, is a former graffiti artist and college hockey player. He plays bass guitar in a rock band. He can take a car engine apart and put it back

together, and when he's assembling a cake he likes to use power tools.

He has also been cooking all his life, and he graduated from the prestigious Culinary Institute of America. But he wasn't enamored with the hazing process aspiring chefs have to go through. He learned early that in the culinary world, pastries are the path to sanity and serenity.

"Here I am rolling out some dough, sipping on a latte that I made myself, chatting up one of the waitresses or whatever, and the guys on the line, all the line cooks, are like, they're burning themselves, they're all stressed out, really just freaking out," Goldman said. "And I'm like, 'I don't think I want that job.'"

He made desserts at several prestigious restaurants, but when a wedding cake he made for a friend drew raves, the light bulb went on. Goldman moved back to Baltimore — he had graduated from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where he studied history and philosophy — and started Charm City Cakes in 2000. Just two years ago, the bakery was still operating out of a rowhouse near the Johns

Hopkins University campus, but then "business just blew up," Goldman said.

Charm City Cakes relocated to a sprawling space that allowed Goldman to hire more staff. Rather than sifting through the résumés of culinary school graduates, he recruits local artists, many of them alumni of the Maryland Institute's College of Art. With their variety of skills, they can make a cake that looks like nearly anything.

"I've got sculptors on staff, I've got painters on staff, I've got graphic people on staff, color people on staff," he said. "(Customers) just tell me what they want and I'm like, 'All right.'"

Mary Alice Yeskey, the manager of Charm City Cakes and a friend of Goldman's since college, isn't shocked that he found fame. But she wouldn't have pegged him as a celebrity baker.

"He's always been a larger-than-life personality. I knew that he wouldn't be able to settle for something mediocre," Yeskey said. "I thought he would be a rising chef, or an abstract artist. This (the show) just sort of happened."

• McPhee

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1)

AP: Your image is much sexier now. Was that intentional?

McPhee: We didn't think, with this kind of music, a long gown was going to mix well together. That's definitely a part of me. ... But for this kind of music, it was more the side of me who's a typical day-to-day jeans and T-shirt kind of girl with some cute high heels.

AP: Any downsides to overnight fame?

McPhee: Right now there hasn't been too many downsides. I've really enjoyed all of it. You do get tired, like everybody else, and sometimes you wish that the Internet didn't have a right to say all the things they want to say, but also there's the upside that they ... publicize all the things that you want to have people know.



FRANKLIN COLLEGE

Announcement
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All events are free unless cost is listed.

Saturday, February 3
3 p.m., FC Men's Basketball vs. Manchester College, Spurlock Center Gymnasium. Admission: Adults \$3, High School/College Students \$2, Middle School Students/Younger Free.

Wednesday, February 7
7:30 p.m., FC Women's Basketball vs. Transylvania University, Spurlock Center Gymnasium. Admission: Adults \$3, High School/College Students \$2, Middle School Students/Younger Free.

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