

BVLGARI

THE CITY OBSERVED

Beat Generation

HIP-HOPPING WITH ACTOR
ADRIEN BRODY BY MARY MELTON

We are repeatedly being asked, rather politely, to put our hands in the air, to which we respond: "Woo, woo." ♪ "Put your hands in da air." ♪ "Woo, woo." ♪ The hip-hop group the Beatnuts is on-stage at the Knitting Factory in Hollywood. Like the actor Adrien Brody, who is calmly bopping to their rhythms in the audience, they are from Queens. ▶▶ They are by no means his favorite group—his choice



SURVIVOR: Brody with Emilia Fox in *The Pianist* and John Leguizamo in *Summer of Sam*

▶ of concerts tonight was between this and the Jewish American Symphony—but he appreciates their beats and likes the samples they work into their songs. He's a sampler himself, one who's always listening out for the trickle of water, the static from a TV set, the

ENCOUNTER

bursting of a popcorn kernel to record, rework, maybe even sell to a singer or producer. Earlier, over a Pilsner Urquell at the club's bar, he described his passion for hip-hop. "You just give in to the melodies of it," he said. "The lyrical content is all about urban struggle and conflicts. It's like a sad story in a movie."

Sweating in a club that is full of jumping, hopping, teeming *woo, woo*, Brody is as far as one can imagine from the life he portrays in his current film, *The Pianist*. Directed by Roman Polanski, the movie is based on the memoirs of Wladyslaw Szpilman, a classical pianist and Polish Jew who survived incomprehensible horrors in World War II. As Szpilman, Brody is numb, humiliated, devastated, resilient. At the film's start he wears a smart suit; by its end it has degenerated into rags.

Tall and wiry, Brody, who is 29, is dressed this evening in a puffy black jacket and baggy cargo pants, with a fat silver chain resting on his chest. Under thick upturned brows, his hazel eyes are perpetually loaded with an expression that can be interpreted either as extreme empathy or early-morning fatigue. He is handsome, with an

easy grin and a nose that could give Mammoth Mountain an inferiority complex.

To prepare for his role in *The Pianist*, Brody subsisted for six weeks on two boiled eggs for breakfast, a bit of chicken for lunch, and a bit of fish for dinner. "I had to diet in Paris and gain it back in Poland," he says. "That was cruel. I couldn't eat a croissant, but I could have all the borscht I could handle." During the Nazi occupation, Szpilman spent years in both hard labor and hiding. He navigated the Warsaw ghetto, deprived not only of nourishment but of any human contact. "Roman," Brody says, "wanted more than I thought I could give." The director locked him up in a

Paris hotel room with a synthesizer and the portable keyboard that accompanies Brody to every location. Brody knew how to sample beats, but he had no idea how to play Chopin. "It was initially intimidating," he says. "I don't read music, and my knowledge is very slim. The piano lessons distracted me from my hunger." During the isolation, he says, he was surprised to feel "the most calm and Zen I'd ever been."

Brody is the son of Sylvia Plachy, the longtime staff photographer for *The Village Voice*, and Elliot Brody, a schoolteacher. His parents, he says, were "wonderfully sensitive. I was exposed to so much." Sensitivity, however, is frowned upon in boys. Trying to fit in with the kids in his neighborhood, he became a chameleon and as a result, an actor. "The local high school would have been a disaster for me," he says. He enrolled in the LaGuardia High School of Music & Arts and Performing Arts in Manhattan—the *Fame* school. "It was the perfect outlet," he says. "I was free."

In previous films Brody has played variations of the gangly good-natured outsider: a teenage con artist who helps kids out of jams in *King of the Hill*, a bisexual punk rocker living among paranoid disco

L.A. MOMENT



DOES MY ASS LOOK BIG IN THIS? Outside R.M. Schindler's Buck House, a donkey awaits his cameo in an S&M dungeon scene for the TV series *Fastlane*. Photographed by Ted Soqui

queens in *Summer of Sam*, a union organizer who fights for Justice for Janitors in *Bread and Roses*. "I grew up in front of the camera," Brody says. One of his mother's fortes as a photographer is people; her son has been one of her favorite subjects. "It's a safe place. I wasn't encouraged to act up a storm, but to remain subtle."

At the Knitting Factory the dance floor is pulsating. Brody runs into a friend, the actor Dash Mihok, whom he met on the set of *The Thin Red Line*. They high-five. Brody says that while the two were on location in the Solomon Islands, they'd break-dance and rap between takes. At the moment Mihok is putting his hands in the air all over the place, so Brody gives him some room. He removes his jacket, says he's fighting off a headache and is thirsty as all get-out. He slowly works his way into an empty space near the wall, where he can stand alone to groove.

The thumping beats don't seem conducive to becoming lost in one's thoughts. But Brody's eyes are shut, his head is bowed, and his body is quietly rocking side to side. "It's like going into a trance," he says. "I get into a clear meditative zone."

There are long portions of *The Pianist* in which Brody is the only actor on-screen. His character—starving, freezing, merely existing—finds his sole comfort in the sounds of his piano, which play only in his head. Each night after filming, Brody would retreat to his room at the Warsaw Marriott. Away from friends and family, scrubbed clean of the mud and the filth of the re-created ghetto, he would close his eyes and concentrate on the beats he could coax out of his synthesizer.

Outside after the concert, he's left the zone. Hollywood Boulevard has been closed to traffic. A huge grid of blazing white stage lights towers over the middle of the street, where the rapper Ja Rule is filming a video full of jumping, hopping, teeming *woo*, *woo* girls in tight tops and hot pants. Brody stops to watch a dance sequence. "Yeah, I'm a white guy named Adrien who likes to make beats," he says. "I taught myself that I don't have to be self-conscious about it."

L.A.

BUZZCUTS

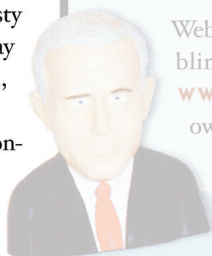
A LITTLE OFF THE TOP—AND BOTTOM—FOR A BETTER JANUARY

Designated driving for \$35 round-trip? A **LIMO SERVICE** has struck a deal with **THE SCENE**, the nouveau dive in Glendale brought to you by the creators of the Short Stop, to shuttle east-of-Western Avenue denizens to and from the bar. Call 323-573-9795 to arrange for a pick-me-up—uh, make that a pickup.

Love those German soaps but don't want to mess with a satellite dish? We hear you. Now the **GOETHE INSTITUT** in Los Angeles is offering anyone who walks into the lobby a daily helping of the all-Deutsch station **GERMAN TV**. The big hit? Recaps of weekend soccer games Mondays at noon.



Web site of the month: For \$12.95, you can buy doggy chew toys resembling George W., Hillary Clinton, and Osama bin Laden at L.A.-based **WWW.POLITICALPETTOYS.COM**. Small dogs just love Bin Laden, says co-owner Aaron Bush, thanks to his white outfit and short neck. Department of Homeland Security, take note.

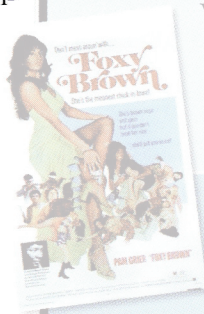


The City of West Hollywood tells us that its new **FOG FOUNTAIN** in the Westmount-West Knoll traffic circle has already attracted the interest of a major motion picture director, who's using it in a film. Perhaps the plot involves a five-car pileup due to poor visibility.

The **NEW YORK POST**, with its sassy Page Six column, will begin **SAME-DAY DELIVERY** this month in L.A. Funny how we have to rely on an East Coast daily to get West Coast gossip.



THA ROW RECORDS appears to be promoting a gangsta's take on the joys of Metamucil with a **BILLBOARD** on Wilshire Boulevard featuring a cartoon of rapper Crooked I sitting on a toilet proclaiming, "I'm the shit." (Yes, they spell out the s word.) Clear Channel, which owns the board, is going to court in February to try to get rid of the image.



What to do when a year of box office flops has lost you big money? Start selling a different kind of dud. **MGM** is releasing a line of apparel based on its '70s **SOUL CINEMA** films, like *Cooley High* and *Foxy Brown*. If the clothes take off, the studio will mine its sci-fi archives next. Thank goodness—*Star Trek* convention couture could use a real kick in the pants.

Penile implants. Pec implants. Now, from Beverly Hills plastic surgeon Nikolas Chugay, **BICEPS IMPLANTS** to help you "climb the corporate ladder." Just don't let the VP of finance lure your sorry ass down to the company gym, or the jig is up.

Some cities adapt abandoned churches. We turn to crown jewels of our dearly departed rail system. The **CENTER THEATER GROUP** has moved its offshoot productions, including this month's *Taper Too*, into the **IVY SUBSTATION**, a Culver City switching station built in 1902 to give juice to the Pacific Railway cars.

