

# Elliott Smith endures through thoughtful songs

BY TOM MOON  
KNIGHT-RIDDER NEWSPAPERS (KRT)

To most consumers of pop music, Elliott Smith blipped on the screen exactly once — when his hushed song "Miss Misery," written for the closing credits of the 1997 film "Good Will Hunting," became a hit and was nominated for an Oscar.

But to a smaller constellation of listeners, Smith, found dead in his Los Angeles apartment Tuesday night from an apparently self-inflicted stab wound to the chest, was one of the most promising poets of the post-grunge era.

Smith, 34, was an omnivore whose recordings threaded motifs from sunny '60s pop and shoe-gazing '80s mope-rock and folk into revelatory, multihued music. He wasn't a maverick in the Kurt

Cobain sense. Or a satyr consumed by passion, like the late Jeff Buckley.

Though he lived with his girlfriend, he was an artistic recluse who observed life from a perch in the corner. His lyrics were thoughtful commentaries disguised as ragged, extemporaneous monologues. But as he pondered loneliness and human cruelty, Smith's acidic words and painfully sharp perceptions were softened by his easygoing melodies, which had a boyish innocence.

In "Tomorrow Tomorrow," on his 1998 album "XO," Smith described fame in typically withering terms — "They took your life apart, they called your failures art" — as the music bubbled happily underneath, lessening the sting. Like many of his heroes — Nick Drake and Brian Wilson, for

example — darkness was Smith's muse. He sang about rejection with a wistful air and could sound as if he were enduring an ordeal and romanticizing its aftershocks at the same time.

Smith, who was working on music for a CD planned for the spring, struggled with depression and drug and alcohol addiction. In interviews, he could be sullen and cranky, and on stage he sometimes looked profoundly uncomfortable. He spoke haltingly, in cryptic mumbles, and though he was forthright about his addictions, he said his lyrics were not autobiographical.

"I don't feel like my songs are particularly fragile or revealing," the Nebraska native, who grew up in Dallas and Portland, Ore., told the Los Angeles Times in 1998. "It's not like a diary, and they're

not intended to be any sort of super-intimate, confessional singer-songwriterish thing."

Indirectly, of course, Smith's experiences did enrich his songs. He knew what faltering felt like, the effort it takes to keep one's soul together and then to lose. His music was profound without being corny as it expressed empathy for those caught in hardly heroic daily struggles.

For all their introspection, Smith's narratives were never self-obsessed. Part of the credit goes to his musical curiosity. Where other singer-songwriters use a spider web of acoustic-guitar arpeggios as their constant backdrop, Smith wrote in a diverse range of styles.

Some of his buoyant, impossibly melodic songs ("Sweet Adeline," "Bled White") recall the

florid psychedelia of the Beatles, while others ("Waltz #2") are set in a stately Germanic oompah rhythm. He was good at agitated rock — before setting off on his own, he was in a fondly remembered Portland band called Heatmiser. And while he was expert at elaborate vocal chorales, he was equally at home singing plaintive guy-with-guitar songs.

Smith — who said he started calling himself Elliott in middle school because his real name, Steve, was too "jockish" — began his solo career with the 1994 album "Roman Candle." But it wasn't until 1997's "Either/Or" that he began to attract widespread attention. "XO," the following year, was hailed as the work of a major talent and turned up on many critics' best-of-year lists.

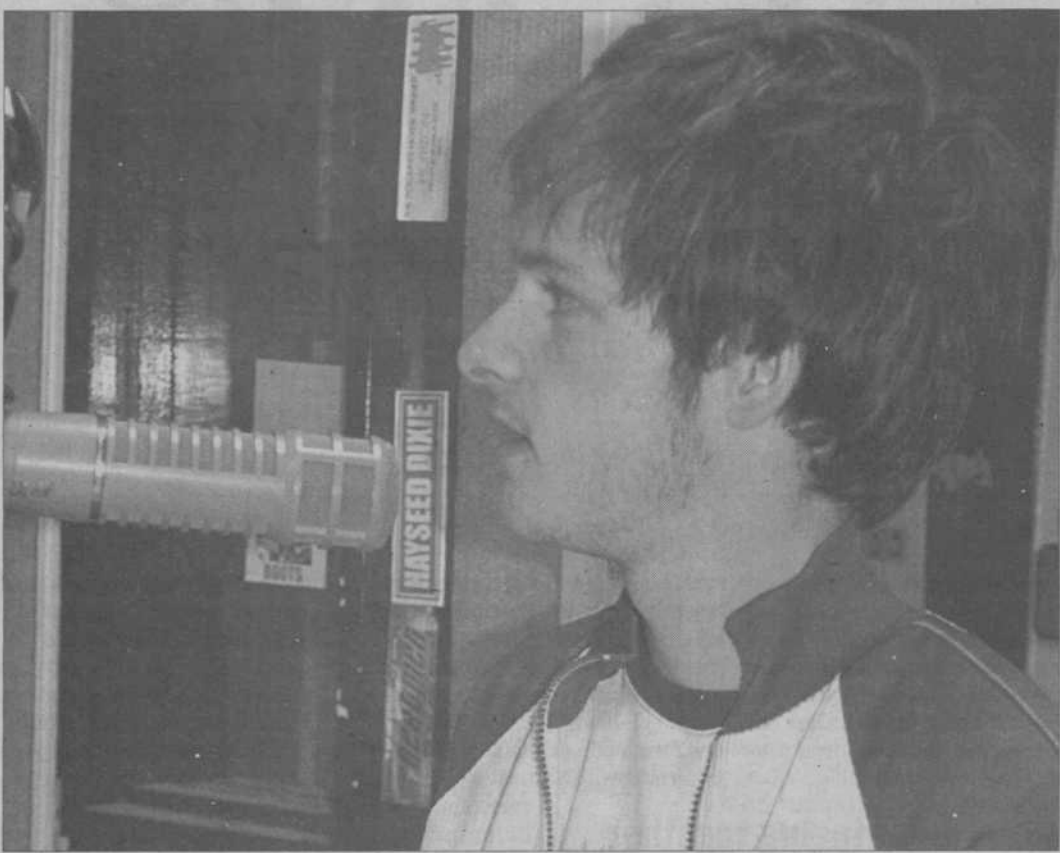
"Miss Misery," which is on the

"Good Will Hunting" soundtrack but none of Smith's solo albums, illustrated the ephemeral nature of pop fame. When the movie was hot, his dejected little song seemed to be everywhere. But the attention didn't translate into sustained sales of his own works. The masterly "XO" failed to connect with the older listeners who might have appreciated the sophistication of his compositions.

Though he performed occasionally, Smith spent most of the last two years writing and recording. He issued the single "Pretty (Ugly Before)" on Seattle's Suicide Squeeze label in August and had composed at least two discs' worth of material for a set tentatively titled "From a Basement on the Hill."

Smith's label, DreamWorks Records, had no comment Wednesday about the project.

## Owen Beverly hits the airwaves




Owen Beverly does a radio interview with a WUSC DJ on Thursday before playing at Banana Joe's that evening. Beverly is currently on tour to promote his new EP.


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# Soviets invade New York in 'Freedom Fighters' game

BY VICTOR GODINEZ  
THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS (KRT)

A decade after the death of the Evil Empire, gamers are getting a taste of what a Soviet invasion of America might have looked like.

If Electronic Arts' new Freedom Fighters is any indication, it would have been an embarrassing boondoggle for the Russkies and a fun, if brief, interlude for most Americans.

Freedom Fighters (\$49, suitable for ages 13 and up) is available for all the mainstream consoles. I tried the GameCube version.

The game is set in an alternate universe, where Stalin has ended World War II by nuking Berlin and staking a claim to most of Europe.

By the late 1990s, the Soviet imperialist thirst can no longer be quenched by a clutch of puny European states, and it is time for "The Commies Take Manhattan!"

You play as a mild-mannered New York plumber named Chris.

You and your brother are out plumbing one day when explosions suddenly rattle the building. Communist thugs burst in and kidnap your sibling, and a Soviet attack chopper sprays the building with hot lead.

Apparently, the soldiers manning the early warning radars were napping when the entire Soviet armed forces strolled across the Atlantic.

You flee, make contact with underground rebels and set about kicking the Russians back across the pond.

The game is broken up into

campaigns, each of which has several missions, such as capturing a dock or blowing up a helicopter landing pad.

Every time you complete an objective or heal wounded civilians, you earn charisma points. Get enough charisma points, and you can add an extra rebel to your squad.

This is the best part of Freedom Fighters, as you can eventually command over a dozen rebels.

Your buddies fight competently enough on their own, but they perform best when you order them around.

By default, they'll simply follow you and attack nearby enemies. But you can also tell them to defend their current position while you freelance, advance in the direction you're facing or regroup on your position.

By tapping a button, just one of your soldiers will act; holding the button down for a second will make all of them react.

The simple control scheme works well and allows you to command your squad quickly even in the middle of firefights, which get huge in the final missions.

The main controls for Chris are also streamlined. You can only carry one main weapon and one pistol, but you can easily access stored grenades, Molotov cocktails, binoculars, health kits and C-4 at the touch of a button.

The game uses a third-person perspective, which gives you a good view of the action when you send your squad off.

The graphics are pleasantly detailed. For example, there are some nice lighting effects when

you fire your machine gun at night, and the snowfall is almost hypnotic.

You can occasionally see thin, white seams on the streets where patches of graphics seem to be stretching apart, but this annoying bug is rare.

The sound and music are also excellent. The enemies shout in Russian, and there are some great orchestral tunes reminiscent of the Soviet national anthem.

Freedom Fighters does have two significant flaws, though.

First, the enemies are sometimes stunningly dumb. Usually they're smart about taking cover and picking off your men from a distance. But some Soviet troops will simply wander into the middle of your squad, blissfully unaware that they're being perforated with several hundred rounds of ammo.

What's even more annoying is how short this game is.

After you've successfully completed the last campaign required to boot the Soviets out of New York, you're ready to move on to Cleveland, Kansas City and Boise.

But apparently the Soviets only brought enough soldiers, food and ammo to conquer New York, and you and your Dirty Dozen have single-handedly crushed the entire Red Army.

But they'll be back! Freedom Fighters 2: The Quest for More of Your Cash, coming soon!

Most gamers should be able to blast through this game on the medium difficulty setting in about 10 hours, which is too bad because those 10 hours are a lot of fun.

# 'Chainsaw Massacre' puts Biel back in spotlight of box office

BY JOE NEUMAIER  
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS (KRT)

**NEW YORK** — Sex and violence have been good to Jessica Biel.

On TV she plays the minister's daughter on the family-friendly drama "7th Heaven," but today Biel stands atop the movie box office wearing a tight, wet T-shirt.

Battling a homicidal slasher in "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," which sold more than \$29 million in tickets, has turned the 21-year-old actress into Hollywood's new scream queen.

But Biel insists she's not a good girl gone bad — despite evidence to the contrary, including her previous movie role, as a coked-up coed running around in her underwear in "The Rules of Attraction."

"I never really thought that people might think, 'Oh, she's in that (bad-girl) niche, and that's it for her,'" she said.

"Maybe I'm a good girl trying to grow up who made some bad mistakes. Or maybe I'm just a good girl trying to be a good actress."

The biggest of those mistakes, she says, was Gear's now-infamous photo spread in 2000.

Biel — who started on "7th Heaven" when she was 14 and had parts in such inoffensive movies as "I'll Be Home for Christmas" and "Ulee's Gold" — posed with only a strategically placed forearm keeping her from being topless.

The revealing photo spread was

designed to force "Heaven" producer Aaron Spelling to release her from her contract. Spelling had responded to her first request with a loud "I own you!"

Nonetheless, Biel says she now regrets the whole thing and is happy to be appearing as a guest star. This season, she says, Mary will become pregnant on the show.

"I was an immature 17-year-old who thought I was a woman, and wanted to explore my sexuality," she says.

"(Everyone) was encouraging more risqué shots — 'Take your shirt off and just cover your breasts.' When everyone is saying you look beautiful, you think, 'OK, yeah,' even though on the inside I was freaking out."

"I don't want people to think this is a sob story. The fact is, I was trying to act grownup, and I did it in front of the whole world."

That experience, Biel says, solidified her feelings about on-screen nudity — which explains why she is fully clothed when she smashes psycho killers in "Chainsaw Massacre."

"Chainsaw" is a remake of the classic 1974 gorefest. Biel plays one of five teenagers who pick up a survivor of a mass slaughter and are used as bloody bait to entice the killer into the open.

"As confident as you are with your body, it changes when you take your clothes off," she says.

"I wouldn't have done the movie if it required nudity. That's one of my big problems with hor-

ror films — I hate it when movies do that just to sell tickets, just for young boys to go, 'All right, boobs!'

"Just get over it already!" Biel was born in Ely, Minn., but her father, a business consultant, and her mother, a homemaker, moved what the actress calls her "crunchy granola" family to Boulder, Colo., when she was an infant.

An appearance at an international modeling competition in L.A. at age 12 landed Biel acting classes and an audition for "7th Heaven." In 1996, she won the role of Mary, the oldest daughter of the Rev. Eric Camden.

Though Biel considered leaving the show to attend Tufts University — she has a year and half under her belt — after co-starring in the Freddie Prinze Jr. romantic comedy flop "Summer Catch" in 2001, she returned for guest appearances that allowed her character to grow.

She's growing in other ways, too. In her next film, "Blade 3," she plays a vampire hunter fighting with Wesley Snipes' blood-sucking superhero. She's already getting into the role, eating high-protein snacks to increase muscle mass, and says she doesn't mind trying to make the leap from horror movies to more serious fare.

"I'm very happy to be compared to Sigourney Weaver in 'Alien' and Jamie Lee Curtis in 'Halloween' — those are strong characters who don't give up," she says.