

# THE LANTERN

THE STUDENT VOICE OF OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

## Wexner program draws rising star musicians

Chad Rutan

Art-rockers Man Man will storm through the Wexner Center for the Arts on April 25th, thanks to the Next@Wex program.

"While many people go to the shows, not many of them know what the program itself is all about," said Erik Pepple, media relations coordinator for the Wexner Center.

Next@Wex is the brainchild of Charles Helm, director of performing arts at the Wexner. His idea finally took shape in 2000 through a generous endowment from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation's invitation-only "Leading Presenting Institutions" program.

Helm said the goals are to bring bands to Columbus that are on the cusp of making it big, treat them as artists and provide high-quality performance spaces.

The program offers a large array of acts in venues that have first-class sound and production. Helm said that because Next@Wex is a university organization, it is important that the shows be all-age accessible.

"Music is one of the most widely accepted and universally embraced art forms right now, particularly with young audiences," Helm said. "I have to think about who I consider the innovators."

The variety of musical acts that come through the program is immense, said Pepple, ranging from Feist to Animal Collective. Helm prides himself on the way the Wexner Center treats musicians, no matter how popular they may be.

"Next@Wex provides these musical artists an opportunity to play in the context of an arts center at Ohio State," Helm said. "We treat them as artists, not just as a band, because that's what they are, with the same care we provide theater or dance companies."

Helm said the Next@Wex idea has inspired other similar programs at art institutions around the country, such as The Andy Warhol Museum. A sharing of ideas occurs between arts centers, Helm said, and people are picking up on the values the Next@Wex series exemplifies.

The Next@Wex series strives to have excellent, professional sound and production values with their intimate performance spaces. The rooms in which the bands play are important to Helm, who wants there to be an atmosphere between a concert experience and a loft party.

While not choosing any one performance as his favorite thus far, Helm said what he likes the most is the variety that the series represents.

Tom Windish is the owner of The Windish Agency, a booking agency that represents a large gamut of musical artists such as RJD2, Ladytron, Tortoise and Boards of Canada. Windish has worked closely with Helm and is impressed with the program's selection of acts.

"They (The Wexner Center) are at the forefront of universities willing to book new artists," said Windish. "I definitely keep Columbus in mind when I'm routing tours."

To gain a wider audience and more exposure, the Next@Wex program has been moving more into the digital realm with expanded web content, Flickr pages of past acts and podcasts that discuss past and upcoming events, said Pepple.

"These new medias have allowed us to 'octopus' out and get the programs tentacles in many aspects of the media," Pepple said.

Pepple foresees the Next@Wex program continuing to grow into its own entity and build recognition for itself as it constantly keeps an eye out for the next emerging band.

"That's what Next@Wex is - it's what's next," Pepple said.