

HIGHPOINT

BELMONT HIGH SCHOOL

FEBRUARY 2010



Belmont Idol Rocks BHS

by Whan Lee

In the final minutes before the curtains opened for Belmont Idol, Ms. Garschina of the Foreign Language Department could be seen busily running around, a phenomenon sure to garner the empathy of coordinators of any kind. Back in the band room, where the musicians waited, there was a subtle air of tension and excitement.

"We've only had three rehearsals," said junior KJ Miller with a grin, as she added, "But I'm ready to rock!"

Ready to rock they were. As the curtains opened, emcees Andrea Meyer and Joe Verran energetically danced onstage in a routine that would become somewhat repetitive, and introduced the judges: Belmont High alumnus Andrew Flamang, local

musician Jean Gautier, and our very own assistant principal Mr. Layne Millington.

The two mentioned that the show would fund Diversity Week, a well received annual week of presentations and films at Belmont High that emphasizes the importance of diversity. Each performing group had an accompanying statement that related their music to the fundamentals of diversity, though at

times the connections between what was being sung and what was sung for were strained.

Belmont Idol opened with a conventional rock performance by Daniel Miller-Medzon, Joseph Ayanian, Matthew Lee, and Gabriel Plass. After playing a cover of "Under the Bridge" by the Red Hot Chili Peppers, the band surprised the audience with an exceptional rendition of the eighties anthem, "Don't Stop Believin'" by Journey, aided by Plass' fiery guitar riffing and solos.

Janis Joplin's "Me and Bobby McGee" by Haruna Matsusaka and Christian Backus followed, in an act punctuated by Matsusaka's soulful voice.

Issac Pritchett then performed a cover of "Pike St./ Park Slope" by Harvey Danger, featuring minimalist piano self-accompaniment and lyricism Gautier called "novel."

After Pritchett was belter Ayanna Coleman-Potempa, in a melancholy rendition of Christina Aguilera's "Hurt" that was ethereal at moments and, according to judge Flamang, "better than Christina is."

The last act of Part I of Belmont Idol was a duo called Sir Thomas Wiggery, consisting of Alanna Weil and Julia Harris, who, both singing and playing guitar, performed "Rise Up With Fists!!" by Jenny Lewis and The Watson Twins. Though its lyrics were transparently critical of modern American society, Sir Thomas Wiggery's musicality and enthusiasm were not lost in the audience.

The intermission included an onstage dance to "Jai Ho" from the popular film "Slumdog Millionaire" led by Melanie Nehrkorn. Audience participation was urged, and along with Ms. Garschina, there was strong

continued on page 3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Belmont Idol Recap - 1

Diversity Week Preview - 2

Nick Lattanzi Album Review and Interview - 4

Avatar Point/Counterpoint - 6

Mr. Randall Interview - 8

Roving Reporter - 8

Diversity Week Preview

by Lucy You

As great as Belmont Idol was, the event is more than just a competition for students to express their talents: it is also a fundraiser for Diversity Week, a weeklong program to promote different cultures, views, ideas – anything that falls under the broad category of diversity. Ms. Garschina, the organizer of Belmont Idol along with Mr. Preston, stresses the fact that the event is a fundraiser, “All of the money we make goes straight into supporting this year’s and next year’s programs.”

Dr. Comment, co-director of Diversity Week along with assistant principal Mr. Richard, is thankful for the funds from Belmont Idol. As the years go by Dr. Comment is happy that “[Students are] becoming more involved with the program” and “it’s something that they look forward to every year. We’re establishing ourselves as a tradition.” Like all traditions, Diversity Week retains its appeal through the years, replacing some programs with others to provide exposure to different experiences and cultures and to keep people coming.

Various programs are featured in this year’s week-long event: a presentation students will be attending by Lillian Lincoln Lambert, the first African American woman to receive a MBA from Harvard Business and whose autobiography is being released this month, on the Monday after February vacation; performances by our own Belmont High students; a program on

students with learning differences organized by Mr. Sabella and freshman Yulia Katzman; Thursday afternoon’s Latin American music performance by the Manguito, five internationally known Latino musicians; and the Hunger Banquet, a special event spreading awareness of the realities of class and food in the world, hosted on Friday morning by Working to Help the Homeless.

Even with all of these different programs going on, when asked what the main theme of Diversity Week was, Dr. Comment promptly replied, “Celebration. [Diversity Week] is about celebrating diversity and raising the awareness of students toward the variety of different cultures and experiences that they do not come in contact with often.”

The Hunger Banquet provides a simulation of the divide between classes. Ironically, the simulation doesn’t focus on minority, but the *majority* of the world’s class, the poor and very often hungry class, a majority that is prevalent in America as well. This event represents the world’s hunger, how many people in the world struggle daily to obtain the amount of food that BHS students can get easily.

The leaders of Working to Help the Homeless, Julia Rodgers and Nadine Karaa, say, “the simulation is pretty much by the book,” referring to Oxfam America, the creator of the Hunger Banquet and an international organization that helps developing nations. “Everyone can see the amount of people in the low class versus the high class clearly.”

The simulation is based on the percentages of people who are in

classes based on the quality of food ² they eat. The amount of people in the lower class to the people in the higher class is proportional to reality. A presentation will follow the simulation that will provide more information on world hunger and the people that are living with it. Not only does the Hunger Banquet represent people around the world, but the event is also about Massachusetts and Boston. A food drive will be held around the time of the Hunger Banquet that will give all of its donations to Belmont Pantry.

“[Students] should tell teachers to bring them down. It’s a lot of fun!” – Julia Rodgers exclaims with a smile. Despite the event’s serious theme, the Banquet can be a lot of fun (I can say from experience) and is very informative about the very large, very real problem of hunger.

As Nadine Karaa says, “A little theater, a little food, and a lot of information and caring.” Those four things combined can make a large difference in the world and help people maintain their lives and thus their diversity as people.

While Diversity Week is a successful event, Dr. Comment expressed her desire for more clubs like Working to Help the Homeless to participate in Diversity Week. “What I would like to see happen in the future is more student involvement, and also more involvement from the various clubs in Belmont, with the planning and organizing of Diversity Week.” She also expressed the desire for not just entire clubs, but individual people to “pitch in and help put a program together or organize something for Diversity Week.”

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Belmont Idol (continued)

representation from the Belmont High English Department, as the stage was graced by the presences of Ms. Bloom, Dr. Comment, Ms. Hurtabuise, and Ms. Wayne.

All proceeds from the sale of refreshments went to funding Reds Cross humanitarian efforts in Haiti.

Following the intermission, KJ Miller continued the show with Lady Gaga's "Speechless," adding vigor to the performance with a vibrant stage performance.

Next was the single underclassmen act of the night, Oasis' "Let There Be Love" by Nick Brancazio and Matt Nemitz, a commendable effort featuring two maturing voices that seemed to weave between the restrained electric guitar and piano instrumentation.

The performance after that to be judged—and the one that won Belmont Idol—was a quartet made up of vocalists Margot Alexander, Julia Davidovitz, and Ayla Erdos-Steinberg and guitarist Sam Eftim. Starting with an a cappella rendition of "Taking

Chances" by Platinum Weird, the group segued seamlessly into "Fireflies" by Owl City, a piece that was praised by the judges for its harmonic fluidity.

The final performance was by junior Marcus Dixon, who told the audience he was "just as surprised" to be singing that night, as he stepped in for step squad. After reciting a spoken word love poem he had penned himself, Dixon sang a Boyz II Men song a cappella with élan.

As soon as the winners of the event were announced, the audience hurried out of the auditorium, much to the dismay of an assembly of the Belmont Idol musicians, who concluded the night with "Twist and Shout" by the Beatles.

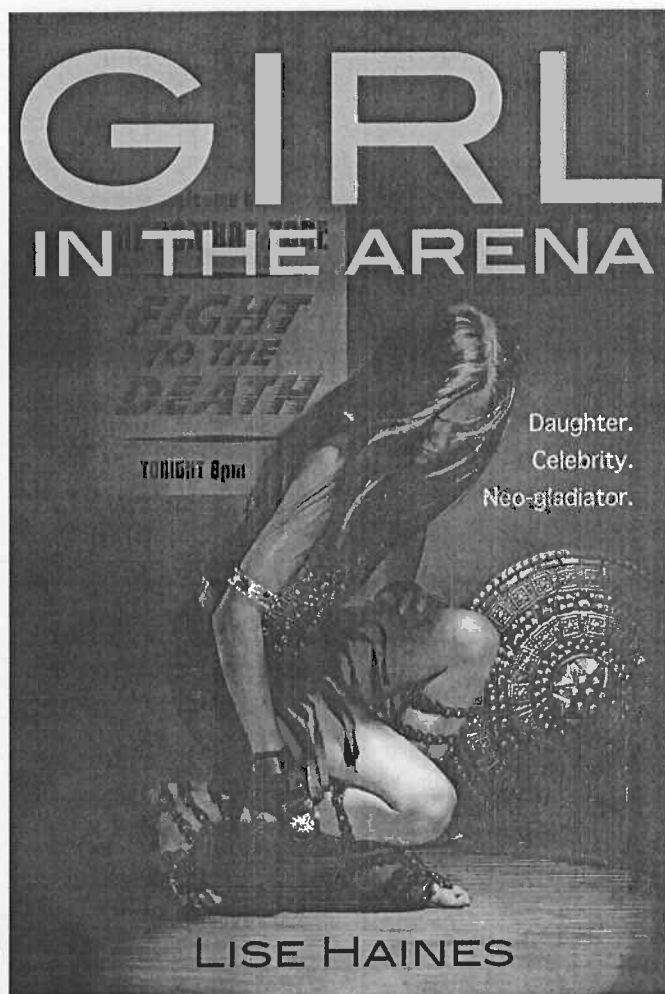
Speaking with Ms. Garschina was much easier at the end of the night.

She admitted, "There weren't many rehearsals, so we had some mess-ups", though she cheerfully continued, "But it was really competitive—I felt sorry for the judges."

A Message from the Junior Class Officers

Class of 2011:
Please forward any suggestions you have about ways to raise money for our class to 2011classofficers@gmail.com or our Facebook group "Belmont High Class of 2011" **Not the Australian one

"Lyn's droll, sometimes poignant first-person narrative is engaging and intimate, and it deftly combines romance, Lyn's family responsibilities, and thought-provoking, frequently satirical looks at societal issues, such as celebrity, violence, and a culture that prizes profit over compassion. ~Booklist



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With New Album, BHS Alum Changes Style

4

by Chris Stadler

When Nick Lattanzi released his first album (*Shiny Car!*, 2007), I was immediately impressed that someone who attended the same school as me could write music at such a high quality. His recently released third album *Running of the Bulls*, released under the name Sun Cut Flat, makes it clear that he is no longer a high schooler. The new album sounds much more polished and professional in terms of sound quality, musical complexity, and lyrical maturity.

Nick started mainly as a folk singer, polishing his chops at Club Passim in Cambridge and gaining much of his initial popularity within the Boston folk scene. Since then he has turned progressively toward a more electronic sound while still maintaining the folk traditions of storytelling. On *Running of the Bulls* he has perfected this balance, sounding less experimental than his last album, *Paxamericana*, and effectively melding acoustic and electronic instrumentation. The album also sounds coherent as a whole, a feat that is becoming increasingly more rare in the era of the iPod. And yet each song maintains a unique sound, something that heavily electronic bands like Radiohead sometimes fail to do. Lyrically the songs also make up a differentiated whole: each song is very personal and seems to provide a snapshot of a different aspect of one story. Nick's dedication to his music is palpable as one listens to this album; it is an impressive piece of work for any artist to have produced, let alone one who is still in college.

"Running of the Bulls" is available for free download at www.nicklattanzi.com as well as on iTunes and other online music stores.

Q&A with Nick Lattanzi

CS: How did you start playing music and performing?

NL: I started primitively playing music when I was around thirteen and I started performing around the time I went into high school. I used to play at Club Passim open mic every week. I think I started playing before I was actually good, but performing really helps you to get better and I got comfortable enough in front of a crowd that I could actually improve.

CS: And when you started you played more folk music?

NL: Actually, I didn't even consider this, but I started recording music even before



I started playing guitar. When I was in Cambridge I used to rap on instrumentals with my friends, so I actually did a few albums before I started playing guitar, just rapping. I think that helped me a lot to write songs and stuff.

CS: Since the release of *Shiny Car!* in 2007, what has changed in your style?

NL: Well, I released my first two albums under just my name, "Nick Lattanzi," and on those I wasn't able to get the sound quality I get now. At the time I thought it

was sick, but looking back on it it's kind of raw. But those two albums were not really, like "albums," in the sense that it's comprehensive piece of work, they were kind of just collections of songs that I'd recorded. Whereas, with *Sun Cut Flat* I feel that it's like a "work" that should be taken as one album, rather than just random songs. That's the biggest development and as well I think the songs are more dynamic and my voice sounds much older now.

CS: I think that the new album felt more like a coherent whole. If this is true, then is there a central concept?

NL: Well, I wouldn't say it's like a concept album where there's a thesis or something like that. It's more just like a personal reflection. Before I used to write, my songs were always personal but they used to be figurative and stuff. With this album I kind of put it all out there and didn't really care about exposing myself, which is kind of intimidating but at the same time I'm really proud of it because all the songs are direct, personal expression of stuff I was feeling, rather than just polished products for consumption.

CS: I saw in another interview on your website that in your earlier phase you considered yourself more like Dylan, with the lyrics as the most important aspect of the music, and now you are more like Thom Yorke (of Radiohead), where you are trying to create an atmospheric feel. How would you describe that shift?

NL: I definitely think that's true, but I still think the lyrics are really important in my songs. I think it's the style of lyrics, rather than how important the lyrics are. Before it would be explicitly: this is a story, this is what the song is about. That's the folk tradition you know, telling a story. What I'm interested in is taking elements of that, but condensing them into really efficient snapshots, rather than a whole novel. I saw an interview with Thom Yorke where he said the way he writes is flashing images on a train and you just see an image. I feel like that's what I tried to do, I guess it's just little images rather than like a novel or something.

continued on next page

CS: So would you say that Dylan and Radiohead have had the most influence on you?

NL: Yeah, those are two of them definitely. I think with Dylan the lyrical influence is huge, and with Radiohead some of my songs are a little in that feel of kind of being dark and atmospheric but even the songs that are actually poppy or upbeat I think are actually really influenced by Radiohead because of the layering and the texturing. And The Beatles. I think The Beatles are really my biggest influence, but everyone has that. What I want to do is take the fundamental form of the pop song and then add the texturing and complexity and layering and the sound of what Radiohead does where it's just like, when you have headphones, it's all around you.

CS: How do you write and record? Do you write first and then come up with the music?

NL: I think it's changed a lot over time. When I was first doing it on *Shiny Car!*, songs like "Annabell" and stuff like that, I would come up with a melody and a progression on the acoustic guitar, and then I would just record that and any cool things I would add to make it more dynamic. Then I started experimenting more, I did this track "Someone's In Your Corner" where I did these samples and then programmed this beat and just kind of went with it, I would come up with parts as I go. I don't record in professional studios because I feel like the advantage of being able to experiment and just come up with stuff on the spot in your own bedroom is way more legit than being on the clock and having this really planned out thing.

CS: I love "Annabell" by the way.

NL: Thanks. I have a kind of love hate relationship, I think a lot of artists have that. I just feel like a lot of people really like it but then they don't know any of my other stuff, which I'm a lot more proud of. But I love when people say they like my songs, it's really satisfying.

CS: How is the new album being distributed? Is there going to be a CD or will it only be released online?

NL: There is going to be a CD, I'm waiting on that. We put it out first just through Myspace, Facebook, and Twitter, for free download and we got close to a thousand downloads within the first week. Just a few days ago it went up on iTunes and all the online stores. That's kind of like phase two and now we're just promoting it, sending it to a lot of blogs, the online campaign. Then eventually, I think when we start to see money from the iTunes release then we'll pay to get it physically made. Then at shows we'll be selling that.



CS: Do you have any plans for shows right now?

NL: Right now we just finished a series of stuff to promote the album right away. We're taking a break until January but we're definitely going to be doing stuff throughout January, February, March, and then in the Summer we're going to do a lot. The coolest thing we've done is this video for BU Today: we got filmed playing three tunes in this really nice studio with all this really sophisticated equipment. It's going to be like an online show kind of. That's going to be really cool to show other people the live aspect, who maybe haven't seen us play yet.

CS: What is it like for you to be a college student but also a musician who spends a lot of time doing shows and recording?

NL: It's really hard at times. Sometimes I struggle because I feel that music is what I really want to be doing but I have to put it off for school. So it is a constant conflict for me right now but I'm really glad I'm in school at the same time. And I don't think the two are mutually exclusive either; I get a lot of inspiration from everything around.

CS: Do you plan on still playing and recording after college?

NL: Yeah definitely, I at least want to give it a shot. I feel that I'm always going to be making music, whether it's my profession or just a hobby. I think the thing that's most important is the reasons why you do it have to be for your own artistic satisfaction. It's easy to get caught up in trying to get people to hear it and all that, because it's really satisfying, but really I just do it because I love doing it. I think a lot of people get lost, if they make it or whatever, 'cause the source isn't the same anymore, you're just trying to please people. That's why I love independent music, a lot of my friends are musicians too and they're not trying to be famous at all or anything, they're just doing it because the love it.

CS: Do you have any suggestions for high schoolers interested in writing and performing their own music?

NL: What I did start small, and just do it for the enjoyment. I never took music lessons when I was growing up, I just enjoyed playing so I kept playing. And I think if you make something a job or a chore it won't be the same. You just have to enjoy doing it for the sake of it. Hard work too, everyone wants to do something awesome but it takes a lot of hard work. I don't know if you can understand how difficult it is; It's not always fun, it really sucks sometimes. Especially recording at home it's frustrating, even now I still get really pissed and it's really awful when I can't get the sound I want. You just gotta stick with it and keep persevering through it.

Point/Counterpoint: Avatar

6

Avatar Lives up to the Hype

by Chris Stadler

Hype is a dangerous weapon; a two sided sword, it cuts those who wield it without experience. James Cameron has plenty of experience. The director of "Titanic," "Aliens," and "The Terminator," he still knows how to make a good movie. And "Avatar" is a great movie.

Many reviews of the film have focused on its environmental and anti-imperialistic themes, and criticized it for their simplicity. Although these are both present, they serve mainly as the superficial excuse for a plot, while the true themes are more personal. The main character, Jake Sully, begins the movie as a straight-faced marine, not even flinching as his brother's body is incinerated. The lead actor, Sam Worthington, has been criticized by some for his lack of emotion in this role. But this only holds true when considering solely his appearances as a human, while he spends the majority of the movie in blue Na'vi form. Worthington is still acting during these scenes, but he has been covered in digital skin through motion capture. The formerly crippled, emotionally conditioned marine is set free

when surrounded by nature instead of the sterile inside of a spaceship. As soon as he puts on the blue body for the first time he bursts into a full grin. In this new skin his emotions range from pure exhilaration to complete grief and hopelessness. He learns to love, to care for others, and to lead them when all seems to be lost. The grunt becomes a hero.

"Avatar" is one of those movies that forces you to believe. At first it was difficult: jaded by the hype I found myself criticizing every minor detail. But soon I fell in and was enveloped. The rest of the audience believed too: they clapped during the hero's moment of victory, and probably almost cried, as I did, during the saddest moments.

Some movies make the audience believe through realistic dialogue and acting. "Avatar" is not one of these movies. Decidedly ascribing to the "epic" school of filmmaking, it envelops the viewer in a visual and aural atmosphere. Although the 3D was at first distracting and at times blurry (I saw the film

Beauty is Only Skin Deep

by Leonid Grinberg

When *Phantom Menace* was released in 1999, millions of *Star Wars* fans were outraged. *Phantom Menace* (as well as *Attack of the Clones* after it) betrayed the depth, plot, and character development that made people love the original *Star Wars* trilogy so much, and instead replaced them with cheap gimmicks and CGI-heavy fight scenes. "Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it," wrote the philosopher George Santayana, and it seems James Cameron indeed cannot learn from past mistakes, as he has fallen into the same trap with *Avatar* as George Lucas had with *Star Wars*.

As it is, *Avatar* wins over the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy in one important aspect – its CGI is much better. Whereas George Lucas simply stuffed every frame with random creatures and effects, James Cameron spent a considerable amount of time and money in making every shot look breathtaking. The 30-minute fight scene that concludes the film is an especially incredible sight; too bad it follows two hours of utter mediocrity.

Indeed, "mediocre" is a decent single-word summary of the film. It seems Cameron tried so hard to make his film look good, that he forgot that a truly great film requires a plot, talented actors, and a depth in its characters. *Avatar* has none of these things. Its plot ranges from the overused to the inventively ludicrous. Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), a wounded ex-marine who is confined to a wheelchair, is asked to work on a military base on "Pandora," a lush moon of some faraway planet, which the human race is ruthlessly mining for a valuable element called "Unobtainium" (I wish I were kidding). Sully is asked to operate an "avatar" – a body he can telepathically control that has identical genetic makeup to the Na'vi, a species of humanoid cat-like creatures that live on Pandora, and who live on top of a very large mine of Unobtainium. His job is primarily to act as bodyguard to scientists studying all the creatures on Pandora, but due to an accident, he ends up breaking away and living with the Na'vi, learning their way of life, and gradually rebelling against the humans invasion of Pandora.

This fairly simplistic plot is made much worse as Cameron takes every opportunity to make the film as cliché as possible. The moment Sully first operates his avatar, he temporarily breaks away from his leader and runs around ("I can walk again!"). He spends most of the film living with the Na'vi, in a commonly used plot device in which an unlikely pair end up matched together and teach each other. Nearly every stock character imaginable is present in the film. There is the arrogant but ultimately kind and wise scientist played by Sigourney Weaver, the proud alpha-male and romantic rival to

continued on next page



by Amrita Ray

Point/Counterpoint: Avatar (continued)

7

twice and it seemed more out of focus the first time, suggesting that the projector and/or seating position may affect the image), it was usually unnoticeable and occasionally stunning. I am still in awe of one scene featuring glowing particles of ash blowing around blue Na'vi brilliantly covered in bright green warpaint. The computer graphics were verging on realism and it was often unclear whether some creature looked strange because it was digital, or because it was from an alien planet. These technologies combined to create some of the most breathtakingly beautiful scenes ever on film.

Millions of dollars were spent on making this film realistic, and fittingly its greatest flaw is that which no amount of money alone can fix: dialogue. Although it was often very cliché, this was made up for by the surprisingly effective acting. No one stole the show, but this made it even more realistic. The musical score, while never the focus, was an excellent complement to the film.

"Avatar" one of the most engaging movies in recent memory. Maybe, hopefully even, this movie is the future, a sign of hope for the stagnant movie industry, or maybe it's just a fluke. Either way, it made me want to stay on Pandora for a while longer, and I was sad but satisfied when it all ended. Thankfully, two sequels are already planned.

Sully played by Laz Alonso, and of course Sully himself -- the underdog and outsider, who must fight for his role in society and the girl that comes with it. Even the main villain of the film is a typical stock character: Colonel Miles Quaritch (Stephen Lang), a macho American military man -- hard-headed and ruthless, with no respect or care for the delicate society his war will destroy.

Quaritch is just one example of the film's many political messages. The film has very strong anti-corporate, anti-war, environmentalist undertones, as well as a decent dose of general anti-Americanism to go along with it. Now, don't get me wrong -- I don't have any problem with the messages themselves. But the mark of a good film is subtlety, and *Avatar* is not subtle.

Hype, as Chris mentioned, is dangerous. *Avatar* has been featured on most Top 10 lists and is looking like it might win the Oscars. This is a huge pity, especially when another 2009 science fiction film is so much more deserving. *District 9*, by Neill Blomkamp, is remarkable not only in that it is an all-around fantastic film, but also in that it does almost everything *Avatar* tried to do, but well. There are aliens and space ships and there is impressive CGI; there is corporate greed and political messages. But there is also subtlety, and a compelling plot, not to mention fantastic acting. One can only hope that the sequels planned for *Avatar* will be less like the original and more like *District 9*.



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SENIOR CO-EDITOR

Ben Green

IDEOLOGICAL STRONGHOLD

Drew Ohringer

IN THIS ISSUE:

Lenora Ellison

Leonid Grinberg

Whan Lee

Amrita Ray

Chris Stadler

Alanna Weil

Lucy You

The Man Upstairs

by Alanna Weil

Even if you have never exchanged so much as a word with him, you probably have gotten a glimpse of the 5'9" man in the Mezzanine. In fact, this man has a name! Robert Randall is the new face of Belmont High School's "Mezz". I sat down with Robert Randall to find out why he took such a job.

Where did you attend high school and college?

I went to Tantasqua High School in Sturbridge, MA. Not to far away from Belmont! I went to McDaniel College where I got my Bachelor's Degree.

How did you decide to become the man of the mezzanine?

I actually did not intend to work as a mezzanine monitor. I lived in Washington D.C. for three years. I wanted to come back to Somerville area for

education. After a lot of searching, I had an interview with Mr. Harvey. I initially intended on becoming a history teacher, however they needed someone to attend the mezzanine and I took what was available.

How did you decide to become a teacher?

In college I planned to be a teacher. After I got my teaching certification, it was hard to leave Massachusetts, which is why I came back.

So how did you decide to teach in a high school?

I have always been with little kids in my past teaching careers. However working with high school students seemed like a better fit for my teaching career, which is why I sought out an interview with Dr. Harvey. I also really like sports which is cool to be at a school where students are really into sports, especially football.

On a more personal note, what are your favorite pastimes?

Well as I said before, I really like sports, especially watching them. I also really like to read, watch movies, and listen to music.

Do you like to read fiction?

No! I can't read fiction. I read anything I can take out, libraries are awesome!

What is your favorite movie?

I have two main favorites, Forest Gump and Shawshank Redemption.

And how would you describe your musical taste?

I would say that I have a pretty eclectic taste. One of my favorite bands of all time is Goldfinger.

Do you have any parting words that will give students a better view of your job?

My responsibility is to be an extra resource for students, and I want everyone to know that I am here to help!

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Roving Reporter

BY LENORA ELLISON

What Was Your New Year's Resolution?

- Work harder at home
- Do more chores
- Do better at school
- Get better grades
- Actually do my homework
- Make it alive through junior year
- Procrastinate less
- Avoid going to summer school
- Be more self-disciplined
- Be more responsible
- Make money instead of borrowing from friends
- Use Facebook less
- Stop biting my nails
- Be a more open person
- Learn how to surf
- Go running everyday
- I don't make New Year's Resolutions
- It's too high to keep up
- I'm too lazy