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Killer cowboy terrorizes rock group in 'Diablo High

HAVRE — The blood! Ohhh, the blood!

Out of beer and gas, the indie-rock band the Magpies should have known nothing but trouble can happen when driving a '71 VW bus down a remote road in the sticks.



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Told with tongue firmly planted in cheek, "Diablo Highway" is the story of what happens to the Magpies one dark and bloody night. I'm not spoiling anything by telling you most of them die, bludgeoned with a tire iron by a maniacal cowboy.

Like the chainsaw massacre movie that inspired it, "Diablo Highway" was shot over two weeks in June on a miniscule budget — just \$2,200 — in the Bear Paw Mountains south of Havre.

Tolan Harber, who grew up in Ohio and Big Sandy, wrote and directed the movie and even makes a brief appearance. For convenience sake, he is the first band member slaughtered.

"Diablo Highway" is the third movie Harber and his wife and co-producer Samantha Pollington have shot in Havre. The road trip flick "Burnt Sienna" was selected to play at the 2003 Mill Valley Film Festival. An experimental movie about a small town, "Stranger than Fiction" was included in the 2007 Rejects Film Festival.

Pollington and a few of the couple's friends star in the movie. Their band, the Magpies, also wrote and recorded the soundtrack.



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"I'm a really lucky person in that I get to make art with my wife," Harber said.

Harber said he loves filming in Havre because unlike bigger cities permits aren't needed and the town goes out of its way to be helpful.

Having talented actors available through the Montana Actors' Theater is another big plus.

The movie and music store Creative Leisure has supported the upstart filmmakers, hosting screenings of their other Havre-made movies.

"We wanted to do a big bombastic screening this time," Harber said. Fortunately, the cowboy killer Jay Pyette stars and directs performances at MSU-Northern's Little Theater and arranged a special screening there Saturday.

Harber plans to shop "Diablo Highway" around at film festivals until the end of the year. A Western he wrote three years ago, "Lone Tree Branch" has a chance of being picked up by a studio, but if Hollywood passes it by then he'll start work on it in Havre next year.

LEWISTOWN — As with all things politics, there are a few rumors floating around the annual Montana Democrats Mansfield/ Metcalf Dinner on April 5.

Being the event emcee, Andrée O'Shea, whose parents live in Lewistown, hears the whispers and speculation first hand.

The timing of the event ahead of Montana's June 3 primaries makes it a logical spot for presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

"It's possible," O'Shea said of a presidential candidate appearance. "We had the president of Ireland in Butte, so why not?"

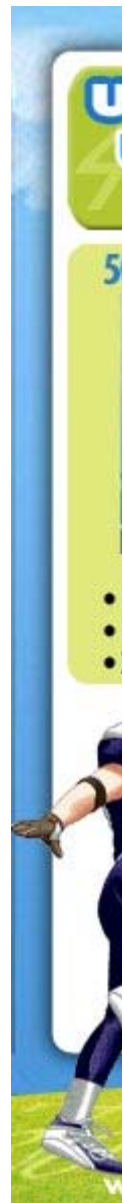
While the idea of extra guests makes her nervous, O'Shea is preparing for the event as if she hadn't heard the buzz.

As founder and artistic director of the Big Sky Repertory Theatre in Butte, O'Shea is comfortable in front of a crowd. Before settling in Butte two years ago, O'Shea studied theater in St. Louis and was featured in television shows, including "Touched by an Angel" and "Everwood."

She plans to take advantage of Butte's history as a pit stop on the vaudeville tour between Minneapolis and Seattle to spice up the annual Democrat dinner.

So don't be surprised if Hillary is greeted on stage by Butte regulars Mae West or Groucho Marx, or if Obama is introduced by Charlie Chaplin.

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STORYCHAT 

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