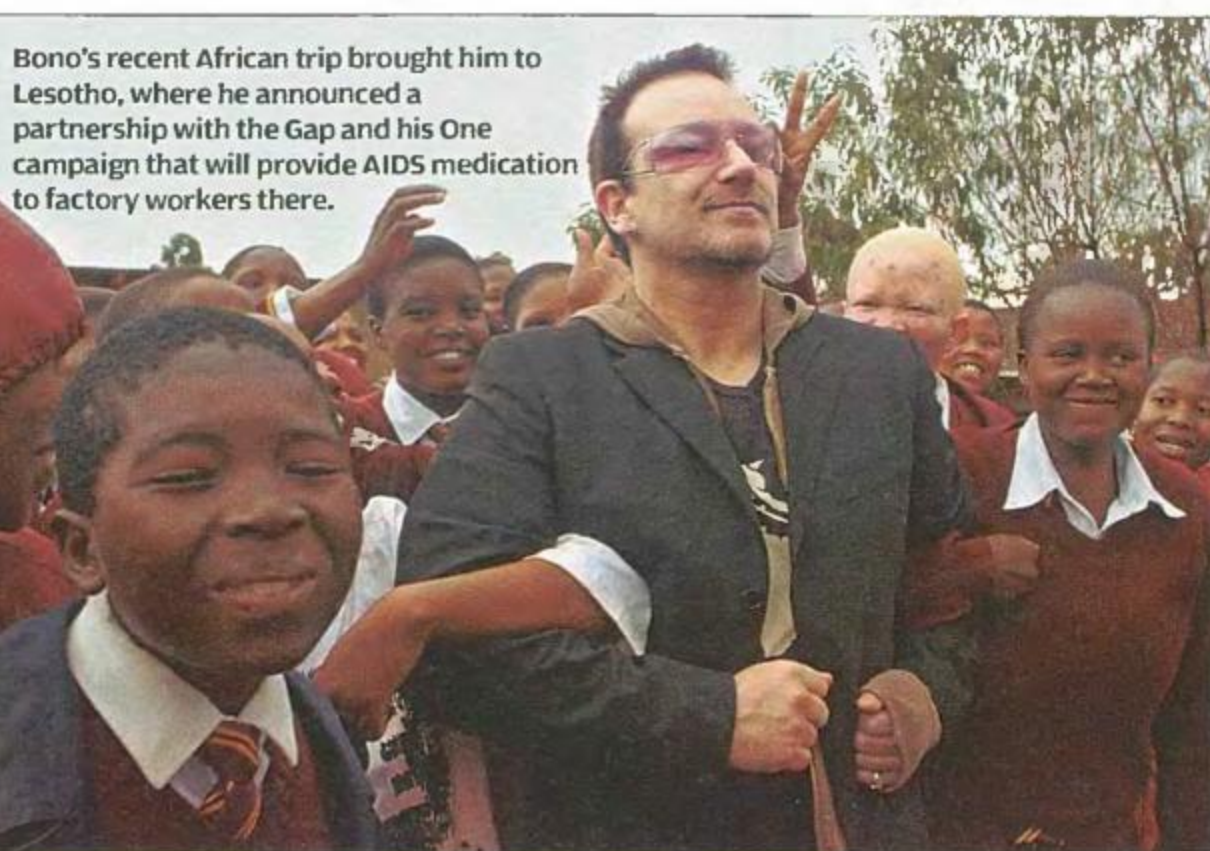


James Taylor went military for a cover of Edwin Starr's "War"; Will Ferrell did interpretive dance to "MacArthur Park"; Joel did a Cocker impression; Sting jammed on Hendrix.



Bono's recent African trip brought him to Lesotho, where he announced a partnership with the Gap and his One campaign that will provide AIDS medication to factory workers there.



Angels and Airwaves and eight ball: Drummer Willard (left) and frontman DeLonge shoot some stick in New York.



During a day off from Pearl Jam's world tour, Illinois native Eddie Vedder threw out the first pitch at a Cubs game at Wrigley Field. The little girl on his arm is his two-year-old daughter, Olivia.



I am trying to get your vote: Obama lays his hands on Tweedy, and Wilco rejoice.

Obama in Wilcoland

Continuing Illinois citizens' dominance of Random Notes (see left), **Wilco** hooked up with their senator **Barack Obama** backstage at the *Conan O'Brien* show. The band debuted a new tune, "The Thanks I Get." In other Wilco-related news, a DVD of singer **Jeff Tweedy**'s solo tour from early '06 should be out by the end of the year. Rad!

By Lauren Gitlin, Andy Greene, Lesley Savage, Evan Serpick

SMOKING SECTION

By Austin Scaggs

It's been a while since the last Smoking Section, so let's rewind to March 27th - that's when we set foot in the L.A. home studio of **Tom Petty**. On the wall was a self-portrait by **Bob Dylan**, which, Petty explains, was "my production fee" for Dylan's 1986 disc *Knocked Out Loaded*. Petty led us into his control room, where we sat behind the console and he played us tracks from his upcoming summer album, *Highway Companion*, which he made solely with **Heartbreaker Mike Campbell** ("Mike is just ridiculous," says Petty) and fellow **Wilbury Jeff Lynne**. After absorbing tunes like "Saving Grace" and the beautiful "Took a Long Time to Get Back Here," we are ready to be the first to declare *Highway* a classic in the ranks of Petty's *Full Moon Fever* and *Wildflowers*. Just wait till you hear him sing, "So if I come to your door, let me sleep on your floor/I'll give you all I have, and a little more." After that song, Petty leans back in his chair. "That's pretty good, huh?" he asks. "I dig it." Us, too. We'll see y'all and Petty down at Bonnaroo - and don't even try to sell us that bunk acid.



Petty

Fast-forward to the end of April, the first weekend of Jazz Fest. The Smoking Section jetted to New Orleans for a remarkable three days. We were twenty-five feet away from Bob Dylan (happy sixty-fifth!) while he delivered a badass set; we felt the spirit in the Gospel Tent, got funky up by the **Meters** and hung out with Big Easy legend **Allen Toussaint**, who gave us the lowdown on his to-die-for green-and-ivory Rolls-Royce, which was parked backstage. "It's a 1974-and-a-half Rolls," Toussaint said. "That car been with me since it was brand-new. It's part of the family." The festival grounds were well-packed, but without more tourist revenue the French Quarter is in trouble. If you got the means, do us all a favor: Go spend some money down there.

Then the Smoking Section hit a three-day trinity of unforgettable rock & roll parties. On May 4th, **ROLLING STONE** rang in its 1,000th issue with a perfect throwdown in Manhattan. There, the **Strokes** delivered the set of their lives and we kicked it with **Marilyn Manson**. The next night we saw one of the greatest rock shows ever: **Pearl Jam** playing rarities like "State



Flowers

of Love and Trust" and "Garden" at the small club Irving Plaza. Three hours after leaving PJ's afterparty at Pop Burger, we boarded a plane to Las Vegas. **Killers** singer **Brandon Flowers** greeted us in the high-stakes poker room at the Palms hotel (where we'd just won \$2,500 on an ace-high straight)

sporting a very sexy mustache. His band was wrapping up its second album, and we got to hear nearly all of the sick new tracks, like "Bling" and "Sam's Town." If you thought the foursome couldn't top *Hot Fuss*, you're way wrong. **Louis XIV** were also there, recording backup vocals for the Killers, and that night we all raged in the Palms' new Playboy wing with our main man, producer-songman-phenom **Butch Walker**.

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