The Good, the Bad and the Ugly of 2004

By Jennifer Picard/Appeal-Democrat

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The Acting Company finally finished renovations on a theater to be proud of. The Martian Puppits reunited and rocked for its fans and Ozzy Osbourne. Opera returned to Marysville and dazzled sold-out audiences.

Wine lovers found a tasting delight at Harper's Ferry in Yuba City. Martini's 227 and The Brick both prospered in Marysville. After the Silence made it to the final round of Sammy Hagar's "A Shot at the Cabo Wabo" battle of the bands and had a song featured on 98 Rock's CD compilation "Sacramento Rocks Vol. 11."

All in all, I'd say it's been a pretty good year for the Yuba-Sutter area.

One of the best parts of this job is getting to write this particular column. It's always fun to look back at all the things that made the past year good, bad and ugly. And man, oh man, were there ever a lot of things - locally, nationally and globally. From the good of "Way, Way, Way Off Broadway" and the second annual Music From the Heart, to the bad of Janet Jackson’s "wardrobe malfunction" and Ashlee Simpson's lip-sync gaffe, 2004 has definitely been an interesting year.

Let's start with the good, in no particular order, since it is my biggest category and gets top billing in that nifty borrowed headline. Truth be told, when I sat down and started brainstorming about what I thought should go in this article in regards to local activities, I only came up with good. Really.

The Acting Company finished a long, long renovation project in June on its theater on B Street in Yuba City. The project - which relied heavily on donations and volunteers - hit a few snags, but it definitely seems worth it. With more seats, a sound and lighting booth, more storage and indoor bathrooms, The Acting Company is a lovely, intimate community theater. It's going to be fun seeing what the company has in store for us in 2005, but it already seems off to a great start with "Fully Committed."

Broadway lights shone on Yuba City again and only got brighter. "Way, Way, Way Off Broadway 2004" was a success by all indicators. Good performances, tasty dinner, great service by all the volunteers and it truly remains a brilliant idea for this area. Getting all the Yuba-Sutter area's many talented arts organizations together for a community fund-raiser is fabulous. It's organizers are passionate, the cause is great - Woodleaf and the very good Sutter Theatre renovation project - and the community is receptive and entertained. And it was a better event this year. The only way it could be improved is to include drinking water on all the tables.

Opera returned to Marysville with an all-star Yuba-Sutter area cast. The Borgamaria Lyric Opera Company, under the direction of Joaquina Johnson, presented two one-act operas as a fund-raiser for the embattled Yuba-Sutter Regional Arts Council (more on that later). Featuring the amazing vocal talents of Heather Leri, Kathryn Donovan, Brant Borsden, Bronwyn Eisermann and many, many others, the opera was a complete success. Funny and tragic, profound and light-hearted, the performance made me take back all the bad things I used to say about opera. Johnson promises Borgamaria will return in 2005 and I, for one, will be holding her to that.

Local bands do Yuba-Sutter proud. In April, the Martian Puppits, a Yuba City alternative hard-rock band reunited after four years apart and fans couldn't be happier. These guys rock. I know, I've seen them play. And so has Ozzy Osbourne, who was impressed by the band when they traveled to Los Angeles later in the year to compete for a opening slot on Ozzfest. They didn't make it, but don't count these guys out, I have a feeling 2005 may be their year. They play Friday night at Nu Generations in Yuba City.

After the Silence scored with fans in Yuba-Sutter and elsewhere, making it to the finals of a pretty big battle of the bands held at the Hard Rock Café in Sacramento. The band's latest demo rocked and they continue to headline shows all over Northern California. They play Friday night at the Town Pump in Yuba City.

Harry Bidasha scored once again in September with the second annual Music From the Heart festival in Live Oak. Billed as a tribute, dedication, memorial, reunion and local talent showcase, Music From the Heart was all of those things AND a great fund-raiser for local schools music programs.
And we can't forget the new blood in town. Martini's 227 opened its doors and is doing extremely well. The Brick, located at 316 D St. in Marysville, is a great coffee house and alternative music venue to the bars. Not to mention they make the best spinach salad I've ever eaten. We've got some cool radio going with Rex McNeil in the mornings on Sunny 101.5 FM and Rhythm 105.9, and I've got high hopes for Jermaine Chadband and the new Planet Rock.

So that pretty much sums up the good of 2004, and when you add the awesome album from "Green Day," a resurgence of terrific television in the form of "Lost" and "Desperate Housewives," it's hard to let the bad get you down.

So let's get on with the bad while we're still on such a high.

The Yuba-Sutter Regional Arts Council faces financial collapse. It was a bad year for the arts council. All state funding dried up, leaving it without a reasonable budget, and people just didn't seem that interested. Granted, the arts council needs to diversify it's programs a bit - it can't just rely on opera and classical music to pull it through - but it is an amazing and vital resource in this community that we can't turn our backs on. Things are turning around, though, and I'm extremely excited about Michael Darnell, the council's new executive director. I had lunch with him a few weeks back and he had me sold on every one of his ideas. He, and the arts council, envision great things for this community, and I know I'll be supporting them and their programs in the year to come.

The Midnight Cowboy passed away. Long-time Yuba-Sutter resident and well-known blues musician Andy Rodgers died Aug. 13 in Redding at the age of 82 due to complications from diabetes. He was a great man who will be missed.

And that's pretty much all I could come up with, other than the lack of good movies playing in good theaters in the area, but that's about to change.

Nationally, it was a different story though. Janet Jackson's Superbowl stunt was utterly stupid and shameful, but it wasn't exactly the end of all things moral as some people have made it out to be. I think war and disregard for human life are better indicators, but that's just me.

As bad as it seemed for Ashlee Simpson, she actually did us all a favor when she got caught lip-synching on "Saturday Night Live." Finally, teen-agers got to see and hear what their favorite pop tarts actually do. But hey, the show's got to go on, regardless of acid reflux.

Now, let's get to the ugly.

This year, I actually have a trifecta of ugliness - Michael Jackson, R. Kelley and Donald Trump. These three men have demonstrated some of the worst possible characteristics a human being could have and yet, they're still idolized and raking in the money.

And I'm sure I've forgotten plenty more. But I've got another 52 columns in 2005 to try and get it right. You've got to love a new year.

As always, it's been an absolute pleasure working, talking, arguing and laughing with you. May you all have happiness and health in the new year and for many years to come.

My top 8 films (when all was said and done, these eight were the only ones that stuck with me):

1. "Hero"
2. "Team America: World Police"
3. "Spider-Man 2"
4. "Bourne Supremacy"
5. "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind"
6. "King Arthur"
7. "The Incredibles"
8. "Control Room"

The top 10 films I wish I had seen (and will before Oscar time):

1. "House of Flying Daggers"
2. "Sideways"
3. "Shrek 2"
4. "Kinsey"
5. "Maria Full of Grace"
6. "The Motorcycle Diaries"
7. "Andrew Lloyd Webber's Phantom of the Opera"
8. "Ray"
9. "Garden State"

10. "Napoleon Dynamite" (it's coming on Netflix next week, I swear)

My top 6 favorite songs:
  1. "Save Me," Jem
  2. "Boulevard of Broken Dreams," Green Day
  3. "She Will Be Loved," Maroon 5
  4. "Vindicated," Dashboard Confessional
  5. "Breakaway," Kelly Clarkson (she'll always be my favorite American Idol and this song just gets me)
  6. "Restless," Alison Krauss and Union Station

Best album of the year: "American Idiot"

The top 6 albums I must download immediately:
  1. "College Dropout," Kanye West
  2. "Van Lear Rose," Loretta Lynn
  3. "A Ghost is Born," Wilco
  6. "Get Away From Me," Nellie McKay

My top 6 favorite TV shows:
  1. "Lost"
  2. "Veronica Mars"
  3. "Desperate Housewives"
  4. "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation"
  5. "South Park"
  6. "Best Week Ever"

My new favorite magazine: Paste. It's tagline is "Signs of life in music, film & culture" and it comes with a CD of cool new music not deemed fit for commercial radio.

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