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Suede to play at URI April 1

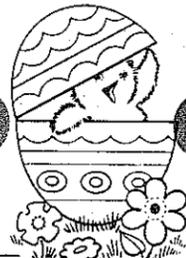
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REGULAR FEATURES	• Restaurant guide 2-C
	• Calendar of events 8-C
	• Entertainment 4-C

March 26 - 28, 1997

The Narragansett Times • The North Kingstown Standard-Times • The East Greenwich Pendulum • The Charleho Times • The Coventry Courier

Mom gives reluctant 'actor' a push onto big screen

By PATRICK W. FEALEY

COVENTRY — Richard Gagnon didn't even want to be in the movies.

The 17-year-old high school senior had no acting experience, had no desire to act in the future and did not even go to the auditions when Steven Spielberg put out a call for extras for "Amistad."

He's more into math and physics, which he hopes to someday teach. In fact, he was at the library doing homework when Hollywood came calling.

But he had the look Spielberg wanted. And what Spielberg wants, he gets. Of course, playing hard to get — for whatever reason — is one tried and true method of negotiation in Hollywood.

In this case, Gagnon had a little help from his mother, Deb, who was admittedly star-struck by the filming in Newport. Deb, along with her sister and both their daughters, tried out to be extras. Unfortunately for them, they were not called back.

But Deb was aware that Spielberg was looking for extras to play marine guards whose job it was to watch over the African prisoners in the months before their groundbreaking trial. He wanted the extras to be young and good-looking, like star Matthew McConaughey, who is playing the Africans' defense lawyer. He especially wanted young men with beards.

She looked at her son Richard: young, handsome, with short blonde hair, sideburns and a goatee. Like a good agent, Mom saw the potential.

But Richard had shown no interest in the casting call. And when Mom mentioned sending in a photograph of him, he balked.

was expected on the set. Sister Becky answered the phone and excitedly relayed the news to Mom: "It's them. It's the 'Amistad' people."

Later that night, when Richard returned from the library, they told him the good news. "When we first told him he was going to be in the movie, he didn't believe us," Deb said.

The next morning, they scrambled to Walmart for a pair of long johns to wear under the wool uniform. Richard skipped school and headed over to Newport, where he was to play one of seven marine guards who prevent the captive Africans from escaping.

Spielberg saying, "Hold the gun toward the door." Spielberg would say, "You, go around the back and pretend to get the slave that's escaping."

Spielberg wasn't the only one who was laid back. McConaughey, who was also in the scene, stood beside Richard for most of the day before Richard realized who he was. The star of "A Time to Kill," "Dazed and Confused" and "Lone Star" acted like just one of the guys. "Spielberg kept calling him Matt," Richard recalled.

Perhaps not knowing who was who spared him from being star-struck and nervous. There was at least one awkward moment on the set, however, but it was not Richard's fault.

While preparing for a shot, one of the assistant directors accidentally stuck his finger in Richard's ear. "He was pointing out where somebody was supposed to stand and he stuck his finger in my ear," said Richard. What happened next was just as funny: "He was walking, and he tripped. I caught him. Everybody was laughing."

\$50 a day

It wasn't all laughs, though. They spent nine hours sitting around hotels in wool uniforms, wondering what they were going to do. It wasn't until right before filming that they were given muskets and told what their parts were. In addition to getting to work with the stars, Richard was paid \$50 and got a zero on a physics assignment that day.

"Now I know what it feels like," said Richard. "You think actors don't do anything. But they work hard." He said he would be willing

'He didn't even know the name of the movie until he was in it.'

— Becky Gagnon

Thus began a 16-hour day that introduced Richard to a world of big stars and long waits.

"It was probably a 30-second blot in the movie," said Richard, sitting in the living room of his Coventry home with mother, sister and father, also named Richard. "But I was



lead guitarist Matthew Smith contribute the bulk of the material with love songs heavy on the dreamy harmonies and luminous guitar jangle at a premium. It is tough not to fall prey to a number like "Two Seconds" about a guy who dreams for just a snippet of his girl's love, or the sweet folk pop sensibility and airy harmonies that engulf "Annabel." Equally appealing is the grainy, sort of Conway Twitty-like soulfulness in the croon of Oakes.

"Sky and the Ocean" isn't all placid pop. The Volebeats still bend those guitar strings in the twang direction, however, it's a lot more subtle this time out. As their fearless cover of Barry White's "I'm Gonna Love You just a Little More, Baby" from last year's "Bittersweet" EP (Third Gear Records) and, more recently, the excellent reworking of the 1939 York Brothers cathouse classic "Hamtramck Mama" from the recent "Straight Outta Boone County" (Bloodshot) compilation will attest, the Volebeats can branch with the best of them. On "Sky and the Ocean," the neo-rockabilly of "Warm Weather," with its hot licks and rocking 88s on the ivories, and the surreal title track with its spaghetti western backdrop are bona fide wing spreaders.

With "Sky and the Ocean," the Volebeats are destined for glory. Now folks just need to wake up and buy the darn thing. Highly recommended. (Safe House Records, P.O. Box 214, Poultney, VT 05764)

(Dan Ferguson is a free-lance music writer and host of *The Boudin Barndance*, broadcast Thursday nights on WRU-FM 90.3. He lives in Peace Dale and can be reached at Boudindan@aol.com.)

Suede to play at URI April 1

KINGSTON — Pop jazz vocalist and musician, Suede, will perform in a free concert Tuesday, April 1 at 7:30 p.m. at the Memorial Union Ballroom, located on the University of Rhode Island's Kingston campus.

Suede, a self-taught musician and writer on piano, guitar and trumpet, performed at President Clinton's 1993 Inaugural Ball and has been featured on ABC's television show "20/20." She has also received numerous awards including New York's Bistro Award.

The concert marks the beginning of the third annual Symposium on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues to be held April 10 through April 12. For more information, call Lois Cuddy at 874-4671.



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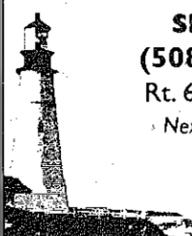
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