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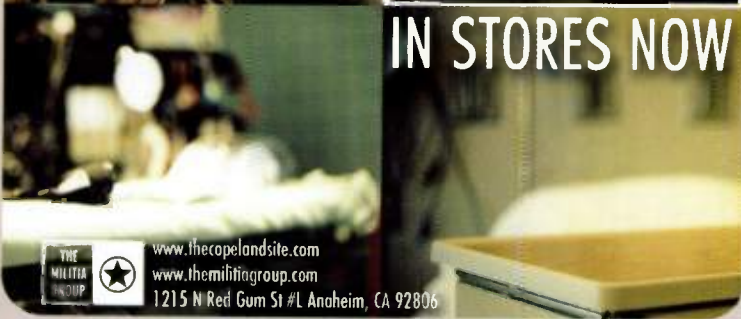
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**Mike Quinn**  
owner, No Quarter Records

Hands down, "Padded Bra" by Gene Defcon will beat out any other contenders for the coveted No. 1 summer party song this year. Good lookin' fella, too.

**Kate F.**  
Scientist/ Fashion Designer

Don't you hate it when the cops come and are all like "What are you doing behind that car?" and you're all like "Coke, no, psych—nothing," and they're all like "You're under arrest" and you're all like "As if" and they're all like, "Stop, or my mom will shoot," and you're like, to your friends, "See, I told you we should've just gone to the club."



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# CONTENTS

## Features ▶▶

### NO GUITARS 35

click-beep, boom-blp, toot-toot

turntable/equipment photos by Jason Messer  
stories by Reed Jackson, Julie Gerstein,  
Brian Baker and Mike McKee

### GIRL SKATER 26

Big Brother's Dave Carnie and Whytehouse Productions  
document the All Girl Skate Jam by Sarah Tomlinson

### IDLEWILD 30

Rockpile's Luke O'Neil chats with frontman Roddy  
Woomble about quick success and speed reading

### BEN HARPER 32

From blacklists and dismissed, Harper finds  
the universal groove. By Subhash Kulkarni

## Lava ▶▶ HOT BANDS

Cursive ..... 10  
*by Kurt Orzeck*

Yo La Tengo ..... 12  
*by Christian Lorentz*

Nada Surf ..... 14  
*by Joe Sweeney*

Jon Langford ..... 16  
*by Brian Baker*

Cave In ..... 18  
*by Kurt Orzeck*

Ten Grand ..... 20  
*by Brian Peterson*

Songs: Ohia ..... 22  
*by Brian Baker*

## Departments ▶▶

Records ..... 43

Under The Radar ..... 46  
*albums you may have missed*

Switched On ..... 50  
*hip hop and electronica*

All Things Indie ..... 58

Hard Rock News ..... 64

Afterthought ..... 66

## Sections ▶▶

Gravel Pit ..... 8  
*music news, reviews and interviews*

Five Questions ..... 9,17,25

Straight From the Edge ..... 62

Classifieds ..... 65



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THE STRATFORD 4

## ◀ BITS & PIECES

► If you *still* don't think 2003 is really just 1993 in disguise, then you're not paying attention to the major labels scooping up indie hopefuls at break-neck speed. The latest: **Yeah Yeah Yeahs** make the last minute switch from **Touch and Go** to **Interscope**, **The Mooney Suzuki** ditches **Gammon** for **Columbia** and **The Icarus Line** signs onto **V2**. Interscope also just dropped **The Briefs** mere months after signing them—a prophecy, you say?... Riding the roller coaster of rock's highs and lows, **Kranky's Outhud** found itself dropped from its U.S. tour with **Ladytron** this winter. Not wasting any time, the band soon sprinted off to tour Europe this March with **Radio 4**. It seems Outhud has come out on top... If you want more evidence that the major



Paper Doll: No Connection to Down and Out with the Dolls

labels are run by chimps, internal conflicts and rearrangements within **RCA** led to the dropping of Kansas City rockers **The Gadgets** mere months after the contracts were signed... **The Flaming Lips** only pressed 3,000 copies of their promo-only EP, *Yoshimi Wins: Live Radio Sessions*, last year, and because those are now selling on **eBay** for almost \$19, **Reprise** has decided to re-service some of the prized covers featured only on the record. In late April, fans found the squeaky-clean *Fight Test* EP waiting expectantly in record-store racks from Boise to Boston, and eagerly gobbled up the release re-offering the band's radio-performance covers of "Knives Out" (**Radiohead**), "Golden Age" (**Beck**) and "Can't Get You Out of My Head" (**Kylie Minogue**). It also has the title track, a B-side version of "Do You Realize??" and two newly recorded songs... Jimmy Tamborello of **DNTEL** and Ben Gibbard of **Death Cab for Cutie** are currently riding the hype wave with their new duo record, *Give Up*, with their **Postal Service** project (**Sub Pop**). Fans of DNTEL won't be disappointed with this genuinely original and engaging release... Coming to a theater probably not too near you is *Down & Out with the Dolls*, a movie chronicling "the fast rise and fall of **The Paper Dolls**," a fictitious, Portland-based all-female band. **Lemmy**, Inger Lorre of **The Nymphs** and Janice Tanaka of **L7** make cameo

appearances, and there's a soundtrack (**Paper Dolls**, **Bangs**, **Kinnie Starr**) planned too. Sadly, this probably spells months of annoying questions for the coincidentally named Washington, D.C.-based band **Paper Doll**, who have nothing to do with the film... Canada's indie-minded turntablist **Kid Koala** will release what he describes as a "silent paperback," (we call it a graphic novel), titled *Nufonia Must Fall*, this March. The book comes courtesy of **ECW Press** and is accompanied by a CD of 10 new songs from the Kid... Not since **Hootie and the Blowfish** asked their fans to pick what songs they wanted to see on the best-of Hootie record did something this fun and exciting come along—**Tori Amos** let her fans create the set list for her performance on Oxygen's *Custom Concert* program. Of course, fans only got a limited number of songs to choose from, and you *know* if no one picked "Cornflake Girl," heads would've rolled. ■

## Muck-Draking

► If you *were* getting into folk's fallen hero in late 2000, you were just in time for Rykodisc's remastered, handsomely packaged versions of Nick Drake's three proper releases—*Five Leaves Left*, *Bryter Layter* and *Pink Moon*. Now, Island records releases the same albums again sans bonus tracks, expanded art or even remastered sound.

Sorting out the bureaucracy is like trying to disentangle 30 feet of headphone wire—it essentially boils down to Island being the label officially owning the records, and, because the Drake legacy continues to strengthen with each passing year, Island wants ultimate authority over the titles.

Not that fans would appreciate some actual reason for shelling out money for the reissue, but why not include some unreleased or rare songs, then?

"For starters, there really are no bonus tracks," an inside source told *Rockpile*. "The guy only recorded three records, and they are what they are. There are outtakes and alternates, but it was just the label and the estate wished to keep the records intact, and they are. Loose ends will appear on compilations in the future."

However, this same source indicated fans could keep their eyes open for reissues and a rarities set in the future, as well as the probability of a box set.

"It's the start of a long campaign on Nick Drake," he also adds, noting talk of a revised *Time of No Reply* (first rarities collection) and a box set.

— Kurt Orzek



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## 5 QUESTIONS **The Thermals**

The Thermals champion the “no-fi” aesthetic with *More Parts Per Million*, a collection of wry, distorted pop songs housed fittingly as part of the Sub Pop stable. Recorded DIY-style for \$60 in singer Hutch Harris’ kitchen, the band revels in the classic Seattle sound, bringing listeners full circle back to their fuzzed-out, hook-laden leanings.

Answers by Hutch Harris

**Was Sub Pop your ideal label choice?** It actually has been my ideal label for quite some time. I practically grew up on Sub Pop releases. We are definitely the iconoclastic Sub Pop band. We’re kind of a mix of all the great bands they’ve done records for over the years.

**Did you guys actually record *More Parts Per Million* in Hutch’s basement for \$60?** It was the kitchen, but yes, really cheap. The basic tracks were recorded for about \$15 dollars.

**Any reason you guys didn’t get your Pro Tools on and record a slick, happy radio record?** Pro Tools is a cold and unforgiving lover. The Thermals sound is totally analog based—the more you slam a sound into a tape machine, the more color and personality you get out of it.

**Is the lo-fi aesthetic a large element of the band’s overall sound?** Definitely, we all love lo-fi. But let me tell you about *No-Fi*. It is the loss of all fidelity, total audio faithlessness. That’s really what The Thermals sound is all about. No-Fi is the future... and present and past.

**Sub Pop describes the band as “classic Sub Pop with a twist.” What is the twist?** The twist may be that we’re simply better, or it’s just lime.

—Dan Pastorius



Photo by Chelsea Mosher

PlayStation 2



### PRIMAL PLAYSTATION 2

Primal isn’t the first fantasy action game to feature an alternative-rock-looking female character, but it certainly goes a bit overboard, making her generic tribal tattoos integral to the action. When this bad-ass turns into her demon half (you knew she’d have a demon side didn’t you?) her tattoos glow a bright green! How

cool. Anyway, the Godsmack groupie can definitely hold her own as she battles foes in creepy 3-D castles. But the highlight is her grumpy, midget, gargoyle sidekick who provides some humor to the otherwise basic storyline. Despite the handful of entertaining features, there are certainly better fantasy titles out there (*Devil May Cry 2*) demanding attention before anyone needs to bother with Primal.

—Dave Thomas

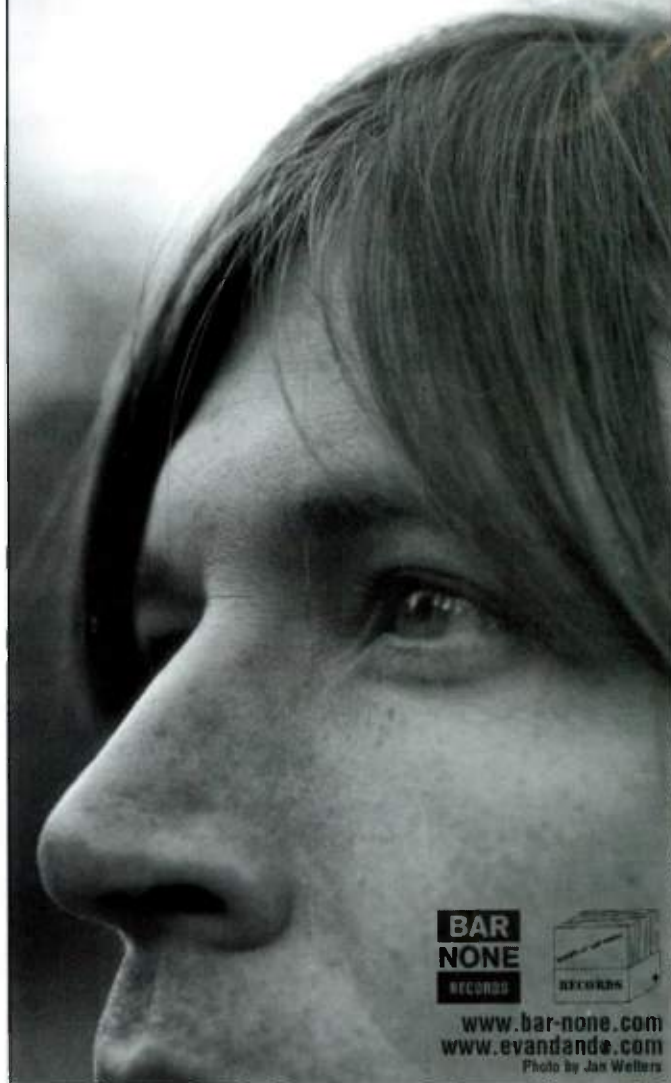
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# SIGNING ON THE DOTTED LINE

**CURSIVE** Frontman Tim Kasher Waivers  
Between Musical Commitment and True Happiness

As the frontman for an eight-year-old indie band whose fan base has essentially doubled this year, it's a bit bewildering to hear Cursive ace Tim Kasher say, "being in a band is really frustrating."

It's much more frustrating than early-morning traffic, or ironing the button-down in time to dart out the door before seven. But, certainly, it's better than trying to cram in a call to your great-aunt—who just happens to be gasping her last few breaths before being taken by the cancer—into your timecarded 30-minute lunch hour.

Kasher recognizes the perks, of course, but maintains there are serious sacrifices in pursuing the life of a professional musician.

"Doing what I do doesn't let me pursue relationships, see people and friends," he explains. "But I do recognize that if I were to be able to choose to do something else, I'd probably rather stay with what I'm doing now."

When pressed to explain further, Kasher provides a convincing, thoughtful analogy. He paints the verbal picture of someone who toiled away, opened his own toy store and ran it with care for some 60 years. Looking back proudly on a life dedicated to what one wants to do is rewarding and comforting. However, Kasher suggests, we need to be pretty sure we're involved in the right line of work.

"I don't want to dedicate my whole life's work to being in a band," he says, wryly. "I want to move on and find other endeavors out there."

Maybe the bounty has come too late. Or maybe it's the fact Cursive's six-album career is only partially responsible for the attention the band is getting in 2003. Or maybe it was inevitable Kasher's enthusiasm would eventually wear thin.

Indeed, it seems Kasher was, to some degree, set back from the start. Last year he suffered a collapsed lung, the result of a malady he endured for some 12 years.

"It's a disorder I was born with," he says, "The doctors couldn't come up with any idea what it is, and there's nothing you can do about it. The doctors just encourage me not to smoke and tell me not to let it slow me down."

**"I DON'T WANT TO DEDICATE MY WHOLE LIFE'S WORK TO BEING IN A BAND. I WANT TO MOVE ON AND FIND OTHER ENDEAVORS OUT THERE."**



Bryce Bridges

Slowing down doesn't seem to be much of a hazard, judging from the sharp pangs of emotion Kasher belts out on Cursive's latest record, the conceptually based *The Ugly Organ*. Gravitating around a base of interior monologue, Kasher's words are loud and clear and, sometimes, tough to swallow.

"So why do I think I'm any different?/I've been making money off my indifference/We all pass the hat around/This is my body/This is the blood I found/on my hands after I wrote this album."

Those lines are drawn from "Some Red Handed Slight of Hand," the second track on the record. A mere song later appear equally explicit lyrics possibly directed towards the recently sprung deluge of Saddle Creek Records wannabes.

"You gotta fake the pain/you better make it sting/you're gonna break a leg/when you get on stage/and they scream your name."

If you lived under a rock last year, you probably didn't hear about the bizarre surge of interest in the Omaha-based Saddle Creek, fueled primarily by many write-ups of label linchpins Bright Eyes and The Faint in all the big newspapers with titles ending in *Times*.

Even those who witnessed the peculiar trend setting surely can concede it's odd Cursive—a band previously playing clubs with between 200 and 500 capacity—is now selling out ones hosting Sleater-Kinney, Interpol and Elliott Smith.

Kasher's typically self-deprecating response to the frenzy?

"I'm really kind of freaked out by the whole thing. I spent the longest time scared of 500-person rooms. To exceed that is really strange. "It's really affected everyone. Even this tour we're on now, we're noticing a lot of people coming out just curious to hear what we sound like."

Despite all this, *The Ugly Organ* is proof of one band's unwavering desire to breathe life into the declining aesthetic of hard, lo-fi rock. Angular, cranky and abrasive, snapping time signatures at will and merrily deconstructing basic rhythms, Cursive's latest has a smart, evil eye locked inside.

Believe it or not, there may just be a glimmer of optimism tucked inside that pupil.

"Working in the hard rock construct can seem crippling if you try to expand ideas, but I feel that we've really opened the doors as far as what hard rock is and can't be," says Kasher. "We've shaped this album into something that's very paranoid, frustrated and sexually driven."

—Kurt Orzek

# Party of Helicopters Where's The Party At? ▶▶

Where's the party in Party of Helicopters?

Well, if you look closely, it can be found in a bunch of places. There's the soiree of musical styles congregating loudly over 40 minutes, or there're the house parties the band played for its first few tours. Mostly, though, you can find the party in four friends from Kent, Ohio, getting together to rock out and accidentally creating some brutally innovative and challenging music.

"When we got together, we didn't fully intend to start a band," says guitar player Jamie Stillman. "We just wanted to play instruments that we weren't playing in our own bands."

Stillman recently pounded the skins in the midwestern art-rock outfit Harriet the Spy during his teenage years, but desperately wanted to hone his axe-wielding skills. Meanwhile, singer Joe Dennis and original drummer John Finley were playing guitar and bass respectively in the drone-core The Man I Fell in Love With, both yearning for a change of pace as well. The friends got together some time in 1995, brought in the Sebadoh-inspired bassist Ryan Brannon and began to crank out dense, Helmet-influenced rock with its 1997 Stickfigure Records debut, *From Abracadaver*. Finley parted ways with the band in early 2000 and was replaced by Cory Rice, an alum of the rock act Gold Circles.

The eclectic background of Party's members makes for a combined force of eclectic sounds—the band's style has reached farther with each record. Its fantastically scatterbrained new offering, *Please Believe It*, conjures '70s punk, '80s metal, '90s grunge and '00s indie rock. Dennis' airy falsetto simply floats along Stillman's Black Sabbath riffing in "Brutal Enigma" and "Cover Me," while the six-minute opener, "The Good Punk," gets dizzyingly prog with off-kilter beats and ascending-scale riffs. "Neverending Cycle" even sounds like it might have been a leftover from Pavement's *Slanted and Enchanted*.

Stillman says the band's stylistic curveballs have always made life on the road a bit taxing.

"The first tour we ever did was fucking impossible," he recalls. "We'd get up there and people would just be like 'huh??' They wouldn't know what to think."

Eager for a less awkward reception, the group tried to play peoples' living rooms and basements whenever the option presented itself, not only to escape the uncomfortable nature of the club scene, but also to circumvent perplexed promoters who wouldn't book the band, baffled as to

how to bill them. Stillman says getting proper venues interested in Party of Helicopters has always been a challenge until recently, when the road-ravaged quartet's reputation for fiery performances finally got a few heads turning.

"I guess we'd drink too much at our shows, play harder and it would be amusing," he chuckles.

Boozing in basements and barrooms aside, Stillman views Party's openness to experimentation and dedication to the DIY ethic as the tie bonding the band for the past eight years.

"I think we come from that small-town punk band school of thought," he said. "We just happen to not quite be a snotty '77 punk band."

—John Vettese



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# ANOTHER SUMMER ON THE FRINGES OF POP CULTURE

YO LA TENGO Still Entrenched

When asked if he thinks his band will ever take over the world, Yo La Tengo's Ira Kaplan dryly replies, "That will never happen." A week later, U.S. fighter jets were attempting something of the kind, obliterating targets in Baghdad.

Last November, Yo La Tengo released *Nuclear War*, an EP of different takes on an obscure 1982 Sun Ra number. The song's chanted chorus ends, "Nuclear war/It's a motherfucker/If they push that button, your ass gotta go/And whatcha gonna do without your ass?" Though below the radar of the mainstream, the single is among the smartest anti-war statements to come out of pop music since the Bush Administration embarked on its adventure of military pre-emption. Not a clumsily literal, tossed-off original, like Neil ("How am I the Same Man Who Wrote 'Ohio'") Young's "Let's Roll," "Nuclear War," a long-lost Cold War relic by a jazz eccentric, speaks to Yo La Tengo's knack for pulling rock's unheard gems from its Library of Congress-sized record collection and dusting off core themes—in this case, absurdity and fear. On the second of four tracks, a chorus of children sings backup, and the song conveys its message without speaking literally to current events.

Kaplan himself is more frank.

"The Bush Administration has seemed pretty hell-bent for war," he says. "I sneer whenever I see references to diplomacy being exhausted. This has been what they wanted all along, and now they've got what they want. We started doing 'Nuclear War' not with reference to Iraq, specifically. In the winter of 2001, we were getting ready to play and rehearsing, and we were just trying to deal with our own emotions and the audience's emotions."

The band's new record, *Summer Sun*, is not about war. Nor, as critics everywhere agreed was the case on the band's last record, *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside Out*, is it about Kaplan's marriage to drummer Georgia Hubley. Nor is it about summer, at least not in the sense of the "miniature golf and Hondas in the park" the Beach Boys sang about in *All Summer Long*. Despite the beach ball on the cover, the surf boards in the promo shots and titles like "Beach Party Tonight," the new songs evoke less surf than shade—love songs whispered from under the boardwalk where nobody has a tan. In Yo La Tengo's vocabulary, summer is not synonymous with fun. As bassist James McNew sings on "Tiny Birds," "Summer stinks/And summer stays too long."

THIS WAS A LETTER TO THE EDITOR  
ABOUT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR  
—THE ACT OF A MORE THAN  
MILDLY OBSESSIVE FAN



Matthew Salacuse

In the spring of 1985, the *New York Times* published a letter to the sports editor from a young fan living in Hoboken. A week earlier, another fan, Paul Slavnyu of Port Chester, N.Y., had protested a *Times* columnist's call to eliminate the designated hitter and further suggested the Major Leagues adopt a two-platoon system in which fielders didn't hit and hitters didn't field. The Hoboken fan countered, "The only flaw I can find with his plan is that it's not carried to its logical conclusion. If baseball is to use football as a model, why not also incorporate free substitution? This will eliminate the necessity of a batting order. And just as some football coaches rely on a durable running back to carry the ball 30 times a game, so too will a shrewd manager be able to send his best hitters to the plate over and over again, resting them perhaps after an especially grueling sprint along the base paths."

He signed off with an ironic flourish—"Take it Away Commissioner Ueberroth!" This was a letter to the editor about a letter to the editor—the act of a more than mildly obsessive fan.

Around the time the Hoboken fan wrote his note to the *Times*, he and his wife, Georgia Hubley, were taking out ads in another New York paper, the *Village Voice*, to put together Yo La Tengo.

"I was proud of that one," Kaplan says of the letter. "I had a pretty good feeling when I sent that off that I had a chance of getting that published."

In the long run, Yo La Tengo's nine albums and their underground cultural ubiquity—popping up in the fiction of Rick Moody, playing the theme song on *The Simpsons*, standing in for the Velvet Underground in *I Shot Andy Warhol*—probably amount to a bigger achievement.

"I'm very proud that we exist entrenched on the fringes of culture."

During the mid-'80s, Kaplan was a genius trapped in a fan's life. His letter to the editor displays a well-developed sense of irony, a knowledge of the game and an agile imagination. But the letters section, even in the *Times*, is a small-time arena for self-expression. A kid in his mid-20s who grew up on the Kinks and the Ramones, Kaplan was mixing sound for bands playing Maxwell's, singing covers with Hubley in their living room and writing for rock magazines.

"I wasn't cranking out prose by the page," he recalls. "I'm not sure that I ever quite made it to full-time with rock journalism. It was full-time in the sense that I wasn't doing much else. If you're a certain age, you look back and wonder how you were living. How did I do that? I didn't seem to earn any money, and yet, I'm still alive." ▶▶

My first exposure to Kaplan was a 1992 *Spin* interview he did with Neil Young. After the interview, Kaplan took Young's leftover fries home and photographed them. It was Kaplan's next-to-last time out with the tape recorder. Now making a living as a musician, he gave up rock writing after *Spin* made him "one of those offers you can't refuse"—covering Velvet Underground's tour in Europe.

The ads Kaplan and Hubley had taken out in the *Voice*, lured Hoboken neighbors Dave Schramm and Mike Lewis and resulted in a clanging guitar-pop record, 1986's *Ride the Tiger*. Schramm and Lewis didn't stick around. For the next four records, the bass slot was a revolving door.

Kaplan's retirement from rock journalism coincided with James McNew's arrival on bass. *Painful* (1993) was the first record the band produced collectively with a steady bassist. Kaplan says this newfound stability may have informed Yo La Tengo's attitude to keep going, no matter how successful or obscure the band was perceived. "Before that, it had a temporary quality to it," he shares.

Why did McNew stick?

"It's something hard to put into words about the way we enjoyed working together. It's a rapport. We like the same TV shows."

The difference in sound between the garage-style *Tiger* and the practically immaculate *Painful* is stark. Six years on, Kaplan was a candidate for Indie Rock's Most Improved Guitarist award.

"I played music all my life with varying degrees of seriousness," Kaplan admits. "I don't think I started playing guitar until Yo La Tengo had been together for two years. It depends on how you define it."

While the band's initial stabs at songwriting involved playing covers, by 1995's *Electr-O-Pura*, Kaplan says, Yo La Tengo was beginning to run with whatever happened in the practice room, with lyrics sometimes arriving in the 11th hour in the recording studio. *I Can Hear the Heart Beating As One* further refined their alternation between jangling rockers, slow, feedback-drenched ambient numbers and poignant, whispered folk ballads. *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside Out* (2000) caused surprise with its uniformity of sound, organ-driven ambiance, whispers and a near-perfect, 18-minute closer. *Summer Sun* adheres to a similar style.

"We're always curious about trying things that we haven't tried before," says Kaplan. "But it's not like we feel like we have to."

The new record is just as quiet, but more playful than *Nothing*, with jazz rhythms driving three of the tracks and jazz vocal styles seeping into most of the others. The band left three rock songs off the record just before finishing. Kaplan says this decision accentuates the common ground between *Nothing* and *Summer Sun*, though he insists the remaining songs are far from throwaways.

"Will those songs ever see the light of day?" he asks himself. "I hope so."

—Christian Lorentzen



## ON VIDEO MAGAZINE WINTER 2003 ISSUE

How do Dylan, The Beatles and Velvet Underground differ from Creed, Nickelback and Avril Lavigne? They're all just rocking, right? Not quite. So, what's different about Gonz and Natas versus all the new skateboarders? They're all pushing boundaries, right? The difference is the first group allows the creative juices to flow off its every

action. The second group, meanwhile, merely licks the ground trying to catch what creativity is left, but just winds up eating filth. While the rest of the video is largely forgettable, *ON* (the 60 minutes of skateboarding) does excellent work exploring the inescapably brilliant contributions Natas Kaupaus has made to skateboarding.

—Jay Yaro

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# KEEPING UP WITH THE FURLEYS

NADA SURF Leaves Elektra's Regal Beagle to Find Three's Company



A “one-hit wonder” is a fluke, an unworthy pack of charlatans who managed to snag the spotlight for a month or so. It’s an idea undoubtedly created by labels as an excuse for dropping a band for purely financial reasons. It’s no surprise critics have been bowled over by *Let Go*, the positively beautiful new album from New York power popsters Nada Surf.

Much of the band’s story is by the book... Band signs with major label (Elektra). Band makes a quirky hit single (“Popular”). Band sells some records. While making its second album, band gets dropped for putting art before profit.

Instead of just going away, the trio endured a prolonged copyright battle, eventually releasing its second album, *The Proximity Effect*, on its newly created label, MarDev. Then the three musicians hit the studio, freed from label responsibilities and pressures, with nothing to focus on but the songs.

“We couldn’t picture anyone expecting *Let Go*, except for a couple of people on the message board,” lead singer Matthew Caws muses with a laugh. “There was nobody waiting to hear that breakout song. On pretty much every song we do, we’re trying to make a single—it’s just not for this planet. This planet’s singles are generally pretty bad.”

Whatever planet commissioned Nada Surf to write *Let Go* must have a penchant for precious acoustic pop songs, punchy Cheap Trick rock and lyrics both accessible and poignant. It’s an album swimming in harmony, from quiet falsetto melodies to rambunctious, Police-era sing-alongs. The maturation of Nada Surf as songwriters is shockingly evident, and while the people who weren’t on the band’s message board will find it precocious, to Caws it’s just the result of a natural progression.

“We seem to have been gone for so long, it seems like such a surprise,” he says. “The evolution from the more consistently hard rock or pop of our earlier stuff to this more schizophrenic mix we’ve got now seems natural to us. It doesn’t feel like a breakout, because it’s not.”

Although *Let Go* may not be a breakout album to the band, it’s sure being treated like one. While it stands to reason a talented band would evolve over several years into a group of gifted songsmiths, this record comes like a blow upside the head to the casual listener. Why? Because these guys weren’t supposed to make this record. They’re supposed to have faded into the woodwork, waiting for their token appearance on VH1. Our culture just can’t fathom the return of the “one-hit wonder.” How have the Surfers dealt with this? Quietly and calmly—they were never aiming for the Buzz Bin in the first place.

“This has been a surprise for me,” admits Caws. “I thought the reaction would be more like *The Proximity Effect*, a slightly cultishly appreciated record, with a ‘gone south’ kind of career. Any success we had felt very accidental at the time. So when it went away, it wasn’t like we were in some abject state of failure. It was just kind of a speed bump.”

What Nada Surf sees as a harmless driving obstacle has actually spelled the doom of countless bands before them. The trio’s indifference to rock stardom has allowed it to press on, in the process creating an album fueled by

melody and meditation. From the graceful opener, “Blizzard of ‘77,” to the calming, acoustic melancholy of “Paper Boats,” the record’s formula is decidedly uncomplicated—unguardedly pretty pop songs with equally catchy lyrics, produced with the effect of the subtlest of pond ripples. *Let Go* is the product of an environment absent of deadlines and bottom line pressures, and full of desires to make something with musical substance.

“I was really enjoying an unambitious home life, working at a record store, just hanging out with friends in the neighborhood, going down to the local bar pretty often, maybe too often,” said Caws, with a chuckle. “It was the first time I lived in a neighborhood where there were bars near my house. It’s so easy to go, ‘well, I’ll go to bed, or maybe I’ll just go and see who’s down at the Thingy Thingy, at the Regal Beagle.’ I basically felt like John Ritter for two years.”

While enjoying the casual life of Jack Tripper, Caws and his bandmates (bassist Daniel Lorca and drummer Ira Elliot) were able to inject genuine feelings of lazy summer days and stress-free strolls through the park in their music. The philosophy asserted here is largely why we’re still talking about Nada Surf, and why so many superlatives are being attached to the band’s newest work. It’s just another example of the empty promises of mainstream rock fame, something maybe fulfilling superficial urges for a while, but ultimately leaving the artistic type wanting.

“It’s obviously much better at an independent label,” says Caws. “The folks at Barsuk, I count them as really good friends. There’s more mutual respect going on and less crap.”

The result is a lovely document of a rock band finding adulthood, forged from a sincere love for making records. It’s also pretty quiet.

“I think the older you get, the noisier everything is,” starts Caws. “There are just more noises, both physical and psychological. Maybe that’s part of what life is, just figuring out what you’d like life to be like and trying to make it happen. And musically, I wanted some peace, somewhere to go.”

Any fan of legitimate pop music should thank Nada Surf for creating *Let Go*, a snug little cubbyhole in which we can hide and forget about the news tickers, traffic jams and bill collectors, just for a second.

—Joe Sweeney

“I WAS REALLY ENJOYING AN UNAMBITIOUS HOME LIFE... I BASICALLY FELT LIKE JOHN RITTER FOR TWO YEARS.”

# Del Cielo Do More Than Wish And Wait ▶▶

While big names like Sleater-Kinney and Le Tigre might set the current standard for the femme trio, Washington, D.C.'s Del Cielo is a promising contender.

The threesome of Andrea Lisi (vocals/guitar), Basla Andolsun (bass/vocals) and Katy Otto (drums) has played together for two years, during which time they've released two split EPs on Ed Walters Records and crisscrossed the country on tour. The group's debut full-length, *Wish and Wait*, hit the streets April 8. Recorded at Washington, D.C.'s legendary Inner Ear Studios (Disemberment Plan, Fugazi, Jawbox), *Wish and Wait* was engineered by the band and former Smart Went Crazy frontman Chad Clark (with whom bassist Andolsun also plays with in Dischord's The Beauty Pill). The album rages with the confessional-style lyrics of emo, but is thankfully devoid of the genre's musical wanking, opting instead for a more user-friendly pop-punk approach.

This accessibility is a mark of the ladies themselves, whose personable fashion is quickly apparent, even as they cram into their van to rush off to a gig in Boston. Named after a phrase from one of Linda Ronstadt's albums of Mexican songs, Del Cielo is a band born of friendship.

In 2000, Andolsun, having just relocated to Richmond, Va., heard Lisi playing guitar on the balcony of an apartment in her building.

"I was all shy but I really wanted to meet her, so I went downstairs and introduced myself," shares Andolsun. "We sat on the porch, and she played songs for me, and we were singing songs together and stuff."

About a month later, the pair met Otto at a house party. The three were soon playing together in January 2001. While Andolsun continues to reside in Richmond, Lisi and Otto live together in the Washington, D.C., suburb of Riverdale, where Otto divides her time between a full-time job at the Empower Program (a gender violence prevention program for youth) and Exotic Fever, the record label she runs with two female friends.

Besides the joint vinyl release of *Wish and Wait* with the Golden Brown label (the CD is released by Eyeball), Exotic Fever's output includes benefit records for the D.C. Books for Prisons Project, the American Veterans of the Vietnam War and the Empower Program (including musical contributions from Lisi). Otto's outside projects and Del Cielo's choice of political gigs (at events like the International Women's Day Festival, the Southern Girls' Convention, Ladyfest, Philadelphia's Books Through Bars Benefit Series, Rock for Choice and Take Back the Night) show

the band has a social conscience, but this doesn't usually factor into its lyrics, mostly penned by Lisi.

"I like writing love songs," Lisi admits with her trademark chuckle. "I'm a total, hopeless romantic."

Del Cielo will strike out for a six-week U.S. tour (dates to be announced at [www.exoticfever.com/delcielo](http://www.exoticfever.com/delcielo)) starting July 1, just after Andolsun wraps up dates with The Beauty Pill.

"I just want to play as much as possible," says Andolsun, who pulls double band duty when not studying as a sociology graduate student. "We really love it, so we just want to do as much as we can."

—Charlotte Robinson



Kadd Stephens

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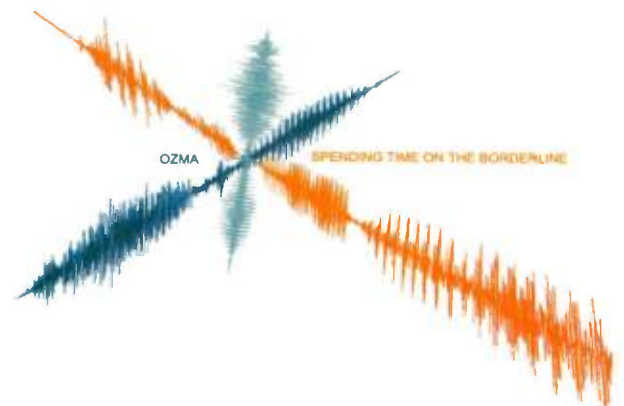
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# THE SECOND HARDEST WORKING MAN IN SHOW BUSINESS

the many words of JOHN LANGFORD

With James Brown slowing the pace ever so slightly in his 70th year, Jon Langford stands ready to shoulder the responsibility of being the hardest working man in show business. Langford's Mekons remain a viable force, having just celebrated their silver anniversary last year with the release of *OOH*, and Langford divides his non-Mekons time among an amazingly diverse collection of side projects (the Waco Brothers, the Pine Valley Cosmonauts, Skull Orchard, solo work) and his burgeoning painting career (detailed at [www.yarddog.com](http://www.yarddog.com)).

For a guy whose plate is fairly filled to overflowing, it doesn't seem to make a lot of sense for Langford to commit to even more side action. And yet this is exactly where he finds himself with the release of *Mayors of the Moon*, his new project with Canadian twangpunk roots rockers and labelmates the Sadies.

To hear Langford tell it, he was not exactly a willing participant in the *Mayors* album.

"They kind of bullied me," he says with a smile from his Chicago painting studio. "It came about from the idea that they didn't like to write words. They found that quite difficult when they write songs, so they do a lot of instrumentals. I like their songs, and words I have a lot of."

The project could easily have languished in the limbo of "we'll-have-to-do-something-together-sometime," but the Sadies were serious about the proposition and pushed for a commitment. The first detail to attend to was how to accomplish the physical work, beginning with the songwriting. Although Langford's studio is littered with lyric shards, the process of translating those fragments into actual songs varies from band to band.

"It was a different way of working for me," says Langford. "I have a lot of stuff that I write, and the Wacos is a very particular thing, and the Mekons is a very particular thing. We don't really write the stuff collectively with the Mekons, and there's an area the Waco Brothers cover. I write a lot of stuff, it's not poetry, but I just write it down and it doesn't have a home unless I do a solo record or some kind of other project. It was a nice relief because they were like, 'Give us the lyrics.' I had tunes for them in my head but I just gave them the lyrics and said, 'Take them and see what you can do.'"

With Langford's lyrics in hand, the Sadies (guitarist brothers Travis and Dallas Good, along with bassist Bear, vibist Critter and drummer Snake) applied their rarely equalled musical skills to Langford's pithy Englishman-in-the-Midwest wordplay and came up with the 12 rollicking roots/soul/pop gems forming the set list of *Mayors of the Moon*. After writing the music for Langford's words (or,

**I HAD TUNES FOR THEM IN MY HEAD BUT I JUST GAVE THEM THE LYRICS AND SAID, "TAKE THEM AND SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO."**



in a handful of cases, arranging the skeleton tunes Langford provided), the next phase involved springing Langford from his increasingly tight Chicago schedule to record the fruits of their separate-but-equal collaboration.

"They kept telling me I had to do it," says Langford. "So they booked the studio and I went up to Canada and we did it. It was a very live situation we did it in. They're very accomplished musicians."

The Mekons co-founder says he surrendered several areas of responsibility he normally handles while working on this latest collaboration, noting his absence in most of the songwriting.

"I'll write tunes deliberately without taxing melody lines," he reflects. "They were writing stuff and didn't even know what key I sang in. They wrote things where I had to bend my voice and go quite high in places."

When Langford approached the Sadies' Sally Timms about this obstacle, her wry response was to suggest Jon "loosen up and find a new way of singing."

As always, just as Langford's output is street-ready, the man himself is charting his next adventure. He's talked to the Sadies about a follow-up project (which could wind up as Langford and the band playing songs he has written for other artists and never recorded himself), he's close to completion of his second solo album after three years work, and he's just put the finishing touches on Volumes 2 and 3 of the Pine Valley Cosmonauts's anti-death penalty compilation series, *The Executioner's Last Song*.

Langford is a man of many passions, and with the *Executioner* series, he's been able to marry his musical ideals to one of his many social concerns, and, unlike so many lip service activists, directs his money, art and mouth together.

"It's kind of a thankless charity to be involved in," says Langford. "It's not fluffy and cozy and comfortable. People get pissed off about it. People who support the death penalty quite militantly think we're a bunch of murderer huggers. I really admire the people who are involved in the campaign and the work they've done."

Langford says he has issues with the traditional role of pop musicians hyping politics—mostly careerist publicity moves. He describes himself and his musical mates as simple, working musicians, believing the benefit records and concerts are just a natural way for them to get involved. To date, the *Executioner's* series has raised more than \$20,000 for the groups working to abolish the death penalty in Illinois.

"That's a big deal for them because it's not a cozy, warm thing where people are handing over money. People don't think about the death penalty, they just think it's a good thing until we point out what a fucking iniquitous, disgusting, barbaric thing it is."

—Brian Baker



## The Music Make People Happy ▶▶

Some people are born great, some achieve greatness and then some are proclaimed “potentially the most important British group since Oasis”—the natural heir to the collective crowns of The Stone Roses, The Verve and Primal Scream—and tour America’s sold-out arenas with Coldplay before they can legally drink liquor.

“It all seems perfectly natural,” states The Music’s vocalist Robert Harvey with the archetypal nonchalance of one who is genuinely neither fazed by success nor concerned about image. “We’ve done an awful lot for a band that’s just 19 to 20 years old. People just think we’ve been given it, but we’ve fucking worked hard for it. We’ve been to Japan three times, Australia, toured England four times, Europe twice, and this is our second time in America. We haven’t just been given it.”

Initially greeted with cynicism at the hype heaped upon the band, and derided as drug-addled, retro-obsessed hippies by a jaded U.K. audience who thought they’d heard it all before, The Music simply set about releasing some epic, swaggering records and honing its live performance into a shamanic, psychedelic experience before deciding to take America by storm.

“We just don’t care,” continues Harvey on the band’s refusal to pander to anything remotely approximating “cool.” “It’s not like we’re saying, ‘we haven’t got

an image,’ it’s just we don’t give a fuck about it. People have these fashions, and they only get certain people to gigs, but we’re getting a mixture of people, and that’s what I like about our gigs. I want to appeal to as many people as I can. But people think we’re just a long-hair band.”

Formed by four school friends in Leeds in 1999, the band was a direct reaction to the listless boredom of youth and quickly became a natural focus for many others looking for a euphoric escape from the mundane a great gig provides.

“When people started to like what we were doing, we kind of thought, ‘well, we can do that for everyone, can’t we?’ It’s so little but it can mean so much to someone. We’re not trying to save the world or anything, we’re just trying to make people happy. But people might class that as saving the world.”

Such exalted aims should come easily to a band with remarkable self-confidence and impeccable influences.

“There’s so much music nowadays, people are gonna struggle to create something that’s not gonna remind somebody of something else,” considers Harvey of songs hewn from mammoth jam sessions. “But as long as you’ve got your soul in the right place, no one can shoot you down.”

—Steve Paul Gibbs



## 5 QUESTIONS The D4

Hailing from Auckland, New Zealand, The D4 pumps listeners full of quick, two-minute shots of pure garage rock power with its debut release, *6TWEENTY*. Not to be confused with the far superior Dillinger Four, who share a similar abbreviation, this group of kiwis still throw down. Full of big guitar riffs both terse and heavy, The D4 is the latest to perfect the punk rock formula of four chords, a simple melody and irresistibly inane lyrics.

Answers by Dion

**How did “Rock ‘N Roll Mother-fucker” become the album opener?** ▶ We had just come back from our first tour overseas. I wrote that song in my head on the way to the studio. It is about the feeling I had coming off that tour and the new, revitalized D4 attitude.

**How did a bunch of guys from New Zealand start playing this type of racket?** ▶ I got into punk rock as a kid, and have had a few people at

home telling me about groups a teenager like myself may like. I formed my first band at school and just didn’t want to stop.

**Barely any songs on the record last more than two minutes. Did you grow up listening to the Ramones and the Stooges?** ▶ Of course. I have always liked the two-minute song. Short, sharp and to the point.

**Describe the typical D4 show.** ▶ We sit around for hours, and we only get an hour to do what we do, so we are going to make the most of it. We travel a long way to play shows. So, we are going to make sure people walk away talking about it.

**Is it important to rock in today’s musical climate?** ▶ I don’t know how important it is, but I like it! It is a lot better than installing bad taste, record company manufactured, unit-moving popsters onto teenagers.

—Dan Pastorius



PlayStation 2



AMPLITUDE  
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Imagine you’ve just been zapped into a computer world. But unlike Tron, this computer is outfitted with Pro Tools, and you must destroy geometric shapes to the beat of artists like Garbage and David Bowie to survive. The colorful Amplitude is one of the most addictive games to come out this year and will have your head bobbing to songs

and bands you never thought you’d enjoy, like Quarashi. This party game is easy to learn but will take time to master, and any music geek will be thoroughly impressed with the layout of tracks. Simple yet innovative button controls and a basic premise allow casual gamers to enjoy this as much as hardcore players.

—Dave Thomas

# an experiment in unpredictability

Cave In Survive their Vehicles



Tony Wooliscroft

Stephen Brodsky is a happy man today. Not because he stands front-and-center in Cave In, arguably the densest punk-rock band to ever grace a major label. Not because said band has aroused Dave Grohl to the point of ejaculation. Not because he finally has a day off after countless consecutive weeks of touring with Sparta, Foo Fighters and others.

Alas, it's a two dollar scratch ticket distinguishing this particular day as a great one for Brodsky.

"I hate gambling," he confesses, ironically. "I've never played scratch tickets, never played the lottery. But I was feeling lucky the other day, and, lo and behold, I won \$100. There's my dinner!"

Some dinner.

It's been six months since the band capped off work on *Antenna*, its inaugural record for RCA. A pastiche of re-recorded old material and new tracks, the volume calls to mind a revved-up Piebald or toned-down Icarus Line, plastering an endless supply of complicated twists and turns and a—gasp—prog-related mastery integrated within a double-edged guitar technique.

Having teamed with producer Rich Costey (Apples in Stereo, Injected), Cave In has come a long way since its original incarnation as a proponent of Methuen, Mass., high-school hardcore.

"We're not like The Ramones, where we put out virtually the same record every time," Brodsky assures. "That's no dis to The Ramones—they should've put out the same record every time, because they had a great formula. But with us it's a gamble. What I've come to find with our band is that the more records we put out and the longer we're around, the more people don't like us, and the more people do. It's one of the perks that comes with being unpredictable."

For a test of unpredictability, one could easily point to Cave In's broad scope of cover selections—from the obvious ("Dazed and Confused") to the obscure (Giants Chair's "The Callus")—peppering the band's live sets. You could just as easily tie in the remarkably random events escorting the band through its unique career.

**"THE LONGER WE'RE AROUND,  
THE MORE PEOPLE DON'T LIKE US...  
IT'S ONE OF THE PERKS THAT  
COMES WITH BEING UNPREDICTABLE."**

Try three exploding tour vans on for size—plus two additional cars of Brodsky's own.

"The first car I owned I bought from my grandparents," Brodsky recounts. "It was this Oldsmobile of theirs that had been sitting in the garage for years. A little while after I bought it, I was driving along the highway and the engine rusted out of place and fell on top of the steering wheel. I was on the highway, unable to turn or drive any faster than 45 mph. As I turned into a parking space in front of my apartment, the steering wheel snapped free and the engine died."

Reaching back even further, he recalls his earliest memory as a musician, performing with neighborhood chum Jeff Coco as Stevie-B & Jivin' Jeff.

"I never made an attempt at songwriting until I was in the fifth grade," he smirks.

Talk about a late bloomer.

"We had a little boombox, and we'd find karaoke tapes and make up our own words. Of course, they'd be a lot more juvenile and raunchy than anyone needed to hear. We're talking 'Cherry Bomb' and 'Don't Worry Be Happy.'"

In celebration of the band's first major-label record release, Cave In teamed with amigos Piebald for an evening at Boston's pre-eminent Avalon club, recently the onstage home of The Vines, Pete Dinklage and others.

Prior to the gig, Brodsky confessed, "We're worried that it's going to be this Spinal Tap thing where there's 150 people at an 800-capacity venue. Thousands of people pouring out the doors after Piebald gets offstage."

Worry not. With the array of concert tales Brodsky has to relate, it's amazing nervousness can still fit into the equation. For starters, there was the time Godsmack invited the band to perform at its self-owned club in Haverill, Mass. Surprisingly, Cave In managed to sneak in two gigs at Aerosmith's Mama Kin venue before it shut down a few years back.

"It was actually a cool place to plays shows," he admits. "The stage was very visible from any point in the audience, the sound system was loud. I never met anyone from Aerosmith, but it was fun to play there."

Compared with the impossibly gaudy Steven Tyler, it seems strange Brodsky hails from the same region (and listens to Toys in the Attic on a daily basis).

As for his own, fiesta-free home life, it requires turning the volume knob down to one.

"My days are usually spent reading at home or making recordings on my four-track machine," Brodsky confesses before the rock star myth. "I just went to a party the other night and left after about an hour."

— Kurt Orzeck

# NOFX

# The War On Errorism

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# Resuscitating Independent Music

## Ten Grand Breathes Life Back Into the Underground

Having faith in the present state of independent music sometimes takes more than hope and prayers. In fact, with the amount of redundancy and excess currently parading the once bountiful mom and pop record shops, one could wager the lines between corporate-controlled and indie have irreversibly blurred.

Luckily for underground die-hards, there are still a handful of groups functioning as polar opposites of the here today, gone tomorrow bling-blingers. In particular, one band with a passion for road trips and Wes Anderson films comes instantly into focus. Though the band's name may coincide with a monetary amount, the group's ethic and attitude offers a rare commodity—sincerity and soul.

Ten Grand, Iowa's effervescent home team, is four individuals with a long history in music—so long, in fact, the form of art works as a sixth sense for the members. Doubt it? Just see them live and defy their tumultuous wavelengths.

For those not yet hip to the band, there is no easy way to describe its musical melange. Sure, one could discuss the drum-tight rhythm section, the mixture of trebly and beefy post-hardcore riffage, the contrast between shrieking and vibed-out vocal patterns. Those with a history in mid-'90s underground post-hardcore might be able to swap comparisons as a starting point, but no clean formula really presents itself.

Come to think of it, even the band members have yet to figure out their exact sound, except—like pornography—they know it when they see it.

With the results they have attained thus far, though, this appears to be a good thing.

Guitarist Joel calls it "powerwank," drummer Bob "extremo."

According to vocalist/guitarist/Tim Burton fan Matt Davis, "Genres become exhausting after a while. You just get sick of hearing the words. I think we all agree we're a rock band, and that should have a much broader umbrella than perhaps it does."

Rock tends to be the only fitting attempt at a definition due to the vast array of influences the group displays in its work.

"None of us grew up listening to the same kind of music or even within the punk/hardcore community, and I think that's given us a large measure of diversity and a lot of freedom as opposed to a lot of groups who all grew up loving the same kind of music and having a similar idea of what they wanted a band to sound like or what they think a band should be," Davis shares. "Although there is a lot of common ground, we end up pushing and pulling each other in different directions."

This amalgam of intonations may be the major factor in what separates the world of rock into Ten Grand vs. everyone else. They have made their case slowly, release by release. In fact, over the past five years, the group has received nine offerings from a variety of labels—ranging from Blood of the Young to Sickroom and everywhere else in between. This persistent writing and recording has not only brought the group acclaim from countless sources, but attention from the indie elite—Southern Records, in particular.

And, boy has Southern inked the group at the right moment. Ten Grand's brand new release, *This is the Way to Rule*, is the culmination of everything the band has fought and scraped for since its 1998 inception.

Over the course of its existence, Ten Grand has taken a liking to the highways, to

**"THE MUSIC WE GREW UP LOVING AND  
THE MUSIC WE LOVE NOW IS ALL VERY DIFFERENT...  
...WE END UP PUSHING AND PULLING  
EACH OTHER IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS."**



say the least. In fact, one could argue the boys have racked up more mileage than most of the independent scene over the same time period. Though the band has come a long way since day one, the members of Ten Grand never forgot the intrinsic fortunes the rock 'n roll life has given them.

"It's a very remarkable and lucky thing to be able to do what we do, and I think we're all very aware of that and as such are excited to do it as much as possible," Davis waxes humbly. "Nothing is quite as amazing as the hospitality and friendship and generosity that you encounter from strangers on tour—being able to meet new people and play music in places many people never get to go. I don't think there's anything else any of us would rather do, which is probably why we do it so much."

Sure enough, the band is still at it. Ten Grand has already spent the early span of 2003 in the confines of its home on wheels. Though this is a typical joy for the band, the bandmembers do look forward to small breaks here and there.

"Touring has been great, but we're also looking forward to writing new songs," guitarist Joel Anderson states. "We haven't dropped a new track since June, and it gets a bit suffocating."

Aside from plugging their latest cuts and making scores of new friends, all of this world beating has not only enabled the fellas to harness their sonic sensibilities but also to magnify their personal outlook.

"Our musical and personal lives are vastly expanded and have been greatly changed due to being in a band with each other," Davis shares. "We're an odd group of people to be playing together but remarkably similar ethically and philosophically, and that's allowed us to be and do a lot of different unexpected things."

Now, even though the band states its intentions, there are always the backbiters ready to chomp at the bit, poised to decry any minuscule change. This may be justified due to the vast volume of groups who have used the indie scene as a stepping stool to fortune and fame. Admittedly, the band must face some scrutiny. What of the rising notoriety its name is acquiring? Obviously, the new release on Southern will offer the guys a chance to get their records out to people on a wider scale. The question remains—how wide?

"We don't take each other seriously enough to let much go to our heads," says Anderson with a tinge of sarcasm. "Success will change any band, but we're not holding our breath. We plan on taking it as it comes. We're just a bunch of shiteheads from Iowa, and we're honored and flattered that anyone is kind enough to like our band and see us play. That has always been rule No. 1."

So, is it safe to say placing confidence in Ten Grand is also believing in an ethical rebirth for the indie scene? Only time will tell. Davis, though, has confidence in the future of music.

"There's a lot of talent and a lot of good ideas right now, and I think that music, like it always does, will change in ways that are entirely unforeseeable. I can only hope I'm still around to take part in it and to keep playing and enjoying it."

At the current rate of acceleration, the odds are Ten Grand will exist indefinitely—provided the higher power has a heart... and a sense of humor.

—Brian Peterson

## 5 QUESTIONS **The Notwist**

Replete with stimulating beats, subtle guitars and melancholic, detached vocals, The Notwist's *Neon Golden* juxtaposes electronic and organic sounds into jazzy, melodic textures. Originally released in 2002 to critical acclaim by those who could find it, the album has finally made its way to America thanks to the Domino imprint.

Answers by Markus Acher

**Describe the band's evolution to what it is today.** ▶ We evolved similar to our record collection. We always look for new and interesting music and try to integrate it into our music. We try to make records that we would like to hear.

**Did the five-year gap between records help you hone the band's sound?** ▶ It took a long time to finish the arrangements for *Neon Golden*. We wanted to bring everything together and confront different elements within every song.

**With members of the band having different projects, is The Notwist everyone's main priority right now?** ▶ No. Every band—Console, Lali Puna, Tied + Tickled Trio

and MS John Soda—has its audience and is equally important to the members. We try to keep it equal.

**Is your relationship with Martin (Gretchmann) collaborative, or does he simply add to already written compositions?** ▶ He's a member of the band—he writes and arranges songs with us. His contribution is mainly his special way of using electronic instruments, but he is also a good composer and a big fan of indie rock.

**Has it been hard to distribute albums in America and get your music out?** ▶ Zero Hour licensed two of our records, made two tours with us and went broke. There wasn't much response. It took us quite a time to find a label, but now we are happy with Domino.

—Dan Pastorius



## Coachwhips Put the R in Rawk ▶▶

Somewhere out there, beyond the halcyon fancy of suburban white boys dreaming of careers in rock 'n roll, there are still a few greasy nut balls who make R 'n R for all the right reasons—to make noise, be different and fuck shit up. At the intersection of these values resides John Dwyer, the former spaceman-on-acid half of San Francisco's chaos and metal duo Pink & Brown. This time, however, Dwyer's not pimping the heavy metallic thing, but rather he's using old-fashion garage rock as his muse, and he hasn't let up on the chaos at all. Google his new band's name, Coachwhips, and you'll find show reviews describing gigs played in bathrooms, where urinals stand in as drum thrones and people dance, slopping the floor with blood and sweat. If there's a method to Dwyer's madness, it's definitely beyond the machinations of the id.

"I think we definitely feel it more if people are silly and not caring so much about their hair or their nice, \$300 booties," says Dwyer of the band's famously frenetic performances. "I think booze gets the people started, and if we approach them with high energy it sometimes starts a chain reaction."

And why not? Something about the libidinal, cave man-like thumping of a tom-tom starts people rutting like rabbits. Juices start flowing. The mind and body start responding to the rhythm of the drum, and your self and all its inhibitions are subsumed by the beat—and then you dance your ass off.

But if Dwyer is some high priest of rock 'n roll, whipping his devotees into dervish-like fervor,

the device he uses to get them to a higher place is strictly earthbound. Like England's Billy Childish or Boston's Lyres, the Coachwhips rely on simple, yet profound beats and three-chord melodies augmented by cheap-ass organ sounds. Throw 'em all together, and voila! Primal scrap blues rock 'n roll.

"The secret ingredient is good stops and starts and driving beats," explains Dwyer. "And each song—to me anyways—needs something just an ass hair different than all the other songs. We try to have as much fun during recording as we can. We get a little loaded, then usually me and Mary Ann fight. Then she cries. Then I cry."

Like all good rock 'n roll bands, sex is at the root of the Coachwhips' sound, and if the song titles on the band's debut full-length, *Get Yer Body Next To Mine* (Narnack) are any evidence, the record is chock full of booty-shakin' beats and crotch-grinding geetars.

Songs like "Put It In, Way Down South" and "Hey Stiffie" seem to bespeak a band content to permanently dwell on the razor's edge of sexual tension.

"Coachwhips is total and basic pop about sex and other carnal situations, and sex," says Dwyer.

When asked for a fantastic quote, Dwyer, ever the rector of the ridiculous, offers this:

"The guys from the band The Dragons, at Emo's last year, said, 'Who wants to fuck a Dragon tonight?' And one guy yells out, 'Yeahhhhhh!' I don't think he really wanted to fuck a dragon though."

—Allan Martin Kemler



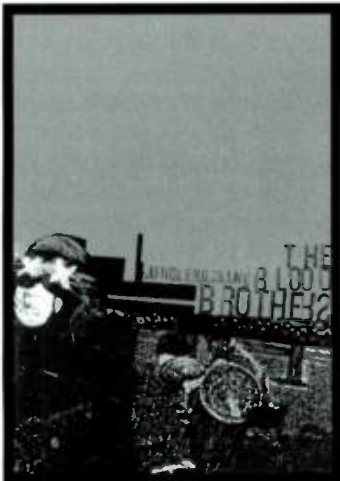
Drew Goren

## BLOOD BROTHERS A DOCUMENTARY FILM

With only a few albums under their belt, Pacific Northwest panic rockers The Blood Brothers have released a DVD. Filmed in front of a lively hometown crowd in Redmond, Wash., back in September of 2002, *Jungle Rules Live* gives viewers a glimpse into the frenetic stage show of the band. With an 11-song set belting tunes ranging from

"Guitarmy" to "Mr. Electric Ocean," *Jungle* is a perfect companion piece to the group's much heralded sophomore release, *Burn Piano Island, Burn*. In addition to the live footage, *Jungle* also includes three, audio-only tunes—"Ambulance vs. Ambulance," "USA Nails" and "Meet Me at the Water Front After School." (Artist Direct, 1540 Broadway, New York 10036)

—Gordon Downs





Steve Gullick

# HEEY YOOU GUUUYS!

Songs: Ohia is not **ELECTRIC CO.**

"Songs: Ohia is over," says Songs: Ohia braintrust Jason Molina with more than a hint of finality. "It didn't start out to be a band ever, and as far as I can tell, it never will be an actual band. I'm just going to start using this 'Something Electric Co.'"

The first release in Molina's planned Electric Co. series, *The Magnolia Electric Co.*, is ostensibly the seventh full-length Songs: Ohia album. Although *Magnolia*, engineered by Steve Albini at his Electrical Audio Studio in Chicago, is being touted as a Songs: Ohia record by everyone from publicist to booking agent, the band's name is visibly absent anywhere in the packaging, exactly as Molina had planned.

"It sort of makes special this grouping of players," he says in explaining the Electric Co. concept. "Everytime I've put together a band for a record, they're never on another record with me. Since I'm the blood and guts thread from record to record, it overstates my importance in the record. It takes away too much from the players' contributions and it somehow focuses the whole record on me. I never wanted it to be about me. The songs are all things I dreamed up but I don't want to be one of those musicians that's a performer. I'm not putting on a show beyond what you get on the record and what you get onstage, which is just a new presentation of the songs. I'm sure there will always be a sticker that says what it is, but that was a 10 year experiment doing music that way, and now I'm doing something different."

**"I CAN DO BETTER, MY NEXT ONE, I'M ALREADY SWEATING IT. SINCE THE DAY I WALKED OUT OF THE STUDIO, I'VE BEEN WORKING ON THE NEXT ONE."**

Molina is just as adamantly averse to *Magnolia Electric Co.* being measured as a solo record.

"It's not a Jason Molina record," he says with a laugh. "I don't even know what that would be, since they have all sort of been that."

Molina confesses he used to be afraid he'd be lumped into a folk category, because he wasn't screaming or trying to execute a one-man Sonic Youth. With a hefty discography and touring history behind him, he might find he's already achieved the distinction he desires.

Most of Songs: Ohia's various incarnations have played to Molina's Leonard-Cohen-shoots-pool-with-Neil-Young tendencies, with a rotating cast of bandmembers offering a constant diversity.

"I write the music and do the words and part and parcel with that is putting together a band," says Molina. "I almost write the music at the same time I'm trying to think of who could best put this onto tape, and that goes right down to the engineer. Maybe it's a cowardly way to work because I don't take all of the burden onto myself, but ego should never be part of the music."

As in years past, 2003 will see multiple Molina projects—later this spring, he'll follow the dense Youngian rock majesty of *Magnolia Electric Co.* with the sparse and largely solo *Pyramid Electric Co.*, recorded nearly two years ago with Lullaby for the Working Class's Mike Mogis. *Pyramid* will depart from *Magnolia* in another significant aspect, available only in a limited edition vinyl run, a common Molina strategy.

As Molina fields the compliments paid to him on the release of *The Magnolia Electric Co.*, he responds with an answer obviously forged in the furnace compiled of his numerous albums, singles, EPs and compilation tracks.

"I can do better," he states firmly. "My next one, I'm already sweating it. Since the day I walked out of the studio, I've been working on the next one. I don't feel like this one failed, but I'm still looking for the better one."

—Brian Baker

## Owl and the Pussycat Sparse ▶▶

Lamenters of the use of "Pink Moon" in a Volkswagen commercial overlook a fact Nick Drake fans need not be ashamed of admitting—the song really does make you want, among other things, to fill your car with photogenic friends and drive around in the country testing the strength of the sexual tensions binding you all together.

On a baser note, I find T. Rex's *Electric Warrior* a perfect evocation of a burnout puffing on headache-inducing Mexi-press during breaks from dry-humping his foul-mouthed girlfriend on a beanbag in his parents' attic, converted Brady-style, but squalid.

While my girlfriend was off scraping the resin from our two-foot Graffix, I turned down "Motivator" and asked Greg and Lois, the duo who comprise Owl and the Pussycat, what an ideal fan would be up to while listening to their imminent self-titled debut.

I felt bad about the lack of furniture in the attic, and tried to find something to flip over for them to sit on, but the beanbag kept sticking to my thighs. I should really have had at least sweat pants on for the interview. I put on my Billabong t-shirt.

"I picture someone like me, walking around, enjoying the weather," Greg said, cracking the window to let out some of the gamey air.

Well, it's always around, so you may as well enjoy it—a challenge in their de facto HQ of Olympia.

The prolific Lois, luckily, was more expansive.

"He or she is drinking a glass of Côtes du Rhone wine and chopping onions and carrying on a conversation with a friend who is reading intriguing paragraphs from the *New York Times* out loud."

The arrangements on the record are casual, befitting a dinner party

or a ramble out amidst nature. (I find nature to be a bit of a disappointment, to be honest, but Greg's characterization is accurate). Acoustic guitar and vocals are supplemented in a rather whatever's-lying-around sort of way with flute, bass and electric guitar—drums would add an off-key propulsiveness to the album's languid drift. An exemplary moment is the way a potentially ominous Sartre reference—"Hell is other people"—gives way to the easily melancholy, "but loneliness is worse."

The spareness is not a studied move. The pair had only met on a few occasions and had the benefit of three practices before recording, so neither knew what indignities were about to be inflicted on a given song. Neither reported any horrors or amphetamine-fueled fist fights in the control room, but they wouldn't want to harsh their reps.

Greg approached Lois first as a fan of her music, pressing his Moore Brothers demo tapes into her hands as she got off stage. Stalky loner? Nope—Lois remains a big fan of the Moore Bro's. Lois liked the tape, which ended up by a mysterious chain of events in her tour van, and they decided, after a few more chance meetings, to collaborate.

After they left, I put their CD in my Aiwa. O & P made me feel bad about my squalid room. I doubt my girlfriend really likes it very much in here, what with the stale air and carpet soggy with bongwater. After my 5:30 sponge bath (self-administered), I'm definitely going to go for a walk—perhaps even in nature.

—Benjamin Phelan

*Owl & Pussycat is Lois Maffeo and Greg Moore. Their new album is available now at [www.killrockstars.com](http://www.killrockstars.com)*



## DARK CLOUD 2 PLAYSTATION 2

Role playing games have not much evolved since the breakthrough of the epic *Final Fantasy* series. Sony tries to compete by recapturing the inventive play of the original *Dark Cloud* with this expansive sequel and its kid-friendly plot and cartoonish graphics. Despite everything looking Disney-fied, the game offers decent

action with lots of fighting. And if you have a fear of clowns, the enemies in this game might even freak you out a bit. The plot may be thin at times, but the scope of the game is gigantic, with world building features and a tool for creating inventions to help out characters along the way.

— Dave Thomas

## The Virus Tank'd & Pogo'd ▶▶

Everyone has an opinion about when punk rock "started," but for most of us the crystallization period falls somewhere between the late '70s and early '80s, conjuring images of angry youngsters with colored hair and defiant facial contortions. The Virus are the living, snarling embodiment of this archetype, splashed against the bland backdrop of modern day Pennsylvania.

*Nowhere to Hide*, the band's 2002 full-length, documents a band perfectly content to have nothing in common with its surroundings, a celebrated revivalist of an aesthetic trampled upon by media-friendly drivel. While cartoonish rock stars vamp and preen for MTV's cameras, the Virus is carving a niche in bars and basements all over the country. Of course, paying one's dues hardly ever equals paying the bills, and 1998 would've been a great year to start a band with more, well, *emotive* tendencies. Refreshingly, the Virus never gave it a thought.

"We never had a plan," says drummer Jarrod. "It was never, like, 'what kind of band can we start that's gonna be big?' Obviously, we wouldn't have started this!"

In fact, the Virus' style references decades of obscure punk and hardcore usually reserved for the

droll conversations of record collectors. some grainy VHS bootleg. *Nowhere to Hide* careens along perilously fast, leaving no time for vague lyrical meanderings.

"One of the hardest things to overcome, for us, is that we have completely different opinions on things," he says.

Choosing to let the lyrics speak for themselves, the Virus sets itself apart from bands packaged with a pre-scripted agenda on every topic imaginable. Perhaps wisely, the music precedes a spelled-out party line. Instead, political pretense is shelved in favor of the common man's helplessly pissed-off point of view. "Working For the Company," showcases frontman Paul bellowing like a disgruntled Teamster in rush-hour traffic. The Virus hit the road this summer for the Holiday In The Sun festival alongside legends lost in time.

—Artie Phillie



# Open Hand Closed Mind >>

Open Hand is a Hollywood-based, melodic hardcore band with a guy who used to be in Not Waving But Drowning. Mike Dailey is a salty kid who doesn't like anything, especially band interviews. We let Mike do a Q&A with Open Hand and then add his crotchety commentary.

Answers by Jeff Meyer.  
Saltiness by Dailey.

## How did the band get together?

The band was formed by Alex and Justin. I'm not sure as to where or when the first show was. **[Who the fuck are Alex and Justin? I thought YOU were the guy to talk to. What are you—the drummer!?!]**

## This year's been marked by 'extremes' in the music world. Do you feel this trend has effected the hard rock scene?

There are a lot of bands now that are all fashion, no passion. I remember when hardcore was all about having a good time. We like the feeling of stage dives and pile ups. **[Gorilla Biscuits reference or homoerotic imagery?]** I've never felt more alive then when I see Sick of it All and there are 12 dudes **[doods]** battling for the mic. It's an amazing feeling of unity. **[Is that what you call it?]** This is what we hope kids get out of our live shows.

## Describe a typical Open Hand live show.

Bloodshed, bruises, flying guitars which most the time ends up as broken guitars and a monkey. **[OK, describe a REAL Open Hand live show...]**

## What are some obstacles you've dealt with trying to get your music heard?

When the band was started, Justin and Alex worked hard to DIY their own tours and merch. **[note: DIY is now a verb.]** We couldn't ask for more than the support Josh Trustkill has given us. Eventually we just caved in to his good looks—I haven't one negative comment for you on our label. **[Boring!]**

## Describe your most harrowing live experience.

Once, I did a behind-the-back with my bass and my strap broke. I turned around only to see this poor girl dumfounded cause my bass had traveled about 20 feet into the side of her head. I ran over to her and immediately apologized and gave her shirts and CDs. **[Insult to injury?]** Thank God she was okay **[Thank you, God!!]**. She's actually a big fan and a friend of ours now. Sorry Randy!

## Who do you consider to be Open Hand's peers?

If you mean the people we look up to and influence us, **[well, no, I mean your peers]**, I'd say King Crimson, Metallica, Hendrix, Mock Orange, Mercury

Program and Codeseven. Just read the "thank you's" on the next album. **[No, er, "thanks."]**

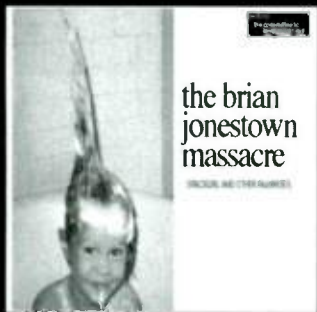
## What kind of band do you consider Open Hand to be?

I'd like to say we are a part of some type of musical revolution, but we are four dudes playing music **[doooooods]** we all enjoy. We're influenced by many types of genres, which adds to the melting pot that is Open Hand. **[Precisely the type of melting pot I thought you were!]**

Open Hand's new album, *The Dream*, is available now through Trustkill Records ([www.trustkillrecords.com](http://www.trustkillrecords.com)).



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Having delivered some of the most strikingly psychedelic pop with underground legends Drop City, singer-songwriter Matthew J. Tow gets back to his pop roots with his brilliant new band The Lovetones. Album out and on tour with BJM.

### THE TELESCOPES:

One of England's most uncompromising bands of the early '90s has compiled the best of their out-of-print classics to make a dazzling album, coming in June. "Like mad cultural terrorists, they've taken the norm and fed it through a psychedelic blender."

--Melody Maker

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# The Vexers Get Excited >>

About two years ago, a perplexing listing popped up in the "Musicians Wanted" section of the weekly e-mail list sent out by the prestigious Los Angeles indie club, The Fold.

"New Wave / No Wave art-damaged pop punk band seeks drummer aged 21 to 30 who can still get excited about stuff," the ad read, before going on to list a crazy range of influences such as Prince, The Damned, Adam and the Ants, Radio Birdman and Wire, to name a few.

"We decided to just go with a lot of different shit," says Jennifer Taylor, who is partially responsible for the ad. "If you list three bands who are all similar, well, you're gonna get one type of person. We didn't want that, so we decided to break it up all schizo-like."

Although singer/guitarist Taylor admits the listing didn't help pull in a drummer to back her and bassist Mike Hammil in their freshly formed rock group The Vexers, it did secure the interest of second guitarist Tres Warren. Then they all left town.

"L.A. is really cut off from other cities," explains Taylor. "Every time you go to play a show out of town, you're looking at a drive of at least a couple hours, sometimes through rough terrain."

The trio pulled out a map, deciding Philadelphia—situated smack in between Washington, D.C., Baltimore, New York and Boston—was the best new HQ.

The drummerless Vexers relocated and scored a new drummer, Jesse Van Anglen, within two months.

After about a year of gigs in Philly's many rock bars and playing adjacent cities as much as possible, The Vexers hooked up with producer Mike Musmanno, whose credits include such indie luminaries as Pavement and Delta 72, and cranked out their self-titled debut.

The record is a sweaty rock 'n roll romp of Joan Jett proportions, with angular punk leanings and warm bass tones padding the raunchier cuts like "Something Dirty" and "Mutual Masturbation." In the standout "The Saint," Taylor pines about frustration with the nine-to-five grind over a glorious, Sonic Youth riff. ("By the time I get home, the day is gone and so is the sun/Should I buy a guitar, baby? Should I buy a gun?")

Also like Jett, Taylor fronts her band with unwavering rock star confidence, but doesn't make a huge issue of her gender. While she holds politic-centric feminist groups like Le Tigre and Sleater-Kinney in high regard, Taylor feels that it's better to just get out there and rock, without all the baggage.

"It works well, I don't think we really fit into any stereotypes because of that," she reasons. "I don't call attention to or deter from the fact that I'm a female. The dudes don't call attention to or deter from the fact that they're dudes. We're just people, and as far as close-minded people making a big deal out of it—I've never had that problem. I hope never to have that problem."

—John Vettese



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# SISTER'S

## GONNA WORK IT OUT

AKA: GIRL SKATER DOCUMENTS  
THE FIRST ALL GIRL SKATE JAM

By Sarah Tomlinson

**THE** action is fast—blurred shots of asphalt, canvas sneakers clutching a skateboard. The sound of hard plastic wheels scraping concrete is heard, then the quick, unmistakable explosion of a kick against wood, the grind of decks against concrete.

It's classic skate video material, capturing the fearless acrobatics of pro skaters, which drive teenagers to practice until their knees and elbows bleed, and the quick quips of skate culture's smart-ass independence. Only, at the top of the chunky sneakers atop the board, is a female skater.

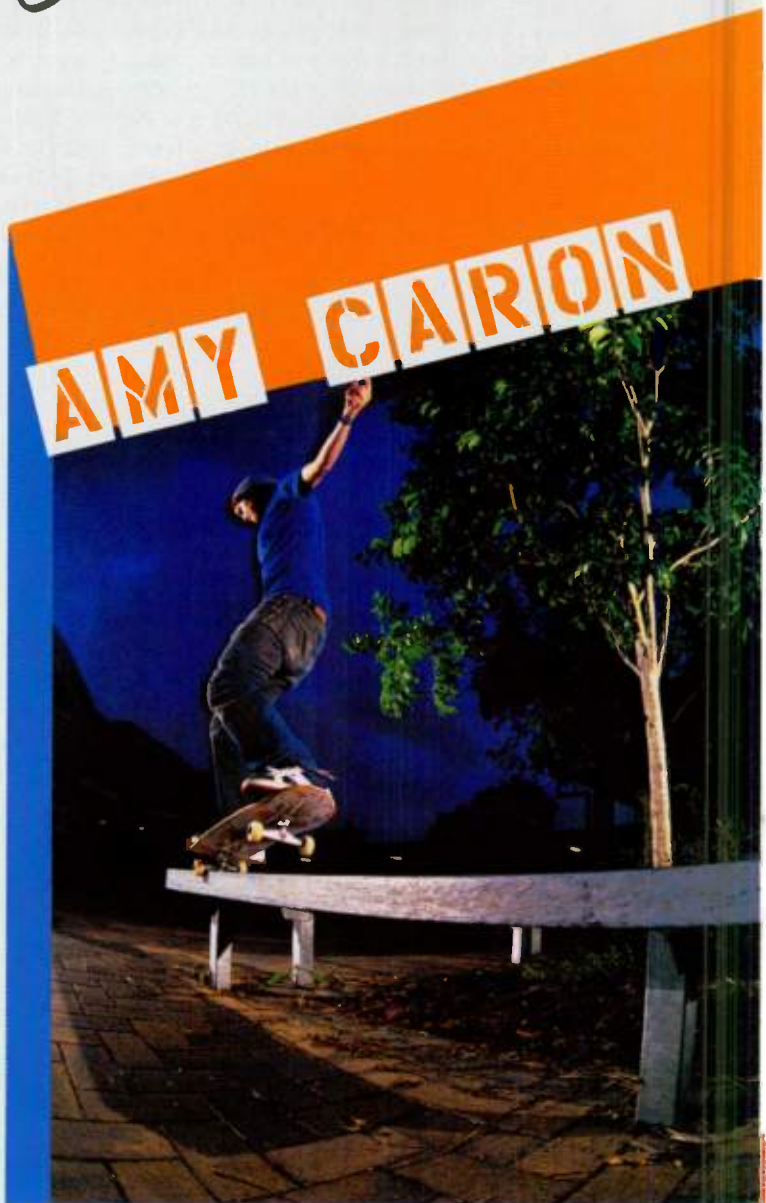
If this is unexpected, it might be because the first-ever, all-women's demo tour—the All Girl Skate Jam—is still only recent history.

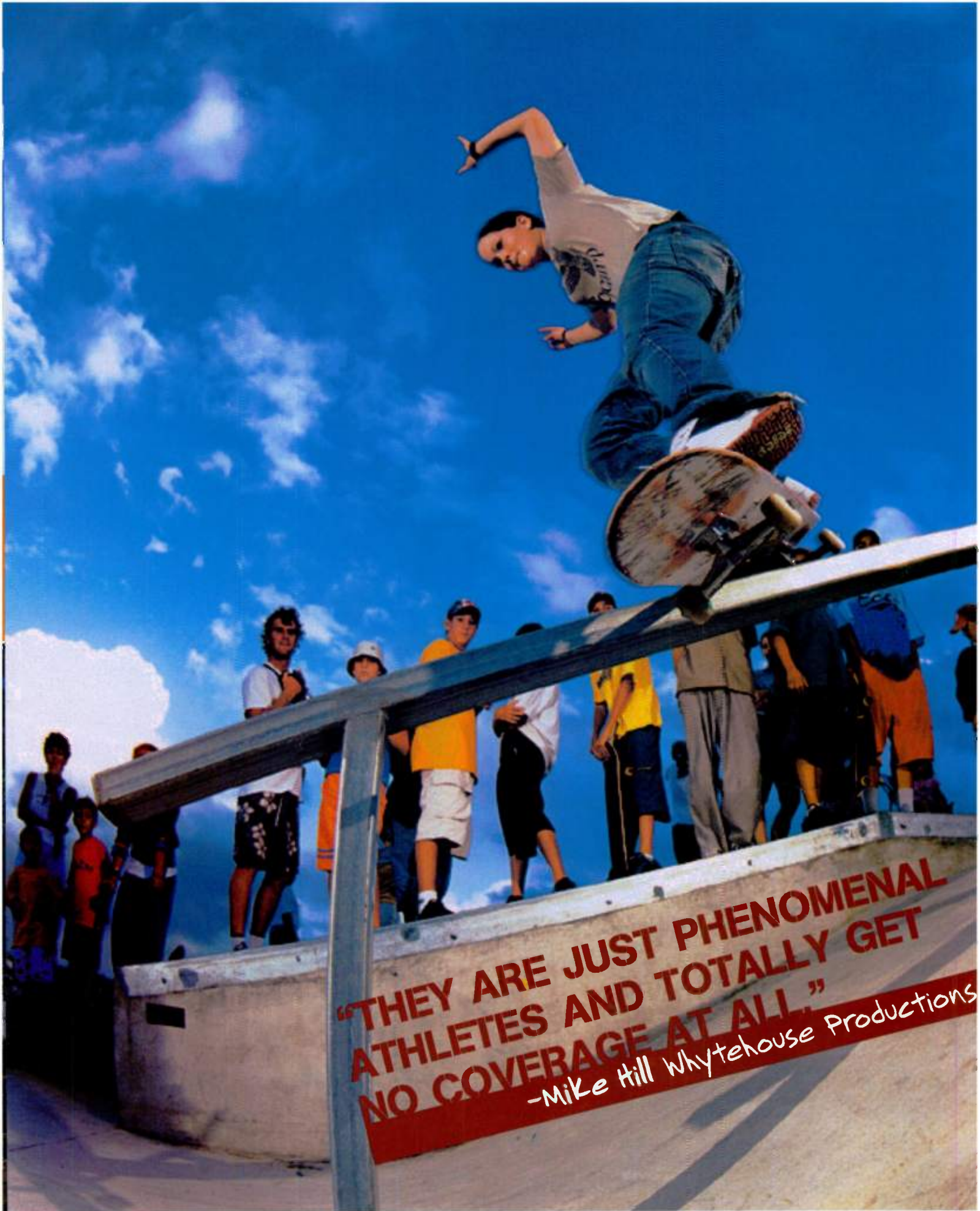
In 1998, the Globe World Cup of Skating competition added a women's division, thus offering serious prize money and lending a lucrative angle to the fun of women's skating. The competition—sponsored by Globe sneakers and its female department, Gallaz—wound up as the finish line for the All Girl Skate Jam's tour across Australia. Now, a full-length DVD from Whytehouse Productions and Gallaz shoes, *AKA: Girl Skater*, chronicles the whole trip.

While women skaters are not a new phenomenon, aggressive moves like the tour and Gallaz' new DVD certainly try to score a spot on the map. The women featured on *AKA* are tough and daring, pushing themselves to conquer new tricks, running wild with on-camera shenanigans with their "Deadbeat Mom" chaperone, Dave Carnie—editor of *Big Brother*, a skateboarding magazine. They definitely have the chops to carry their own video. This is why Carnie says he got involved in the first place.

"You see them skate and say, 'fuck, they can skate as good as guys,'" says the bearded patriarch.

"They are just phenomenal athletes and totally get no coverage at all," says Mike Hill, who directed and co-produced the video for Australia-based Whytehouse Productions. ▶▶





**"THEY ARE JUST PHENOMENAL  
ATHLETES AND TOTALLY GET  
NO COVERAGE AT ALL."**  
-Mike Hill Whytehouse Productions

# PART

of the momentum behind the current interest in female skaters is a new breed who are skating better than ever before. Inspired by original trailblazers like Cara-Beth Burnside and (*Tony Hawk ProSkater* personality) Elissia Steamer, a new generation is coming up.

So where did these girls come from?

Among the team are some of the top skaters in the industry, like Americans Amy Caron, Vanessa Torres and Jaime Reyes, as well as up-and-comers like Australia's Monica Shaw. They've been out there for years, skating with the boys after picking up their first board and finding themselves driven to skate with little regard to where it might lead.

Jaime Reyes, 25, has been skating for 11 years, since the day a lack of waves in her native Hawaii kept her off her surfboard. It took a while, but her passion turned from catching waves to catching air and "somehow, I got good and got sponsored," she says.

While Reyes makes it sound effortless, she has skated her way to an important place in the industry, with her own pro model for Rookie Skate—the company she's skated for since January 2000. Reyes has also placed herself among a handful of pro women skateboarders, compared to the hundreds of male skateboarders who support themselves with sponsorships and contest earnings.

Perhaps her most lasting accomplishment, Reyes has inspired a new generation of women skaters, like Shaw, her 18-year-old teammate.

Shaw has skated for six years, since she picked up her brother's board, and says Reyes was definitely a role model.

"In '98, when I started skating, there were a few local girls, but nothing special, so I had to look up to people like Jamie," Shaw says. "I knew Jamie because she pretty much set the record for girl skating."

While they don't like to make a big deal about being girl skaters—rather than just skaters—Reyes and Shaw have found the experience of skating exclusively with women skaters during the video's filming to be positive. They quickly explain how they pushed each other to master increasingly difficult tricks without falling prey to competitiveness.

"We all encourage each other," Reyes relays.

In addition to the camaraderie of skating together, the members of the Skate Jam were obviously glad to form a unified front as they traveled Australia, often giving demo audiences their first view of a girl who could really handle herself on a board.

"I think they were scared, a whole bunch of girls skateboarding—what the hell is going on?" the Hawaii native laughs.

Despite the top 40 crooning of Avril Lavigne, Reyes, for one, is adamant about her autonomy. While she admits some dating between boy and girl skaters is natural, she'd never date a guy just because he skates. Besides, she adds, "no guy skateboarders can handle us anyway. We're bitches and noisy."

"There always have been girls, and I'm not saying this to offend them, but they've always sucked," says the typically controversial Carnie. "Right now, they are a tight-knit group, unified by their piranha status in skateboarding. But they have a long way to go before skate magazines run photos of them regularly."

This outsider position has earned these skaters a reputation as the new rebels in an industry largely divorced from its original outlaw status. While videos like the *Landspeed/CKY* dynasty clearly maintain the bad-boy image, extreme sports has become more popular, blending in with staid big business.

"They're fucking pirates," Carnie laughs, sharing a tale about the girls getting kicked out of their hotel room.

Hill agrees with the assessment of girls as the new punks of skateboarding. He also cites a similarity between their role now and the early days of skateboarding while he was filming a history of Australian skating. While the girls may be outlaws, Hill sees the project as long overdue—20 percent of Australian skaters are women, and there are several teams of female skaters.

While the novelty-act stigma can still be a drag, most of the skaters on the tour say they get "mad respect" from other pro (male) skaters and relish their own outsider status, as well as the dimension of purity it can add to their work.

"We're untainted by fame and stuff like that, because there are less of us," says Australian Monica Shaw.

When pressed, most of the skaters from the tour agree they'd like the progress they've seen to continue. This means encouraging even more girls to skate.

AKA does this by the sheer virtue of its visibility, along with the help of a step-by-step trick tutorial provided by Gallaz team member Lauren Mollica, who teaches the basics from an ollie to a 360 flip. Plenty of quick edits and fast action highlight the sport's adrenaline and drama, while a spirited soundtrack arrives, replete with groups like Kill Rock Stars' The Bangs.

"There was a natural synergy there," says Hill about the Kill Rock Stars artists peppering the DVD's soundtrack. "They are such an enthusiastic supporter of female musicians and female music."

Sadly, it's still an uphill battle for women in pro skateboarding. Whytehouse Productions admits it's had trouble finding major distribution for AKA, despite the relative ease with which they've placed their videos featuring male skaters.

"There's a whole mental block against female skateboarders," says director Hill.

In the mean time, the Gallaz girls remind women out there not to take any attitude when they first pick up a board. Shaw's advice, while understated, seems appropriate.

"Stay focused on skating and don't listen to what people have to say." ■



"THEY HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO BEFORE SKATE MAGAZINES RUN REGULARLY"  
-Dave Carnie Big Brother Magazine



# TOO SMART to be rock.

# TOO ROCK to be anything else.

By Luke O'Neil



## IDLEWILD frontman Roddy Woomble explains the band's booksmart point of view.

**It's** not very often I find myself singing along to an undeniable pop rock gem of a song and pausing midway to think about what books the lyricist has gotten himself into lately. Idlewild's *The Remote Part*, just released in the States but already a hit in the United Kingdom, should push the band above and beyond its modest but discerning following of bookish anglophiles. Unlike your average rock fare about loves lost and the struggles of the road, Idlewild steers its ship head on into the chaotic realm of larger, universal truths. But these Brits do it in such an unobtrusive manner, those who aren't paying attention may simply think the band is playing happy sing-along pop songs. It's the best of both worlds.

Frontman Roddy Woomble's attention to bigger themes finds an interesting roost in the structure of heavy, melodic rock, though the singer seems quick in his humble demeanor to deflect questions about his literary allusions.

"The worst thing about it is that people sometimes presume that you're trying to give a lecture if you talk about a book—it's difficult to come across as unpretentious," he says. "I have always tried to stand behind the music, because essentially we're a loud rock band, and a lot of the music does rely on the power of the riffs, but it's nice when you can hear lyrics and they are actually about something."

Woomble says he felt more confident on this latest record, with songs like "American English" and "I am What I am Not" dealing with people's relationships with the world around them.

After some prodding, the Scottish singer admits to a connection with some books one might expect to find on his list—particularly *Being and Nothingness*, by Sartre. He soon confesses "I am What..."—one of the album's standout tracks—is rooted in existential philosophy, the recognition of self through the recognition that one is not another.

"That's the way I always view things," Woomble agreed. "I'm always singing about existentialism. I have this complex, because I never finished college and all my friends did. I always liked books and read books, but I'm not an academic. I'm really kind of shit at that sort of thing. I have this sort of persecution complex of not learning enough. So I spent about two years reading all the books that I would see on my friends' reading

lists. They would have exams on it, and I'd write songs about it."

The discussion on traditional subject matter for songs may not seem like much, but it's an important one to Woomble. Despite the clichés, Woomble says he thinks people sing more about themselves than they do about love.

"It's a very selfish pastime, songwriting," says Woomble. "'American English' presents itself as a song about the people who wrote it. In one way, it is like an anti-anthem, with such a sing-along chorus. When we play it live, we have everyone sing along with it, which is funny. It's like holding the mirror back at them. Essentially it's about nothing. It's about you singing your song. At the same time, I'm not trying to manipulate people."

The Scot says he feels a special respect for the lyrics of Conor Oberst (Bright Eyes), although the typical Idlewild song usually takes a more straightforward approach.

Of course, the U.K. Idlewild is a different band than Idlewild in the States, regarded too good for mass consumption in America by some. The band doesn't expect to remain a rare delicacy stateside for long.

"The songs are really made to be heard by everyone," says Woomble. "'American English' and 'You Held the World in Your Arms' are hits here. The latter is being played as the theme for this sports highlight program here, which I find hilarious. It's so not about sports. It's sort of pointing a finger at people like that. It's not criticizing, but just saying, 'Look, this is what you're like.'"

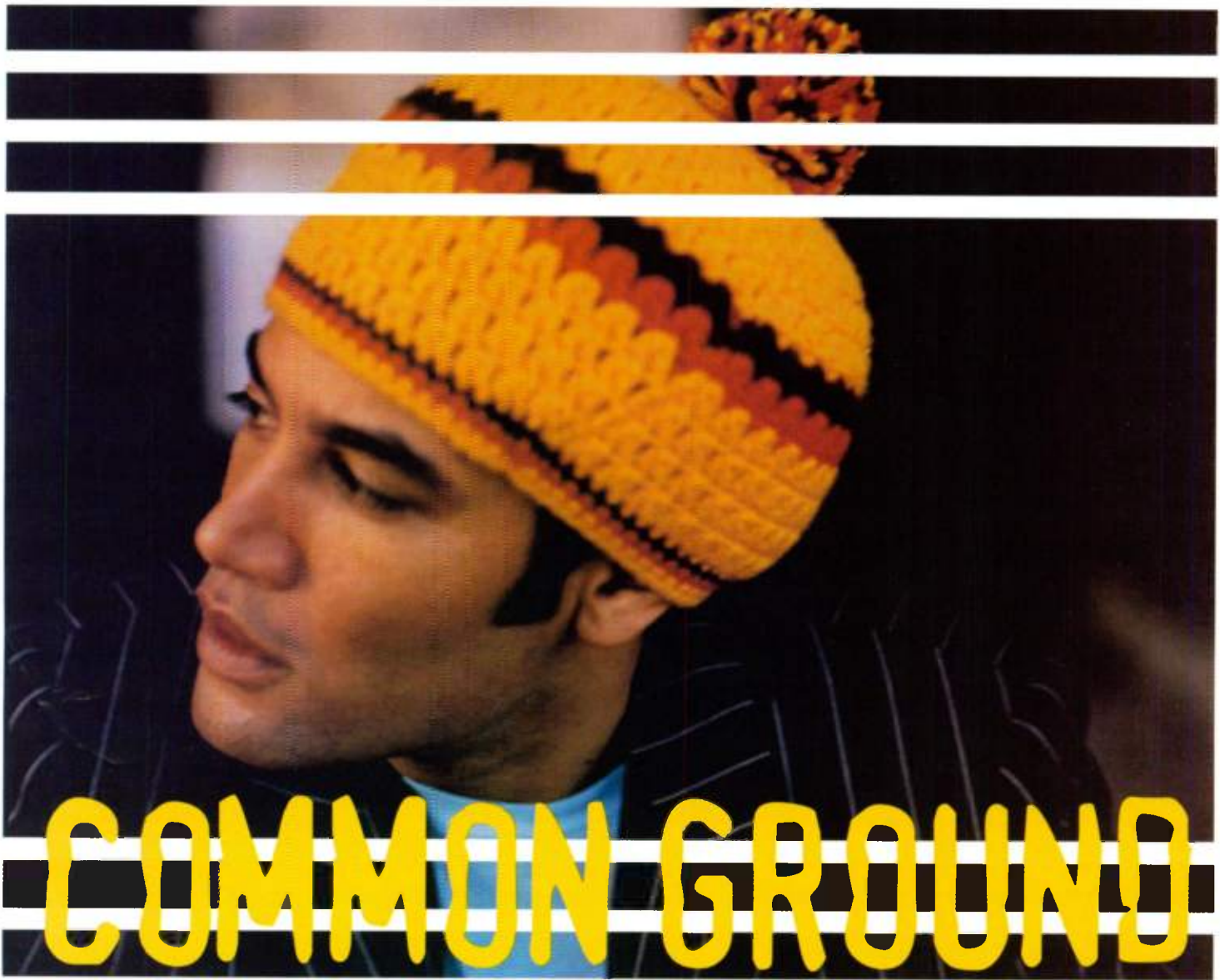
Woomble concedes most of Idlewild's output observes the verse-chorus-bridge model, but he says he feels it's impossible to over-intellectualize music.

"Over-intellectualizing a song should be done," he says. "A lot of people just take things at face value, which is fine, but it's nice when people can really get into the lyrics and the music. Unfortunately, the most popular bands are a bit shallow. They do write good tunes, but there isn't much going on. That's why it's a shame that bands like Bright Eyes and Modest Mouse, where there is so much going on, on all levels, don't have massive hits everywhere." ■



It's nice when you can hear lyrics and they are actually about something...

—Roddy Woomble



# COMMON GROUND

BEN HARPER BRINGS THE SMART FUNK

BY SUBHASH KULKARNI

## BEN

Harper speaks first with silence. Ask him a question and his immediate response tends to be a long—and I do mean long—pause, making you wonder whether you’ve pissed him off or given him narcolepsy. It’s as if the stop-and-go, push-pull rhythm of the rock ‘n roll schedule he’s been living for over eight years has seared itself into his consciousness.

Then, just when you’re ready to ask, “did you catch that?” his tongue lurches forward. Off he goes, running away with the baton, often into unrelated tangents as if he’s heard a different question altogether from the one you’ve just asked. Again, you want to ask, “did you catch that?”

Ben Harper isn’t unfocused. In fact, he hasn’t lost sight of your question at all—he just needs to do a few laps before zeroing in for the kill.

“I’m trying to get with you, man, but I’m not locking in at the moment,” he says, invoking the mellow Tao of Spicoli.

Despite having just returned from a month spent doing European press, Harper shows no will towards being difficult, haughty or even remote. If you’re looking, really searching for something, eventually you will strike a

chord with Harper. The more hungry you are, the more he will try to connect. He has a way of making you feel important in the process.

On his only night home before leaving for New Zealand to start touring behind his latest album, *Diamonds on the Inside* (Virgin), Harper is meditative but also buoyant with excitement that he’s just hours away from getting back on the road with his band.

Listening to *Diamonds* makes for a considerably smoother ride than trying to keep up with Ben’s thoughts, but the song-to-song variation does pose challenges. Most remarkable is how Harper and his cohorts blend different styles in new ways within the same song. Check out how he lays an airy falsetto down over a delta blues slide guitar shuffle and gospel claps on “When it’s Good.” On “Bring the Funk,” he and his bandmates play a prototypical, late-’70s hip hop beat smacking of Prince, but he weaves through the sparse groove with buttery vocals evoking Stevie Wonder. “When She Believes” sounds like gospel music woven into a classic 1940s film score and then adapted by street musicians on a Parisian sidewalk. The arrangement is sparse yet lush, with snare brushes providing a light, jazzy touch.



Harper's vocal style changes drastically on each piece. He interrupts the floral mellotron intro to "So High So Low" with a scream easily misattributed to Rob Halford before the band sends the song careening into Grand Funk Railroad territory. This is not easily definable music. Maybe this explains why, although he maintains a good relationship with his record company, he's had to do a little elbowing to establish the creative freedom he now enjoys.

Ben Harper's managed to find his audience in a music industry climate where everybody's screaming "imminent collapse." And he's determined to maintain it.

**You made a comment once where you said you responded to your parents playing gospel music on a higher level than what you felt listening to things like Queen in your bedroom. Is there anybody in rock who gives you the same tingle?**

I get off on Gillian Welch, Wilco, Jurassic 5, Blackalicious. *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* is my favorite record of the past five years—that and The Verve's *Urban Hymns*. And I love Damian Marley's last record too. But gospel's gospel. I'm not going to get the same feeling when I'm listening to Air as when I'm listening to Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers. I get a similar feeling when I'm listening to Willie Nelson and Johnny Cash.

**You're on the road for a while starting immediately. How do you focus on this when you have kids at home?**

You just gotta make sure that when you're there you have a strong presence in their lives. And everybody's got to go to work and go do what they love, because if you're not fulfilled, then you're not going to be able to fulfill your children. You just balance it out.

**Your audiences have come to expect variation in your live set, and you've got a fairly sizable back catalog now. How much more difficult does it get to pick the songs in the repertoire?**

It's challenging now. There's some good spats between the band members. One more record and it's going to be... I don't know. We've been doing three-hour shows, and I don't think we're going to be able keep up that Springsteen pace, really.

**Certain dates are billed as Ben Harper and the Innocent Criminals, others are billed as just you.**

I guess different promoters are billing it differently, but it's gonna be me with the band all year. I'm touring with the original Innocent Criminals right now.

**How do you record on the road?**

I only sketch on the road, with a walkman and a tape player.

**So you just have one of those things with a microphone where you, like, whistle into it?**

Guitar, whistle, humming, lyrics, music—I'm always going. I've got probably 500 to 1000 tapes.

**I carry a microcassette recorder around with me. I like to joke that that's my studio.**

All right! That's the way I like to work. I don't want to get caught up—when it's time to multi-track, man, I'm making a record.

**A lot of musicians talk about having a difficult time writing on the road. How is that for you guys? How much are new songs born on the road?**

I spend a good amount of time doing promotion. Outside of that, there's barely time to rest, but my nights are my nights, and I keep those to myself. That's when I write.

**Talk to me about the new record.**

It's on a major label—we've infiltrated the system. People are like "oh, it's gonna be hard for radio"—good! Virgin loved it. Much to their credit, they're up to the challenge.



**I STARTED WORKING AT MY PARENTS' MUSIC STORE... I REALLY STARTED TO SEE MUSIC CLEARLY AND WHERE I WANTED TO BRING MY OWN.**

**How did people categorize you earlier in your career?**

In one year, we opened up for Luscious Jackson, PJ Harvey, the Roots, the Fugees, the Pharcyde, Gil Scott-Heron, J.J. Cale and John Lee Hooker—in one year. And I drove the van to every gig.

**Why were you the only one driving?**

You don't want to know. One guy doesn't have a license, one guy's license is suspended. Once in a while somebody would sneak a little help. I'd start weaving off the damn road and somebody would grab the wheel and say, "let me drive." I drove from New York to Memphis, and I listened to Bob Marley the whole way.

**Rastafarianism, to a lot of people, amounts to little more than a fashion statement. Can you give me something more than just dreadlocks and Bob Marley posters in college dorms?**

Its birthplace is Ethiopia. What moved me the strongest about it is that it's connected with and a cross between Christianity and Judaism. Jamaican Rastafarianism is quite its own belief system. Jamaica completely transformed and transcended whatever Rastafarianism was before it hit Jamaica.

**Do you listen to Bad Brains at all?**

I have. I like H.R.'s ruthless attack on the mic, I really do.

**Who was Ben Harper as a teenager? Paint the picture for me.**

Your average confused, frustrated, angry young man. A hip hop head. I listened to strictly hip hop. Big Daddy Kane, Slick Rick, EPMD, Eric B. and Rakim—all the good shit. LL Cool J when he first came out.

***Paid in Full*? "My Radio?" Slick Rick and Doug E. Fresh?**

That's right.

**I'm from the South Bronx.**

So that's your shit! [laughs]

**It was Public Enemy that did it for me.**

God man, when that shit dropped... [hushes]. The Beasties were a big part of that too.

**Where did you go from hip hop?**

I started working at my parents' music store and having this hip hop consciousness and crossing that with blues and Woody Guthrie and Dylan and Gil Scott-Heron. Having it all right in my hands, I really started to see music clearly and where I wanted to bring my own. ▶▶

**MUSICIANS GET FRUSTRATED  
WITH JOURNALISTS, BUT YOU  
KNOW WHAT? I'VE MET A LOT  
OF JOURNALISTS THAT GET  
FRUSTRATED WITH MUSICIANS.  
IF WE'RE NOT DOING  
SOMETHING THAT CAN LAST,  
WHY ARE WE DOING IT?**



Once you take a step, from the teenage phase of being attached to one particular style, to one other thing, the effect begins to snowball.

Then you start hearing Jacques Brel and Edith Piaf and Turkish folk music and all of a sudden, it's just open and open and open, wider and wider. Once you get through that need to take one stance, there's no turning back. But imagine me in high school, trying to turn a hip hop head on to Son House. Man, I would get laughed off the block. Imagine me rollin' down the street in my Suzuki Samurai full of 12-inch speakers in the back, with an amp for each one bumpin' Robert Johnson? What's gonna happen? There's a certain closed-mindedness that goes with musical extremism. You don't know that you're being closed-minded because to you at the time, there is nothing else.

But it seems to be an amazing time to be alive, on the one hand. Corporate radio is very controlled, but people's tastes just don't seem as stratified. If you listen to what DJs are spinning, for example, it's a dizzying blend of stuff.

That's a good point. What's being spun by DJs is a definite reflection of musical expansion.

**You're one of those artists who draws an audience from seemingly disparate camps. What's your take on the state of the music industry right now?**

It's as scrambled as it's been since the history of its conception, with technology moving faster than they know how to keep up with it. It's gonna unmask them. They're gonna have to get extremely honest. I mean, my relationship with Virgin's been solid. I've had my problems, but every time I've been able to go to them and get them worked out. But I'll tell you what, technology's gonna make them and keep them honest.

**You were one of the first acts where the record company allowed downloads, with alternate versions of songs, right?**

Yeah, live stuff, and we did do a record way back where we allowed people to download. But most recently, there's this copy protection bullshit they put on my record without asking, where the CD won't even play on computers. We had to raise Cain to get it removed!

**You want people to be able to copy your albums?**

Yeah. See, that's where the scramble occurs. You said, "how's the music industry right now?" Kids are trying to protect their pocketbooks and record companies are trying to protect their bank accounts. Nobody wants to sit around for an hour and download.

**Your family was blacklisted, right?**

During the McCarthy period of the 1950s, my grandfather was blacklisted by Senator McCarthy, hardcore. He couldn't work for a decade. He got literally chased out of New England because he wouldn't drop names. They considered him a hyper-liberal teacher. They were trying to weed out the Communist ethic in America. The Communist Party in America used to be an established ideal.

**An important part of the labor movement, and now it's been wiped out.**

Russian Communism and American Communism had very little in common when you pick them apart politically. That's something that doesn't get discussed often enough, I find. My Mom got her doctorate picking that apart. That's her doctoral thesis. So Gramps, they tried to push him. "Name four names. We want four names or you're not working." And he wouldn't give up the names. He would go out to try to find night work, and government officials would come to the door. When something like that happens in your family, it stays with you. I read probably a book a month, which isn't enough. But it's enough to keep me tuned to things that I wouldn't be focusing on. I finished *The Little Prince*, a French fairy tale. Then I just finished Michael Moore's *Stupid White Men* a week ago.

**You just finished a press tour. You must be tired of doing interviews.**

Not at all. Musicians get frustrated with journalists, but you know what? I've met a lot of journalists that get frustrated with musicians. If we're not doing something that can last, why are we doing it? You go back over some of those old articles and see it has a life that's longer than ours. I've got old issues of *Creem*, heck yeah!

**I got a collection of *Circus* and *Hit Parader*. Two years' worth, still in plastic sleeves. Mint condition.**

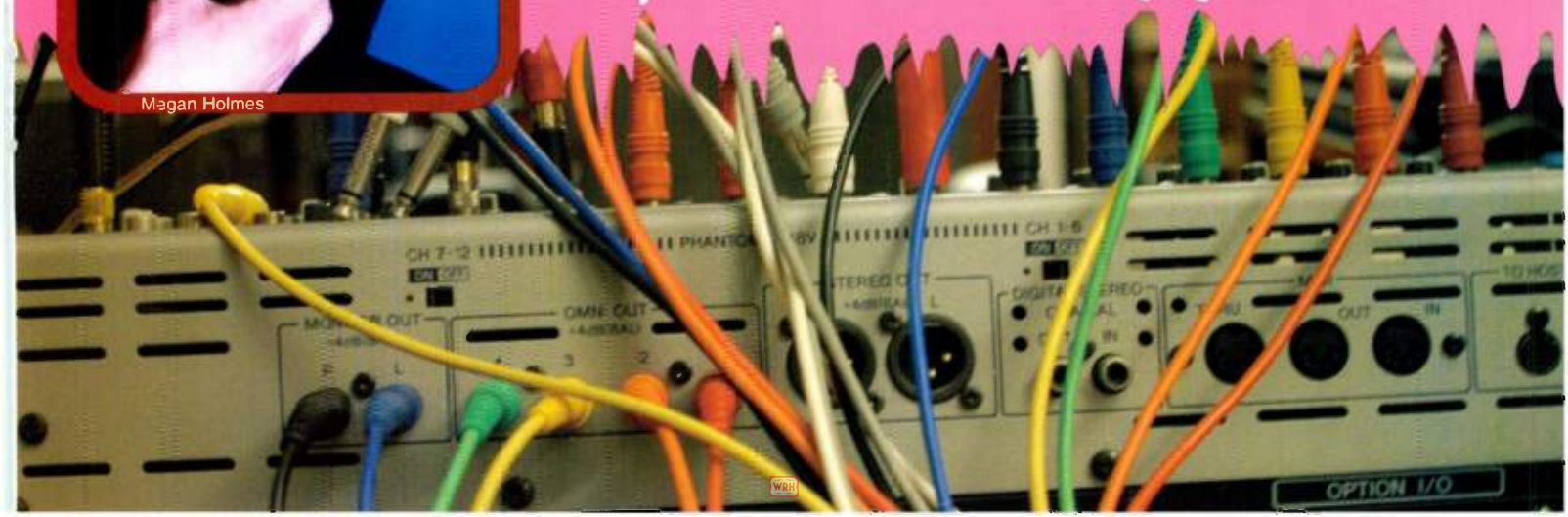
Is it *Circus*, with Gram Parsons? I keep all that. It's as much a musical reference as it is a time capsule.

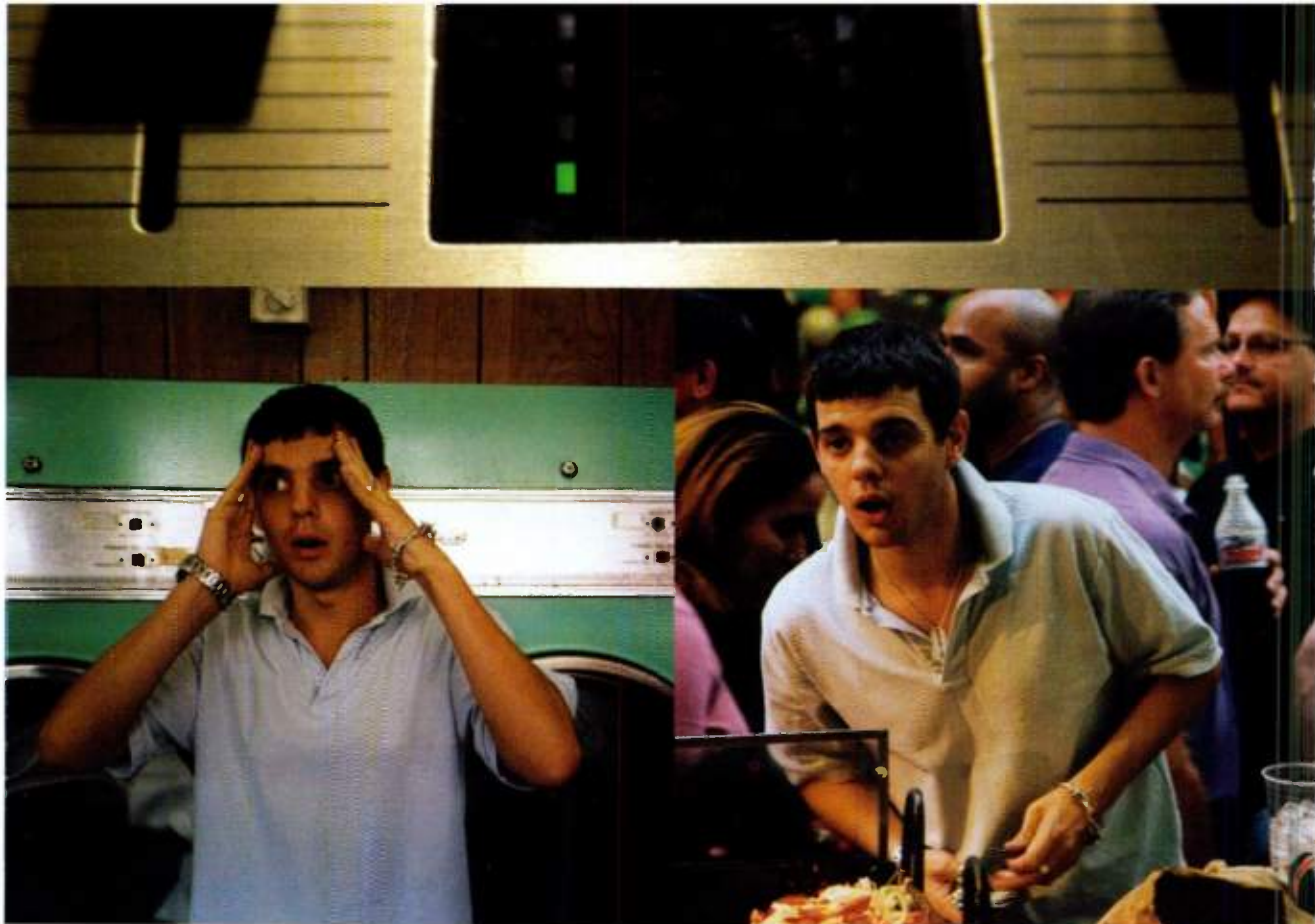
# MR. SUMMERS



Megan Holmes

THE STREETS ▶ RJD2 ▶ FISCHERSPOONER ▶ ANTICON ▶ PEACHES  
TRIPLE THREAT DJS ▶ AKROBATIK ▶ MS. KITTIN ▶ BEANS  
J-LIVE ▶ TOMMY GUERRERO ▶ JEAN GRAE ▶ JAZZANOVA





## Let's Push Things FWD by Julie Gerstein

Mike Skinner writes like a girl.

His handwriting adorning the back and inside covers of *The Streets'* debut release, *Original Pirate Material*, is full of wide and open "a"s and scrawly, childish "y"s. Skinner barely flinches at the comment.

"Well, let's just say that I'm in touch with my feminine side," he quips. "Plus, bigger handwriting makes you look confident."

Not lacking in confidence or quick wit, the 24-year-old Skinner is just now getting around to selling *The Streets* to a U.S. audience. A one-man keyboard and vocals outfit, *The Streets* has been racking up accolades and record sales in the United Kingdom, and Skinner is poised to do the same in the States. Actually, Skinner insists he cares very little about making it big in America.

"I think Americans think that if you haven't made it in the States you haven't made it at all. There are Americans that really like *The Streets*, and they're buying the record. It's good to sell records, and I love doing what I'm doing, but I'd never sell anything to anyone who didn't want it."

This past fall Skinner was nominated for a U.K. Mercury Music Award, the British equivalent of a Grammy—not bad for an album recorded for less than 500 pounds in a bedroom at his mother's house in Birmingham. The youngest of three kids, Skinner explains he "didn't have anything else I could do."

"Living in a small town or city makes you a lot more direct," he says.

At 20, Skinner spent a year traveling and working in Australia and returned with the idea to release a garage/hip hop hybrid record. The project initially started out as a collective venture, but Skinner eventually made *The Streets* a solo project.

"My friends just weren't that keen on it and didn't want to be

involved. I also realized that working on my own is much better—I could have it exactly the way I wanted it," he shares.

In 2000, Skinner sent a demo to England's Locked On, a label made famous for its roster of top-notch club acts, including Tuff Jam and Artful Dodger. Locked On signed Skinner and released a home-made version of what would eventually become *Material's* first single, "Has it Come to This?" The success of the single and Skinner's signature style caught the attention of Atlantic Records, resulting in a 2002 full-length.

After his record failed to get distribution in the States, Skinner hooked up with Vice Records, the new record label end of the *Vice Magazine* empire.

"America was the last place we released *The Streets*," says Skinner. "We wanted to go with a really small company, and they kind of came to us."

Mixing a deadpan vocal style (with a standard Cockney twang) and hard garage beats, *Material* is far from an average hip hop record. One part social commentary, one part small town diary, Skinner rhymes about girls, drugs and bourbon (yes, bourbon), managing to perfectly capture both the glum stupor of getting on in the suburbs.

"In England, that's life," he smirks. "That's what people get passionate about."

A strong element on the record is the distinctive sound of U.K. garage beats. "Garage," Skinner explains, "is U.K. urban music that's, like, a lot more influenced by dance beats than by hip hop. In London, the people that are into hip hop and R&B listen to garage. It's an urban thing, really."

Partly because he grew up in the industrial port of Birmingham, Skinner's experience with garage and dance music was limited.

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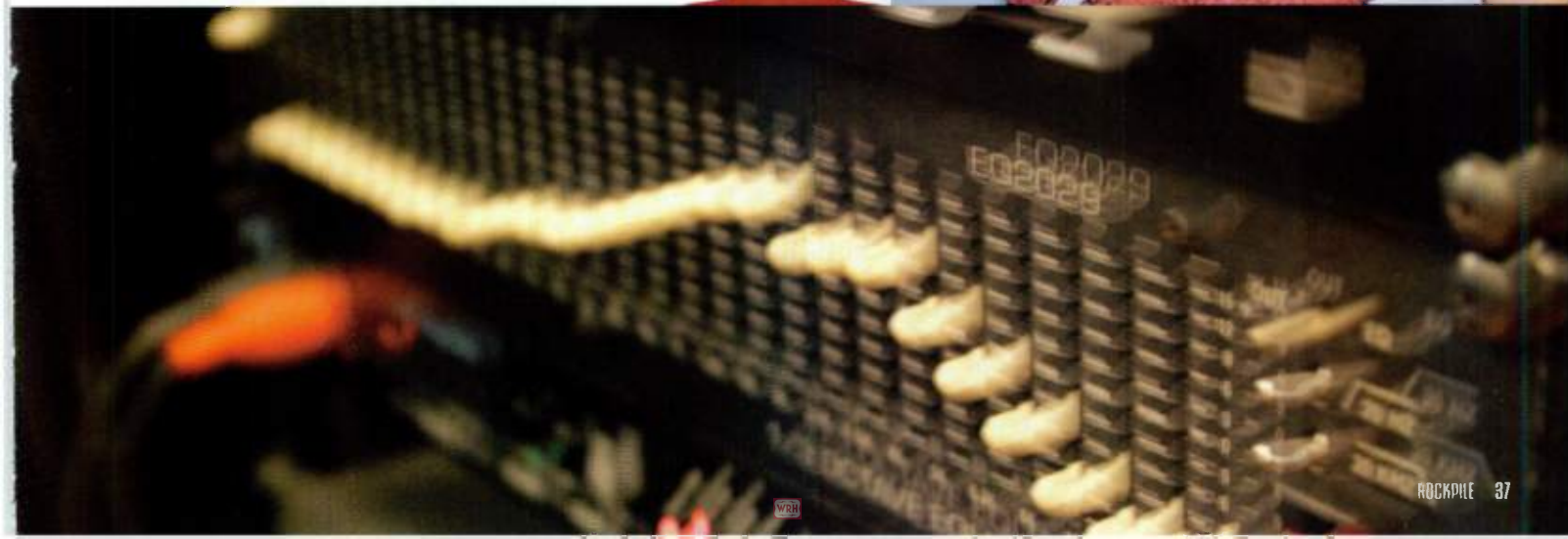


## JEAN GRAE

Named for the telekinetic leading lady of the celebrated X-Men comics, Grae is an artist to watch with baited breath. Tony from the block is quick to point out his "Kiss Me, I'm Old School" know-how by identifying Jean Grae by her former nom de flow, What What, from her National Resource days. Nice to know, but no history lesson is necessary to qualify Grae as a gifted rhymesayer. For proof, one need look no further than her debut solo full-length, *Attack of the Attacking Things*. Released by Third Earth, *Attack* features Grae's silky, yet percussive delivery laced over beats constructed both by the artist herself and by The Beatminerz's Evil Dee. While the production of Grae's album might be classified as so-fly-but-oh-my-how-lo-fi-near-no-fi, we can't all be the Neptunes.

## PEACHES

"People think Peaches is about sex first and music second," though this couldn't be further from the truth, according to the artist, born Merrill Nisker. Whatever her priorities, Peaches captivates sold-out crowds for more than an hour, non-stop, with nothing but a CD or DAT player as her backup—showmanship is alive and well. Mixing the show-a-little-leg of vaudeville and the say-whatcha-want of punk with the boom-bip of grind-minded club hip hop and the "suckin' on my titties like you wanted me" of Lil' Kim, Peaches seems to have found a niche, while many seem psyched to follow. On the strength of her live show and a sole full-length, *The Teaches of Peaches*, alone, Niskir has managed to drum up a hormone-crazy following on the dancefloor, while obscuring the lines of Larry T's label along the way. For an introduction, check her single, "Fuck the Pain Away."





Pearl Bell

## More Than Just a Star Wars Reference by Reed Jackson

If, as the Olde English writer Walter Benjamin wrote, a collector's passion "borders on the chaos of memory," then hip hop DJs overrun the border like a Soviet tank. Not only do they allocate the best years of their life to ferreting out and assembling towers of obscure vinyl (as memorably depicted in Doug Pray's 2002 film, *Scratch*), they then go on to do something more drastic. Eschewing the traditional collector's satisfaction with mere presence, members of RJD2's ilk wreck their beloved objects, cutting and blending tattered old sounds into new aural fabric, creating a scrambled historical collage, a hopelessly rearranged living memory.

RJD2, a young DJ who recently left his hometown of Columbus, Ohio, for the grittier milieu of Philly, started off innocently.

"A friend of mine was in a financial jam," he relates of his origins. "He sold me his turntables and a bunch of records for really cheap. He had all these 12-inches with bonus tracks and stuff, and I mainly just wanted to get my hands on those. I figured I would sell the decks."

It wasn't long before RJ, who came of age in the early-'90s world of readily available new school rappers such as The Pharcyde, succumbed to the lure of the wheels of steel.

"I eventually started just messing around, and it turned into a hobby, and then it turned into a job," he summarizes.

The word job is ridiculously inadequate for what happens when RJ gets behind a needle. His 2002 debut, *Dead Ringers* (on Brooklyn's esteemed Definitive Jux label), surprised many aficionados with its deft mix of domestic theory and wild style. RJ's inventive samples described an obsessive depth and rigor, while

his pliant beats and knowing use of melody imparted a welcome accessibility. It was undeniably strong hip hop, but with the crowd-pleasing bounce of big beat.

Now, with the release of *The Horror* EP, RJD2 stands poised to further solidify his status as a major talent. The EP opens with its title track, originally perhaps the most difficult entry found on *Dead Ringers*. Shrieking-elephant keyboards run amok over an ominously insistent beat, fashioning an atmosphere equally charged with irritation and menace. It is a bold maneuver, a seemingly calculated response to detractors who accused RJD2 of being too user-friendly.

The music finds its footing shortly thereafter, mostly in the form of some remix tracks and a handful of instrumental joints. The reworked material is both playful and serious, old tricks being blithely improved upon even as new directions are explored.

"I think DJ music or turntablism or whatever you want to call it, is at kind of a volatile time," RJ muses. "It's either going to become something else or someone is going to come along and make it be taken seriously."

He may be too modest to say it outright, but RJD2 would clearly like to be this person. And given time, he might be. The reigning contender, DJ Shadow, has in some analyst's conjecture entered a slow slide into irrelevancy, spending too much time collecting records and archiving sound, letting his creative skills slacken and atrophy.

It is RJD2's emergence from this fetishistic world of beat-digging suggesting the most hope for the future. Unlike the closeted wraiths

continued on page 53 ►►



Maya Hayuk

# AKROBATIK

Born Jared Bridgeman, Boston's Akrobatik first debuted with 1998's single, "Ruff Enough," though he probably grabbed wider attention with his "Internet MC" single on Rawkus the following year. *Balance*, his first proper full-length, appears courtesy of the new Coup d'Etat label and has the potential to break this rowdy rapper equal parts KRS One and Guru. Also boasting DJ and producer credits, Akrobatik has worked with impressive peers such as Afu Ra, Fakts One, the legendary Diamond D and Mr. Lif, who makes a stellar cameo on *Balance*. From the heavy stomp of "Hypocrite" to the closing "Here and Now," Akrobatik displays a strong sense of consciousness usually sharing ink with Talib Kweli ("Woman III"), while maintaining a smirk-worthy, LL approach ("Always Bet on AK").



# TRIPLE THREAT DJS

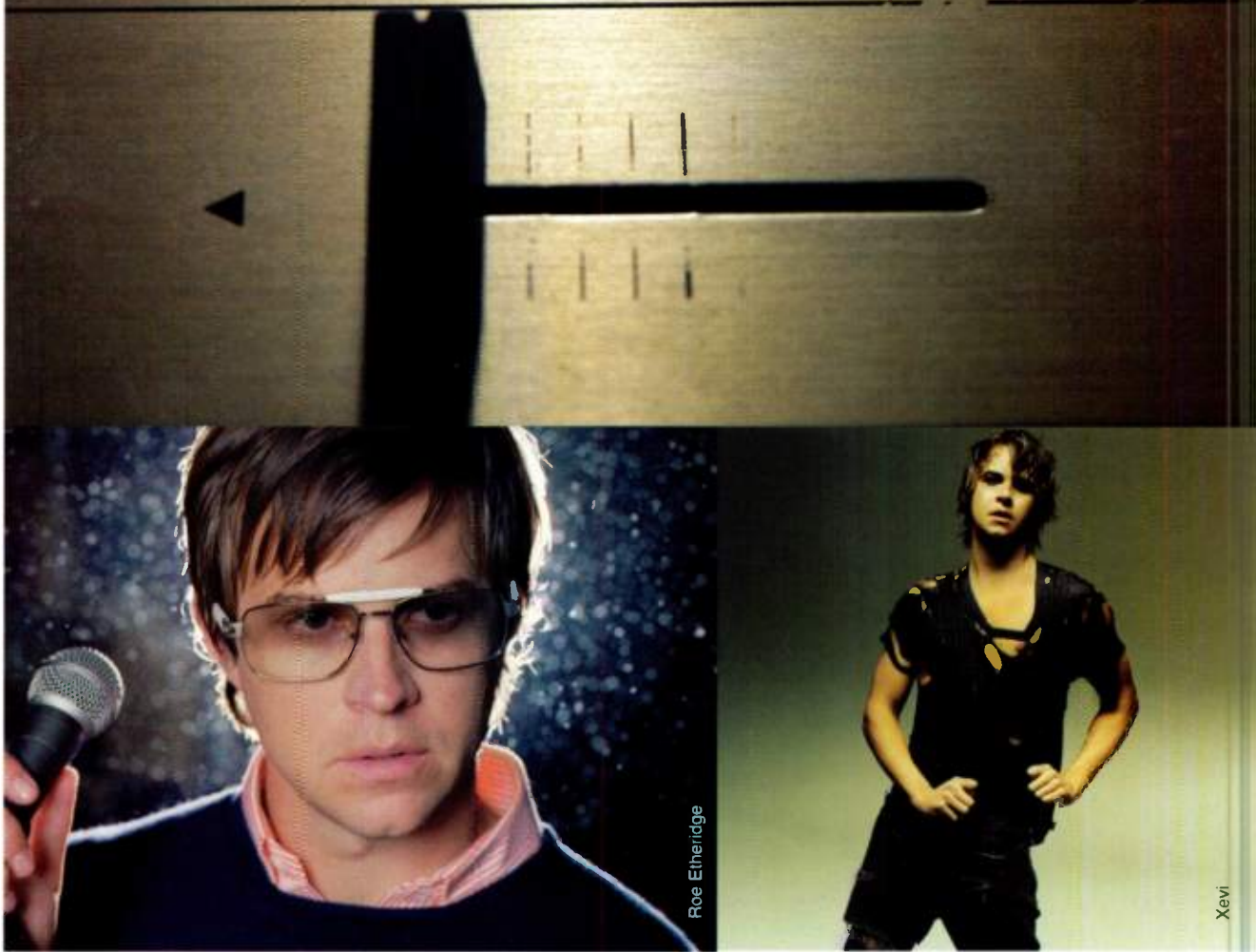
San Francisco's Triple Threat attempts to re-invent the role of the DJ, merging several styles and responsibilities of the trade to entertain and move the masses. DJs Apollo, Shortkut (both of the Invisibl Skratch Piklz) and Vinroc switch records and samples faster than a speed freak clicks his TV remote, pulling out everything from Wu Tang to *The Big Lebowski* to squeeze into their danceable, party jams. The Threat's latest record, *Many Styles*, appears courtesy of Fat Beats (yes, the same people with the bangin' record store) and features cameos from Talib Kweli, Main Flow, Black Thought (The Roots), Planet Asia, Souls of Mischief and ("damn, i wish wasn't such a wimp") Pharcyde. While *Many Styles* makes for a convincing souvenir, Triple Threat's live sets and radio sessions deliver better than any hype man, water bottle, towel around the neck and all.



Trisha Leeper



## CROSS FADER



### Reeeally, Reeeally, Reeeally Ridiculously Good Looking by Gordon Downs

With a heavy dose of Kraftwerk and hint of performance art, Fischerspooner has become the toast of the town with its major label debut *#1*. Known for its over-the-top stage productions and ornate stage outfits made by some of New York's most prestigious designers has certainly lent itself to Fischerspooner's rise to the top of the both the art and musical communities in its native New York and the world.

The music created by Fischerspooner is certainly some of the most engaging music to be spewed out by any electronic artist today. The group takes its namesake very simply from the last names of the group's figurehead—Warren Fischer and Casey Spooner. Meeting while attending art school in Chicago during the late '90s, the duo relocated to New York shortly thereafter. Fischer is the man behind the hypnotic beats, while Spooner dishes out the onstage antics and makes the rounds as the dance world's new "it" boy.

With Fischerspooner defining the line between what can be described as performance art and music (the group has added 12 dancers to its roster since inception,) the man behind the music, Warren Fischer seems to sum it up best.

"The way I look at it is I think we make rock music with electronic instruments," he explains from his Big Apple home. "I like to categorize it as digital rock maybe? Techno is pretty straightforward—there aren't a lot of dynamic shifts and it's a little bit more repetitive than our music is.

Our music definitely has repetitive elements, but they tend to be put together in more of a rock song format."

With his musical roots stretching from classical violin to hardcore punk, it's quite evident Fischer is the musical force behind the juggernaut of beats found on *#1*.

"The record was primarily done with a computer," Fischer deadpans. "I was learning the technology as I was making the record."

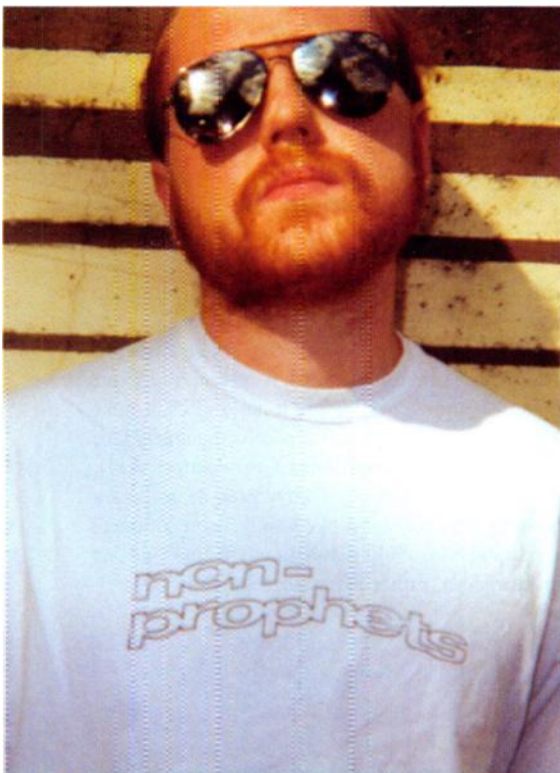
While Fischer may be the impresario of the duo, it is the charismatic Casey Spooner who is the spirit of the group. Though not available for comment, Fischer gave these kind words on his cohort's behalf.

"He's a very frustrated, angry person, and he has chosen to express that through this one-man assault on pop entertainment."

Originally released by Gigolo Records in 2001, it took two years and an ocean for *#1* to finally see a release stateside, and with the industry buzz rising, Fischerspooner seems to have hit a grand slam on its first swing at the plate. With its music invading the globe, and a North American tour poised for the spring, Fischerspooner are riding this wave of mutilation all the way to the top. When asked how he's responding to the onslaught of publicity his creation has garnered, Fischer responds with a casual breeze.

"I'm letting it feed right into my megalomania, and I feel like I'm a notch below God at this point." ■





## SOLE

To describe Sole as one of anticon's more accessible artists is sort of like saying *Gravity's Rainbow* is more straightforward than *Ulysses*. Still, compared to the unnerving collage style of peers like cLOUDDEAD's Odd Nosedam, Sole's oh-I-could-maybe-dance-to-that groove can come as a welcome respite. Having founded his own indie label by the age of 15, Sole founded an online radio station in the mid-'90s, launching anticon as a force in new music. After releasing the controversial *Hip Hop Music for the Advanced Listener* EP, the New England-native left the East Coast hoping to transcend narrow-minded audiences—much of the anticon collective soon followed. His last album, *Bottle of Humans*, eschewed the rules and conventions of even the indie hip hop. Sole's new full-length, *Selling Live Water*, begins with a scathing scrap where the MC delivers intensity, suspending judgment over potentially disastrous lines like "I wanted to be black at 15" and "the white man is the devil." There might not be a definable Anticon sound, but it's agreed Sole is a good place to start.

ANTICON  
Jel  
Sole  
Pedestrian  
Odd Nosedam  
Why  
Alias  
Doseone  
Passage

"Comprised of eight gentlemen involved both individually and in small groups with recording, performing, writing and unlearning art at large, anticon is a label for a movement. Bound by eight brands of genre defiance, the anticon family along with a handful of coworker cousins have been amassing an archetypal work ethic for the past five years, while allowing their respective aesthetics to grow separately and influence one another."



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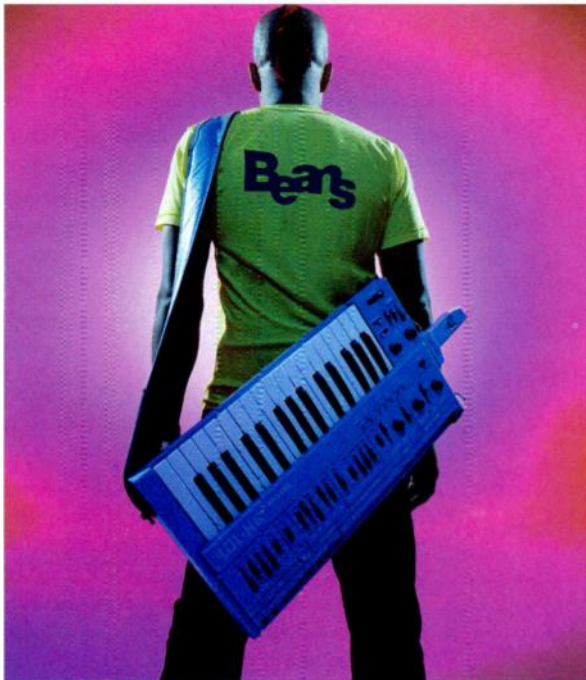
## ODD NOSDAM

If Born Again\$t were a noisy hip hop collage artist, Odd Nosedam might be *Nine Patriotic Ballads*. With a dirty, often violent sound aesthetic and an absurdist approach to content, the man behind cLOUDDEAD brings together a visceral pastiche of infomercials, radio clips, distorted snares and sound effects on his latest album, *No More Wig for Ohio*. Drawing influence from everything from Stereolab and Flying Saucer Attack to Prince Paul, Nosedam separates his third full-length into two movements, starting aggressively abstract and closing with a passionately alienated storm of filth, fury and dedication.



# BEANS

Kid 'N Play, King Kong and Cheap Trick's Rick Nielsen taught us all an important lesson—if you're going to look really silly, you need to be able to throw down. The cover of Beans' *Tommorow Right Now* depicts the artist in snowboarding/ Space Man Spiff shades behind a bold, Venus-sunrise-style backdrop, sporting a Thomas Dolby-approved frontal fauxhawk on an otherwise bic'd head. Luckily, this former Antipop Consortium MC earns the rights to so outlandish a look. While much of the indie hip hop scene still feels the loss of APC, Beans' solo debut continues in the group's tradition, fusing left-of-center lyricism with nostalgic, '80s-influenced drum tones and click-tight beats. *Tommorow* provides plenty to soothe the lonely fan, while Consortium's E. Blaize donates production skills. Those not familiar with APC need only know Beans blazes a very different path than one is likely to hear on commercial radio, naming Sam Prekop and Jim O'Rourke on his collaboration wishlist, rather than Cormega or J-Lo.



# JAZZANOVA

Formed in 1996, the DJ collective known as Jazzanova, is made up of six talented Berliners, each representing his own flavorful style, together having worked with luminaries such as Ursula Rucker and King Britt. While the 'Nova scored national attention with its 1998 debut EP, *Caravelle*, its following outside of Germany was relegated to diehards and bear addicts. The group's recent debut album, *In Between*, took more than five years to write and record, though most listeners agree it's worth the wait. Already, they say they're already hard at work on a follow-up to this first full serving of the collective's deep, jazz-influenced grooves, drawing voraciously from the oft-overlooked corners of drum 'n bass, house and hip hop.

# J-LIVE

The fact J-Live's most recent album, *All of the Above*, came and went without winning a shitload of awards is a harsh indictment of the so-called pundits. Capitalizing on the creative common ground between Common and the Hieroglyphics crew, this New York school teacher produced an album of astounding insight, humor, depth and groove, including cultural anchors like "One for the Griot" alongside radical, post-Patriot Act burners like "Satisfied." Clever interludes reminiscent of Tribe or Black Sheep ("I'm a Rapper") demonstrate J-Live's stunning clarity of vision from the trenches, having survived label woes surrounding the official release of his debut album before finding a home with Coup d'Etat.

# TOMMY GUERRERO

When Tommy Guerrero gained a cultish following in the '80s, it wasn't for his music, but rather as a member of the now legendary Bones Brigade team assembled by Powell Peralta. The team, quickly gained a reputation for its aggressive and ruggedly individualistic style, qualities Guerrero has used to fuel the launch of his own skate company (REAL) and an impressive career in music. After a 2000 debut on Mo' Wax (DJ Shadow, UNKLE), he now offers *Soul Food*—required summer listening—fusing elements of jazz, stripped-down blues, Latin rhythms and the chilliest of hip hop. Artwork by ESPO, no less.

# MS. KITTIN

Known well around the United Kingdom for her work with Felix Da Housecat and Goldenboy, Miss Kittin (born Caroline Herve) got her start as a techno DJ around Europe. Luckily, the same wide variety enriching those club sets informs much of her first commercially available full-length, *Radio Caroline*. The album, appearing courtesy of Emperor Norton, opens with a vocal introduction from Herve—echoed later as a segue between songs—where the artist expounds on life and good times, most of which make for terrific opportunities to test the "Skip Ahead" button on any CD player. Contributions from Delarosa & Asora (aka Scott Herron, aka Prefuse 73), Conrad Black and Autechre add to Herve's infectious selections, while emailed testimonials from scenesters and perverts in the liner notes maintain a special, Happy-Graduation-Pet-the-Seal mood.





elephant



## THE WHITE STRIPES

WATCH OUT,  
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## Elephant

It's always exciting to break the news about a truly unique, under-the-radar band free from all the hype of the flavor-of-the-month music biz. The White Stripes are apparently a Detroit duo, boldly attempting to rekindle some of the old Motor City spirit, and—get this!—they're brother and sister! In a time when the rest of the rock flock, both in the mainstream and underground, haven't even considered drawing influence from stripped down, garage-styled glory days, the White Stripes are prepared to don the stole of musical vanguards with their sophomore album, *Elephant*. Named after a popular animal with a long trunk and a wrinkly butt, this latest release from these newcomers continues the bluesy, guitar-driven yowls found on its Sympathy for the Record Industry output. While the album's opener only partially excites, midway through *Elephant*, the cheeky siblings, Meg and Jack, start to inject melody and grit with stronger staying power, such as on the Divinyls-inspired "I Don't Know What to Do With Myself." While the brother-sister combo, two-piece lineup and trademark duochrome aesthetic might help set this new band apart, one can't help but wonder how the Stripes will fare in such a hype-driven rat race without some kind of buzz.

—Mike McKee

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### FOR FANS OF:

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◀ RATINGS ▶



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YR STYLE IS SO-SO



MMM, PUSH ON



MAKE IT STOP!

UNDER THE RADAR

BECAUSE IT ROCKS!



**T. REX** *Electric Warrior*

Long before "20th Century Boy" soundtracked a car commercial, Britain's T. Rex kept company with David Bowie as the reigning kings of '70s glam rock. Lead by the flamboyant Marc Bolan—whose gender-bending tenor perfectly showcased his whimsical, often nonsensical lyrics—T. Rex's mellow psychedelia mixed with soul/funk grooves and blues guitar defined the glam era with classics like "Bang a Gong" and "Jeepster." Last year saw the release of *T. Rex: Ultimate Collection—20th Century Boy*, commemorating the 25th anniversary of Bolan's early death in a 1977 car crash. Now Rhino records follows suit with a re-mastered, expanded version of 1971's classic release, *Electric Warrior*. In much the way *Billion Dollar Babies* showcases the legendary

Alice Cooper band at its creative apex, so *Electric Warrior* stands as almost a greatest hits collection, including both "Bang a Gong" and "Jeepster," along with favorites like the cryptic protest song, "Rip Off" and the eerily prescient "Cosmic Dancer"—a song about reincarnation on which Bolan sings, "I danced myself into the tomb/Is it strange to dance so soon?" Seven added bonus tracks include a 20-minute interview with Bolan, which alone is worth the album's price. *Electric Warrior's* re-release—complete with extensive historical liner notes and photos—also serves to honor the recent passing of original T. Rex percussionist Mickey Finn. Gone but never forgotten, the "20th Century Boy's" legend lives. —Gail Worley



**COBRA VERDE** *Easy Listening*

A few years back, Cleveland's Cobra Verde, along with Seattle's The Makers, belonged to a short-lived glam rock revival movement which, sadly, seemed to pass without ever actually happening. Cobra Verde's vocalist/guitarist/visionary John Petkovic was probably schooled in the ways of rock by bands like T. Rex and Alice Cooper, if 2001's astounding, critically lauded *Night Life* was any indication. *Night Life's* much-anticipated follow-up, *Easy Listening*, on Wayne Kramer's MuscleTone Records, finds the band refocusing its sound with an emphasis on rock over glam, though the boys still flaunt a love for camp and cabaret ("Your Pretty Face"). At least as much of a cerebral smart ass as Ray Davies, Petkovic's knack for sardonic lyri-

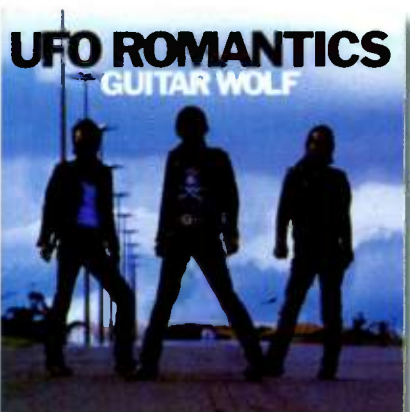
cal fatalism is all over this excellent album. Dig the anthemic energy behind the self-deprecating masterpiece, "My Name is Nobody," and feel yourself compelled to sing along to an exuberant chorus of "Whores" — "Do you think we're whores in the making?" But please don't overlook the moody closing track, "Don't Worry (The Law's Gonna Break You)," where the singer tosses out the line "When hopes are high/I'll bring them down for you," in an almost comforting manner. For a record so thoroughly drenched in mid-to-late-'70s rock sensibilities (the band could have used The Kinks' *Schoolboys in Disgrace* as a template), Cobra Verde still sounds suspiciously like the future of rock to those who are paying attention. —Gail Worley



**THE SUPERSUCKERS** *Motherfuckers Be Trippin'*

Stoner rock has had its day, and garage rock bands like The Hives, The Strokes and The Vines appeal to fickle music trendoids who change their tastes for the Band of the Day like they change underwear. With their unique "Ramones trip over The Beatles at a Motorhead concert" approach to rock, the Supersuckers have kept a low profile lately, observing the state of rock and reporting back with their findings. The power chord-loving quartets' latest, *Motherfuckers Be Trippin'*, on the band's own Mid-Fi Recordings, opens with Eddie Spaghetti's concise take on the state of the record industry throughout the past decade—"Rock-N-Roll Records (Ain't Sellin' This Year)." From there, just take

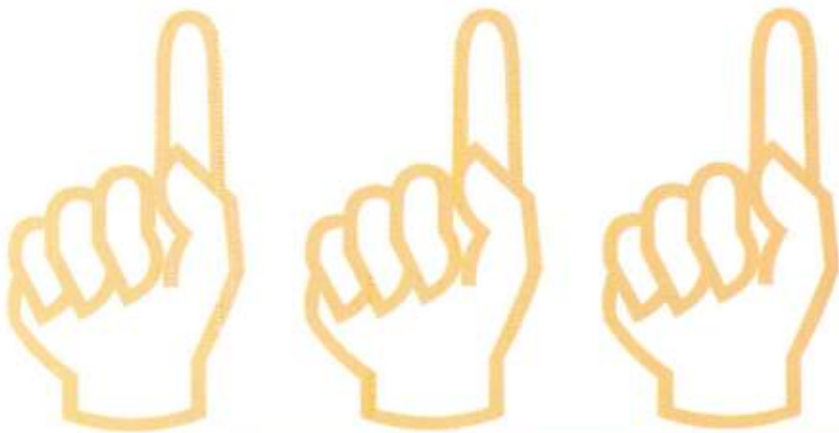
a look at these song titles (and sample lyrics), which read like a combination tour diary/manifesto for rock world domination—"Rock Your Ass" ("Grab a drink and chugalug/have some sex and take some drugs"), "Bubblægum and Beer" ("...popularity and profit/isn't why I'm here...") "Nowhere Special" ("I always wanted to go there") and "Some Day I Will Kill You." Clearly, Supersuckers have no hidden agenda. Rumor has it the newly reformed Jane's Addiction will take an all-rock version of Lollapalooza back on the road for the Summer of 2003. In the meantime, *Motherfuckers Be Trippin'* proves Supersuckers are the rock band to beat at kicking the ass of the world. —Gail Worley



**GUITAR WOLF** *UFO Romantics*

When I was at a local college radio station, a DJ used Guitar Wolf's last album as a doorstop so he could run to his car long enough to roll a joint. Later the same year, my friends came home from a horror movie nerd convention estatic over their big score—a VHS-compatible copy of an obscure Japanese B-movie with cult status. The film, *Wild Zero*, revolves around the Yakuza (the Japanese mob) being hounded by flesh-eating zombies and coke-addled rock club promoters. There's even the obligatory love-related side plot in which a young rocker is reminded "love knows no boundaries or sexes" and consequently makes out with a cute tranny. Providing this we're-not-that-different

council is a rock band who goes on to kill all the zombies with a lethal combination of garage rock and guns. The band, of course, is Guitar Wolf. Embodying wreckless, rebelling-against-anything-you've-got attitude, this leather-jacketed trio from the land of the rising sun proves the denim industry is a still a safe investment. While Americans seem to have largely forgotten about the occasional need for pill-popping motorcycle rock, the Wolf keeps its collar up and its hair perfect 24-7. The title track is pretty cliché Johnny Thunders, but tracks like "Zaa Zaa Asphalt" and "Jett Beer" keep the engines revving. "Ace is-a numba one!!!" —Mike McKee



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# elephant

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**NATE ASHLEY**  
THE DARKER CORNERS OF YOUR HEART

*The Darker Corners of Your Heart* marks Nate Ashley's fourth album, and yet this Olympia, Wash., native remains little more than a blip on today's musical radar. This could change quickly, however, if he is able to continue creating songs as enjoyable as those in this batch, and do so with such ease. Ashley meshes a slew of classic sounds, from folk, to pop, to rock, sometimes even with a bit of a seductive, Spanish feel. From the simple melodies to the layered extras (like violin and singing saw), the textures work together nicely. The result is a lush and soulful album sliding into the ear so smoothly, it's fit for fans of all genres. ([www.left-handedlabel.com](http://www.left-handedlabel.com))

—Eddie Fournier

**ADAM BRODSKY**  
HOOKERS, NICKS & HEEBS

The bluegrass, folk and protest songs on this album are certainly proficient, but with it all built around Brodsky's humor, it's a love it or hate it affair. Tracks like the country swing tune "Rejection"

are hilarious, but somehow the whole record leaves listeners feeling less inspired than when basking in the light of comics like Momus or Ween. Often, the less stellar moments revolve around the divergence from Brodsky's best genre—personal antifolk. "Thank You" is still one of the greatest antifolk narratives, a beautifully rambling comic tirade. (Permanent, 505 South St., 3rd Floor, Philadelphia 19147)

—Charles Spano

**BROKEBACK**  
LOOKS AT THE BIRD

With Brokeback's *Looks at the Bird*, Doug McCombs distills the broad, utopian city plans he drew up with Tortoise into a calming, spiraling work of bucolic textures, electro-acoustic folk, disintegrating static and warm, woody grooves. If *Standards* is the perfect urban wonderland of the future, then tracks like "Name's Winston, Friends Call Me James" prove *Looks at the Bird* to be some far-off tomorrow's return to nature. Including covers of Tortoise's "The

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"NATURAL SELECTION"

SLEEP STATION  
"HANG IN THERE CHARLIE"

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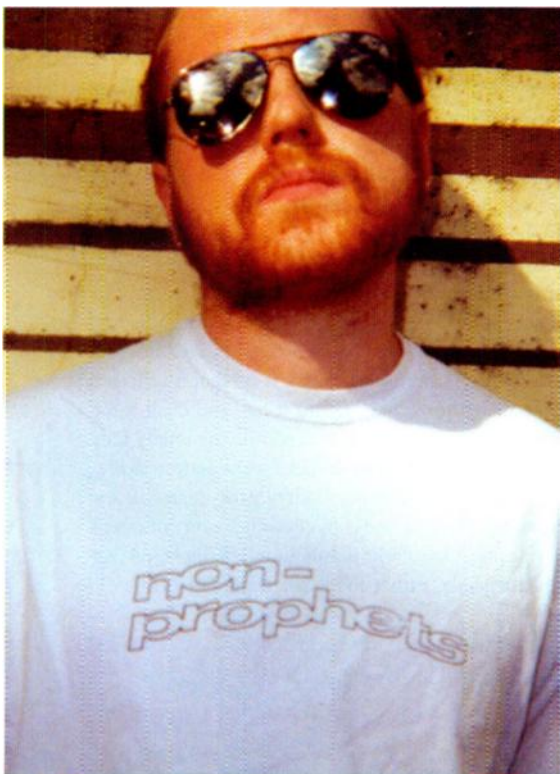
THIS ALBUM IS CALLED WISH AND WAIT

ALSO AVAILABLE:

THE KILLING TREE  
"WE SING SIN"

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE  
"I BROUGHT YOU MY BULLETS,  
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ZOLO OF THE ROCK AND ROLL  
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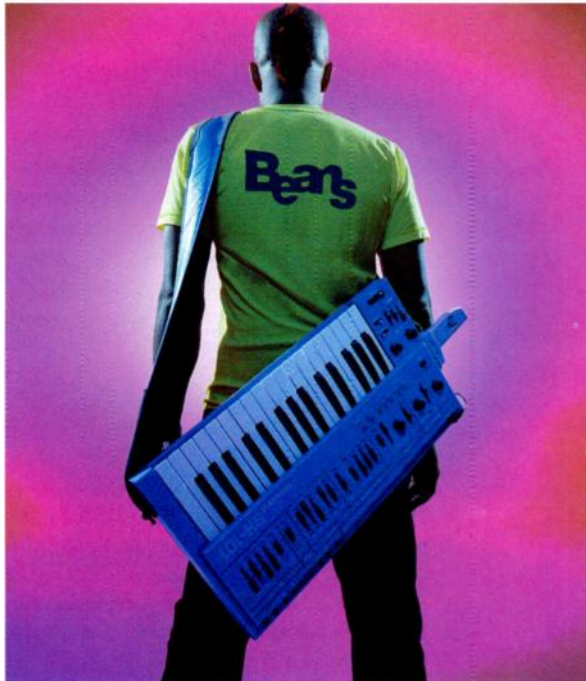
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Formed in 1996, the DJ collective known as Jazzanova, is made up of six talented Berliners, each representing his own flavorful style, together having worked with luminaries such as Ursula Rucker and King Britt. While the 'Nova scored national attention with its 1998 debut EP, *Caravelle*, its following outside of Germany was relegated to diehards and beat addicts. The group's recent debut album, *In Between*, took more than five years to write and record, though most listeners agree it's worth the wait. Already, they say they're already hard at work on a follow-up to this first full serving of the collective's deep, jazz-influenced grooves, drawing voraciously from the oft-overlooked corners of drum 'n bass, house and hip hop.

# J-LIVE

The fact J-Live's most recent album, *All of the Above*, came and went without winning a shitload of awards is a harsh indictment of the so-called pundits. Capitalizing on the creative common ground between Common and the Hieroglyphics crew, this New York school teacher produced an album of astounding insight, humor, depth and groove, including cultural anchors like "One for the Griot" alongside radical, post-Patriot Act burners like "Satisfied." Clever interludes reminiscent of Tribe or Black Sheep ("I'm a Rapper") demonstrate J-Live's stunning clarity of vision from the trenches, having survived label woes surrounding the official release of his debut album before finding a home with Coup d'Etat.

# TOMMY GUERRERO

When Tommy Guerrero gained a cultish following in the '80s, it wasn't for his music, but rather as a member of the now legendary Bones Brigade team assembled by Powell Peralta. The team, quickly gained a reputation for its aggressive and ruggedly individualistic style, qualities Guerrero has used to fuel the launch of his own skate company (REAL) and an impressive career in music. After a 2000 debut on Mo' Wax (DJ Shadow, UNKLE), he now offers *Soul Food*—required summer listening—fusing elements of jazz, stripped-down blues, Latin rhythms and the chilliest of hip hop. Artwork by ESPO, no less.

# MS. KITTIN

Known well around the United Kingdom for her work with Felix Da Housecat and Goldenboy, Miss Kittin (born Caroline Herve) got her start as a techno DJ around Europe. Luckily, the same wide variety enriching those club sets informs much of her first commercially available full-length, *Radio Caroline*. The album, appearing courtesy of Emperor Norton, opens with a vocal introduction from Herve—echoed later as a segue between songs—where the artist expounds on life and good times, most of which make for terrific opportunities to test the "Skip Ahead" button on any CD player. Contributions from Delarosa & Asora (aka Scott Herron, aka Prefuse 73), Conrad Black and Autechre add to Herve's infectious selections, while emailed testimonials from scenesters and perverts in the liner notes maintain a special, Happy-Graduation-Pet-the-Seal mood.







## THE WHITE STRIPES

WATCH OUT,  
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## Elephant

# elephant

It's always exciting to break the news about a truly unique, under-the-radar band free from all the hype of the flavor-of-the-month music biz. The White Stripes are apparently a Detroit duo, boldly attempting to rekindle some of the old Motor City spirit, and—get this!—they're brother and sister! In a time when the rest of the rock flock, both in the mainstream and underground, haven't even considered drawing influence from stripped down, garage-styled glory days, the White Stripes are prepared to don the stole of musical vanguards with their sophomore album, *Elephant*. Named after a popular animal with a long trunk and a wrinkly butt, this latest release from these newcomers continues the bluesy, guitar-driven yowls found on its Sympathy for the Record Industry output. While the album's opener only partially excites, midway through *Elephant*, the cheeky siblings, Meg and Jack, start to inject melody and grit with stronger staying power, such as on the Divinyls-inspired "I Don't Know What to Do With Myself." While the brother-sister combo, two-piece lineup and trademark duochrome aesthetic might help set this new band apart, one can't help but wonder how the Stripes will fare in such a hype-driven rat race without some kind of buzz.

—Mike McKee

### TRACK LISTING

01. Seven Nation Army
02. Black Math
03. There's No Home For You Here
04. I Just Don't Know What to Do With Myself
05. In The Cold, Cold Night
06. I Want to Be the Boy...
07. You've Got Her In Your Pocket
08. Ball and Biscuit
09. The Hardest Button to Button
10. Little Acorns
11. Hypnotise
12. The Air Near My Fingers
13. Girl, You Have No Faith in Medicine
14. It's True That We Love One Another

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**MATE ASHLEY**  
THE DARKER CORNERS OF YOUR HEART

*The Darker Corners of Your Heart* marks Nate Ashley's fourth album, and yet this Olympia, Wash., native remains little more than a blip on today's musical radar. This could change quickly, however, if he is able to continue creating songs as enjoyable as those in this batch, and do so with such ease. Ashley meshes a slew of classic sounds, from folk, to pop, to rock, sometimes even with a bit of a seductive, Spanish feel. From the simple melodies to the layered extras (like violin and singing saw), the textures work together nicely. The result is a lush and soulful album sliding into the ear so smoothly, it's fit for fans of all genres. ([www.left-handedlabel.com](http://www.left-handedlabel.com))

—Eddie Fournier

**ADAM BRODSKY**  
HOOKERS, HICKS & HEEBS

The bluegrass, folk and protest songs on this album are certainly proficient, but with it all built around Brodsky's humor, it's a love it or hate it affair. Tracks like the country swing tune "Rejection"

are hilarious, but somehow the whole record leaves listeners feeling less inspired than when basking in the light of comics like Momus or Ween. Often, the less stellar moments revolve around the divergence from Brodsky's best genre—personal antfolk. "Thank You" is still one of the greatest antfolk narratives, a beautifully rambling comic tirade. (Permanent, 505 South St., 3rd Floor, Philadelphia 19147)

—Charles Spano

**BROKEBACK**  
LOOKS AT THE BIRD

With *Brokeback's Looks at the Bird*, Doug McCombs distills the broad, utopian city plans he drew up with Tortoise into a calming, spiraling work of bucolic textures, electro-acoustic folk, disintegrating static and warm, woody grooves. If *Standards* is the perfect urban wonderland of the future, then tracks like "Name's Winston, Friends Call Me James" prove *Looks at the Bird* to be some far-off tomorrow's return to nature. Including covers of Tortoise's "The

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"I BROUGHT YOU MY BULLETS,  
YOU BROUGHT ME YOUR LOVE"

**ZOLO OF THE ROCK AND ROLL DESTROYER**  
"JALOPY GO FAR"

Suspension Bridge at Iguazu Falls" and Walter Schumann's "Pearl's Dream" from *Night of the Hunter*, this album is a true curiosity. Vocals from Stereolab's Laetitia Sadier and Mary Hansen (one the last albums to which she contributed) on a few tracks including the Brazilian-sounding "In the Reeds" add a dreamy, albeit sad layer to an album ready to fly away if listeners aren't careful to tether it to the ground. **(Thrill Jockey, Box 08038, Chicago 60608)**

—Charles Spano

**STEVE CABALLERO**  
BANDOLGY, VOLUME ONE

Some people are lawyers, some people are firemen. Lawyers are bad at putting fires out and firemen are bad at defending clients. Steve Caballero is a skater, but luckily he makes a smoother transfer into the realm of punk musicianship. *Bandology* is a compilation of four of Caballero's various bands from the past. Fraction will always enjoy cult status among skater punks worldwide, often mentioned reverently in the same

breath as heroes like JFA and Code of Honor. Caballero's post-Fraction endeavors fail to impress on so high a level—Odd Man Out sounds like disarming goth punk, Shovelhead doles out slow, melodic '80s hardcore. In classic, all's-well-that-ends-well fashion, however, Cab comes correct to wrap it up with Soda, an energetic, pop-punk vessel reminiscent of Tilt. For those without the Bones Brigade-era skate-punk history (or sympathy), Soda is clearly the shining star of this new CD. **(Sessions)**

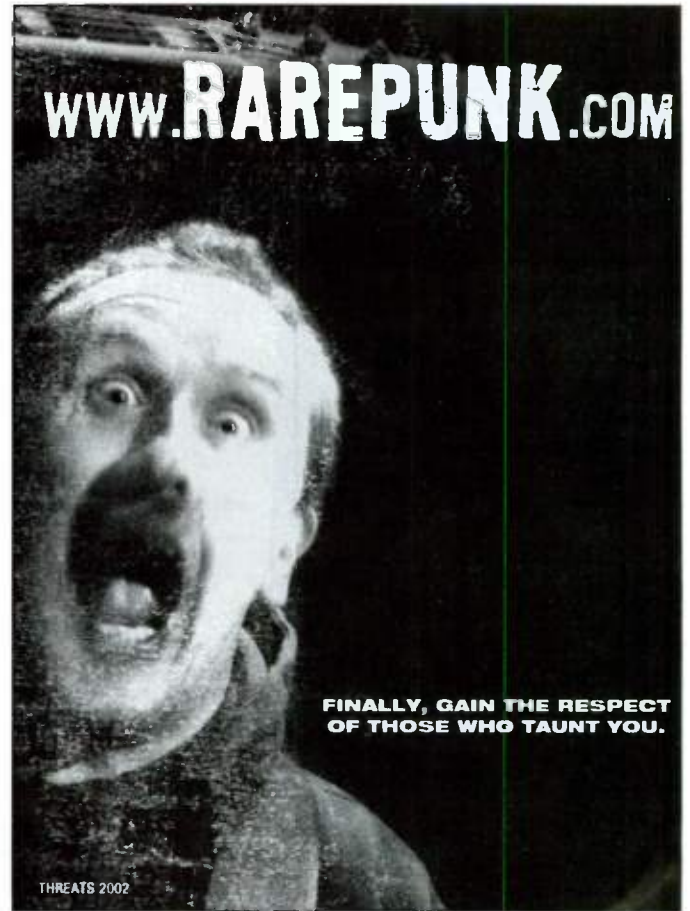
—Beau Brendley

**CROOKED FINGERS**  
RED DEVIL DAWN

Crooked Fingers is the brainchild of former Archers of Loaf frontman Eric Bachmann, who has been compared to everyone from Nick Drake to Leonard Cohen to Tom Waits. Crooked Fingers rejects the chaotic pop of Bachmann's previous band for a melancholy singer-songwriter approach, as his throaty crooning spins tales of desperation, survival and

continued on page 47 >>

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**T. REX** *Electric Warrior*

Long before "20th Century Boy" soundtracked a car commercial, Britain's T. Rex kept company with David Bowie as the reigning kings of '70s glam rock. Lead by the flamboyant Marc Bolan—whose gender-bending tenor perfectly showcased his whimsical, often nonsensical lyrics—T. Rex's mellow psychedelia mixed with soul/funk grooves and blues guitar defined the glam era with classics like "Bang a Gong" and "Jeepster." Last year saw the release of *T. Rex: Ultimate Collection—20th Century Boy*, commemorating the 25th anniversary of Bolan's early death in a 1977 car crash. Now Rhino records follows suit with a re-mastered, expanded version of 1971's classic release, *Electric Warrior*. In much the way *Billion Dollar Babies* showcases the legendary

Alice Cooper band at its creative apex, so *Electric Warrior* stands as almost a greatest hits collection, including both "Bang a Gong" and "Jeepster," along with favorites like the cryptic protest song, "Rip Off" and the eerily prescient "Cosmic Dancer"—a song about reincarnation on which Bolan sings, "I danced myself into the tomb/Is it strange to dance so soon?" Seven added bonus tracks include a 20-minute interview with Bolan, which alone is worth the album's price. *Electric Warrior's* re-release—complete with extensive historical liner notes and photos—also serves to honor the recent passing of original T. Rex percussionist Mickey Finn. Gone but never forgotten, the "20th Century Boy's" legend lives.

— Gail Worley



**COBRA VERDE** *Easy Listening*

A few years back, Cleveland's Cobra Verde, along with Seattle's The Makers, belonged to a short-lived glam rock revival movement which, sadly, seemed to pass without ever actually happening. Cobra Verde's vocalist/guitarist/visionary John Petkovic was probably schooled in the ways of rock by bands like T. Rex and Alice Cooper, if 2001's astounding, critically lauded *Night Life* was any indication. *Night Life's* much-anticipated follow-up, *Easy Listening*, on Wayne Kramer's MuscleTone Records, finds the band refocusing its sound with an emphasis on rock over glam, though the boys still flaunt a love for camp and cabaret ("Your Pretty Face"). At least as much of a cerebral smart ass as Ray Davies, Petkovic's knack for sardonic lyri-

cal fatalism is all over this excellent album. Dig the anthemic energy behind the self-deprecating masterpiece, "My Name is Nobody," and feel yourself compelled to sing along to an exuberant chorus of "Whores" —"Do you think we're whores in the making?" But please don't overlook the moody closing track, "Don't Worry (The Law's Gonna Break You)," where the singer tosses out the line "When hopes are high/I'll bring them down for you," in an almost comforting manner. For a record so thoroughly drenched in mid-to-late-'70s rock sensibilities (the band could have used The Kinks' *Schoolboys in Disgrace* as a template), Cobra Verde still sounds suspiciously like the future of rock to those who are paying attention.

— Gail Worley

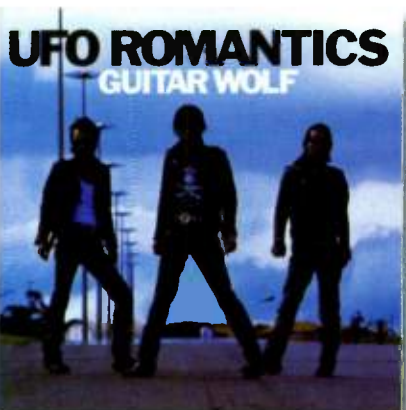


**THE SUPERSUCKERS** *Motherfuckers Be Trippin'*

Stoner rock has had its day, and garage rock bands like The Hives, The Strokes and The Vines appeal to fickle music trendoids who change their tastes for the Band of the Day like they change underwear. With their unique "Ramones trip over The Beatles at a Motorhead concert" approach to rock, the Supersuckers have kept a low profile lately, observing the state of rock and reporting back with their findings. The power chord-loving quartets' latest, *Motherfuckers Be Trippin'*, on the band's own Mid-Fi Recordings, opens with Eddie Spaghetti's concise take on the state of the record industry throughout the past decade—"Rock-N-Roll Records (Ain't Sellin' This Year)." From there, just take

a look at these song titles (and sample lyrics), which read like a combination tour diary/manifesto for rock world domination—"Rock Your Ass" ("Grab a drink and chugalug/have some sex and take some drugs"), "Bubbegum and Beer" ("...popularity and profit/isn't why I'm here...") "Nowhere Special" ("I always wanted to go there") and "Some Day I Will Kill You." Clearly, Supersuckers have no hidden agenda. Rumor has it the newly reformed Jane's Addiction will take an all-rock version of Lollapalooza back on the road for the Summer of 2003. In the meantime, *Motherfuckers Be Trippin'* proves Supersuckers are the rock band to beat at kicking the ass of the world.

— Gail Worley



**GUITAR WOLF** *UFO Romantics*

When I was at a local college radio station, a DJ used Guitar Wolf's last album as a doorstop so he could run to his car long enough to roll a joint. Later the same year, my friends came home from a horror movie nerd convention ecstatic over their big score—a VHS-compatible copy of an obscure Japanese B-movie with cult status. The film, *Wild Zero*, revolves around the Yakuza (the Japanese mob) being hounded by flesh-eating zombies and coke-addled rock club promoters. There's even the obligatory love-related side plot in which a young rocker is reminded "love knows no boundaries or sexes" and consequently makes out with a cute tranny. Providing this we're-not-that-different

council is a rock band who goes on to kill all the zombies with a lethal combination of garage rock and guns. The band, of course, is Guitar Wolf. Embodying wreckless, rebelling-against-anything-you've-got attitude, this leather-jacketed trio from the land of the rising sun proves the denim industry is a still a safe investment. While Americans seem to have largely forgotten about the occasional need for pill-popping motorcycle rock, the Wolf keeps its collar up and its hair perfect 24-7. The title track is pretty cliché Johnny Thunders, but tracks like "Zaa Zaa Asphalt" and "Jett Beer" keep the engines revving. "Ace is a numba one!!!"

— Mike McKee

everything in between. This melancholy vibe paints pictures of characters you see every day but may not notice, and their stories are filled with intense and often heart-breaking emotion. But there also seems to be a faint glimmer of hope, with some sense of redemption buried beneath the layers of loss and pain. (Merge, P.O. Box 1235, Chapel Hill, NC 27514)

—Eddie Fournier

**THE CURSE**  
THE CURSE

Having seen this band a fair share of times in and around their hometown of Philadelphia, I was pleasantly surprised by this CD. It's much better than expected—in fact, it's quite good. Anyone with an affinity for up tempo melodic punk will not be disappointed with these six tracks. Besides a Kid Dynamite influence (not at all surprising due to principle song writer David Hause's long stint as a roadie with the band), there is also a vibe reminiscent of the early period Rancid (especially in the vocals) and an almost Oi/work-ing class lyrical theme ("April 15th,"

"Rankers and Rotters"). Brian McTer-nan does an excellent job twisting the knobs and getting a nice, crisp sound out of the foursome without sacrificing the any of the punk rock rawness. (Hellbent, P.O. Box 1529, Pt. Pleasant Beach, NJ 08742)

—Michael O'Brien

**THE ENGLISH SYSTEM**  
BANDED BLUE

Straddling the tinny, jangly chime of Beulah with the larger-than-life crunch of Superchunk, The English System balances its approach to the indie rock, Fender sound the way a Kung Fu master might balance tippy-toed on an upright lotus leaf. Fronted by the powerfully voxed Jessica Larrabee, this relatively new Philadelphia group comes to the table free of frills or gimmicks to offer a strong debut CD of guitar-driven, alter-native pop dodging the early-'90s default settings. Larrabee, who also adds some guitar to the mix, lends some strong definition to her band, at times invoking a less Starbucksy Natalie Merchant or a more Starbucksy Elizabeth Elmore (Sarge). "Faded Stained Glass" illustrates the work of a band not content to churn out It's a Shame About

**ERLEND OYE**

**Unrest**



Erlend Oye has released quiet and mesmerizing songs as one half of the Norwegian duo Kings of Convenience for over three years. On *Unrest*—Oye's first solo release—he steps it up a bit, adding electro-lounge beats and coy lyrics. The result is an album screaming "international jet-set" loud and clear. From the opening track, "Ghost Train" (a mass of retro-'80s blips and hollow vocals), to "The Talk" (a biting requiem for the bitter end of a relationship), Oye creates a record full of stripped down electronic bliss.

—Julie Gerstein

(Astral Werks)



**BETTER THAN AVERAGE**

Ray carbon copies, while the title track suggests The English System is aiming for more than mere zip code celebrity. (Limekiln, P.O. Box 4064, Philadelphia 19118)

—Denis Carey

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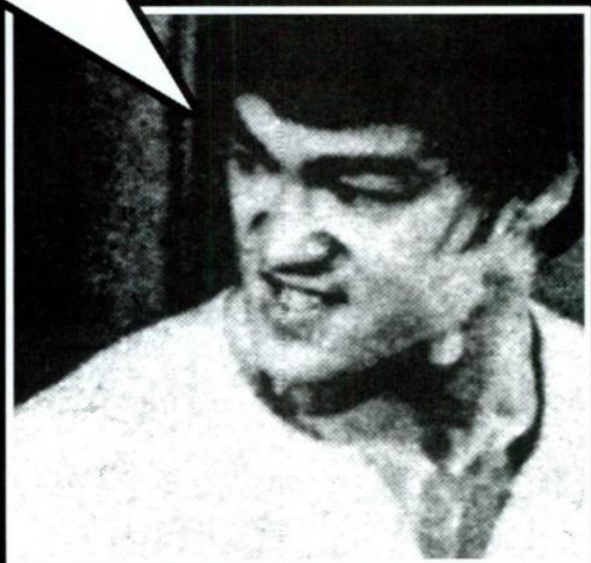
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Entrance, combines Zeppelin and blues legend Skip James (whose "I'm So Glad" is covered intensely and earnestly) into an off-kilter, one-guy-and-his-guitar masterpiece. Like the mind-boggling anti-folk genius Devendra Banhart, for whom Blakeslee has opened, Entrance sounds most like T. Rex—before the glam, conjuring up an epic and mythical acoustic world of green hills, lush valleys and ancient folklore. From the wicked and psychedelic "Valium Blues" to the haunting closer, "A Farewell to My Friends," Entrance's debut is alternately abysmal and hopeful, oppressive and sunny. It's a record truly deserving of the cliché measure—so good it hurts. (Tigerstyle, 401 Broadway, 26th Floor, New York 10013)

—Charles Spano

the vein of 7 Seconds with an attempt at Crucial Youth wit. It's fast, aggressive hardcore with anthemic singalongs and a drug-free message. Some of the heavy issues *Good Clean Fun* dares to address include the roles of women in hardcore ("Equal Rights Means Equal Hits"), sharing ("Who Shares Wins") and breaking your edge upon entering "Colledge." While the band is still active, this CD packages all of the glory days with John "Delve" Robinson on guitar. After leaving Good Clean Fun, Robinson moved to India to study Krishna consciousness. The last track on this compilation CD is an interview sadly lacking in relevancy. Overall, however, *Positively Positive* is a good discography worth buying. (Equal Vision, P.O. Box 14, Hudson, NY 12534)

—Beau Brendley



## GOOD CLEAN FUN POSITIVELY POSITIVE 1997-2002

This five-year-stretch anthology delivers 30 songs in alphabetical order resembling either a vegan straight-edge guide or a boy scout manual. These songs are written in



## GRAND MAL BAD TIMING

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mixing T. Rex and Mott the Hoople with a contemporary indie rock flair to make for an undeniable groove sure to get listeners on their feet. "1st Round K.O." is like Supergrass doing Bolan on its criminally underrated 2002 album, *Life on Other Planets*. The title track crosses Hunky Dory Bowie with Young Americans Bowie and "Quicksilver" actually sounds very much like Pavement. Grand Mal is the straight up rock band of 2003—better get with 'em before you're too late and then have to cop an attitude about 'em. (Arena Rock, 242 Wythe Avenue, Brooklyn 11211)

—Charles Spano

**HOLDING ON**  
QUESTION WHAT YOU LIVE FOR

This full-length starts off very strong with the impact of a Dr. Marten dental plan and a salt mouthwash chaser. This is fast, aggressive hardcore, too intelligent to be youth crew but lacking distracting metal accents. This record belongs on Bridge Nine, continuing their tradition of not-

sucky hardcore. The guitar work on the record is tight and vocals are angry, with the drumming pulling it all together. *Question What You Live For* belts out anthem after anthem of sing-alongs and lyrics of early adulthood angst. Fans of other Bridge Nine releases will not be disappointed. Keep an eye out for these guys—waves will be made. (Bridge Nine, P.O. Box 990052, Boston 02199-0052)

—Beau Brendley

**THE HOOKERS**  
THE HOOKERS

There is nothing better than straight up booze and drug-riddled rock 'n roll, and The Hookers provide it in spades. Sounding a lot like a clean and sober Delta 72, The Hookers' self-titled, eight-song debut is full of snarling vocals and soul-tight bass lines. On the first track, "What You Need," following a catchy-as-fuck guitar line, singer Spencer Moody kicks out the jams. "I'm not going to give

continued on page 51

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### MURS *The End of the Beginning*

There's always a fluke, a fly-by-night, a one-hit-wonder and a flavor-of-the-month—it's the nature of music. If you're looking for a quick, brilliant flash and then a quiet, unpublicized fade, usually the group or label with the most hype is the safe bet. Definitive Jux Records, however, has been holding court for quite some time now and shows no signs of slowing down. As if to prove they've yet to exhaust their tricks, the ponies of Def Jux have trotted out MURS. A former member of Los Angeles' Living Legends crew, this latest MC continues the label's tradition of pro-

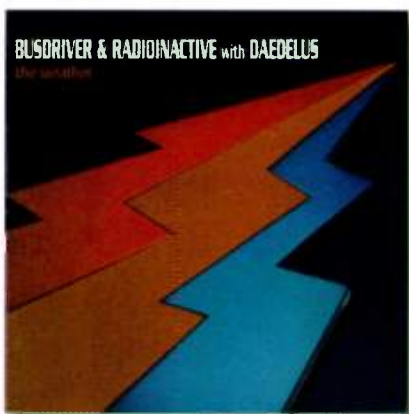
gressive hip hop with *The End of the Beginning*, the first West Coast offering from EL-P's imprint. "I Know" suggests Murs hasn't defected from the Left Coast style wise, while production on "The Dance" hints at classic EL-P beats. "Transitions of a Rider" shares the details of Murs' time as a skateboarder, while other songs weigh in with varying results. While discriminating heads might clamor most loudly for the new *God's Work* single, *The End of the Beginning* provides the best introduction to Murs' strong showing as a soloist. (Def Jux, [www.definitivejux.net](http://www.definitivejux.net))



### MOUSE ON MARS *Rost Pocks: The EP Collection*

The progressive duo of Andi Toma and Jan St. Werner has commanded a deep respect since debuting on the electronic music scene in 1993 with its impressive *Vulvaland*. Known for its German post-techno style, Mouse on Mars has made it a habit to draw from the works of Neu!, Can and—in nomine patri—Kraftwerk. What's always set the band apart, however, has been its will to dare, fusing a vast array of other resources into a strictly Mouse on Mars hybrid. To talk of labels is to whirl into a Calpyso-level vertigo, grabbing at clumsy terms

from free-jazz to jungle-trance to dub-post-pre-house-new-wave-rock. The schema is seamless, leaving much sought after singles like the opening "Frosch" and "Lazergum" all the more palatable to experienced and curious ears. While the band surely made a name for itself, even among come lately Yankee crowds, many of its singles, EPs and compilation tracks have huddled in obscurity. *Rost Pocks* seeks to shed light on the subject by gathering them all together. Yawl better recognize. (Beggars Group, 625, 12th Floor, New York 10012)



### BUSDRIVER AND RADIOINACTIVE WITH DAEDELUS *The Weather*

If MCs Busdriver and Radioinactive were applying for secretary jobs, they'd pretty much have the other applicants left out in the cold. The verbal WPM of these two is enough to make a rapping hummingbird dizzy. Not many hummingbirds rap, of course, as few have access to turntables and record shops. So, then, man must make the effort to take flight himself—thus, the aptly named Daedelus, whose production sets this duo (*The Weather*) apart from other motormouthed novelty acts. Colorful tracks such as "Fine for a Robot," "Break for 2300" and "Fizzling Energy Drink" boast a musical free association on

par with the seemingly scatterbrained flow of Busdriver and Radioinactive, topic-hopping across a wide thematic spectrum from the banal to the absurd. The tracks with cohesive themes, such as "Glorified Hype Man" suggest a message in this madness, but it would take a linguist on amphetamines to fully decipher the high-velocity content. While Mush might not yet be a household name (despite dropping Aesop Rock's debut), strong showings such as this, along with releases by Four Tet, cLouddead, Clue and Kalo will surely keep the name on hand. (Mush, [www.dirtyloop.com](http://www.dirtyloop.com))



### DJ SPOOKY *Dubtometry*

When I was in grade school, I remember concurrently listing future career goals to become a fireman, astronaut, animal doctor, international spy, racecar driver and—depending on the seasons—a ghost, pro-skateboarder and world renowned breakdancer. Tragically, few of us maintain such holistic ambition as we pass through the schools and factories of teen years. Instead of reaching for the stars with one hand while conducting a heart transplant with the other, we specialize. Of course, specialization is a good thing. The division of labor is a cornerstone of any civilization—remember social studies? Still, it's always impressive to witness an artist bucking this convention by charg-

ing multiple fronts with equal vigor. It's this renaissance man quality distinguishing DJ Spooky from the rest of the crowd as a first rate entertainer. On his new 17-song collection, *Dubtometry*, Spooky cuts left-of-center buzz with *Negativland* one minute, and then drops into a gritty, warm dub with Lee Perry himself the next. In between, he finds time to supply the foundation for J-Live on "Optometrix." Sadly, the final track credited as a collaboration with Animal Crackers does not, in fact, involve the obscure, New York hardcore band featuring ex-Citizens Arrest/Medicine Man. I guess diversity has its limits. (Thirsty Ear, [www.thirstyear.com](http://www.thirstyear.com))



you what you want," he snarls, "I'm going to give you what you need, and what you need is rock 'n roll." Surely an apt diagnosis. (DimMak, P.O. Box 348 Hollywood 90078)

—Julie Gerstein

**JOHN AND SPENCER  
BOOZE EXPLOSION**

**JOHN AND SPENCER BOOZE EXPLOSION**

Spencer Moody (Murder City Devils, Dead Low Tide) and John Atkins (764-Hero) have united to form the John and Spencer Booze Explosion, a goofy little project formed years ago but just now available to the music-buying masses. The group is rounded out by Joe Plummer (Black Heart Procession), Dann Galluci (Murder City Devils), Jim Roth (Built to Spill) and the ubiquitous Phil Ek. All six songs are covers, from Lou Reed, to Fred Neil, to Ben Folds, but listeners will hardly recognize them when compared to the originals. The problem is this feels, not so strangely, like guys from a bunch of different bands screwing around, and the resulting album feels like a

not very funny joke. (Tiger Style, 401 Broadway, 26th Floor, New York 10013)

—Eddie Fournier

**KING MISSILE III  
THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

First you see the artwork by famed New York artist Fly— people eating detached human limbs from a can, bunnies sawing people into pieces and hopping on top of corpses, Satan having sex with a rabbit. Then you press play and are greeted by "My Father," the story of "the first white man to play in the Negro Leagues," who started the Hare Krishna religion, was the first man to be born with fallopian tubes, had his testicles and clitoris pierced, worked for the CIA and wrote a play five years after he died. In between, what you can only loosely refer to as songs are the likes of "Hot Coffee," "Hammer Thumb," "Paper Cut," "Cold Pool" and "Stomach Cramps," all of which are little more than strings of profanity resulting from the narrator being injured. Despite a rich history from *Fluting on the Hump* to *Mystical Shit*, listeners will



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**Zumm Zumm**  
Crusp Srexling

This lo-fi, trashy masterpiece combines jagged, distorted, out of tune raucousness with undeniable singalong hooks, featuring quasi political rants and plain, stupid fun. This cd features hand made covers so get 'em while they last....look for these young hooligans on tour in your town all this year!



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Individualized Shirts

Peter Ehrchick, whom you might recall tickling the ivories for Olivia Tremor Control and Circulatory System, "Individualized Shirts" mixes heartfelt piano based balladry with the experimental tendencies of the aforementioned bands, resulting in a tasty melodic stew.

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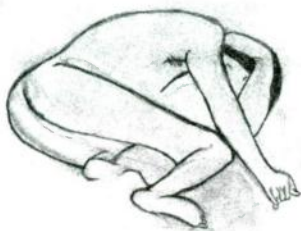


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- The Chicago Reader Feb 2003

### Happy Ashtray big apple

Subtle melodic underground pop. John Swamy is Happy Ashtray. *Big Apple* is a great album featuring Swamy's unique and intelligent slant on life. The tunes are clean from unnecessary clutter and feature wonderfully sincere melodies. Swamy's deep vocals are extraordinarily effective. Wonderfully fulfilling songs...showcase a fresh new artist with an uncanny knack for writing timeless pop tunes. Recommended. Excellent.

- babysue.com March 2003



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have to decide for themselves whether *Psychopathology* is another work of genius or one more record full of complete rubbish. (*Instinct*, 75 Leonard St., New York 10013)

—Eddie Fournier

### MORAL CRUX POP CULTURE ASSASSINS

If you're a fan of politically and socially charged pop punk in the vein of Screeching Weasel and all imitators, Moral Crux is for you. *Pop Culture Assassins* blends classic and modern punk rock in a far more enjoyable fashion than the slew of bands attempting to do the same. The band wears its influences on its sleeve, with Dead Kennedys patches and Ramones pins clinging to its collective jacket, but Moral Crux doesn't try for the vintage sound becoming increasingly popular these days. The roots are exposed for all to see, but there is also a strong sense of progress and relevance, and it's difficult to see why these guys have yet to make a larger dent in the punk scene. (*Panic Button*, 3264 Adeline St., Berkeley, CA 94712)

—Eddie Fournier

### PATRICK O'DONNELL THEN I WOKE UP

Talk about the perfect soundtrack to a night of drinking and smoking with the guys. Patrick O'Donnell plays a uniquely dark and dreary sort of rock built upon elements of folk, country and punk. The songs are brimming with emotion, but instead of coming off as sappy and whiny, they use a more piss-and-vinegar method of exorcising demons. There are dark cemetery companions like the opening "Passed Out on the Night Tram," along with poppy numbers like "Burning Youth." This is the sort of sound I would expect to hear coming through the walls if my father were in a garage band. (*Skoda*, P.O. Box 77611, Washington, DC 20013)

—Eddie Fournier

### THE PACIFIC OCEAN SO BEAUTIFUL AND CHEAP AND WARM

For the most part, this is mercurial, slow paced indie rock album featuring

lots of acoustic guitar work. The songwriting is competent but pedestrian, leaving listeners wondering what happened to the use of dynamics. There are moments on *So Beautiful* where the Pacific Ocean seems to have really succeeded in delivering easy listening for the gas-station-jacket set, but the formula soon cools. The album speeds up on one track and later offers a strong Brian May cover. (*Teen Beat*, P.O. Box 3265, Arlington, VA 22203)

—Michael O'Brien

### PULSEPROGRAMMING TULSA FOR ONE SECOND

Complete with a cardboard gatefold able to fold into a house, Pulseprogramming's *Tulsa For One Second* is a meticulously designed project settling into an electro-acoustic pop groove somewhere between the pastoral realm of Boards of Canada and the experimental click and thump of Tadd Mullinix. "Blooms Eventually," though less of a dance tune, grabs a similar vibe to Dirty Vegas' "Days Go By," setting the tone for the record, diverging from the group's previous, largely ambient output. From the trippy call and response of "Stylophone Purrs and Mannerist Blossoms" to the charming "Off to Do Showery Snapshots" and the inward "Don't Swell Up Your Glass Pocket," *Tulsa For One Second* is haunting, gentle, nostalgic, hallucinatory and always impressive. (*Aesthetics*, P.O. Box 82233, Portland, OR 97282)

—Charles Spano

### REACHING FORWARD COMPLETE DISCOGRAPHY 1998-2000

In the world of youth crew hardcore, Europe has always played second fiddle to the United States. It's contributions to the genre, excepting the communist Manliftingbaner, have been nothing more than hackneyed and derivative imitations of the more famous American bands. The Netherlands' Reaching Forward is no different. Aping the sound of Chain of Strength, the band, along with Mainstrike, spearheaded the European contingent of youth crew revivalists at the end of the past century. Interestingly, Martyr records thinks there is enough market demand to collect the complete recordings of Reaching Forward —

continued on page 55 >>

« THE STREETS continued from page 36

Instead, he cut his teeth on his older brother's records, listening to De La Soul, the Beastie Boys and Rage Against the Machine. And surprisingly, Skinner spent most of his formative years listening to guitar-based rock music and playing in indie rock bands in his early teens.

"The very nature of being original is you can't be totally original, but I wasn't absorbed with garage in the same way that a lot of people were.

"All you can ever do is combine things that are already there. The more you know the more you can combine."

Skinner lays his vocals over the quick garage beats is as original as the record title might suggest. Skinner recites his lyrics slowly, conversationally and almost poetically.

"I've never really read any poems," he confesses. "That's just the way it came out. I just intended to cross a hip hop vocal style with garage beats."

Now living in London, Skinner has recently produced remixes for Ghostface Killer and Cassius. Skinner has already toured both the United States and United Kingdom, playing newer songs and tracks of *Original Pirate Material*.

"American audiences didn't really know us then, so it was kind of good fun. We couldn't really gauge how we were going down."

This summer, he's set to go back into the studio to record The Streets' second full-length release.

All this fame might have spoiled such an average kid from Birmingham, but Skinner says otherwise.

"I worked really hard, so I'm just enjoying it," he says casually. "My life hasn't really changed. Yeah, my work has changed, but your life never really changes as much as it looks like it changes. I've got more channels on my telly now." ■

*Julie Gerstein is an organizer of Ladyfest Philly and a contributing writer to Anthem magazine and the Philadelphia Weekly.*

« RJD2 continued from page 38

seen holing up with musty albums and weird theories about extraterrestrials in *Scratch*, RJD2 is a fully engaged citizen of the social sphere.

"I have to choose my battles at this point," asserts the DJ with a determined glint in his eye. "I have a personal life and a wife and home. And I have to tour."

Such pragmatic determination serves RJ well, giving his style a focus and clarity seen in few others. Supporting the myriad bits of nostalgic chatter and flashy samples brightening the EP is a firm base of melody and rhythm. No matter how arcane the reference or kaleidoscopic the orchestration, an RJ song nearly always connects in the most basic, irreducible way—with the body.

"It's subconscious for me," reveals the artist of his booty-moving technique. "I just hear a beat or a movement, and it makes you want to dance."

Balancing this easy naturalism is a healthy competitive urge, one contrasting sharply with the reclusive nature of Shadow or the friendly bonhomie of Dan the Automator.

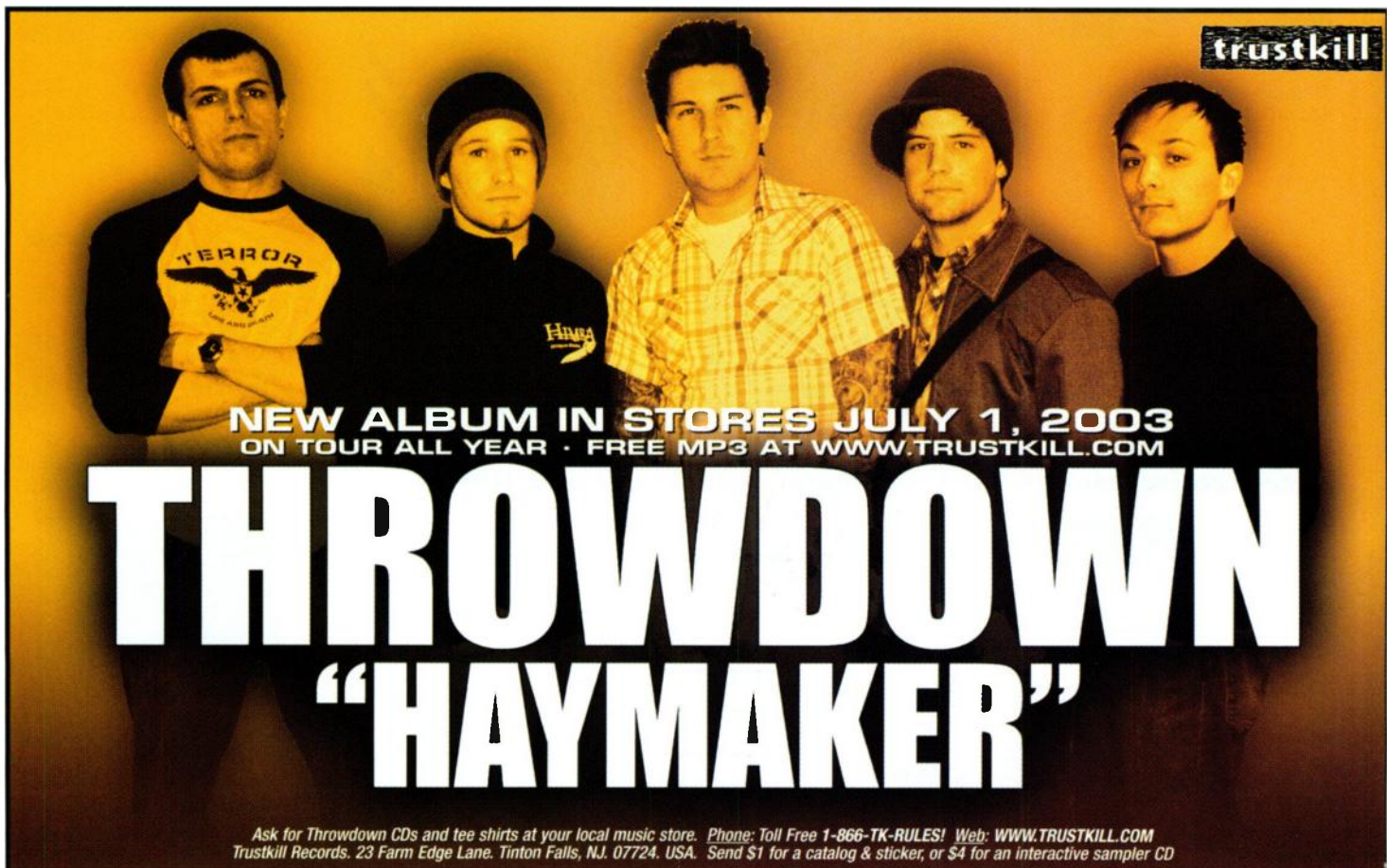
"In hip hop, there's a lot of pressure in a good way," RJ shares, his callused fingers twitching. "There's really a drive to earn the respect of your peers and then take them out."

Previous fears suggesting RJ flirts with excessively dance-lite tendencies come off unfounded in the face of his vision and maturity. Nonetheless, the fair-minded spinner sees benefit even in those club DJs who, unlike hip hoppers, make music expressly designed to dissipate in the memory after the moment's passing.

"In the end, there's something to be said for someone who can get on the radio and hype up some bullshit," he snickers.

A sentiment worth remembering, for many reasons. ■

*Reed Jackson is a contributing writer to Resonance and Skyscraper and an intern at the esteemed Harper's Magazine.*



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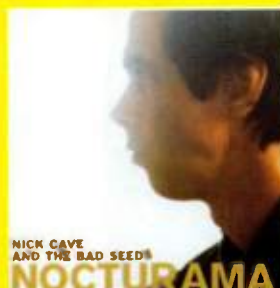
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23 original tracks, a cover and a live set from Poland. Lyrically this is youth crew in its simplest form, as songs never stray from the themes of straightedge, friendships and back stabbing. This disc is only recommended to those who must possess every piece of recorded material in which a member appears on the cover with X-ed up hands. (**Martyr**, P.O. Box 955, Harriman, NY 10926)

—Michael O'Brien

**BETTIE SERVEERT**  
LOG 22

Holland's oddly named Bettie Serveert ("Bettie Serves") is a pop band with a symphony's sophistication. The band's fifth album presents an expanded palette of carefully crafted songs, encompassing styles from unrestrained rock ("Not Coming Down") to quirk-pop ("Smack") and disco ("The Love In"). What Bettie Serveert does flawlessly on Log 22 is make brilliant use of tempo as a tool, pulling a melancholy musical passage to further anchor a dark mood (the opiated, lounge wooziness of "Certain Lie") or pushing the tempo

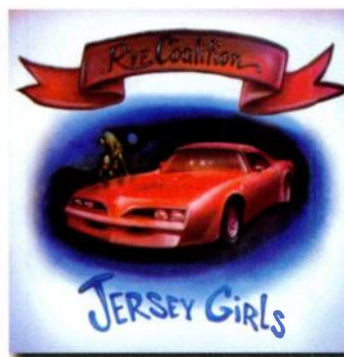
to create a triumphant anthem (the title track's ecstatic, string enhanced bridge lifted from Roxy Music's "Out of the Blue"). Vocalist Carol Van Dyk's mix of confidence and vulnerability evokes thoughts of a softer shelled Justine Frischman, while rolling snare cadences married to walking bass riffs create a seductive rhythmic undertow throughout. Van Dyk could be speaking directly to fans when she croons "This is not a rehearsal/This is what we've been waiting for." (**Hidden Agenda**)

—Gail Worley

**SLAPSHOT**  
GREATEST HITS, SLASHES & CROSSCHECKS

Growing up listening to hardcore, Slapshot was one of my all-time favorites. With good bands, however, often come bad decisions. For proof, check Suicidal Tendencies' *Still Psycho After All These Years*. When music can age while remaining popular, there's no reason to re-record it, especially when revisitations lack crucial samples or betray the classic. This record takes old, hardcore anthems and occasionally adds a new twist. Some of the ver-

**RYE COALITION**



**Jersey Girls**

Oh, Rye Coalition, are you still here? Rising from the depths of mid-'90s obscurity, this New York area five-piece is now dancing to the heady sounds of mediocrity in the new millennium. The boys' new release, *Jersey Girls* (an indication they know who their true fans

are) is rife with rock clichés and overstatement. While most of their contemporaries (Promise Ring, Texas is the Reason) gave up rock glory long ago, Rye Coalition just doesn't know when to stop, and are now foisting regurgitated indie rock anthems on a whole new generation.

—Julie Gerstein

(Tiger Style, 401 Broadway, 26th Floor, New York 10013)



sions of classics such as "Firewalker," "Step on it," "Hang up your Boots" and "Say Goodbye" appear in fine form, maintaining their original,

aggressive feel. Some other gems are not so lucky, especially the famous "Punk's Dead, You're Next." Fans of old Slapshot should buy this, though they

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—Beau Brendley

**SMALL BROWN BIKE/  
THE CASKET LOTTERY**

**SMALL BROWN BIKE/THE CASKET LOTTERY**

This anticipated disc from Second Nature aims to put a new spin on split recordings. Moving beyond the covering of the other's songs or writing songs for the other's band, Small Brown Bike and the Casket Lottery actually collaborate in the writing of new material together. There are six songs on this CD, one each by the bands independently, two songs written by and played by one band, but sung by the frontman of the other, plus a song performed by members of both bands. Closing the split is a cover—fittingly Bowie and Queen's "Under Pressure." Musically both bands fall under the Midwest emo umbrella, though the collaborative tune "Riding with Death," with its slide guitar, strays heavily into alt-country territory.

Throughout the album, there are many specific mentions of places, events and times, always in the past tense, sometimes spoken, sometimes sung and sometimes screamed, while the music goes from soft to loud. Michigan's Small Brown Bike's tunes are more rocking in the Hot Water Music vein, while Kansas City's The Casket Lottery drops a sound akin to The Get Up Kids' early material. As always, the Second Nature packaging is gorgeous, in the classic emo aesthetic Dan Askew helped to create. It's nice to see, in these days when overproduced pop bands have absconded with the emo genre, a record taking it back to the Mid Western basements of small college towns where this sound was born in the mid 1990s. (Second Nature)

—Michael O'Brien



**TOBIN SPROUT  
LOST PLANETS & PHANTOM VOICES**

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continued on page 60 ▶▶



**EMBRACE TODAY «SOLDIERS» «DEATHWISH INC**

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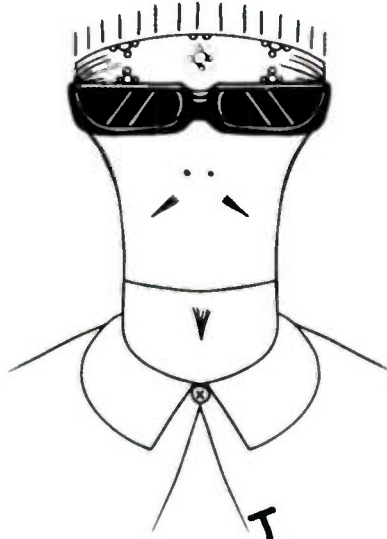
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**STRATFORD 4** *Love & Distortion*

When my friend Brian said he thought Stratford 4's last record sounded like Space-man 3, I was pretty sure he hadn't listened to it. He wouldn't admit it, of course, since it was a present from his sister. Now the group releases *Love & Distortion*, and Brian maybe has a little more of a case. Still, I'd say My Bloody Valentine or Yo La Tengo before Spaceman 3, even if the numeral



sounds convincing. Upon hearing the first track, "Where the Ocean Meets the Eye," all I could think about was the popular Rod Stewart classic, "Rythm of My Heart (Where the Ocean Meets the Sky)," although the two songs sounded very different. Five songs later, as this hushed, melodic quartet was delivering "Telephone," I couldn't help trying to mentally picture the Stratford 4 crew with blow-dried, feathered hair and brown leather flight jackets, suggesting listeners "come on, baby, let them know" if they "like [their] bodies and [they] think their sexy." Although bassist Chris Streng originally played with BRMC, *Love & Distortion* has more in common with VU's *Loaded* than Marlon Brando's *The Wild One*. I lent Brian my copy of the album and asked him a few days later what he thought. When he told me it reminded him of Small Faces, I was positive he had, in fact, spent some time with the disc. (Jetset, 67 Vestry St., New York 10013)

—Mike McKee

**MARK KOZELEK** *Duk Koo Kim*

As if the vinyl-only promo for the new White Stripes album didn't have CD-purists in an uproar, this latest surprise from Vinyl Films (Cameron Crowe's production company) is sure to send them over the edge. Former Red House Painter-cum-actor Mark Kozelek kicks off the company's first in a series of vinyl-only, 10" releases with a two-song single



for "Duk Koo Kim." As if the vinyl-only formatting wasn't enough to ruffle feathers, the people at Vinyl Films have announced the single will be limited to 1000 numbered copies worldwide. Gracing the A-side of this intimate release is a 10-minute session of Kozelek's signature, heartwrenching beauty, ethereal, acoustic and manipulated guitar kept sparse with a melody delivered with a glacial coo. While comparisons to his former band and contemporaries like Elliot Smith and Badly Drawn Boy maintain, here, as on other releases, Kozelek distinguishes himself, often tending towards less conventional paths traversed by the likes of Will Oldham and Mountain Goats. Side B, meanwhile offers a moving live version of the same composition. Sadly, this new single offers no AC/DC covers. (Vinyl Films, www.vinylfilms.com)

—Mike McKee

**KRISTEN HERSH** *returns and brings Throwing Muses along*

"I'm playing air guitar, cookies are flying around the room, we have to make this record."

On such apparently surreal moments many great albums hinge, and as Kristin Hersh relates a pivotal scene from the creation of Throwing Muses' eponymous comeback CD, it's clear the band never really went away.

"It was really Bernard, he made it all happen," Hersh explains, paying credit to her bassist, Bernard Georges. "It was he who kicked me and Dave Narcizo [drummer] in the ass and said 'make a record.' But the only reason we could do it is because it's technically a solo record, made with a solo advance, and they're my backing band on what is essentially a Throwing Muses record. It might not even be a legal way to go about it, but 4AD doesn't mind."

To complicate matters, the album—full of raw and angelic, twisted but soaring songs, reaching something approaching a career high—was released on the same day as Hersh's sixth solo album, *The Grotto* (in its own way, with its naked, textured torch songs, just as powerful and involving as the Muses).

"One is day and the other is night, and together they make the full 24-hour cycle," Hersh shares with a laugh. "I think the Throwing Muses one is the record we should have made all along. Even though it sounds that way because we didn't have any money. It's nice that it finally sounds the way we sound in a room."

As the respected frontwoman and mother of four tells it, Throwing Muses never really split up. The band simply couldn't afford to make another record or tour. She jokes, remarking if any member of the group had won the lottery or inherited a fortune from a rich fan, the band would quickly slip back into full-time status.

These complications of time and money were but further obstacles in a life yielding more intrigue than your average soap opera. Throughout the Muses' run, Kristin has also dealt with commercial under-achievement, her status as a reluctant icon and spokesperson to countless fans and a mis-diagnosed mental illness resulting in hallucinations, rendering her a mere conduit for some of her harrowing songs. Does she wish any of it had been different?

"Oh sure! I feel like almost everything," she exclaims with a laugh. "But that's OK. I can't be bitter, because I'm still a working musician. We're obsessed with what we do, but we never for a minute thought anyone would like it. So we actually feel lucky, as pathetic as that sounds."

And, as befits a woman who admits music is the hardest drug she has ever done, Hersh wouldn't actually have it any other way. She says there's



Steve Gullick

nothing quite as intense as the experience of creating and performing music.

After 21 years as a band (seven after the first "last" album), the legacy and influence of Throwing Muses as pioneers of grungy, feminine music is finally receiving acknowledgement.

"Isn't that funny?" she jokes with a smirk. "I wanna say, 'where were you people?' But that's great—the more people think Throwing Muses was an important band, the more we really could be."

—Steve Paul Gibbs



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\* A few clear samples featuring one previously released track as well as one new and exclusive track from Austin Bay, Bright Eyes, Cursive, Desaparecidos, The Faint, The Grand Larceny, Mayday Parade, The Overhead, Rilo Kiley, Son Ambulance, and Sorry About Dresden. 27 Songs on the CD. 11 Songs on the LP.

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◀ RECORDS continued from page 56

psychedelic "Doctor #8" and the unabashedly sentimental "Catch the Sun," Tobin Sprout has made his best solo record, and one that probably should have been called *Mellow Gold*. Though the songwriting would not be out of place on a Guided By Voices album, the actual recordings take the psych-folk of the Bevis Frond without ever departing from a tight, Midwestern, pop-driven core. Even when Sprout tries out spy movie surf rock on "Martini," he stays true to his sound. *Lost Planets & Phantom Voices* is not the kind of record likely to wake up music listeners everywhere, but those who know will have found a gem. (Luna Music, 1521 West 86th St., Indianapolis, IN 46260)

—Charles Spano

 **THERE WERE WIRES**  
THERE WERE WIRES

This album starts out with a straight, brutal punch in the face in the vein of His Hero is Gone or All Else Failed and Neurosis. The vocals are sure to remind at least

a few listeners of Tragedy, while the music delivers a heavy-guitar assault, quick time changes along with melodic interludes building predictably into moshy breakdowns. The band's self-titled debut runs strong to the end, though it fails to offer anything new to crate searchers. Perhaps it's a blessing for kids who have yet to hear of Uranus? (Iodine, Commonwealth Ave., PMB 318, Boston 02215)

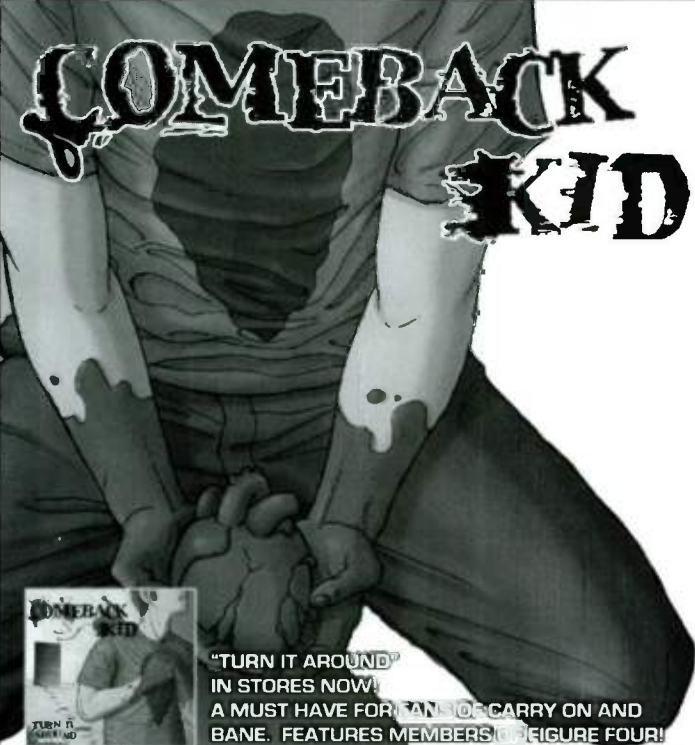
—Beau Brendley

 **USELESS ID**  
NO VACATION FROM THE WORLD

The most notable piece of information about Useless ID is the fact the band hails from Israel. This must be the reason the band attracted the attention of the Vandals and/or Kung Fu records, because the band, while composed of completely competent musicians and songwriters, breaks no barriers in the world of independent music. On this CD, Useless ID turns in 14 songs of pop punk, leaning heavily on the pop side of things. Comparisons

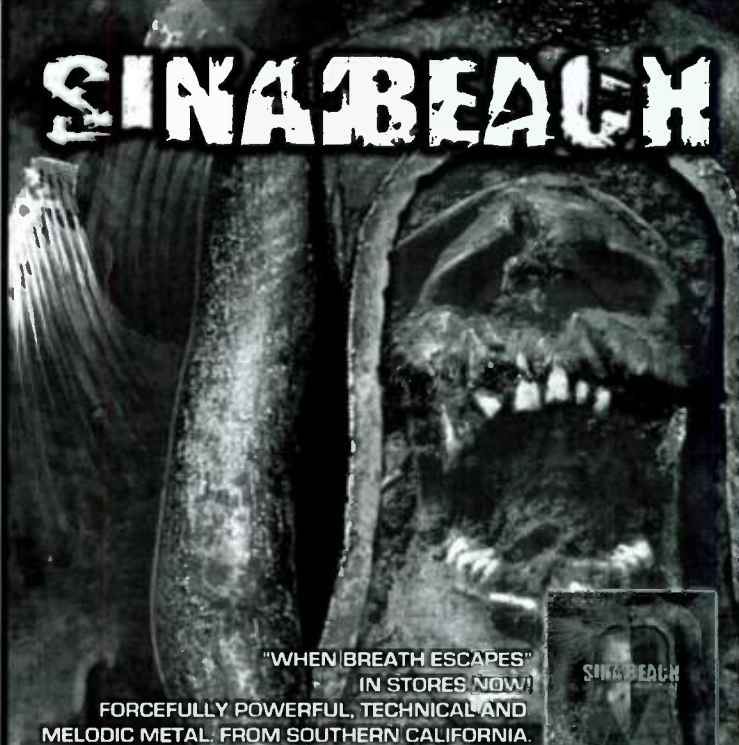
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to Jimmy Eat World, The Ataris, Samiam, or other bands playing polished and catchy rock music with punk leanings could be easily substantiated. Useless ID does maintain a certain rawness coming from their vocalist's limitations and/or the limitations of the CD's production budget. One or two of the tracks speed up into NOFX like tempo (complete with the signature Fat Wreck Chord's drumbeat), and there is an acoustic song. For the most part, however, the songs don't stray from the modern pop punk formula. Of course nearly every song is about being in love with girls, being dumped by girls, or girls in general. The CD also includes a video for "Teenager." **(Kung Fu)**

—Michael O'Brien

**VARIOUS ARTISTS**

**TOXIC SHOCK: FOUR OLD SEVEN INCHES**

Cruising through the Inland Empire in the early 1980's, swimming in my leather jacket in the intense California heat on my way to see *Repo Man* for the 14th time, I'm thinking about how much a recent episode of *Quincy* irritated me. I

pop in a mix tape of local bands—Moslem Birth, Kent State and Manson Youth. You youngsters of the faster, louder, snottier punk rock school of the 1990's, might have considered some of these tracks a little art damaged, but what do you know? It was real back then, real underground. Back in the day, Toxic Shock's record store was the only place in the area where we could go to get our gear and records. There wasn't shit like Hot Topic and there sure as hell wasn't any goddamn internet. This is why I am glad Dr. Strange put out this record compiling the early releases of this record store-turned mailorder company-turned record label. Groups like Red Tide, the Massacre Guys and Peace Corpse, now there are some real punk bands—not the stuff you kids listen to today, like Blink 182. Great liner notes from the Doc and Bill Sassenberger (owner of Toxic Shock) add flavor, along with some artwork done by a fellow named Pushead before he sold out and started making Metallica t-shirts. **(Dr. Strange)**

—Michael O'Brien

**KENNETH MASTERS**

**Independent as Fuck**



"Too sick to open shows when I should be headlinin'/Sick of being broke and drivin' a broke wheel/I'm sick of magazines and MCs with no skills." So Philadelphia's Kenneth Masters asserts on the title track of his latest EP, *Independent as Fuck*, a four-song shout out to all starving artists who can't afford

decent food because their record and electricity debts come first. Masters has reason to feel his time is due, he's been pushing along on the indie hip hop scene for several years now, having some vinyl, plastic and online buzz under his belt. As of this spring, he can also add a successful European tour to his resume. While side A's second track, "Above Rising" edges dangerously close to sounding pedestrian, offering too similar a groove to the title track, side B starts things off fresh again with "2 Part Harmony," featuring a collaboration with Mic Stylz. The production on this latest Masters EP is thinner than on his debut with the Dept. of Rec, though few will be able to argue it gels with this MC's delivery. —Mike McKee

(Arrakis, [www.arrakisrecords.com](http://www.arrakisrecords.com))



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## SINAI BEACH When Breath Escapes

Sinai Beach's *When Breath Escapes* is textbook metalcore—breakdowns, melodic departures, crunching guitars, concussive drums with fury and rage enough to melt the skin clean off the bone. The Southern California band delivers such a pounding assault, the band comes close to nullifying its own carefully composed moments of intricate melody. Luckily, like real pros, the players know exactly when to peel off the fire and brimstone to allow the bitter sweetness through. The anger quotient

is at an all-time high, despite an annoying, Christian slant to the lyrics. There's a good argument suggesting Christians have less to be angry about than most people in the world, but Sinai Beach doesn't seem consoled judging by the distortion-driven vitriol on this debut release. *When Breath Escapes* comes recommended without reservation for fans of Eighteen Visions, Martyr AD, Living Sacrifice and Throwdown. (Facedown, P.O. Box 477, Sun City, CA 92586) —Amy Sciarretto

Martyr Records will release Murder Weapon's debut EP, *Nervous Wreck*... As I Lay Dying has inked a record deal with Metal Blade... Northern Virginia's Pageninety-nine has broken up... Avenged Sevenfold expects to release a new album this summer and is busy writing new material... Darkest Hour has titled its forthcoming album *Hidden Hands of a Sadist Nation*... Victory Records will release *Between the Buried and Me's* label debut in September... From Autumn to Ashes are in the studio recording the follow-up to *Too Bad You're Beautiful*... Twelve Tribes and Eulogy Recordings have parted ways. New demos by the Tribes are rather incredible, though, so some smart hardcore label should pick the band up soon... Poison the Well has titled its new album *You Come Before You*. Expect a summer release through Velvet-Hammer/Atlantic...

Most Precious Blood frontman Tom Sheehan has left the band to pursue his career as a forensic psychologist. Sheehan has been replaced by former One King Down frontman Rob Fusco. The band says it's already working on new material with Fusco... One Day Savior Recordings has signed Undying. The band is currently recording *At History's End*, a full-length debut set for a summer release... Solid State has signed Figure Four, formerly of the amazing Facedown Records roster. The band's Solid State debut, *Suffering the Loss*, has already been recorded... Stretch Arm Strong is recording its next effort, titled *Engage*. Look for the band to be on tour all summer long... Former Orange 9 MM/Burn frontman Chaka Malik has a new band called *Moving to America*. Although the name sounds like an Eddie Murphy movie, inside sources suggest it will funny in

a different way... Glassjaw frontman Daryl Palumbo and The Movielife's Vinnie Caruana have formed a side project. Palumbo is also working on another side project with former members of J Majesty entitled *Geometry*... Devilinside, the Midwestern metalcore band featuring former members of Disembodied, is working on its *Now Or Never Records* debut... Ex-members of National Acrobat have formed the new band *Breather Resist*, not to be confused with Moss Icon spinoff *Breathing Walker*... Bridge Nine has been busy as usual with new releases from *Terror* and *Holding On*... Hardcore illustrator Mike Bukowski (*Last Chance Illustration*), known for his work for *Damage*, *R.A.M.B.O.* and Most Precious Blood, has scored a West Coast hit with his original artwork for the new *NOFX* poster and CD—Fat Mike and company have never seemed so scary. More next month...

# THE SUBTERRANEAN



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**THE KOVENANT**  
SETI  
The Kovenant's newest gothic, electro-metal opus, *S.E.T.I.* is a crazy mix of styles including aggressive electronics, gothic rock and extreme metal. The Kovenant are no strangers to the underground metal scene, boasting members of high caliber bands like Dimmu Borgir, Arcturus and Mayhem, but their musical style is much more evolved, going far beyond the confines of extreme metal.



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## ZEKE *Live and Uncensored*

Sometime between the late '80s and the end of Nirvana, punk rock and metal split into about 5,000 cross-pollinated genres, one of them being (drum roll please) punk metal (or some other equally nonsensical term). During this time a little band from the Pacific Northwest called Zeke was born and metal—and punk—loving fans across the country heard this band and knew that it was good. Countless gigs and 10 years later, Zeke is still tearing up concert stages with an

exhaust manifold-rattling brand of grease monkey rock fit for comparisons to Fu Manchu or The Dwarves. To (unofficially) celebrate its anniversary, the Seattle-based band has released *Live and Uncensored* (Dead Teenager Records). Featuring 33 tracks of greasy, speed-metal madness culled from live recordings and unreleased material, *Live* is a big-fat, gas-huffing treat for old fans and neophiles alike. **(Dead Teenager, )**

—Allan Martin Kemler



## PELICAN *Pelican*

Though Chicago's Pelican has never even played a show outside its home state, critics are already buzzing about the band's brand of technical, thinking man's metal. Pelican's only recorded effort, a four-song untitled EP, takes instrumental music to new heights. The band paints cosmic, ethereal soundscapes on its musical canvas with a crushing wall of gloom-and-doom sound. The tunes are not quite as experimental as fellow metal instrumentalists Isis, but the material can be equally as hypnotic. Some of the com-

positions pound through the speakers like a jackhammer while other parts are melodious and soothing. However, the Isis comparisons are inevitable, especially since Isis' Aaron Turner liked the band so much he re-released the EP on his Hydrahead label. The tracks are long enough to have the listener lulled into a deep coma by the time the disc is done spinning. The quartet is currently working on its first full-length album, due this summer. **(Hydrahead)**

—Mandy Feingold



## DRUNK HORSE *Adult Situations*

Most people prick up their ears when they hear a buzzworthy name like Steve Albini, Billy Anderson or Phil Elvrum has produced a record. Those in the know pay attention when Tim Green's name pops up on liner notes. Green is perhaps best known for his band, The Fucking Champs, and having co-founded the seminal Nation of Ulysses. His recording credits are equally as impressive. The new full-length from this Bay Area band was recorded by Green, as was all of the band's previous output. Having shared the stages with guitar-

driven luminaries like High on Fire, Nebula and EyeHateGod, Drunk Horse delivers meaty, southern-fried rock riffs fit for a fishbowed joyride or a packed arena. Frontman Eli Eckert's biting, quirky lyrics provide an interesting foil to the often fantasy-laced smoke talk of his peers, while the need-for-power guitars crash and burn just like a label like Tee Pee promises. *Adult Situations* places as yet another soundtrack to teen truancy and youthful indiscretion. **(Tee Pee)**

—Oscar Phelps



## ERIC LARSON *The Resounding*

Alabama Thunderpussy singer Eric Larson (also known for his time behind the drum kit with Avail and Kilara) has shown his songwriting prowess by unleashing a new solo album unlike either of his other projects. *The Resounding*, released in March on Small Stone, has some heavy stoner-rock jams like "Rede" and "Our Voice," as well as mellow, acoustic ballads like "Of Storms" and "Unresolved." On the poppy, mid-tempo track "Mine Never Was," Larson sings a heartfelt tune to an ex-girlfriend. Not only is the songwriting diverse, but Larson deserves credit for laying down the vocal, guitar and drum tracks for

the album alone. Bassist Sam Krivanec is the only other player, aside from some guest vocals by Kachina Oxindine. "I had all these songs that didn't work for the band, and felt like I had to get them down on tape," explains Larson of his endeavor into solo territory. "Since it was basically just engineer Mark Miley and me, we put them together instrument by instrument." The final result is a bit more poppy and accessible than Larsons fans may be used to, but every song has substance. There are no filler tunes on this one. **(Small Stone)**

—Mandy Feingold

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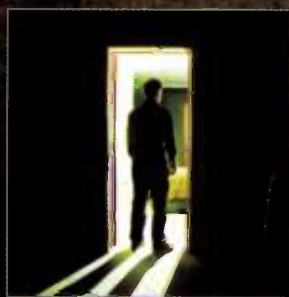
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*Mourning*

CD IN STORES 5.13.03