

The Columbian
Life

Section D

SUNDAY, MAY 21, 2006

Today's weather picture by **Ashley Helmold, 8**, La Center, La Center Elementary School



Scientific fact: We are idiots

You don't realize it, but you are constantly enjoying the benefits of science. For example, when you turn on the radio, you take it for granted that music will come out. But do you ever stop to think that this miracle would not be possible without the work of scientists?

That's right: There are tiny scientists inside that radio, playing instruments! A similar principle is used in automatic bank-teller machines, which is why they frequently say, "Sorry, out of service." They're too embarrassed to say, "Sorry, tiny scientist going to the bathroom."

Yes, science plays a vital role in your life, but when it comes to scientific knowledge, there's an excellent chance that you're a moron.

I base this statement on a recent survey conducted by the National Science Foundation. It showed that the average American does not understand basic scientific principles.

Naturally, the news media reported this finding as though it were shocking, which is silly.

This is, after all, a nation that has produced tournament bass fishing and the Home Shopping Channel. We should be shocked that the average American still knows how to walk erect.

But the point is that we have a scientific illiteracy problem in this nation, and you could be a part of it.

To find out, see if you can answer these three actual questions from the National Science Foundation survey:

1. True or False: The earliest human beings lived at the same time as the dinosaurs.

2. Which travels faster, light or sound?

3. Explain, in your own words: What is DNA?

All finished? Now, let's look at the correct answers:

1. FALSE. The truth is that the dinosaurs had been dead for over a week before the first human came along, probably in the form of Bob Dole. Yet most Americans firmly believe that humans and dinosaurs once co-existed.

This misconception arose from the many absurdly inaccurate fictional depictions of caveman life, such as the TV cartoon show "The Flintstones," in which the Flintstones own a pet dinosaur named Dino.

But paleontologists, who can determine the age of fossils with a high degree of accuracy using a technique called "carbon dating," have known for many years that "Dino" is actually another character wearing a costume.

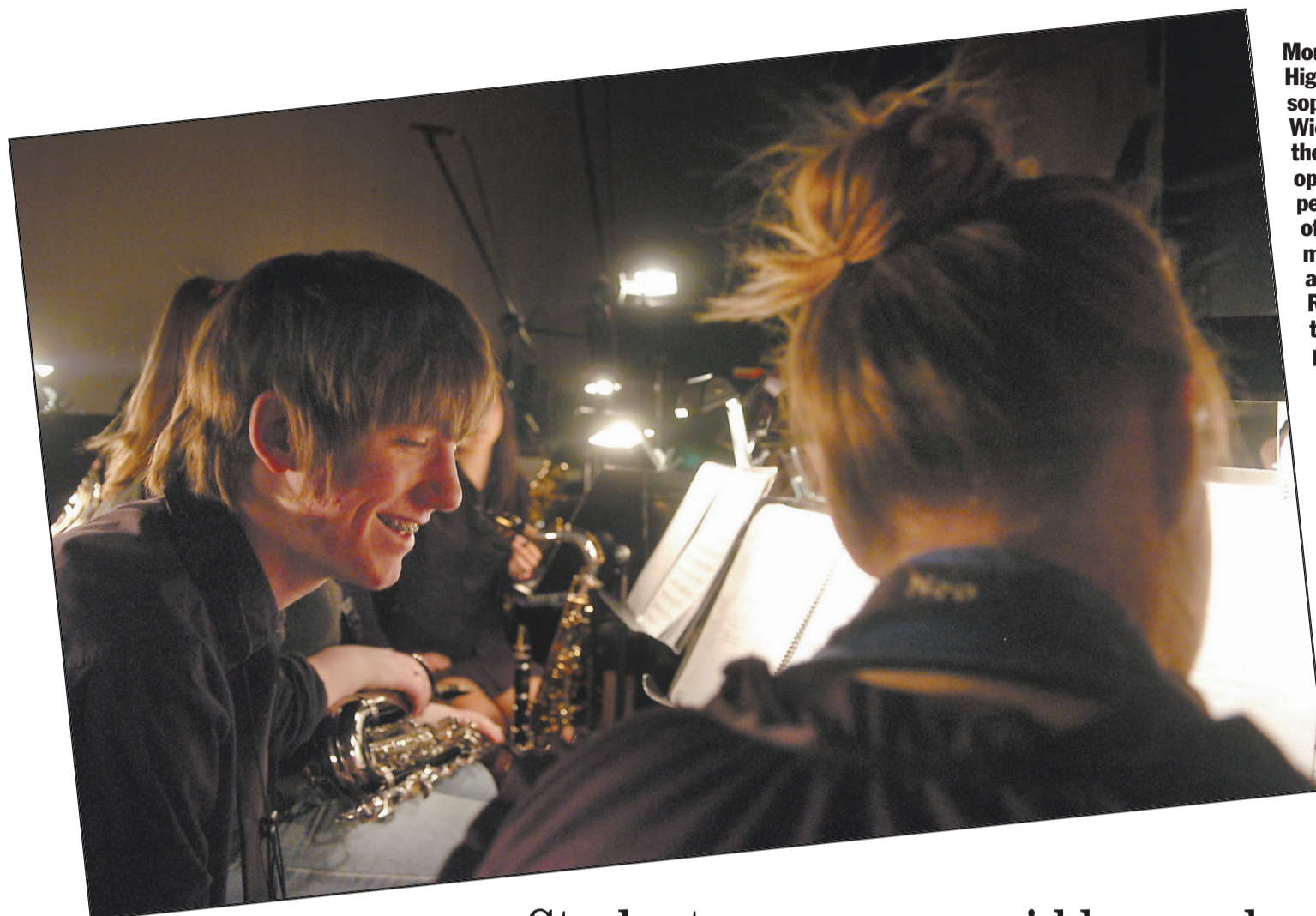
"We think it's Barney," the paleontologists announced recently, "but we can't say for sure until we get another government grant."

2. To answer the light-vs.-sound question, consider what you observe when a thunderstorm is approaching and a bolt of lightning strikes.

First, you see the lightning bolt, then you hear thunder, then you hear a scream if the lightning bolt has struck a person, then you hear a loud cheer from bystanders if the person was George Steinbrenner.

BARRY, page D8

DAVE BARRY is a columnist for the Miami Herald. His classic column was originally published July 7, 1996. He is currently taking a leave of absence from writing his weekly humor column. Write to him c/o The Miami Herald, One Herald Plaza, Miami FL 33132.



Mountain View High School sophomore Ryan Wickman awaits the start of the opening night performance of the school's musical "Guys and Dolls." Ryan plays in the school's pit orchestra as well as its jazz, symphonic and marching bands. But that's just the beginning of his music-related activities.

Photos by **MIKE SALSBURY** The Columbian

Student composes amid busy school life

CLASS NOTES

By **BRETT OPPEGAARD**
Columbian staff writer

The beeping alarm clock near his head rarely rousts 16-year-old Ryan Wickman. His father, Rodney, usually has to make a few passes in the hallway, chiming: "Getting late." "Don't you have to get up?" "Don't you have jazz band this morning?" When that doesn't work, his mother, Julie, takes a more hands-on, shaking-the-boy-until-he-tumbles-out-of-the-bed approach.

"He knows when I get in there, it's later," Julie says. "He knows when he hears my voice, it's crunch time. It's time to really get moving."

On this particular morning, Julie finally is able to get her son up about 6:20 a.m. He hurriedly gets dressed and brushes his braces. He has a big day ahead of him.

Jazz band practice starts at 6:30. Ryan gets a short break, then his high school classes start at 7:55. English. Biology. Band. Math. Spanish. History. After school, he stays behind for a couple of hours to catch up on some of the class time he's missed for music-related activities. A worksheet on the novel "Lord of the Flies" is due the next day. Among its questions: Which of the boys volunteer to go into the forest? More dauntingly, it adds: And why?

A couple of hours later, Ryan's high school, Mountain View, will open its annual musical production, "Guys and Dolls." About 70 kids will be on stage, acting, singing and dancing. Yet many

more students are involved. Some helped build the set. Some operate spotlights. Some decorated the foyer. Some usher. The pit orchestra has 15 student musicians, hidden from view behind the stage, including Ryan.

As far as providing opportunities for children, from sports to academics to theater to music, Clark County and the complementary metropolis of Portland offer virtually unlimited choices and chances. The complex question

parents and the most ambitious kids, such as Ryan, becomes how much can — or should — they do?

While most students seem content playing an instrument in the school band, Ryan found that was just the beginning of what he wanted out of music. He will perform both the clarinet and saxophone parts in the high school musical.

Before the first performance, he relaxes at home by playing a keyboard in his room and working on the score of his first symphony. He not only is writing music, he's making efforts to get it played. He wants to polish his compositions to the point that he can use them to gain scholarships and access to the best in college education, eventually turning those activities into a lucrative and glamorous career writing film scores.

Besides jazz band and the pit orchestra, Ryan is part of the school's symphonic band, which is in the middle of preparing for a districtwide

COMPOSER, page D6

Ryan composes music on a keyboard and computer in his room. He's less serious around his friends, below, from left, Rachael Miller, Shayna Pordes and Vicki Yeh. Most of intermission on the opening night of his school's musical was spent laughing at the way he and bandmates look in the program.



If you go

■ **What:** Young Composers Concert, original work by school-aged children, including three from Clark County, performed by the professional musicians of the FearNoMusic Ensemble.

■ **When:** 2:30 p.m. Sunday.

■ **Where:** Agnes Flanagan Chapel at Lewis and Clark College, 0615 S.W. Palatine Hill Road, Portland.

■ **Cost:** \$10, \$5 for students and senior citizens.

■ **Information:** 503-227-3127, www.learnomusic.org.

Right type? Online liaisons live, die by keyboard

Dating sites go the next step and offer advice

By **MELISSA RAYWORTH**
Associated Press writer

My best friend called yesterday, asking me to check out his latest crush. I typed his user name and password into the dating Web site Match.com and within seconds I was reading every word of the flirtatious exchange leading up to their first date.

It's surreal, peering at the pseudo-intimacy blossoming between people who've not yet met. But it

shouldn't strike me as odd, given that nearly all my single friends — straight and gay, mid-twenties through mid-forties — search for love on Match.com, eHarmony.com and JDate.com.

And no wonder they do. In an increasingly outsourced world where everything from banking to grocery shopping can be done online, we go days without introducing ourselves to a flesh-and-blood stranger. If your whole life

is stored inside a BlackBerry, why not search for love in there, too?

"We lead such regimented lives that if you're hoping you're going to bump into somebody at the Starbucks, it's probably not going to happen," says Match.com's spokeswoman, Kristin Kelly. It's an argument that 15 million Match subscribers have bought into so far.

And since January, some have taken the outsourcing one step

further: An additional \$8.99 per month buys them Match's MindFindBind service.

Break up? We never met

MindFindBind may sound like something hostage takers do to encourage Stockholm syndrome, but it's actually a database that uses the wisdom of the ubiquitous Dr.

OUTSOURCING, page D8

your Guide:



More veterinarians head out of their offices and visit pets to conduct exams /D3



Travel: World Cup gives Germany chance to show off its beautiful cities, museums, beer /D5

Coming Monday:

Teens use Web to make lip-syncing concerts a public affair /D1

Composer:

From page D1

showcase, and part of its marching band, which is in the middle of preparing for the Starlight Parade. He maintains a 3.8 grade-point average, including membership in the National Honor Society and Key Club International. Those are just his activities within the east Vancouver schoolyard.

Ryan also takes private clarinet lessons. He plays for the wind ensemble of the Portland

Youth Philharmonic. For the past three years, he's been involved with a group called FearNoMusic. That Portland-based organization offers an unusual year-long training program for young composers, culminating today with a concert of original work. The quintet of professional musicians will play a piece by Ryan and two others from Clark County — Riley Crabtree of Vancouver and Aaron Kirkpatrick of Washougal — as part of the show at Lewis & Clark College.

Ryan and Riley have been friends and part of FearNo-

Music for a few years. Riley's mother, JoAnn, lists a similarly hectic schedule for her 14-year-old son: Concert band and jazz band at Wy'east Middle School. Two sets of private lessons, piano and oboe. A 3.8 grade-point average, including participation in the Science Olympiad and Knowledge Bowl. Both boys have gravitated to music and academics while dropping other pursuits, such as soccer.

"Childhood is an excellent opportunity to explore all different areas," JoAnn Crabtree says. "To find out what our interests are. Learn what we're

good at. Discover who we are and what we want to pursue as our lifetime work."

But she adds, there's a fine line between encouraging ambition and overloading a child. Jeffrey Payne, director of FearNoMusic, says the 14 students in his program this year share similar traits. They play more than one instrument. They are involved in several different bands. They achieve high grades.

"We've never had a shortage of (applicants)," he says.

Ryan won the state's high school competition for composers last year with "Cairo Sketches," a short piece incorporating traditional Egyptian themes. But when the work didn't also win regional or national titles, Ryan decided to gut and rebuild the piece as part of the FearNoMusic program this year. He's excited to hear how the new version sounds, but the FearNoMusic concert happens to be on the same afternoon as his final Portland Youth Philharmonic show of the season. He wants to hear his music played, but he wants to play music, too. He doesn't want to miss either event.

So to make both, he will have to show up and practice with the philharmonic before the concert in downtown Portland. Then, during that group's break, rush over to the college campus (a 15-to-20-minute drive) to hear his new song played by FearNoMusic, then hurry back. He'll deal with the logistics of pulling that off later. More pressing at the moment, or at least unavoidably imminent, is the opening night of Mountain View's musical, with its cast of 70 classmates, the 15-student orchestra and an expected audience of several hundred people.



When Ryan Wickman's grandmother, Eleanor Linden, arrives to watch his school show, Ryan only has time to give her a quick hug before leaving.

MAKE SALSURBY/The Columbian

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The Columbian

The show is scheduled to start at 7:30 p.m. Ryan's supposed to be back to the school, four blocks away from his house, at 6:45 p.m. He leaves at 6:43. His mother, Julie, takes him in the family minivan.

"I've been meaning to take the driver's test," Ryan says. "Just haven't had time."

Money's an issue, too, to help cover the costs of insurance and gas. He says he's willing to work as much as 20 hours a week for the chance to drive. He's not so clear on when he would do that.

If he can figure it out, his parents would like for some of that cash to help cover the costs of his musical interests. Ryan needed three sets of concert attire for his various bands this year. But he lost and had to replace two of them, including a new \$100 pair of shoes that he simply left behind in a concert hall after a show.

As Ryan was changing into his black clothes for opening night, which didn't take more than a couple of minutes, his father, Rodney, sprawled on the couch in the family's living room, watching the Golf Channel. Rodney played on his high school's golf team, and he yearns to get out on a course. But he spent a Christmas gift certificate this year on a lunch at the clubhouse, instead of a round, as way to save time and be thrifty. He hasn't actually played the game in years. Ryan's mother, Julie, says the two of them spend 10 to 15 hours a week just transporting their youngest son around.

When they get to Mountain View in the minivan, Ryan jumps out and walks quickly to the band room, gets his instruments, sits down with the other kids, also dressed in all black, and starts following the instructions of the band director. The group practices a few troublesome sections with the singers, then the musicians move to their cramped spot backstage, behind the set, where no one in the audience can see them.

At intermission of the three-hour show, Ryan finds a copy of the freshly printed program, and he and few of his friends laugh for several minutes about the picture of the kids in the orchestra, especially the way one of the boys looks, leaning back just a bit with an uncomfortable grin.

When the show is over, conductor and co-band director Eric Smedsrud announces, "Count on being here at 6:45 (on performance nights), and there is jazz band tomorrow (morning)." Several of the students let out a simultaneous groan.

Back in the band room, Ryan and his friends are laughing again about the contents of the program. What other kids look like in their pictures, what they wrote in their biographies.

Ryan's mother, Julie, finds him, and he sheepishly asks her about the show, "Did you like it... a lot?"

Julie says, "Yeah!" She makes plans to meet him in the parking lot and goes to get the rest of their party, including Julie's mother, who came to the show to support her grandchild even though her husband was in the hospital that night recovering from surgery to repair a clogged artery.

While Julie gets the minivan, Ryan chats with his friends, and they began needling him about his picture in the program. One girl starts to make amends, saying how much she liked the show, asking for a list of songs, then goes right back to teasing him about his picture.

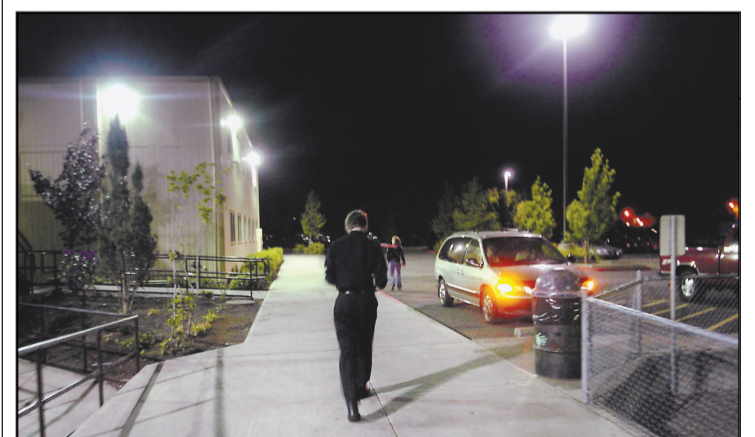
"You're just jealous," Ryan says. "Just jealous."

The girl, Shayna Pordes, replies, "I'm just jealous I'm not a band nerd?"

Ryan quips, "at least I know the song list" as he goes into the instrument storage room to pack away his equipment for the night. By the time he's finished, the friends are gone. His parents are anxiously waiting in the parking lot. Both of them commute to work across the Columbia River each morning. It's nearly 11 p.m.

Ryan has homework to finish, including that worksheet on the "Lord of the Flies," thinking about why any of the boys in that book would go into the forest. He decides to skip the usual evening shower, to collect just a bit more sleep. He's passed out in bed by midnight.

Before long, his alarm clock is beeping. His father is going up and down the hall, trying to wake him. His mother comes into his room. It's time to get up. Jazz band practice starts at 6:30.



The day started for Ryan at 6:30 a.m. He leaves after the musical ends, about 11 p.m. And he still has homework to do.



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Outsourcing:

From page D1

Phil McGraw to advise people on strategies for conducting the relationship that Match.com has begun for them.

How Orwellian. What's next? A Web site that experiences the whole relationship for you, then sends an e-mail letting you know how things worked out? Entire relationships already begin and end without a face-to-face meeting.

"I did meet one Match guy that I never met in person," says Rebecca Rich, a 30-something veteran of Match and JDate. After exchanging long e-mails daily for more than a week and enjoying it, Rebecca and this man spoke by phone.

"There was something in his voice that was a complete turnoff," she says. "I thought about ending it after our first phone call." But she decided to keep things going — until he sent roses, a book he wrote and a box of chocolates.

"He was professing his love to me and I was like, 'Oh, absolutely no,'" she says. "'You don't know me!'" She then "broke up" with him via e-mail and "even gave him advice, like 'You might want to slow it down a notch,'" she says. "He wrote me back a five-page letter about what I was missing out on and still professing his love for me!"

These two people met, flirted, liked each other, had a bad date, gave it another shot, then endured a messy breakup — without ever being in the same room. (On the bright side, Rich later met her current boyfriend on JDate and they're happily living together.)

So long, serendipity

Even Match knows that online dating can run amok: Their research suggests that "couples" who spend too much time communicating online before meeting in person may end up with impossible expectations. Ditto for those who develop an online relationship, then schedule a first date that lasts an entire weekend.

To remedy that, Match's new spinoff service (Chemistry.com) guides people through a brief volley of e-mails, then instructs them to meet for a 30-minute coffee date. They even offer a map of Starbucks locations to take the guesswork out of choosing a meeting point.

Sounds incredibly efficient. And antiseptic.

Are we moving toward the death of serendipitous dating?

Or dates that suck for the first hour, but just before bailing you discover that you went to the same summer camp when you were 11 and suddenly you're totally connected?

What about falling for someone that no computer would ever match you up with? When I met my husband, he was preparing for a trip to a frozen outpost of a city in Mongolia. We were co-workers on a business trip, discussing where we planned to vacation once our work was done.

"You're going to Mongolia? In February?" I asked. "Isn't Mongolia, like, next door to Siberia?"

"I love the cold," he answered with a shrug. "Where are you going?"

"Hawaii," I replied, "I love the heat."

I walked away thinking, "I could never date that guy." He grew up traveling the globe, I was sequestered in suburbia. He eats jalapenos at 7 a.m., I pour milk over my oatmeal. But somehow, eight years later, we're preparing for the birth of our second child.

Not skin deep

Granted, no one can argue with the efficiency of online dating.

"The technology has increased the ability of people to meet others who are similar and meet a much greater number of people who are potential mates for them than has ever been true in human history," says Robert E. Rosenwein, professor of social psychology at Lehigh University, who researches the connection between technology and human interaction.

He also points out that online dating's current structure — based primarily on text and not photos or video — allows potential couples to connect without basing their interest on physical attraction. "All the nonverbal stuff goes away. Attractiveness is about how you present yourself in words," Rosenwein says.

For the first time in modern history, he says, we're seeing "people learning to 'know' each other better by virtue of text."

So maybe I shouldn't worry that online dating is taking all the romance out of romance. But I do wonder whether, decades from now, these millions of perfectly matched people will have such perfectly balanced children that no one will ever create the next generation of punk music or become the next Jackson Pollock.

That would render the world about as compelling as a dateless Saturday night.

Being on Broadway "was always the ultimate goal. I was a theater major in college. My goal was not to be a pop star. I went on every audition I could, and I just saw 'American Idol' as just another audition."

Frenchie Davis, former "Idol" contestant



Broadway greets 'Idol' alums

Past contestants prove to be box office draws

By GREG BRAXTON
Los Angeles Times

She was already a big star, adored by millions. But when it was announced that she would make her Broadway debut this spring, the anticipatory buzz went through the roof.

Ads with her name splashed in large, bold type popped up all over New York City. A mad scramble for tickets erupted. Fans squealed the moment she stepped on stage. Crowds mobbed her at the stage door, clamoring for autographs and pictures. And producers of the show rejoiced in their financial good fortune.



Tamyra Gray
Appeared in "Bombay Dreams"

But all this fuss isn't over movie star Julia Roberts and her theatrical debut in "Three Days of Rain." One of the hottest marquee draws on Broadway this year is Diana DeGarmo, who is appearing in a supporting role in the musical "Hairspray."

Diana who? If you have to ask, you're probably not one of the 31 million viewers who tune in to "American Idol," television's top-rated show and a cultural phenomenon.

"Idol" has spawned numerous imitators. Its far-reaching influence has drawn in seasoned entertainers, such as Rod Stewart and Barry Manilow, seeking to reinvigorate their careers — as well as boost their own record sales. Then there are the record deals — not only for the winners but also for the losers — "Idol" concert tours, movie roles, trivia games, perfume, shower radios, and Pez dispensers.

And now class is trying to cash in on flash.

"Theater of the 21st century needs to appeal to a younger generation," says "Hairspray" producer Margo Lion. "American Idol" has certainly brought in audiences — people are dying to see these performers. It brings in a hip factor, just like Disney brought in family audiences."

Of course, success isn't always guaranteed. Last week, 2003 finalist Josh Strickland made his Broadway bow in the title role of Disney's "Tarzan," which opened to very mixed reviews. Strickland's debut on the Great White Way followed triumphs by earlier "Idol" castoffs DeGarmo, Frenchie Davis and Tamyra Gray. Davis, who was bounced from the series in 2003 following revelations that she had once worked for an adult Web site, landed a role in "Rent," with a featured solo in the musical's anthem "Seasons of Love."

First season also-ran Gray appeared in the musical "Bombay Dreams" in 2004. "American Idol" has absolutely become a big deal here in terms of finding new talent," says New York casting director Bernard Telsey, who placed DeGarmo, Strickland and Davis in Broadway shows. "Watching this show has become another way to locate incredibly talented people — it's like a televised open call. I watch it, and certain people on our staff have to watch it. Our inside joke is we root for our favorites to lose so that they can become available to us."

No longer can acerbic judge Simon Cowell's criticism of being "too Broadway" be considered a slap in the face. MTV's "Total Request Live" may have closed its doors to these "Idol" wannabes, but the Great White Way is laying out the welcome mat — and with good reason.

Last February, the 19-year-

old DeGarmo joined the cast of the 2003 Tony Award-winning "Hairspray," playing not the leading role in the '60s-era musical based on the 1988 John Waters film, but the smaller part of Penny Pingleton, a perky and slightly clueless teen. Just before DeGarmo signed on, "Hairspray's" net receipts were about \$465,000, reported Variety. Her first week in the show, box-office figures jumped to \$530,000, then \$673,000, topping \$855,000 for the second week in April.

When Davis first joined "Rent" in the spring of 2003, there was a noticeable boost in the box office, according to producer Jeffrey Seller.

"I really didn't know who she was, but my staff said we needed to get her," he recalls. "I didn't think an 'Idol' contestant would sell tickets. But lo and behold, for her first four months, we saw a rise in sales of about 20 percent. Frenchie had an immediate impact. People wanted to see her sing 'Seasons of Love.'"

But the theatrical tentacles of "American Idol" stretch far beyond New York's Times Square.

Amy Adams, a finalist from the 2004 season, is making her theatrical debut in a touring production of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat." Jennifer Hudson, an "Idol" finalist last year, is in the upcoming film of the Broadway hit "Dreamgirls." "Rent" continues to audition "Idol" contestants. A production of "Ain't Misbehavin'" with former "Idols" is in the works. And producers of "The Color Purple" also have shown interest in contestants.

"The show is a very legitimate venue for talent," Seller said. "The whole thing may be totally insipid, but in a culture where it seems that football and basketball are our most important competitions, it's very heartening when the highest-rated show in America is a competition of singers. It's

a good thing for the culture, and I can't help but think it's a great thing for those of us who work in the world of live performance."

The road to Broadway has become so lucrative that key "American Idol" honchos are advising contestants to explore a range of opportunities. "Many of these kids come in with tunnel vision, saying they want a hit record, and I'm telling them now there are more ways to have a wonderful career," says Debra Byrd, "Idol's" vocal coach and vocal arranger, who has guided each of the show's contestants since the series started in 2001.

Byrd says she's already positioning one of this season's finalists, Katharine McPhee, as a Broadway prospect. "She's got real potential," says Byrd.

DeGarmo admits that her "Idol" past can provoke tension at times: "A lot of people in the industry don't think you can back it up. I've really enjoyed the challenge of having to prove myself. There comes a point where you have to stand on your own two feet rather than use that show as a crutch."

For Davis, being on Broadway "was always the ultimate goal."

"I was a theater major in college. My goal was not to be a pop star. I went on every audition I could, and I just saw 'American Idol' as just another audition."

Making her debut in "Rent," she says, was "an amazing experience."

"There are no words to describe how amazing it is to be part of this show. I've enjoyed my life and being on Broadway."

But don't ask her too much about "American Idol." She doesn't watch it — and she really doesn't like to look back.

"It comes up a lot. That may be how people define me, so I don't talk about it. I want them to see there's so much more to me," she said. "I've moved on."

Barry:

From page D1

This tells us that light travels faster than sound, because light goes straight down from the sky and is therefore attracted by gravity, whereas sound goes sideways and is slowed down by friction with the Earth's rotation, also known as "peristalsis," or "The Greenhouse Effect."

3. "DNA" is an abbreviation for "deoxyribonucleic acid-disestablishmentarianism," a complex string of syllables that is found inside your body in tiny little genes called "chromosomes."

Biologists often refer to DNA as "The Body's Secret Handshake," because the information encoded in your DNA determines your unique biological characteristics, such as sex, eye color, age and Social Security number.

There is surprisingly little difference between the DNA found in humans and that found in other species, such as H. Ross Perot.

This fact has led to research that could benefit mankind, most notably a series of experiments in which biologists chemically altered the DNA in fruit flies in an effort to isolate the gene that causes baldness.

The biologists reasoned that fruit flies must contain this gene, because virtually all of them (the fruit flies) (also the biologists) are bald.

This work took nine years and cost \$31 million, but the results were impressive. When a group of fruit flies with normal DNA were compared to a group with altered DNA, both groups were found to consist of little random black smears, because the only way the biologists could get them to hold still was to whack them with rolled-up copies of Scientific American.

Nevertheless, the biologists believe they're on the right track.

So those are your correct answers.

If you did poorly, you're not alone; the National Science

Foundation reports that only 25 percent of the people surveyed, or 1 in 6, passed the quiz.

And if you think that's a pathetic commentary on our national intelligence, you should see all the mail I'm going to get in which people will send me this column with the words "25 percent" and "1 in 6" circled and a snotty

note informing me that this is incorrect.

So there's no question about it: Scientific illiteracy is definitely a major problem in America. And as the saying goes: "If you're not part of the solution, you're a newspaper columnist." So I feel I've done my part. And now, if you'll excuse me, I have to shake the radio.

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