

(THE SHORT LIST)

STARTER

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Jersey City. "As you learn and develop, you approach things differently."

The first offering by an independent Ohio publisher named 1913 Press, *Seismosis* reflects Keene's collaboration with a friend, Brooklyn-based visual artist Christopher Stackhouse. In the 100-page work, Keene riffs on abstract themes such as linearity, form, and chaos—and even the idea of abstraction itself—in half-poetic, half-philosophic speculations spurred by Stackhouse's fevered scribbles. "I am behind an oscillating screen, the scene of an act, envisioning beauty and its planar articulation," Keene writes. "I am in your chamber cinema."

Last October, the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation named Keene one of ten American writers with exceptional talent, joining a roster of past awardees that includes August Wilson and Tony Kushner. Keene's style of free-associating wordplay has prompted the label "experimental," a description he challenges. "Every writer facing a blank page is experimental."

Growing up in St. Louis, Keene's family placed a high value on education. After high school, the bookish young man headed off to Harvard. While working odd jobs after graduation, he joined the burgeoning Dark Room Collective, a group of emerging young black poets that included Thomas Sayers Ellis and Kevin Young. "I was always a shy person," he says, "but with the collective, I gained more confidence." And as for the nickname John-John? He quietly chuckles. "Nobody has called me that since junior high." ■

Self-help with Scarlett; a South Side soprano gets Bach; puppets, squid, and other items for May

» **FRANKLY, MY DEAR:** While you're trying to enjoy your risotto, the guy at the adjacent table is doing business on his cell phone. What to do? Ask **Lisa Bertagnoli**, who crafted a new self-help manual around *Gone with the Wind's* **Scarlett O'Hara**. "She'd turn to the yakker, widen those green eyes, and say, 'Oh, dear, you sound so lonely, doing business during dinner. Why don't you keep me company?'" says Bertagnoli, author of *Scarlett Rules: When Life Gives You Green Velvet Curtains, Make a Green Velvet Dress* (Villard Trade Paperback; \$12.95). "The guy wouldn't be able to resist and Scarlett would have a double victory: a quiet dinner and another **man for her harem.**"

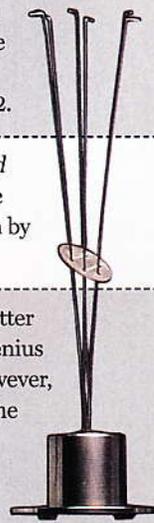
» **WHAT'S IN A NAME?** "It's a nod to historic Chicago," says Shirley Novak, co-owner of **Wolfbait & B-girls**, a new **Logan Square** apparel and craft store (3131 W. Logan Blvd.; 312-698-8685) named after a term from a 1950 guidebook called *Chicago Confidential*. In fifties speak, wolfbait means girls who move to the city looking for success, and B-girls are what they turn into—namely, barflies paid to con men inside taverns.



» **THIS DOESN'T HAPPEN AT STATE SCHOOL:** Just after sunset on May 12th, Manifest, a clamorous campus-wide sendoff for **Columbia College** seniors, climaxes with . . . a keg party? **Campus streaking?** Try instead a parade of costumed students led by a 20-foot puppet. The parade runs from the South Loop campus to Grant Park, where students will smash Mexican cascarones—or hand-painted eggshells filled with confetti. For more info, call 312-344-6642.

» **WHAT'S BETTER THAN A THEATRE WITH A BAR?** Theatre with a bar and an **interactive crack-the-code device**. Starting May 13th, audiences help solve the mystery in the House Theatre's new show, *The Boy Detective Fails*, written by Chicago's **Joe Meno**, at The Viaduct (3111 N. Western Ave.; 773-296-6024).

» **THANK GOOGLINESS:** When diners sample **Alinea's** take on peanut butter and jelly—served in a contraption called the "Squid"—they marvel at the genius of chef **Grant Achatz**, who is up for a James Beard Award this month. However, a lesser-known name also deserves appreciation: that of **Martin Kastner**, the Czech-born designer who helped fashion the four-star spot's odd utensils, soon available via his company, **Crucial Detail** (www.crucialdetail.com). Kastner connected with Achatz through **Google** in 2003: "Grant typed the word 'designer,' called 30 people, and only heard back from me."



» The Squid

» **BACH TO THE FUTURE:** "You know, they were born the same year—1685," says coloratura soprano **Elizabeth Norman**, of Bach and Handel, whose arias she will perform May 12th as part of the **Bach Week Festival** at the Music Institute of Chicago (800-595-4849 or bachweek.org). The encyclopedic knowledge stems from the 30-something's impressive vocal career, which has taken her around the world and back to Chicago's South Side, where she grew up and now lives. "I started singing in church when I was five."



» Norman