

A SEMI-BRIEF HISTORY OF **UNPLUGGED**

Inspired by the success of Paul McComas' anti-teen-suicide program Rock Against Depression (1995–99), and published in 2002 (by John Daniel & Co., Santa Barbara/McKinleyville, CA), *Unplugged* went on to become the most critically acclaimed small-press novel of the year. It's also one of the most widely praised novels of this new century; no other book has garnered simultaneous raves from *ROCKRGR* Magazine, *Out in the Mountains* (Vermont's LGBTQ weekly), *The Lakota Journal* (newspaper of the Lakota Sioux), and *Christian Century*, which named it one of the six best novels of '02, alongside Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* and Ian McEwan's *Atonement*. *Unplugged* earned Book of the Month and Critic's Pick designations from publications nationwide; in addition, author Joyce Carol Oates calls the novel "very compelling," actor/activist Ed Asner praises its "excellent descriptive writing," and then-Congressman Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) introduced Paul thusly at a Providence bookstore event: "His novel fulfills a vital mission in a vivid, unique, creative, effective fashion."

Throughout the book's 20-month, 20-state, 50-city, 80-stop tour, Paul affiliated with various mental-health, anti-sexual-violence, LGBTQ-rights, and environmental organizations; the coast-to-coast trip was thus less a commercial or even a professional enterprise than a ministry—a mission. (It was also at this time that Paul began working with the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network [RAINN], on whose National Leadership Council and Speakers Bureau he now serves.) Moreover, each tour event was less an author reading than a combined theatrical performance and mini-rock-concert; indeed, during the show's 2003 run at the city's

Chopin Theater, "Unplugged—Live" earned a coveted Critic's Choice designation in Theater and Performance from the *Chicago Reader*, which wrote: "An original, passionate, witty work that confronts the conundrums of transformation; an earnest, principled piece that bridges the gap between stripped-down rock and theatrical storytelling."

During the 2002–04 tour, Paul worked with 30 different female vocalists nationwide (the singer *du jour* depending on both availability and geography), thanks to which the show's songs kept changing; no two performances were alike.

In late 2013, he decided to revisit and revise the show for a new series of benefit performances during the book's 12th-anniversary year—working, now, with one gifted lead vocalist. Paul is honored to partner with Chicago singer-songwriter and keyboardist **Maya Kuper**. Friends since 2008, they have collaborated on other projects at the nexus of the arts and social outreach, including Paul's 2010 RAINN benefit 2-CD set, *Amateur*; his 2013–14 Requiem for Richard (LaValliere)/Rover-Rescue concerts to help homeless pets; and his *No-Budget Theatre* indie-film series, benefiting blood-donation services.

Joining the duo tonight are D.C. musicians **Jeff "Wag" Wagner**, drummer for ROADDOG and a (long ago!) college classmate of Paul's, and **Matt Connolly**, guitarist for Jet Jaguar and the host of Fourth Sundays at The Black Squirrel.

"When *Unplugged* was published," Paul reflects, "I thought, 'If I get hit by a bus or something, at least this book is out there.' I feel the same way today. Some stories get published, you tour for them, and then you move on ... but *others*, like Dayna's, pull you back in. My deep thanks to Maya; to Matt and Wag; to Colin and Tree House Lounge; to Bernie and Craig; and to everyone here today for making the 'return trip' with me."

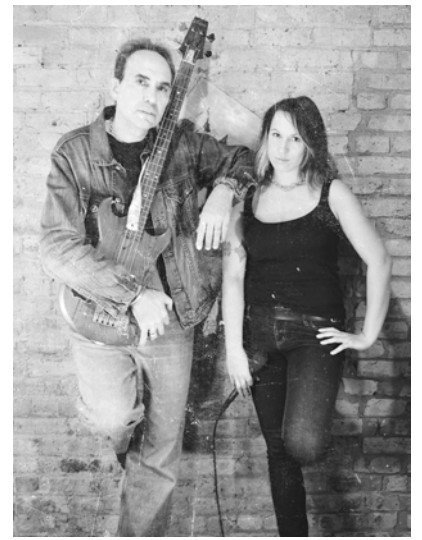
Tonight's show is dedicated to Tori Amos, Scott Berkowitz, Chelsea Bowers, Meg Biallas, Christina Ricci, and all the other heroes at RAINN.

Pre-show songs written and performed by RAINN co-founder Tori Amos

"Nature is in everything, if you look: the shoulder of the mountain, the curve of a wave, the screaming floods ... I found myself screaming at Nature over the past few years. I am done; I am just done. No scream came back. Just: 'You are only beginning.'" - Tori

UNPLUGGED

*Scenes & songs from the
2002 novel by Paul McComas,
performed by the author & Maya Kuper*



“Fireproof Storage” ♪

The opening song reflects 27-year-old protagonist Dayna Clay’s mindset at the beginning of the novel, when—afflicted by a deep depression—she sees nothing in which to believe, no signs of hope.

“For Julia”

*Paul’s essay (about one of the main inspirations for Unplugged) aired on public radio, then was published in the Pulitzer-Prize-nominated anthology *The Survivors Project: Telling the Truth About Life After Sexual Abuse* (2012, Philadelphia Weekly Press).*

“Give Me Oblivion” ♪

A song-as-suicide-note; not recognized as such by Dayna’s sales-focused reps, it becomes a hit.

“Last Encore”

The novel’s first scene documents the last night of Dayna’s 7-month North American tour.

“Virtual Virtue” ♪* (Music by Jim Schettl & Paul; lyrics by Paul)

Dayna unflinchingly recounts both her childhood rape and her determination to survive it.

Plummeting post-tour, Dayna goes home to Chicago and attempts suicide—but Nature seemingly steps in to spare her. Unsure whether her life is worth living, she forfeits her career, hits the road, winds up in the South Dakota Badlands, and checks into a cheap motel:

“Descent/Ascent” & “The Answering Wind”

“Hand Over Hand” ♪

A high point of the original tour was performing this one on NPR’s “Tavis Smiley Show.”

Dayna soon comes to know not just the land, but also the local people—both for better ...

“Rattlesnake Road”

... and for worse—though even negative experiences can lead to learning and growth:

“Little Church” ♪

“First Storm”

Dayna’s flashback sets up the next song—in which she realizes how far she’s come, how much she’s healed and ‘found’ herself since the day she first drove into South Dakota:

“Second Storm” ♪* (Music & lyrics by Maya & Paul)

“Symmetry”

Near the novel’s end, Dayna barely emerges from a harrowing near-death wilderness ordeal—and, in the process, from the last vestiges of her depression—with new insights and understandings about herself, others, and the world ... all of which she expresses in a new song:

“Carried Away” ♪* (Music & lyrics by Maya)

**A brief talkback with Paul, Maya, and
Chelsea Bowers of RAINN follows the performance.**

Book: \$10 (\$5 off retail) • CD: \$7 • T-shirt: \$15
Any 2 items, take \$2 off; any 3, take \$3 off.

**Book/CD/T-shirt sales benefit the
Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network.
www.rainn.org • 800-656-HOPE**

**<http://daynaclay.bandcamp.com>
www.paulmccomas.com • www.mayakuper.com**

Songs by Paul, unless * otherwise noted

