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IN MY HUMBLE OPINION
 By Jonathan Charles Fox

Freaks and geeks

The Catskills is crawling with 'em, so I fit in pretty well these days. Oddballs, loners and folks who march to the beat of their own drum (as my mother was fond of saying) are holding their heads up high, as well they should. Showcasing unique music, art and entertainment has long been a tradition in the Upper Delaware River region, and now that warmer weather is upon us, it's easier to chauffeur the Wonder Dog around town to check it all out.

Long before it was *de rigueur*, I was labeled a geek, mostly based on outward appearance. Thick glasses and sporting a yarmulke didn't win me any popularity contests, so I was forced to develop a (debatable) personality and study less than my bookworm sister, who wore the report-card crown in my family. Early on, I made a decision to pursue my dream of entertaining schoolmates as a way of making friends and influencing enemies, mostly to avoid being beaten up (for being different) on the playground. I'm reminded of an old song from "A Chorus Line" (www.broadwaymusicalhome.com) that states that "different is nice, but it sure isn't pretty—pretty is what it's about," but I beg to differ. From my vantage point, different is the new pretty, and I had the opportunity to explore that concept a few times over the last week.

Finding myself in Livingston Manor, I ducked in to CAS (www.catskillartsociety.org) to check out the newest Elevator Gallery art exhibit, dubbed "Exquisite Corpse of the Catskills," which (I discovered) is based on an old parlor game designed to "help artists break from reason." Co-curators Akira and Ellie Ohiso (www.ohiso.com) brought this concept to CAS, and 30 local geeks (I mean artists) joined them in creating multiple conjoined works of art that "Corpse" rules dictate. The reception, touted as the big "reveal," featured many of the artists themselves unveiling the collaborative pieces to which each had contributed, but had yet to see the final result. Each artist was given a "panel" on which to draw portions of a body with each having access to only an inch of the other's work from which to continue the piece. The result is a fascinating peek into the individual artist's imagination, and each completed triptych is wildly interesting and a great example of what is defined (by the exercise) as "happstance art." I can't draw but admire those who can, and "Corpse" (on display through August 2) is fun, captivating and different. So be sure to check it out.

Crossing "geeks" off my list, I set out in search of "freaks," and having heard that the circus (I mean Cooper Boone) was in town, I put a bow (oy) in Dharma's hair and followed her lead to Boone's "Sideshow," which had made its way to Sullivan County (www.forestburghtav-



TRR photos by Jonathan Charles Fox
 As Cooper Boone performed the haunting single "Circus" off his "Sideshow" album, entertainer Mark Silverstone peeled away the layers of his "Lady Teak Wonders" character illusion before the hushed crowd.



Local "art geeks" Nancy Low Lee (center panel) and Nancy Wells (lower panel) clowned around while waiting to see Jill Wiener's (top panel) reaction to their completed triptych at the opening of the Elevator Gallery's newest show, "Exquisite Corpse of the Catskills" in Livingston Manor.



Dharma the Wonder Dog had a blast posing with some of the "Sideshow" "freaks" at the Forestburgh Tavern's extravaganza, starring Cooper Boone.



Cooper Boone's talented band was decked out in outlandish attire as they entertained the crowd during the Forestburgh Tavern's presentation of Boone's "Sideshow."

ern.com) following the show's acclaimed debut in New York City. Being greeted at the door by a bearded lady was just the tip of the freaky iceberg that awaited guests inside the tavern, which had been transformed into Boone's vision of the inner workings of his disturbed, demented, and (IMHO) wildly talented mind. Serving as a launch for his new CD of the same name, "Sideshow" is a three-ring extravaganza, giving Boone an opportunity to explore his multi-faceted ability to entertain the audience with powerhouse vocals and innovative style, which serves as a showcase for his ability to engage.

Far beyond a simple concert, Boone's show (www.cooperboone.com) takes the audience on a journey of self-discovery laced with beautiful harmonies, gorgeous arrangements, stunning visuals and true originality that sets him far apart from the rest of the madding crowd. Supported by a talented cast and band, Boone manages to sweep the casual observer into his dizzying world, while performing future hits off the album like, "Other Side of Crazy," "You Make the Ugly Go down Easy," and the memorable "Typical Saturday Night." As the sideshow itself paraded through the venue, Boone plumbd the depth of varied emotions and his new spin on the Village Peoples' anthem, "YMCA," was a surprising, moving interpretation of what has heretofore been labeled as a camp classic.

Boone's talent for storytelling shone as the evening progressed and as "Sideshow" performer Lady Teak Wonders (Mark Silverstone) sat in the spotlight literally removing her layers of illusion, a hush fell over the crowd as

Boone sang the plaintive "Circus"—which, combined with Silverstone's moving performance, caused more than one tear to fall in the tavern. Three years in the making, Boone describes "Sideshow" as "throwing caution to the wind" and "trusting his instincts to grow as an artist," and the prowess he displays is exemplified with every nuance, every gesture and every crystal clear note that soars. With several local appearances upcoming, check out his schedule so that you, too, can be dazzled. Freaks? Geeks? *Vive la difference!*

[Cooper Boone's fabulous Shohola residence, Blue Stone Farm, is featured in TRR's "Our Country Home" in next week's issue.]