

# Montage

Art, books, diverse creations



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**Jocelyn and Chris Arndt, siblings from Fort Plain, New York, balanced a full-time tour schedule and undergraduate life.**

## Weekend Rock Stars

*For two Harvard siblings, studying and songwriting went hand in hand.*

by JACOB SWEET

**I**N AUGUST 2012, Jocelyn Arndt '17 and her brother, Chris '18, played a rock concert in front of approximately six people—including their parents and a couple of hot-dog vendors. The performance was set to be one of the last of their careers. In a year, Jocelyn would be at college; having a band would be infeasible.

"We were just like, 'Oh yeah, fun time's over,'" Chris said.

But among the handful of people there

that day was David Bourgeois, co-owner of a small production company near Albany. He couldn't believe it; the two teenagers performed in a glorified beer tent as if they were in front of a crowd of thousands. Jocelyn's soulful voice—which has drawn comparisons to Fiona Apple and Janis Joplin—and raw intensity were stunning to see from a 17-year-old. Chris played highly technical guitar riffs in an understated, bluesy way. The two had even written some of their own

songs, sprinkling them between somewhat obscure pop and rock selections from the '80s and '90s.

After the concert, Bourgeois met with both of them and their parents. If they wanted, he told them, Jocelyn and Chris could make it as professionals.

"I remember going home and being like, 'I never thought of music as something that could be a job,'" Jocelyn said. "It seems too fun to be a job."

The Arndts had started playing music in elementary school—separately at first, taking turns in the family's music room. When that proved burdensome, their parents suggested they just learn the same songs so they could practice together, Jocelyn on voice

and keys and Chris on guitar. Within a couple of years, they performed Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" for a small talent show in Fort Plain—their hometown in rural upstate New York. By high school, they had become local rock stars. Classic albums were always playing at home. "The Arndt household has a steadfast rule: we can't have dinner without music playing in the background," Jocelyn said. "Growing up, Chris and I would take turns picking the soundtrack before dinner...We both took it very seriously."

Still, before hearing from Bourgeois, the two thought their musical careers would end after high school. Their parents were both teachers. It just seemed like they'd "go to college and then have college jobs," Chris said.

The December following their beer-tent performance, Jocelyn was accepted at Harvard. A month later, she and Chris signed a record deal with Bourgeois. The group, called Jocelyn & Chris Arndt, would be filled out by a rotating cast of two or three studio musicians, with Bourgeois on drums. Jocelyn knew that moving to Cambridge wouldn't shake her music resolve, even though her brother was four-and-a-half hours away and writing songs required long-distance correspondence. Every weekend during the semester, she returned to Albany to rehearse and tour. "It worked, I think, because we kind of thought that we could make it work," Jocelyn said. "People at Harvard are pretty hardcore about everything, so I don't know if my commitment seemed any crazier than the next person's."

A year later, Chris joined her at Harvard. They put the finishing touches on *Strangers in Fairyland*, their first studio extended-play record, and took a Greyhound bus out of Boston every weekend to gig around the East Coast. The proximity made it easier to write songs ("Usually really late at night," Chris said) and plan tours.

Easier, of course, is relative. During a typical week they'd leave campus on Thursday, travel for nine or 10 hours on a Friday, perform a show that night, travel another nine or 10 hours on Saturday, perform another show, and lug themselves back to campus on Sunday. Longer breaks meant more elaborate tours. Weekend homework was done in cars, trains, and hotel rooms between performances. Once, when a Chinese final was scheduled during a tour, Jocelyn

O P E N B O O K

## Harper Lee, Crime Reporter

*Casey N. Cep '07*, a former Berta Greenwald Leducky Undergraduate Fellow at this magazine, has since written widely and well, for *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, and other publications. But she has never written anything like *Furious Hours: Murder, Fraud, and the Last Trial of Harper Lee* (Knopf, \$26.95), her first book, on the dual mysteries of a notorious crime and a famous novelist's attempt to write about it. The gripping pace is established in the prologue.

...Hundreds of people were crowded into the gallery, filling the wooden benches that squeaked whenever someone moved or leaning against the back wall if they hadn't arrived in time for a seat. Late September was not late enough for the Alabama heat to have died down, and the air-conditioning in the courtroom wasn't working, so the women waved fans while the men's suits grew damp under their arms and around their collars. The spectators whispered from time to time, and every so often they laughed—an uneasy laughter that evaporated whenever the judge quieted them.

The defendant was black, but the lawyers were white, and so were the judge and jury. The charge was murder in the first degree. Three months before, at the funeral of a 16-year-old girl, the man with his legs crossed patiently beside the defense table had pulled a pistol from the inside pocket of his jacket and shot the Reverend Willie Maxwell three times in the head. Three hundred people had seen him do it. Many of them were now at his trial, not to learn why he had killed the Reverend—everyone in three counties knew that, and some were surprised no one had done it sooner—but to understand the disturbing series of deaths that had come before the one they'd witnessed.

One by one, over a period of seven years, six people close to the Reverend had died under circumstances that nearly everyone agreed were suspicious and some deemed supernatural. Through all of the resulting investigations, the Reverend was represented by a lawyer named

Harper Lee



Tom Radney, whose presence in the courtroom that day wouldn't have been remarkable had he not been there to defend the man who killed his former client. A Kennedy liberal in the Wallace South, Radney was used to making headlines, and this time he would make them far beyond the local *Alexander City Outlook*. Reporters...had flocked to Alexander City to cover what was already being called the tale of the murderous voodoo preacher and the vigilante who shot him.

One of the reporters, though, wasn't constrained by a daily deadline. Harper Lee lived in Manhattan but still spent some of each year in Monroeville...only 150 miles away from Alex City. Seventeen years had passed since she'd published *To Kill a Mockingbird* and 12 since she'd finished helping her friend Truman Capote report the crime story in Kansas that became *In Cold Blood*. Now, finally, she was ready to try again....She would spend a year in town investigating the case, and many more turning it into prose. The mystery in the courtroom that day was what would become of the man who shot the Reverend Willie Maxwell. But for decades after the verdict, the mystery was what became of Harper Lee's book.

went to her professor's office a day early, completed the test, walked to the T, got to South Station, took a bus to Albany, and got on the road.

Their time in college has matured their songwriting. Chris, who concentrated in computer science, deals more heavily with the harmony and mixing side and Jocelyn deals more with lyrics and melody. Their sound has developed into something that Jocelyn—a former English concentrator—can't quite describe. Chris suggested "Indie blues rock" or "Alternative blues rock" as rough approximations. Bourgeois called it

"some new breed of millennialized authentic alternative rock."

Either way, it's unique. Their newest album, *The Fun and the Fight*, is their most cohesive yet. You might even guess they're siblings just by listening. Chris' rhythm guitar playing is almost voice-like, weaving through and echoing Jocelyn's emotional vocal lines, which can be upbeat one minute and sorrowful the next. On stage, Jocelyn often seems in a near-trance. Chris, also lost in the music, is a more serene presence.

Today, Chris said, they feel like everything they're doing has a little more weight and

significance. Their concert crowds, which often include both teenagers and baby boomers, give a pretty good indication of their musical range. On the music-streaming site Spotify, the group reaches just short of 50,000 listeners a month. On February 28, they performed on NBC's *Today Show*, their highest profile performance to date. It's hard for them to imagine that just a few years ago, they were pulling all-nighters to finish homework assignments between sets. "I know either one would've been a big deal for us, and for our parents, too," Jocelyn said. "I can't believe it when we look back."

# The Comic-Book Storyteller

Graphic novelist Amy Chu

by S.I. ROSENBAUM

**W**ATCHING AMY CHU, M.B.A. '99, stride through Midtown Comics in Manhattan's Times Square is like watching a queen visit the heart of her realm. The staff know her, of course. She looks up a few graphic novels by writers she knows, then heads upstairs to search for some of her own back issues, breezing past posters of characters she's written for DC and Marvel: Wonder Woman, Deadpool, Red Sonja, Poison Ivy, Green Hornet.

At 51, Chu is an established comics writer, working for the biggest publishers on some of the biggest titles in the business. She's living any comics nerd's fondest childhood dream. It just was never her dream. As a kid, Chu hadn't wanted to be comic-book writer—or any kind of writer. She certainly never planned on telling stories about antiheroes in spandex or metal-bikini-clad warrior babes for a living.

**Accidental comics writer Amy Chu, whose graphic novel, *Sea Sirens*, comes out this spring**

In fact, before 2010, the closest she'd come to writing a comic book was creating a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation in her old life as a business consultant. "It's not the same," she says now. "No one says, 'I was so moved by your PowerPoint presentation.'" But perhaps there were clues to Chu's destiny in her early

life. Born in Boston, she went to high school in Iowa, an experience she now describes as "fairly traumatic." Chu was nerdy and shy and one of the only Asian kids in town, and her dream was to play soccer. Only one problem: her school didn't have a girls' team. When the school district forbade her from trying out for the boys' team, Chu's parents sued and won under Title IX. She joined the boys' team. But the first time she stepped onto the field to play, the opposing team walked off en masse—forfeiting the game as a political statement, rather than face a female opponent.

She remembers the experience as mortifying. But it stood her in good stead when she eventually made it to Wellesley College, where she completed a double degree in East Asian studies and architecture, in a joint program with MIT. "You sue under Title IX," she jokes. "That's a really great thing to get you into a women's college."

At Wellesley and MIT, Chu was more in her element than in the mostly white Iowa town she'd left behind. "I'd never seen so many Asians," she says. "Suddenly I'm actually popular. I can actually be invited to parties." At one party, she met the future writer and business consultant Jeff Yang '89, then a Harvard undergraduate. Chu had founded a literary journal for Asian-American stu-

