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THE BEST MAGAZINE YOU EVER HEARD

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Senior Book Critic: ANDREW LEAHEY

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CULTURE SHOCK 6

Shivaree gives Nikki Six some foreplay; a man makes Iron Maiden sound good in the key of whoopee; Band Of Annuals: timing's most put-upon victim; and where the Coathangers go to get Criminal.

QUICK FIX 8

Superchunk, Petra Haden and others discuss the complexity of their *Guilt*. Also, Frank Black rides the snake; David Yow invites us to the party in his pants; *Manda Bala* director Jason Kohn gives us some tropicalia love; the Honorary Title provides the privilege of the meaning behind their songs; and more... (much, actually)

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If they can make it here, they can make it anywhere. And by anywhere, we mean here: the A-Sides, Bat For Lashes, Ferraby Lionheart, Gliss, Jamie T, Just Jack, No Age, Tha Pumpsta, Turzi, Nicole Willis, You Say Party! We Say Die!

RILO KILEY 30

Don't call it a come-*Black*. Jenny Lewis and Blake Sennett talk to Rebecca Raber—and each other—about why reconvening for their latest collective effort was both imperative and second nature, despite the allure of individual successes on the side.

IRON & WINE 34

The Good Shepherd is Sam Beam's most sophisticated and challenging record yet, which is precisely why it might confound his loyal indie-folk following. But as Lora Kolodny discovers, the bearded songsmith could not be less ambivalent toward anything but the music itself.

OAKLEY HALL 36

Even as the members of Oakley Hall sat down for this interview, they were busy auditioning for a new drummer so they could tour behind *I'll Follow You*. Nothing new for these psych-country-folk rockers, who've endured more revolving-door antics and mundane hardships than most political administrations. Doug Mosurock gets all the gory details.

AESOP ROCK 40

In the four years since *Bazooka Tooth*, Definitive Jux's Robin to El-P's Batman turned 30, got married, moved to Cali and became buds with John Darnielle. He and Kevin Kampwirth clearly had a lot of catching up to do.

ON THE COVER: NICOLE ATKINS 44

What's more endearing than crafting a full-bodied, sweeping and heart-on-sleeve pop record that merges timeless Brill-ness with contemporary bohemia? Not much, when the woman behind the instant classic, *Neptune City*, is a too-likeable-for-words Jersey Girl who's more aware of where she's from than wherever her career might take her. Maggie Serota met up with Chris Isaak's tourmate for a tour through her life—and many job terminations.

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Nicole Atkins, Office, Ani DiFranco, Mike Errico, Eulogies, Paul Spencer & The Maxines, Robbers On High Street, The TrolleyVox, The Kin, White Light Riot, Three Day Threshold, The Primidonnatives, Stephanie's ID, The Cruxshadows, Laurie Lawson, Adrian Bourgeois, An American Chinese, Two Sheds

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VHS are Beta than ever (ditto for the Goodnight Loving, Marisa Nadler and the rest of their *Best New Music* mates). Also reviewed are new albums by Sharon Jones, Rogue Wave, Caribou and Michael Fakesch, among roughly half-a-century more, in addition to reissues from Prefab Sprout and Young Marble Giants, the long-overdue definitive DVD of *GG Allin: Hated* and Glen E. Friedman's photo homage to Fugazi.

BEST SONG TITLES OF THE MONTH

- 1 Trencher—"Two Semi's Don't Make A Hard-On" (Southern)
- 2 Bleach03—"The Head That Controls Both Right And Left Sides Eats Meat And Slobbers Even Today" (Australian Cattle God)
- 3 The Holloways—"Your Fragrance Was Worn By An Ex Of Mine" (TVT)
- 4 The Coathangers—"Nestle In My Boobies" (Rob's House)
- 5 Bang Lime—"The Death Of Death" (Last Gang)

Trencher: Not exactly "Hard" up for good song titles!



WHAT THE F*#@? FACTOR

SCENE REPORT ATLANTA, GEORGIA

ACCORDING TO THE COATHANGERS' STEPHANIE LUKE

THE BEST PLACE TO SEE A BAND IS:

Our favorite places in the dirty dirtay to see bands are, in no particular order, the Earl, Lenny's, Drunken Unicorn at MJQ.

THE BEST PLACE TO BUY RECORDS IS:

Criminal Records is amazing, as well as Full Moon Records. Also, Robshouserecords.com and Dieslaughterhausrecords.com are great local labels with lots of great 7-inches and 12-inches to buy online.

THE BEST LOCAL BAND WE'VE NEVER HEARD OF IS:

There's so fuckin' many! Chopper, Sealions, Stonerider, N.E.C., Frantic, Thee Crucials, the Carbonas, Beat Beat Beat, Variac... The Atlanta music scene is one of the best in the known universe—get into it.

The Coathangers' self-titled, femme-punk pastiche is out now on Rob's House.

HOMAGE IS WHERE THE HEART IS

For their fourth LP, *Tainted Love: Mating Calls And Fight Songs* (Zoë), NYC-based electro-pop outfit Shivaree decided that nobody says "I love you" better than Nikki Sixx. Well, maybe Michael Jackson. Both are represented on this collection of covers that the band felt summed up love "in all its crazy disguises."

Anchored by sexy chanteuse Ambrosia Parsley, the band also takes on R. Kelly and Gary Glitter, both of whom, last we checked, are alleged or convicted sex offenders. Parsley, for her part, remarks on their website, "Fact is, I got knocked up, and there's something about having regular occasions to slip into a paper gown that makes a girl feel extra naughty... and who better to play doctor with than Ike Turner, Gary Glitter and David Allen Coe??" KEVIN KAMPWIRTH



Given the number of new indie bands that seem to crop up everyday, name duplication is inevitable. Just ask Utah's Band Of Annuals, who've recently found themselves in the unfortunate position of sharing a moniker with not just one, but two fairly high-profile acts: North Carolina's Annuals and Seattle's Band Of Horses. The story begins about two years ago when BOA was still the Annuals. The other Annuals were made privy of the situation, and the two bands made an agreement by which whomever got signed first would change their name. NC's Annuals prevailed, and BOA acquiesced. Says BOA frontman Trevor Hadley: "We came up with a few ideas: the Annual Band, the Perinals, the Bandannuals, but finally decided on Band Of Annuals. Then, of course, Band Of Horses blew up." Call us crazy, but "Goddamn The Annuals" seems a lot catchier. Just food for thought. KK



THE COATHANGERS



MPEG'D FOR SUCCESS

Though long underappreciated, manualism—the art of procuring notes from one's hands by rhythmically squeezing air through them—has been waiting some time to hit its stride as a respectable musical expression. And who better to lead the effort than Iron Maiden? While the band themselves are presumably clueless to the technique, that didn't stop one Stradivarius of finger-wringing from reinventing the heavy metal gods' "The Trooper," the way he knows best for the YouTube masses. The 47-year-old gun-shop owner from Troy, Michigan—known as "gunecologist" on his MySpace page—has made quite a name for himself virally, having also replicated the *Super Mario Bros.* and *Benny Hill* theme songs, simultaneously proving his range and demonstrating how a gun-shop owner in the fifth-safest city in America fills his spare time. KK



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World Radio History

The Year of The Snake

Black Francis' Chinese Astrology

Interview By Kory Grow

ON APRIL 6, 1965, Charles Michael Kittridge Thompson IV—Pixies' vocalist/guitarist Black Francis and solo artist Frank Black—was born. Upon discovering the legacy of Dutch musician/painter/junky Herman Brood, he felt inspired to write an excellent album, *Bluefinger* (Cooking Vinyl), about him that, with its screechy vocals, catchy hooks and raw guitar, is his best solo effort since *Frank Black*. On a phone call from his Paris hotel while vacationing with his family, Black Francis discussed Brood, along with some other astral influences.

You've said Herman Brood turned you back into Black Francis.

It's one thing to say that "I will don myself Black Francis again." It's another thing to begin some sort of transformation literally... With the Herman Brood thing, I felt like at least at the that that suddenly something was happening... It's not like you sit around and have all this artistic vision when you are born in the year 1965, the year of the snake.

Oh?

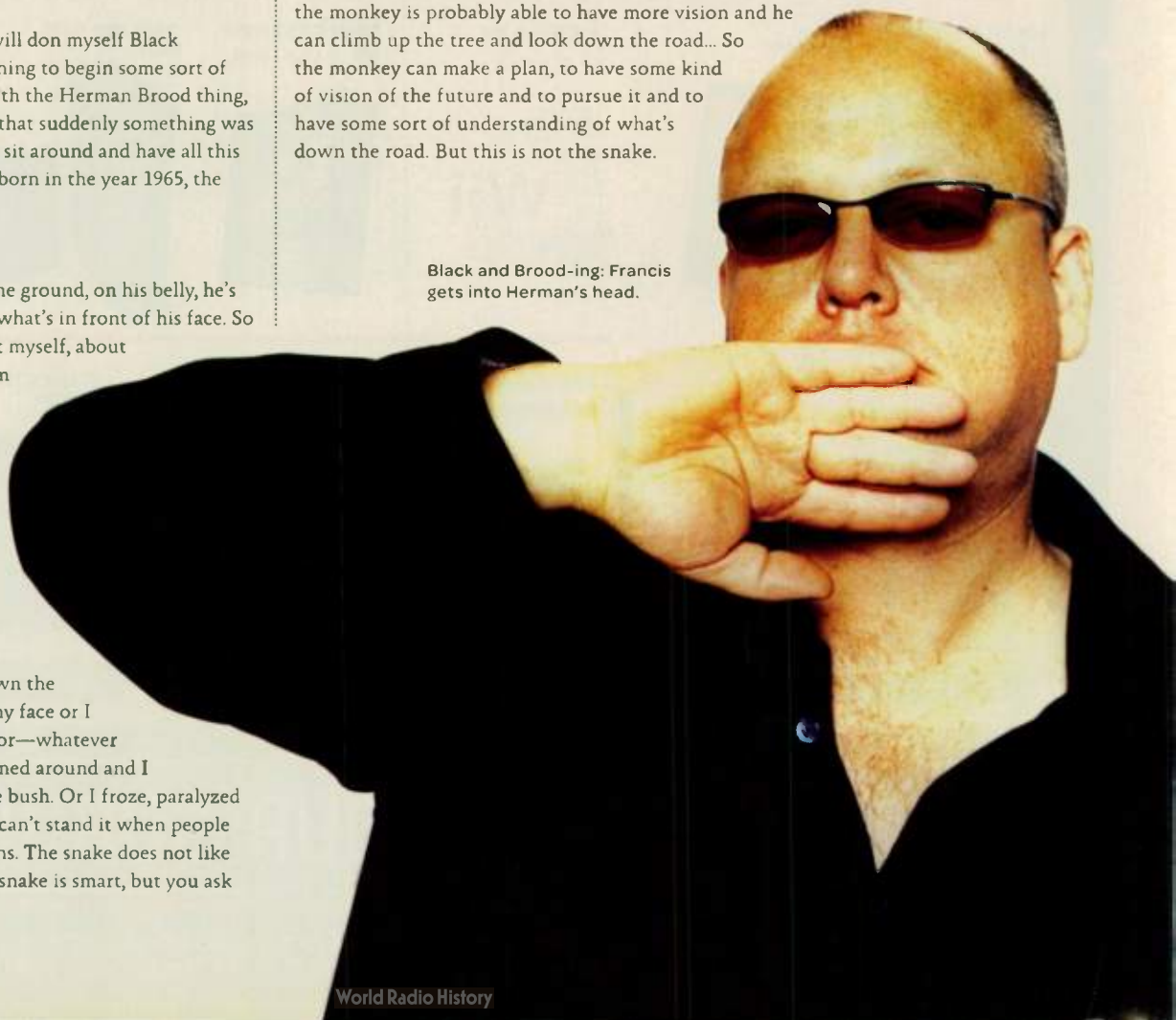
The snake feels his way on the ground, on his belly, he's instinctual. He can only see what's in front of his face. So when I discovered this about myself, about five years ago... I realized I am the way that I am because I was born in the year of the snake. And so I chock it all up to that now, and I don't feel bad about saying that to the journalist. So in the response to his question, "Why did you do that?" now I can say, "I have no idea why I did that. I'm a snake!" I was cruising on down the path and a shadow crossed my face or I heard a sound—I felt a tremor—whatever it is that snakes do, and I turned around and I bit. Or I scurried off into the bush. Or I froze, paralyzed in the middle of the path... I can't stand it when people ask me hypothetical questions. The snake does not like hypothetical questions. The snake is smart, but you ask

him a hypothetical... "What is your dream band, Frank?" "Name one artist, dead or alive, that you would have loved to collaborate with." When I get asked a question like that, it just drives me insane. I think it's just because my little snake brain can't deal with it. I just go, "What?!" I just can't deal with that kind of abstraction... It actually involves a lot of analytical thought, and it's just not the way that I am.

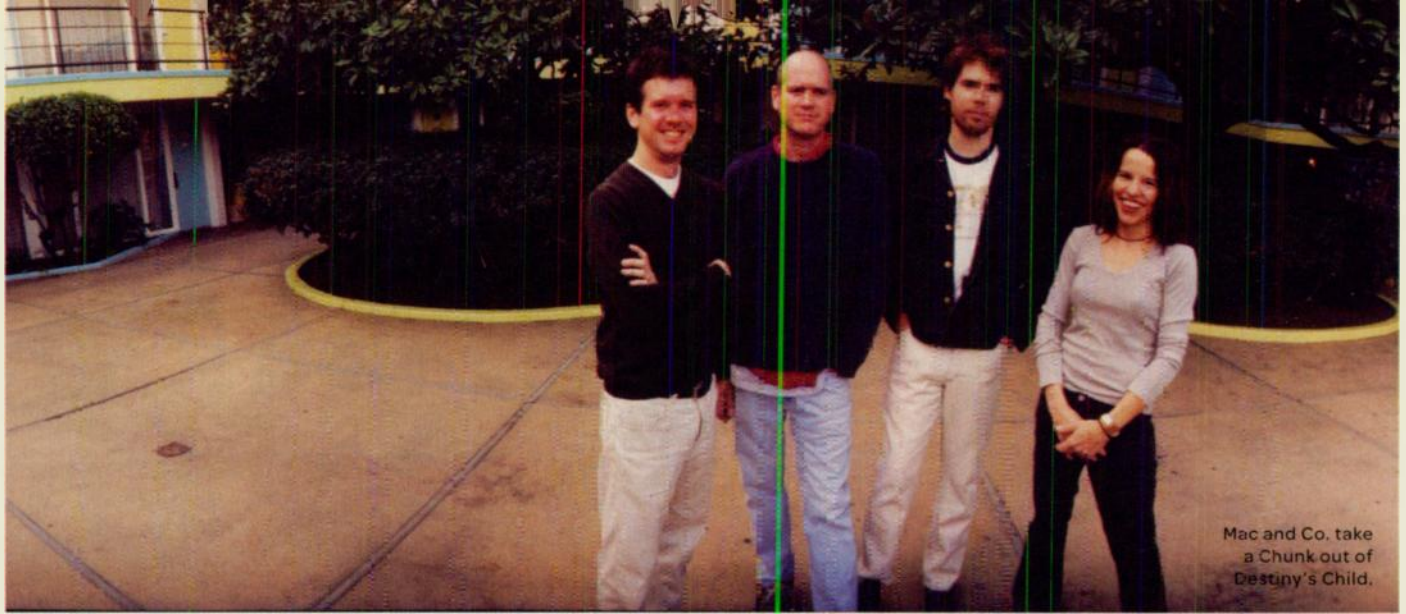
I was born in the year of the monkey.

I forget what all the attributes of the monkey even are, but I'll just be an armchair stargazer here and say that the monkey is probably able to have more vision and he can climb up the tree and look down the road... So the monkey can make a plan, to have some kind of vision of the future and to pursue it and to have some sort of understanding of what's down the road. But this is not the snake.

Black and Brood-ing: Francis gets into Herman's head.



"I can't stand it when people ask me hypothetical questions. The snake does not like hypothetical questions."



Mac and Co. take a Chunk out of Destiny's Child.

Pleasure Principle

Superchunk, Mike Watt And Others Exorcise Their Guilt On Covers Comp

By Rebecca Raber

EVERYONE LOVES A GOOD COVER. They allow you to revisit your favorite tracks in a whole new way or give you license to enjoy a song you never could before. In that spirit, Engine Room has released the *Guilt By Association* compilation, which finds indie rock royalty like Bonnie "Prince" Billy and Jim O'Rourke taking on the works of Mariah Carey and the Spice Girls. And the results range from the surprising (who knew Goat could make Fall Out Boy sound so fresh?) to the sublime (Casey Shea's quiet, folky take on "Chop Suey"). Despite what the album's title insinuates, almost none of the performers we spoke with—from Mac McCaughan of Superchunk to Petra Haden, whose a cappella rendition of "Don't Stop Believin'" will totally erase your memories of that *Sopranos* finale—said they felt bad about liking these supposedly cheesy songs. Only Mike Watt admits to feeling otherwise. "We all want to be free to like whatever the fuck we want," he says. "But I'm guilty of feeling guilty." So just what *did* get these well-respected musicians to take on some of radio's biggest hits in the name of guilty pleasures?

PETRA HADEN: "DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'" (JOURNEY)

Why this song?

I used to do impressions of Steve Perry a long time ago. I kind of do impressions of people, and he was one that used to make people crack up.

How did you make it your own?

You know how you play with little babies? That's how I did [the guitar lick]. I started out singing and then sped up and ran my finger over my lips.

MARK MULCAHY: "FROM THIS MOMENT ON" (SHANIA TWAIN)

Why this song?

I can really get right into Shania or someone like Celine Dion, Christina Aguilera, because they have a lot of talent... And I think I probably listen to the radio more than records.

How did you make it your own?

We did [the song] two different ways. The one they used is kind of an acoustic version, and we did another version that's more of a rock version. I like that one too, but I think it was maybe just too much like the original.

SUPERCHUNK: "SAY MY NAME" (DESTINY'S CHILD)

Why this song?

Mac McCaughan: I really like the original and I really like Destiny's Child... It seemed like a good place to go [for a cover] and not a song that's already a rock song, because what's the point in that?

How did you make it your own?

We couldn't play it like it existed already if we wanted to, so it was just,

"Can we get close to it? Can we get the chords right? And the melodies?" And the hardest part is obviously that those girls can sing and I can't.

GOAT: "SUGAR, WE'RE GOING DOWN" (FALL OUT BOY)

Why this song?

Originally I had covered Shania Twain's "Still The One," but then the producers approached me to take a listen to "Sugar, We're Going Down." They wanted something upbeat with my little Goat twist.

How did you make it your own?

I heard the arrangement immediately upon hearing the song: "[It should] have a fast Aphex Twin-like snare thing and acoustic guitar and bass"... I knew I wanted to indulge in the lyric and kept things simple, music-wise... It's a Goat thang.

MIKE WATT: "BURNIN' FOR YOU" (BLUE OYSTER CULT)

Why this song?

I didn't pick it. It was given to me by Jimbo Dunbar, who was involved with getting the people together. He was an old buddy of mine, and when we were boys we both really liked Blue Oyster Cult... Richard Meltzer wrote the words [to this song] and, I guess, did the concept of the record. Richard's a big hero of mine, so any time I get to read his words...

How did you make it your own?

Petra [Haden] sang with me and did violin, and Chad Smith did drums and Money Mark did the organ... The politics of bassists is kind of righteous; you look good making other people look good. So I picked these certain folks to do it because I thought they would bring trips from their own musical worlds.



Five Mekons Records That Make Jon Langford And Sally Timms Proud To Be Mekons

Even After 30 Years

Interview By Kory Grow

FORMED IN 1977, Leeds' the Mekons remain among the longest-running (and consistently excellent) first-wave punk groups, releasing their 16th studio album, *Natural* (Quarterstick), this year. Their seminal 1985 album, *Fear And Whiskey*, introduced melancholy-yet-hopeful-sounding country to the genre, solidified them as legends and inspired countless subgenres. Co-founder and vocalist/guitarist Jon Langford and vocalist Sally Timms, who joined in 1986, take a moment to share their highlights with us.

1. *Devils, Rats And Piggies: A Special Message From Godzilla* (1980)

Jon Langford: For me it was just the first time we actually kind of took control of what we were doing... I like the fact that the first time Sally heard it, when it came out, she rolled around on the floor laughing for about an hour.

Sally Timms: The weird thing about those old Mekons records is that... I go back to them and they sound surprisingly modern and undated. But it

just goes to show that I didn't know what I was talking about back then.

2. *Fear And Whiskey* (1985)

Langford: It took a long time to make that record... The first side of the album took about four years to record and the second side of the album was recorded in an afternoon. It was when the miners' strike was going on in England. We decided we should all be playing live and doing benefits and raising money for the striking miners and their families... [We were] very interested in things like country music, Cajun music and traditional English dance music, reggae music, music that had to be made for people to dance to on a Friday night.

3. *So Good It Hurts* (1988)

Timms: I don't know if I did ["Heart Of Stone"] much justice...

Photo: Derrick Santini



Well Merlots (left to right): Jon Langford, Rico Bell, Sally Timms, Susie Honeyman, Lu Edmonds, Tom Greenhalgh, Sarah Corina and Steve Goulding

Langford: We wanted Tom to sing it. We had an idea doing a '60s covers record. Doing "Death Of A Clown," that Dave Davies song, and "Heart Of Stone" and all of these sort of sexy '60s songs about being a rock 'n' roll rebel and loving man. But he refused.

Timms: And just passed it on to me.

4. Punk Rock (2004)

Timms: It was kind of was a retrospective... It was right at the same time as that whole revival punk movement, with Franz Ferdinand and all these bands that were inspired by Gang Of Four, that were Interpol and Radio 4. And so it was quite funny to go, "Well actually this is punk rock?" And we're 40-year-old people that are playing something like this and it's actually the same, you know? It was just quite entertaining.

5. Natural (2007)

Langford: I'd been living with the aboriginals for about six months last year... in Australia and eating bugs and honey ham and... A lot of songs are about that. I needed to hunt and kill with my bare hands.

Timms: [laughs] Sitting around the fire with your mates.

Langford: Yeah, punching a hole in a side of a can of beer and sucking it down in one gulp. It's great. It was very much about our little community. It was about us coming in and actually liking the idea of making the record. How people's situations have changed, but there's still a common thread.

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Zé Anything

Manda Bala director Jason Kohn discusses the Tropicalia legends that drive his film Interview by Kenny Herzog

“All the music at that time was in response to the horrible politics.”

AS AMERICA'S WEALTHY sit around immersed in privilege and are beckoned to take part in masturbatory reality shows, the upper class of São Paulo, Brazil is subject to constant kidnappings and violence. It's a situation precipitated by years of governmental corruption, and Jason Kohn's Sundance-award winning *Manda Bala* ("Speed The Bullet") confronts this oft-overlooked crisis with elegiac, Errol Morris-esque imagery (not surprising, since he mentored Kohn), devastatingly candid interviews and a soundtrack of tropicalia and other Brazilian sounds that gives the film its pulse. In between phone calls about soundtrack-licensing rights, Kohn took time out to break down the significance of the musicians used in his movie, whether to the film itself or the larger evolution of Latin American music.

TOM ZÉ

He was the guy that was instrumental in the foundation of the tropicalia movement, right there with Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil. Where all those other guys went on to pop superstardom in the '80s, he never budged from his tropicalia roots. He was always very left-leaning, very political. Here's a guy that never sold out... I think Tom Zé is the most important person on the soundtrack.

JORGE BEN

He has an album called *África Brasil*, which I think is probably the single greatest Brazilian album of all time. A lot of these Brazilian albums, they have really great tracks, but they weren't into album. But *África Brasil* is a concept

album. And Jorge Ben, better than anybody else, understood what was going on in the early '70s, which is a lot of what the music in the movie is about: the classic Brazilian sound—bossa nova and samba—and the new rock that was going on in the England and the United States. He was the best at making that fusion work.

OS MUTANTES

They're another really amazing example of Brazilian bossa nova mixing with American psychedelic rock. It's the irreverent leftist politics that all these guys are commenting on. They were dealing with the military dictatorship. Most of them had to leave the country for a while because they were being censored. All the music at that time was in response to the horrible politics, and that hasn't really happened in Brazil since the late-'60s.

PAULO DINIZ

He's one of those guys that I bought a CD by, not knowing anything about him, just based on a cool cover, and he ended up with two songs on the soundtrack. I have no idea why he never made it in Brazil. His sound is so fucking contemporary. He's got one song that sounds like a precursor to rap, and this is like 1972. I don't know much about his personal story, I don't know much about his reputation amongst [other] musicians, but he was just making contemporaneous music that had all that same kind of energy, switching between Portuguese and English, really rock-centered, based in samba. He was one of the people I was most happy to use, because nobody knows who the fuck he is.

Bullet boy: Kohn doesn't shy away from looking into the eyes of Brazil's young kidnapers in *Manda Bala*.



So I shot the passenger seat and said he would be next.



Wowee Yowee, it's Qui!
(left to right): Paul
Christensen, David Yow
and Matt Cronk.

In My Pants

With Qui's David Yow

Interview by Kory Grow

SURE EVERYONE'S HEARD rumors about what former Jesus Lizard/Scratch Acid frontman David Yow keeps in his pants, and some concertgoers might have even caught a glimpse. But now that he's joined up with L.A. noise-rock duo Qui (say "kwee") and performs on their latest slab of skronk *par excellence*, *Love's Miracle* (Ipecac), which features ragged Pink Floyd and Zappa covers alongside insta-classics like "Today, Gestation," we figured now's the time to take a gander at what he's really hiding in his black Wrangler jeans. Luckily for us, he obliged, even though, as he asserts, "the contents of my pants right now aren't very interesting."

LEFT FRONT POCKET

I have one of those small, red BIC lighters that I took out of the kitchen drawer of my friend Ellen's house this morning because my lighter ran out of gas last night. I have my keys. There are a pretty fair number of them. I'm not quite a janitor, but I've got finger nail clips on it, a pretty snappy bottle opener, my car keys, the keys to the Qui van and the practice space, my mailbox, the house.

RIGHT FRONT POCKET

I have a dollar and 17 cents in change... My shitty new Sprint telephone. The buttons don't work right... At the top of the screen, with the time and date and stuff, mine says "Hot Head" on it... I was listening to Captain Beefheart when I was setting it up and he was playing

"Hot Head," and so I put "Hot Head" on there.

LEFT REAR POCKET

I have my business card holder... I usually don't have my business card holder... because it's metal [and] it's worn holes in all my left rear pockets. This pair of pants is newer than most of my pants, so it can hold the business card holder, whereas the other ones, it would just drop right out.

RIGHT REAR POCKET

[I have] my wallet. I need to go get a new driver's license because I lost it recently. A lot of money... 60 bucks. Some receipts—a bunch... And then the photos in here. My cat is all grown up now, but I have a picture of him as a kitten, Little Buddy. He's a silvery-grey, medium-hair, uh, wild man. He's great. There's an old picture from a photo booth of... Jesus' old soundman and [the person] who used to do merchandise for us, and Mac [McNeilly] who played drums for us and me, and we all look ugly. And then there's a picture of my mom and a picture of my nieces.

NITTY GRITTY

There's probably a little bit of lint in each one of those pockets, but I didn't pull it out... No drugs or anything interesting like that though. They're rarely [in my pants]. And if there are, they're probably not mine... Yes sir, officer.

"My cat is all grown up now, but I have a picture of him as a kitten, Little Buddy."

My Favorite Gear

With *The Budos Band* Interview by Dan MacIntosh



WHEN YOU TALK equipment with the Budos Band, keep in mind this isn't your average collection of white guys. Rather, it's an expansive 11-member funk group that demands more than a nearly broken down Econoline van and a tank of gas to get from town to town, and to replicate the sprawling works on its latest, *The Budos Band II* (World's Fair). Guitarist Thomas Brenneck runs down some of what it takes to make the Budos live experience come, well, alive (even when it's hard to tell if he's half-joking).

We Are The Road Crew

We need a five-man loading crew, minimum; two 18-passenger vans, eight orange cones, a ramp and an elevator.

Party All The Time

Four cases of beer (minimum), an ounce of weed (sour diesel much preferred) and two strippers.

Weapon Of Choice

A 1959 Silvertone hollow body guitar. A true beau.

Learning To Improvise

A couple years ago, at an infamous party called Rubulad, the power cord to the Farfisa wasn't working. This was at about 3 a.m. in front of hundreds of people drunk on absinthe. Two guys from the crowd cut and spliced another power cord into it from who knows what and got it working. The wires were wrapped in gum. Quite a few people got electrocuted that night, but we did have a Farfisa.

What's This Song About?

With *The Honorary Title's* Jarrod Gorbel Interview by Taylor Mason

"Stay Away"

The lyrics are kind of like an accumulation of something, a little bit of what I was going through but a lot more of what a friend of mine was going through. A girl that I knew had a big crush on this guy, she was kind of going through hell with it. She would kind of vent to me emotionally when she was hurt, and that's where most of it came from. It was just what she was going through and my description of it.

"Far More"

When we were writing for the record, I was going through a breakup with somebody who I'd been with for a long time, and it's describing when something ends, something serious, you try to re-create it, you try to come back to it because it was so amazing, but it'll never be the way it was no matter how hard you try. I think everybody when they break up is like, "Oh, maybe we'll be together in the future, maybe this will be the way it once was." But it never does, not in my experience. It's probably one of my favorites on the record. It's totally my head, my world.



"Radiate"

The song itself we've been jamming to for years. The band started playing a riff and I just sang the word "radiate" repeatedly. I really loved the melody and the way that word sounded in the context of that song. I went backwards, wrote the verses and the bridge and was like, "How can I get the word radiate to make sense?" And it turned into a song about my family; radiate becoming this metaphor for how the sun brings light to the earth and the plants, related to parenthood, motherhood, bringing life to your children, just about growing up, just about the beginning of my family, how my

father and mother came together and started the family, moved out from Queens and the Bronx out to suburban Long Island, the beginning of my world.

"Thin Layer"

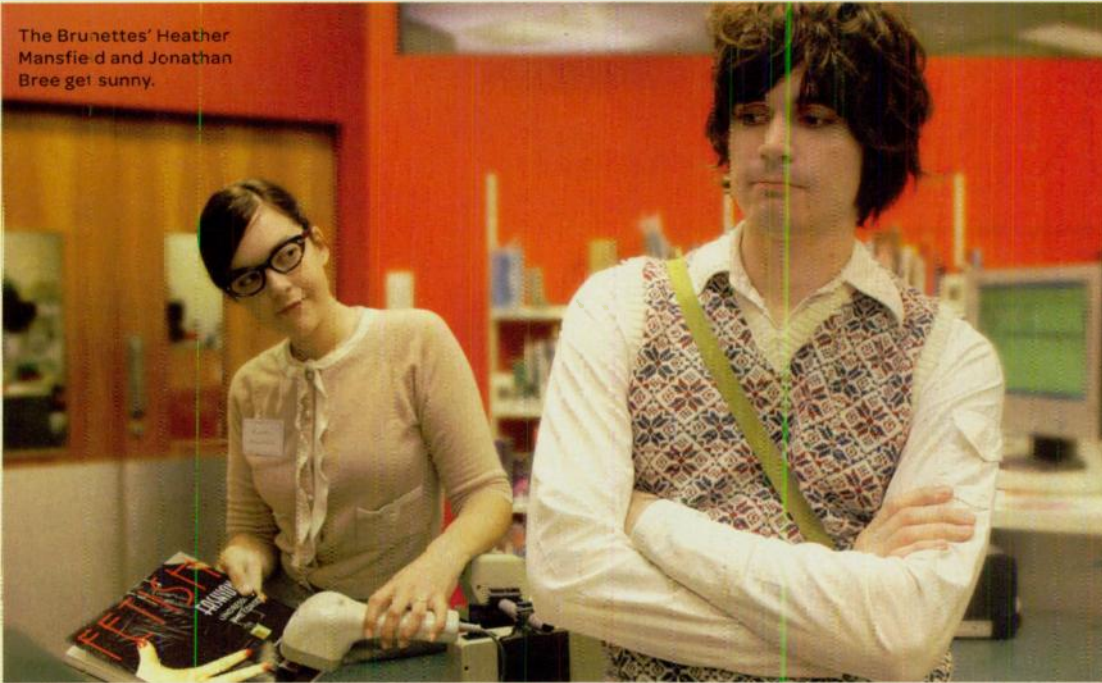
"Thin Layer" is actually the oldest song on the record, I wrote it like seven or eight years ago. I was hooking up with this girl who was a lot younger than me and we just kind of met through

mutual friends. I was having fun with it because I remember at that point too, I was also coming out of a long-term relationship, but a different one, and this girl was somebody I was having fun with. The lyrics are kind of explaining that, "Here's what I intended, here's the truth." I guess I was different then. I think I was more of a dick back then. I hadn't grown up yet.

The Honorary Title's *Scream And Light Up The Sky* is out now on Warner Bros.

Photo: Josh Bernstein

The Brunettes' Heather Mansfield and Jonathan Bree get sunny.



Bubble Um....

The Brunettes' Jonathan Bree chews on one of his fave genres

Interview By Eric Davidson

ON THEIR THIRD CD, *Structure & Cosmetics* (Sub Pop), this cutie Kiwi couple serves up suave, celestial pop with the ease of a slow, silk robe-besuited morning stretch as the sun slips in. Though for all that urbane charm, the heaving moods and subtly sticky hooks hint at a deep love of the most processed of cheesy pop. Then what of that first song, "Brunettes Against Bubblegum Youth?" Vocalist/guitarist Jonathan Bree chews on his more sour tastes.

Five Most Hated Bubblegum Flavors:

1. Venga Boys—My first job was working at a record store. I had to endure "Boom boom boom/I want you in my room" and their other hits everyday for months in the lunchtime "rush hour." It was an awful act of mind softening.

2. Hanson's third single—Can't remember what it was. I was so disappointed. "Mmmmbop" and "Where's The Love" were pretty good pop songs and then they released some totally forgettable adult contemporary ballad. I'm no authority on Hanson and their career. I just don't know why young artists get serious about their art. Kids should sing more songs about consumer products like shoes than they do their feelings.

3. Nineties boy bands that some people classify as bubblegum—Backstreet Boys, *NSync, Boyzøne, etc. May

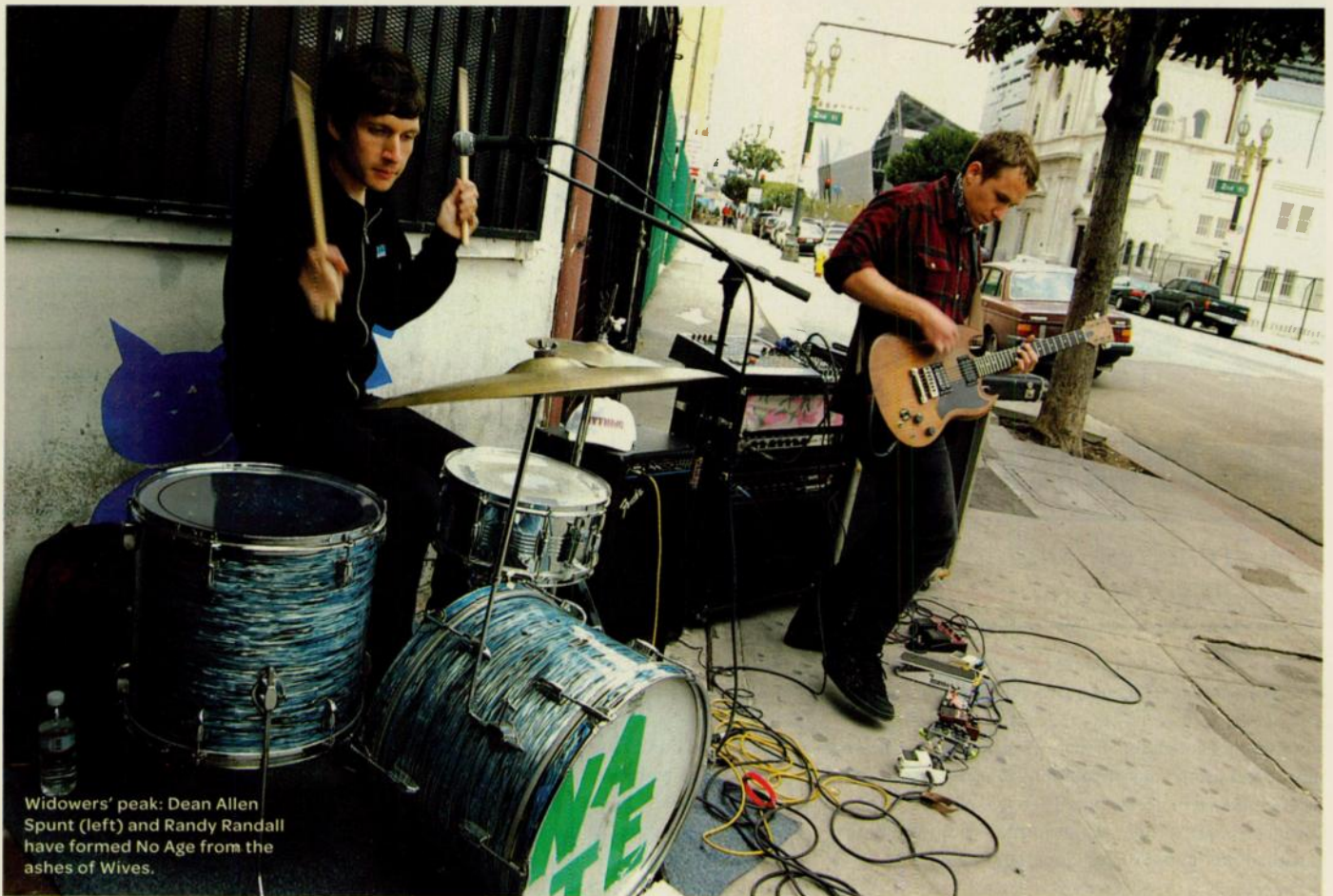
your legend fade away and never be mentioned again to any future generations.

4. Billie—I don't hate her, but I hate her fans that came between us many years ago. I only had an hour on my lunch break to get uptown and meet her where she was signing copies of her "Honey To The Bee" single. The queue was too long, I knew that our eyes would not lock gaze with each other that day. I still wonder what might have been.

5. Debbie Gibson—I regret that I stopped myself from putting my hand on her ass one hot night in L.A. The Brunettes and her were invited back out on stage during Rilo Kiley's encore to all sing "Let My Love Open The Door." I remember thinking to myself, "Damn, that would be funny if I cozied up to her right now onstage in front of all these people." I think she was wearing these eye-catching tight, silver sequined pants. The others onstage seemed to be feeling the moment, arms around each others shoulders and all that. My thoughts were elsewhere, yet I didn't act for better or for worse. It's not really much of a bubblegum hate, more a C-grade story about an ex-bubblegum star and my lousy mind. •

"Kids should sing more songs about consumer products like shoes than they do their feelings."—Jonathan Bree

No Age



Widowers' peak: Dean Allen Spunt (left) and Randy Randall have formed No Age from the ashes of Wives.

WHEN L.A. PUNKS Wives broke up while on tour in Germany in 2005, guitarist Randy Randall and bassist/vocalist Dean Spunt decided that they weren't ready to stop playing music together. The two weeks after they returned home found Randall playing and recording constantly to a four-track and Spunt avoiding his instrument. But then, the duo were ready to shed their old identity and assume that of the more experimental No Age. "We decided that the music we should play should be the exact music we want to listen to," says Spunt, who mans the drums that accompany Randall's vocals and guitar. "[Wives] served its purpose, but do I want to listen to this in my house? It sounds obvious, but that was a big revelation for us." To reintroduce themselves, No Age spread their wings as widely as possible, recording five EPs, each with a unique tracklisting and artwork, on five different labels, resulting in 20 new songs. The tracks and their sequencing were chosen to reflect the bands' different moods, and were all

released on the same day. Eleven of those have been combined for their debut full-length, *Weirdo Rippers* (FatCat), the cover art of which features a photo of the Smell, an L.A.-based art-and-performance space that was the site of No Age's first show in April 2006. "The Smell is the reason we exist as a band," says Spunt of the all-ages venue. "It's shaped the way I feel about music." Not only has the venue served as a launch pad for the band's live performances, but it's become a stomping ground for many associates, including the independent labels that released the EPs. The band is now trying to capitalize on their momentum, continuously writing while touring both US coasts and Europe. Despite cautioning Wives fans that No Age has taken a more atmospheric, noise-laden approach, Spunt has no doubt that their current incarnation is the logical next step forward. "It was an easy transition for us, but maybe not so much for the people who were into Wives," he says. "No Age had to be better. This is what was supposed to happen." **AMANDA FARAH**

Photo: No Age

Panic on the streets
of London: Jamie T

Jamie T

WHILE THEY CAN sometimes feel like a prison, the suburbs are actually an excellent training ground for a musician. Just ask Jamie T (né Treays), the 21-year-old British troubadour with the preternatural lyrical acuity of Arctic Monkeys Alex Turner, the urban rhythms of Mike Skinner, the earnest acoustic sense of Billy Bragg and the scruffy looks of a grown-up Billy Elliott. He used his upbringing in Wimbledon, a place better known for its tennis courts than its rock stars, as inspiration for his excellent (and Mercury Prize-nominated) debut full-length, *Panic Prevention* (Caroline). Spending his time making mix tapes, skateboarding and drumming in the punk band Bylaw 20 (named for the rule “against dogs shitting in public”), Treays was never part of any one scene, gobbling up the Clash, Desmond Dekker and Gang Starr with equal verve. “Me and my close friends were always quite nomadic like that,” he says while sucking on a Marlboro Light on the patio of a Brooklyn bar. “We’ve got loads of different friends who are into different shit, so one night you’d be like, ‘Let’s go out with John the bass player.’ Or I’ve got my mates who spend all fucking weekend in a drum ‘n’ bass rave doing pills, and I can pop down there for a night or two and leave before my mind totally blows up.” *Panic Prevention* synthesizes all of these influences into an album that’s suffused with intimate singer-songwriter storytelling, crunchy pop hooks, Brit-hop electro beats and his own faux-patios delivery. The songs, which play out like finely drawn short stories, revolve around a cast of characters—like Sheila and Stella, who go out for a boozy night on the town in the appropriately titled “Sheila,” or the exhausted harmonica man Sam of “So Lonely Was The Ballad”—who are partially based in reality and partially figments of the songwriter’s vast imagination. “I can’t write songs about myself,” says Treays. “I’d feel like a dick.” And while he is certainly young to be so accomplished, Jamie T is no dilettante. Music, he says, is the one pastime he’s stuck with after all these years. “Someone said to me at this thing in England, ‘Wow, you came from nowhere.’ And almost criticized me for it, like I was just a fad thing,” remembers Treays. “And I got a bit fucked off. I was like ‘No, fuck you. Because I was playing in clubs for years, just none of you fuckers gave a fuck!” **REBECCA RABER**

Photo: Derrick Santini

Bat For Lashes

IF BAT FOR LASHES' music seems otherworldly, that's because it is. "Regularly I dream whole concerts," says Natasha Khan, the 27-year-old British singer-songwriter who records and performs hauntingly theatrical tunes under the amorphous moniker. "'Prescilla' came to me in a dream by an imaginary friend, it was sung to me. I woke up and I was like, 'Oh my God, that song is amazing.' I wished someone could tell me who it was by, and then I had realized it was something I had *written*." Bat For Lashes' debut, *Fur And Gold* (Parlophone), is indeed composed of sonic dreamscapes. A musical whirlwind of thunderous tribal beats, plaintive piano lines, harpsichord swirls and the occasional hand-clap soundtrack an unearthly universe populated by horses, wizards, bats' mouths and seal jubilees. And that's to say nothing of her voice, an ethereal-yet-soulful siren call, somewhat akin to Björk and Kate Bush, but with an organic warmth so original it makes such comparisons moot. Given the mystical nature of Khan's music it might be hard to believe she's so heavily influenced by everyday reality, which in her case entails a former job as a nursery school teacher. "Whatever you're creating it's filtered through your experience," Khan says. "When I was working with the kids it was like a doorway into the liberated imagination and freedom of thought and also the animalistic." Aspects of both the whimsical and the primal permeate the Bat For Lashes aesthetic, from the album's ghostly atmospheric sounds to her performances' theatrical style and costumes, no doubt an extension of her film school background. "The thing with the album is I felt like different animals at different times," she concedes. At the moment Khan likens herself to "a mother bear," since "they are pretty fierce and protective, maternal. But at the same time they're really wild and intuitive and magical. They're bound up in a lot of mythology and folklore and they're very feminine as well and they like honey. I like honey." Khan has also garnered some very high-profile fans, including Radiohead's Thom Yorke. The majestic "Horse & I" even landed in his iTunes Top Ten playlist. And fittingly, she describes the endorsement as "kind of surreal" —not unlike her music itself. **JESSICA GENTILE**



Photo: Bohdan Cap

Gliss

Perpetual Gliss (left to right): David Reiss, Victoria Cecilia and Martin Klingman



THE ATMOSPHERIC VOCALS, swirling guitar sounds and propulsive drum beats on L.A. trio Gliss' *Love The Virgins* (Cordless) are bound to inspire the standard comparisons to My Bloody Valentine. But the group's members don't really mind, especially since they've also inspired the fandom of Billy Corgan, who tapped them for an opening slot on his Future Embrace Tour in 2005. The three-piece have an untraditional approach when it comes to songwriting and performing, with Martin Klingman, Victoria

Cecilia and David Reiss spontaneously trading off instruments. "It's really pretty balanced," says Klingman of the switch-offs. "It's fun. We get a chance to play everything and appreciate it." When Corgan invited the group to join him on the road after hearing their debut EP, they were motivated to write songs for *Virgins*, and have since found themselves booked for a fall tour supporting the Raveonettes. Klingman admits the band has much to look forward to, characterizing himself and his cohorts as "big fans of the Raveonettes"

and acknowledging that "it's really bringing us to a bigger level." Klingman also feels that his is part of a wave of bands that stray from the standard pop-rock formula and turn to a more experimental approach to songwriting. "The movement of music always changes," he says. "There's a twist of being more moody and experimental while still being a good song and having all the pop elements." Meshing this creative looseness with a traditional foundation makes it hard to define Gliss as shoegaze, pop or dance-rock, instead leaving their songs as an alluring combination of all three genres. And while the group has generated a significant amount of buzz in recent months, they are in no way resting on their laurels, and are already looking forward to getting into the studio again, even if it's purely for their own edification. "We really want to get on the radar with another record," Klingman says. "We hope people are looking forward to the next one, because we are." **KENSEY POTTER**

Nicole-hearted shake:
Willis investigates the
boundaries of soul.

A photograph of Nicole Willis sitting on a light blue armchair, wearing a green patterned dress and a necklace. She is holding a small white cup. Behind her, the band The Soul Investigators is standing. The band members are dressed in dark clothing, some in suits. They are holding various instruments: saxophones, trumpets, a red electric guitar, and a drum set. The drum set has the text "THE SOUL INVESTIGATORS" and a musical note symbol on it. The background is a simple room with curtains.

Nicole Willis

THE LATEST STOP on Nicole Willis' musical journey, *Keep Reachin' Up* (Light In The Attic), is the third album under her own name and first with the Soul Investigators, a prodigious collective of groove-laden Fins. Together, they tackle a wide spectrum of R&B, soul and funk that could have been released in the early days of this mother-of-two's 43 years on earth. "I realized some things that were still poignant about that era are the things that are lacking from music at this point," she says. "The youth culture doesn't seem to have the same kind of modesty and innocence now. Everybody is so overt and you have to put all out on the table. Compared to retro-stylist/tabloid ink-spiller Amy Winehouse, Willis sings like the picture of health and clarity on the Supremes-styled "My Four Leaf Clover" and "If This Ain't Love (Don't Know What It Is)," which features a dizzying flute solo by husband Jim Tenor, an artist and producer in his own right. Also unlike Winehouse, her language is simpler and sweeter, with one critic even dubbing it a bit clichéd. "I actually use words that my father used to use when I was talking to him," she says, unfazed. "I don't think that at the time when my father was saying those words, maybe 20 years ago or more, that we

thought he was speaking in clichés. Leading up to *Reachin' Up*, the Brooklyn-born Willis worked with Curtis Mayfield, the Brand New Heavies and Deee-Lite, among others. She has experimented with electronic, neo-soul and reggae stylings and eases a delivery that echoes the 5th Dimension's Marilyn McCoo. As a whole, she and her Soul Investigators, regardless of the backing group's pasty skin color, are giving Sharon Jones And The Dap Kings a run for their money. "There's white girls singing R&B and black girls singing punk rock," she says. "It doesn't matter really. I think what's great about the Soul Investigators is that they have a raw sound. You have lots of musicians who play so well that it becomes uninteresting." After an overseas release last year, *Keep Reachin' Up* has finally reached US shores, but Willis' commitments as a mother, wife and full-time student have kept plans of touring North America touring plans on hold. And unlike speedy, hit-producing strongholds on labels like Motown, Willis says recording a follow-up's going to take a while. "I'm not on a team of songwriters," she says. "I write the songs that I sing. I don't think anyone else performs the songs that I sing—not yet anyway." **REED FISCHER**

You Say Party! We Say Die!



One hell of a Party: Derek Adam, Stephen O'Shea, Becky Ninkovic, Devon Clifford and Krista Loewen

Photo: Fiona Garden

IT'S A SHAME that *Lose All Time* (Paper Bag), the sophomore effort from You Say Party! We Say Die!, is so great. As soon as you hear these sexy, throttling rhythms and tart, synth-laced melodies, you'll want to see this British Columbian five-piece play live in a town near you. But unfortunately, that can't happen until 2011. "As it stands right now, we're still banned [from the US] for five years," says frontwoman Becky Ninkovic, whose prickly Exene Cervenka-ish singing voice is softened by a warm Canadian accent when she speaks. "Basically we got caught trying to go down into the States with a full tour booked down there, but without the proper work visa... They kept [bassist Stephen O'Shea] in a small room and interrogated him for five hours... It was a really bad experience, and I don't wish it upon anybody." That's quite a dramatic turn of events for a group from the sleepy hamlet of Abbotsford, who started out, innocently enough, riding their vintage bicycles together. In fact, the band owes its birth to the boring suburban sprawl in which it was created. "There wasn't really anything to do," says Ninkovic. "If you're naturally a somewhat creative person, you make your own fun, which is what we did. We just took matters into our own hands. And since it's quite a religious community—it's known as the Bible Belt—there's a lot of empty churches, so a lot of our first shows were in church basements." But the band clearly always had dreams of playing outside those basements, even going so far as to christen themselves with an unusually long moniker in the hopes of inspiring chanting crowds. "We were jamming in my parents' basement, writing this song, and all the lyrics were pretty much, 'You say party! We say die!' We thought it would be really awesome if, at the show, people were doing a chant along, back and forth, with us... The song wasn't that great, but we really liked that connection that we created with the audience, so we decided that if we had a band name like that, even if the songs come and go, we'd always be able to have little moments like that with the crowd." A few lineup changes and two albums later, the small-town quintet has made connections with audiences not only at home, but across Europe and the UK. Now if they could just get back into the States.

REBECCA RABER

Let us bask in Romain's glory:
Turzi's namesake is feeling bubbly.

Turzi

PSYCHEDELIA MIGHT MAINTAIN a strong rapport with recreational chemicals, but one would hardly expect one of its arbiters to indulge in the bourgeois implications of high-end spirits. Yet, in typically Parisian fashion, Romain Turzi is doing it up. "I just opened a bottle of champagne," he exclaims. "Did you hear it?" The celebration is warranted, though, as the previous night saw the avant-psych musician and his backing band—collectively known by their guru's last name—cap yet another successful performance in the French capital. For the 28-year-old songwriter and producer, the live arena isn't just a plug-in-and-play affair. The next recent show included "a lot of stroboscopic lights and ecstatic moods," accompaniments Turzi views as essential. "I want my music to be a total experience," he explains. "It can extract a feeling or a picture [and] can lead people to imagine a world based on that." The world he's imagined on *A* (Kemado), the group's self-produced stateside debut, is awash with waves of spectral color. Comprised entirely of solo compositions, half of which are "arranged and interpreted" by the group, *A*'s sprawling, cavernous soundscapes seamlessly merge vintage synth indulgences, droning '60s garage experimentation and sharp, streamlined krautrock into a largely instrumental amalgam of

heady post-rock. Turzi's fascination with music both obscure and inventive goes back to his teen years as a guitar-wielding skate rat in the luxurious Paris suburb of Versailles. "The music I picked up on was the '90s stuff—Sonic Youth and My Bloody Valentine. I just liked that they were playing the instruments [away from] their first function, playing guitar differently, using effects and playing screwdrivers and things like that." After a brief stint studying economics at the University In Paris where he was a less-than-stellar student ("I preferred listening to music, smoking joints, hanging out with friends and playing"), the young musician began tinkering with home-recording software in the kitchen of his tiny student flat and eventually drew the attention of Record Makers, the label responsible for Air's international success. After signing, Turzi spent the next three years performing and recording both alone and with various band lineups before finally putting *A* to tape last summer. Now, with a US deal secured and tour set for the fall ("a dream we've had since [we were] children") Turzi is hoping for the same success on the other side of the Atlantic, and has little doubts, as he pours some bubbly and comfortably asserts, "I personally think my music can interest people from the opposite side of the world." **SAM DUKE**

Photo: David Sauvage



Outfitted for big things: the A-Sides' (left to right) Mike Fleming, Charlie Cottone, Jon Barthmus, Christopher Doyle and Patrick Marsceill

The A-Sides

THERE ARE A LOT of comely, '60s-rooted indie-pop platters putzing around these days, so you're forgiven if you missed the A-Sides' fine power-pop debut, *Hello, Hello* (Prison Jazz). And even if you did hear it, you're forgiven if you don't recognize the Philadelphia fivesome's new release, *Silver Storms* (Vagrant), as the same band. "It's definitely a conscious decision for us to move away from where we started," admits singer Jon Barthmus, calling from his day gig as a graphic designer. "We started with the idea of doing the '60s pop kind of thing, but we always knew that we wanted to do a lot more." More indeed, as the band stretches the dusky horizon of the mostly sunny *Hello* into more orchestrated, echoey sonic colors, layered vocals and near solemn moods. "[I was inspired by] newer music like Broken Social Scene, Animal Collective, Spiritualized—bands with a lot of epic arrangements," explains Barthmus, noting the addition of a keyboardist and a guitarist who had mostly played in atmospheric metal bands. All of this sounds fairly foofy for a band Vice TV described as "raging partiers." "Not true," states

Barthmus. "Well, there are five of us, and if there was a one-to-five scale, we're all at different points on the party spectrum. We definitely have a hard partier, then a less hard partier, and I guess I'm the three." One can ascertain that bassist Mike Flemming is the one, since he's recently completed a month-long bicycle trip through the middle of the US and a three-week ride in Europe. With the A-Sides now on a bigger label and ready to hit the road, Barthmus, like any good middleman, brokered a deal with the rootless bassist, and Flemming promises to be ready for the month-long tour starting in late September. That trek may get longer though, as the band's manager does music supervision for Urban Outfitters, and they've got a way-catchy, fitting room-ready single, "Cinematic," with a sweep and lyrical sense that lifts away from the hunkered down bedroom-tethered emotions of much of today's laptop Brian Wilsons. As Barthmus confirms, "The biggest influence [taken] from the Beach Boys or Beatles for us was the ambition... That song is mostly about doing something notable, about being remembered." **ERIC DAVIDSON**

Just Jack

YOUTH TENDS TO BE a major form of currency in pop music. Jack Allsopp, aka Just Jack, has already outgrown the vague, bumpy territory of adolescence. But the north London native isn't ashamed of being a 30-something rap troubadour. In fact, he considers his age a point of distinction, especially when he's compared to other British MCs with a penchant for half-sung, half-spoken narratives laid over hip-hop influenced beats (see Jamie T, the Streets, Lady Sovereign). "I'm probably 10 years older than a lot of the people I get lumped in with," he says via phone from London. "I think I'm at a different place. As you get older the subject matter you work with is a bit broader and a bit wider. It's not about me going out and getting pissed with my mates." Instead, various other characters partake in the routine debauchery on Jack's sophomore release, *Overtones* (Mercury). The album's dozen hip-hop soul confections resemble a linked collection of short stories. Some, like "Hold On," a languid ballad with flamenco rhythms, veer into autobiographical territory, while other tracks function as third-person narratives. "Disco Friends"

is a sexy, finger-snap musing about a jaded model turned "happy-clappy trustafarian." For the majority of *Overtones*, Jack plays the part of a fly on the wall, an observer who watches and reports his findings with a wry, amused detachment. "I tried to write some songs about other people's lives, not just my own," he explains. While Jack's particular form of songwriting bravado might not be as gleefully mean-spirited as Lily Allen's, it's also darker, slightly twisted and far more thoughtful. "Starz In Their Eyes," which climbed to No. 2 in the UK and is well-armed to take on the stateside charts, is one such tale. The song arose from his distaste for the celebrity machine, the manner in which *Pop Idol* contestants are built up and trashed in the press to the general fakeness of the music industry. "I think it's all a bit strange and definitely a bit negative," he says. "It's like when you get these magazines and they have a section calling out people, pictures of someone with a tiny bent finger or bizarre strange stupid things, or someone putting on a strange face cause they're caught on camera." "Starz," with its shaken-not-stirred guitar hook, is



Just Jack, no chaser: Allsopp is old and jaded and proud of it.

easily the catchiest cut off *Overtones*. Lurking beneath the surface, however, is a smirking examination of the bitter consequences of fame. That's exactly the way Jack likes it. "When I'm writing songs I never want everything to be nice and shiny and lovely," he says. "Life's not like that. If I made it into a shouty punk song, it wouldn't have gotten as far as it did." **SHARON STEEL**

Photo: Jay Brooks

He's had his Lion's share of comparisons: Ferraby's folk rings a familiar, but welcome, bell.



Ferraby Lionheart

FERRABY LIONHEART SOUNDS like Elliott Smith. There's really no denying it. This is, therefore, the first thing one learns about him amidst the blogosphere babbling where, as a fledgling artist, there may not be a more desirable or detestable place to be. Although his music was eliciting positive responses, comparisons lead to categorization, so Lionheart had to figure out how to separate himself on his full-length debut, *Catch The Brass Ring* (Nettwerk). "I look up to Elliott Smith, musically, a lot," says Lionheart, an L.A.-by-way-of-Nashville transplant, from his car on a California freeway. "But it's got a duality because people tend to draw really quick comparisons with my music to, say, Elliott Smith and Rufus Wainwright, and part of me gets really frustrated because the stuff I'm working on now is pretty different from theirs." Over his almost seven-year career, Lionheart—which is not actually his last name, but a moniker given to him by a friend—has dabbled in lo-fi rock, European electronica and power-pop, the latter of which he garnered some degree of notoriety for in the band Telecast. Only in the past two years has he gotten into folksier sounds, shedding the keyboards and drum kit for an acoustic guitar and an upright piano. "The thing about my last band is that I felt really confined to one format and my musical inspirations were always changing," he says. "I didn't want to be stuck in that sort of electric guitar/synths format, and as a solo musician I can just invite anyone along depending on what I want it to sound like." Upon releasing his eponymous debut EP earlier this year, the Net nattering started almost immediately with the Smith/Beatles/Jon Brion parallels—similarities he does not deny—but by the time the buzz reached a slow crawl, he was already branching out into a more robust sound replete with brass arrangements in anticipation of *Brass Ring*. "The EP was really just kind of an accident," he contends. "I was just working on some intimate songs in my bedroom, and it just kind of took off from my MySpace page. I can see why the comparisons are easy ones to make, but I'm really hoping that the new record can kind of be a departure from that because I feel like I explored a lot more territory this time around." **KEVIN KAMPWIRTH**

Photo: Lucy Hamblin

ONSTAGE, 27-YEAR-OLD Jeremy Parker, aka the Pumpsta, is the ultimate postmodern lothario. Prone to lurking around in shiny velvet pants while cradling a beer as passionately as his microphone, Parker is a deviant man-slut, grinding mischievously and spewing quick-moving crunk verses over booty-bass beats, both as a solo MC and part of the bi-racial, bisexual Brooklyn clan, the Dirty Nanas. "Yeah, there's a sexual element to it," Parker affirms, seeming a lot less come-hither atop a Manhattan high-rise, squinting to keep the sun from his eyes. "It's booty bass, and we're rapping and we're talking about making love and fucking and I'm gyrating onstage, you know?" But in casual discourse, he's clearly an insightful individual with a matter-of-fact lack of self-consciousness about embracing the cultural expression he grew up with in Atlanta. While Parker is now a visible member of New York's underground, his hometown catalyzed the electro-crunk fusion of *Bass Black Treble White* (Milk The Beef), the follow-up to his equally bizarre *Alphabetize The Nation!* "[*Bass Black*] fuses together a lot of elements that I think hip-hop is just now welcoming into its realm," he says. "And it's Atlanta, too... Atlanta is really amazing in that there doesn't really seem to be a definitive hip-hop scene or a definitive punk rock scene or a definitive Britpop scene. Everything fuses together and I think that's evident in groups like Outkast and Gnarls Barkley." However, it's not registering with the upper echelon of New York hip just yet. Existing outside of the obvious network of cool (from !!! down to Dragons Of Zynth) that currently clouds the metropolis, the Pumpsta and his Nanas kin pack sweaty basement

Tha Pumpsta

venues on the regular, but ask your average Williamsburg-ian about Parker and pals, and you'll probably get a dismissive shrug. "We're kind of just our own little powerhouse," says Parker with equally casual confidence. "We don't have any label backing us. We don't have anybody doing our promotions... If we can lay down our tracks, if we can get to the show without fucking destroying each other, then we're good to go. So that's probably a lot of the reason why we're not a household name as of yet." It's even easier to have such a devil-may-care perspective when your main goal isn't to be blogged about, but to enjoy the moment of living and making music with likeminded peers. "I think that the most important part is to have a good time, and to be aware of the audience and to incorporate them," says Parker, whose perspiration pales compared to the sweat he pours out during a show. "I think a lot of people have forgotten to do that... That's probably one of our most important things, for me at least, is to really entertain and to really capture people in a live element." And as for *Bass Black's* confounding, ass-shaking insanity, Parker has a suggestion of where retailers can stock it. "Put it in the fun section." **KENNY HERZOG**

The fun sex-ion: Parker tells us where to stuff it.

Photo: Elizabeth Weinberg



OurStage: Let The Fans Decide

Who isn't a tastemaker these days? The current musical climate dictates that anybody with a domain name and something to say can flex their opinions onto the masses, potentially reaching millions of people. Today, more than ever, fans and musicians have the unique opportunity to communicate with each other, which makes for exciting times. So instead of being told what to like, perhaps listeners should be allowed to choose for themselves. OurStage.com gives artists the tools and space to allow their creativity to shine, without the risk of being lost in the crowd. Need a launching pad? At OurStage.com, all artists have the chance to upload their music, film, or photographs to find their audiences and keep them.

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For fans, it's time to speak up about what you want to hear. No more being told what is cool. No more money wasted. Instead of just telling your friends about your new favorite band, at OurStage you can tell the whole world. Plus, it's not only the artists who are able to win great prizes. Just by ranking what you are listening to or watching, fans can win video iPods and a myvu, which turns any room into a big screen TV. But in case you need a little help sifting

OurStage EJs



through all the talent, our staff of EJs will provide you with a backstage pass to the most buzz-worthy acts.

What better endorsement, though, than from an OurStage user? Jon Visger of Mason Proper, whose song "Life's Cornucopia" rests in the top 10 for August on the indie/alternative channel, can attest to the site's benefits: "The concept is fun, and I applaud that it presents a completely even playing field, and as such will almost certainly tend to get much-needed money into the hands of unknown musicians based solely on the quality of their actual work. Without having information about the artists right there alongside the songs, there isn't as much chance for people to base their votes on the less noble choices of criteria [such as] looks, location, genre name and apparent popularity. It's a great little lottery for unknown artists, and a great way for music listeners to gamble their time on potentially finding a truly undiscovered gem."

So far so good, right? Well, it's time to get logged on then. To create a FREE account, all you have to do is go to OurStage.com where you'll create a user name and password. That's all it takes. If you're an artist, you've just gotten the opportunity to expose your music to a wider audience, and if you're a fan, you're deciding what you like most rather than having it decided for you. The competitions run on a monthly basis, so artists have a new chance to win every month. Entries are corralled into one of 15 different genres or 'channels' – including indie, hip-hop, jazz, world and R&B – and fans log on and vote on their favorite from each. During four rounds of judging, selections are pared down until, at midnight on the last day of the month, the grand prize winners are announced. As is OurStage's mantra, if you're really the best, the fans will drive you to the top.



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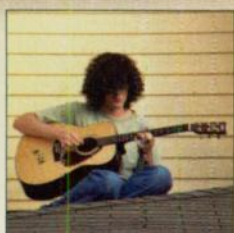
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EXPERIMENTAL



Raise Ya Three Nature Is Shady

Less experimental, more Daniel Johnston, RYT has made a "perverted alliance" with an acoustic guitar and harmonica. This song might be a good excuse to make weird music just for the sake of it, or allow for casual spurts of welcomed anti-folk nonsense.

RIYL: Moddy Peaches, Kimya Dawson, Half Japanese
WEB: search by Raise Ya Three at www.ourstage.com

ACOUSTIC



Jon Call My Ship

Take a little bit of blues, a little bit of folk, and a little bit of rock, throw in some melodic vocals and soft guitar, call it "My Ship." Listen and repeat.

RIYL: Ben Harper, Plain White T's, Tom Petty
WEB: search by Jon Call at www.ourstage.com

METAL



Descolada Lucker

Metal drums and guitar with violin swim triumphantly atop this entire piece. The song includes dueling bass and violin followed up by emotionally charged screaming.

RIYL: Isis, Murder By Death
WEB: search by Descolada at www.ourstage.com

HIP-HOP



Press Project Get Right

Enjoy the smooth, jazzy beat and buttery flows while you can, before the distorted crunch of the bridge grates your eardrums in all the right ways.

RIYL: Lupe Fiasco, Roots, De La Soul
WEB: search by Press Project at www.ourstage.com

SOLO PERF.



Marnee Down In The Valley

Singer/songwriter Marnee sings very mature lyrics belying her 11 years of age with sweet whispering, yet full and rich vocals. Blending minimalist guitar and a spine tingling voice, "Down In The Valley" is entrancing and unique.

RIYL: Jewel, Sarah McLachlan, Joan Baez
WEB: search by Marnee at www.ourstage.com

INDIE / ALT



Don DiLego Falling Into Space

Playful alternative rock that unapologetically obeys straightforward chord progressions and pop mantras, Don DiLego writes of a destiny unattained, turning hardship into something agreeably digestible, though not as easily forgettable.

RIYL: Spoon, Beach Boys, Wilco
WEB: search by Don DiLego at www.ourstage.com

All We Care About Is Young Folks

2007's MOST PROMISING
PUBESCENT POP STARS



STORY BY JOHN BEARDSLEY



Chloe (left) and Asya of Smoosh

It may have taken the better part of a decade, but we've finally cancelled all those pesky *Tiger Beat* and *YM* subscriptions that plagued our mailboxes in our younger days. But every now and then, flipping through the glossies and gossip rags, we feel the occasional pang for the golden era of the two Coreys. Hell, we've even been known to crave a chorus of "MMMBop" from time to time. So when some fresh young face comes along and makes music worth quitting the boy scouts for, we can't help but get a little excited. And with back-to-school season upon us, we thought we'd take a look at some young artists who are blowing up before growing up:

THE PRODIGY KID-SISTER

Smooch

Hometown: Seattle, Washington

School Attended: Going into 7th and 8th grade, respectively.

The Deal: Sisters Chloe and Asya (last name never given) were 10 and 12, respectively, when their debut, *She Like Electric* (Pattern 25), came out in 2004. But that's the last time they'll let you hear about their age. "I don't want people only to like us because of our age. I play music for sound, not looks," says Chloe.

Pedigree: Toured with Jimmy Eat World and Mates Of State; *She Like Electric* spent nine weeks in the CMJ Radio 200 chart and got rave reviews from *NME*, *Alternative Press*; and many others.

Seriously: Smooch bought their first drum kit (instead of a violin) after meeting their later teacher, Death Cab For Cutie's Jason McGerr, at Seattle's Trading Musician store.

THE BROODING MIDDLE CHILD

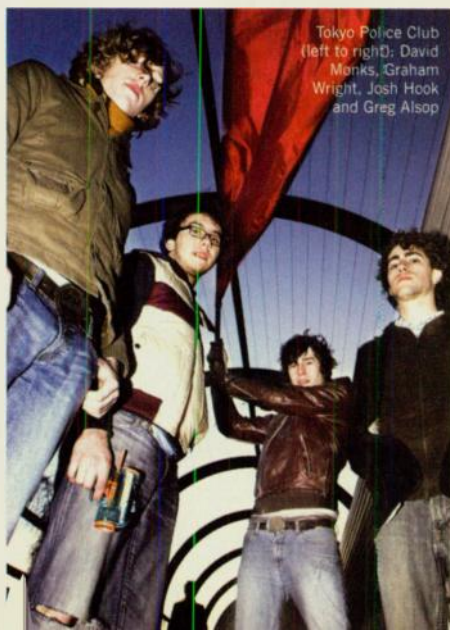
Hayes Peebles

Hometown: The Bronx, New York

School Attended: Going into 10th grade.

The Deal: Fifteen years old and no record deal yet, but it can only be a matter of time. The kid draws Bright Eyes comparisons like moths to a flame, but if what he's shown thus far is any indication, he'll outgrow them sooner than later. He started playing guitar when he was 12 and stirred up downtown NYC not long after, earning *Gothamist's* Band Of The Week distinction back in November 2006.

Seriously: Hayes played to his first sold-out crowd (albeit accidentally) when delayed openers pushed his set into Kimya Dawson's timeslot at Union Hall in Brooklyn.



Tokyo Police Club (left to right): David Monks, Graham Wright, Josh Hook and Greg Alsop

THE MISBEHAVING BOB BROTHER

Idiot Pilot

Hometown: Bellingham, Washington

School Attended: Graduated high school just 30 minutes under the limit for absences.

The Deal: The laptop-toting electronicore duo started writing music together at the age of 12, and put out their first album, *Strange We Should Meet Here*, in 2004. Most recently featured on *The Transformers* soundtrack, the pair is readying their second full-length for a September 25 release.

Seriously: In what he calls "a rather symbolic turn of events," guitarist/electronics guy Daniel Anderson flew to Los Angeles to sign with Warner on the day he was scheduled to take the SAT. "I just never showed up for the test," he says.

THE FASHION PLATE BIG SISTER

Lil' Mama

Hometown: Brooklyn, New York

The Deal: You know it, you've probably bumped to it and maybe its bombastic drum/clap ride has left its mark on you. Yup, the self-proclaimed "Voice Of The Young People" behind "Lip Gloss" has catapulted herself into the mainstream hip-pop consciousness at an age (17) when most kids aren't even fully aware of their own consciousness.

Whatchu Know 'Bout Her?: The video for "Lip Gloss" was shot at Edward R. Murrow High School in Brooklyn, Mama's alma mater and Beasties haunt of yore.

THE FAST-LIVING OLDER BROTHER

Tokyo Police Club

Hometown: Newmarket, Ontario, Canada

School Attended: They almost made it to college, er... university.

The Deal: After playing together in high school, they were all set to call it quits and head off to different universities when they got invited to play the Pop Montreal Festival. They played a sold-out show, said fuhgeddaboutit to college a week later and, via a breakout performance at SXSW (among plenty of others), have now claimed their ascendancy in the world of post-Strokes garage rock.

Forseriously: Keeping everybody hungry for more, TPC's debut EP, *A Lesson in Crime* (Paper Bag), clocks in at a tantalizing 16 minutes. Shame on you if you haven't given a quarter-hour of your life to being bowled over by it.



The Tiny Masters Of Today: Ada and Ivan

THE PRECOCIOUS YOUNG ONE

The Tiny Masters Of Today

Hometown: Brooklyn, New York

School Attended: Going into 6th (Aida) and 8th (Ivan) grades.

The Deal: Recently signed to Mute, Aida and Ivan, aged 11 and 13, are being hailed as the best thing to happen to lo-fi since the White Stripes, having amazed audiences at Brooklyn's McCarron Pool and SXSW. As a guy and a girl with the same last name (which they never give out, incidentally) making drum-and-guitar punk with caveman-like effectiveness, they're certainly not far off. We're pretty sure, however, that these guys aren't going to turn out to be ex-husband and wife.

Seriously: The star guest-talent on their debut LP? Fred Schneider of the B-52's. Yeah. Mr. Rock Lobster himself.

THE HYPERACTIVE YOUNGER SIBLING

Be Your Own Pet

Hometown: Nashville, Tennessee

School Attended: One member cropped out; one's taking senior-year English online; one graduated early.

The Deal: Sen or member and lead singer Jemima Pearl just turned 20 in June, but they've been making ADHD-inspiring rock music for three years now.

Free-Association: Neon-speed-destroy-slam-punk-facemelt-spandex-psycho-puke.

Seriously: Pearl went to (yes, you're reading this right) Southern Girls Rock And Roll Camp, and first heard about punk rock from a Sid Vicious postcard.



Be Your Own Pet (left to right): Jemima Pearl, John Vasquez, John Stern and John Eatherly

Reunited

And It Feels So Good

After Side-Project Successes, **Rilo Kiley**
Are Even More Adventurous

STORY BY REBECCA RABER

PHOTO BY AUTUMN DE WILDE



TALKING TO JENNY LEWIS and Blake Sennett on the phone is like eavesdropping on the perfect couple. You know, the kind that speak in private shorthand and call each other by nicknames. Of course Rilo Kiley's co-bandleaders aren't a couple and haven't been in years, but calling from their respective L.A.-area homes, they speak so intimately with one another that trying to get a question in almost feels like an intrusion on a personal conversation. Sennett refers to the flame-haired singer almost exclusively as "Lewis" and defers to her throughout. And she, in turn, goes out of her way to credit him for writing the best songs or teaching her how to play certain instruments. They seem so intertwined in each others' lives that it is easy to forget that they spent the better part of the last two years working separately—she on her solo debut and he on his second record with the Elected. But after an 18-month hiatus and the surprising success of Lewis' *Rabbit Fur Coat*, they did something they didn't have to do: They came back together.

"I was slightly nervous because we had been away from each other for a minute," admits Sennett. "But once we got in there, for me anyway, the second we started playing music it was like, 'Oh yeah, I know these dudes. These are my friends, and I love playing music with these guys.' So the transition from nervous to comfortable was probably about five minutes for me."

"I think you and I, Blake, were always about a fresh start," concurs Lewis. "So I think with every tour, with every record, with every project, we were kind of ready to close the door on some of those relationships, on some of those songs. I think with this, it was exciting to start a whole new process and work on a whole new batch of songs."

Those songs, captured in their hometown last fall, became *Under The Blacklight*, the fourth full-length of their 10-year career. Longtime fans who swooned for the lo-fi bent of the slightly country-ish, scruffy folk-rock of their earlier records will be shocked by *Blacklight*'s sheen. It is, as its title announces, a plugged-in affair. Almost every song hinges on big electric guitar hooks and many feature neon-lit keyboards. "I think my Crumar [synthesizer] was the secret weapon," says Sennett. "Every time I turn that thing on, something good happens." Even the brightest, poppiest choruses on 2004's *More Adventurous*, which was, at the time, the band's most polished effort, could not have prepared audiences for the size and sophistication of the new Rilo Kiley sound. That said, this album still couldn't have been made by any other band.

As on many of their best tracks, there is a murky undercurrent to *Blacklight*'s shiny tunes. That is partly because Rilo Kiley, as a band, have always been at their best when they are finding beauty in the worst situations. It's also partly because the album itself plays out like a song cycle about L.A., a city that may be the best example of a place with a glossy exterior and sleazy underbelly.

"I think this record is a reflection of growing up in Los Angeles, all of the good things and all of the bad things," says Lewis. "And I think a lot of the songs are basic observations about the kinds of characters you might run into in various areas of Los Angeles. For me, I grew up in Van Nuys in the San Fernando Valley, which happens to be the pornography capitol of the universe. And although my life wasn't directly linked to that particular industry, I think as a child growing up, I noticed things on the boulevard—and by boulevard I mean Ventura Boulevard—that kind of alluded to that seedier lifestyle."

Songs like "The MoneyMaker" and "Close Call" explicitly deal with the topic of the sex industry—sample lyric: "Funny thing about money for sex/You might get rich, but you die by it"—and others, like "Breaking Up" and "15," are simply about romantic disappointments. "Well, I guess a lot of the songs are about the most regrettable sex I never had," jokes Lewis. These debauched stories are scored with dusky melodies that recall Fleetwood Mac at their most coked up and decadent rhythms that recall the Rolling Stones during their disco heyday. But what has always made Lewis, who has evolved into the group's primary lyricist, an especially compelling songwriter is her facility with dark subject matter; she always makes unpleasantness sound good.

"I think Lewis has such a unique gift for what a song wants," says Sennett. "I think she has such a great and almost effortless sense of what keeps a song interesting... It's not coming from her, it's coming

through her. It's that effortless. I think her innate sense of what a song wants is second to none."

MEANS TO A FRIEND

The Rilo Kiley story is, by now, well-known. Two ex-child stars come together to make music; their romance doesn't last, but their musical partnership does. They record for a string of well-respected indies (Barsuk, Saddle Creek) and then start their own (Brute/Beaute) under Warner Bros. before signing to that major label outright. In the meantime, Sennett creates two honeyed, vintage-sounding records with his other band, the Elected, and Lewis takes up her old pal Conor Oberst's offer to release a country-soul solo album that goes on to top many of last year's Best-Of lists. Throughout it all, they capture listeners with their uniquely L.A. brand of hipness, accessible pop hooks and the sort of seemingly confessional lyricism that makes their fans feel like they know the attractive couple at the center of the band. But what is, perhaps, less well-known is what has kept Rilo Kiley together all this time when bigger acts have folded under the weight of the break-up of their leaders or the success of their members' side projects.

"These guys are longtime friends," says Sennett. "And I personally am a huge fan of each one of the people in the band individually, so it's kind of exciting to play music with them. Like, if I wasn't in a band with Jenny, I would buy her records and just be a fan. That's a pretty cool place to be—to get to play music with someone that you're generally a fan of."

"A lot of the songs are about the most regrettable sex I never had." —Jenny Lewis

"And I think we've been through so much together, we've worked so hard as a band," offers Lewis in response. "We've done so much, that it's hard to just forget about it."

It's that ease with and respect for each other that makes Rilo Kiley, a decade into their career, still appealing. And listening to Sennett and Lewis riff off of each other, you get a better understanding of the way the bandmembers—including bassist/guitarist Pierre De Reeder and drummer Jason Boesel—play off of each other in their music. A discussion of their past reveals that they have few regrets about the path they've taken and a sense of humor about how they've gotten this far.

Sennett: "If I could have done everything differently, I would have said, 'Ok, this record, Jenny just plays bass.' Cause, Jenny, you have a really cool Kim Deal-like, simple, in-the-pocket bass style that really appeals to me."

Lewis: "That's not intentional, that's just that I know so little. I just know exactly what you taught me on the bass like 10 years ago, and I've been playing the same notes ever since."

Sennett: "Well, I've been playing the same two chords."

Lewis: "Lies! No, it's very difficult. I wish I could do that all the time, but it's so hard to sing out and play the bass at the same time."

Sennett: "Yeah, we would have gotten used to it."

Lewis: "Yeah, you would have."

Sennett: "Old goddamn vaudeville pro."

For two people with so much shared history, however, Sennett and Lewis are loath to dwell on it. Lewis, for her part, says she doesn't listen to their old records unless it's to prepare for a tour, and even out on the road, doesn't enjoy playing songs off of them. And while Sennett admits to more nostalgia than his partner, recently revisiting 2002's *The Execution Of All Things*, which "wasn't as awful as I thought it would be," he too has his sights set firmly on the horizon. Not that he or Lewis is preoccupied with the future of the band, though.

"If you take a look at our savings accounts, you'll find we're not planners," laughs Sennett. "So we're taking it, you know—" Lewis finishes his thought: "We're taking it slow." ●



ION: Sheff's ballads: Okkervil's latest gives voice to the voiceless.

The World's A Stage

And All The Men And Women Merely Players
On **Okkervil River's** New Album

STORY BY KEVIN KAMPWIRTH

PHOTO BY TODD WOLFSON

THREE YEARS AGO, when Okkervil River's singer/guitarist Will Sheff decided to begin writing the band's 2005 album, *Black Sheep Boy*, he drove to Indiana, holding up at a friend's house "in the middle of nowhere." It was winter, and the isolated environment contributed heavily to the album's tone: rough, austere and, at times, nightmarish. Sheff is hardly one to remain sedentary, driven by an almost compulsive urge to uproot. For the band's most recent effort, *The Stage Names* (Jagjaguwar), he again drove across the country by himself, this time landing in New York (his girlfriend lives in Brooklyn), where he remained for six months working on the songs.

"I've become a little less bound to one place in terms of where I end up," Sheff says, picking at a bowl of raspberries at a refurbished loft in New York's Meatpacking District. "There's been about five times in the last three years where I've just put all my shit in storage and kind of gone and lived wherever. I'm never in one place long enough to feel like I live there, because I tend to spend nine months or so out of the year on the road."

The 30-year-old Sheff (for whom Austin, Texas has been the closest thing to a permanent home he's had over the past eight years) is of average height, but his slight build suggests a tallness that he doesn't really carry. Wearing two-day stubble and thin, dark-rimmed glasses, he's a thoughtful speaker—despite the occasional "like"—and when not sustaining eye contact, he stares pensively at the table in front of him.

A LIT FUSE

The Stage Names marks Okkervil River's fourth proper LP since Sheff formed the band nearly a decade ago in his native New Hampshire with some high school friends. In the time since, they've gone through several lineup changes and relocated to Austin, but Sheff believes a stable core of musicians has at last been attained.

"It was a very long time before we had any kind of recognition," he says. "It was just hard to keep touring sometimes for some people, especially because we weren't making any money. Since then, things have solidified a little more, partly because the profile has been raised, but a bigger part of it was just finding people who could manage to make it work... as opposed to people who wanted to have 'real careers.'"

The process of cementing this, however, was all but invisible to listeners. Anchored by Sheff, Okkervil's output has been consistent in both quality and quantity. In addition to their full-lengths, the band has released several EPs, while Sheff and his longtime keyboardist, Jonathan

that mean that Nina Simone or Hank Williams is emo? I think that's just a natural quality of my voice... Lit-rock is even sillier, the implication being that rock music could be better if it was classed up with some literary trappings, and I think that's snotty and meaningless. I don't think it's useful to talk about music in terms of literature. None of my favorite songs are trying to be literary."

The fact that Sheff—in his songs, conversation and even onstage banter—frequently drops SAT-caliber vocabulary is one reason why his music is often corralled into such categories, which he feels are more appropriate for artists like the Decemberists or Sufjan Stevens. Okkervil River is, in every sense, a rock band, and if there's anyone its leader feels a kinship with, it's Bob Dylan, whose approach Sheff says is "far more what I'm going for than whatever lit-rock means. He was very ambitious in terms of what he wanted to convey in his lyrics, but I feel like the big difference is that you have to make sure that the music is equally robust."

HERE WE ARE NOW, ENTERTAIN US

The release of a new Okkervil record is so hotly anticipated by their fans because each one differs stylistically. Although they've never really made a concept album, per se, each has been constructed around a unifying theme that works towards sustaining a sense of time and place or specific emotions from start to finish. *Names* functions partly as a travelogue, detailing towns and people that Sheff has encountered, and partly to give shape to an idea that he's been formulating over the last year or so.

"I had all these songs and they dealt with these themes of entertainment—not just literature, but music, theater, film and these kinds of characters who are entertainers—and I needed a ribbon to tie them altogether," he says. "So I got this idea that if the whole thing had a title track that it would work, and this became 'The Stage Names.'"

Among the entertainers Sheff gives voice to on the record are porn star Savannah ("Savannah Smiles") and poet John Berryman ("John Allyn Smith Sails"), both of whom took their own lives. One of the underlying concepts throughout was this idea of someone having to die inside of a name. "There's a persona aspect to it I suppose," says Sheff, "but there's also an aspect of a gulf between a thing and its representation and the way our emotions and the things we want fill that gulf."

There's a line on what may be the record's best track, "Unless It's Kicks," that goes, "He's been driving too long on a dark windless night/ With the stereo on, with the towns flying by and the ground getting soft." Like most Okkervil River songs, the music and Sheff's nonpareil rhythmic delivery only make the words stand out that much more

"I don't think it's useful to talk about music in terms of literature. None of my favorite songs are trying to be literary." —Will Sheff

Meiburg, started the band Shearwater in their spare time. (Sheff has since stopped contributing to the latter to avoid it being misconstrued as an Okkervil side project.)

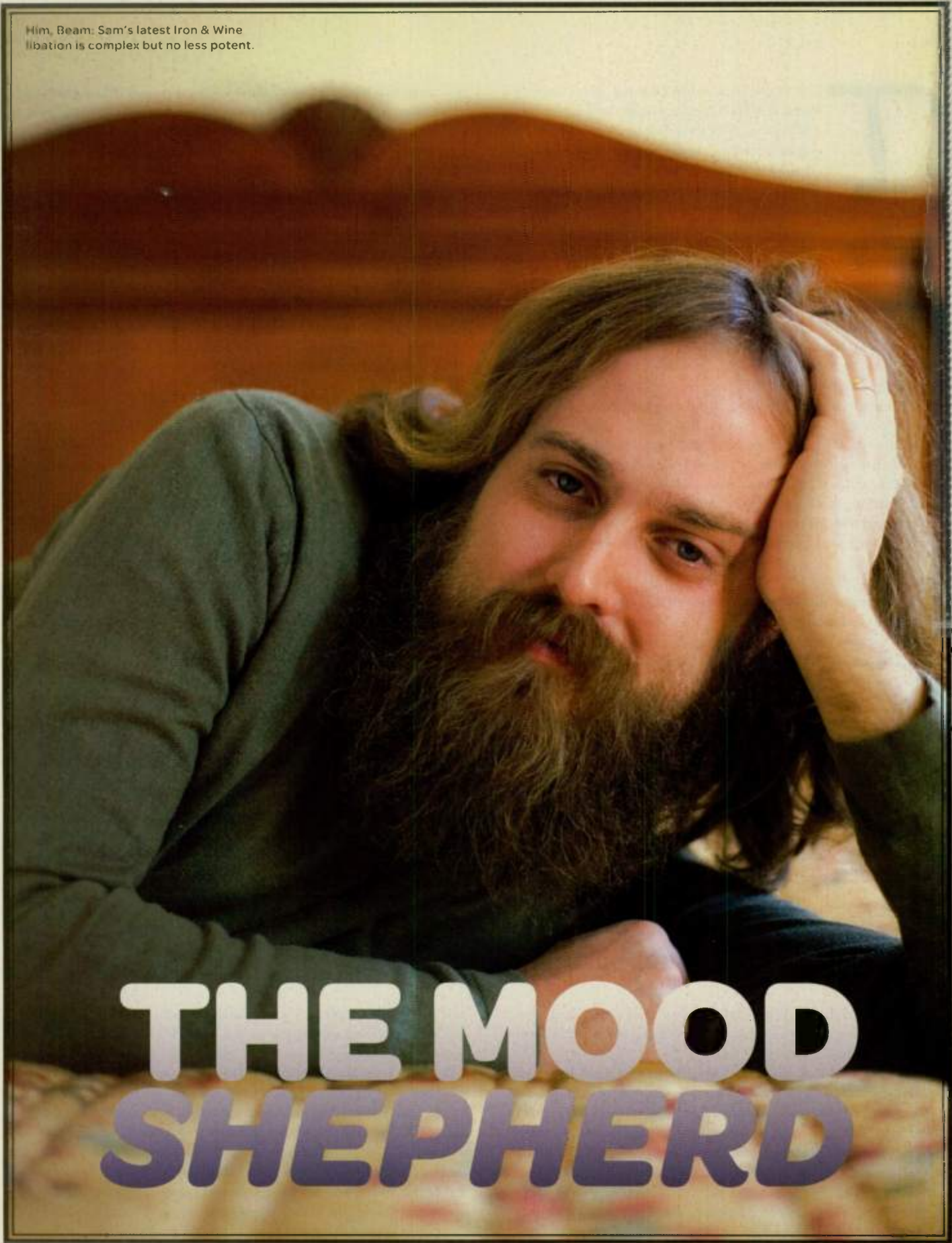
The critical adulation has more or less always been there for the band, but for whatever reason, only since *Black Sheep Boy* have they seen a devoted fan base grow exponentially. Their music is most frequently referred to as "folk-rock" or some variation on the tag, but that's generally been out of convenience more than anything. Almost everything ever written about them has also included the modifiers "lit-rock" and "emo," two labels that are more puzzling to Sheff than they are vexing.

"They're both very silly descriptive tags that don't mean very much," he says. "Emo is extremely silly because it just means emotional. Does

boldly. But that couplet is a particularly referential moment in regards to a band, and more specifically an individual, for whom searching has never been an option.

"I think that maybe you never feel like you've made it, which is a good thing," Sheff demures. "We've been doing it for nine years now, so I guess you can sort of look at it and say, 'Well, maybe we haven't come so far,' but I'm very grateful that I get paid to do what I love. The way people think that we've 'made it,' so to speak, is how maybe we think about Spoon, and what Spoon thinks about Wilco and Wilco probably thinks that about Radiohead and Radiohead probably thinks that about the Stones. It's just the human condition to be really bitter and take for granted every good thing that's ever happened to you."

Him, Beam: Sam's latest Iron & Wine libation is complex but no less potent.



THE MOOD SHEPHERD

Sam Beam's Most Nuanced Record Might Also Be One For The Ages

STORY BY LORDA KOLODNY // PHOTO BY EMILY WILSON

IT'S A FUNNY THING for a 21st century band not to keep track of who played what parts in which songs and when. Any three-note lick could generate big bucks if sampled, or made into a ringtone later. Yet when Iron & Wine, aka singer-songwriter Sam Beam, cut *The Shepherd's Dog* (Sub Pop), he was too engaged in the creative process to stop and write things down like "handclap percussion by so-and-so," or "trippy backing vocals contributed by so-and-so." So there's no detail in memory, or in the liner notes, about how it all came together exactly.

Beam, speaking from his home about an hour outside of Austin, says he was focused on "making a record... where you listen to it beginning to end and feel like you went on a musical journey. Yes, you make sure you spend a lot of time on each song, so it is a complete listening experience. At the same time, for those who want to go further, you try to connect with them just as well." The results? A 39-minute body of trance-

development that I feel, and that I know I can only get from myself."

Beam's folk roots may not be the dominating sound anymore, but they do break through on two of the new tracks. "Resurrection Fern" and "Innocent Bones" are fairly straightforward vocal-and-guitar numbers, complete with biblical imagery and slide guitars. There was no conscious decision to depart from one style for another, according to Beam, for whom songwriting is a constant process, done without audience approval or a particular genre or album structure in mind. "When you write all the time," he offers, "the challenge is to later go back through to see what songs work together as a group."

The image of the shepherd's dog appealed to Beam as a unifying concept for a record because of its duality. "When you think of this animal, a shepherd's dog, that is either an image of responsibility or a lack of responsibility," he explains. "These songs may seem like they're trying to say something very specific, but when you break them down, they're not. Instead, what was important to me was to create this mesmerizing

"There's a lot of the unrest of [Dylan's] Highway 61 in my mind in The Shepherd's Dog." —Sam Beam

inducing, belly danceable new songs that could transform the listening public's view and expectations of Iron & Wine.

Beam originally rose from the indie underground to the mainstream limelight as a downer acoustic act whose cover of the Postal Service hit "Such Great Heights" was notably featured on the *Garden State* soundtrack and later in an M&Ms commercial. Beam's songs—from 2002's long-player *The Creek Drank The Cradle* to the 2005 EP *Woman King*—have been consistently characterized as "naked," "lo-fi" and "Southern."

On *The Shepherd's Dog*, Beam incorporates new instrumentation, more electricity and West African and Middle Eastern rhythms into his music. Gone are the literal story-songs (like "The Trapeze Swinger" or "Free Until They Cut Me Down"). Instead, there's a didgeridoo creaking away in the desolate, meditative "House By the Sea"; hand claps and highly delayed guitar lines dizzying the lead single "Boy With a Coin"; and Beam and his sister, vocalist Sarah Beam, in harmonious lockstep, recalling echoey dream pop à la Cocteau Twins on the sentimental "Carousel."

Does Beam worry that moving into new musical territory could alienate his earlier folk fans? Not at all. "If my audience listens to just one song, I'm happy," he jokes. Attending a fine arts school in the hopes of becoming a painter helped him learn to take constructive criticism and ignore invalid critiques. "I hope people enjoy this record, of course," he says. But if you start making work for other people you won't break new ground. You'll work on something that's already a proven model. And what's great about that? Nothing I do is totally avant-garde, but there is a personal

feeling, this sedation that only comes from music. There's a lot of the unrest of [Dylan's] *Highway 61 in my mind in The Shepherd's Dog*."

Rock listeners can easily draw some comparisons to other classic acts driven by singer-songwriters. Western bands who turned to music from faraway lands, then combined its influence with ultra modern recording technology for a mid-career creative jolt, as Beam has done with *The Shepherd's Dog*, include: the Beatles ("Norwegian Wood"), Led Zeppelin ("Kashmir"), Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young ("Guinevere") and U2 ("Mysterious Ways").

Beam reveals that his musical diet while writing and recording *The Shepherd's Dog* was eclectic and random, belying a sort of aural ADD. Among his recent favorites are dub's King Tubby and Lee Perry, prog-rockers Yes and Genesis, and jazz pioneers like Steve Reich and Miles Davis.

Listening to these great collaborators and working with more musicians—the public presentation of Iron & Wine is up to seven members—has begun to change Beam's mind about songwriting in other ways. Though he has, until now, only written by himself (even for collaborative projects like the 2006 recording with Calexico, *In the Reins*), he and Califone—the folk-funk-electronic Chicago band—are planning to co-write a prog-inspired, long-format record.

"Any time you do something different, there are people who don't like it because it's not the same thing they know," says Beam. "It could create conflict of some kind. I'm glad people enjoy my little records, but it would be silly to keep doing the same one over and over again."

Lots of kids in the Hall: (left to right) Greg Anderson, Claudia Mogel, Fred Wallace, Jesse Barnes, Rachel Cox and Pat Sullivan



Following Through

Oakley Hall's Career Has Been A Continuous Hurdle... And It's Finally Paying Off

STORY BY DOUG MOSUROCK // PHOTO BY MAYA HAYUK

THINGS DON'T ALWAYS happen the way we'd expect them to. That certainly rings true in the case of Oakley Hall. Sitting on the back patio of a Brooklyn bar, banjo/lap steel/guitar player Fred Wallace recalls the event that changed his life. "I was living in Virginia at the time," he explains. "I came up to New York for a few days to visit a friend, and I got home from my trip and my apartment had burned to the ground. I had no intentions of ever living in New York. All I had was my truck and the clothes on my back, and there's this yellow police ribbon across the front of the burned-out building I used to live in. So I just turned around and came back."

Throughout their half-decade history, Oakley Hall have survived as iconoclasts in the New York scene with a delirious, expansive approach

more suited to the Carolinas than the Big Apple. Blending country, American folk, psychedelia and Southern rock into a disciplined, yet free-spirited mix, the six-member group presents their own blistering take on those musical modes around a traditional backbone, merging influences and energy into one jubilant whole. Oakley Hall's breakneck work ethic is worth noting, if for no other reason than to shed light on the struggles they've experienced. They've released four albums on four different independent labels, leading up to their latest, *I'll Follow You (Merge)*, and gone through the sort of setbacks that would have killed a lesser band 10 times over. Frontman Pat Sullivan informs me of the newest one. "Greg quit," he says with a look of casual, familiar defeat. He's referring to Greg Anderson, the group's drummer of the past three years. Citing an amicable split over Anderson's decision to open a restaurant due to weariness with

life on tour, Sullivan laments, "It's not an easy situation. Greg knew what he liked about us before he joined the band and really pushed us to get moving in those directions." Adds guitarist/vocalist Rachel Cox, "His work also reminded us of a sense of urgency, that we are all getting older." The band soldiers on, however, trying out drummers for their upcoming, headlining US tour. "When all else fails," Sullivan laments, "the only thing we can do is just focus on moving forward, to distance ourselves from the things that hold us back."

CRAZEE TRAIN

Oakley Hall formed out of the scattered remnants of Crazee & Heaven, a country outfit that served as both an avenue for Sullivan, then Oneida's frontman, to get something more out of music, and for a handful of the brighter stars he'd met on tour to move to Brooklyn and make music together. "I love chord changes and a bit more traditional structure to music, and Crazee & Heaven was an outlet for that," he says, those notions in sharp contrast to the endless repetition and full-throttle burn of Oneida, then in the midst of their most directly psychedelic phase. This proved to be the tipping point for Sullivan, who quit Oneida in late 2001, pouring all of his creative energies into what was once a side project, just in time to watch Crazee collapse following one tour. "The intensity that I put into Oneida was something I brought over to Crazee & Heaven, which was a really young band and one not exactly up to the challenge. With touring life, as much as you need musical partners, you also need people who are ready to hit the road."

Now, a number of musicians, nearly all of whom moved from the South to play with Sullivan, found themselves out of a band. "I'd experienced one extreme with Oneida and another different extreme with the follow-up," Sullivan says. "And when they both fell apart for me around the same time, I discovered that I didn't have to choose one or the other, that I could do them both in the same band—heavier music with a country backbone." Drummer Will Dyar, bassist Jesse Barnes and fiddle player Claudia Mogel were charter members of Oakley Hall, along with Wallace, guitarists Steve Tesh and Ed Kurz, vocalist Leah Blessoff, Company's Chris Teret and assorted others.

"We'd have as many as 11 members crammed onto this tiny stage," Sullivan says. "We had to travel in two separate vehicles on the road, which is no way to survive on tour." Adds Wallace, "We'd spill off the stage and onto the floor. At times there'd be more band members than audience, and sometimes it was hard to draw the line between the two. We didn't know who was going to show up to play, so we just went with it."

Since most of the group's members didn't know one another well, their interaction centered around constant practice and gigs first, social hour second. "It got kind of hard to even remember each other's names," cracks Wallace. "We could barely fit everyone into our rehearsal space." Regardless, the band pushed itself through a handful of small tours before recording its first, self-titled album, which Dyar engineered on fairly basic equipment. "We did that one live in the space, with no overdubs," Sullivan recalls. "Many of us had no intention of ever playing in a band, and here we were. We didn't have the kind of rapport to tell each other how to do things." Released by tiny Michigan label Bulb in early 2004 amidst inner turmoil (including Dyar's exit and Greg Anderson's entrance), the end result confirms these sentiments, but remains a vibrant, heartfelt work.

After a few months set aside to cool off, Oakley Hall was ready to reconvene when a workplace accident severed three of the fingers on Sullivan's right hand. Emergency surgery enabled doctors to reattach his index and middle fingers, but his ring finger could not be saved. Recovery time and additional operations sidelined the band for the better part of a year. "We were finally starting to get used to the idea of playing again," Wallace notes, "and the layoff time really brought that lineup to an end." That time, however, allowed the remaining members to achieve the camaraderie they had lacked. "In the end, particularly with the help of Greg, we all became more able to focus on sounds and ideas without really

hurting anyone's feelings," says Sullivan, "or being *laissez-faire* about how we wanted to sound."

The band spent most of 2004 writing and recording *Second Guessing*, a tremendous step forward. Not that it was without its own internal issues, of course, as the group parted ways with vocalist Blessoff halfway through the sessions, leading to the decision to bring Cox into the fold. And so Cox, who was born with 50 percent hearing loss, was given just a few weeks to learn the band's songs and hit the road, not to mention re-record Blessoff's parts on the album.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE HALL

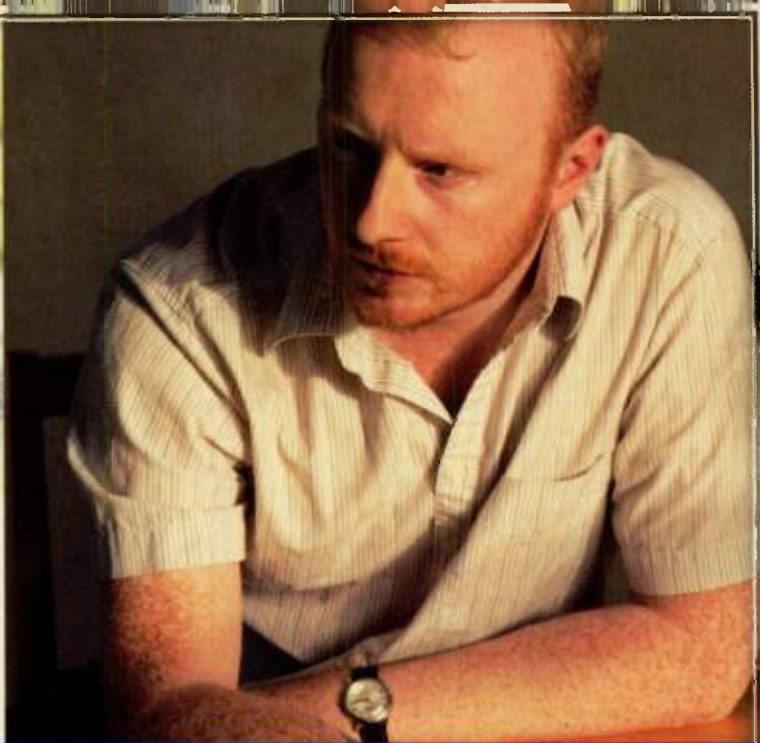
It was only a few months before a co-headlining tour with the Constantines when Oakley Hall found themselves without a label, after Bulb unceremoniously folded in 2004. "Pete [Larson, Bulb founder] was an extremely supportive, very friendly guy who really just didn't want to release records anymore, and might have been in denial over the fact," Sullivan says, looking back. "It wasn't intentional, but it could have been handled better on both ends." Weighing their options, they decided to cut a 2005 EP, *Gypsum Strings*, and sell it on a Canadian tour. This wild, beatific departure of a release was later expanded to album length and released on Brah, an imprint of indie label Jagjaguwar run by Sullivan's former bandmates in Oneida. "We had just about given up on the hope that *Second Guessing* would see the light of day," he says. "And Oneida were fed up with their own label for passing over Oakley Hall yet again, so they pulled together a deal of their own and signed us up." Then, in an eleventh-hour save, New York's Amish label decided to release the abandoned project, and 2006 saw these two distinct works released within three months of one another. "The fact that we were able to drop two serious records so closely to one another didn't work against us as much as we had feared," says Sullivan of this unusual arrangement. "It definitely gave people something to talk about."

This ceaseless work ethic, and a connection through the Yeah Yeah Yeahs' Brian Chase, who played on *Gypsum Strings*, landed the group a new booking agent. Lengthy tours opening for like-minded outfits such as Bright Eyes, Calexico, Gillian Welch and M. Ward followed, raising the group's profile from headlining in front of dozens to warming up in front of thousands, including a dream gig at Nashville's Rymer Auditorium. "Playing with Bright Eyes was sort of like opening for Elvis," says Wallace. "People didn't give a shit who opened for Elvis. But we were really fortunate to get quite a lot of love from the audience at most of the shows." This level of exposure subsequently attracted Merge to Oakley Hall, who signed the band on the road for their fourth and most realized album yet.

"I was blown away," says Merge founder Mac McCaughan of the group. "I've seen them convert hundreds of people at a time who've never heard a note [of their music] before the set started." Accessible, open and sequenced for maximum diversity of sound, *I'll Follow You* showcases the band in as full of control of their sound as they've ever been, with stirring folk ballads ("First Frost"), the dreamlike wander of the title track, and the blazing rock of "Alive Among Thieves" and "No Dreams" setting the pace for another varied, yet seamless collection of songs and styles.

"One thing different about *I'll Follow You*," recalls Wallace, "is that while we had more time for recording and working on the production, we had the least amount of time to work on actual material because we've been touring so much. We're not ones to write much on the road." Sullivan qualifies, "We'd become so jammy in the live setting that it was a big shift for us to pare down to these opening slots. So with the new one, we decided to try to take things back to our earliest approaches to writing, but to use the depth of instrumentation we'd developed over the years."

"At this point," Wallace summarizes, "and I think I speak for all of us, I can't think of not being in this band. After all we've been through, the regret I'd live with of giving up on it without having seen it through would be too much."



Why The Word "Glaswegian" Will Remain
In Your Indie-Rock Vocabulary

THE LAST KINGS OF SCOTLAND

STORY BY KORY GROW



A LITTLE OVER A DECADE AGO, Glasgow was billed as an indie-rock Mecca, having housed several excellent, influential bands, including indie-popsters the Delgados, instrumental-rock metalloids Mogwai, teeth-gnashing folksters Arab Strap, indie icons Belle & Sebastian and many others. Legends slowly amassed around these bands—people were having sex at Mogwai shows, feuds (imagined or not) were reported between Arab Strap and Belle & Sebastian over album titles and over who would be the first to breakout on the Delgados' self-run Chemikal Underground label. Regardless of the *NME* hyperbole-of-the-moment, the bands kept their course, releasing one solid record after another.

Lately, however, many of Glasgow's erstwhile legends have reached a turning point. The Delgados disbanded in 2005, despite their final album garnering rave reviews. A year later, one of their label's greatest successes, Arab Strap, did the same. Most recently, indie rock/metalloids Aereogramme, who issued a well-received collaboration with US psych-meddlers Isis in 2006, called it quits, playing their final show in late August of 2007. It may seem like the end of an era, but in actuality, it's just part of the city's history of creative regeneration, which has recently launched the careers of post-punk groups like Franz Ferdinand and the Fratellis.

In *CMJ New Music Monthly's* September 1998 issue, Stephen

McRobbie, vocalist/guitarist for Glasgow psych-folksters the Pastels, praised his city's 20th century architecture and foggy weather, capping it with a joke about Scotland's more tourist-y city: "Just don't mention Edinburgh, OK?" Its metro-area boasts a little over a million denizens, making it the UK's third most-populous city, after London and Birmingham. Like most big, Western cities, it boasts a hip youth culture and supportive musical community. "It's got a constant scene," says the delightfully exuberant ex-Delgado Emma Pollock, sitting at a café in New York. "I don't like using that word because it suggests it's a temporary thing, but Glasgow has always had music and it will continue to be vibrant in that way, partly because of the attitude of the people as well... People are just very down to earth. There's not a lot of pretension in Glasgow."

SCOTTI BROTHERS

Although the city first produced musicians like AC/DC's Young brothers (before moving to Australia), David Byrne, Jesus And Mary Chain and Simple Minds, its first notable alternative group was Orange Juice, a quirky pseudo-new-wave quartet that begat singer/songwriter Edwyn Collins. A few years later came the ascent of Teenage Fanclub, the sublimely melodic group that provided a musical blueprint for Weezer, among others, with *Bandwagonesque*. From there, Glasgow's musically cyclical nature started to form.

"I think there's always a good music scene here, but people just notice it every 10 years," says Mogwai guitarist Stuart Braithwaite. "I think there are always good bands probably just because there are lots of good venues and a supportive musical community."

It was the Delgados, formed in 1994, that first fostered Glasgow's musical community. "There wasn't really much of a scene," recalls ex-Arab Strap member Malcolm Middleton. "There were a few people fighting against what was there, which was all blues bands and heavy metal bands, like these old guys who didn't like what we were doing and we didn't like what they were doing." Starting Chemikal Underground to release their own records, the Delgados began operating outside of London's then-dominating music industry. "It's always astounded me how record companies try and sign the next [thing]," Pollock says. "The public aren't stupid and the things that catch people's imagination are usually the things that are different, unique and have a confidence about them."

Releasing Bis' *The Secret Vampire Soundtrack* in 1996, the label was pleased to see it chart in the UK's Top 40. Perhaps because they saw that they could do it on their own, many Chemikal Underground-related artists started harboring distrust for the London music industry, not taking their distance for granted. Each band developed a unique sound. "If someone was going to make a drum machine or a keyboard with a preset of the 'Glasgow' setting, I don't know what it'd be," says Middleton, laughing. The city has many, unusually supportive venues that allow bands to hone their sound. For every group that formed, another would watch and come up with something new, all the while supporting one another. "I wouldn't say there's a competition," Pollock says. "If there is, it's healthy. It's friendly. I would say it's a pretty positive environment."

Two unique bands that formed around the same time and looked up to each other were Mogwai and Arab Strap. Having initially met up at a Ned's Atomic Dustbin concert, Mogwai's Braithwaite and Dominic Aitchison quickly formed a kinship that would lead to their loud-soft contrasting, mostly instrumental rock and metal. Most recently, they released their soundtrack to a film about French soccer player Zinedine Zidane, titled *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (PIAS America). Through the years, Mogwai has had a spotty history with BBC radio, although they have found their music creeping into more than a few film and TV soundtracks.

"I think the happiest I've ever been was [when] on the news, there were several politicians that got sent to jail for perjury when they caught Jeffrey Archer," says Braithwaite from the rehearsal studio. "They were showing a slow-motion thing of him going to jail [on TV] and they played a song by us, and I think that's probably the best thing that ever happened to the band."

With such a unique sound—its closet audible cousin is Kentucky quiet-rockers Slint—Mogwai have been difficult to pin down. Called post-rock by some and derided for their metal leanings by others, they've been critically lauded and frequently misunderstood. "[Post-rock] implies there's a listener that just isn't there," says Braithwaite. "Especially with us, we're very quiet, humble people... It's just kind of annoying and it makes you feel arrogant."

Arab Strap, another band possibly too smart for their own good, formed in 1995, the brainchild of hirsute vocalist Aidan Moffat and pasty

instrumentalist Malcolm Middleton, in Falkirk, about 25 miles from Glasgow. ("In America it's not far, but in Scotland, it's like the other side of the world," says Middleton.) With Arab Strap, it was their differing personalities and lack of musical accomplishment that immediately set them apart. Moffat was obsessed with Drag City folk rockers like Palace Brothers and (Smog), whereas Middleton was more into straight-ahead rock.

"Arab Strap are a great example where a band did something utterly unique," Pollock says. "Aidan's probably the most vulgar individual I know, but at the same time, he's also the most articulate and intelligent storyteller when it comes to relationships." The band released several high-charting albums over the years, and their swan song, fittingly titled *The Last Romance*, even ranked No. 1 on CMJ's radio chart upon release. Since breaking up, Moffat has gone on to release an electronica-laced solo album under the name L. Pierre, a pseudonym he's used since 2002. Similarly, Middleton is now releasing *A Brighter Beat* (Full Time Hobby), his first solo album (and third overall under his own name) since the band's breakup. It's a brilliant collection of traditional verse-chorus songs but with his trademark cynicism and infectious hooks. When it comes to his band's breakup though, Middleton still sounds a bit shaken.

"I just felt like the love had gone out of it," says Middleton. "The reason we started out was just [to make] songs and demo tapes for a laugh to give our friends of stuff that happened over the weekend and tell them stories. And it just kind of changed, like we'd grown up... And it just seemed like Arab Strap to us was very youth[-oriented] and we didn't have that anymore, so it had become too much like a business—like a serious band."

Pollock, though, wrote some of the songs on her new solo album, *Watch The Fireworks* (4AD), while still in the Delgados. Although it's not coming out on Chemikal Underground—she thought it would be weird having her ex-bandmates release it—she's still with family. Working with Delgados drummer (and her husband) Paul Savage, along with Aereogramme bassist Campbell McNeil, she's crafted an album of lush indie rock that doesn't stray too far from her former band's musical legacy.

"Within a few weeks [of breaking up] I knew I at least wanted to give it another shot, so it wasn't a hard decision," Pollock says. "I could've maybe taken a year out. It would have taken so long to get the record out anyway I thought there was no time like the present."

LIFE'S A GLAS

As newer Glaswegian bands garner more attention, it's immediately clear that it's a different generation. Both Franz Ferdinand and the Fratellis continue their city's tradition of producing catchy, hook-laden indie rock, but they didn't rely so much on their city's musical community—with the speed at which both were signed they didn't have to.

"It's a funny time now," Pollock says. "It's probably a new generation of bands coming through just now who look at ours and think they're just a bunch of old bastards... I'd like to think the people that we've worked with—I mean Mogwai is still together, Arab Strap will, as individuals, keep doing it—they're just people who have to make music and they will continue to do so."

The Fratellis, flag wavers for the new generation, have experienced a trajectory of which most bands could only dream. Only two years after their first gig, at Glasgow's O'Henry's Bar, they played New York's 250-capacity club Mercury Lounge. By mid-July they were co-headlining the Big Apple's 3,200-capacity venue Roseland Ballroom with Peter Bjorn And John and supporting the Police in stadiums (thanks to their inclusion in Apple's iPod's advertising campaign). Strangely, vocalist/guitarist Jon Fratelli's (real name: John Lawler) opinion couldn't be more opposite of those that came before him.

"For a long time, Glasgow seemed to take care of itself really well," says Fratelli. "I think for a long time, it was kind of ignored by the UK music scene and, because it was ignored, it seemed to become self-sufficient... For a long time, I really liked that about Glasgow. But I suppose sometime quite recently, a few bands decided they weren't content just to sort of play in Glasgow... I've always wanted to do the opposite of what would be the normal thing to do, so I didn't go and hang around those [popular] places. Maybe for us it was a good thing because we never got sucked into that mentality of just existing within Glasgow."

In fact, Fratelli is blasé when asked about his hometown heroes, putting the success of the Glasgow scene in perspective. "The Beatles and Dylan didn't come from Glasgow," he says, "or the Clash. I wish they had." And the bagpipes play on.

Do Not Pass...Go

Aesop Rock Keeps Evolving With His First Full-Length In Four Years

INTERVIEW BY KEVIN KAMPWIRTH

PHOTO BY CHRIS PIPER

AT AN IMPOSING 6'4", Aesop Rock is built like a small forward and speaks in lengthy, pointed sentences during which he makes minimal eye contact. As time passes though, he becomes markedly more relaxed, lacing his thoughts with the same humor, poignancy and charisma that mark his music. Having built a loyal grassroots following while graduating into one of the game's most critically adored underground MCs, the 31-year-old Long Island native has just released his fourth proper LP, *None Shall Pass* (Definitive Jux). And though the album is far removed from his *Float* days, it's clear there's still no one else quite like Aesop Rock.

Do you still catch heat about moving to San Francisco?

I'm 31 and I've been in New York forever, so if I move to San Francisco for a couple of years, it's OK. Although I feel like the subject matter that I'm writing about is very New York-based, it's just a different vibe out [in San Francisco]... It's actually kind of cool because I wrote about New York for so long from inside of it, but when you leave, you look at it from a different perspective... But it's not like I'm going to make a hyphy record or anything like that.

That said, your style as an MC seems to change just a bit with each record.

Yeah, I think I used to be a lot more talking at you, and now I think I'm trying to engage somebody as opposed to like berate them or something.

Do you consciously try to make every record sound different?

Something new comes up each time and you throw yourself into this new idea that you have, and by the time you're finished with a project you're kind of sick of that idea. It always seems to happen by the time you're mixing the record.

Why do you think *Bazooka Tooth* functioned as your breakout record?

Each one progressively kind of did a little more. *Float* did pretty well for me as far as getting a buzz going. So when *Labor Days* came out, people knew to look for it, I guess, and it was received pretty well. So, even though *Bazooka Tooth* wasn't my sophomore album or anything, it almost felt like it was because it was sort of that follow-up record.

It was also your second on Definitive Jux.

That was huge too. When Def Jux kicked off, there was this big blast of press with it because it was El-P's label and it was kind of anticipated, so it just almost seemed like my sophomore LP on this cutting edge indie label or whatever.

Do you think that your background in painting has influenced your music in any way?

I always get pegged as kind of this "abstract lyricist" guy, which is funny because I think I go for the opposite in trying to make these very detailed and realistic scenes. The painting school I went to is very traditional and was the kind of thing where you learn how to draw circles for a year... Abstract painting was never something I was interested in. I feel I approach my music the same way, but unfortunately no one else seems to [laughs].

John Darnielle contributes to "Coffee" on the new album. How did this come about?

I first heard the Mountain Goats in like '94... My older brother gave me this Mountain Goats tape and I was like, "This is fucking badass! This dude's lyrics are crazy." I really can only describe it as like a fishing hook in my ear... It was kind of hip-hop-y in the way that you're really focused on the lyrics and his music is almost like a beat... In 2003, I saw some year-end list he did and he put *Bazooka Tooth* on it and I was like, "Holy shit!" So I was at one of his shows a bit later... [and] went up to him and was like, "Hey man, I think you put my album on a list and I just wanted to say thanks and I'm a huge fan" and he was like, "Who are you?" So I told him and he was really psyched and we had this little fan-out session. We just kind of maintained a friendship after that.

So do you try to keep an ear to the ground in general as far as new music goes?

Being around music all the time takes the thrill out of it a little. But that's cool, because you have to dig deeper to find things that really impact you, and then when you find something that hits you in that way like when you were 15, it's just like, "Oh fuck."... I've kind of grown out of my hip-hop snobbery phase, so I'll give anything a try, besides maybe techno and country music—the two that white people invented.

'Sop story: Many New Yorkers shed a tear when Rock relocated to California.



*Electro-Dance
diva M.I.A.
went out to the
world when she
couldn't get
into America*

**STORY BY KORY GROW
PHOTO BY JANETTE BECKMAN**

Leader of the Banned

"You Africans, listen to me as Africans
And you non-Africans, listen to me with open mind
Suffer, suffer, suffer, suffer, suffer, suffer Third World—
Not your fault to be that
Me, I say, not your fault to be that"

—Fela Kuti,

"Shuffling And Shmiling, Part 2" (1977)

A T A MID-JULY outdoor music festival in Coney Island, Brooklyn, polyglot-dance singer M.I.A. performed a stunt far more impressive than anything the Mesozoic amusement park's sideshow performers, beach exhibitionists and salivating carnies have done previously: She showed up. Taking a charismatic Prince-like stance after singing "Bucky Done Gun," she surveyed the crowd and said, "I nearly had a seezhah, trying to get my visa." Dressed in a gold-sequined vest top, tight, vinyl-looking black pants and a captain's hat, the 30-year-old—who's lately been getting equal ink for her neon, '80s throwback clothing as her visa troubles—commanded the festival. Showing up was a triumph of sorts, and she wouldn't let it go by in passing.

For almost a year, Mathangi Arulpragasam had been denied entry into the US, with no clear reason given. And although she has an apartment in Brooklyn, this English-born Sri Lankan songstress decided she didn't need America to make music and focused her energy internationally.

"[My album's] direction was obviously in the opposite direction to the borders of the United States," she says matter-of-factly via phone from XL's London office. "Cause I couldn't quite get past those." As she made her travels, which included her parents' homeland of Sri Lanka, Jamaica and Australia, among others, to record her second album, *Kala* (XL-Interscope), it came to a head in Liberia (which she praises for beating the US to a female president) where, as she writes on her MySpace blog, "I wanted to go and deal with post-Bono era."

**"Coming out of Africa or coming from India,
we think all America is, is like video
chicks and bling at the moment."**

"For me to go back to the Third World and be able to be a part of that again made me realize how in the West we're so good at sort of going over there and documenting it and then we just leave," says Arulpragasam. "We never actually have to live that reality. But at the same time, we've never actually taught people over there to have the power to document themselves. And if they did, what would they actually say?... If these kids were on MySpace and knew or understood the urgency or the speed at which you can make a song from your village and upload [it] and then have it heard by people halfway across the globe, I wonder what that would be like, you know? And it made me realize that I was extremely lucky to be, like, the first person to actually come from that environment—I've lived like the kids that I saw in Africa—and it was perchance that... now I'm in the position to make music."

Caring about social plight is in her blood, after all, since her father is the Sri Lankan revolutionary Arul Pragasam (the "Arular" for whom her debut album was named). And previously she showed Third World solidarity when she sang, "You wanna win a war?/Like P.L.O., don't surrender," referring to the Palestine Liberation Organization, on her 2005 single, "Sunshowers," which led to MTV refusing to air the video. (That, coupled with politically liberal comments she's made in the press, might account for her visa's tardiness.)

She forced herself to take on the Liberians' perspective, living with them and experiencing their everyday happenings. Perhaps her most interesting lesson concerned how American culture, specifically hip-hop,

impacts other countries. "Most African kids still aspire to the whole SUV-ice-bling-50 Cent lifestyle because that's the only thing they get in their media," says the singer. "I was just learning for the first time that exchange of, 'Be careful what you show other people,' because coming out of Africa or coming from India, we think all America is, is like video chicks and bling at the moment. They don't even know the intricacies and diversity of what you could get within America and other music, you know?"

Her song "Paper Planes," written from the perspective of a Third World denizen, features the chorus, "All I wanna do is [four gun shots] and I [gun cocking sound] and [cash register opening] and take your money." Combined with the song's Pulp-like pastoral guitar line and her grimey delivery, the effect is disconcerting. When still recording, the added sound effects bred dissension among her production staff, but she rationalized that Interscope's biggest star was "famous for being shot nine times" and, fittingly, stuck to her guns.

"I just thought it was quite a funny predicament to get put in, so I just kind of left it," says Arulpragasam. "But I was going to make a remix using like... little squeaky teddy bears or like little puppies to make like the really cute version of it and take out the guns and cash registers, but I don't know... we're either obsessed by money or we're obsessed by being patriotic and fighting. It's guns and cash."

In contrast, "Mango Pickle Down River," which she recorded in Australia with aboriginal tweens dubbed the Wilcannia Mob, presents exactly what disadvantaged children think about. Rapping about catching fish and eating them, it's easily the most endearing song on the album. She says, "I kind of did it because at the time the kids are actually in like a [youth center], and I think after a certain point... these kids just do coke because there isn't a way for them to make music and get it out there. There's just not much interaction between, like, aboriginal Australia and White Australia... If I could put it on the album, then I could get some money to them and at least pay for their schooling, or make sure they were OK." Since the recording was part of a youth-outreach program, she felt like she really connected with the kids and hopes to help them with the song's proceeds.

In her quest, purposely didactic or not, to present all facets of Third

World living, she's taken one of rap's most overused phrases and redefined it on "Hussel." Whereas gangsta rap has glamorized the art of the hustle, usually implying some criminal behavior, Arulpragasam favors a more realistic definition, in which single mothers work all day for their children's well-being, but don't have time to take care of their own needs, like love.

"When I go to these places, what most people ask about [is] education," she says. "Like if you say, 'What do you want?' they don't say money or a car, but everyone always says school."

In this regard, she thinks of *Kala* as the feminine ying to Arular's yang. Named after her mother (who raised her alone), she's succeeded in turning around timeworn stereotypes. It's her most stylistically diverse album, including vocal references to the Modern Lovers and Pixies just songs away from her cover of "Jimmy Jimmy Jimmy Aaja" (shortened to "Jimmy"), from the Bollywood movie *Disco Dancer*, in the midst of her usual brew of reggaeton, funk carioca, grime and dancehall. And although she feels this is her least-political effort so far (remember, her debut was the *Piracy Funds Terrorism, Volume 1* mixtape), she's succeeded in showing the way in which her subjects live, rather than the hit-and-run diplomacy she pins on Bono, in a kind of fusion of journalism and pop music.

And even if the thousands who flocked to her Brooklyn concert or those who will buy her new album don't intentionally process her words, the catchy rhythms will subconsciously drive them in. At Coney Island, as she finished the last bangs and clangs of her most-famous song, "Galang," the audience cheers provided hope.

City By The Sea: Nicole Kidman has shored up a timeless debut full-length.



Homeward Bound



***Nicole Atkins Returns To
Jersey—Literally And Lyrically—
For Her Sweeping Pop Opus***



**STORY BY MAGGIE SEROTA
PHOTO BY NOAH KALINA**

IT'S EARLY ON A THURSDAY afternoon, and singer/songwriter Nicole Atkins is smearing on smoky eye shadow at the bar in preparation for her photo shoot at New York haunt Hi-Fi. "I've been fired from every job I've ever had," she laments, as she hurries to get herself together. "I think I got fired from every restaurant on Avenue A and B." Pausing from her make-up application to gesture grandly toward the street, she confesses that, "If music doesn't work out, I don't know what I'm gonna do. I'm just gonna paint Tuscany murals in every Italian restaurant in Monmouth County—and they're already done."

Even if she was resigned to a life of painting fishing villages and lighthouses on the bathroom walls of pizzerias along the New Jersey Turnpike, at the very least she'd be putting her art school education to use. "Every weekend they'd tell me, 'You're fired,'" she reminisces between giggles. "And I'd just be like, 'Sweet. I'm going to the beach.'" Atkins was even let go from the luncheonette owned by her parents—repeatedly.

At first glance, with her petit frame, fringed bangs and denim, A-line Anna Sui dress, Atkins looks like a delicate chanteuse, almost Nancy Sinatra-esque. "Sixties fashions fit a girl with a big ass really well," Atkins candidly declares, as she jumps off the stool and does a little pirouette, showing off the outfit, which is paired with a dusty pair of motorcycle boots. But when she opens her mouth, she unleashes a voice that seems more suited for an octogenarian with an affinity for Lucky Strikes. Lively, funny and self-deprecating, Atkins talks at a speed that must have earned her a few childhood Ritalin prescriptions. Between the throaty voice and animated hand gestures, one thing becomes instantly clear: While she may lack the archetypal big hair and the stirrup pants, Atkins is, through and through, a Jersey girl. More specifically, a Jersey Shore girl, making it only fitting that she's dubbed her backing band the Sea and her full-length debut, *Neptune City* (Columbia).

NEPTUNE-ING UP

For three months every year, the Jersey shore terrain is a disposable backdrop where sun-burnt toddlers throw temper tantrums over beach pails and broken sand castles; drunken teenagers huddle under the boardwalk, discarding their virginity as casually as they would empty bottles of Mountain Dew; and awkward, hairy dads with smudged zinc oxide expose their chalky legs in all of their black sock-and-khaki shorts-glory. But after the last charcoal embers of Labor Day go cold, the towns that line the coast empty out and the landscape becomes a grey, windy wasteland of crumpled paper soda cups, steel shuttered boardwalk T-shirt stands and residual broken hearts from summer romances. The smell of caramel corn and suntan lotion dissipates and the lights adorning Ferris Wheels go dim. It is this cold, fog-entrenched desolation that haunts *Neptune City*.

"Neptune is a nothing town," Atkins states succinctly. "It's where you come to get your fence and your tombstone made. That's really what all my songs are about: small hometown tragedies and the overcoming of them. You know, all the tears and the bad times and the locking yourself in your room... there's a string line for that. There's a little piano tinkle for that."

With its sweeping, spacious orchestrations and appetite for melodrama, *Neptune City* certainly has the market on string lines and piano tinkles cornered, fusing the husky, whiskey tinged-vocals of Loretta Lynn or Lucinda Williams with both folk and psychedelic sensibilities. It's a convergence that may even signal an end to her unemployment days. Atkins is happy to point out that since getting signed to Columbia, her mother has ceased clipping out classified job ads for her.

Neptune was informed by other environments as well though, having been recorded in Sweden with producer Tore Johansson, who has twiddled knobs for the likes of New Order, Franz Ferdinand and the Cardigans. "The winter in Sweden wasn't all that different from Jersey," Atkins says. "It was dark, foggy and rainy over there. It took just a month to record, but it felt like 12 years."

The early afternoon dusk and sense of isolation enhanced Atkins' personal ennui, profoundly influencing the record's melancholy musings. "Because of the time difference, I couldn't talk to my boyfriend," she recalls. "The string arranger was going through a divorce. The producer was going through a break-up. We were this gang of sad saps. I was like, 'Great! Let's use this!'"

Like the spectrum of emotions it covers, *Neptune City* is a record that sounds, well, big. At times, it's damn near overwhelming. "Some people say it sounds overproduced," confesses Atkins. "But of course it's going to sound big. Anyone who knows me or has hung out with me knows I'm like the most dramatic, annoying person ever."

DONNY AND THE DEVIL

This tendency towards drama first surfaced at an early age, while sharing a stage with Donny and Marie Osmond, in Atlantic City, no less. "I was sitting there with my parents, thinking, 'This fucking blows,'" she remembers. "The week before we saw the Monkees, and now we're seeing

this?" The songstress saw a golden opportunity when Donny picked the 7-year-old out of the front row, pulled her up onstage and propped her up on a stool to serenade her with "Puppy Love." As soon as Donny turned his back, Atkins channeled Gene Simmons as she flexed her tongue out and threw her hands up in devil horn formation. The crowd loved it.

"Donny was like, 'What are you doing?' He was pissed!" she says, demonstrating said devil's horns while emitting a metal growl. "After the incident, people were asking me who my agent was and I said, 'Mom, I need an agent.'" But even if the feisty female didn't know she was going to be a singer at that point, her grandma sure did. From early childhood, she played Atkins a steady stream of old country albums and insisted

not getting gigs," she says of performing in her native state. "I always have a place to play, but I have to sell 40 tickets if I don't want to get yelled at. You pretty much buy your gigs here, which is why I went to New York because I could play for free."

HOME DARK HOME

All that said, the lyrics to *Neptune City's* title track, in which Atkins sings, "Maybe if I could pay attention/I could learn to love the landscape I was born to..." have proven prophetic. The poverty that goes hand in hand with being a struggling musician has forced Atkins to move back home with her parents, where she's become re-acquainted with the quiet desolation of small town living.

And if one thing holds true, it's that musicians who make dark music tend to attract

“That’s really what all my songs are about: small hometown tragedies and the overcoming of them.”

that she was destined for a headlining gig at the Opry. And although the young rebel was initially resistant, she eventually conceded there was room for honky tonk among her love of '60s and '70s rock.

"The country way of crooning is really fun, when you're not totally 'Reba McEntire-ing' it," says Atkins. "It feels really good to croon like Roy Orbison. It makes your throat feel better to sing that way. From that point on, I decided I was only going to write and listen to music that feels good." Nowadays, she considers herself "a country singer in a '60s orchestra band," gleefully adding, "I'd be in a gown with my wrists bleeding."

While earning her illustration degree at UNC Charlotte, Atkins performed in the alt-country outfit Los Parasols before returning to Jersey, spending brief stints living in Brooklyn and striking out on her own, performing in New York and all along the Jersey Shore circuit, which, given the "pay to play" politics of the smaller clubs, proved to be more of a labor of love than anything else.

"Everybody wants to be Bruce Springsteen, and if you're not kissing ass then you're

attention and admiration from musicians with the same brooding tendencies. In a *Rolling Stone* piece, Atkins gushed that she'd love to create the kind of music used in a David Lynch film. This caught the eye of iconic Lynch soundtrack composer and fellow Jersey resident Angelo Badalamenti, who then personally extended an invitation to spend the weekend at his Morristown home. According to Atkins, the two got along famously.

"Now Nicole, I'm not saying you're ripping me off," Atkins says, imitating Badalamenti in her best ribald-grandfather impersonation. "I'm just saying that somewhere, a long time ago, two of our great-great-great grandparents laid down on a blanket out in Sicily and did something naughty."

Prior to collaborating with one of her idols however, she's concentrating on scraping together the money to move out of her parents' house and, ultimately, stay out. Not that she's the sort to get down for too long about it anyhow. "My music is dark, but I'm actually not that dark," assures the ever-giggly Atkins. "Music is the way to get your 'dark' out." ❖

THE GARDEN'S SLATE:

JERSEY'S OTHER FORMIDABLE FEMALES

Music from New Jersey is often pigeon-holed into two camps. For some, it embodies a sentimental esteem for blue-collar aesthetics, à la Bruce Springsteen. For others, it conjures images of Jon Bon Jovi's feathered bangs. Unfortunately, either way, its primary legacy seems to be something of a boy's club, which is a shame, because the women of "Dirty Jerz" have broken ground in a diverse array of genres, as evidenced by the following five heroines.

PATTI SMITH

Despite being born in Chicago, Smith spent her formative years in Woodbury, NJ, and eventually attended (and dropped out of) the former Glassboro State College, now Rowan University. *Spare*, Smith ran off to the Chelsea Hotel in the late '60s to find herself and get entangled with controversial artist: Robert Mapplethorpe, but this punk pioneer will always have roots in Jersey. The Garden State's loss turned out to be the music world's gain.

WHITNEY HOUSTON

Newark's greatest export enchanted the world with her string of number-one hits, powerful, soulful voice and the ability to gracefully recover from Serge Gainsbourg's lewd, on-air shenanigans. Of course, despite her legacy as a formidable diva who practically sneezes platinum records, Houston's recent drug-addled histrionics may be more entertaining than anything she's ever recorded.

DEBBIE HARRY

Hawthorne's Debbie Harry was in touch with her blonde ambition long before Madonna cut the fingers off of her first pair of lace gloves. Much like Patti Smith, Harry is another Jersey girl who was seduced by nearby New York's grimy but fertile musical ground, paying her dues waiting tables, dancing and working as a *Playboy* bunny. When Harry gained notoriety via new wave pioneers Blondie, she helped redeem the late '70s cultural landscape and became the best peroxide endorsement money could and didn't buy.

LAURYN HILL

This South Orange native broke onto the scene in the mid-'90s as one third of the Fugees, but she proved she didn't need Wyclef or Pras to make music history when *The Miseducation Of Lauryn Hill* became the first hip-hop album to win a Grammy for Album Of The Year. Of course, an inflammatory urban legend where she allegedly claimed she'd rather her children starve than have white people buy her records certainly helped keep her name in the press. Unfortunately, musical genius rarely comes without a touch of insanity, which was evidenced by some curious behavior and hairstyle choices at 2005's Vibe Musicfest. Maybe Hill was dipping into Whitney's crazy pills.

QUEEN LATIFAH

Newark's Dana Owens is one of the only people who can declare herself royalty without any opposition. With her uncompromising point of view Owens penned hits like "Ladies First" and "UNITY," which both challenge the inherent misogyny in hip-hop and make booties hit the dance floor. While the '90s saw her Highness conquer television and film, her roles in such cinematic embarrassments as *Bridging Down The House* and *Taxi* come dangerously close to negating all of her achievements.

on the cd

NICOLE ATKINS Party's Over 4:15 Columbia Records

OFFICE The Ritz 3:49 New Line / Scratchie Records

ANI DIFRANCO Both Hands (2007 Version) 3:21 Righteous Babe Records

MIKE ERRICO Ever Since 3:30 Tallboy 7, Inc.

EULOGIES One Man 2:58 Dangerbird Records

PAUL SPENCER & THE MAXINES No Regrets 4:06 Vimana Records

ROBBERS ON HIGH STREET Crown Victoria 3:30 New Line / Scratchie Records

THE TROLLEYVOX I Call On You 2:52 Transit Of Venus

THE KIN See 3:02 Aletheia Records

WHITE LIGHT RIOT Out Of Sight 3:31 50 Records

THREE DAY THRESHOLD Uni 1:57 Hi-N-Dry

THE PRIMIDONNATIVES Ain't No Soft Machine 3:47 Vague Moon Records

STEPHANIE'S ID Unmistakably Love 3:25 Nine Mile Records

THE CRÜXSHADOWS Birthday (Radio Edit) 4:27 Dancing Ferret Discs

Laurie Lawson My Time Will Arrive 3:33 Raptor Music

OurStage Contest Winner:

ADRIAN BOURGEOIS Mr. Imaginary Friend 3:36 C-Side Records

Zig-Zag Live Contest Winner:

AN AMERICAN CHINESE No No Like That 2:43 Self-Released

CMJ Sonicbids Spotlight Artist:

TWO SHEDS It's Hard 4:42 UnderAcloud Records

Nicole Atkins



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THE GOODNIGHT LOVING

Crooked Lake Dusty Medical

Far out of the reaches of any scene or town qualified as hip, utterly removed from any incestuous network of connections or blog hype, Milwaukee denizens the Goodnight Loving are making the sort of indelible rock 'n' roll that will undoubtedly inspire cult legions long after their demise. Hopefully though, *Crooked Lake* will lead to a more quickly developed following, one that will afford them the chance do more than spew out a few unheralded masterpieces that wind up on some out-of-print compilation for future garage-punk nerds. Less poppy than last year's *Cemetery Trails*, but somehow as stuffed to the gills with brilliant, compelling choruses and invigorating dynamics, *Crooked Lake* is, to possibly coin a phrase, rustic-majestic. They've finely-tuned the imbalances of prior efforts and created a succinct, even-keeled and rollicking roundup of cuts that is both immediate, unrelenting, deceptively sophisticated and incredibly attentive to its nuance. Just as readily as they launch into the shaker-and-harmonica-induced shimmy and jubilant singalong that hallmarks "Land Of 1,000 Bars" (an ode-of-sorts to their small-town roots), things slow down to the plaintive nature sounds and mournful twang of "Talking Tall," the archetypal boozy, textured anti-ballad that Goodnight Loving pulls off with such curious catchiness. And as ever, they have a lyrical everyman-ness that's simultaneously poignant and unexpectedly poetic, a perfect reflection of the endearing dichotomies that lace through their sound and aesthetic. This near-perfect batch of songs is drinking music, fireside music, hoedown music, jittery pogoing music, cry your eyes out music and celebrate life with friends music. And the best part? *Crooked Lake's* malleability around those many moods and moments is purely an extension of the music itself, not an attempt for the songs to accommodate a pre-existing idea of what direction its waters should flow down. **KENNY HERZOG**

Link www.myspace.com/thegoodnightloving

File Under Lake and bake

RIYL The Sonics, caUSE co-MOTION!, the Black Lips



THE GO! TEAM

Proof Of Youth Sub Pop

Like if *Road To Ruin*-era Phil Spector was producing Salt-N-Pepa on a tight budget, the Go! Team's 2004 debut, *Thunder! Lightning! Strike!* was a tin foil-covered Wurlitzer of peppy pop history that could've only rang cold to the most hardened pop surveyor. How a pop surveyor could become hardened is hard to figure, except that the current state of catchy pop is either aggravatingly corporate-calculated or, on the indie tip, subsumed in some iPod shuffle approach it has yet to master. Except when it comes to, once again, the Go! Team. Their second slab jumps out with "Grip Like A Vice," which takes a slightly sterner stab at the big beat J.J. Fad action they predominantly prefer. "Doing It Right" then rides a Motown boogie board down Willy Wonka's chocolate river (Gene Wilder, bitch!). Then "My World" marinates an '81 *After School Special* credit roll in a tall grass-lying acoustic ripple that plays like a reflective breather offered for all the kids who never did talk to that cheerleader. But then "Titanic Vandalism" blasts away, and the rest of *Proof* proceeds to metaphorically tell you to fuck it and go have a ball. The band raps and yelps more while the instrumental exaltation jumps back and forth from '84 to '74 TV thematics ("The Wrath Of Marcie") amongst future-marching garage rock ("Fake ID," "Keys To The City"). Things wrap up with a stumbling try at coy mope-pop ("I Never Needed It Now So Much") followed by a bitchin' Chuck D guest-spot blotter ("Flashlight Fight"). It's this kind of throwing the kitchen sink in the air and leaving the jazz hands up in glorious "hell yeah!" that is one of the few encouraging examples of the iPod-ization of musical deconstruction that is now, seemingly, the construction—and often all the more unfocused for it. The Go! Team, though, is a laser, baby. **ERIC DAVIDSON**

Link www.thegoteam.co.uk

File Under Pom-pom bombs

RIYL CSS, Junior Senior, the Avalanches

BAND-ON-BAND ACTION



Emma Pollock Pores Over Marissa Nadler's *Songs III* Kemado

The third full-length from this Boston-based songwriter sees Marissa Nadler in pure, plaintive voice accompanied for the most part by a single acoustic guitar. These haunting, gothic melodies took a while to get under my skin, but once they did I was perfectly happy to let them reside there and accompany me throughout the following weeks. To listen to this album is to surrender yourself to a simultaneously soothing, but strangely unnerving mood, which soon commands your immediate environment. Often transporting me to enchanted fairytale landscapes, as in "Sylvia," the songs are full of tales of loss, love and death, all delivered in timeless, classic prose that only furthers the effect of searing us from the present and temporarily relocating us in a much more agreeable, if tragic, sleepy and magical world. Working best with sparse guitar accompaniment, but sometimes introducing more involved instrumentation, as found on "Bird On Your Grave" and "Rachel," the songs melt into the background (in the best possible way) and then ambush you long after listening to remind you of the many intricate and effortless melodies found within. One cover appears in the form of "Famous Blue Raincoat" by Leonard Cohen, but the album's highlights are Nadler's own compositions "Diamond Heart" and, once again, "Sylvia." The arrangements and light touch of the vocals bring to mind Mazzy Star on "She Hangs Brightly," but the more folksy elements of the melodies make the songs Nadler's own. A perfect antidote to the rush of the modern world. **EP**

To see one of our critics' take on Emma Pollock's latest, turn to the reviews on page 54.

Link www.marissanadler.com
File Under Marissa Explains It All
RIYL Low, Mazzy Star, Joanna Newsom



NUMBERS
Now You Are This Kill Rock Stars

What became of all of those dance punk outfits that were making spazzy, synth-laden Liquid Liquid homages at the turn of the century? Maybe they're home crying onto their A Certain Ratio vinyl or maybe they're still trying to rehash that jittery, high-hat-reliant sound on new records that no one is buying. But not Numbers. Five years and four albums into their career, the San Francisco trio have moved beyond their initial-of-the-moment genre, offering up a spate of droning, moody (and, not coincidentally, their best) songs on *Now You Are This*. Perhaps it's the mournful warmth of Eric Landmark's Moog or the bruised disenchantment of Indra Dunis' vocals, but despite the cacophonous peal of percussion that manages to peak out from behind the wall of guitar squall from time to time, these songs sound less like invitations to incite dancefloor riots than rainy-day soundtracks for intimate contemplation. Like Deerhoof without the jazzy weirdness or Erase Errata after guzzling a handful of downers, Numbers turns left coast rock on its ear, bridging the gap between lo-fi garage fuzz and sweetly sung art rock. The gooey low-end buzzing of Landmark's analog synthesizers anchors almost every track, acting, on "I Ripped My Own Heart Out" and "Hey Hey Dream," as a weighty counterpoint to Dave Broekema's tempestuous guitar bursts and Dunis' wispy, airy singing. It is, in fact, the myriad of keyboards that gives this record its distinctively unvarnished, vaguely futuristic, keening sound. There is something heartbreaking about the raw, unflinching vocal harmonies on top of those synth drones and hums. And with lyrics like, "What happened to me? What happened to you?" a sense of aching nostalgia pervades every note. Who knew that sadness could sound so noisy? **REBECCA RABER**

Link www.numbersmusic.com
File Under Moog music
RIYL Erase Errata, Silver Apples, Electrelane



VHS OR BETA
Bring On The Comets Astralwerks

Keep those fried chicken state jokes to yourself, buster, because VHS Or Beta sound like no other Kentucky band you've heard before. Similar to how the Killers make you forget the leisure-suited lounge singers and nervous high rollers of their home state, VHS' step forward on *Comets* suggests a new age, not the Old South. They accomplish this beautiful brainwashing by proving that electric guitar grooves and dance beats are not always mutually exclusive. Both "Take It or Leave It" and "We Can Be One" are sonic exceptions, however, and feature percolating, skittering keyboards. But chunky six-string riffs drive the majority of the disc. The title track, for instance, is transcendent in an Echo & The Bunnymen way. That is, of course, if the Bunnymen had even one optimistic bone in their bodies. And optimism is a word that comes to mind throughout *Comets*, because VHS are consistently grandly kids. Even though they describe a breakup via "Time Stands Still" by announcing, "This is the last day of our love," the track's snappy, hand-clappy beat tells an entirely different story. Paradoxically, the words sadly stare into a rearview mirror while the music is scoping the wild blue yonder up ahead, as though it were the first day of the rest of their lives. Stylistically, much of the album adheres to an '80s Lite-Brite approach: Everything is crisp, clear and concise. But the closer, "The Stars Where We Came From," seemingly comes from a previously unexplored galaxy in VHS's universe. It's a meditative little number with warm pedal steel work and straight acoustic piano. VHS may not serve their meal in a greasy cardboard bucket, but their sounds sure are finger lickin' good. **DAN MACINTOSH**

Link www.vhsorbeta.com
File Under Ken-plucky
RIYL The Killers, Franz Ferdinand, Moving Units

ANIMAL COLLECTIVE

Strawberry Jam Domino



Animal Collective fans can generally be separated into two groups: those who knew about the band before *Sung Tongs* and those who heard about them after. Hyping oneself as a member of that

first crowd implies either pretentiousness or extreme patience, given that the bulk of their pre-*Tongs* output was comparatively unpalatable. AC is quintessentially a pop band guising as brazen experimentalists, and *Tongs* was the culmination of those efforts. 2005's *Feels* continued their slow crawl toward accessibility, and this, their eighth LP, finally confirms it. The incongruous guitar squalls, incoherent lyrics and six minute white noise drones of yore have given way to the heavy use of mixing equipment, tight song structures and words that don't require liner notes. It's not as if the music has become easier, exactly, just more centered on the sounds that matter. "Peacebone" and "For Reverend Green" are among AC's strongest recorded moments, and "Winter Wonder Land"—propelled by a frantic snare and underlying knob-twiddle that mimics a constantly closing cash register—best indicates where they are right now as a band. Really, though, what makes *Jam* a great record is the same thing that's made all their music great: songs dripping with melody and ingenuity, sweet as, well... you know.

KEVIN KAMPWIRTH

Link www.myanimalhome.net

File Under Jam band

RIYL The Fiery Furnaces, Grizzly Bear, The Unicorns

CARLA BRUNI

No Promises Downtown



Using famous poems by famous English-language poets as lyrics is a risky move for an Italian artist raised in France, but Carla Bruni manages it with ease, which may also be surprising considering

her history as a supermodel and rockstar girlfriend. And yet this multicultural, trilingual chanteuse's low, sultry voice and smooth, subtle style fully wring the evocative language out of Dickinson, Yeats, Auden and others on her second album. Bruni carries the weight of such famous names with elegance, while harnessing just enough spunk to give the music unique character. The opening track, "Those Dancing Days Are Gone," featuring softly strummed acoustic guitar and harmonica, somehow fits alt-country instrumentation, and Yeats' stanzas and Bruni's gentle, sweetly accented voice together perfectly. "If You Were Coming Into The Fall" takes a Dickinson poem and sets it against a mix of electronica-style beats, country steel-string guitar, a jumpy piano line and an edgy electric lead. The energy of the track makes the lyrics Bruni's own, providing a modern take on classically influenced components. Throughout *No Promises*, the music more than lives up to the lyric authors' pedigree, and that's saying a lot.

CONOR MCKAY

Link www.carlabruni.com

File Under Model for success

RIYL Feist, Cat Power, Tori Amos

C.O.C.O.

Play Drums + Bass K



On *Play Drums + Bass*, C.O.C.O. (pronounced "see oh, see oh") provides highly danceable ditties with frisky drum lines and plump bass chords augmented only by the occasional hoot or handclap. Throughout the

album, the duo, composed of drummer Chris Sutton (of Dub Narcotic Sound System) and bassist Olivia Ness, crow their country-punk vocals over a playful polyrhythm. Things start off strong, with the simple but catchy "Good," followed by the punkier "For You" and proceeding to the slower "Your Own Secret Way / Sly," which jars the listener (though not unpleasantly) with a bass line that recalls "Summer Lovin'." Other notable tracks include "Much To Learn," which pits tribal vocables against elongated swells of song, and "Asteroids," in which a dub thrum leaks into the track. Most songs conclude before their beats grow stale; one or two stretch on a bit too long. And while C.O.C.O. are quite capable of crafting danceworthy tunes, limp lyrics are their Achilles heel, so word-nerdy music aficionados should steer clear. On "Bss.Ay," especially, the grungy, pounding instrumentation is marred by the whiny platitudes that warble on its surface. But perhaps we can forgive this in light of the new direction they're exploring. **JOSH SPIRO**

Link www.kreccs.com

File Under Bare bones drum 'n' bass

RIYL Lightning Bolt, Pholek, Four Tet

DAVID DONDERO

Simple Love Team Love



As any good singer/songwriter should, vagabond David Dondero depicts his traveling bluesman life with a guitar in his hand and a quiver in his voice. Often credited with the shaky vocal style of Conor Oberst—

and now releasing albums on Oberst's *Team Love* label—Dondero takes neo-art-folk back to its roots with observational ballads depicting the joys and sorrows of day-to-day life. From a longing for lost love on the last American Frontier on "The Prince William Sound," to the place he had to call his own in the deep south—"Mighty Mississippi!"—Dondero draws beautiful yet unnerving pictures of a *mare ad mare* American subsistence. The album closes with the oft-requested "Double Murder Ballad Suicide," a haunting 10 minute-ballad—sardonically set to a lively jazz piano—about a jumper standing on the Golden Gate Bridge. With a mix of Midwestern twang, stripped down confessional lyrics, praise to "the church of John Coltrane" and liberal sprinklings of Charlie Parker quotes, the most notable stop along the *Simple Love* Americana highways is "Rothko Chapel," named for a secular church in Houston filled with evocative black paintings by Mark Rothko. On this track, Dondero sings of spiritual soul discovery without missing a step, intertwining both smart, quivering lyrics and unshakeable hooks. **LISA HRESKO**

Link www.daviddondero.net

File Under Team Americana

RIYL Bright Eyes, Fourth Of July, Langhorne Slim

DRUG RUG

Drug Rug Black And Greene



Illegible kiddie-doodle artwork, a crackling Victrola-sounding opening and a loose-limbed guitar crash all spell yet more simp-psych silliness. But a mile high-pitched cuddle trickles just

out the side of gal singer Sarah Cronin's pie hole; whilst boy-moaner Tommy Allen sounds sufficiently weary, or as weary as a 20-something who just excitedly discovered why Mick Jagger moaned wearily on *Beggars Banquet* can sound. There's a slight Velvets drone in between boozy shuffling strolls ("Winter Time," "Cut The Meat") and faintly psychedelic pop-stomps ("Walden," "Alright") that roll, echo and ring like Califone on a fine Thursday afternoon in June. One could assume this is more class downshifting from some blue bloods, only these Cambridge, Massachusetts cads go at it cleanly, don't fumble with faux po' boy shtick in an attempt to distance daddy's dough (thank god, no sleeve pics with beards and back porches) and actually have the air of folks who hope their music inspires rather than condescends. At its heart, this is not depressive dress-up. It's fumblingly transcendent roots-rock identity building that, by its end, finds a joyous junk-jangly body for that heart. **ERIC DAVIDSON**

Link www.myspace.com/drugrugdude

File Under Afghan jigs

RIYL Giant Drag, O'Death, Galaxie 500

EARLIMART

Mentor Tormentor Majordomo



Many have made attempts to fill Elliott Smith's shoes since the songwriter's premature death. After issuing the follow-up to 2004's *Treble & Tremble*, Earlimart may be best poised to inherit

his tragic kingdom. The L.A. folk outfit's latest disc offers acoustic melancholia brimming with romantic anguish and bids for a lover's return. "You said your love ain't dead/ Just disappearin' instead," they lament in break-up ballad "Don't Think About Me." While the lyrics describe crash-and-burn relationships, mining the vast territories of solitude and sadness, *Mentor's* sumptuous melodies soar. The dusky tunes are accented with twinkling keys, booming cymbals and surging string arrangements. "Everybody Knows Everybody" bristles with tension and paranoia, showing a more hard-edged side of the band. Yet ultimately, the album highlights the restrained vocals of frontman Aaron Espinoza, whose hushed verses are aching and unsettling, much like those of the departed Smith. "No one likes to be alone," he opines on "Nevermind The Phonecalls," "But coming down is better on your own." **GINNY YANG**

Link www.earlimartmusic.com

File Under Mentor Splendor

RIYL Badly Drawn Boy, Elliott Smith, Grandaddy

MICHAEL FAKESCH

Dos K7



Taprikk Sweezee's elastic vocals, which ride atop the insistent, synthesized drumbeats of "Escalate," bring back fond memories of Prince's *Dirty Mind* and the Times' *Ice Cream Castles*. It's akin to having large dopamine dosages

direct deposited into your memory banks. Sweezee and Michael Fakesch co-produced this funky retro slice of '80s Minnesota life, which is closer to funktronica than electronica (the banner under which Fakesch is usually categorized). One poorly named track is given the unrepresentative title "Complicated," because there's hardly anything complex about Fakesch's booty shaking music. The Munich-based artist blends German electronic precision with urban dance grooves, as Sweezee sings simply atop. (Ah, there is beauty in simplicity!) Granted, "Crest" interrupts the otherwise body-centric flow with a little brainy, computerized instrumental excess. But it is only a temporary brainwave spike since, for the most part, *Dos* is ruled by the groove. Furthermore, almost every song gets straight to a basic, relatable lyrical point. "I Want It," "Give It to Me," and "Don't Stop" are concisely blunt and contain little verbal fat, just as their straightforward titles suggest. Keyboard may be this project's alpha instrument, but it would go nowhere without Andreas Kellner's memorably bumping bass lines. Fakesch's music is especially refreshing when contrasted with today's oftentimes overly predictable, metro-nomic electronica. On *Dos*, he parties spontaneously, like it's 1999 all over again. **DAN MACINTOSH**

Link www.michaelfakesch.com
File Under Purple reigns again
RIYL (Early) Prince, the Time, the Kid

GALACTIC

From The Corner To The Block Anti-



Jazz-funk all-stars Galactic produce hip-hop-influenced psychedelia that holds up against the best P-Funk followers around. The group's fifth proper studio album, *From The Corner To The Block*, is a far cry from their jazz-

based debut, *Coolin' Off*, as they've evolved from a talented group of jammers and have converged with the likes of Gorillaz and Madvillain. Except, where dubbers and DJs use an amalgam of samples in odd assortment, the boys of Galactic play it all themselves, with an instrumental virtuosity others dream about. *Block* goes one step further, using guest soul and rap vocals from a slew of hip-hop heavy-hitters to make the group's already contagious instrumental polyphony all the more enticing, while birthing a number of surprisingly poppy, catchy, radio-ready songs. Lead track "I Got It (What You Need?)" has an energy that hits your ears like a freight train, packing a punch of eclectic percussion, seemingly aimless chainsaw guitar rips and an immediately addictive and an assortment of random sounds, and that's the point. Galactic harbors a style that manages to make a homogenous mixture out of instruments and rhythms most bands shy away from, playing as a cohesive ensemble where every odd little thing fits oh-so-perfectly. **CM**

Link www.galacticfunk.com
File Under Mothership connection
RIYL Medeski, Martin & Wood, Gorillaz, Parliament/Funkadelic

MARY GAUTHIER

Between Daylight And Dark Lost Highway



The perceptive honesty throughout *Between Daylight And Dark* is astounding, its 10 songs divided between woman-on-the street narratives and lyrical self-examinations. "Can't Find the Way" brings

back Hurricane Katrina's nightmares, as Gauthier channel's one particular survivor's pained words: "I wanna go home/I can't find the way." Then with "Snakebit," Gauthier relays the story of someone who's been victimized far too long over blues slide guitar. "Forty years of push," the song's character complains, "turns into a shove." Not turning the other cheek, this man's "hand's wrapped around the handle of a gun." On the more personal side, "I Ain't Leaving" is the best of Gauthier's internalized musings. It celebrates a newfound resolve to stick it out instead of running when life gets bad. "Broken on the inside/That's what I used to say," she admits early in the song, before announcing, "I'm gonna stand my demons down/I ain't leaving," near its end. "Same Road," meanwhile, contains the startling revelation that "The same road that brought me to you is going to carry me away." Speaking of separation, "Before You Leave" asks a loved one to verbalize a simple "I love you" before hitting the road. But whether she's describing others' pain or spilling her own guts, *Between Daylight* reveals plenty of keen insight into how we humans tick. **DM**

Link www.marygauthier.com
File Under The personal and the observational
RIYL Lucinda Williams, John Prine, Gillian Welch

THE GOOD LIFE

Help Wanted Nights Saddle Creek



After three albums of aching, intricate pop, you'd think Tim Kasher's the Good Life—named for his home state's motto—would have outgrown its tag as a Cursive side-project. But, unfortunately, Kasher's more mellow

output has always been relegated to second-string status thanks to the long shadows cast by Cursive albums. The Good Life's fourth full-length, however, is about to change those perceptions. Originally intended to score a movie Kasher was writing, *Help Wanted Nights* became a concept album (of sorts) about life at a small-town watering hole. And with its non-linear, yet terribly specific, tales of love lost it represents the finest writing of Kasher's career. Gone are the British new wave influences of earlier records and in their place is an appreciation for sprawling Americana. *Help Wanted* is rich in dusty acoustic guitars, shuffling, easy rhythms and an obvious reverence for Bruce Springsteen—*Nebraska*-era, naturally. From the first arpeggiated strains of opener "On The Picket Fence," Kasher sets the boozy, late night scene. He sings with a new-found restraint, and his yearning whisper on lines like, "I ain't asking for redemption and this ain't no cry for help," immediately pulls listeners in to his fully imagined world of darkened bar corners and weary, wasted patrons. **REBECCA RABER**

Link www.myspace.com/thegoodlife
File Under *Nebraska*-ns
RIYL Bright Eyes, Elliott Smith, Rilo Kiley

HIGH ON FIRE

Death Is The Communion Relapse



With so many recent trendy copycats springing up in the wake of High On Fire's much-lauded 2005 album *Blessed Black Wings*, the band does not falter in their crusty, raspy caterwaul on *Death Is The Communion*. Al-

though their lineup is slightly different from that album (bassist Jeff Matz replaced Melvins alum Joe Preston), the trio's power lies in guitarist/vocalist Matt Pike's urgent riffing and drummer Des Kensel's fiery bombast. Ironically, this is High On Fire's least musically ornamented release to date. Pike still shreds Maiden-worshipping leads and wheezes out Lemmy-sounding tales of Cyclopes and war, but the focus is more on keeping it together rather than on writing hooks. (Incidentally, we have no idea what the title "Waste Of Tiamat" could mean, since, upon researching, Tiamat was the Babylonian goddess of ocean waters—it's too bad Pike's lyrics aren't more coherent.) While some of their peers have delved deep enough into prog-rock to the point of alienating fans (ahem, looking at you Mastodon), it seems High On Fire are sticking strictly to the basic blueprint they originally drafted on 2000's *The Art Of Self Defense*. Instead, they perfect their nuances, such as the boogie-rock outro on the six-minute album closer "Return To NOD" and the acoustic interludes on "Waste Of Tiamat" and "Cyclopan Scape." With this level of quality, their legacy will carry on. **KORY GROW**

Link www.highonfire.net
File Under More than one way to skin a copycat
RIYL Mastodon, Kylea, Black Label Society

HOT HOT HEAT

Happiness Ltd. Sire



The third full-length from British Columbia foursome Hot Hot Heat is the band's most adventurous release yet. While they continue to produce jittery, dance-ready '70s/'80s revivalist rock, their sound has

matured, cross-pollinating its XTC/Clash/Cars influences with newfound hints of U2/Cure-style anthemic rock. The result? A bigger, darker, more elaborate and experimental take on the band's signature stylings and a whole lot more reverb. Opener "Happiness Ltd." sets the tone with slow, steady drums and melodic guitars set against keyboardist/frontman Steve Bays' smooth vocals as he states simply, "Happiness is limited, but misery has no end." Despite some classic major-key moments, the song proves gloomy and brooding, boiling over into a Muse-like grandiose crashing of piano, guitar and cymbals with a chorus of many singing out, "It's over now" in tandem. Though this might seem out of character for a band known for its witty, playful lyrics and jumpy guitars, HHH pulls it off with ease, while maintaining the charm that made their previous albums so compelling. *Happiness* plays out like a movie, with ups and downs along the way, featuring a diversity of sound, tempo and style that make the album a gripping ride from start to finish. **CM**

Link www.hothotheat.com
File Under A Warm Gun
RIYL The Futureheads, XTC, the Walkmen

HOWLING HEX

XI Drag City



From the looks of XI's drab cover "art" and the dudes sloppin' around in it, Howling Hex guru Neil Michael Hagerty has stolen your uncle's weekend blues bar band for his latest lineup. Sounds like it some-

times too. "Everybody's Doing It" feels like the faint signal of a long lost Georgia Satellite. Though one must remember, if one wishes to continue to follow the trajectory of one of the ginchiest guitar players of the alt-rock era, that deconstructing bar band blues is Hagerty's thing. He comes to praise your uncle's cover of "It's Only Rock 'n' Roll," not bury it. And right when things are getting grey and haggard ("Dr. Slaughter"), tunes like "Lines In The Sky," "Keychains" and "Live Wire" stumble over some nasty lead licks, simple sax and more cowbells that have the ability to pull that bar hag grin out. Only so much, of course. Singed, even surly irony is in Haggerty's denim genes. So Haggerty often defers lead vox to Mike Signs, who rambles with a strained whine. And requisite arty interludes ("Let Fridays Decide") gum up the proceedings like dropped buffalo wings on the bar floor. Meaning Hagerty is still reliably sticky, which is more than you can say for many of his aging skuzz-rock contemporaries. **ED**

Link www.thehowlinghex.com

File Under Between The Bourbons

RIYL Entrance, Royal Trux, Bonnie "Prince" Billy

IDIOT PILOT

Wolves Reprise



After making their debut with 2005's conceptually abstract *Strange We Should Meet Here*, the longtime bros of Idiot Pilot were ready to get a little deeper. Delving into their electro-centric psyche, vocalist Michael

Harris and computer maestro Daniel Anderson entered producer Ross Robinson's studio with a handful of moody post-rock tracks to be welded into what we know now as *Wolves*, the Bellingham, Washington duo's sophomore effort. Right from the start of cinematic opener "Last Chance," it's clear that *Wolves* is the product of a highly stylized collective. Accepting collaborative gestures from coproducer Mark Hoppus, Idiot Pilot enlisted the assistance of drummers Travis Barker and Chris Pennie (Dillinger Escape Plan) to track live percussion, an aggressive endeavor that marks the first time the group has veered from their strictly synthetic instrumentation. The evolution of Idiot Pilot's accessibility is apparent, particularly on the more straightforward stand-outs like "In Record Shape" and "Red Museum." Perhaps the most curious track is "Theme From The Pit," a dark pop embrace of post-hardcore emotionalism (think Mogwai meets My Bloody Valentine), proof that these 21-year-olds can get introspective without the "emo" connotations. Essentially, Idiot Pilot demonstrate that they have the earmarks of success with a second, stellar recording. These lads just may be ahead of (or behind) the masses. **Taylor Mason**

Link www.idiotpilot.com

File Under Boys who cried *Wolves*

RIYL Mogwai, My Bloody Valentine, Explosions In The Sky

IMPERIAL TEEN

The Hair The TV The Baby And The Band Merge



It's been more than five years since this co-ed foursome, which initially shot to fame on the reputation of ex-Faith No More member Roddy Bottom, released their Merge debut, *On*.

But after years of flying under the radar, Imperial Teen returns full force with the catchy ditties and sing-along fun that defined their sound in the late '90s. The Teens have reached an easily accessible middle ground between NewPornographers-style indie-pop and flamboyant Japanese neo-glam, pumping out clever lyrics under the guise of sugary songs worthy of a spot on every teen queen's iPod. The title track is a fun romp through the band's off-stage lives and the upbeat "Sweet Potato" will have '60s sunshine-pop lovers thumbing through their worn vinyl for youthful beehive anthems of the same ilk. The cooing "oohs" and "aahs" of "Room With A View" and "Fallen Idol" momentarily slow the album down from its "Love Shack" dance-party mood. The blanket bubbly optimism of "Everything" resonates in its undeniably catchy chorus and tambourine claps—but not without a little cheek—as they toast "everything sadistic and everything fantastical" and basically everything in between. *The Hair The TV The Baby And The Band* is the perfect wedding of guilty pleasure pop and wistful wit. **LH**

Link www.myspace.com/imperialteen

File Under Teen Bop

RIYL The New Pornographers, Immaculate Machine, the B-52's

JUNIOR SENIOR

Hey Hey My My Yo Yo Ryko



Don't expect the album title to suggest that mournful Neil Young allusions have been incorporated into this Danish duo's day-glo disco pop, though they are just a wee bit more reflective on this long-

awaited sophomore CD. Well, reflective like if you switched four Cokes for two espressos as the after-dinner *digestif*. The lads lay low on the cheekier references of their fab 2003 debut. Vivacious hip shakes like "Hip Hop A Lula" and "Take My Time" sport loads of Chic-y guitar licks and soul-gal shouts that burst like horn blasts—and there are loads of those too, if mainly fashioned from sunny synths, of which there are also plenty. There's a bit of that B-52's flavor ("I Like Music (W.O.S.B.)"), though it's really more *Cosmic Thing* than *Wild Planet*. Nothing here hits the bubblegum zenith of "Rhythm Bandits," but then again nothing has so far in the oughts. And unlike the pathologically nervous tendencies of most of their contemporaries, Junior Senior remains unaffected by expectations to completely remix their angle every time, while offering a smooth way away from a very possible tip-over into complete kitsch. Bonus: *Hey Hey* also comes with a seven-song BP (*Say Hello, Wave Goobye*) that was just whipped up over four days in June. **ED**

Link www.juniorsenior.dk

File Under After the sugar rush

RIYL Daft Punk, Scissor Sisters, the B-52's

LE LOUP

The Throne Of The Third Heaven... Hardly Art



Like the piece of obscure folk art that gives the album its name, Le Loup's debut is unmistakably esoteric. The original *Throne* was fashioned by James Hampton, an uneducated janitor who secretly constructed a 177-piece religious

monument out of discarded furniture items, foil and household adhesives. Sam Simkoff, Le Loup frontman and sole presence on the band's debut, models his music after Hampton's symmetrical approach. Selections begin as minimalist riffs, often plucked on Simkoff's trebly banjo, before gradually expanding into lo-fi indie symphonies. Melodies are sung and repeated in overlapping harmony while electronic drums beat parallel patterns. And when songs unfold with such measured calculation, the payoff had better be big. Happily, it is, and *Throne* takes strength in its totality. As Hampton used gold foil to transform soiled junk into gleaming art, Le Loup employs eccentric instruments (banjo, toy glockenspiels) and electronic expertise to achieve similar luminescence. Tracks like "Canto XxXVI" would sound odd if heard out of context, but they're nothing short of essential as a piece of the musical puzzle. Every song is a cornerstone for this *Throne*, and Le Loup's debut ultimately shines as both an homage to Hampton's influence and an introduction to DC's latest buzz band. **ANDREW LEAHEY**

Link www.louloupmusic.net

File Under Get in the Loup

RIYL Sufjan Stevens, Arcade Fire, Dante's Inferno

MIRAH AND SPECTRATONE INTERNATIONAL

Share This Place K



On *Share This Place*, the always eclectic and genre-journeing Mirah collects pedigreed musicians in a jar, letting us watch them glow. She tells her song cycle through the kaleidoscopic eyes of insects, who have an un-

canny resemblance to the human race. Through musical metamorphosis, the instrumentation (including accordion, cello and lute) creates a different habitat for each song. Based on the entomological studies of theorist Fabre, the cycle begins with Mirah's delicate vocals over a sparse guitar buzzing about social patterns, repeating, "We get things done." With song titles that read like textbook chapters, Mirah defines each creepy-crawler with the obsession of a child who owns an ant farm. On "Gestation Of The Sacred Beetle," she sings like the hard-shelled predator as she begins to "consume and fatten up sublime," commenting on gluttony and survival of the fittest. "Following The Sun" swells slowly as Mirah—and the insect she personifies—grows wings and enters a seducing tango with a warm, sappy cello. On "Love Song Of The Fly," which begins with a Spanish guitar solo, she desperately hums, "Just the scent of what you left behind drives me in circles of lust/Oh your crumbs and your dust." In the end, it's clear Mirah And The Spectratone International have music down to a science. **LISA DONNELLY**

Link www.kreccs.com

File Under A bug's life

RIYL Serge Gainsbourg, Astor Piazzola, Björk

MOBILE

Tomorrow Starts Today The Militia Group



The latest band to emerge from Montreal's musical hotbed, Mobile unapologetically shoots for the stars on their debut. *Tomorrow Starts Today* is produced to a spit-shine polish, with crisply distorted

guitars and new wave pianos recalling the same '80s retreads that currently congest our airwaves. Recognizable? Yes. Overtly commercial? Sure. But that doesn't keep songs like "Montreal Calling" and "Out of my Head," both prime-time candidates for radio rotation, from flexing their alterna-pop muscles to impressive effect. Mobile is every bit as momentum-driven as the name suggests, and *Today* barrels through slickly danceable tunes and melodies with confidence. The band appears to be familiar with the Jimmy Eat World handbook of songwriting, wherein every riff is treated like a guitar solo and every lyric is sung like a chorus. Such bombast can be dangerous, and token ballad "Dusting Down the Stars" walks a precariously fine line between bittersweet and overwrought. When frontman Mat Joly's voice scrapes the stratosphere in standout "Seeing Right Through Me," however, a little anemic eagerness is easily forgiven. **AL**

Link www.mobiletheband.com
File Under High-octane Mobility
RIYL Franz Ferdinand, Muse, Jimmy Eat World

MÚM

Go Go Smear The Poison Ivy Fat Cat



The recent departure of founding member Kristín Anna Valtýsdóttir has left Icelandic ambient outfit múm with only two of its original four musicians. The peaceful vocals and electron-

ic beats are not lost, but the touring lineup has expanded with the addition of five players who bring delightfully eerie violins, viola, cellos and whistles to their already atypical glitch ballads. The band recorded a portion of *Go Go Smear* in a music school in a small fishing town on Iceland's western fjords, making use of the institution's myriad of instruments. Opening with "Blessed Brambles," the half-whispered vocals and hauntingly triumphant arrangements make hairs stand on end, and the poignant, spectral "A Little Bit, Sometimes" would be most at home scoring a scene in a mad scientist's laboratory as he toils over his latest creation. For just a moment, though, with songs like "They Made Frogs Smoke 'Til They Exploded"—about animal cruelty—the album becomes seemingly more playful, the beats more reminiscent of DNTEL than Sigur Rós, with chirpy vocals and a fleeting pop feel. Closing out affairs are the choral chamber chants of "Winter (What We Never Were after Me)," which harbor a lingering feeling of the vastness—and isolation—of the open seas. **LH**

Link www.randomsummer.com
File Under Electro Viking ghosts
RIYL Sigur Rós, Jem, Röyksopp

NEDELLE

The Locksmith Cometh Tangram 7s



Quirk and craftsmanship pervade singer-songwriter Nedelle's third album, a record whose lightheartedness and humor belie a frequently transcendent beauty and understated lyrical poignancy. These tracks,

sparsely arranged and ardently sung, teeter on the edge of twee without falling victim to their own innocence, finding a lustrous balance between the often absurd naïveté of their subject matter and the sterling wit of their delivery. It is this balance—between the self-awareness of the singer and the regressive syntax of her songs—that elevates *Locksmith* from the ironic charm of most indie pop to something of a minor masterpiece. "I Hate A Mountain" bounces bazuki band textures over wide-eyed vocal refrains and carnival chords, an effect that manages to be evocative—of childhood, of Broadway, of the wilderness—without making much sense. Layered harmonicas and acoustic guitars groove over a third-grade-music-class rhythm section (more woodblock!) on "Ghost Ships," the polka percussion marching confidently towards kitsch while Nedelle trades hooks with a phantom backup chorus. What's amazing in these numbers is the unwavering control with which the songwriter matches minimal, spacious orchestration to the limitations of her voice. Nedelle is neither a diva nor a smoky-lunged crooner. And in a genre where words take artistic precedence over instrumental inventiveness, it is a testament to the musician that her compositions hook the ear rather than catch in the throat.

BEN LASMAN

Link www.nedelle.com
File Under Kit-Kat Power
RIYL Joanna Newsom, Cat Power, Regina Spektor

THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS

Challengers Matador



The New Pornographers are what the Decemberists would sound like had Colin Meloy been raised on a steady diet of three-minute power-pop singles and various British Invasion hits. Although song titles like

"Mutiny, I Promise You" conjure up those stereotypical seafaring images Russell Baker might use to introduce *Masterpiece Theatre* episodes, tandem vocalists Carl Newman and Neko Case are not nearly so Old World. For instance, a keyboard-heavy and new wave-y "All The Things That Go To Make Heaven And Earth" comes off like the Cars—albeit after Ric Ocasek has completed English Lit. With "Entering White Cecilia," Newman puts on a Peter Noone British accent, and after just a few seconds, you know you're into something good; it just has the sort of shuffling beat that makes you want to skip like a true English dandy. "Go Places" stands out above everything else because Case sings its upbeat lyric over jaunty piano. *Challengers* is, per usual (despite the mandolin-flavoring of its title track), an uncluttered and seriously pleasurable guitar-oriented offering of straightforward pop-rock. **DM**

Link www.thenewpornographers.com
File Under Canadians rakin'
RIYL The Decemberists, the Shins, Spoon

OFFICE

A Night At The Ritz New Line



There's been a baffling amount of hype surrounding this band since their song "Wound Up" grabbed a coveted iTunes "Download Of The Week" designation last May. The track thrust the

then-unsigned, Chicago-based outfit toward some high-profile appearances, including ones at SXSW and Lollapalooza. This, their first label release, comprised mostly of remastered old songs and two new ones, essentially functions as yet another primer for a band that has been priming since 2001. There'd be a bit more tolerance for biding one's time had their music been more absorbing, but they simply crib the best features from early new wave (tinny synthesizers, viral guitar lines, ersatz-Anglo vocals) and give it an adult-alternative spin, which more or less sounds like Snow Patrol covering *Door To Door*-era Cars. The record isn't entirely without appeal, providing no less than four melodies—with the hooky "Oh My" leading the way—that are hard to shake off. But *Ritz*, which Office is hoping will break them from the ranks of hometown heroes to a more national audience, ultimately sinks under the weight of its own ambitions. It seems there's more time spent here pandering to the iTunes signalization of music method than there is at forging an identity of their own. **KK**

Link www.reachoffice.net
File Under Blunder-Miffin
RIYL The Cars, the Knack, Snow Patrol

PINBACK

Autumn Of The Seraphs Touch And Go



Another season, another Biblical reference. Three years after Pinback's well-received *Summer In Abaddon*, this is another solid collection of quirky indie-pop. This album, however, follows more

of a definite arc than on previous efforts, spanning the band's jittery electro spasms into epic rockers. What separates it from other Pinback records, however, is its precision. Although the San Diego duo (Rob Crow and Zach Smith) have always crafted nuanced, occasionally morose heartstring tuggers and uplifiters, the sound layers on *Autumn* are somehow more effective. For instance, the somber piano and bouncy guitar/bass on both "Devil You Know" and "Torch" work together in a way that, independently, would each make their own song, but together, hone in on some undefined emotion between contemplation and satisfaction. This might be because in the three years between records, both members have been busy with outside projects. Smith has performed with and worked on an as-yet-unreleased album with his former band, Three Mile Pilot, and Crow has put out several solo releases, including the metallic *Goblin Cock* and jazzy *Ladies* collaboration with Hella's Zach Hill. With so many active outside influences, they had to creep up somewhere, and for the most part it's what keeps the album interesting throughout.

But as they keep progressing, it only makes us wonder: What will winter bring? **KG**

Link www.pinback.com
File Under **Goblin Pop**
RIYL Dismemberment Plan, Minus The Bear, Postal Service

EMMA POLLOCK

Watch The Fireworks 4AD



Somewhere between the alt-rock boom of the '90s and the indie-pop fizz of the '00s, popular music shed much of its excess seriousness for a more subdued sincerity, with artists opting to give listeners a know-

ing wink in lieu of an expectant stare. Such is the lesson learned from, and largely ignored by, Emma Pollock's new record, *Watch The Fireworks*, which finds the former Delgados frontwoman treading water somewhere between the languorous atmospherics of her native Glasgow's pop pedigree and the rapidly depreciating influence of last decade's stateside singer-songwriters. The album plays like a prolonged bout of indecision between the established paradigm of the past and the unfulfilled promise of the present. Ultimately, it resembles the Vaselines covering U2. The problem here is not lack of professionalism—indeed, these songs burst with thick licks, verdant guitar textures and beefy percussion—but an absence of personality. Pollock's voice runs across the record like a draft through a heavily insulated house. Still, several tracks on *Fireworks* manage to sidestep this troublesome anonymity to produce propulsive, tantalizingly anthemic pop. The brilliant "Acid Test" twists like a lost Pixies single while "Adrenaline" aspires to the kind of hair-in-the-face bliss evoked by the best of the singer's Glaswegian peers. Unfortunately, it's not enough. If this album is Pollock's version of fireworks, she'll want some dynamite for her next. **BEN LASMAN**

Link www.emmapollock.com
File Under **Scotland Yawn**
RIYL The Cranberries, the Sugarbubes, the Vaselines

DAX RIGGS

We Sing Of Only Blood Or Love Fat Possum



Despite its long-winded, vaguely macabre title, songwriter Dax Riggs' new album *We Sing Of Only Blood Or Love* finds the former Acid Bath/current Deadboy And The Elephantmen singer in familiar blues-

rock territory. In Riggs' music, the supernatural and the sexual find equal expression in the lean-spirited, full-throated laments of wounded frontmen, and an overdriven six-string represents the shortest road to salvation. Sounding like a cross between a hell-possessed Richard Thompson and a hellhound-tracked Robert Johnson, Riggs' songs operate more like concise exorcisms than recognizable singles, charging his drawl-soaked vocals past the point of histrionics into what seems like utter despair. Were he not such a captivating singer—effortlessly melodic, tangibly unhinged—his tunes might verge on competently played hard-rock anonymity. But rather than hide amidst the distorted stomp and roll of his bar-band backups, the vocalist inhabits these standard-issue drivers like a lunatic poltergeist, breaking the riffs open

with his devastating bellow and then crooning over the shards. Opener "Demon Tied To A Chair In My Brain" builds from acoustic lament to excoriating pummel in just over two minutes, Riggs' repeated utterances of the title mounting in conviction like a 12-bar prayer. Elsewhere, "Living Is Suicide" mixes disco strings with garage-band bounce while "Wall of Death" imagines a post-mortem march into the darkened valley, suggesting that even though Riggs may sing exclusively about death, he knows how to sound exuberantly, defiantly alive. **BL**

Link www.myspace.com/daxriggs
File Under **Dead man electric blues**
RIYL Kyuss, Dead Boy And The Elephantmen, Richard Thompson

JOSH RITTER

The Historical Conquests Of Josh Ritter Sony BMG



That Stephen King named Ritter's last album, *The Animal Years*, the best of 2006 in his *Entertainment Weekly* column says something about both parties: 1) King has proven, in recent years, to be a studious and

insightful observer of modern American pop-culture, and 2) that Ritter's music can appeal to both sexagenarian literary giants and the *EW* set. The 31-year-old Idaho native is someone who can legitimately be called an "old soul": a relative youngster whose music inhabits the space between modern folk affectations (think Ryan Adams and Mason Jennings) and the revelatory, hard-nosed poetics of Leonard Cohen and Bruce Springsteen. The balance he's been striving for over the past decade or so finally coalesces on this, his fifth proper LP. And Ritter would, if there were any justice, supplant the aforementioned Adams as the name in modern alt-folk. From the first twangy Telecaster strums of "To The Dogs Or Whoever"—which segue into a muddy piano line and Ritter's distorted, back-country croon about locating Joan Of Arc in the belly of a whale (continuing his penchant for Biblical imagery)—there's something undeniably epic about the entire effort. Had Sufjan shed the string section, 12 songs and his over-precociousness, *Illinois* might have sounded something like this. **KK**

Link www.joshritter.com
File Under **American history text**
RIYL Leonard Cohen, Townes Van Zandt, John Prine

ROGUE WAVE

Asleep At Heaven's Gate Brushfire



Up until now, Rogue Wave has been touted as much for its compelling back story as for their music. Abridged version: Oakland denizen Zach Rogue loses job in 2002 dot-com bust, moves to New York

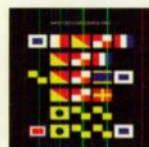
to write songs, moves back to California with an album's worth of material, self-releases Rogue Wave's debut LP, *Out Of The Shadow*, in February 2003, then places a Craigslist ad seeking a band. The initial comparisons to the Shins'/Death Cab's strain of guitar-driven, summery pop—a tag that led to an obligatory *O.C.* soundtrack appearance and a legion of Seth Cohen-like followers—are still applicable on their third LP. Like both of those aforementioned peers

though, here Rogue has decided to focus less on three-minute, hook-heavy, dependable rockers and more on creating a sustainable atmosphere. Before, where Rogue may have ended a fantastic song prematurely to try and sound tidy (take "California" from *Descended Like Vultures*), here he seems to actually strive for embellishment. Six of the 12 tracks run over five minutes on the near-hour spin, most notably the six-plus-minute opener "Harmonium," which, with its urgent, melodic guitars, sympathetic words and footnote keys work, might just be the band's defining moment to date. **KK**

Link www.roguewavemusic.com
File Under **Sleeping beauties**
RIYL Death Cab For Cutie, Russian Futurists, matt pond PA

SHOUT OUT LOUDS

Our Ill Wills Merge



The leadoff track on *Our Ill Wills*, "Tonight I Have To Leave It," finds this Swedish band doing a spot-on imitation of the Cure's "In Between Days." It has everything necessary, including a momen-

tum-building acoustic guitar part and plenty of Robert Smith-ian whine in vocalist Adam Olenious' voice. Later, with "Normandie," they borrow liberally from the beat of "Close To Me." Adding to the flavor, Beeban Stenberg spices up "Blue Headlights" with a woman's soft touch. And when Stenberg joins in with Olenious on "Impossible," the track nicely recalls early Go-Betweens. But for an entirely different reference point, "Parents Livingroom," with its Johnny Marr-ish acoustic guitar riff, brings to mind their gentler Smiths side. Furthermore, its lyric, which fondly recalls time spent at a girlfriend's house, also hearkens back to Morrissey moments like "Late Night Maudlin Street." Bjorn Ytting, of Peter, Bjorn And John, produced *Our Ill Wills* and gives it a bright, clear sonic sheen. Shout Out Louds may have a moniker like a KISS song, but their 12 latest tracks are filled out quite memorably. **DM**

Link www.shoutoutlouds.com
File Under **Swede-hearts**
RIYL Peter Bjorn And John, Belle & Sebastian, the Concretes

STEREO TOTAL

Paris-Berlin Kill Rock Stars



This French-German duo has always been something of an acquired taste. Not everyone is charmed by their childlike, multi-lingual mish-mash of vintage '60s *chanson*, synthesizer-laden new wave and raw

punk enthusiasm. Perhaps it is too unself-conscious, or perhaps the vocals, which are usually not in English and are often flat, thin or half-sung, are grating to ears accustomed to pitch perfection. But on the eighth album of their 12-year career, Stereo Total's Françoise Cactus and Brezel Göring are at their most poppy. And with melodies this infectious, they've gone from being an unusual delicacy to the aural equivalent of potato chips, something everyone likes and no one can stop consuming. Though they don't stray far from the formula laid out on previous records (kitschy party beats + sexy

male/female vocals= good fun), the songs on *Paris-Berlin* are stripped of inessential sound effects and recorded on a four-track, making for an incredibly intimate album. "Ta Voix Au Téléphone," for example, is like a Stereo Total version of a Gainsbourg/Birkin tune, featuring Cactus' orgasmic coos and Göring's louche croon over a slightly silly synth line. The band hasn't lost its harder edge, though, as they prove on the disc's best track, "Baisers De L'Enfer De La Musique," which marries an unrelenting bassline to "We Didn't Start The Fire"-like lyrics about famous rock 'n' roll deaths. **RR**

Link www.stereototal.de
File Under Cunning linguists
RIYL Cibo Matto, Serge Gainsbourg, Plastic Bertrand

TWO GALLANTS

Two Gallants Saddle Creek



If a dusty Midwest dive bar rattling with Americana were plopped down in the middle of a coastal city and given a pair of skinny trousers, its resulting music would be that of Two Gallants. On their self-titled new album, the duo presents clean, straightforward rock with a satisfyingly unprocessed indie edge. Hailing from San Francisco, the pair, named for a James Joyce short story, plays out their own brand of audio vignettes, producing thoughtful and moving songs with a sound conjuring tumbleweed poetry and the vast plains of the Wild West. Their lyrics are smart and expressive—vulnerable without being sappy, pointed without being malicious. On "The Hand that Held You Down," Adam Stephens croons poignantly, "When there's rust upon your ragged crown, who will stand in your defense?" while Tyson Vogel's rhythms smash along determinedly. Tracks like "Trembling Of The Rose" are raw, quiet and mournful, showcasing Stephens' earnest, throaty vocals. The Gallants' loping, rural indie rock all comes home on the heavily Dylan/Springsteen-influenced "Emo Country Song." Throughout *Two Gallants*, they are focused, moving decidedly along their sonic journey, hitting each wayward cowboy outpost as they go. **E.M. GALLAGHER**

Link www.twogallants.com
File Under On The Road to perfection
RIYL Cold War Kids, Langhorne Slim, Neutral Milk Hotel

WILEY

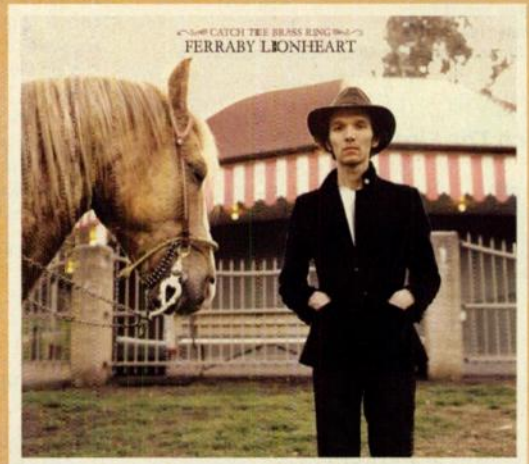
Playtime Is Over Big Dada



Is playtime really over for the pioneer of grime? On what is rumored to be his last album on the mic, Wiley—aka Eski-Boy, Igloo-Boy, Phaze One, or simply Richard Kylea Cowie—delivers a string of spitfire raps like a barrage of bullets. The MC and guest stars unleash havoc with speedy rhymes set to beats that evoke old-school videogames. The sonic monster "Eski-boy" fuses energy and urgency, giving birth to a dance machine. "Getalong Gang" and "Stars" maintain the pace, but Wiley brings it down a notch on two of the album's standouts. On the heartfelt "Baby Girl" the grime innovator reveals his dreams for his young daughter. "Letter 2 Dizzee" addresses the rift between Wiley and his protégé-turned-nemesis, Dizzee Rascal, minus the fury-fest you'd expect from a rap star: "It don't matter, I'm still your big brother." While it's a letdown not to witness Wiley let loose, it's refreshing to hear a rapper maturely reflect upon a feud (especially an MC with an army of rivals). Whether or not Wiley will actually step away from the mic is unclear. It won't be easy considering that *Playtime Is Over* isn't memorable enough to afford Wiley the luxury of confidently retiring as younger talent set out to conquer the scene. In true rap fashion, Wiley may be back. **HELEN MATATOV**

Link www.bigdada.com
File Under Need for speed
RIYL Dizzee Rascal, Roll Deep, the Streets

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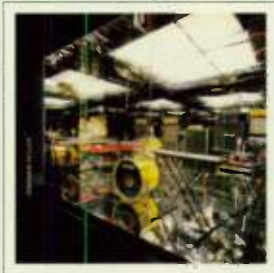


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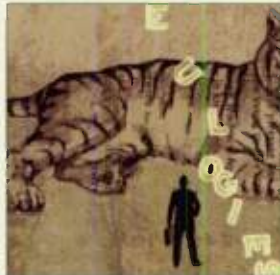
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ALAMO RACE TRACK

Black Cat John Brown
Minty Fresh

Alamo Race Track's songs are like the perfect first date: You're enchanted but left wanting more. With its tambourines and dreamy harmonies, *Black Cat John Brown* has a '60s pop feel, à la the Magic Numbers or the Thrills, but subtracts some sunshine and adds sophisticated, aloof musings. Tracks like "Don't Beat This Dog" and "Stanley Vs. Hannah" should have even the most stoic hipsters nodding their heads and tapping their Con-verses. **E.M. GALLAGHER**

ARCHITECTURE IN HELSINKI

Places Like This Polyvinyl

This Brooklyn/Melbourne sextet has upped their quirk factor tenfold. Shifting from dub-infused tracks that sound like Man Man covering the B-52's ("Heart It Races," "Red Turned White") to infantile Neutral Milk Hotel miming ("Like It Or Not"), AIH are always chaotically swinging through the branches of pop music like banana-starved monkeys, and they bring enough steel drums and fuzzy synths to have a blast doing so. **SAM DUKE**

ART IN MANILA

Set The Woods On Fire
Saddle Creek

As one half of now-defunct Azure Ray, Orenda Fink's appeal was based around an alto that sounded like 330-grit sandpaper running over wood and her ability to write pretty, emotionally available pop songs. Her new project offers more of the same on an album of alt-folk tunes that veer from weepy ballads ("Precious Pearl") to all-out foot-tappers ("The Abomination"), the latter of which are as contagious and aurally pleasing as anything Feist has ever done. **KEVIN KAMPWIRTH**

BEASTS OF EDEN

End Times Expansion Team

There aren't many bands from Brooklyn these days that can evoke comparisons to Thin Lizzy, Megadeth and Linkin Park—something this foursome unequivocally does. This debut EP smacks of all the aforementioned acts, but sounds more like a band unconsciously filtering their influences into a fledgling solidarity. If an EP is meant to entice listeners into wanting more, then *End Times* succeeds. **KK**



CLARE BURSON

BENZOS

Branches Stinky

Had this NYC-based trio decided to make their sophomore LP an instrumental affair, we'd have a listenable record here. The music itself isn't bad—an amalgam of layered Explo-sions In The Sky-style guitars crossed with the atmospheric flourishes of a mild Autechre tune. But alas, it's not instrumental. The lyrics are innocuous and silly, while vocalist Christian Celaya sounds exactly like that one guy from that '90s alternative band. Yeah, that one. **KK**

SIR RICHARD BISHOP

Polytheistic Fragments Drag City

On *Polytheistic Fragments*, the Sun City Girls alum continues in the vein of his last package of instrumental weirdness, *While My Guitar Violently Bleeds*. Noodling his way from jazz to folk to drone to Eastern and Middle Eastern sounds, Bishop bangs out songs that, between the expressiveness of the picking and the esotericism of the track titles, create vivid free-flowing narratives out of thin air. **JOSH SPIRO**

BITTER: SWEET

The Remix Game Quango

This SoCal duo's first album, *The Mating Game*, is taken out of its previously verdant jazzy-pop setting and rethought here into groove-ready beats by the likes of Thievery Corporation, AtJazz, Skeewiff, Nicola Conte and Fort Knox Five. The results are occasionally inspired (see Thievery Corporation's twiddling on "Bittersweet Faith") and Halligan's sinewy

alto still commands attention. But for the most part we're left wondering whether this was worth the time and effort. **KK**

CLARE BURSON

Thieves Self-Released

On her sophomore LP, this Tennessee native hungers for a lost love within musical laments built on Americana roots and indie-rock lilts. Tender sentiments give way to embittered warbles with tracks like the wronged-gal anthem, "These Boots Are Made For Walkin'," which Burson undresses to a soulful cry and a lone twangy banjo. Intimate and brooding, *Thieves* is the confessions, obsessions and mixed emotions of the broken-hearted. **HELEN MATATOV**

ELLEGARDEN

Eleven Fire Crackers Nettwerk

Though from Japan, Ellegarden makes music that is as American as anything Blink-182 has ever released. In fact, Ellegarden's fifth proper LP is more impressive for their ridiculously accurate portrayal of a West Coast skate-punk bunch than for the actual music on it, which does little more than make the listener feel as if they're at once being duped and assaulted with sounds that are innocuous and, like, so y2k. **KK**

FLORATONE

Floratone Blue Note

Publicity folklore is playing up this all-star combo—consisting of session drummer extraordinaire Matt Chamberlain, jazz guitar virtuoso Bill Frisell and producers Tucker Martine and Lee Townsend—as a sound and vision kin to the likes of *Bitches Brew* or *On The Corner*. It's not, although Floratone does come close

on cuts like "Swamped" and "The Future." Otherwise, this respectable set cooks up a nice ambient groove that recalls some of Frisell's more kinetic albums. **RON HART**

JESSE HARRIS

The Hottest State Hickory

Jesse Harris can write a decent tune, but his songs truly shine when sung by the right artist. On the soundtrack to the Ethan Hawke-helmed flick *The Hottest State*, Feist infuses "Somewhere Down the Road" with sweet optimism, while Willie Nelson's well-worn drawl brings out the underlying remorse of "Always Seem to Get Things Wrong." Even longtime collaborator Norah Jones makes an appearance on "World Of Trouble," which is nearly as heartbreakingly bluesy as the chanteuse herself. **GINNY YANG**

JOE HENRY

Civilians Anti-

It's quite au courant to sing anti-war songs. And song titles like the album's namesake and "Civil War" suggest Joe Henry is hitched to today's peace train. *Civilians* is not intentionally political. Nevertheless, Henry admits that "the times in which we live have somewhat subverted the process." Whatever "the times" happen to be, Henry always creates timeless American music. **DAN MACINTOSH**

JOHNNY IRION

Ex Tempore Route 8/RCAM

While some musicians sacrifice steady love lives for their careers, Johnny Irion is cultivating both. Irion's wife, Sarah Lee Guthrie—with whom he also records as a folk/country duo—doubles as his honey-throat-



ed backup singer on this sophomore solo effort. The happy monogamy can be heard in everything from the flirty piano trills in opening track "Take Care" to the tender narrative of "Eyes Like A Levee." Whether he's channeling Harvest-era Neil Young or navigating the mellow highways between bedroom pop and Americana, Irion crafts arrangements that are sophisticated without sounding aloof.

SHARON STEEL

KINSKI

Down Below It's Chaos Sub Pop

Hey America, you're idolizing the wrong Chris Martin! Sure, one's married to a movie star and makes treachery hit records, but the guitarist of Seattle's Kinski definitely fronts the sexier, sludgier and superior band. On his group's sixth proper full-length, however, Kinski's Martin does take a cue from Mr. Goldplay, moving away from all-instrumental tracks and adding vocals (albeit deadpan Thurston Moore-ish ones) to many of these fuzz-toned, druggy songs. **REBECCA RABER**

PEOPLE

Misbegotten Man I And Ear

Think of People as a more experimental Fiery Furnaces. For those who appreciate a band that eschews the traditional rock dynamic to make music that sounds as if it were being mainlined straight from the id of a 6-year-old boy with ADHD, you can't miss this. This duo's sophomore LP finds them pulling sounds from their respective instruments that conjure some sort of Shaggs/Weather Report collaboration. **KK**

PRINZHORN DANCE SCHOOL

Prinzhorn Dance School DFA/Astralwerks

The debut album from Tobin Prinz and Suzi Horn—a duo who like nothing more than the sound of hitting things—embraces simplicity. The album, recorded in a barn, preserves the raw sound of heavy drums and thick guitar lines plucked and plonked out more like a bass (not unlike early White Stripes or DFA 1979), with very stripped-down lyrics depicting England as only minimalists could—with more sounds than actual words. **LISA HRESKO**

CHUCK RAGAN

Feast Or Famine Side One Dummy

Backed by an array of down-home accompaniment that includes banjos, fiddles and accordions, the former Hot Water Music man goes solo for a romp through countrified

acoustic numbers and emerges with a surprising amount of punk-country gems. Ragan simmers his characteristically sweltering voice enough to sound like a cheese-less Bob Seger, and the songs here contain enough mellow sing-alongs and down-and-out narratives to sound legitimate. **SD**

REED KD

The Ashes Bloom Dirty Laundry

The acoustic guitar and harmonica rack-clad singer/songwriter has never gone away, that archetype has just become increasingly diluted in the wash of new cross-styles. Reed Dahlmeier can be counted among this breed, one whose heart lays aside Dylan's, but whose affectations wander towards heavier instrumentation and all the hooks you can fit in a three-minute pop song. For the most part, on his second proper LP, he succeeds—at his best conjuring Elliott Smith, and at his worst, Brendan Benson. **KK**

MICHELLE SHOCKED

ToHEAVENuRIDE Mighty Sound

Michelle Shocked's musical curiosities have led her from folk to country, with many stylistic stops along the way, while her staunchly political bent has expanded to include a strongly religious angle. With *ToHEAVENuRIDE*, Shocked expresses her Christian faith within a black gospel context. Captured at the 2003 Telluride Bluegrass Festival, Shocked easily inhabits the Staple Singers' "Wade in the Water" and Sister Rosetta Tharp's "Strange Things Are Happening Every Day." But are we shocked? Nah. **DM**

STABILISERS

Wanna Do The Wild Plastic Brane Love Thing? Wicked Cool

These Brit garage rock geezers pull out of the driveway, er, car park, and shift gears into a louder, fatter machine than their previous pedigree peddled (guitarist Allan Crockford was in the more raw Thee Headcoats). Buzzy riffs and slamming snare stomp but don't stop fingers from snapping through curmudgeon candy like "Queen Of The Scene" and "Born To Kiss Arse." This is a comp of recent UK releases, with Wicked Cool honcho Little Steven Van Zandt tracking the tunes. **ERIC DAVIDSON**

JACKY TERRASSON

Mirror Blue Note

The French-American pianist, who has released 10 albums as a

bandleader since winning the Thelonious Monk International Piano Competition in 1993, finally emerges with his first solo LP—a collection of standards and originals. Hearing how effortlessly and prodigiously he can switch from jaunty, fractured key runs in 7/4 time ("Caravan") to fluidly phrased nuances just dripping with melody ("Juvenile") makes one wonder why he's been hiding out amidst bass and drums for so long. **KK**

TEDDY THOMPSON

Up Front and Down Low Verve Forecast

With his Raul Malo-like voice and love of traditional country music, Teddy Thompson has delivered

But in their more serious moments, as on the doomy, almost eight-minute synth-drone opus, "In Reverence," they prove that behind their goofy grossness is real musical acuity. **RR**

MICK TURNER/TREN BROTHERS

Blue Trees Drag City

While Dirty Three violinist/frontman Warren Ellis has been busy musically canoodling with Nick Cave, Dirty Three guitarist Mick Turner and drummer Jim White have been keeping busy with their Tren Brothers project (among others), having released a handful of BPs. And as this collection of rare singles and compilation tracks proves, the pick



a twang-y delight. Tear-in-your-beer songs perfectly suit Thompson's crying vocals. The son of British folk-rock troubadours Richard and Linda Thompson, he comes off like a red-blooded American traditionalist. Iris DeMent's similarly sad singing on "My Heart Echoes" and the omnipresent country-politan strings help heighten the beautifully retro atmosphere of Thompson's lowdown moods. **DM**

TRENCHER

Lips Southern

English trio Trencher call their mix of spooky, throttling synthesizers and throat-shredding, howled vocals "Casio-grind." And on their second full-length CD, they wink at their own aggressive theatricality with song titles like "Mouth To Anus" and "Two Semi's Don't Make A Hard-On."

doesn't fall far from the bow, although their arrangements are more lush than the Three's. **KG**

JOHN VANDERSLICE

Emerald City Barsuk

Shelving, for a moment, that he's simply a spectacular songwriter, Vanderslice's greatest gift as a musician might be his unparalleled ear for sound. *City* picks up where 2005's excellent *Pixel Revolt* left off, lyrically sorting through a world that he's becoming increasingly paranoid within (due to war, failed relationships), while lacing the words with anomalously mellifluous music. He mixes jingly guitars, bells, woolly bass lines, multi-tracked harmonies and kick drums so heavy and muffled, they sound as if they're being beaten with a pillow. **KK**

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THE FOR CARNATION

Promised Works Touch And Go



In 2006, when he was doing interviews for his label's 25th anniversary, Touch And Go head honcho Corey Rusk told reporters he thought the record people had most "criminally

overlooked" was the For Carnation's self-titled LP, which was released in 2000. With eyes back on this sleepy, slower-than-slowcore Kentucky collective, lead by erstwhile Squirrel Bait/Slint member Brian McMahan, this compilation of two mid-'90s EPs, originally issued by Matorador, serve to bolster Rusk's praise. The first three songs on *Promised Works* originally comprised 1995's *Fight Songs* EP, and its standout, "How I Beat The Devil," could double as one of *Spiderland*'s well-behaved cousins. (The lineup featured Slint's Pajo and members of Tortoise.) Their second EP, 1996's *Marshmallows*, found the ensemble (now with a Shrimp Boat member onboard) delicately balancing dynamic contrasts of loud and soft with exceptional results, especially on the plinky piano ballad "Imyr, Marshmallow." McMahan sounds reserved throughout, making for a delicate listen, but one that's worth all the 20/20-hindsight praise he's now getting for the For Carnation. **KORY GROW**

FEMI KUTI

The Definitive Collection Wrasse



This two-CD retrospective of the award-winning Nigerian musician (and son of famous Afrobeat innovator Fela) is a great introduction for those unfamiliar with his genre.

Disc One acts as a best-of collection, gathering tracks from his three albums. "Traitors of Africa," with its funky horns and *Remain in Light*-era Talking Heads electric guitar groove, will have you shaking your backside even if you aren't yet well-versed in African politics. Like father, like son; much of Femi's lyrical content is of the stridently political variety. Although sincere, these words do not rank up with, say, Bob Dylan's best biting barbs. "Fight To Win," for instance, simply states: "There is suffering in the street/In the street/Our leaders say let it be/Let it be/We the people don't agree." These angry sentiments may be perfectly warranted, but they're hardly poetry. Even so, his music has attracted more than his share of famous American admirers: Macy Gray and Mos Def appear on Disc Two, which is primarily comprised of remixes, closing out a package that mostly sounds better than it seems on the surface. **DAN MACINTOSH**

PREFAB SPROUT

Steve McQueen Epic-Legacy



"Hallelujah" is but one song on Prefab Sprout's *Steve McQueen* reissue. Yet that's exactly the praise you'll exclaim once you realize that at least one 1985 album doesn't sound dated with overbear-

ing synthesizers and drum machines. The fact that electronic gizmo maestro Thomas Dolby produced it only bolsters the miracle. Never mind the artificial vegetable name—Prefab Sprout's the real thing. Paddy McAloon writes literate lyrics without name-dropping or getting all morbid, à la Morrissey. Yet like Moz, McAloon is at his best when he's blessed with lively musical support. The twangy guitar on "Faron Young," for instance, makes for a rumbling motorbike ride in the country. Originally titled *Two Wheels Good* in the US, this re-release includes an extra disc of new acoustic *Steve McQueen* reinterpretations. McAloon's voice is lower now and the recordings have a stripped down feel, but they're no match for the re-mastered studio takes. Like the actor bearing this project's name, this Prefab Sprout disc is a true original. **DM**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Vee-Jay: The Definitive Collection Shout! Factory



We're all aware of Stax and Motown, but there was a distillery full of great, mid-century soul and R&B labels that left a hefty legacy then went belly-up, their catalogs cast off to Italian bootleggers or publishing disputes for decades. Vee-Jay was one of the best, and the first African American-owned record label. So thanks to Shout! Factory for

starting out a series of Vee-Jay releases with this four-CD monster. Chock full of bluesy ballers (Jimmy Reed, John Lee Hooker), sock-hop pop (Dukays, Moonglows) and a surprising amount of oft-covered hits, *Definitive* is primarily packed with great doo-wop weepers (the Spaniels, the Dells) and wailers (Eddie Taylor, the Pyramids). Vee-Jay aimed to expand out from the R&B beat, so there's the Staple Singers' sparse gospel ("Uncolored Day"), Four Seasons' bleach-wop ("Sherry") and Hoyt Axton's Memphis-to-Mersey horn-dogging ("Bring Your Lovin'"). We're a much louder, saturated world now. Much of the sweaty, American innovation Vee-Jay dished up may be lost on those under 30 (though the snare sounds of that era remain DJ fodder). Still, in those immortal words, you can dance to it. **ERIC DAVIDSON**

MICHAEL YONKERS

Grimwood De Stijl



Michael Yonkers was a fledgling psych-rocker in the late 1960s who made his own experimental guitars and recorded an insane basement tape that sounded like a one-man Son-

ic Youth dropped out of a time machine into a mossy swimming hole. That album, contracted to Sire, was never released. A load of computers fell on him at work, leaving him permanently disabled. That led to increasingly crestfallen, often beautiful self-released folk records throughout the 70s, and, eventually, Yonkers fashioned himself a homemade exoskeleton that helped ease some of his chronic back pains, reemerged in the fledgling Twin Cities' '80s new wave scene and subsequently became the template of the exhumed freak folk character. De Stijl-Sub Pop finally released that amazing first album (*Microminiature Love*) in 2002. *Grimwood* is the less cranky, but even more bunkered-feeling follow-up. The warbly vocals and echoey vibe remain, otherwise it's extremely sparse, slow, dark folk, akin to Leonard Cohen in a serious fever drifting through olde sea shantys about ancient lands, sand crabs and lost love—all heard as if standing right outside the walls of the lonely guy next door. **ED**

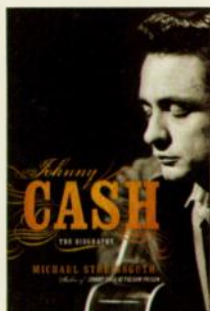
YOUNG MARBLE GIANTS

Colossal Youth Domino



Before the term "indie rock" was even uttered to describe a form of modern pop, Cardiff, Wales' Young Marble Giants were the living embodiment of it. Formed at the height

of new wave and the comedown of punk, YMG sounded like nothing in existence at the time. Utilizing a strange combination of hockey-rink organ, sharp near-hardcore basslines, sparse guitar lines and a metronome-style drum machine groove, their definition of pop was captured in its perfection on the group's sole official LP, *Colossal Youth*. "Quiet radicalism" is how their music is described in writer Simon Reynolds' liner notes to Domino's long-awaited deluxe revamp of *Youth*. In addition to their landmark 15-track full-length, this three-disc version also features the group's 1979 "Final Day" single, the largely instrumental 1981 *Testcard* EP, a track from the *Is The War Over?* compilation, the early demo version of *Colossal Youth* (which was released as *Salad Days* in Japan), and an entire disc from their 1980 Peel Session. Here's hoping their recent reunion lasts longer than their tenure together the first time around. **RON HART**



JOHNNY CASH: THE BIOGRAPHY

By Michael Streissguth Da Capo

With two autobiographies, a biopic, tour films and countless biographies both authorized and not-so-authorized, the life of Johnny Cash certainly hasn't gone unexplored. Michael Streissguth, an English professor and something of a Johnny Cash historian, knows this better than anyone, since he has already edited *Ring Of Fire: The Johnny Cash Reader* and authored *Johnny Cash At Folsom Prison: The Making Of A Masterpiece*, prior to scribing *Johnny Cash: The Biography*. Sure, most of the media on the Man In Black is comprised of shameless fawning, elevating him to a near sacred cow. While Streissguth has a noted admiration for Cash, he also attempts to demystify the trailblazer. Sure, he was a genre- and generation-defying idol, but Streissguth never loses sight of the fact that Cash was also an adulterer, speed freak and absentee father. That being said, his account doesn't condemn Cash, but sympathetically reconciles the inherent contradictions. **MAGGIE SEROTA**

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN

By Glen E. Friedman Burning Flags Press (www.burningflags.com)

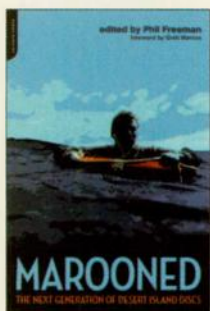
There's a long, heartfelt intro to this Fugazi photo-mage by former Nation Of Ulysses/the Make-Up frontman Ian Svenonious. It's very long. You will probably skip it. Perhaps epitomizing the "Picture says 1,000 words" adage, however, you will then spend 30 minutes glaring at each subsequent photo snapped by hardcore-shutterbug legend Friedman (*Get In The Van*, *Fuck You Heroes*, etc.), taken over the entirety of the Washington, D.C. post-hardcore legends' career. There's a fantastic juxtaposition that comes to light across these 100-plus glossy, coffee-table-book-on-cool-steroids pages: The visceral energy of the band's live shows is captured with artistic elegance by Friedman, as the convergence of band and artist's work brings out each other's subtler qualities. It is no doubt awesome to play "I was at that show" as you slide your fingers through its chronological layout. The finest moments, however, are captured during the *In On The Kill Taker* era, as the group allowed their visual confidant to catch them in a more comfortable state of mid-career bohemia than in their guarded, *Marin Walker*-period of punk righteousness. Few bands have been as important to their subgenre's maturation—and to modern music's sense of social obligation—as Fugazi, and it's only fitting that the king of DIY lens-crafting finally showed that no shouting or slogans are needed to convey the band's searing poeticism. **KENNY HERZOG**



MAROONED: THE NEXT GENERATION OF DESERT ISLAND DISCS

Edited By Phil Freeman Da Capo

As the obsessive music fan gets older and more concerned with paying rent than finding sonic catharsis, there tends to be a waning interest in newer bands. By this same juncture, they've likely exhausted the paths to new discovery of pre-established personal favorites. But some little part of them will always thirst to be consumed all over again, and that's what books like *Marooned* are supposed to be all about: music geeks inspiring other music geeks when the well of inspiration was thought to have run dry. Unfortunately, this collection culls a mostly sub-thrilling crop of records from a generally less-than-convincing group of music critics, and you're primarily left wondering, "Seriously? Skunk Anansie?" Sure, there are moments too compelling in their novelty to pass up (John Darnielle waxing romantic about Dionne Warwick) and intriguingly unexpected (Michaelangelo Matos taking on *History Of Our World Part 1: Breakbeats And Jungle Ultramix* By DJ DB). But because the nature of these essays is personal, the quality of writing needs to approach that of the music it's suggesting immortality for. And where you'd love to see a record like Spiritualized's undervalued opus *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space* get an impassioned and intelligent homage, Daphne Carr makes nary a case for it being more than a soundtrack to some heartbroken teenager's diary. Sadly, slightly cynical musicheads seeking their next great impetus to go back to the record-shopping block might want to search a little deeper for something new in the albums they already adore. **KH**



MY FIRST TIME

Edited By Chris Duncan AK Press

More than 40 punk rockers, activists, writers and left-leaning minds collaborated on *My First Time*. The idea of getting these folks to wax rhapsodical about what went down at their first punk show, how it changed their lives and steered them on their current paths certainly had potential. The concept of going to see a rock band amidst the pit violence and intimidation of the scattered punk scenes that dot the globe is a daunting one indeed. Too bad, then, that most of the contributors here seem to be telling what largely amounts to the same story, over and over. "I was young, money and success and the attention of being in a band were strange concepts to me, and I had to convince my parents to let me go, and I was probably more scared than they were! But Underdog/7 Seconds/the Circle Jerks were playing, and I got excited. I jumped into the pit and got hurt! Friends, or maybe somebody I just met at the show, were nearby and I got to share in the experience with them! I went back the next week. *My life would never be the same!*" In the collection's most striking essay, Michelle Tea reminisces about being foremost in love with the idea of how punk looked and what that meant to her as she gained her teenage independence. Faced with a rickety club and a beer-drenched set by Gang Green, she decided it wasn't really for her after all. Her words speak volumes about an experience best internalized by its practitioners. **DOUG MOSUROCK**



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THE KITCH KORNER

GG ALLIN: HATED (SPECIAL EDITION) (MVD)

Hated's notoriety has reached much farther than the feces its subject habitually flung at audiences. Part of that is due to its affiliation with director Todd Phillips (who contributes commentary), but ultimately its allure is Allin, a polarizing figure whose self-immolating and audience-threatening behavior seemed as spawned from intelligent rebellion as it did from erratic drug abuse. However, it's his mother, brother Merle and bandmate Dino who shine as beacons of bonkers-ness in new interview footage and



commentary. An overweight, glass-eyed, circus-haired Dino is downright frightening as he sits mostly quiet beside Merle, who essentially gives a needlessly lengthy oral history of he and his brother's ascension to cult success. And as for Mrs. Allin, three minutes of never-seen footage depicts a slightly zoned-out old lady who was probably too busy praying to Jesus (which was the name she gave GG at birth) to notice her son morphing into a self-destructive maniac. A one-time rental for owners of previous DVD editions, but the definitive statement for those clinging to their tattered VHS.

KENNY HERZOG



AIR GUITAR NATION (Docurama)

When relegated to teen boys' bedrooms, air guitar is an indulgent yet harmless habit. But when acted out at concerts, it's nothing short of embarrassing. You don't see dudes working out their best Vin Diesel moves from stadium seats in the middle of action flicks, do you? *Air Guitar Nation*—a mockumentary if you will—takes on a decidedly patriotic undertone. C. Diddy (real name: David Jung) is introduced as the first American pseudo-guitarist to both enter and win the World Air Guitar Championship in Oulu, Finland. Fortunately, Jung is an actor who doesn't take himself all that seriously. We follow Diddy's journey from New York, where he must defeat rival/wonderfully named Bjorn Turoque [pronounced be-orn-to-rock], to the Roxy on Sunset for the West Coast prize. C. Diddy performance footage is mixed with half-serious reflections on what it all means to be heir to the air throne. By attaining World Air Guitar Championship victory, C. Diddy apes the chord seen round the world. **DAN MACINTOSH**



THE FLAMING LIPS UFO AT THE ZOO (Warner Bros.)

Anyone who's ever seen the Lips live knows that Wayne Coyne has more or less lost his mind. He's not necessarily crazy in that straitjacket sort of way, but in the way that a person who attacks their art with zero inhibition is crazy. The band's stage shows have, in recent years, become just as much about the spectacle as the music. Filmed last year in their hometown, this DVD documents the band at their chaotic best, surrounding the songs with live animals, confetti, a human-sized bubble and a giant, homemade UFO. The music itself is excellent, heavily borrowing from their recent albums and held in place by drummer Steve Drozd, allowing Coyne to do his thing. Some fault the band for veering their performances towards the carnivalesque, but that reasoning is misguided. The Lips learned long ago that the point of a live show is to appeal to all the senses, to divert from the mundane and ultimately, to remind us how much beauty there can be in bedlam. **KEVIN KAMPWIRTH**



STRANGER THAN PARADISE (Criterion Collection)

One of the definitive independent films gets a definitive release. Watching it again, any complaints of pretension—about the only gripe leveled at Jim Jarmusch's 1984 masterpiece—have dissipated with time. Actually, this calm, funny eulogy to the grimy beauty of a pre-consumer-devoured America (NYC and Cleveland, specifically) actually feels strikingly heartfelt, a real revelation for the filmic template of hipster cool. Of course, *Stranger* is from a time when a good film from a young cool hipster portended more good films from said hipster rather than the promise of being offered the next *Batman* movie. The extras are plenty and insightful, including Jarmusch's 1980 debut, *Permanent Vacation* (now that's pretentious, but in that young-filmmaker-genuinely-groping-to-separate-style-from-his-influences way); a short silent 8mm film made by Jarmusch's brother Tom while on location in Cleveland during the making of *Stranger*; and *Kino 84*, a 1984 German TV doc on Jarmusch, in which it's interesting to hear cast and crew mention how much NYC had changed in the five years between *Permanent* and *Stranger*--and that was 1984! **ERIC DAVIDSON**



SXSW LIVE 2007 (Shout! Factory)

Given the hundreds of bands who flock from all over the globe to the indie mecca that is Austin, Texas for SXSW, it would seem like a daunting task to cinematically document such a massive music event. And despite their best efforts, Shout! Factory barely scratches the surface with *SXSW Live*, which contains 18 performances by some of the biggest names within the smaller scenes. Rousing renditions of Peter Bjorn And John's now-ubiquitous "Young Folks" and Annuals' electrifying "Complete Or Completing" are among the film's highlights, as is watching all two dozen-or-so members of the Polyphonic Spree belting out "When The Fool Becomes A King" while crammed on a soundstage. However, inclusions by bands such as the Bravery and top-40 buffoons Bowling For Soup seem antithetical to the festival's initial mission of discovering music's finest unsigned talent (although the festival itself, for better or for worse, has greatly extended its scope since its inception in 1987). Regardless of such qualms, *SXSW Live* is a suitable enough souvenir for those of us who couldn't witness the fest firsthand. **JESSICA GENTILE**

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Custard Records

Bettye LaVette
You Don't Know Me At All
Anti-

The Most Serene Republic
The Men Who Live Upstairs
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Chase Pagan
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Rue Melo
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TriBattery Pops

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TW	LW	2W	PK	WKS	ARTIST + TITLE	LABEL
1	1	3	1	5	TEGAN AND SARA The Con	Sire
2	2	1	1	8	INTERPOL Our Love To Admire	Capitol
3	4	0	3	4	ARCHITECTURE IN HELSINKI Places Like This	Polyvinyl
4	3	2	7	10	SPoon Ga Ga #1 TRIPLE A #1 RADIO SELECT	Merge
5	11	102	5	3	MINUS THE BEAR Planet Of Ice	Suicide Squeeze
6	39	-	5	2	CARIBOU Andorra	Merge
7	5	10	5	5	OKKERVIL RIVER The Stage Names	Jagjaguwar
8	43	-	8	2	NEW PORNোগRAPHERS Challengers #1 A.I.M.S.	Matador
9	73	-	9	2	RILO KILEY Under The Blacklight	Warner Bros.
10	6	7	5	7	JUSTICE Cross #1 RPM	Vice
11	14	14	11	2	AGAINST ME! New Wave	Sire
12	7	4	4	6	YEAH YEAH YEAHS Is Is [EP]	Interscope
13	86	-	13	2	M.I.A. Kala	Interscope
14	12	11	11	6	EDITORS An End Has A Start	FADER-Epic
15	10	8	8	7	IRON AND WINE Boy With A Coin [EP]	Sub Pop
16	9	9	5	7	1990S Cookies	Rough Trade
17	19	27	17	3	IMPERIAL TEEN The Hair The TV The Baby And The Band	Merge
18	42	-	18	2	NEW YOUNG PONY CLUB Fantastic Playroom	Modular
19	8	5	7	11	WHITE STRIPES Icky Thump	Warner Bros.
20	13	12	12	6	JOHN VANDERSLICE Emerald City	Barsuk
21	22	121	21	3	MIRAH AND SPECTRATONE INT'L Share This Place	K
22	15	17	15	8	ST. VINCENT Marry Me	Beggars Banquet
23	26	29	23	3	STEREO TOTAL Paris-Berlin	Kill Rock Stars
24	23	22	22	5	EMILY HAINES AND THE SOFT SKEL What Is Free	Last Gang
25	21	28	21	5	BILLIE HOLIDAY Remixed And Reimagined #1 JAZZ	Sony Legacy
26	19	18	14	8	CHEMICAL BROTHERS We Are The Night	Astralwerks
27	49	-	27	2	EISLEY Combinations	Reprise-Warner
28	33	50	28	3	RENTALS Last Little Life [EP]	Boomp
29	25	16	11	8	SMASHING PUMPKINS Zeitgeist	Reprise
30	36	68	30	3	MAE Singularity	Capitol
31	181	-	31	2	LIARS Liars TOP MOVER	Mute
32	20	23	20	5	TURBO FRUITS Turbo Fruits	Ecstatic Peace
33	29	41	29	3	BRUNETTES Structure And Cosmetics	Sub Pop
34	31	32	31	4	COMMON Finding Forever #1 HIP-HOP	Geffen
35	17	13	6	10	RYAN ADAMS Easy Tiger	Lost Highway
36	88	-	36	2	JOSH RITTER The Historical Conquests Of Josh Ritter	Sony
37	27	26	6	12	METRIC Grow Up And Blow Away	Last Gang
38	16	15	7	9	GOGOL BORDELLO Super Taranta!	Side One Dummy
39	71	-	39	2	NINA NASTASIA AND JIM WHITE You Follow Me	FatCat
40	54	59	40	8	YOU SAY PARTY! WE SAY DIE! Lose All Time	Paper Bag
41	32	20	4	10	POLYPHONIC SPREE The Fragile Army	TVT
42	-	-	42	1	DIRTY PROJECTORS Rise Above TOP DEBUT	Dead Oceans
43	25	25	29	9	BUDOS BAND The Budos Band II	Daptone
44	-	-	44	1	ANIMAL COLLECTIVE "Peacebone" [Single]	Domino
45	53	56	45	5	MANCHESTER ORCHESTRA I'm Like A Virgin	Canvas Back
46	46	37	37	6	NICOLE WILLIS... Keep Reachin' Up	Light In The Attic
47	52	-	47	2	ODD NOSDAM Level Live Wires	Anticon
48	30	19	3	11	BEASTIE BOYS The Mix-Up	Capitol
49	41	43	41	5	YELLOWCARD Paper Walls	Capitol
50	47	67	47	3	ART IN MANILA Set The Woods On Fire	Saddle Creek

Radio Select Albums

PERIOD ENDING 8/26/2007
WWW.CMJ.COM/MEDIAGUIDE

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Mediaguide

TW	LW	2W	PK	WKS	SPINS	ARTIST + TITLE	LABEL
1	1	1	1	13	422	SPoon Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga	Merge
2	2	3	1	17	315	WHITE STRIPES Icky Thump	Warner Bros.
3	14	-	3	2	300	NEW PORNোগRAPHERS Challengers	Matador
4	3	4	3	16	245	INTERPOL Our Love To Admire	Capitol
5	119	-	5	1	239	IRON AND WINE Boy With A Coin [EP]	Sub Pop
6	8	8	6	5	226	TEGAN AND SARA The Con	Sire
7	9	14	2	20	215	FEIST The Reminder	Cherry Tree-Interscope
8	19	2	1	13	213	SMASHING PUMPKINS Zeitgeist	Reprise
9	7	7	4	14	208	RYAN ADAMS Easy Tiger	Lost Highway
9	5	6	1	21	208	WILCO Sky Blue Sky	Nonesuch
11	13	16	11	4	199	OKKERVIL RIVER The Stage Names	Jagjaguwar
12	15	24	12	3	188	ARCHITECTURE IN HELSINKI Places Like This	Polyvinyl
13	10	12	10	14	185	COMMON Finding Forever	Geffen
14	66	17	10	6	182	RILO KILEY Under The Blacklight	Warner Bros.
15	48	-	15	2	173	M.I.A. Kala	Interscope
16	27	34	16	5	170	JOHN VANDERSLICE Emerald City	Barsuk
17	11	5	3	6	165	YEAH YEAH YEAHS Is Is [EP]	Interscope
18	6	18	6	10	164	BEASTIE BOYS The Mix-Up	Capitol
19	4	10	4	6	160	EDITORS An End Has A Start	FADER-Epic
19	18	25	18	6	160	JUSTICE Cross	Vice

Important: In order for your music to be eligible for appearance on CMJ RADIO SELECT ALBUMS, you must service Mediaguide with all albums, EPs and singles (including remises and edits). Please visit the "Submit Music" tab of www.musicmonitor.com or www.cmj.com/airplayreporting and follow the instructions for submission.

A.I.M.S.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ALLIANCE OF INDEPENDENT
MEDIA STORES, GO TO WWW.THEALLIANCEROCKS.COM

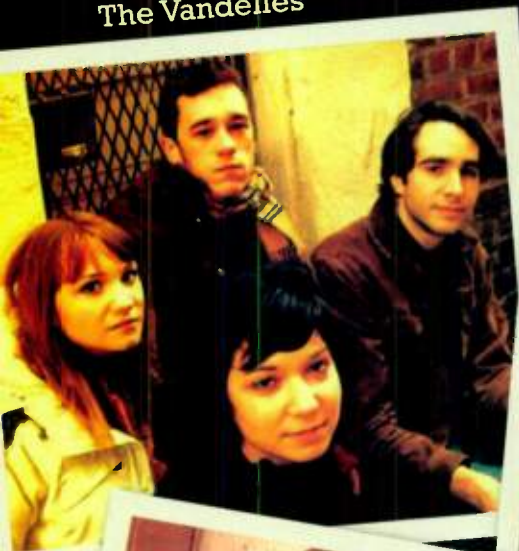
PERIOD ENDING 8/28/2007

TW	LW	ARTIST + TITLE	LABEL
1	88	NEW PORNোগRAPHERS Challengers (10770)	Matador
2	-	M.I.A. Kala (965902)	Interscope
3	-	RILO KILEY Under The Blacklight (189372)	Warner Bros.
4	2	SPoon Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga (50295)	Merge
5	-	MINUS THE BEAR Planet Of Ice (65)	Suicide Squeeze
6	-	LIVE AT KEXP, VOL. 3 Various Artists	Self-Released
7	-	TALIB KWELI Eardrum (277244)	Warner Bros.
8	1	OKKERVIL RIVER The Stage Names (110)	Jagjaguwar
9	-	JOSH RITTER The Historical Conquests Of Josh Ritter (712256)	Sony
10	71	CARIBOU Andorra (308)	Merge
11	-	ARCHITECTURE IN HELSINKI Places Like This (139)	Polyvinyl
12	-	GALACTIC From The Corner To The Block (86889)	Anti
13	-	FLAMING LIPS UFOs At The Zoo (44437)	Warner Bros.
14	6	ST. VINCENT Marry Me (80254)	Beggars Banquet
15	3	COMMON Finding Forever (938202)	Geffen
16	11	FLIGHT OF THE CONCORDS The Distant Future (746)	Sub Pop
17	-	OVER THE RHINE The Trumpet Child (101)	Great Speckled Dog
18	-	JANELLE MONAE Metropolis, Suite I Wondaland Arts Society-Purple Ribbon	
19	-	KINSKI Down Below It's Chaos (741)	Sub Pop
20	-	EARLIMART Mentor Tormentor (31060)	Majordomo

ZIG-ZAG LIVE

www.ZigZagLive.com

The Vandelles



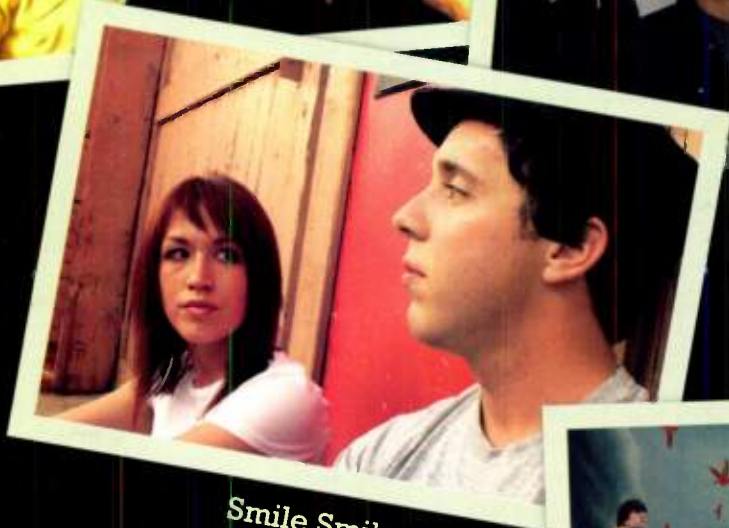
Rockfour



The Shapes



Smile Smile



Four Fifty One



An American Chinese



Congratulations to the recent winners from the Zig-Zag® Live Band Competition! Over the last few months you have seen and heard all of these bands throughout the pages of CMJ and we are proud to recognize them all at once. Be a part of the fourth season!

Check out www.ZigZagLive.com for details and listen to music from all of the winners!

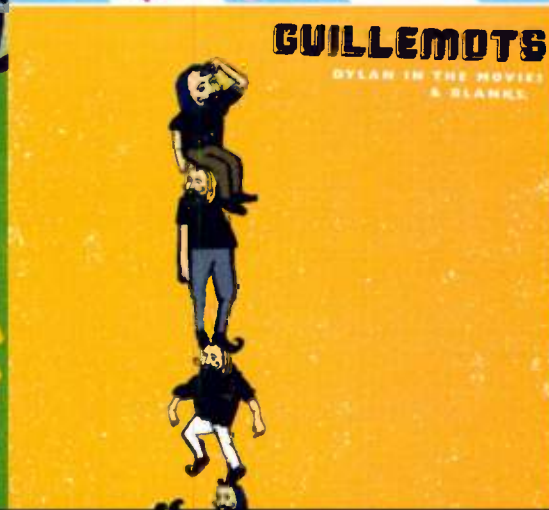
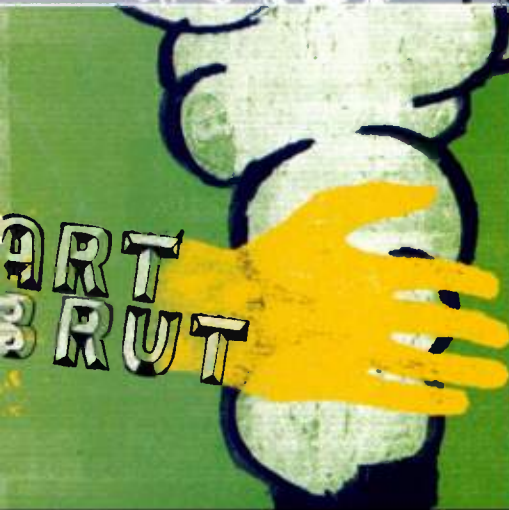
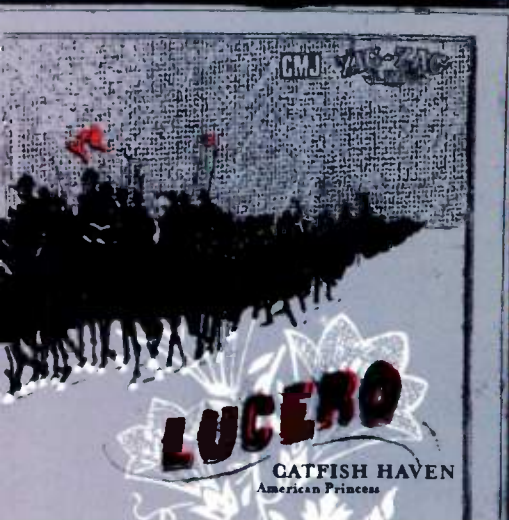
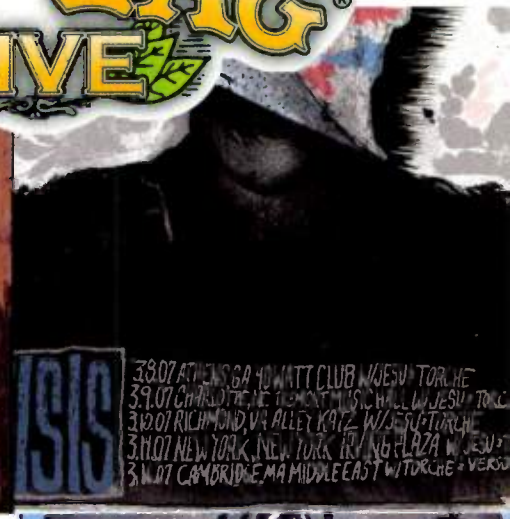
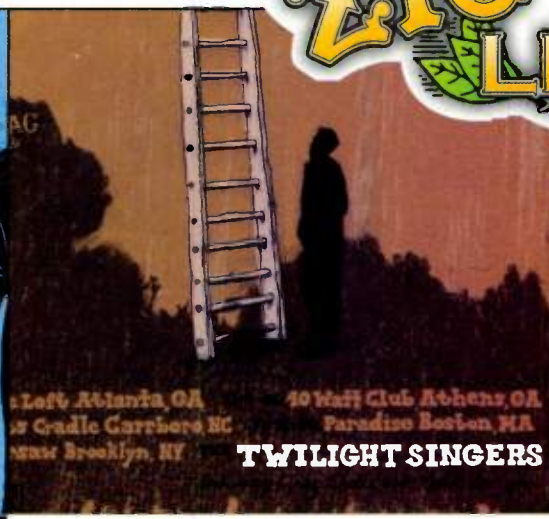


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