

# In Madrid

Cupid  
got  
you?

the alternative  
Valentine's  
issue

**FREE**

- **SWINGING** would you swap your lover for another?
- **FANTASY** exploring the limitless possibilities in a shop in Chueca
- **CROSS-CULTURAL ROMANCE** when a guiri falls for a Spaniard
- **GREAT VALENTINE'S DATES** romantic spots in Madrid
- **TRAVEL** Liverpool: Capital of Culture 2008
- **MUSIC** Nada Surf



SAT 2nd FEB 15:00	IRELAND	V	ITALY
SAT 2nd FEB 17:30	ENGLAND	V	WALES
SUN 3rd FEB 16:00	SCOTLAND	V	FRANCE
SAT 9th FEB 15:00	WALES	V	SCOTLAND
SAT 9th FEB 18:00	FRANCE	V	IRELAND
SUN 10th FEB 16:30	ITALY	V	ENGLAND
SAT 23rd FEB 16:00	WALES	V	ITALY
SAT 23rd FEB 18:00	IRELAND	V	SCOTLAND
SAT 23rd FEB 22:00	FRANCE	V	ENGLAND
SAT 8th MAR 14:15	IRELAND	V	WALES
SAT 8th MAR 16:15	SCOTLAND	V	ENGLAND
SUN 9th MAR 17:00	FRANCE	V	ITALY
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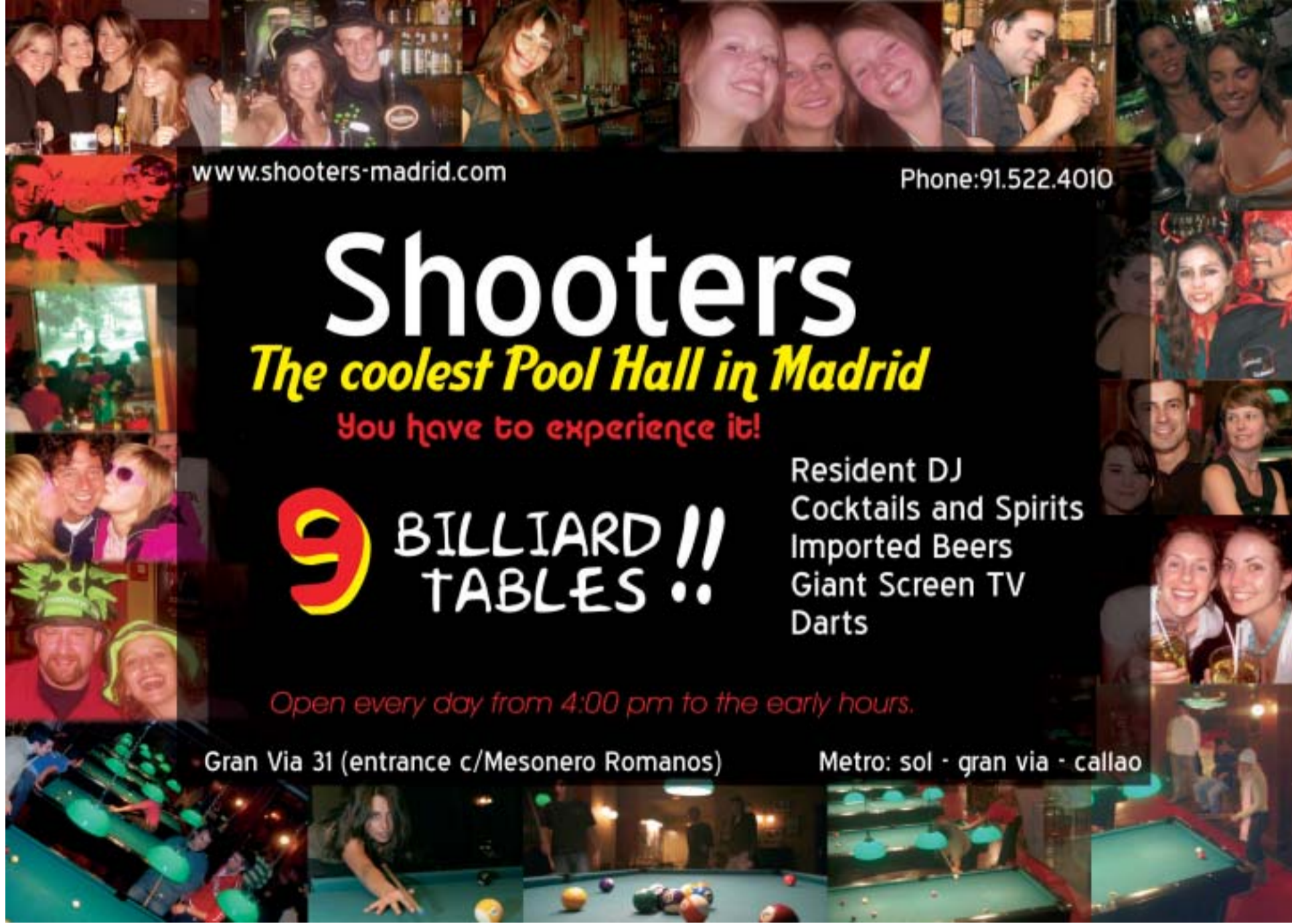


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## editor's note

It's the month for luuurrrve, and even if you're not feeling loved up, fear not, because we've packed this issue

with plenty of alternative and somewhat raunchy ideas guaranteed at least, to keep you feeling steamy all month. Plus there are plenty of pages dedicated to travel, music, films and books as always.

For those of you who have been hit by Cupid's arrow and are keen to read sappy love stories, we take a look at how mixed-culture couples deal with their cultural differences (p12), and then we move on to bring you some of Madrid's most romantic spots (p13). No matter what your budget, there's somewhere you can take your beloved on Valentine's Day. Even if you're flying solo this month, we think you'll still fancy a visit to some of the spas featured in this article — there's no excuse not to pamper yourself.

For those who are definitely not feeling like celebrating a typical Valentine's Day, then look no further than our investigative article about a mysterious sex shop where your wildest fantasies can come true (p14). We find out what goes on behind the scenes.

Perhaps you're bored with your sex life? We sent our bravest roving reporter along to try out Madrid's swinging scene (p16). The report he brought back for us has left no doubt in our minds that there are plenty of ways to spice up your sex life that we certainly hadn't thought of!

There's a wealth of theatre and art exhibitions throughout February, loads of great film releases, and don't forget it's the month of *Carnaval*, so get out your party mask (whether it's a gimp mask or not) and join in the fun!

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**PUBLISHED BY: CITYSCOPE S.L. (UNIPERSONAL)**

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Knic

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# February

■ OLIVER ATKINS AND ERIN SWANSON

# museum and exhibition update

**Fundamental**

As fundamentalism becomes more and more dominant in today's world, it's not surprising that it is now an artistic muse. *Fundamental* offers a timely glimpse into the disturbing world of religious extremism around the globe, and aims to dispense falsehoods, to inform and to inspire debate. Featured in the exhibition are works by renowned international artists Paraston Farahour from Iran, Mark Vallen from the USA and Debbie Hill from Israel. Farahour's wallpaper art features pic-

**PICK o' the month**



miniatures, but on closer inspection they reveal scenes of public executions and torture from her experience in Iran. Also included in the exhibition are a number of photographs that were smuggled out of Afghanistan during the rule of the Taliban, images from post invasion Iraq and works that document the rise of the Evangelical Christian right. **La Boca del Lobo, c/Argmosa, 11, tel: 91 468 17 91 (Metro: Lavapiés). Wed-Mon, 4-9pm. From 21 February until 2 March.**

Tsugukaru Foujika and Jules Pascin among others. One of the great figures of 20th-century art, Modigliani was open to the principals of the Parisian avant-guard, and at the same time, independent of them all.

This exhibition attempts to analyse his artistic trajectory from his arrival in Paris in 1906 until the time of his death at the age of 35. From 5 February to 15 March.

**CÍRCULO DE BELLAS ARTES**

**C/Marqués de Casa Riera, 2, tel: 91 360 54 00 (Metro: Banco de España). Tues-Fri, 5-9pm; Sat, 11am-2pm and 5-9pm; Sun, 11am-2pm; Mon, closed.**

**Paisajes: Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe** Constant and prolific in his work, Goethe never wanted, nor pretended to defend his professional competency. It was the different facets of his creative work – poet, thinker and scientist – that gave him public notoriety. For Goethe, drawing offered a limited dimension to the private world. Landscapes held particular emphasis and importance among the subjects that Goethe dealt with in his drawings. From 1765 onwards Goethe worked tirelessly on capturing nature, with as much intention to document the direct contemplation of concrete landscapes as serve himself from drawing as a means of imaginative recreation.

The exhibition consists of 75 works, centred exclusively on this theme as well as images compiled from one of his sketchbooks that are edited in the form of facsimiles. Until April.



**MUSEO DEL PRADO**

**Pº del Prado, s/n, tel: 91 330 28 00 (Metro: Atocha). Tues-Sun, 9am-8pm; Mon, closed.**

**Fábulas de Velázquez: Mitología e Historia Sagrada en el Siglo de Oro** Closing at the end of the month is *Fábulas de Velázquez*, a rich and vibrant display of the artist's work and one of the most interesting exhibitions of late. As the title suggests, storytelling and mythology are very much a part of this intimate and in-depth look at Velázquez's work as a narrative painter. A rich collection of 51 paintings, 28 by Velázquez and 24 from 17 other artists, the exhibit attempts to uncover the circumstances in which the artist produced some of his most important works.

**CENTRO DE ARTE REINA SOFIA**

**C/Santa Isabel, 52, tel: 91 774 10 00 (Metro: Atocha). Mon-Sat, 10am-9pm; Sun, 10am-2.30pm.**

**Picasso: La Colección del Museo Nacional Picasso de Paris** The Reina Sofia has a reputation for providing mouthwatering exhibitions year round, and 2008 is no exception. With the closure of the Picasso museum in Paris, due to renovations and refurbishments, a vast collection of 400 works has been moved to Madrid for exhibition in the Reina Sofia until May. The collection includes 140 paintings, 10 papiers colles (pasted paper), 70 sculptures, nine ceramics, more than 140 drawings, sketchbooks, documents and film. Given the importance of this occasion and the huge number of works, the museum has given up three of its temporary exhibition spaces, as well as a number of rooms from the permanent collection, including those nearest to the "Guernica", where the works from the Picasso Museum painted in the same period will be housed. 6 February — 5 May.

**OTHER GALLERIES**

**ARCO** This February sees the 27th International Fair of Contemporary Art, otherwise known as ARCO. The guest country this year is Brazil. ARCO has increased in size since last year, and this year 257 galleries from 57 countries have been selected to partake by exhibiting their works of art. This year boasts a new section called "ARCO 40" where artists with "new contemporary visions" have been chosen to exhibit their works. **The main body of the fair is situated at the IFEMA exhibition centre in halls 12, 14 and 14.1. (Metro: Campo de las Naciones). Open to the public from 12-9pm on 15-17 February and 12-6pm on 18 February. Entry fee adults: 32, students: 21. See www.ifema.es/ferias/arco/default\_1.html for more information.**

**Impresiones de un Viajero Geólogo, Aprendiz de Pintor (top right)** Santiago Ríos is a mining engineer by trade and also a doctor from the Polytechnic University here in Madrid. He has travelled extensively, crossing continents that have been the inspiration for his creative works. There are 69 of them that make up the exhibition, produced from his diverse travels



overseas, and all in different techniques from watercolour to acrylics, pencil and ink. The subjects alternate between landscapes, portraits and human activity. Distinctive landscapes of mountain ranges in the Alps, Himalayas and the Pyrenees are represented by these numerous artistic forms. Also included are sketches in ink and pencil on paper carried out during his travels in Egypt, Morocco, Tibet, Nepal, Algeria and Venice between the years 1999 and 2007. **Instituto Geológico y Minero de España, c/Ríos Rosas, 23, tel: 91 429 00 79 (Metro: Ríos Rosas). Mon-Sun, 9am-2pm. Until the 29 February.**

**photocall**

**Devaneos** Sixteen colour photographs created in the year 2003 by the Brazilian artist Joaquim Paiva from his personal archive of the last 30 years.



**Devaneos** is an election of apparently disposable images from an orthodox point of view; under-and-over exposed photographs, images printed in negative, film ends, and slides discoloured by time. The Brazilian author has carried out an interesting job of experimenting by way of chemical procedures and editing techniques, and says that his intention is to invite the spectator to take a walk through a dream world of the surreal and the sensual, in which one finds oneself before images of family, friends at home, strangers, and the deep blue of the night sky. **Blanca Berlín Galería, c/Limón, 28, Plaza Guardias de Corps, tel: 91 542 93 13 (Metro: Ventura Rodríguez/Plaza de España/San Bernardo). Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2pm, 5pm-9pm. Until 18 February.**

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# Theatre

**Kampillo, el Corazón de Las Piedras** You'd be hard pressed to find a more heated setting for debate than around the family dinner table. Divisions among relatives often reflect divisions in society, but no war among nations, however grand, will ever stir the same kind of passion that exists between two brothers. This play treats the big issues relevant to all of Spain from within the microcosm of the family. First tackling all the controversial themes that tend to come out rather loudly over a few pitchers of cerveza, it then asks the question: "Can't we all just get along?" **Sala Itaca, c/Canarias, 41, tel: 91 528 91 70 (Metro: Palos de la Frontera/Delicias). Tickets: 12. Fri-Sun, 8.30pm. 22 February-18 May.**



**La Tortuga de Darwin** "To live is to adapt," says Harriet the turtle, and she should know. The so-called oldest animal on earth comes all the way from the Galapagos to share this and countless other pearls of wisdom with you, and one very confused historian in *La Tortuga de Darwin*. Harriet has lots to say about almost every major historical event from the First World War to the Industrial Revolution. Leave the theatre with answers to all your burning questions; just don't tell anyone you got them from a turtle. **Teatro de la Abadía, c/Fernández de los Ríos, 42, tel: 91 448 16 27 (Metro: Quevedo/Moncloa). Tickets: from 22. Tues-Sat, 9am and Sun, 6pm. 6 February-2 March.**

**Key Exchange (right)** When was the last time you saw an off-Broadway show performed live... in Spain? Key Exchange will satisfy your hankering for a quality production, as well the nostalgia you've been feeling for a bit of the English language. It follows three artistically minded New Yorkers (sometimes on bicycles, sometimes not) as they navigate the ups and downs of relationships and the feelings that come with them, turning 30 and their living situations. **Sala TIS, c/Primavera, 11, tel: 91 528 13 59 (Metro: Lavapiés). Tickets: 12. 9pm, 26-28 February and 8pm, 29 February.**



**Por Los Pelos** Ready for a bit of mystery and a lot of fun at the theatre? *Por Los Pelos* takes the audience from their seats to the stage in a game in which they become detectives. Everything starts out normally enough, a typical barber shop, with a few clients in for a quick trim, until: murder, and the audience are the only witnesses. The actors ask the

audience's help in catching the barber-shop culprit before he strikes again. This play has been running for several months and it's still pulling in the crowds. Don't be the only one to miss it! **Teatro Príncipe, c/Tres Cruces, 8, tel: 91 521 83 81 (Metro: Gran Vía). Tickets: from 25. Tues-Sun, 7.30pm and 10.30pm. Until 23 March.**

**Ismena-Muller** What similarities could there be between ancient Greece's Ismena, of Antigone and Ismena, and the modern German playwright Heiner Muller? And what does either of them have to do with the Second World War? Well, more than you'd think, actually. Innovative if nothing else, Ismena-Muller banks on the idea that history repeats itself and that people, whether running from a family secret or from a world war thousands of years later, are always more alike than different. **Teatro Lagrada, c/Ercilla, 20, tel: 91 517 96 98 (Metro: Embajadores/Acacias). Tickets: 13. Sat, 9pm and Fri, 8pm. 2-24 February.**

**Hamlet-Rex** What could be better than seeing one of Shakespeare's classics performed live? How about two of his greatest, shaken together and spiced with a few other references you don't need to be a theatre buff to recognise? Hamlet-Rex takes the classic tragedy of Hamlet and twists it. Is it a comedy? Is it a drama? No one's quite sure exactly how to qualify this hybrid, but if the whole is in fact the sum of its parts, then Hamlet-Rex is bound to be a big hit. **Teatro Lagrada, c/Ercilla, 20, tel: 91 517 96 98 (Metro: Embajadores/Acacias). Tickets: 13. Thurs and Fri, 9pm. Until 22 February. Thurs-Sat, 9pm; Sun, 8pm. 28 February-9 March.**

**King: Una Historia de la Calle** In his last novel, John Berger explores the barbarity of mankind that he believes will eventually lead to its ruin: capitalism. King, the production based on the book, asks what happens when one falls between the cracks, and whether it's ever possible to get back out again. Definitely not suitable for all ages, or for all temperaments, this play may leave you a bit shaken; wondering what it takes to survive in the world, and even questioning your definition of success and of justice in general. **Cuarta Pared, c/Ercilla, 17, tel: 91 517 23 17 (Metro: Embajadores). Tickets: 11. 9pm. 8-10 February.**

**My Arm** "Stop that, or you'll be stuck that way forever!" This play might make you think twice about those warnings mother gave you as a child. *My Arm* is a first person account, an autobiography of sorts, of a time when, yes, someone actually did "get stuck that way". A boy raises his arm at the age of 10, and it changes his life forever. Come and hear from the man with the eternally upright arm. His experiences cannot be duplicated, and the creativity of his stories might give even your mother a run for her money. **Teatro Pradillo, c/Pradillo, 12, tel: 91 416 90 11 (Metro: Concha Espina). Tickets: 12. 8.30pm. 5-6 February.**

# Dance

**Yo Cocino y él Friega Los Platos**

Featuring just three dancers, this production pays homage to the music of New York artist John Cage, with a freedom rarely seen on the established stage. Three award-winning dancers help to create both choreography and sound, uniting movement, words, music and a touch of "the absurd" in the spirit of pure, free self expression. A fitting tribute to one of the 20th century's most innovative composers. **Teatro Pradillo, c/Pradillo, 12, tel: 91 416 90 11 (Metro: Concha Espina). Tickets: 12. 8.30pm. 12,13 February.**



**El Agujero de la Avestruz** Under the direction of choreographer Asier Zabaleta, famous for her productions around the world, *El Agujero de la Avestruz* attempts through dance, to tackle one of life's most pressing and constant evils: fear. The anger, passion, strength and yes, fear, in this ballet promises to satisfy anyone's craving for blood and guts. **Teatro Pradillo, c/Pradillo, 12, tel: 91 416 90 11 (Metro: Concha Espina). Tickets: 12. 8.30pm. 23,24 February.**

**La Canción de Margarita** A moving mix of theatre and dance, this production features Margarita, as well as every aunt, mother, sister and daughter who shares her story. It is a production for every woman who finds her identity in the inbetween: love and war, tradition and modernity, light and obscurity. There is nothing more complex, nothing deeper or darker, and nothing more beautiful than the inner recesses of a woman's mind. It takes real guts to go there, but *La Canción de Margarita* minces no words in its honesty. Gentlemen, just take this as a learning experience. **Cuarta Pared, c/Ercilla, 17, tel: 91 517 23 17 (Metro: Embajadores). Tickets: 11. 9pm. 23, 24 February.**

# Opera

**La Gioconda** Truly an opera for the opera lover, *La Gioconda* has been called "a perfect example of the Italian melodrama." This production inspired by the great Victor Hugo, first opened in 1876 to astounding success, and has since been produced 139 times in Madrid's Teatro Real alone. Back now after more than 30 years, under the direction of Madrid's own Pier Luigi Pizzi, this latest adaptation promises to be one of the finest. The star-studded cast is sure to bring the audience to its feet, and Pizzi's playful use of colour and space will keep them standing. Whether or not you've heard the name *La Gioconda* before, this play's celebrity will make itself apparent from the start. **Teatro Real, Plaza Isabel II, s/n, tel: 91 516 06 60 (Metro: Opera). Tickets: from 16. 8pm.16/19/23/26 and 29 February.**

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# GIGGLING GUIRI

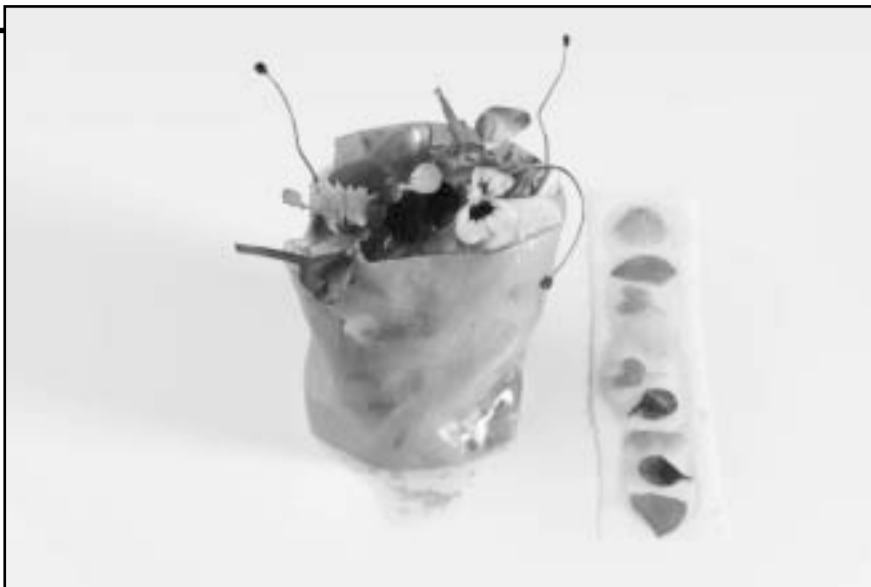


Giggling Guiri brings an Edinburgh Festival veteran to Madrid this month. Michael McIntyre, who was nominated at the 2003 festival as Best Newcomer, has comedy in his blood. His father, comedy scriptwriter Ray Cameron, co-wrote Kenny Everett's TV shows with Barry Cryer. McIntyre brings his adroit, inventive style to Sala Clamores. With dry observations à la Jerry Seinfeld, McIntyre talks about everything from our biannual surprise at the changing of the clocks to the rush of self-esteem at giving a stranger the time.

In 2006, he made his debut at the Kilkenny comedy festival, returning the following year when he also added Montreal's Just For Laughs festival to his CV. In 2007, he was nominated for the Chortle Award best headliner, and embarked on his first national tour, which included a night at the Lyric Theatre in London's West End.

He is a regular face on panel shows and in stand-up shows on both TV and radio, including the Comedy Store and The World Stands Up, both on Paramount, and 4 Stands Up on Radio 4 in 2007/8, which he hosted.

.....  
**Michael McIntyre, Sala Clamores, c/Albuquerque, 14, tel: 91 445 79 38 (Metro: Bilbao). 10pm, 8 February. Tickets available at Fat Tony's, c/de la Cruz, 11 (Metro: Sol) or visit [www.comedyinspain.com](http://www.comedyinspain.com)**



# Bokado-Arzak

Apparently, these chefs' mothers never told them not to play with their food. The 27th FERIA INTERNACIONAL DE ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO (ARCO) returns in February with an exhibit on culinary arts. Juan Mari Arzak and the Grupo Bokado will present a combination of art and tapas inspired in the chef's kitchen. With their colourful presentation, you'll be able to enjoy the exhibition with all five senses.

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**ARCO Madrid, IFEMA, La Sala VIP Hyundai, tel: 91 382 47 81 (Metro: Campamento). 13-18 February. See [www.ifema.es](http://www.ifema.es) for more information.**

# Músicas del Mundo

Looking to get away from salsa or flamenco? Try Musicians of the World at La Escalera de Jacob in Lavapiés, where Eliseo Parra will be the star of the next cycle of performances. Along with traditional Spanish folk music, there will be Sudanese, Greek, Turkish and South American tunes. Every Saturday in February the musicians will present a mix of cultures and music with renowned international artists. Parra is a singer, composer and multi-instrumentalist who has produced numerous works and music for the National Ballet of Spain and the National Classical Theatre. He's also worked in France, Denmark, Brazil and the USA, among other worldwide locations. He plays on 9 February with Sudanese musician Wafir, who is presenting his new disk *Blue Nile*, and on 16 February the programme welcomes Cholga Trio from South America.

.....  
**Músicas del Mundo, La Escalera de Jacob, c/Lavapiés, 11, tel: 91 539 10 44 (Metro: Lavapiés). Tickets: 5-7. 10.30pm, Saturdays in February.**



# Flaco Sessions

Flaco Sessions are back in style at iconic ContraClub, La Latina. Robbie K. Jones and Marcel Mihok host the second season of their cross-pollinating concert/jams pairing up local and international artists on the 2nd Sunday of every month. This Lavapiés-born series has moved into La Latina and will start 10 February with Garrett Wall and Goya-nominee Lantana. To feature in coming months Aroah, Lonely Joe, Tony Martin, Vicky Gastelo, and returning favourites Nick Haughton and Californian bluegrass mandolin master, Tom Corbett.



.....  
**Flaco Sessions, ContraClub, c/Bailén, 16, (Metro: La Latina). 9.30pm, 10 February. Free admission.**

# Competition Winners!

Congratulations to our Aprendiario contest winners! This was a popular one; the correct translation for "meter la pata" was "to put one's foot in it."

Our three winners are:

**Ana de la Morena, Mu-ur Vindel and Alejandro Vazquez.**  
 Drop by our office between 10am and 6pm, Monday to Friday to pick up your very own Aprendiario.

# Democrats Abroad Super Tuesday

Come and celebrate the US primary madness with Democrats Abroad and watch the returns in real time. In case you hadn't noticed, it's election year again in the States, and there is no clear frontrunner between Hillary and Barack. So stop by, have a pint and toast to democracy with live bands and door prizes. Who knew voting could be so much fun?

.....  
**Mega Tuesday party, Star's Café, c/Serrano Jover, 5 (Metro: Argüelles). 8pm, 5 February. Visit [es.democratsabroad.org](http://es.democratsabroad.org) for more information.**



# CLOWN COLLEGE

Your current job's not paying the rent? Well, maybe the life of a street performer is for you. And what better way to hone your talents than clown classes? That's right, there are classes on how to make a fool of yourself for other people's entertainment. Learn observation, imitation, voice skills and how to use your body to perform. Professor Ignacio Maffi has studied the art in various schools around the world, from Argentina to India. He is the current director and acts in the comedy group *Los Hilarantes*. He's written works about the art of comedy and the theatre of the absurd, as well as performing in numerous live performances.

.....  
**Clown courses, LavarteBar, c/San Bruno, 3 tel: 699 759 423 (Metro: Lavapiés). Wed, 7.30-10.30pm, 6 Feb-25 June. Cost: 65 plus registration fee.**



# Wayne Liquorman

If one of your New Year's resolutions involved becoming more spiritual, you're in luck. One of the most "enlightened and spiritually advanced men in the business", Wayne Liquorman is offering open chats and sessions for three days in February. Liquorman talks about Advaita, which isn't so much a religion or philosophy as a collection of concepts. He's written books such as: *No Way: A Guide for the Spiritually Advanced* and *Acceptance of What IS*. His teaching is presented in an uncompromising, often humorous way without religious dogma or new-age veneer. So if you've been feeling a bit confused lately, find out about his thoughts on consciousness, the ground of all being and the source and substance of everything.

.....  
**Wayne Liquorman, Circulo de Bellas Artes, c/Alcalá, 42, tel: 619 246 438 (Metro: Sevilla). 8-10 February. 25. See [www.elobservatorio.org](http://www.elobservatorio.org) for more information.**

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.....  
**Hotel Palacio Miraflores, Fuente del Pino, 6, Miraflores de la Sierra, tel: 91 844 90 50. 9 February, 250 per person.**



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Marty Delfin reports

## Rumblings in the family



Gallardón: rejected Photos: InMadrid

Call it strategy or a personal snub, but last month's decision by opposition leader Mariano Rajoy to exclude Madrid Mayor Alberto Ruiz-Gallardón from the Popular Party's congressional slate shook Spain's political circles. Rajoy explained that his decision was made in accordance with his supporters' wishes. But many party insiders as well as outside observers believed the result meant that the PP was shifting more toward the right by rejecting moderate candidates like Ruiz-Gallardón. One of these key figures is said to be Esperanza Aguirre, Madrid regional premiere and one of the PP hardliners, who pushed Rajoy to make this decision. Aguirre and Ruiz-Gallardón have clashed in the past over capital city policies as well as internal PP matters. The 49-year-old mayor, who has won four consecutive terms and is well-liked among Madrid residents, has long clamoured for a seat in congress. But some political analysts believe that Rajoy feared that Ruiz-Gallardón's popularity would overshadow his own appeal. Nevertheless, a poll published in *El País* showed that 53 percent of the PP supporters across the nation believed that Rajoy committed a grave error by omitting Ruiz-Gallardón from the PP lists. The victim of this political decision, Ruiz-Gallardón said he was "deeply saddened" by Rajoy's decision. "I dreamt of being a congressman, but in politics sometimes you win and sometimes you lose," he told reporters, adding that he will decide about his political future after the 9 March elections. In the meantime, Ruiz-Gallardón, whose father was one of the founders of the modern-day PP, said he will concentrate on Madrid's bid to win the summer Olympic Games in 2016. And, in case Ruiz-Gallardón decides to leave politics, Rajoy is said to be grooming Ana Botella, the wife of former Prime Minister José María Aznar, to become the next candidate for mayor.

## And on a sour note

A wholehearted attempt by the Spanish Olympic Committee to draw up lyrics to Spain's wordless national anthem was dashed last month when the winning entry of a song-writing contest deharmonised certain sectors of society. More than 7,000 people took part in the contest — which was called last year — to write a set



I know the words!

of rousing lyrics to put to the country's 250-year-old anthem titled the "Royal March". In 1770, King Carlos III ordered the "Royal March" to be played at public events attended by the royal family and Spaniards soon came to see it as their national anthem. But it never included words. The Spanish Olympic Committee explained that it wanted people to be able to sing the anthem at international sporting events. After a long search, a six-member panel selected a set written by 52-year-old Paulino Cubero, an unemployed Madrid resident. The committee had hoped to unveil the lyrics at a ceremony on 21 January with tenor Plácido Domingo to perform them, but they were leaked beforehand to the daily *ABC*. From then on, the committee was pelted with criticisms. The lyrics begin with "Viva España" and go on to say: "We all sing together with distinct voice and one heart," then end with: "Justice and greatness." Cultural Minister Carmen Calvo said that she believed the words were "antiquated". But others were more direct, claiming that the lyrics were a throwback to the Franco regime, which employed the "Viva España" salute in its everyday life. With the pressure on, Alejandro Blanco, the Olympic Committee president, said that the organisation had decided to pull the words and begin a new search. "The lyrics generated controversy and were criticised on a number of occasions," he acknowledged. As for the lyricist, Cubero, who is also now an unemployed songwriter, he said he wouldn't mind giving up his song rights in exchange for a job.

## A fine Metro mess

It couldn't have come at a worse time. Just as madrileños were preparing for the bustling Christmas season, more than 1,500 sanitation workers at the Metro de Madrid called a strike on 17 December, creating a mess in the Spanish capital's underground. Piles of rubbish heaped for days from trash bins while newspapers, flyers, empty cans and sunflower seed shells lay trickled along the platforms throughout the whole underground network. Some stations, such as Estrecho,



Madrid's Metro in a dirty state

were vandalised with graffiti. Several commuters were hurt when they slipped on banana peels and other slimy messes. National Police said that they identified at least 22 people, some connected to the striking unions, who were trashing the public transport system throughout the strike and overturning rubbish bins during the early morning hours. Madrid Regional Premier Esperanza Aguirre threatened to rescind the cleaning contracts if the unions didn't clean up their act. After nearly three weeks, the striking unions called off their dirty war and went back to work. But it was too late. Commuters' holiday spirits had already been marred by a trashy situation.

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# BMX RACING

**You might remember your childhood BMX with fond memories. Keith Miles discovers that not everyone left their BMX behind when they grew up . . .**

Saturday, too often the preserve of the hangover and TV channel La2's Premier League match, is in fact the perfect day to check out something new. With Monday's gloom still far enough away, it's a day when you should really get out of your flat and have a bit of fun. You could do worse than head to the exciting BMX Supercross World Cup, which takes place at the Palacio de Deportes on Saturday, 9 February.

The measly sum of 12 will get you trackside for the whole day, and for the work-shy among you, Friday afternoon is included in the ticket price too. The tournament offers the world's best BMX riders racing wheel-to-wheel on a specially built dirt track. The track's huge jumps, banked curves and dips and gullies will pose a challenge to even these elite cyclists. It is the pinnacle of BMX racing and at full speed the riders are really on the limit. Maria Dominguez, from organisers Last Lap, talks about reasons to watch.

"BMX is a young sport in which risk, speed and emotion come into play," she says. "In addition, BMX Supercross will make its debut as an Olympic sport this August in Beijing, so it's a great chance to see the world's best riders in action before the Olympics."

The event came to Madrid for the first time last April, when more than 5,000 spectators saw 22-year-old Australian Khalen Young take the overall prize at the Parque Juan Carlos I. He will be back this month, hoping to prove himself before trying to win the first ever Olympic gold medal for his sport later in the year.

Maria explains why organisers have chosen to move the Madrid event indoors this time.

"Holding the competition in the Palacio de Deportes brings a number of advantages," she says. "Its central location means it is easy to get to. Also, being enclosed ensures that it won't be affected by bad weather. The stadium is perfect for this competition."

While Friday is for practice, the Saturday will see qualifying rounds in the morning followed by the tournament proper from

6pm. In addition, there will be the BMX Dirt Jump, a spectacular freestyle jump competition featuring the world's best jump specialists; bike trials, where riders negotiate obstacles without their feet touching the ground; and a freestyle motocross show.

BMX Supercross is the highest level of BMX racing, characterised by very tall start ramps, fast straights and tight curves. In Beijing it will become the first BMX event ever at an Olympic games. Local interest at the Palacio de Deportes will be focused on seven-time Spanish BMX champion Rafa Alvarez and young madrileño actor and rider Pablo Galán, better known as Manu in the TV series *Los Serrano*. Although already BMX veterans, last April's event was their debut in Supercross, and this time they are determined to improve on last year's performances.

In terms of international riders, among this year's favourites for the race title is 30-year-old flying Dutchman Robert de Wilde, nicknamed Afro Bob, who is a three-time BMX World Cup series winner. He will be aiming to stay ahead of the Americans, lead by the impressive riders Donny Robinson and Mike Day.

Even though most of us fans do not have those riders' talents, many of us grew up riding a BMX, and this gives you an ability to empathise with the competitors that is missing in other sports such as Formula 1 or sailing, for example. The ultimate for any sportsman is an Olympic gold, and in 2008, for these sportsmen the Olympic dream starts in Madrid. *See [www.bmxmadrid.com](http://www.bmxmadrid.com) for more information.*



## FIXTURE FIX

### Games in Madrid

- 3 Feb**  
Atlético v Murcia  
Getafe v Espanyol
- 10 Feb**  
Real Madrid v Valladolid
- 17 Feb**  
Atlético v Athletic Bilbao  
Getafe v Valencia
- 21 Feb**  
Atlético v Bolton Wanderers  
Getafe v AEK Athens

## WHEELS IN MADRID

- 8-9 Feb** BMX Supercross World Cup, Palacio de Deportes
- 25 May** Triathlon World Cup, Casa de Campo
- 17-18 July** Red Bull X-Fighters (Freestyle Motocross), Las Ventas
- 21 Sep** Final stage, la Vuelta, Paseo de la Castellana
- 27-28 Oct** Rally of Madrid, Navalcarnero

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## budget travel

# LIVIN' IT UP IN LIVERPOOL

With Ryanair joining Easyjet in offering direct low-cost flights to Liverpool from Barajas, there is no better time to take a trip to this vibrant northern English city. **Chris Boas** polishes up his Scouser accent . . .

Liverpool is an internationally renowned city of contrasts. To some, it conjures up images of an old industrial port city, past its former splendour. To others, it is the home of The Beatles, countless writers and poets, Merseybeat, and Liverpool and Everton football clubs. Liverpool is a city in the midst of a rebirth and, as a 2008 European Capital of Culture, it is currently gearing up to present itself to its fellow European citizens with a raft of events.

### A bit of history

The history of Liverpool is a fascinating one. From humble beginnings (Liverpool — its 13th-century name literally means pool of dirty water), it rose to be the flagship port of the British empire in the 19th century, and attracted a lively collection of diverse nationalities in the process: Italians, Welsh, Germans, Chinese and 100s of thousands of refugees from the Irish famine.

Liverpool's rich maritime history gives it an unparalleled position in the tale of UK multiculturalism and international trade. Its past is filled with facts that attest to the city's importance in the histories of other countries as far afield as the USA, West Africa and China.

It became the first and largest permanent settlement of overseas Chinese in the 19th century, following the creation of the first direct steamship link between the UK and China in 1868 — mainly trading tea, silk and cotton wool. Testament to



The Albert Dock arch

Photos: Courtesy of www.merseyside.org.uk

its Chinese connection stands today in the form of an elaborate imperial Chinese arch, which is the largest outside of China at 15 metres tall. It was built by craftsmen from Shanghai and completed in 2000 and it now stands on Nelson Street.

Liverpool's shipbuilding history is littered with interesting facts — indeed, the *CSS Alabama*, the last confederate ship was built Merseyside and the *CSS Shenandoah* surrendered there. Other maritime references include notoriety as the town of registration of a certain ship called the *Titanic* and the company that owned it. Those interested in maritime history will no doubt enjoy the Maritime Museum in the Albert Dock, which is free to enter.

### The City: Orientation

Liverpool is host to some 2,500 listed buildings mostly centred around William Brown Street. The city centre is compact, with many of the interesting sites within the boundaries of The Strand, Hanover Street and Dale Street. Here you will find the Cunard Building, the Royal Liver Building, the Liverpool Playhouse, Mathew Street (home of the Cavern Club), the Albert Dock and other attractions. A little further out are the famous Metropolitan and Anglican Cathedrals.

The city's Albert Dock provides a great starting point for visitors. The renovated dock and warehouse complex provides cafés, shops and attractions including The Beatles Museum, the Tate Museum, the Merseyside Maritime Museum and the International Slavery Museum.

### Something for sport fans

Football fans will not be disappointed — Liverpool FC occupies pride of place among the great European clubs and so does its fierce local rival Everton. The two clubs have an incredible history of competitive local derbies, prestigious European titles and passionate fans.

Liverpool FC is located at Anfield. For an insight into the club try the Anfield Experience, which offers two tours of the stadium and facilities. The first includes a training session on the legendary pitch with a club legend. The tour, complete with footballer's breakfast and a three-course lunch, isn't cheap at £245 per person. A more affordable option is the second tour, which includes a trip round the stadium, the facilities, the trophy room, a three-course lunch and a visit from a Liverpool legend for £65 per person.

Everton FC at Goodison Park also offer tours for fans on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Tours cost £8.50 per person (£5.50 for children).



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Golf fans will most likely gravitate to the Royal Birkdale Golf Course at Southport, which has hosted two Ryder cups, and been voted the number one British golf course. Alternatively, the Royal Liverpool Golf Club in Hoylake is another top class course; Tiger Woods won the 2006 British Open there.

Horse racing fans can visit Aintree racecourse, home to the UK's most prestigious race: the Grand National. This year's event takes place from 3-5 April. Early reservations are advised as the city's accommodation sells out early.

## Culture

The Beatles of course, along with plenty of other bands, playwrights, writers and artists have come from Liverpool: Willy Russell (*Educating Rita* and *Shirley Valentine*), Felicia Hemans (*Casablanca*), Peter Shaffer (*Equus* and *Amadeus*), Alan Bleasdale ("Boys from the Blackstuff") and countless others.

The American poet Allen Ginsberg described the city as "the centre of the consciousness of the human universe" — testimony to the city's ability to produce an impact on those who pass through it.

For concert-lovers, there are many theatres and playhouses to choose from including the Liverpool Playhouse, The Empire, The Everyman and Philharmonic Hall (home to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra).

Art lovers should head for the Tate Liverpool Gallery in the Albert Dock complex, which houses the modern art collection of London's Tate Gallery.

Music aficionados should feel at home in Liverpool. Other famous bands and musicians from the city include Echo and the Bunnymen, Gerry and the Pacemakers, Space, Atomic Kitten, Lightning Seeds, the Coral, Billy Fury, Cilla Black, Gomez, Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Icicle Works, Ladytron — the list is endless and traverses all generations.

The Beatles Museum at the Albert Dock is a great starting point for music fans. Tickets cost £9.99 for adults and £4.99 for children. There are also two bus tours: one is called the Magical Mystery Tour, which takes visitors to Beatles landmarks such as Penny Lane, Strawberry Fields and the homes of the Fab Four. At the end of the tour, visitors are handed a voucher for a complimentary tea or coffee at the Cavern Club on Mathew Street. Tickets cost £12.95 per person. The Cavern Club is open daily and there is live music every Thursday, Friday and Saturday night.

The Mendips and 20 Forthlin Road tour takes you to the childhood homes of Paul McCartney and John Lennon. Entry costs £13 per adult and £2 per child.

For live music, try the Carling Academy and the Philharmonic for classical. And, for those who want to dance the night away, the most popular nightclubs include Heebie Jeebies, Society and Garlands.

A good place to start your night out is Concert Square. From there most of the younger crowd then head up to Mathew Street (a 10 minute walk) to carry on the revelry.



The Beatles Museum is packed with history about the Fab Four

## Shopping

Mathew Street is home to the Cavern Walks shopping centre, which features a variety of designer labels. The Met Quarter houses Armani, Gucci and Prada among others. Zara, Topshop and other high street stores are found on Church Street and Bold Street. In addition, the newly opened Liverpool 1 offers over 160 stores in a space the size of 28 full size football pitches. The biggest problem you'll have there is making sure you don't get lost!

## Eating Out

As befits a city with a reputation as a cultural crossroads, there are a plethora of food options. Top-range restaurants include 60 Hope Street, which offers an eclectic menu with a variety of fish and meat dishes and an extensive wine list. Also on Hope Street is the London Carriageworks offering a variety of European foods.

Mid-range options include Egos (again on Hope Street) with two-course menus at £11.95 and Bistro Pierre at 14 Button Street and Bistro Jacques 37-39 Hardman Street — both with three-course menus at £8.50.

Other recommended options include Savina for Mexican, Sapporo for Teapanaki, Il Forno for Italian and Mayur for Indian food. These four restaurants are all more or less next to each other on Duke Street and are in the £7-15 price range.

## Children's Liverpool

The Yellow Submarine at Brunswick Dock features a range of interactive adventure games for children between one and eight years.

Similarly, Underwater Street in the Cunard Building offers a range of interactive activities for young children.

Take a ferry across the Mersey to the Spaceport (interactive Space adventure) at Seacombe Ferry Terminal. With the 08 Card, one paying adult (£11.50) can take the rest of the family for free. Ferries leave from Pierhead near the Albert Dock.

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*The Liverpool Sound*, Anfield Stadium, 1 June. Sir Paul McCartney headlines this once-in-a-lifetime festival to celebrate Liverpool's global status as a world capital of music.

### More info

For more information about Liverpool, visit the Liverpool Tourism website [www.visitliverpool.com](http://www.visitliverpool.com) or call the helpful staff there on (0044) 151 709 81 11.

Call in at the city centre Tourist Information at Whitechapel office to receive your 08 card, which gives discounts for concerts, plays and free tourist buses in the city.

See [www.liverpoolfc.tv/anfieldexperience](http://www.liverpoolfc.tv/anfieldexperience) for more information about the Liverpool FC tours at Anfield.

See [www.evertonfc.com](http://www.evertonfc.com) for more information about football tours at Everton's football ground.

See [www.royalbirkdale.com](http://www.royalbirkdale.com) for more information about the Royal Birkdale Golf Course at Southport.

See [www.royal-liverpool-golf.com](http://www.royal-liverpool-golf.com) for more information about the Royal Liverpool Golf Club in Hoylake.

See [www.aintree.co.uk](http://www.aintree.co.uk) for more information about the Grand National.

See [www.beatlesstory.com](http://www.beatlesstory.com) for more information about The Beatles Museum.

See [www.cavernclub.org/mystery\\_tour.php](http://www.cavernclub.org/mystery_tour.php) for more information about Beatles bus tours.

See [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/beatles/](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/beatles/) for more information about the tour that visits The Beatles' homes.

See [www.60hopestreet.com](http://www.60hopestreet.com) for more information about this famous café and bar.

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# CROSS-CULTURAL ROMANCE

Can romance survive cultural boundaries? Helen Jones asks mixed nationality couples about their relationships

## Exotic attraction

From Melanie Griffith to Norman Foster, foreigners are well known for falling in love with Spaniards. Some of us say it's the lust for life that first attracted us to our Spanish partners, and many Spaniards cite admiration for their foreign partners' independence. And then there are those who just fall for that nice, friendly, very good looking person who happens to be from Spain.

They're all valid reasons for forming an international partnership, but what about the consequences of not going out with the boy or girl next door?

The honeymoon period in a *guiiri*-Spanish relationship, which inevitably includes romantic walks in the Retiro, starchy-eyed tapas in La Latina and several V.O. snogging sessions at the Ideal often coincides with the foreign partner's honeymoon period in their relationship with Spain. You love going out until 7am, smoky bars are positively continental, and the noise of central Madrid is just "hustle and bustle".

## In it for the long term

So what happens when things get a little more permanent, in terms of both relationships?

"Expatriates become enamoured with Spain, but then, as with any relationship, difficulties set in," says David Hugener, a Madrid-based psychotherapist, who suggests that the question that foreigners must ask is whether, "In the long run, do they feel they can adapt to the situation?"

The first stage of adaptation can come when partners decide to commit. If the couple has spent the beginning of the relationship in their respective countries, the time will eventually come to change job, country and language, for love.

Robert, from Malmö, is planning on settling in Madrid with his Spanish girlfriend Silvia in 2008. He's concerned about Silvia's not very Scandinavian habit of "waking up late, and working until late". However she says that there are benefits: "Working in Madrid and learning Spanish will be very good for his career."

Robert should get advice from Tom, who's been in Madrid for 10 years after meeting his Spanish *media naranja* Sara in his home town of Bournemouth. "It was one of those 'at first sight' moments," he remembers. He moved to Madrid shortly afterwards. "I came over to see her and fell in love with the city." And it was a good move, he says: "Meeting Sara has given my life some sort of direction; it all sort of fell into place."



Rafa and Mary

Photos: Helen Jones

Mary and her Spanish boyfriend Rafa moved in together in 2007. "He speaks perfect English and I don't speak Spanish — yet — so we speak purely in English," says Mary. "His parents, however, don't speak English so communication is extremely limited."

So how do you nurture relationships when verbal communication, one of the first things you ever learn, is frustratingly out of your reach? Peter, originally from Boston, doesn't always need words with his wife Yolanda. "We have always found a way to make ourselves understood. Sometimes a simple look speaks more than a spoken phrase."

It also helps that Spaniards, in general, are pretty good at saying what they feel, or at least that's Peter's experience. "I have found Spanish people to be good communicators because they are very direct, often to the point of being blunt, but [this is] often tempered with a wonderful sense of humour." And this has its advantages. "I know exactly what my wife believes and how she feels about things at all times," says Peter. "There's no guessing involved and this makes a relationship more stable and less conflictive."

## Moving countries

So what changes when suddenly the Spaniard becomes the foreigner? Spaniards abroad are loud and proud and even more so in their relationships. "The relationship doesn't change, it just gets better as all the things you love them for when in Spain flower into surreal points of honour," says Rob, married to madrileña Esther for 16 years. They moved back to the UK in 2000. "My British cat and dog only respond to Spanish commands, and we still dine at 10pm before watching a dubbed DVD."

Of course, many predictable things in your relationship would happen if you and your partner had been brought up on the same street. "Do we really have to go to your mother's for lunch?", "What can I get her for her birthday?" and "When will we get to spend more time alone?" are questions that everyone asks and the *guiiri*-Spaniard combination is no exception. Perhaps, for a mixed nationality couple, the answers are a little easier to find, as actually being in the same place and understanding each other are already big achievements that, in the end, make everything else pale in comparison.



Peter, Yolanda and baby Diego

## Lost in translation?

Even if you've lived in Spain before meeting your partner, commitment can often mean doing things you hadn't previously considered part of your *guiiri* lifestyle. You tell each other increasingly serious things in a language that isn't yours, and you also have to communicate with the family. London-born



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# THREE GREAT DATES FOR VALENTINE'S DAY

Even if you're strapped for cash, there's no excuse for neglecting your media naranja this Valentine's Day. Pritheeva Rasaratnam straps on her cupid wings, flexes her arrows and drags us kicking and screaming into a romantic mood

"Valentine's Day is just an over-commercialised ritual which benefits big business." Yawn. "My partner doesn't need a fancy gesture to know that I love her." Oh, please. Frankly, I am yet to meet a woman who doesn't like to be a little pampered on St Valentine's Day. Blame it on the romantic movies. Blame it on the department stores. Blame it on Lionel Ritchie, I don't really care. But don't say I didn't warn you.

Luckily, (if you're reading this hot off the press) there are still two weeks to go and, living in Madrid, there are a sea of options open to you. While Madrid may not be Paris or a Venice when it comes to the archetypal romantic city, it has intimate corners aplenty to inspire even the most hapless of suitors.

Like what? Well, Valentine's Day this year falls on a Thursday. So, first things first, ring your boss and book the day off. And then, make yourself a cup of coffee, read the rest of this article, and let your imagination run riot . . .



Casa de Madrid

Photos: Pritheeva Rasaratnam

## The cheap date

On a budget? Wondering whether you can get away with a bottle of Lambrusco and a box of Ferrero Rocher? Answer: No, you can't. In fact, with a bit of careful planning, you can make the earth move without spending a fortune.

For example, it's hard to think of something more romantic than spending an afternoon rowing your loved one (or, better still, being rowed by your loved one) around the lake in Retiro Park (boat hire daily from 10.30am-5.30pm). I'm not sure why boat trips are inherently romantic, but they just are. Maybe it's because, as my A-level French teacher used to spend most of his time trying to explain, water is a metaphor for sex. Whatever the reason, all the great lovers were at it: Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr in *An Affair to Remember* (ocean liner); Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet (*Titanic*); and of course The Owl and the Pussycat (pea-green boat). And more to the point, at 4.40 per boat for 45 minutes, it's hard to think of a more budget-friendly way to prove your ardour.

From there, I would suggest an intimate home-cooked dinner to build up energy reserves again, and some soulful jazz at Café Jazz Populart. Not a Ferrero Rocher in sight. **Café Jazz Populart**, c/Huertas, 22; tel: 91 429 84 07, (Metro: Sol). Free entry. Shows: 11.30pm and 12.30am.



Rowing in Retiro: good for muscles and romance

## The luxury date

"Money can't buy love," they say. Bah humbug, I say. Bring on the decadence.

I'm thinking water (did I mention the metaphor?), I'm thinking bubbles, I'm thinking total relaxation. I'm thinking an afternoon in the spa.

Check out Diacqua, who offer a 90-minute spa session ( 27) as well as treatments including the intriguing *corporal fondue de chocolate* ( 55/hour); Masvitalcenter, who offer a range of massages from 26/half hour upwards; and, if you are really in the mood to indulge, the luxurious Fusiom, where, immersed in an exotic and minimalist setting, the two of you can enjoy treatments such as the sybaritic "romance massage" for couples ( 140/hr). **Diacqua**, c/Conde Aranda, 14; tel: 91 578 43 87 (Metro: Retiro). See [www.diaqua.net](http://www.diaqua.net) for more information. **Masvitalcenter**, c/Cruz, 28; tel: 902 10 89 10 (Metro: Sol). See [www.masvital.org](http://www.masvital.org) for more information. **Fusiom**, c/Alcalá, 44; tel: 902 402 030 (Metro: Banco de España).

And finally, just in case your partner remains under any illusions as to just how much money is being spent on this date, check into a double room at the exquisite 18th-century bed-and-breakfast Casa de Madrid. Hidden away in an innocuous building a stone's throw from the Opera House, it comprises a beautiful collection of individualised rooms and suites catering to the discerning customer (and, I am told, the occasional celebrity) from 256/night upwards. **Casa de Madrid**, c/Arrieta, 2, 2nd floor; tel: 91 559 57 91 (Metro: Ópera).

## The novelty date

If you are looking for something a little different, you might think about starting the day with a leisurely breakfast delivered to you and your significant other in bed. The online company *Regalo Original* have some great ideas. I was particularly intrigued by the notion of *Desayuno chill out* ( 89 for two people) and *Desayuno con soprano* (from 150). See [www.regalooriginal.com/regalos-desayunos.html](http://www.regalooriginal.com/regalos-desayunos.html) for more information.

And before dinner, make your way to the über-cool Glass Bar in the stylish Hotel Urban for a pre-prandial cocktail. In contrast to your average bar, almost everything — tables, chairs, fittings — is made of glass and, though it might be pricey, being seen (get a seat near the window) in this effortlessly hip establishment will increase your street cred no end. **Glass Bar**, Carrera de San Jerónimo, 34, tel: 91 787 77 70 (Metro: Sevilla).

So that's that — a plethora of romantic destinations all within one city. Finished your coffee? I'd get on the phone then. Time is ticking . . .

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# FANTASY: YOUR FINAL DESTINATION?

Are you tired of the old pink-and-fluffy-style Valentine's Day? Sick of sweets and weary of wine?

Andrew Giles seeks out some alternative ideas for lovers this February

The world of sexual fantasy is endless; the internet throws up millions of possibilities, both welcome and unwelcome. Gay, bisexual, transsexual and straight alike can enjoy various simulated worlds via chat-rooms, and meet like-minded folk to realise these fantasies in the real world — and that's only the beginning. Some sites are incredibly specific: white women who like black men; men who like boys; coprophilia (if you don't already know, then you probably don't want to know. It involves faeces); bestiality; people who like meeting strangers; people who like to dress up; people who like to be beaten. Some people would say that nothing says "I love you" like a night filled with pain and submission. And, you can find all the tools you need to explore your wildest fantasies right here in Madrid.

## Bring out your inner gimp

SR Leather Shop, owned by José Macias and Felix Viana on calle Pelayo in Chueca, promises leather, rubber, S&M, skin, army and industrial paraphernalia for your viewing and using pleasure. José was initially taciturn about the place: "It's a business," he says. "It used to be a garage. Now it's a leather shop." I liked José immediately. His no-nonsense approach was refreshing after my own preconceptions had been bugging me for days. Was it going to be a den filled with daddies



Zip up and hide your whole face if you want, but make sure you can breathe

waiting to tie me up and bundle me home? Daydreaming, it turned out, can be a dangerous thing. My initial ideas had run a little wild. José is a young entrepreneur who, like anyone else, has a business to run, and the shop on further inspection is a meticulously kept altar to all things S&M. "It was a motor-bike garage when we first took it over," he explains. "We've done it all ourselves. It's sort of gothic, Middle Age; the exposed beams, the industrial look, the woodwork. We did it all." José took the shop over nearly nine years ago, in December 1999. "I was living in Barcelona, then I came back to work for a friend, in a leather shop in calle Valgame Dios. That didn't work out, but we got a loan and opened this place. It's been growing ever since." Why the success? "We hand-make almost all the goods, using only the best Spanish leather — quality is very important." Now, I love a man who appreciates quality. Indeed, I find a lovely leather thong made of lamb leather that is incredibly soft, and the good workmanship is unmistakable. José is clearly a man to whom detail is important. "There was originally a workshop out the back. Now I have two people working for me, making leather and accessories." Is there a lot of competition? "We're the only leather shop in Madrid," he says. "There's not enough business for two." There is clearly a minority market for S&M, however, and one wonders who buys this stuff. Another misconception was that it was for gay men. "We get all kinds of people in here. Single men, gay couples, straight couples, married couples. There are a lot of heterosexuals who come in." And do you find that you get a lot of tourists? He smiles ruefully: "Yes, we do get a few people coming in and staring and giggling." That's probably because of your comprehensive selection of shrink-wrapped dildos, I nearly say. But it is clear that this is a shop that caters for a need, and José treats his customers with the respect that any shop owner should. And so, I feel, should we.

## Behind closed doors

Let me make it clear: this is not your average sex shop. No dirty videos, no trench-coated individuals. This is the enlightened person's number-one leather shop in Spain, and if you are looking for top quality stuff this is where you should come. But what to do with all these dangerous and alarming looking things? Why don't we see these leather-clad beings out on the streets with all the other exhibitionists of Madrid? José explains: "Well, this is something people can do at home if they want to. I like this stuff, but in the comfort of my house, with my partner." It's not really about exhibitionism, then, it's about pain. There's a photo on the wall with the benediction in English: "Life is pain". The shop is divided into two parts, the front shop where all the leatherwear is displayed — harnesses, thongs, chaps, waistcoats, basques, strait-jackets and masks. I also noted lube, gloves, nipple clamps, cock-cylinders, cock rings, handcuffs, whips, suspension wear, dilators, electric cock straps and some rubber pants. José also does an on-the-spot adjustment service. "I buy some stuff in from Berlin and Amsterdam, but the best thing about my shop is that I can fix things we've made in the moment. It's a complete service."

The back part is what I took to be a dungeon on my first visit to the shop last year. I thought perhaps it was open for S&M parties. How wrong I was. What I called the "dungeon" José calls "la parte de arriba" (the upstairs bit) which indeed it is. It is merely a showroom for some of José's more vicious equipment. Here I was confronted with a room-length cabinet with the aforementioned shrink-wrapped dildos. "I

like to have a good selection." Indeed. There are a lot of dildos. Some are small. Some are very, very large. Some make you feel faint. Some look hooked and evil. Some look manageable. All of them are black. There are also various stocks, for that full-on Middle-Ages feel. There are some boots nailed to a plank upside down. There is a crucifix. There is a man-sized cage, utterly restrictive. But José's *pièce de résistance* is a leather sling hanging down from the ceiling. I asked him for more information about the sling. "Well, you can tie someone to it and it is used for fisting [*fist*] and fucking [*follar*]." That's another reason why I like José; he does not mince his words.



Who needs yoga?

Photos: Knic

## International appeal?

José is a forward-looking guy, however, and does not rely on his minority clientele for everything. S&M is perennially fashionable and Spain's top designers have used José's work at Cibeles, Madrid's top fashion event. Carlos Diez, that famed bearded fashionista, loves José's stuff, and David Delfin has also used it. The shop has also been used as a set for music videos. "Veronica filmed a music video here, and they used it for the *EisiDisi* films with Santiago Segura, says José. "The ideology is minority but the use is worldwide." José is quite a modest guy, but this kind of exposure is any shop-owner's dream, and he has no qualms about exploiting this idea of "fantasy" for a wider audience. Fantasy is indeed an international business, but Cibeles' attempts at getting S&M to a more widespread demographic are probably only for shock value. "It's not only seen as perverted and strange," retorts José.

It would have been easy to marginalise and softly ridicule this place, dealing as it does with outsiders, or certainly with extremely adventurous members of society — but at SR it is important to leave your preconceptions at the door. **SR Leather Shop, c/Pelayo, 7, tel: 91 523 19 64 (Metro: Chueca). See: [www.sr-shop.com](http://www.sr-shop.com) for more information. Email: [tienda@sr\\_shop.com](mailto:tienda@sr_shop.com)**



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# THE SWING AND I

**Group sex anyone? Peeping Tom, Jack McKay, finds out that many madrileños thoroughly enjoy a night of swinging as a normal part of their relationship**

## Get your peep on

The door was opened by a smiling woman who greeted us warmly and then ushered us through a heavy, red velvet curtain and into an extremely dark but otherwise normal bar. This was my first glimpse into the secretive and much maligned world of swinging, and if it weren't for the huge plasma screen TV above the bar depicting a woman being compromised over a glass coffee table, it might have seemed a bit anticlimactic.

Days earlier, a quick Google search had pulled up pages of information regarding Madrid's swingers' clubs and their weekly fiestas, along with general info concerning the scene itself. Loosely termed, swinging is the exchange of sexual partners by people who are in a relationship. Although any number of people can be involved, swinging is primarily seen as an activity done by couples. Our chosen venue, Triangulo, seemed a safe place to start because it was small, and its pub status was less intimidating than a real live swinging club. Coming here first was like doing the pub run before graduating to a club on a regular night out.

The four men at the bar conspicuously standing alone directed their undivided attention to my companion. In any other setting this would be construed as a lecherous, even aggressive gesture, but here, against a glowing backdrop of pounding pink flesh and noisy moaning it just came across as normal, if not a bit desperate, though it did make my companion and I rather uncomfortable.



A very big bed, all ready to receive naked bodies and tangled limbs

Photos: Jack McKay

prised in a good way, but I was just as in the dark as to the mechanics of the scene as I was before I went in. Fortunately, as we passed back through the velvet curtain our guide informed us of another club just around the corner which, she insisted, was much nicer than this one. **Triangulo, c/Doctor Esquerdo, 67, tel: 91 574 18 94 (Metro: O'Donnell/Sainz de Baranda).**

## Doing your homework

Encuentros, as it turned out, was much nicer. It belongs to the same owners as Triangulo and is in fact one of a group of four *ambiente liberal* venues owned by Ana and Miguel Martínez.

Los Martínez began by owning a disco which, on the recommendation of a friend who was a swinger, they turned into club for swingers. The massive success of this venture led to another and now, along with the help of their four grown-up children, they manage the four businesses in Madrid. Talking to them you quickly come to realise that this isn't just because of a love of alternative lifestyles. Swinging is becoming extremely big business and entry to decent clubs averages at about 25. We were immediately treated to another guided tour and informed in detail about the other clubs, the newest of which, Fusion, is a state-of-the-art, no-expense-spared super-swinger's club complete with swimming pool and valet parking. Ana cordially invited us to their Saturday night fiesta, on her, of course.

Looking round Encuentros, it appeared like any normal club; all modern décor and subtle mood lighting. It was clean and expensive-looking, with a curving tiled bar, at which I was relieved to see several couples drinking and chatting. Downstairs we were shown the changing rooms, standard in Martínez' clubs, where you can store your clothes and make use of the little plastic packet containing a bed sheet and disposable flip-flops. Down a small corridor we saw several rooms with large beds. There was a very dark room for clandestine deeds and another, empty, save for a sex swing. The centrepiece of the club was without doubt in the area restricted to "solo parejas", enclosed by mock prison bars. On a raised platform in the centre stood a Jacuzzi, in which a couple were soaking. The glass floor around the Jacuzzi gave an unrestricted view of the beds below where on a normal night, according to Ana, couples can "do their homework", swinger speak for, well, swinging. Seeing the looks on our faces Ana laughed: "Wait until you see our other club. That'll make your jaw drop". **Encuentros, c/Vicente Caballero, 14, tel: 91 504 35 21 (Metro: O'Donnell/Sainz de Baranda).** See [www.encuentrosvip.com](http://www.encuentrosvip.com) for more information.

*... a subtle hand would be placed on the prospective playmate's shoulder accompanied by the words "quieres jugar?"*

Triangulo, I am later to learn is probably the worst place to go if you want to dispel those uninformed preconceptions of swinging clubs and their patrons as dirty, seedy and immoral. We were treated to a guided tour by the barmaid, and through gloomy half-light we were shown rooms with enormous beds and electric heaters, a cubicle with leather manacles hanging from the wall and an area of private booths backed by wooden screens. A series of peep holes had been made in the screens, some at eye level, and others waist high. If swingers' clubs were airlines, this would certainly be a no-frills budget version.

Even though I had gained a slightly better idea of the activities on offer in these kind of places, on leaving I felt a bit disappointed. I had come with an open mind, hoping to be sur-

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**What actually goes on at these places?  
Will I be expected to join in?  
Will I want to?**

**Saturday night fever**

Saturday night came around with a mix of excitement and trepidation. What actually goes on at these places? Will I be expected to join in? Will I want to? Building up Dutch courage in the bar beforehand, nervous jokes abounded, but by the time we reached Fusion a pervasive silence enveloped us. Ana had related to us how we would know if another couple was interested in 'playing'. Usually a subtle hand would be placed on the prospective playmate's shoulder or gently slid down their arm accompanied by the words "quieres jugar?" This eventuality, frankly, terrified me, not least because my poor Spanish might not be enough to talk myself out of a potential naked tumble. Worst still, my nervous babbling could even come across as coquettish willingness!

Standing in the queue outside, we attracted the attention of a group of 50-somethings in front. Seeing our bemused expressions, they giggled among themselves. What had we got ourselves into? The huge black door opened and we followed the crowd inside. Generic dance music pounded away subtly and we made our way to the small but stylish bar. The place was busy and the two free drinks included in the 30 entry fee proved difficult to obtain. Around the bar area people stood in groups tacitly checking one another out. Glancing around I saw lots of dark secluded corners and little corridors with

thongs pushed to the side, while three older looking naked guys made use of what parts they could. Other couples stood against the walls watching, silently sipping their drinks. We stayed for a while then moved off to another area.

Down a flight of stairs we found the changing room. Some people were wasting no time in stripping-off and making use of the free bed sheet and flip flops; the glare of the lights inside illuminated semi-naked pink bodies of all shapes and sizes struggling out of their clothes. Many of them headed next door where small groups lounged on an enormous bed. Peering inside from the doorway I could see some people undressing one another while close by a man had his head buried between a pair of luminous white thighs.

The lure of the pool proved too much, and as we glided down to its edge we found ourselves next to a large muslin drape acting as a partition. I couldn't resist taking a peek. Behind the drape was an enormous bed, easily big enough to accommodate 25 people. In one corner sat a fully clothed couple talking intimately, seemingly oblivious to the naked couple less than a metre to their left who were in the midst of an act that a few minutes earlier I saw being performed on a plasma screen TV. By the end of the night this bed was a writhing mass of entangled limbs and bobbing heads. Some pairs didn't exchange partners, as though the thrill of having sex in public was enough to keep things interesting, while others let their hands wander freely, delighting in the openness that comes with group copulation.

The club itself was extremely stylish and actually very classy. During the night I saw no evidence of the lecherous and seedy behaviour that I had been afraid of. Everyone seemed to be there with a partner, and a great many of the people in the club seemed content to simply make use of the lounge area and enjoy the ambience. The atmosphere was relaxed, no doubt partly due to the magnificent glowing pool surrounded by tall leafy potted palms. The glowing white drapes that hung from the ceiling divided the club into sections, while the steam from the pool cast an opaque blanket over the scene. Before we decided to call it a night I took one last survey of the club. A young couple draped in bed sheets stumbled out of a bed chamber with flushed faces, holding hands. They looked



It gets steamy in the pool

places to sit. Another flat screen TV showed the obligatory porn and a small group, who seemed to be in their 20s, hovered beneath it, smiling nervously.

From some dark recess two older women, one dressed in PVC, the other in a bizarre-looking thong-dress, stalked across the bar and into a side room. We decided to follow. Inside was a small, dark room with a jail cell at one end. Opposite, nailed to the wall was a huge white cross with straps attached for arms and legs. In the middle of the room, over what looked like a massage table with chains and handcuffs hanging from it, five people were having energetic sex. The two women were dressed in leather Basques and had

like they were wearing togas, and that the club could be a bathhouse where the orgies of ancient Rome took place.

Though the swinging lifestyle may not be for everyone, Fusion would certainly be a step up in the world for anyone so inclined. As the doorman smiled his goodnight and we pushed out into the mercifully fresh night air, I remembered what Ana had told me before about the reactions of the locals to her clubs: "They don't mind at all. There are no drugs, no loud music and the people don't make a lot of noise as they leave. We're actually very good neighbours to have". *Fusion, c/Cardenal Siliceo, 10, tel: 91 519 90 49 (Metro: Properidad/Alonso XIII). See www.fusionvip.com for more information.*

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**music interview**



Nada Surf: Daniel Lorca, Matthew Caws and Ira Elliot  
 Photo: UniversoPop Promociones

**NADA SURF:  
 LUCKY AND POPULAR**

**Kristen Bernardi chats to Daniel Lorca and Matthew Caws of rock trio Nada Surf about strange expectations, rap and their Euro-roots**

"You guys are not ready for Madrid; you won't believe it." That's what Nada Surf bassist Daniel Lorca told his bandmates as they weaved their way through a hazy Malasaña night on their first visit to the capital several years ago. "We stopped at every bar that was playing rock music just to see how long it would take to go three blocks," Lorca recalls. "It was insane. Even the tiny places had a real deejay spinning vinyl."

**Mixed influences**

Though he's a die-hard New Yorker, Lorca was born in Madrid and his family ties are scattered everywhere from Zaragoza to Granada. He met guitarist and lead vocalist Matthew Caws when they were students at the Lycée Français in New York, and learnt that Caws was a fellow Euro-influenced New Yorker (Caws' father is British and his mother is an American professor of French literature.) They played in a few starter bands before joining up with drummer Ira Elliot to create Nada Surf. Lorca is quick to recognise, "We're unusual for an American band."

It's interesting then that the band are best known for their über-American novelty hit "Popular", which blazed MTV airwaves in 1996. While many groups would be content to release a string of kitsch imitations of that initial success, Nada Surf have gone out of their way to do just the opposite. "I think Electra [Records, their former label] would have wanted nothing more than to have us make a second album that consisted of 12 "Popular's," Lorca explains matter-of-factly. Now, after more than 10 years together and on the cusp of releasing their fifth studio album, *Lucky*, they've certainly proven they're more than just a mid-90s blip on the radar.

**Highs and lows**

After the "Popular" frenzy from their respectable debut album, *High/Low*, came a messy song-rights battle with Electra Records over the content of their sophomore album, *The Proximity Effect*. By the time the dust had settled, the MTV-ers had moved on to something else, and the band went on a four-year hiatus. During the pause, Nada Surf's European fan base remained faithful and supportive. Caws worked in a record store in between recording albums, and would occasionally peek at the online fan message boards. "There would be a reminder in my inbox like, 'Oh yeah, I'm still in a band that does stuff.'"

Nada Surf's 2003 release, *Let Go*, was both a critical success and a fan favourite on both sides of the pond, drawing comparisons to groups like Echo and the Bunnymen and Weezer. The band's 2005 album, *The Weight is a Gift*, was by all accounts a turning point for the trio after having survived their brief period of relative obscurity in their home country and successfully battling their record company for the rights to their own songs. It is recognised as their most musically mature record to date. So, where to go from there? "When we did *Lucky*," says Lorca, "we actually thought that it was going to be a total rock album, like Stooges or Queens of the Stone Age." But as rehearsals continued, the songs that emerged were slightly mellower, and showcased Caws' clear, sometimes melancholic vocals in a way that hadn't been captured on previous albums. The band are happy with the more evolved result. "When people say, 'Wow, this album's really different from the previous one', I use the analogy that we're writing a book; each album is a chapter," says Lorca. "I'm not going to tell the same story again but with different characters."

**New and old**

"See These Bones", the first single on *Lucky*, paints an older-and-wiser picture with its chorus: *What you are now/We were once/Just like we are/You will be dust*. Despite this hard-earned songwriter wisdom, Caws says there's still plenty left to discover. "I'm afraid of the day when I just can't do it. I don't know if that'll ever happen, but it's such a mind game. Pop music is just supposed to come out of you naturally, and it does to a certain extent, but . . . melodies are a total mystery." Caws says that he listened to a lot of gangster rap between making *The Weight is a Gift* and *Lucky* when he needed to escape from indie-rock introspection overload. "Anyone can identify with wanting to be taken out of your element. Rap music is so confident. I'm so insecure — I don't want to hear about other peoples' insecurities. Rap has nothing to do with my world."

More than a decade after their music video mega-hit, Nada Surf have managed to capture the next MTV generation. Their songs have been tinkly background music on teeny-bopper TV series' such as "One Tree Hill" and "The O.C." But to their loyal European fans, don't call it a comeback. "We've had a really consistent career here," says Caws, "We never really disappeared." *Nada Surf are playing at Sala Heineken on 14 February. See www.nadasurf.com or www.my space.com/nadasurf to listen to "See These Bones".*

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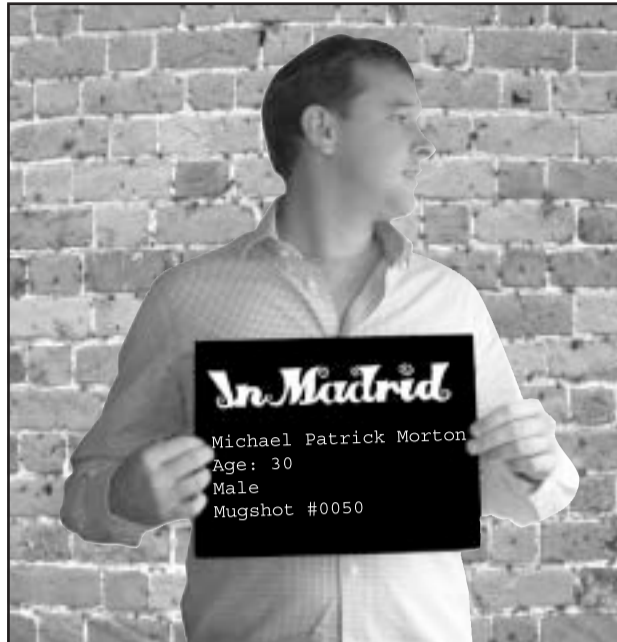
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# MUGSHOT

We've dragged an honorary madrileño down to InMadrid Towers to find out what he's doing here and why. This month, a man with a brilliant, gleaming smile



Photos: InMadrid

**Mugshot:** 0050  
**Name:** Michael Patrick Morton  
**Age:** 30

**Where are you from originally?**  
I grew up in North Carolina and Florida, USA.

**Why did you first come to Madrid?**  
With a job, I was working in London for a distribution company and they decided to set up shop in Spain. I had travelled in Spain before, so I was interested. I came here in 2003. I worked for them for almost three years, then they decided to go back to England. I really liked living here, so I decided to stay.

**What do you do for a living now?**  
I sell teeth-whitening kits online. I was doing it on the side when I was working with the other company, so I decided to just pay more attention to that and work for myself. I have a website and am on eBay all around the world. I work at home.

**Where is your clientele mainly based?**  
All over the world, really. The majority in England and Spain, but I sell in America, Australia, Germany and Italy. I am frustrated with Italy, though, their mail system is terrible. I get random orders from Eastern Europe sometimes, Indonesia, Latvia, not all the time, just once in a while.

**Why is Europe a good market?**  
In the States teeth whitening is really popular, and in Europe it's not as big a deal but it's catching on slowly. And what stains your teeth — coffee, red wine, cigarettes — there's a lot of that going on, especially in Spain. And in England, too.

**How did you get into selling this product?**  
My dad manufactures it, that's how I started. I was doing it in my spare time, so I figured 'why not make a business out of it?'

**What are the best and worst parts of your job?**  
The best aspect is the freedom. I can work whenever I want. My sleeping hours are all screwed up because I recently went to the

US. I can work at night, early in the morning, whenever. This past summer I went to Brazil for three months, and I was still able to work from there. I didn't have to use my savings, because I knew there was still money coming in while I was there. The worst thing? I guess it can get a bit monotonous. But generally I like it. Italy is the worst thing, I guess. And I don't have to work with clients face-to-face.

**How do you promote it?**  
I used to do pay-per-click advertising, with google.com and yahoo.com. But you have to bid on words, and if the price of the word goes up you have to pay. So they were running out the little people. Now I use search-engine optimisation software, which helps you make your website more attractive to search engines. It's just a one-time cost. That's what I've been working on lately.

**What do you most like about Madrid?**  
I like the vibe, you know, it's a very comfortable city, it's easy to manage. It's got the city feel, but it's not too hard to get around. It's not too expensive, it's easy to meet people; there's always something going on.

**What do you most dislike about Madrid?**  
Well, the summers, I mean, I grew up in Florida, so I went home, because I didn't want to stay here in the heat. When I first came to Madrid and I didn't speak Spanish very well, I thought the people were really rude. I mean, you walk into a place and they say 'Dime!' I mean, literally, tell me what you want. Now I'm used to it. But the customer service is the absolute worst. I think it's worse here in Madrid than in smaller places in Spain. The attitude is that they're doing you a favour to take your money, and that still really ticks me off.

**So how Spanish do you feel after four years?**  
I'm not Spanish, I'm American and I'm happy to be. I didn't come here to be Spanish, I came here to live in a different place. I love it, but I'll never be Spanish.

**Tell us something about you that people don't know.**  
I used to be an ice-cream man in Australia. I was the guy in the car with the little tune. I was travelling in Australia for a summer and staying in a hostel where they help you find work. They sent me out and I was driving on the left side of the road with the steering wheel on the right through the suburbs of Brisbane.  
Also, I am taking capoeira classes, which is a mix between Brazilian dance and martial arts started by the slaves in Brazil to practice fighting. See [www.sonrisasdelosol.com](http://www.sonrisasdelosol.com) for more information about how to brighten your smile.

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# concerts

**Queens of the Stone Age**  
**Venue:** La Riviera, Paseo Virgen del Puerto, s/n, tel: 91 36 52 415 (Metro: Puerta del Ángel/Príncipe Pio).  
**Date:** 15 February  
**Price:** 24  
[www.ticketticket.com](http://www.ticketticket.com)

Josh Homme is the self-assured ringmaster of the veritable rock and roll circus that is QOTSA. Members and collaborators come and go but what stays is Homme's vision and a natural awareness of what makes music worth listening to. Their music is at times dark, cinematic and sexy, but above all it is compelling. My friend Kenn still talks of the euphoria that followed his first QOTSA gig after downing half a bottle of vodka and Tesco value cola. That was seven years ago, since then they've played everywhere in the world, released plenty more amazing records and probably taken enough drugs to kill a continent. The newest release *Era Vulgaris* continues in a similar vein - well-written, credible heavy rock music that is the perfect soundtrack to losing your shoes, your hearing and possibly your sanity.

## GIG O' THE MONTH



**Nada Surf**  
**Venue:** Sala Helneken, c/Princesa, 1, tel: 91 54 75 711 (Metro: Plaza de España).  
**Date:** 14 February  
**Price:** 18  
[www.ticketticket.com](http://www.ticketticket.com)



You know that bit in the O.C./Dawson's Creek/Buffy the Vampire Slayer when Joey/Jenny/Buffy suffers a painful revelation but comes out wiser for the experience? They're usually sat in their car holding a photograph of a boy/dog/grandparent while the rain beats down outside. Well, that's Nada Surf gently plinking away in the background. New York's emotive post-punkers use every weapon in their armoury of sincere heartfelt pop-rock tunes to bring you to the very brink of heartbreak. Occasionally clichéd and trite, Nada Surf do a great line in foot-tapping acoustic heavy rock which, if you have any humanity left, makes you want to call up your best friend and reminisce over good times. Their last two albums mark a new maturity for the band, with this year's *Lucky* getting strong reviews across the board.

**The Charlatans**  
**Venue:** Joy Eslava, c/Arenal, 11, tel: 91 36 65 439 (Metro: Sol).  
**Date:** 5 February  
**Price:** 20  
[www.ticketticket.com](http://www.ticketticket.com)

Say what you like about these indie troubadours, because they've probably heard it all before. Not many groups can claim to have run the gauntlet of house-inspired "baggy" rock through the art-school wankery of Britpop and into the new century unscathed, but that's precisely what The Charlatans have done. Yes, they're not as experimental as, say, the soon to be canonised Radiohead, but they are consistent and there's something to be said for that. Still, from the Hammond-bashing "Weirdo" and "The Only One I Know" to the more minimal "Love is the Key" and beyond, The Charlatans have retained an energy that spans nine albums and never fails to get you moving.

**The Mars Volta**  
**Venue:** La Riviera, Paseo Virgen del Puerto, s/n, tel: 91 36 52 415 (Metro: Puerta del Ángel/Príncipe Pio).  
**Date:** 29 February  
**Price:** 28  
[www.gamerco.com](http://www.gamerco.com)



Formerly of At the Drive-In, Cedric Bixler-Zavala and Omar Rodriguez-Lopez bring the enigmatic Volta to Madrid. On stage they bristle with more energy than a birthday party in a coca-cola factory for children with ADD, while playing psychedelic rock infused with elements of free jazz and Spanish screeching to boot. Some hail them as boundary-bashing geniuses, while others highlight their 16-minute looping album tracks as overly conceptual. This year's offering *The Bedlam in Goliath* is a much anticipated follow up to 2006's *Amputechture*, a record that enlisted the help of Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist John Frusciante.

**Fiesta Demoscópica: Love of Lesbian, La Bien Querida, Russian Red, Los Guapos**  
**Venue:** Joy Eslava, c/Arenal, 11, tel: 91 36 65 439 (Metro: Sol).  
**Date:** 29 February  
**Price:** Free



This mini-series of concerts organised by premier Spanish music magazine *Mundo Sonoro* hopes to highlight some of the lesser-known talent currently emerging in Spain, as well as some of MS's favourite groups, including Love of Lesbian, to whom they awarded Album of 2007. The tour includes 11 cities with each city playing host to a new line up. Love of Lesbian's latest album *Chinese Stories for Japanese Children* has garnered them attention from all over the world and could well become a popular international export. Just as interesting, however, is Russian Red, an acoustic folk duo who sound like José Gonzalez had he spent time holed up in Dollywood to write an album. The impossibly cute Lourdes' lilting voice makes some tracks sound like a haunting Iberian take on American country and western.

**Emir Kusturika and The No Smoking Orchestra**  
**Venue:** La Riviera, Paseo Virgen del Puerto, s/n, tel: 91 36 52 415 (Metro: Puerta del Ángel/Príncipe Pio).  
**Date:** 1 February  
**Price:** 28  
[www.salariviera.com](http://www.salariviera.com)



Far be it for me to praise my own powers of perception, but the gypsy-folk pop revolution, like a pedal-driven knife grinder, shows no signs of slowing down. Emir Kusturika is big in Spain. Last year during a concert in La Riviera, Spain's number one Hollywood golden-boy, Javier Bardem, ended up playing the drums on stage with him. This was no casual encounter, however, as Kusturika is well established in the film world as a director, writer, actor and composer. Hailing from Sarajevo, Kusturika has a wicked sense of humour that comes alive during his performances, where along with Eastern gypsy-folk stomps, he includes tunes from his most famous films including *Gato Blanco*, *Gato Negro* and *Time of the Gypsies*.

**Art Brut**  
**Venue:** Sala Caracol, c/Bernardino Obregón, 18, tel: 91 52 73 594 (Metro: Embajadores/Palos de la Frontera).  
**Date:** 22 February  
**Price:** 20  
[www.salacaracol.com](http://www.salacaracol.com)



Like a man who makes miniature buildings out of Pannini football stickers or builds a yogurt-pot city in his back yard, Art Brut's music is art for art's sake. It's funny and catchy and full of deadpan irony. Their quirky indie is more like the mental ramblings of spoken-word poet John Cooper-Clarke than anything found in the charts, although if you like The Wombats, then Art Brut are probably for you.

■ JACK MCKAY

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# movie reviews

BY JESSICA COGAN

**Sweeney Todd** Tim Burton plus Johnny Depp plus big bloody musical numbers equals a truly ghastly good time. If loving a little serial killing song and dance is wrong, I don't wanna be right.



Fifteen years ago Benjamin Barker (Johnny Depp) married a beautiful woman with whom he had a lovely daughter — and the envious Judge Turpin (Alan Rickman) wanted them for himself. So he drummed up some false charges and away went Barker to Australian exile. Years later, a very different man returns with a straight razor and a taste for revenge: Sweeney Todd.

Todd is bent on giving Judge Turpin a very close shave but is willing to practice on innocent gullets. He finds a cheerful accomplice in Mrs Lovett (Helena Bonham Carter). Mrs Lovett has a thing for Todd and happily hides his evidence in her delicious meat pies (beef is so expensive).

Burton has created a dark, fabulous London, and the production is really fun to look at — from Technicolor blood to extravagant dream-sequence costumes. But the pacing stays painfully true to Sondheim's stage pacing — rather too slow for cinema viewing. Still, Depp is delicious and *Sweeney Todd* hard to forget.

**Kite Runner** Translating a bestselling novel into a powerful film can be as challenging as righting a boyhood wrong. Luckily for us, director Marc Forster, screenwriter David Benioff and novelist Khaled Hosseini have succeeded in doing the former in a touching tale about the latter.



Young Afghan friends Amir (Zekeria Ebrahimi) and Hassan (Ahmad Khan Mahmudzada) are inseparable but come from different worlds: Amir is a wealthy man's son and Hassan the son of that man's servant. But where Hassan is fearless, Amir is rather meek. One day that flaw becomes tragic: neighbourhood bully Assef and his gang, attack and violate Hassan. Amir sees but slinks away in fear. Worse yet, consumed by guilt, Amir lies and gets Hassan sent away from their home.

Years later, while living in San Francisco, Amir gets a call urging him to return to Afghanistan. When Amir returns, he is met with a very different Afghanistan — and an opportunity to help Hassan as he was unable to before.

*Kite Runner* is a moving, gentle, beautiful film that plays on our heartstrings without strumming too hard. The end hits some hiccups (the flashbacks are stronger), but by that time, you're invested, and probably crying.

**Juno** It's a tough thing to overcome an unlikable central character. But like indie love child *Napoleon Dynamite* before it, *Juno* wins despite a protagonist you want to throttle.

Juno (Ellen Page) is a high school junior who reacts to getting knocked up as though she's found a tear in her ironic T-shirt. In fact, she's so quippy, glib and dismissive that I found her utterly unbelievable and hateful. But a half hour in, I get swept up in the story and she bugged me slightly less.



Juno decides that she's going to give her baby away to darling yuppie couple Mark (Jason Bateman) and Vanessa (Jennifer Garner). They're perfect on the outside but like everyone else, they've got their own shit going on. This realisation humanises Juno and helps her appreciate what she's got — namely, a sweetheart of a boyfriend Bleeker (Michael Cera).

Although I found the hipster verbal posturing grating, *Juno* is finally quite sweet. The supporting cast is excellent (especially Cera and Juno's step mum Allison Janney). Not totally worth the hype, but offbeat and enjoyable.

**Cloverfield** *Cloverfield* learned some key lessons from *The Blair Witch Project*: firstly, that hand held camerawork can make a film scary and the audience puke; secondly, monsters/witches/bad guys are scarier when you don't see them; and thirdly, expendable 20-somethings make good victims.



*Cloverfield*, the much anticipated monster flick, gets underway on the night of a leaving party for Rob (Michael Stahl-David). It's a swinging party until explosions are seen from lower Manhattan and the Statue of Liberty's head comes off. Ladies and gentleman, meet *Cloverfield*. Whatever it is, it's destructive and indestructible. And for the Earthlings with the video camera, it's run-away time.

If you don't find it sickening, you'll probably enjoy *Cloverfield*. It's quick (under 90 minutes), fast-paced and different. I found some of the imagery too reminiscent of 9/11 to be transported entirely. Still a pretty fun, jumpy time.

# bookbuzz

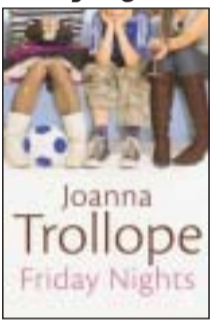
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## The Perk Mark Gimenez Sphere



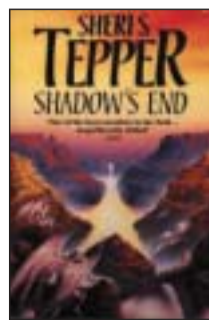
Gimenez's first book, *The Colour of Law*, reviewed in these pages a couple of years ago, received a walloping from yours truly. However, he has begun to grow on me. Perhaps in a slightly fungal way, admittedly, but all the same, his star is rising in my eyes. With the tagline, "There were many perks of the job. A dead girl wasn't meant to be one of them", we can continue taking Gimenez with a pinch of salt. But the difference now is that he has laid his cards on the table. In his first book, he skirted around the fact that he was writing a Russell Crow vehicle. Now his punchy rhythm is clearly steered towards Hollywood and all the better for it. The rule of thumb for these lightweight lawyer-cum-detective novels is to read them as if you were watching a mini-series — always have something else to keep you busy. I managed to knit a sweater and solve many third world problems while simultaneously reading about Beck Hardin, hotshot lawyer, and his (this is becoming a theme, Gimenez!) super-intelligent kids. He comes back to Texas after losing his wife to cancer. His dad JB is a local good ole boy who Beck hated for years, but that is soon sorted: "Why'd you get so hard, JB?" "I didn't get hard, I got scared." This touching macho reunion could be seen as emotionally retarded claptrap, or it could bring tears to your eyes. You decide.

## Friday Nights Joanna Trollope Bloomsbury



For bonking and fun, we have Jill Cooper. For crystalline modern family insights, we have Anne Tyler. Do we need another Joanna Trollope novel? Fay Weldon calls her "as subtle as Austen, as sharp as Bronte". I can only imagine she wasn't talking about this, her seven hundredth book about "normal" ladies. Trollope's selling point was originally her upper-middle-class "Aga sagas" — perfect for upper-middle-class women to read by their Aga stoves. Because that, one presumes, is who Trollope is. However, society has changed since the war and it seems Trollope is jumping on the bandwagon — hence the funky cover with the funky idea of a title — *Friday Nights* — which is bound to drive us all crazy because now we have mobile phones! And computer games! And single women with children! How the world has changed since Joanna fished in the estate lake with old Anthony Trollope, surrounded by giggling courtiers back in the 19th century. OK, that was all a lie, but you get my drift. In *Friday Nights*, we are confronted with a single mother, a wife, a workaholic, a "twenty-thirty-something" (for this, read Bridget Jones) and a spinster. They hang out together on Friday nights, and all look after each other. Quite sweet. There are kids involved. Nice. Then there is some romantic hokum with a chap called Jackson. Trollope is insightful on womenfolk, but to compare her at this stage to Austen and Bronte is rubbish. She's jumping, rather sadly, onto a tired-looking bandwagon driven by Helen Fielding.

## Shadow's End Sheri S Tepper HarperCollins



Rediscovery of the year! Sheri S Tepper, incredibly talented and consistently lauded sci-fi writer, is also known as A J Orde, EE Horlak and B J Oliphant. Her multi-faceted skills are reflected in this — she is endlessly creative and has written over a hundred books under these various pseudonyms — horror, detective and sci-fi, but it is as Sheri S Tepper that she has had most success. She is primarily known as a feminist science fiction writer, and her strong female characters in books such as *Grass* and *Beauty* put her alongside Margaret Atwood and Ursula Le Guin for style and brilliance. Her latest novel, *The Margarets* is just out, but is hard to get hold of in Spain as of yet. The aforementioned novels, however, are in all sci-fi loving bookshops. *Shadow's End* introduces us to a distant future where all worlds are homo-normed (that is, stripped of all life and used as farm planets to support the humans who live there in planet-covering mega-cities). The universe is plagued by "Firstism", "the belief that the universe is made for humanity". But worse is the appearance of the Uliarians, famed for wiping out planet-life and a direct threat to Firstism. This subtle backdrop is beautifully realised and definitely contemporary. What surprises most is just how far Tepper allows us to suspend our disbelief. Sci-fi haters fear the ridiculous, but Tepper is of that rare breed who makes sci-fi scarily resonant and ultimately, believable. Genius.

## Wolf Totem Jiang Rong Hamish Hamilton



The wolf is the symbol of the Mongolian grasslands. The wolf taught Genghis Khan how to be a wily battle-master. The wolf in Mongolia is yellow and has fangs. The Mongols see the Han Chinese as pasty-skinned farmers. The 1960s was the best time for the people of the Inner Mongolian grasslands. They were masters of a wild expanse of never-ending sky. They respected their God, Tengger, and followed with the wolves the cycles of nature, leaving their bodies out on the grasslands when they died to give back to Tengger. Thrown into this is Chen, a Beijing student who wants to learn the ways of Genghis Khan's descendants. He learns to hunt wolf, and he captures some wolf pups. This is all well and good and Rong's description of this Eden is handsome. But why does it take him over five-hundred pages to reach any kind of conclusion? Rong's constant repetition borders on mental illness, or forgetfulness. The repetition only comes into fruition when we reach the end of the book and Chen returns to find the grasslands all but destroyed and the wolves a distant memory. Very sad. Like a hymn or chant, Rong achieves his goal. But this is a novel and would have worked much better four hundred pages shorter. That frugal Mongolian life didn't need to be artlessly thrown at us like Jackson Pollock attacking a canvas. But hey! What do I know? He's sold four million copies, and won a prize, which makes him smug and me annoyed.

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**Email:** eugenia.martin@transcom.com, elena.media@transcom.com, isabel.vaquero@transcom.com, amanda.rodriguez@transcom.com

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