

# The Broad Street Journal

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## Chinese New Year Celebrations Draw To A Close

By Douglas Yeisley

The celebrations for Chinese New Year have finally drawn to a close after a several week saga beginning on February 7. I decided to attend the very last event, which was an epic three hour long golden lion dance on Sunday, February 24. I followed the dancers around for almost the entire time, except for the occasional trip to the bakery for another cup of tea or a pastry or two. The procession consisted of about a dozen dancing lions (at least half of them were children), about twenty musicians dressed in red, a few other characters from Chinese tradition, and a captivated crowd that numbered anywhere from thirty souls to over a hundred strong. The whole parade moved from store to store in order to invoke blessings and good luck upon it for the New Year. Each stop consisted of basically the same formula: first, someone would ready a string of firecrackers tied to a hunk of lettuce. Then, the lions

would rush towards the shop that was being blessed, and back up, and then repeat, all set to frantic percussion instrumentation. After that, the fireworks would be lit, and the lettuce would be released. The lions would put the lettuce in their mouths, and “spit” it out onto the doorstep. Finally, the door would be held wide open, and at least one lion would proceed in while the rest would dance at the storefront, and then on to the next shop. This continued until almost every single business in Chinatown was ministered to in this fashion. It must have been grueling for the dancers, but the crowd continually cheered them on to new heights. The crowd, in fact, was just as interesting as the performers. They varied from out of town tourists to Philadelphia residents, Chinese families to important Chinatown officials decked out in suits and furs, and from the local firefighters to the omnipresent police officer. The children, though, were the unquestioned star of the day. Several of the dancers were really young, and every new person who joined the crowd got real joy from seeing a two foot tall lion. Also, Chinese children unabashedly played in the street, including one fellow who peddled his tricycle all around.

Before the events of the past couple weeks, I hardly knew any of the customs behind Chinese New Year. Now, although my understanding is still cursory, I at least have a better grasp on the traditions. First of all, Chinese New Year is held on the first new moon of the year, which fell on February 7 this year. At the stroke of midnight, every window



Photography by Douglas Yeisley

## Maple Sugar Day in the Wissahickon

By Douglas Yeisley

Maple Sugar Day in the Wissahickon was held in Wissahickon Valley Park on Saturday, February 23, from 11 AM to 3 PM. Three of us decided to take Fairmount Park up on the offer, so we trekked out to the Forbidden Drive in the Chestnut Hill area. MCPC junior Emily Yoder piloted the vehicle, while fellow juniors Diana Ecker and yours truly attempted to navigate. Yes, that was foreshadowing, for as we drove up Germantown Avenue, we came across a roadblock, and had to take a detour. Like any good detour in an unfamiliar part of town, it was not marked at all. We ended up driving through various neighborhoods, which thankfully were comprised of beautiful old stone structures that just glistened in the snow, until we came across a gentleman who was marching out of a cul-de-sac with walking stick in



Photography by Douglas Yeisley

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# Community



Photograph by Douglas Yeisley

## Chinese New Year

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in every building must be opened to let the old year out, while fireworks and lion dancing welcome the new year in. The lions, being one of the luckiest animals according to Chinese tradition, scare out the evil spirits of the area. The red firecrackers, too serve a similar purpose; in other words, Chinese New Year is basically a spiritual spring cleaning. Red is an ongoing motif, and it draws from a tradition that believes red to ward off evil. The festivities extend fifteen days when the moon becomes full. The last day is the lantern festival in which houses are decorated with paper lanterns. Children will walk the streets holding even more lanterns, which are red, of course. Balls of sweet rice are to be enjoyed during the lantern festival.

Of course, there are other traditions surrounding the New Year, such as specific foods that are to be eaten, that I have not yet discovered. These traditions date back thousands of years, and yet they still have power to this day. I particularly love how the old year is so brutally discarded. If last year contained drought, sickness, loss of love, or whatever, it does not matter. All of that staleness, and the lingering evil spirits, are driven out. The new year is here, and with it hope.

## Maple Sugar Day

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hand. He pointed us in the right direction, and even told us the exact mileage (1.4 miles, I believe). We made it at last, pulling in to the parking lot just a few minutes before the festival officially shut down. The only people left were those who manned the booths and one small flock of children who, along with their attendant mothers, were participating in the last maple sugaring demonstration of the day.

I can safely say that the people who ran the maple sugar day were some of the kindest folks that I have come across in recent memory. They quickly gave us some still warm mini-pancakes with some fresh Pennsylvania-brewed maple syrup, even while they were taking down the tent that housed them. Another man directed us over to some just made maple sugar. The syrup was so tasty that I licked it from my plate, prompting one gentleman to comment, "Good to last lick, huh?" It certainly was. Another book contained maple sugar products that were for sale, including bottles of ma-



Photograph by Douglas Yeisley

ple syrup and maple sugar candy. We bought some of the latter, which naturally were shaped like maple leaves.

The three of us then shuffled down to a fire with our newly acquired sweets, drawn by the soothing smell of burning cherry wood and its beckoning warmth. I poked the fire with a stick until the hot embers glowed anew, and we basked in its glow. The snow that covered the ground and still caked the trees gave the park an almost Christmas-time cheer. A family of three came over to share the fire with us, and they explained what they learned from the demonstration. Apparently, the sap that comes out of a tree only contains two percent sugar, so gallons upon gallons of the sticky stuff need to be gathered to produce the syrup that tastes so good on our waffles and pancakes.

We piled back in the car, and headed to the nearby town of Chestnut Hill. After exploring a cheese shop, a bakery, a record shop, and a print shop, it was time to head home. I have to admit, I felt melancholy leaving behind the Wissahickon. Its enchantment is palpable, since gorgeous old growth forests next to bucolic creaks all within city limits are hard to come by. Its paths were walked by the likes of Edgar Allan Poe and other notables. Also, Chestnut Hill, like a few other Philadelphia suburbs, cultivates a wonderful small-town feel. Just a short train ride away, these places should not be overlooked by any of us.



Photograph by Douglas Yeisley

## Film Review: *Be Kind Rewind*

By Douglas Yeisley

Fans of Michel Gondry, after the success of such films as *Science of Sleep* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, have come to expect a visual experience that defies all conventions and logical boundaries. Thankfully, Gondry's latest film *Be Kind Rewind* does not stray from his characteristic surrealist whimsy. *Be Kind Rewind* is more or less one loving homage to the art of fan-produced amateur remakes of popular films, or "sweding." The film stars Jack Black, who plays Jerry, maniacal junkyard worker convinced of the power plant's evil reign of terror; Mos Def, who portrays Mike, an employee of the eponymous *Be Kind Rewind* video and thrift store and close friend of Jerry's; and Danny Glover as Mr. Fletcher, the shop's beleaguered owner. The cast is rounded out by the wonderful Mia Farrow and Melonie Diaz (she starred in the 2005 skateboarding film *Lords of Dogtown*), among others. After an ill-fated sabotage effort to the power plant leaves Jerry dazed and magnetized, he stumbles into the movie store as Mike keeps shop for Mr. Fletcher. Jerry's newly acquired magnetic field erases all of the films, so Mike and Jerry have to re-shoot every single one before Mr. Fletcher returns from his trip.

As Mike and Jerry run around re-shooting such films as *Robocop* and *Ghostbusters*, Gondry truly unveils his ability to transform mundane objects into stunning and wonderful visual vignettes. The imagination and the execution of Gondry's mad ideas prove that he is truly a master of cinematography. Various scenes could be cited to prove this, but the written word really could not do them justice. Basically, Gondry flips the world on its side, giving us an entirely new perspective to enjoy and explore. No one at this point can doubt his abilities artistically, especially since *Eternal*

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## Daniel Johnston and the Devil Town

By Douglas Yeisley

On Friday, February 22, musician Daniel Johnston played at the Trocadero Theater in Center City. Johnston has maintained a passionate cult following since the mid 1980s, but most people know him as being the subject of the award winning documentary *The Devil and Daniel Johnston*. It is admittedly difficult to know where to begin in describing Daniel Johnston, though his sufferings from bipolar disorder seem like the right foundation to get things started. Since his arrival on the Austin music scene in the late 70s, Daniel has been featured in an MTV special on Austin, involuntarily committed to a mental hospital after attempting to crash a plane, claimed Metallica was controlled by the devil, and has been openly admired by such musicians as David Bowie and The Flaming Lips. Basically, Daniel has led a hard life, and unlike other musicians we tend to pity, all of his troubles have been outside his control.

The large crowd that gathered for the show was a rag-tag group of middle-aged men, misfits, punk rockers, repentant hipsters, and other such outsiders who feel inspired by Johnston's story. When the man finally walked out, love from every corner of the old theater extended towards the stage. He guzzled his beloved Mountain Dew (he once upon time wanted to be its spokesman), and set up his white three-ring binder full of all his music. First solo, then accompanied by an acoustic guitar, and finally backed by a full



Daniel Johnston (second from the left) with Backing Band. Photograph by Douglas Yeisley

band, Johnston played songs from twenty years worth of albums. His stage presence is one of absolute nervousness, and when he sings, he clenches his fists as his whole body shakes. Each song is an epiphany: simple, bare, but straight from his soul. He has gone through such tough times of hospitalization, unrequited love, loneliness, and confusion, and the crowd's collective heart breaks. Then, when he sings songs of hope, such as "True Love Will Find You In The End," our spirits just soared. He even wished us a Merry Christmas, which he then recovers by saying "In opinion, every day is Christmas." Not long after he walked off the stage when he "ran out of songs," he came literally sprinting back on to perform an encore much to our jubilation. The backing band and the acoustic guitar player came back, too, and the whole lot of them led the crowd in an a cappella version of "Devil Town." We swayed, and cried out in unison:

*And all my friend were vampires  
Didn't know they were vampires  
Turns out I was a vampire myself  
In the Devil Town*

I can safely say that I have never been so moved at a concert before. In fact, it transcended the concept of the concert, and became a window to a tortured man's soul, and from that, a window into our own.

# Urban Living

## Be Kind Rewind

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*Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* was a critically-acclaimed masterpiece. Unlike his other films, though, *Be Kind Rewind* lacks that overarching sense of melancholy. Instead, it revels in a lighthearted, child-like whimsy that simply lifts the spirits. The plot, as one can glean from the above synopsis, is just absurd, and it admittedly lacks emotional depth. Consequently, the critical consensus is that although the film is indeed good, it can seem empty at times. However, it makes up for it with charm and many genuinely funny moments. Viewers and critics alike simply have to suspend their disbelief, and just let the movie unfold. It is like Orbit gum: a tasty treat that will not deteriorate your gums, but offers little actual nutritional benefit outside of fresh breath and a nice smile. In other words, *Be Kind Rewind* leaves the viewer feeling happy and content, but unlike other films that are not particularly thought provoking, it will not rot your brain. Sometimes it is refreshing to go to a movie just to laugh and feel uplifted, which is something die-hard movie fans often forget. *Be Kind Rewind* might not be as deep, or even as good, as *Eternal Sunshine*, but it is definitely worth your time.

Show Times for *Be Kind  
Rewind:*

Ritz at the Bourse

12:30 3:00 5:20 7:40 10:00



*Image Courtesy of Google Images*



*Image Courtesy of Google Images*

## Writing for The BSJ

By Douglas Yeisley

I understand that everyone is busy with their schoolwork, jobs, or just life in the city. However, taking the time away from all that business to write an article for the Broad Street Journal is both easy and rewarding. A 300 to 500 word piece of any subject of your choosing does not really take up that much time, at least not compared to a research project or any other school project. Furthermore, it allows you to reflect on your time in the city and share your experience with others. By not participating in the Broad Street Journal, you are robbing yourself and others from learning or enjoying that experience. The Broad Street Journal is also used as a recruitment tool, so if you want to continue to see our beloved MCPC thrive, we need to continue to get the word out through this medium. It is just a shame that MCPC alumni with 40 hour work weeks are more willing to write for me than current students. So please write; you will not regret it.

## Lunar Eclipse

By Douglas Yeisley

On Wednesday, February 20, Philadelphia had the privilege to experience the last total lunar eclipse until 2010. The circumstances leading up to the 10:01 p.m. event could not have been more ideal. The snow and clouds that had lingered all day

rolled back to reveal a crisp, clear sky perfect for viewing astral phenomena. In the meantime, many MCPC residents steadily made their way to the rooftop in order to watch the shadowy wave as it incrementally washed over the moon's surface. By the time the eclipse was complete, the entire moon appeared to have taken on a dark rusty hue. The moments before and after, though, were in my opinion the most striking. The contrast between the milky white light of the full moon and the creeping shadow seemed like a physical manifestation of a poem.

The poetics of the scene as it played out before us were obvious, but the science behind it was not (well, for some of us it was not). As it turns out, the concept of a lunar eclipse is actually quite simple. The moon does not produce any of its own light; instead, it reflects the sun's light back to Earth. Occasionally, as the Earth orbits the sun and the moon orbits the Earth, the three celestial bodies line up so the Earth is directly in between the sun and the moon. The moon, then, is caught in the Earth's shadow, and is temporarily robbed of its light.

As it got too cold to continue watching this little slice of science, people filed their way back inside. The aftermath was subtle; the world did not end, as some had joked. Instead, we came away with a better appreciation of astronomy, and, at least for me, a deep regret that I am not better at science.