

listen up

Hot Coldplay

Summer music releases don't

get much bigger – or more highly anticipated – than **Coldplay's** *X&Y*, the band's first studio album in three years. Out June 7, the CD is filled with big, anthemic songs that are a step above those on the band's best-selling last studio album, *A Rush of Blood to the Head*. In *X&Y's* press notes, singer Chris Martin explains that the album's 13 songs – including “What If,” “Speed of Sound,” and “Swallowed in the Sea” – probe the unanswered questions of life. We expect the band's exploration to be on constant rotation all summer long. – *Martin Lieberman*

art scene

Take Me Out to the Museum

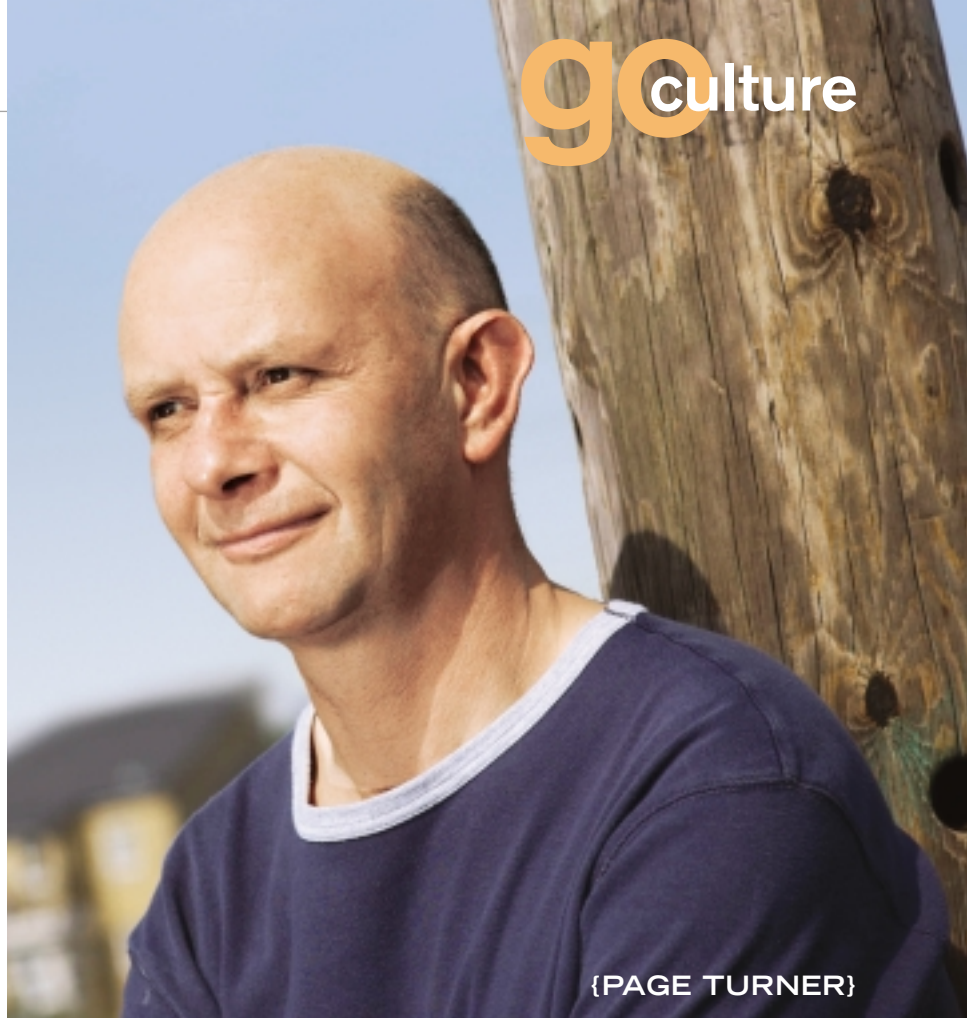
If you're like many baseball fans, you think anything that has to do with America's favorite pastime is art. This month, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston continues to back up that claim. **Baseball as America**, on display through August 14, features more than 500 artifacts from the National Baseball Hall of Fame's permanent collection in Cooperstown, N.Y., and is a must-see exhibit for fans of the sport.

Included in the collection are vintage baseball cards, a letter from John F. Kennedy to Jackie Robinson regarding civil rights, the eyeglasses of famed Chicago Cubs announcer Harry Caray, and the original manuscript of “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.” There's also a special gallery of local and regional baseball memorabilia that encompasses everything from Houston's Little League to major league baseball teams.

If you can't make it all the way to Cooperstown (or if Minute Maid Park is sold out), consider this a great way to get your baseball fix. – *M.L.*



STEPHEN HYDE (HORNBY)



{PAGE TURNER}

Getting Down with Nick Hornby

HE'S PUT OUT EIGHT BOOKS IN THE PAST 11 YEARS. OF THE EIGHT, THREE have been turned into major motion pictures. One book, the memoir *Fever Pitch*, has even been adapted twice. Today, **Nick Hornby**, whose list of best-selling books includes *How to Be Good*, *High Fidelity*, and *About a Boy*, may seem prolific, but there was a time when he wasn't so sure of himself.

“There were some periods in my career where I didn't know what I was going to do,” says the author. “I felt sorry for myself, and I feel sorry for people who feel that they have some kind of artistic sense and no way to express it.”

Upon first inspection, Hornby's fourth novel appears to be the gloomy articulation of that sorrow. *A Long Way Down* begins with four despondent characters coincidentally meeting on the rooftop of a London apartment building one fateful night. But the tale quickly turns from downtrodden to darkly comic, as Hornby probes society's fascination with other people's pain.

In typical Hornby fashion, the book mixes endearing but flawed characters with hilarious yet heartfelt dilemmas. Although that may seem formulaic, Hornby's unique voice consistently echoes to universal acclaim, generating a fandom that rivals that of another London great, Charles Dickens, with whom Hornby is frequently compared. ▶

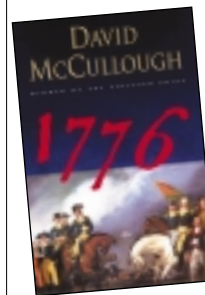
“When people talk about dark comedies, I often wonder if the books have soul,” Hornby says. “It’s very important to me that books have some sort of soul.”

The soul of *A Long Way Down* is the author himself — expressed through aspects of various characters. JJ, a rock musician, is saddened by his artistic struggles. Martin, a former TV morning show host disgraced by scandal, embodies the “very minor form of celebrity” that Hornby has encountered as an author. Jess, an outrageous teenage girl, “is something in my psyche that always wants to speak without thinking.” But the fourth main character, Maureen, might be the closest to Hornby’s heart. Exhausted by caring for her disabled son, she finds hope in this, the unlikeliest of support groups. “Maureen is the emotional center of the book,” says Hornby, “because nothing that happened to her is her fault.”

In *A Long Way Down*, Hornby pushes his fiction to the edge while expressing a larger message of community and hope. “I don’t think the book itself is particularly down,” he says. “I wanted to see if I could take someone from a low point in their life and lead them somewhat toward the light.”

— John Patrick Pullen

Clear Some Room



You should also make time this month for David McCullough’s **1776**, an account of the Revolutionary War drawn from a boatload of correspondence and more than 50 historic

diaries. McCullough makes his signature mark on revolutionary America, bringing you to the period with his vivid writing.

— M.L.