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## Students react to Jeff Mangum's performance at Hamilton

As a part of Hamilton's annual Feb Fest, Jeff Mangum of Neutral Milk Hotel performed a special acoustic concert in the Chapel. *The Spectator* spoke to several awed students in order to share their personal reactions to the event.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFF MANGUM

A clean-shaven Jeff Mangum performs in New York at Occupy Wall Street in 2011.

by Dan Knishkowsky '13  
A&E CONTRIBUTOR

Like everyone else in the Chapel, I had long since given up hopes of seeing Jeff Mangum play live. There was a noticeable tension as the line gathered outside, with excitement and anticipation tempered by murmurs of "does he still have it?" Mangum's long-term hiatus, which only increased the cult hero status he had sought to escape, was only partly responsible for our worries, however.

Again, like almost everyone

else, I was given *In The Aeroplane Over the Sea* in middle school by my cool older sibling. The prime listening years for many of us were early high school, formative years in our lives where music means a lot—this band will always be inextricably linked with these memories. Almost everyone waiting in line had a story to tell—my favorite was Marty Cain '13, who laughed about trying to show NMH to a friend who took one listen to "King of Carrot Flowers Pt. 2" and wrote it off as Christian rock. This music has tremendous nostalgia value,

and Mangum's hiatus served to let it seep further into peoples' lives.

We were not to be disappointed. Mangum was excellent, as expected, but what made this show so special was looking through the crowd, and seeing how much it meant to those around me. Each person seemed to be caught in an intensely personal moment, stuck somewhere between the music and the memories, before Mangum asked us all to sing along, forming an incredible collective energy among the most attentive concert going crowd I've seen. Thank you Mike Kendall and IMF for a night few of us will ever forget.

when he wondered aloud if there were a rabbit or a bird in his chest. Myself and many friends and strangers left feeling, after all, "strange to be anything at all."

by Stephanie Hudon '13  
A&E CONTRIBUTOR

Once eager students and locals were in from the outside chill and all sitting before our sweater clad and humble entertainer, it dawned that the Chapel was the ideal venue for Jeff Mangum and his interactive performance. Still incredibly modest in his appreciation,

you could sense Mangum's relative comfort in such a space. Nonetheless, it triumphed as performance over interaction; we were echoes of the spectacle only his talent could paint for us. His concern for his cramping vocals—"the body is an instrument, you know?"—brought both his humanity and the power of his musical action to life. You didn't doubt him

by Jack McManus '13  
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Songwriters like Jeff Mangum often have an interesting relationship with their songs. Especially when they're as raw and personally reflective as "Two Headed Boy" or "King Of Carrot Flowers," lyrics can almost feel like little pieces of your soul, bared for the world to misinterpret, ridicule, reject or just maybe relate to. Because they're so personal, songwriters sometimes develop a sense of protectiveness or ownership over their songs, which can get awkward in a live concert situation. Knowing Mangum's reclusive nature, I never expected him to be so open and gracious in the way he shared his songs with

all of us.

Since its release in 1998, music fans have had 15 years to form their own deeply personal relationships with *In the Aeroplane Over the Sea*. I first discovered the al-

**"I've never seen a performer share himself so openly."**

—Jack McManus '13

bum in high school, and it helped open my eyes to the wonderful weirdness that exists just below rock's rigid commercial surface. Judging by the vocal crowd in the Chapel on Thursday, I'm far from the only one that the album has affected, and with Mangum's

absence from live performance, we've all shared a common experience of listening to the same studio recordings. After enough time listening to identical performances of the same song, it's natural that NMH fans have developed feelings of shared ownership over Mangum's songs, adopting and internalizing them as important pieces of our own individual identities.

Taking the stage almost anonymously under a low cap and thick beard, Mangum seemed to understand and embrace this idea. Inviting us all to sing every song along with him was an act of tremendous grace and generosity, and it made the concert unique and special in ways I couldn't have anticipated. I've never seen a

by Anna Paikert '13  
A&E CONTRIBUTOR

It's challenging to write about Jeff Mangum's show because I feel that my words cannot express how much I loved it without sounding hyperbolic or cliché. I think I can best describe the show as very meaningful. Neutral Milk Hotel captured a lot of confusing and beautiful parts of life that I tried to understand in high school. Because of Mangum's reclusiveness, I never thought I would see him live. The excitement of his presence (less than five minutes away from where I sleep!) and my nostalgia for his music made me thrilled to

see him. Still, the show exceeded my expectations; Mangum put an astounding amount of energy and enthusiasm into his songs and was very grateful to an audience that would have worshiped him regardless of his performance. Perhaps the best part of the show was the joy that permeated throughout the

Chapel; devoted fans who walked five minutes or drove five hours were simply happy to be there. As Mangum encouraged the audience to sing along and voices,

attaching their own memories and experiences to the songs, rose and fell together, pure happiness resonated throughout the room. I was both a girl wandering the hallways of a

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suburban high school with ear buds wedged in both ears and a near college graduate attempting to make sense of and prepare for the real world, experiencing the rare feeling of being understood and an even more extraordinary feeling of happiness.



NMH's cover art matches Mangum's abstract lyrical style.