

# ROCKPILE

## INSIDE >>

- DVD AND GAME REVIEWS
- 20 NEW CD GIVEAWAYS
- OVER 70 CD REVIEWS

**THURSDAY**  
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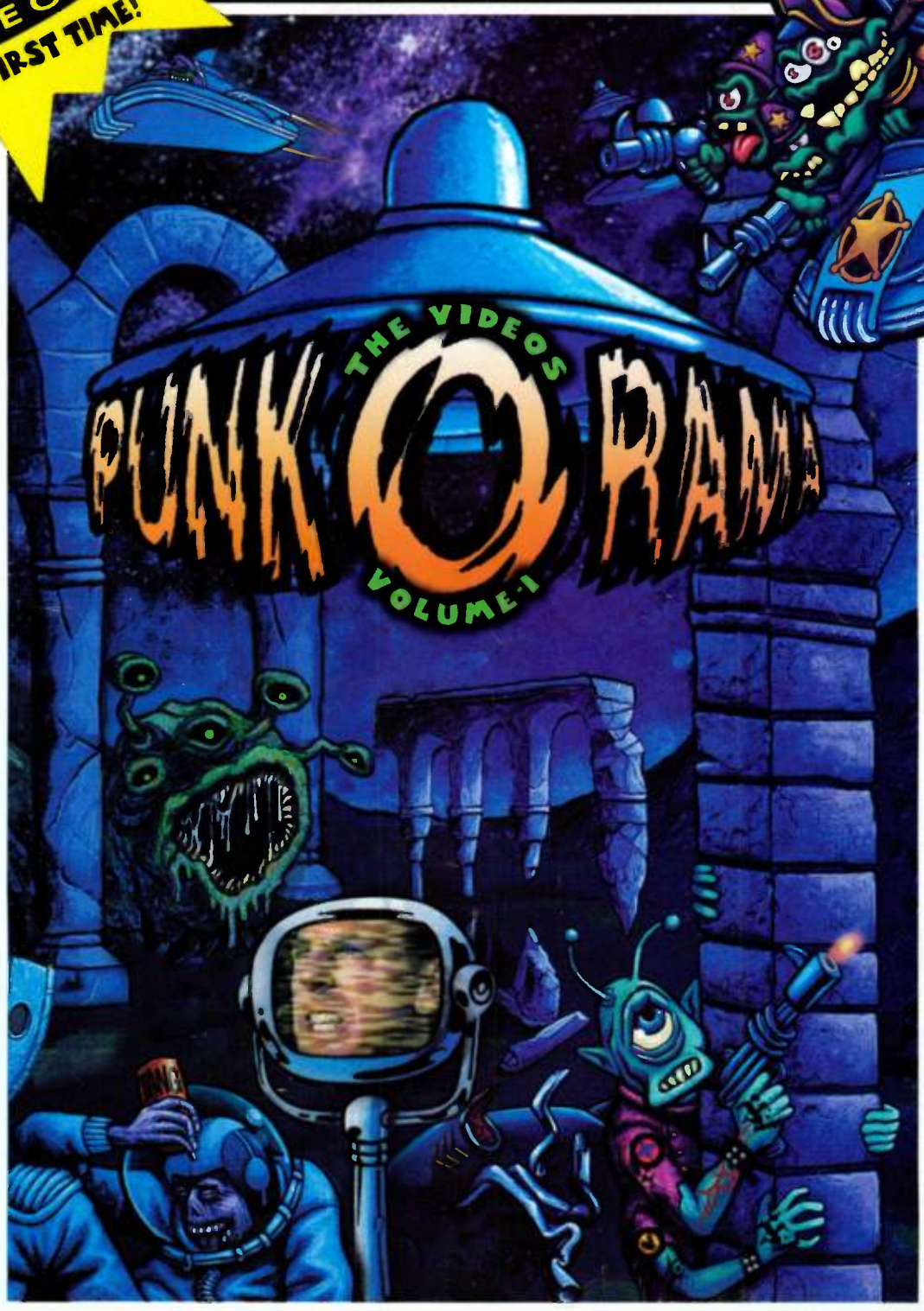
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# ROCKPILE

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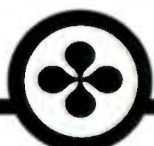
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# CONTENTS

## FEATURES >>

# CATPOWER 36

Analyze This: The talented Chan Marshall returns with *You Are Free*, ready to tour and cure all doubts

Cat Power photos by Chrissy Piper  
story by Gail Worley



## HAR MAR SUPERSTAR 24

"I know you've been lookin' at my Escalade, baby". Give into the power of crunk with Sean Tillman's big booty beats.

## ANI DIFRANCO 28

Hey, you got your Joan Jett in my tea tree oil!

## PEGGIE & THE FULL EFFECT 32

Get Up Kids moonlighter James DeWees speaks out on Radio Free Rockpile.

## THURSDAY 42

Livin' bulldog free in the '03

## RAINER MARIA 44

Lover's Rock for the new millennium

## Lava >> HOT BANDS

Joe Strummer 10  
*by Steve Paul Gibbs*

Emogame.com 12  
*by John Vettesse*

Joan of Arc 14  
*by Sarah Tomlinson*

Over 20 New CD Giveaways!  
PAGE 70

## DEPARTMENTS >>

Records ..... 47

Under The Radar ..... 50  
*albums you may have missed*

Switched On ..... 54  
*hip hop and electronica*

Hard Rock News ..... 58

All Things Indie ..... 62

Afterthought ..... 74  
*Malkemes Team Reviews*

## SECTIONS >>

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

**NEW!** Interactive Media ..... 46

Straight From the Edge ..... 66

A SMALL SAMPLE OF THE  
SXSW 2003 CONFIRMED ACTS.

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## THE PLAN DISMEMBERS

► After an impressive, 10-year run, Washington, D.C.'s The Dismemberment Plan has decided to call it quits. The band insists the split is amicable. Frontman Travis Morrison muses, "We've always been about the adventure, and now the adventure has started to pale." Although the band says it is firm in its decision, it will still go ahead with its plans for a spring tour, with a projected final show this summer at Washington's Fort Reno park. Fans anxiously awaiting the band's remix record need not worry. The album is still expected to drop on DeSoto Records in early 2003. Morrison and his signature hip swinging will be busying themselves with a collaboration with Chris Walla (Death Cab for Cutie) and indie/hip hop crossover sensation Cornbread Compton (Engine Down). ■



## MUSIC NEWS

**Folk Implosion** stars opposite the parturient police-woman from *Fargo* (a.k.a. Frances McDormand) in *Laurel Canyon*. The movie casts da 'Plosion as a Brit-pop band struggling to craft a hit single with producer McDormand. Now for the catch—the last time Folk Implosion danced with the movie biz, the "Natural One" song the duo contributed to *Kids* broke the Top 40. (Contrary to popular belief, it has been their only involvement with the Top 40 thus far.) There's also a new Folk Implosion album called *The New Folk Implosion* and a new tour with an even newer Folk Implosion down the line... NYC's **Yeah Yeah Yeahs** have scrapped plans to release their full length on **Touch and Go** in favor of a yet-unnamed lucky label. Look for an April release. Who wouldn't pick **Marilyn Manson** over **Big Black** for labelmates, though, right?... **Pigface** has reformed to play select shows and release its first new album in six years. Neat... **Rykodisc** has released two full-length CDs from late funnyman **Bill Hicks**. British people love his "comedy stylings," but most Americans have been sleeping on the Hicksman. Get with it, Yanks... Reunions abound: **Camper Van Beethoven's** reformation surely has fans pitching tents in their pants. The seminal alternative group has been playing on-off gigs around the Northeast; a full-fledged jaunt is imminent, and a new album on **Cooking Vinyl**, too... **Mike Watt** has just unveiled *Spiels of a Minuteman/Spiels D'un Minuteman*, a book of lyrics and more, enshrining his days with **The**

**Minutemen** and the ensuing solo. The tome appears in English and French and also features **Thurston Moore**, **Richard Meltzer** and **Joe Carducci** giving sidemouse advice... The media-reticent orchestral monks of Montreal, **Godspeed, You Black Emperor!**, have dropped a hot new party disc, *Yanqui UXO*, on their own **Constellation** label. In case you can't handle the suspense, expect really quiet parts slowly building into dramatic crescendos, collapsing back into quiet parts with plenty of free-range soundclips... On the last day of January, **Ani DiFranco**, **Ozomatli**, **Chuck D**, **Michael Franti** and **Saul Williams** staged, in their names, a benefit gig in support of the anti-war organization **Not in Our Name**. Oh, and a friend had me over to watch *Mac and Me*. More next month. —Kurt Orzeck



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## WHAT'S UP WITH BJÖRK'S MOM GOING ON A HUNGER STRIKE?

► Icelandic alternative diva Björk croons in one of her popular ambient tunes, "All is full of love." Unfortunately, according to the pop star's mother, "all" is a little short on trees and nature.

In early October, when the Pittsburgh-based company Alcoa announced plans to develop and build on a section of Icelandic wilderness, 56-year-old Hildur Runa Hauksdóttir decided to protest, declaring a hunger strike to raise awareness of her country's unchecked development.

The proposed Alcoa site includes an aluminum smelter and a hydroelectric plant. Numerous environmental experts say the project threatens to ruin the Icelandic wilderness north of Vatnajökull, Europe's largest glacier.

Hauksdóttir, a lifelong political activist, stopped eating Oct. 7. She lost more than 14 pounds throughout the month and ended the strike in mid-November.

Alcoa argues it has a good track record on conservation.

Björk, meanwhile, has said little to the media, although her mom says the diva thinks the industrial development is "old-fashioned crazy." ■



## SISTERS TAKE ON THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE: LADYFEST COMES TO PHILADELPHIA

► Picking up where Missy Elliott's feminist lightning rod "Work It" left off, the Ladyfest phenomenon will soon celebrate a new chapter, this time in The City of Brotherly Love.

Ladyfest Philly is scheduled for four days in mid-March as a non-profit festival showcasing women's music, dance, theater, film and visual arts. So far, sister events have already ignited Olympia, Wash. (post-Riot Grrl ground zero), Chicago, San Francisco, New York, D.C. and Glasgow, Scotland.

"What was really important to us from the start was that we make Ladyfest Philly representative of the city," says Laura Bardwell, a 26-year-old library worker who volunteers on the music committee. "This way each Ladyfest is really different."

Some of the common ground Ladyfest Philly shares with predecessors is an emphasis not only on female artists but female promoters and orga-

nizers. As Bardwell explains, in keeping with tried-and-true feminist tradition, process is as important as product. Taking cues from the Riot Grrl movement of the '90s, the fest's organizing body aims for collective decision making and maximum inclusion, even if—as Bardwell hints—this isn't always the quickest method.

Fleshing out these lofty ideas is a diverse group of artists, presenters and workshops ranging from national performers like Mirah (K Records), The Haggard, V for Vendetta and Dame Fate to skill shares on bike repair and women's health. A rare reunion performance from the legendary Tsunami, meanwhile, is sure to have every gal in a Need shirt checking online discount airfares.

"It's really exciting to think about 1,000 women taking Philadelphia over, if only for a weekend," says Ladyfester Shana McCarren. ([www.ladyfestphilly.org](http://www.ladyfestphilly.org)) ■



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# THE LAST OLD PUNK THAT MATTERED

Remembering **JOE STRUMMER** 1952–2002

*"Joe was prepared to fight for workers' rights from Nicaragua to Newcastle. It's a fitting tribute to him that one of his last shows was a firefighters' benefit that he financed out of his own pocket. Joe was a fantastic human being. He changed the course of many people's lives, including mine. The left and the anti-racist cause will miss him badly."*

—Geoff Martin.

John Graham Mellor is dead. Long live Joe Strummer.

Perhaps the most important final image in the 50-year life and work of this ferociously talented bundle of contradictions, after his death from a heart attack on Dec. 22, was not invoked in a tribute from his erstwhile bandmates in The Clash or The Mescaleros, nor from his peers in the United Kingdom's punk movement, nor from any of the next generation of politically active, angry young rock stars he did so much to inspire and influence. It came from Geoff Martin, purveyor of British Trade Union unison, after witnessing Strummer helping London's striking firefighters with his guitar and the raggedy old voice we loved so much—elements sounding like the most potent weapons on earth.

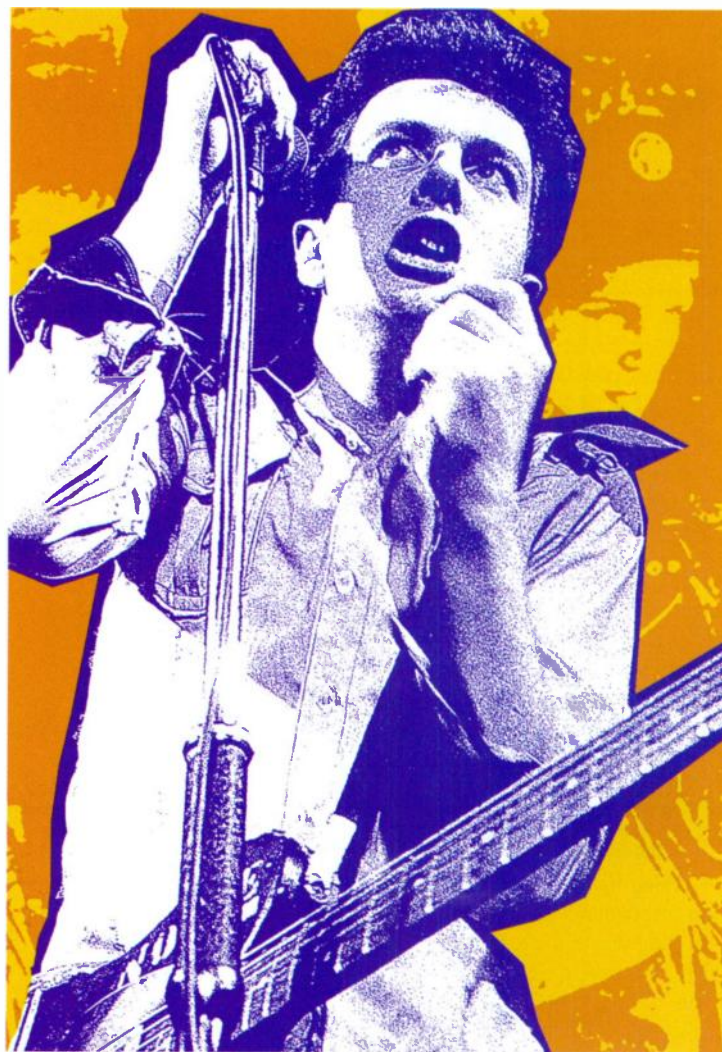
And the man who some hardcore fans saw as too middle class to be a genuine punk rock revolutionary will, in fact, remain politically active after his death in the guise of a co-writing credit, with Bono and Dave Stewart, on a track for Nelson Mandela's *S.O.S. AIDS Awareness In Africa* campaign. A worthy epitaph to a true man of the people, a somewhat reluctant leader of an entirely new subculture who nevertheless made it his duty to enthuse and educate and cajole everyone he met.

Fittingly, this finale benefit gig (held at a Town Hall in his adopted West London) also saw him share a stage with guitarist Mick Jones for the first time in 20 years, reminding us all why The Clash were, as Strummer himself famously asserted, "the only band that matters."

The Clash's collective place in the pantheon of punk has long been arguably Britain's most important and influential punk band, its musical legacy upheld and revered by the likes of Rancid, Green Day, Rage Against the Machine and Radio 4. But Strummer's worldwide outlook on life and his refusal to compromise his principles or dwell on the past when there was new music to make and other cultures to explore, transcended even these accomplishments.

In an age of hollow gestures and false promises, The Clash helped tear down the accepted hero-worshipping notions of rock stars in ivory towers surrounded by (in)security guards ordered to enforce the chasm between the band and its fans. Instead, each member was genuinely interested in meeting his crowd on a personal level. The band continuously fought to keep record prices as low as possible—or at least as low as is possible when working with commercial major labels.

Although largely quiet and thoughtful off stage, under the lights Strummer was a man wracked by feverish pain and anger, a thoroughly engaging frontman whose wired



energy and intensity took the whole band to an entirely new level of performance.

In 1976, punk helped blow away the cobwebs of a stagnant pub rock scene and the bloated histrionics of heavy metal, but the punk movement itself soon became a cliché. Then The Clash happened, a righteous blow to the establishment simply because they dared to hope for a better world and had an agenda beyond vacuous slogans and swearing on television.

The Clash was probably the first British post-punk band, taking the blueprint and ripping it to shreds, injecting it with shards of reggae, dancehall, rockabilly, ska, funk and pure timeless melody. With Strummer at the helm, the band was truly the product of a cosmopolitan city, taking the sound of the West London streets to the world.

Strummer's lyrical, insightful, polemic songwriting clearly played a huge part in this. Whilst the violent, scattergun nihilism of Johnny Rotten and The Sex Pistols became the archetypal public persona of punk, The Clash was blessed with a finely honed pop sensibility and acute political awareness. Through this, Strummer documented the social dysfunction of his own community—his own generation—with more intelligence and passion than almost any of his peers, as England was split asunder by struggle, "The Winter of Discontent," mass strikes and tension fueled by racial violence.

The band's back catalogue remains one of the richest and most enduring of any era, but when The Clash finally split in 1986, as Joe's ego couldn't co-exist with Jones, it felt like the natural conclusion to what had been a thrilling journey. It took drummer Nicky 'Topper' Headon, however, to fully express what most people have been feeling.

"It's taken Joe's death to make me realize just how big The Clash were," said Headon. "We were a political band, and Joe was the one who wrote the lyrics. Joe was one of the truest guys you could ever meet. If he said, 'I am behind you,' then you knew he meant it 100 percent."

In the aftermath of the split, Strummer pursued what he had started in 1980's biopic *Rude Boy*, by starring in poorly received movies like *Straight to Hell* and *Mystery Train*. Luckily, his behind-the-scenes work in film was considered more of a success with moving soundtracks for *Sid and Nancy* and *Permanent Record*.

Strummer toured America as both a stand-in guitarist and singer for kindred spirits The Pogues, played piano for the radical folk-punks The Levellers and even contributed vocals for a song on South Park's *Chef Aid* album.

However, most people still longed to hear the inflammatory chords of "London Calling" or "White Riot." Despite public demand, the group never entertained the notion of a reunion. Even initiation into the Rock 'N Roll Hall of Fame at the band's first year of eligibility couldn't entice The Clash into reforming, as the members balked at the show's \$1,500 ticket price.

Instead, Strummer preferred to work on the third full-length of his new band, The Mescaleros, further cementing their stand-alone reputation for their eclectic stew of organic, multi-racial vibes. In a way, this was always going to be the logical conclusion to his musical output, befitting of someone who has lived in Turkey, Armenia, Egypt, Mexico, Iran and Malawi.

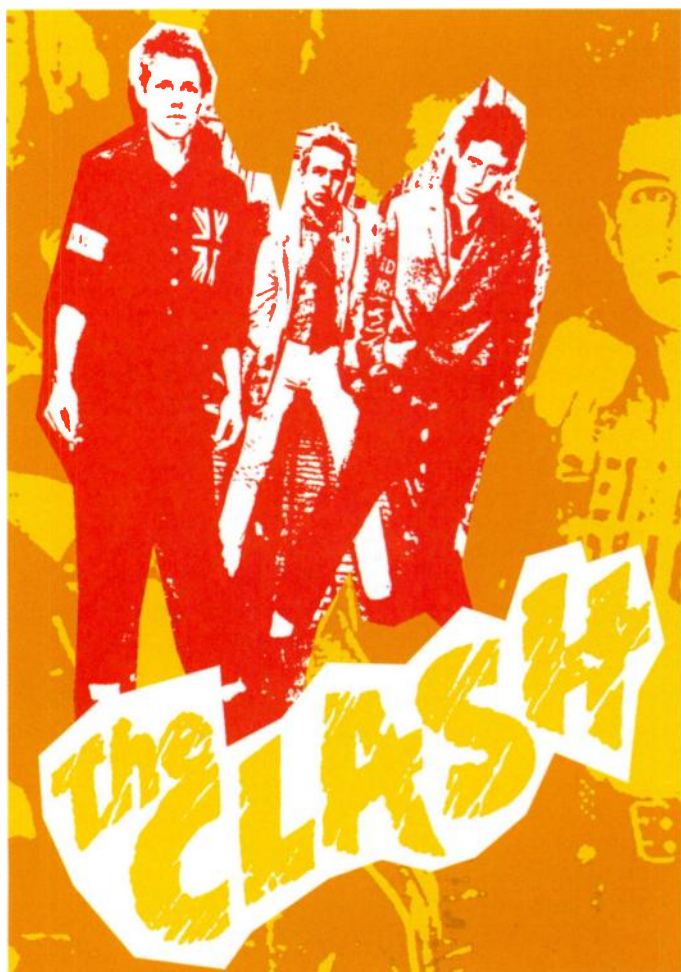
In his 50 years Joe Strummer achieved more than could be expected in the lifetimes of two or three average mortals. Though his name will live on, one can't help but wish he had been given a few more years to finish the work he started. Considering his humble beginnings as a street musician playing Chuck Berry songs on the London subway, one can't help but hope Strummer enjoyed some of his own success.

Perhaps the former Clash frontman expressed his own take on achievement most clearly himself. Years after the dissolution of his groundbreaking band, a reporter asked Strummer to name his most favored accomplishment.

"Just hanging out," Strummer answered modestly. "That's been my main achievement, gaining wisdom through patience."



Go easy. Step lightly. Stay free.


—Steve Paul Gibbs



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# VIDEO KILLED THE EMO ROCK STAR

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One could argue Jason Oda has stronger feelings about Aerosmith's Stephen Tyler than does just about anybody else in the emo world.

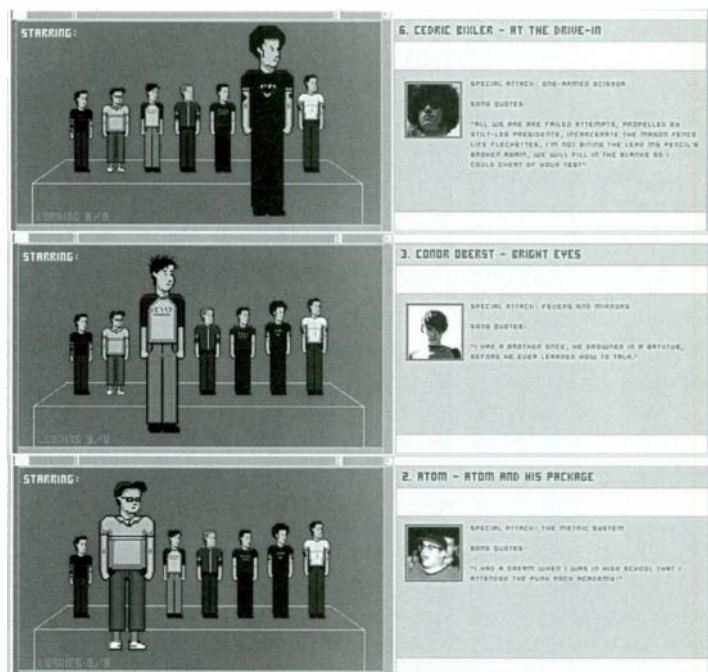
As a graphic designer based in Boston, he is inundated with Aerosmith imagery on a daily basis, from theme restaurants to excessive radio airplay. The veneration simply didn't make sense to him from day one, and as time wore on, it began to crawl deep under his skin.

"For a band with such a legacy, Aerosmith hasn't done anything remotely worthwhile for about 12 years," muses Oda. "The last straw was when I was driving to work one day last summer and I saw a huge billboard that had a picture of Stephen Tyler with a milk mustache and said 'Drink This Way.' That was about when I decided to devote the next three months of my life to raising awareness about how much he sucks."

Pulling together his frustrations—as well as copies of Photoshop, Illustrator and Flash—Oda turned Tyler into an arch-nemesis in an online game wherein the new destroys the old. Behold, Emogame.com.

The story line, dubbed "A Get Up Kid-napping," finds The Get Up Kids abducted by Tyler and stowed away in his secret lair, subject to unspeakable acts of perversion. It's up to a team of seven current scenesters—your choice of Chris Carrabba from Dashboard Confessional, Atom from Atom and His Package, Tim Kasher from Cursive, Conor Oberst from Bright Eyes, Chris Simpson from Mineral, Cedric Bixler from At the Drive-In and Chuck Ragan from Hot Water Music—to track down the group, kill the baddies and make the world safe for rock again. While Atom clearly has the smarts, Rockpile's personal pick goes to HWM's Chuck, who boasts the brawn and stamina.

Along the three-board journey, Oda manages to successfully lampoon much of today's scene. Cubist-animated renderings of our indie and emo heroes fight enemies by throwing seven-inch singles at them, taking out the dreadful (members of New Found Glory who attack on pogo sticks after



unsuccessfully hitting on underage fans) as well as the dubious (Jimmy Eat World swoops down in its 24K gold rocket, The Jimmy Ship). Each player also has a special power they can bring into play—Atom, for one, can attack using the metric system, while the afro-ed Cedric utilizes the ever-handy one-armed scissors.

"The whole thing was for me to express my opinions about the music world in a fun way," admits the 20-something creator. "I like Buddyhead.com [nefarious indie criticism website], because they're not afraid to trash albums. The problem is they hate everything. I think some stuff is good, some stuff is kind of lame."

Emogame certainly offers a healthy dose of scene criticism, mocking how The Anniversary eschews the emo label, questioning why The Promise Ring ever released *Very Emergency* and presenting an insightful look at the "third album syndrome" by studying the career path of Sunny Day Real Estate.

The game's plot and humor can be shaky at some points. Sunny Day's Jeremy Egnik appears in a cloud-filled vision to reveal all emo boys are, in fact, born with ovaries, allowing them to create such sensitive music. Meanwhile, the depiction of Steven Tyler's perversions shoots for the lowest common denominator, not afraid to hedge close to insensitivity towards fellas who like other fellas. In the end, Oda says, it's all about fun. But do the bands get the joke?

Surprisingly, the response has been yes. The site developed a hefty underground buzz since its launch in September 2002, and Oda found out through the grapevine, both on and off the internet, most if not all of the heroes have seen it, and thus far nobody has complained.

"Chad from New Found Glory even signed my guestbook and said 'Thanks for putting me in a video game, even though I die,'" recalls Oda. "He was surprisingly cool about it, considering that I was pretty mean to him."

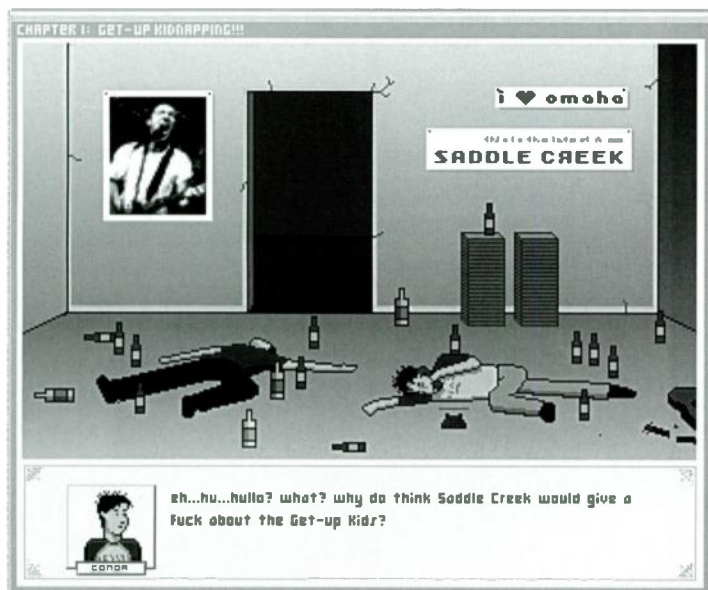
The only criticism, says Oda, came from Atom, who was concerned that with a prevalence of dick jokes, a short scene tossing around the word "fag" and a few sketchy visuals (check Tyler's lair), the game might be a tad homophobic.

"I was worried about that," admits Oda, who says gay-bashing was the farthest thing from his intent. "There is one scene where you kill football players and yuppies who listen to Dave Matthews and I figured that would balance out the homophobia thing, but I'm worried that not a lot of people got it."

As Oda is in the process of designing Emogame II, which he plans to launch in April 2003, he promises "less butt-fucking jokes, more poop jokes." He also hopes to include a further examination of the genre and its intricacies.

"It's tentatively going to be called 'Emo is a Dirty Word,'" he reveals. "It's such an ambiguous word and means so many different things, but things just get pigeonholed. There really is a big scope to it."

—John Vettese



# Mountain Goats John Darnielle Gets into the Divorce ▶▶

There ain't no mountains in Iowa. Ain't no goats, neither. But there is one John Darnielle, a far-out singer/songwriter who qualifies as a bit of an anomaly in his own right. He writes at the rate of a high-speed thresher, having issued more than a dozen records in the past seven years (including *four* in 2002). All in all, it adds up to an impressive run while bumming throughout Iowa for more than half a decade and writing for select rock magazines, to boot.

In addition to all this, the California native has worked in mental homes, documents most of his recordings on a simple boombox and has a recurrent series of relationship-themed songs entitled *Alpha* .

The latest Mountain Goats record, *Tallahassee*, presents an apt example of Darnielle's literary, topically charged approach. It's also his first for 4AD/Beggars Banquet after having previously issued records through Emperor Jones, Ajax and many other imprints.

*Tallahassee*, in a nutshell, is about an alcoholic couple fleeing for Florida under the impression that a geographical adjustment might salvage their plummeting relationship (Zora Neale Hurston would be proud).

"They're married, and they're dedicated to each other's bad habits," Darnielle interprets. "They're heavy, heavy drinkers, and they were

deeply in love at one point, but they managed to drink that into the ground. They spend all their time trying to re-find it, but in all the wrong ways, and they end up developing a real loathing for one another. It's a symbiotic, mutually destructive relationship. They're trying to rescue their marriage, but they're not really in touch with their own motivations. They're determined to see the marriage through to its bitter end, trying to stare each other down and see who blinks first. It's about the movement toward the divorce."

The plot is presented in typical Darniellian fashion—rough and lo-fidelity, yet painstakingly close (think Robyn Hitchcock, minus the pesky nasal delivery). Lending support is fellow rock critic/musical teammate Franklin Bruno, plus Peter Hughes, Michael Irvins and a few other close associates.

Darnielle, who himself is married, surprisingly enough—says he's able to draw distinct lines between his artistic work and personal appetites.

*Tallahassee's* subject matter, for instance, "doesn't really have any bearing on our relationship," he says. "She also knows I'm still working out some California demons. Where I grew up, everyone's parents were divorced. It was considered part of marriage, or at least it was in the '70s."

While his wife completes her graduate school tenure, Darnielle finds himself having undergone a considerable change himself.

"I didn't used to be the hermit that people imagined I was, but I am now," he confesses. "When I go out on tour, it's so extremely intense that I want to cocoon. And when I am here, I'm extremely busy with the next album."

He's also been devoting a considerable amount of time to the refurbished Mountain Goats web site (4AD.com), an interactive, online household of sorts pertaining directly to *Tallahassee*.

And in case Darnielle hadn't yet achieved maximum productivity, after a stint of day-job drudgery, various web-related tasks, writing vignettes of dark psycho-social disfunction and maintaining harmony in his own relationship, Darnielle strives for culinary perfection as well. "When I get home, I hit the kitchen, and we cook from scratch." John Darnielle may not move mountains, but there is little else that is out of his reach.

—Kurt Orzek



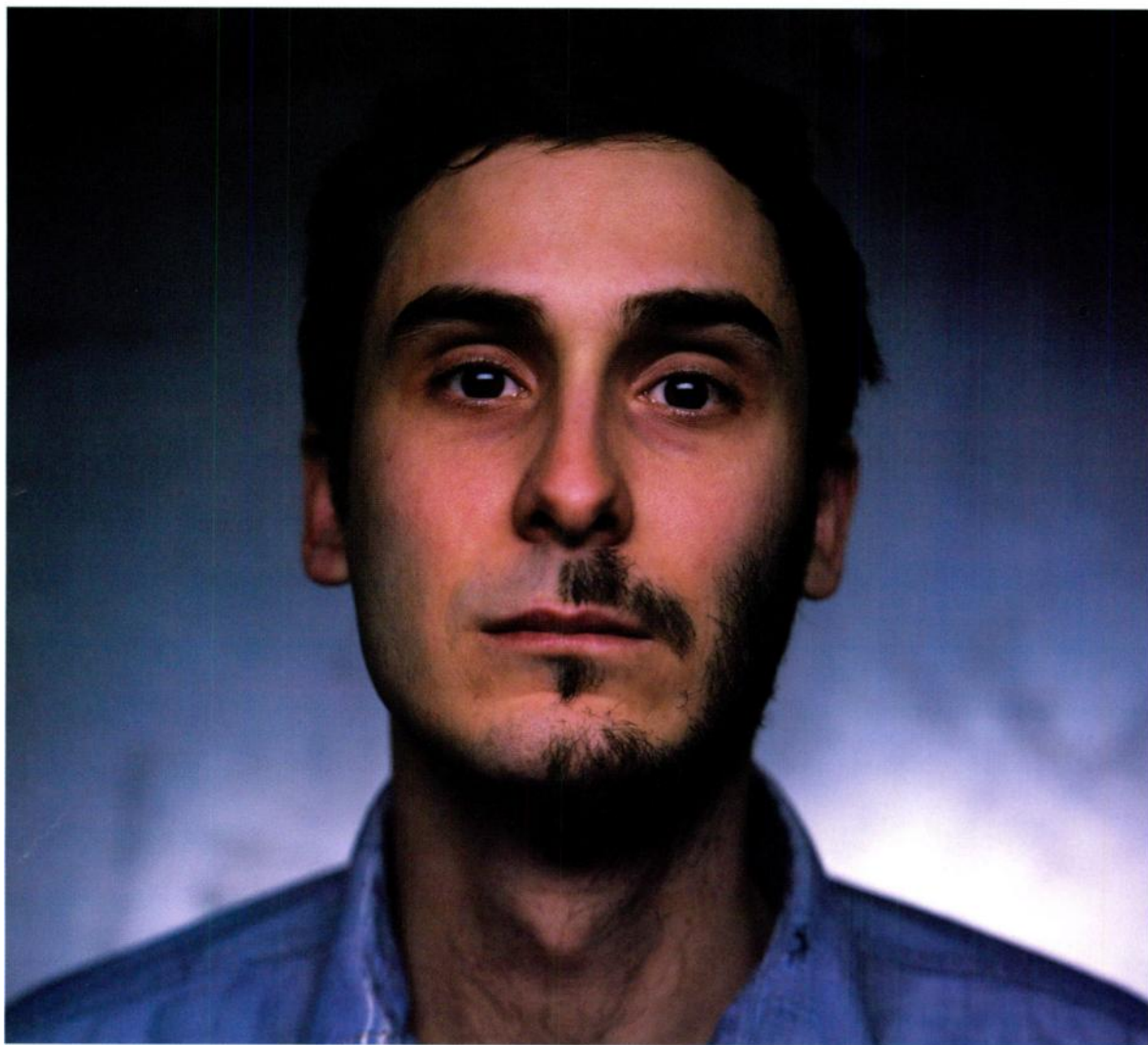
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## going STRAIGHTFORWARD

Now You Know How **JOAN OF ARC** Felt

As he makes clear, Tim Kinsella is uncomfortable being interviewed. The musician behind the indie innovators of Joan of Arc even had a phase when he interviewed journalists, rather than answering questions himself. This is not for lack of words, however—describing someone as having “kitty-litter looks” on a new song like “Dead Together” belies language at its most vivid.

Kinsella is certainly not afraid of revealing too much.

“It’s not like I have some anxiety about the penetrating depth of the average indie rock interview,” he digs with a laugh.

As Kinsella is fond of pointing out, there’s what you say and then there’s how you say it. And the two don’t always seem to add up when his words go to print. For someone who has crafted experimental, melodically offbeat music and lyrics on almost a dozen albums (from the ‘90s emo pioneering of Cap’n Jazz to the unconventional rocking of Joan of Arc), letting someone else control the words must cause considerable anxiety. Fair enough.

Now, with the country poised to go to war, Kinsella is at a loss for why anyone is concerned with the thoughts of a 28-year-old self-described burnout anyhow. By his own confession, he says he mostly “feels like a bartender who has a hobby of recording songs and playing shows.”

While he did forget about this noon interview until the phone woke him up at his home in suburban Chicago, Kinsella is hardly your average burnout.

Every bartender has a band, a book, most unsigned, most unwritten. But bartending is just a job, and music is a passion absorbing Kinsella continually.

“I have the band practicing or recording every day,” he says. “So I’m immersed in it all the time, and pretty much everyone I know I met through playing music or because of it.”

Constant practice and recording over the past two years have resulted in *So Much Staying Alive and Lovelessness*, Joan of Arc’s sixth full-length release. The record also includes songs by another group of Kinsella collaborators, Friend/Enemy. According to Kinsella, the songs were developed in complex layers, recorded in multiple versions, worried over and reworked. Finally, he had lost sight of his original ideas. So he began the songs all over again.

“It gets layered upon, expanded upon, unwound, opened up and gutted,” he says of a work in progress.

The result, ironically, is the band’s most straightforward album thus far. Rather than being muddled or made overly self-conscious by such an intricate creative process, the songs emerged handled and worn like the wood of an old guitar. There are still off-kilter vocals, sudden rhythmic sidesteps and dissonant guitar notes jutting from the melody at sharp angles. But there are also intricate ripples of guitar on the album opener, “On a Bedsheet in the Breeze on the Roof.” A pretty piano and vocal melody is made perfectly sinister when juxtaposed by lyrics about violence and death on “Mr. Participation Billy.” Rich acoustic guitar strums and cantering drums fill out the sound on songs relaxing into moments of rock ‘n roll throughout the album.

Perhaps the biggest difference is, for the first time in the band’s history, there are no Pro-Tools edits or digital effects. It is also the first album without Jeremy Boyle, who along with Kinsella was the only Joan of Arc member previously present on every album and tour.

Nevertheless, the band's collaboration is still relaxed and fluid—musicians have always come and gone and come back again. New incarnations of Joan of Arc, cobbled together from nine different musicians over the years, record songs at different stages of their evolution, with the finished work emerging through the playing.

"We don't know how to write songs or read music or understand music theory," says Kinsella. "So it's not like we sit down and chart it all out and see how it sounds."

The process, rather, is something much harder to pin down. The elusive heart of the song does not come from purely intellectual composition, which Kinsella rejects as perilously close to a cold logic problem, and it's not emotional gush, which risks coming off as a juvenile tantrum. It lies somewhere in between.

"I guess it's finding a balance between heart and mind, which is what everyone is doing when they're walking around all day, deciding should I eat that sandwich now, or wait for later," he says.

Walking around eating a sandwich, getting drunk, falling in and out of love, passing through the dangerous and languorous late nights of city life—these are the scenes in which Kinsella seeks the balance between heart and mind in his songs. His lyrics are richer than ever with these moments. He continues to play with puns and quips, but the essence of his talent lies in his ability to depict a moment of life with lucid simplicity.

It seems Kinsella has grown comfortable with a more accessible sound. His songs still bristle with intelligence and the desire to push musical limits. But he is no longer the boy who cried wolf, sometimes seeming willfully disinterested in communicating melodies or ideas, then becoming frustrated when people didn't understand his artistic intentions.

He still plays with the line between revelation and obscurity. The album's cover features a black and white photo of Kinsella with a red circle hiding his face. The image may be coy, but it also seems like an honest admission of frustrations—his public face may always be misunderstood, his jokes missed. After apologizing several times for the length of his answers, he finally says at one point during the interview, "to give a good interview, you have to just sort of babble. But then when I start babbling, I feel like sort of an egomaniac."

**"I GUESS IT'S FINDING A  
BALANCE BETWEEN HEART  
AND MIND, WHICH IS WHAT  
EVERYONE IS DOING..."**

This is a jibe unlikely to be leveled at Kinsella as he becomes increasingly focused on using his music to communicate his observations on politics and the state of the world. While he wouldn't call *So Much Staying Alive and Lovelessness* overtly political, he describes his next release, due out in May, as more situated in immediate politics than past work has been. But don't worry, it's still Joan of Arc.

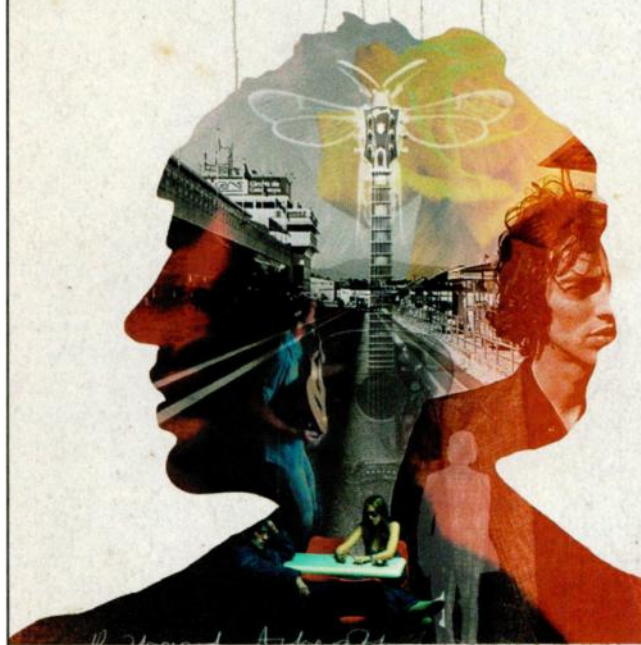
"I'm not saying I made Jello Biafra with Joan of Arc or something," he laughs.

Kinsella has been reading the news lately, reading Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, and feeling frustrated by the political apathy he sees within the counterculture. Considering the state of the world, he's certain the threat of war overshadows the relevance of talk about how a song gets written. It won't overshadow the music itself, however, because he can't help but turn all he sees around him into a song. It's what he does, even if he can't explain how it happens.

"It's all just intuition," he says.

—Sarah Tomlinson

# Richard Ashcroft Human Conditions



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# Manda & The Marbles Power Pop Takes the Midwest

"We're definitely not a punk band," explains drummer Mark Slak of Manda and the Marbles. With their upbeat tempos and catchy melodies, the members of Manda and the Marbles describe their sound as "power pop rock 'n roll."

This Columbus, Ohio, trio just released *More Seduction* on New York's Go Kart Records. Driving über-pop anthems about "love gone bad" and "friendships gone wrong," the tunes on *More Seduction* have kids dancing up a storm, while the band and its critics are locked up in semantics. New Wave perhaps? Vocalist/bassist Manda Marble disagrees.

"I don't think there can be a new wave now," she shares skeptically. "We kind of are, because new wave is marketable punk music. We are mel-lower, more marketable than a punk band."

Brought together by fate, Marble met guitarist Joe Damage while she was recording with a prior band at a free recording workshop. Damage, an engineering student there, was not supposed to tweak knobs until later in the week, but illness and absence obscured his original schedule.

In the studio, he took an instant fancy to Marble's band, got her number, called to offer his guitar services and proceeded to join the band. After one show, Damage and Marble stormed out on the shaky lineup, citing a lack of ambition. Soon after, the duo attended a party where Damage suffered an eye injury, courtesy of a fallen light fixture. The stranger who hap-

pened to assist the injured guitarist soon found himself playing behind the group's drum kit.

Marble says the novelty of a frontwoman seems to be wearing off in Columbus. At first, she says, she felt pigeonholed.

"They think we have to play only with other girl bands," she says of people's narrow views. "They may even be a totally different genre of music, but if it has a girl in it, they put us on the bill."

Gender also treats Marble to a dichotomy of criticism and condescension.

"If you don't play well, people will say, 'well, it's OK, because she's a girl,'" the frontwoman sneers.

The band enjoyed some diverse company, however, for Kill Rock Stars' 2002 compilation *Field and Streams*. Marble says the band plans to tour the West Coast this coming summer in support of its Go Kart debut. The cheeky bassist also notes the release of a movie and a video might not be out of the question.

*Creepers*, directed by Jeff LeRoy, features music by Manda

and the Marbles, marking the group's first foray into the world of low budget horror movies. Fully infected with the video bug, the band also plans to cut a video for "Forget About the Day" from *More Seduction*.

Marble says the video's concept will be loosely based on '80s teen movies (*Pretty in Pink*, *The Breakfast Club*).

Now, if the band could just get booked at a prom...

—Michelle Rush



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# 5 QUESTIONS **kinski**

Although Kinski's sound warrants its indulgences in droning, atmospheric textures, when the songs run long they definitely deserve the time. Reveling in instrumental avant-rock bliss, its latest effort, *Airs Above Your Station*, on Sub Pop, offers thrilling dynamics wrapped in a spiraling cacophony of sound.

**Is Kinski against traditional song structures?** ▶ I wouldn't say we're against them—we actually have a new song that most people would say has a pretty traditional structure. We just find it more interesting to kind of rip things apart and make things go in more unexpected directions.

**How would you describe your music?** ▶ We normally mention krautrock, and I think it is kind of drony, hypnotic, heavy. I try to stay away from mentioning other bands, but you can't help but do it if you want to give somebody a quick idea of what it sounds like.

**Why does the band go without lyrics?** ▶ It is kind of just if the songs call for it, and nothing has really called for it. I do most of the writing. I also have nothing to say.

**Do you agree with krautrock comparisons to Kinski?** ▶ I got heavily into the whole krautrock thing when the revival happened in the mid-'90s. We're big Sonic Youth fans. I think sometimes people just take the easy way out and say we're like Sonic Youth, just as a quick reference point. I think we're more like other bands.

**How would you describe your writing process?** ▶ The songs are pretty worked out. We spend a lot of time rehearsing songs, and we normally are an album ahead of ourselves. Most of it doesn't just come out of jams, but some of it does. Most of the time, it is simply pieces we have written and just put together.

*Answers by Chris Martin*



## HOT HOT HEAT WARMS UP TO WARNER BROS. SUB POP LEFT IN THE COLD?

▶ The relatively new group Hot Hot Heat, having only issued an EP and full-length, has already broken down and gone the way of the major label (holy Burning Brides!). The foursome released its debut, *Knock Knock Knock EP*, last April on Sub Pop, and the *Make Up the Breakdown LP* in October.

Sub Pop's Steve Manning isn't holding any grudges over the move. "They have more money, better connections," he admits. "They can get bands on MTV and we can only get one on MTV2 a

few times. We want the band to be as successful as possible, even if they're on another label, because it makes our catalog stronger. And they're people—we want them to have fun and be successful."

Meanwhile, Warner is embroiled in a maniacal plot to re-release *Make Up the Breakdown* with one bonus track—making the Sub Pop catalog less strong, perhaps? At least this way, the record will be eligible for *SPIN's* 2003 Album of the Year. ■



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## Steve Von Till Enemy with a Sunn ▶▶

If you were in a band known for pumping out as many megawatts of volume and fury as the ever-evolving Neurosis, you'd need the occasional break, too.

Ringleader Steve Von Till takes a breather with solo album *If I Should Fall to the Field*, his second dance with haunting and heartfelt acoustic material. Blending original songs with traditional selections and a cover of Neil Young's "Running Dry," the album is framed with a vivid longing for the past.

Those familiar with Neurosis' apocalyptic output might be surprised at some of the sounds on *If I Should Fall*, though by the same token, Neurosis fans don't need to worry about an incongruous departure. To hear Von Till explain it, he considers his guitar an extension of himself. While Neurosis material tends to come from closed sessions of coaxing and arranging, Von Till's solo joints ooze more seamlessly from impromptu sessions around the house.

"This is more like a conversation," Von Till says of his solo ventures. "I always know what my focus is at the moment of creation."

Despite the relative natural quality of his acoustic writing, one quickly gets the sense of a mood of searching on this latest record, whether the quest is for nature, American history or one's own ancestry.

"There's an underlying theme of a longing, of things that are passing," confesses Von Till. "My obsessions with folklore and mythology pop in and out, more as poetical references than specific subject matter."

As an example, Von Till mentions his recent taking to the western standard, "Ghost Riders," citing a correlation with Nordic tales of Odin's wild hunts and various European winter tales of spirit stampedes.

"It makes sense that it's the same story, because the western traditions are some of the more pure European down-filters—sour mash-soaked, Scottish and Irish," he reflects.

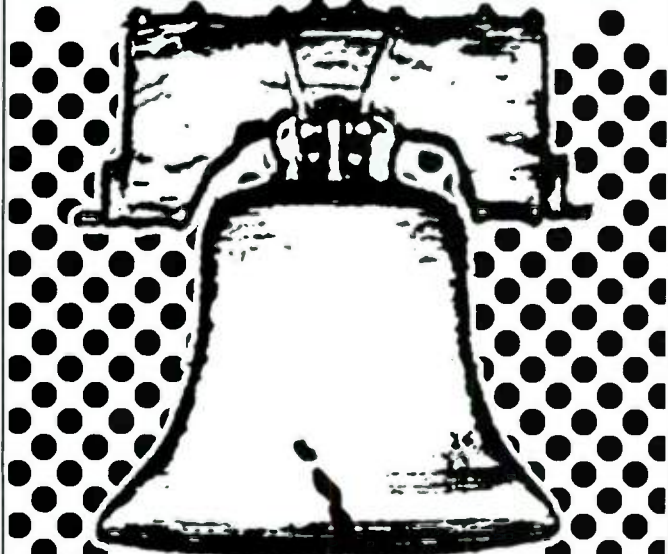
Of course, when discussing creative forces close to his own heart, Von Till doesn't need to jump back quite so many centuries. Aside from Picts and cattle raids, the Neurosis guitarist conjures a healthy litany of influences, touching down on a wide variety of sounds and styles.

Still, one can't help but wonder what pushes someone responsible for a blistering assault like *Word as Law* (Lookout) to pay homage to a Crosby, Stills and Nash collaborator. It's difficult to find much in common between Von Till or Neurosis' dark brooders and the post-Sept. 11 Neil Young, penning new tunes for the war drum and giving the thumbs up from the turrets of tanks. All the same, Von Till says he considers Young's more credible work as stirring, passionate songwriting.

"I've been a bigger fan of his later in life, because I was busy with punk rock rebellion, where you shun all that hippy shit," he chuckles. "Neil Young's one of those guys you can't knock. He's got a depth and soul that few people do. Also, that song ["Running Dry"] goes back over the water—the chorus sounds just like 'Greensleeves.'"

—Kurt Orzcek

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# The Microphones Running the Olympiad ▶▶

Olympia has a history of producing some strange iconoclasts. Home to the resolutely independent Evergreen State College, this small town on the Puget Sound has given birth to K Records founder Calvin Johnson, riotous bombshells Sleater-Kinney and the spectacular post-punk splendor of Unwound. Sole Microphones member Phil Elverum fits right in with this motley list, making uncompromising music that sounds like very little else, even standing far apart from those who share his home town.

It is the sheer originality of The Microphones' 2001 record, *The Glow Pt.*, which vaulted Elverum to an unlikely modest fame.

Packed to the gills with verbose effects, lurid atmosphere and sedate, yet striking craft, the album's undaunted chutzpah gained the notice of folks far outside of Olympia's sheltered confines. The hallowed name of mega-producer Phil Spector was thrown around like so much ink out of a squid. In fine Oly tradition, Elverum capitalized on this windfall by releasing a grandiose concept album involving a vindictive mountain and his own death entitled *Mt. Eerie*. So has this starry-eyed nut shot himself in the foot or what?

"I have an aversion to the whole world of popularity for music and all the imbalances of power and the mightiness of being on a high stage," Elverum shares. Instead of the crude machinations of the music biz, His Philness

prefers the intimate, spontaneous interactions of the small concerts.

"The real juicy parts are when somebody yells some jackass comment, and then we get into a good conversation."

Elverum's interest in playing live belies the intense and detailed work he puts into creating his songs. The content of *Mt. Eerie* may be off-putting (especially considering the 10-minute hand percussion intro), but the unbridled sweep of The Microphones' aesthetic will draw even the most skeptical listener well inside the chamber of secrets.

"I tried to make it a world that you couldn't get out of until the album ended," says Elverum.

While this may sound tragically resonant of the overblown excess marring much of the '70s prog movement, The Microphones for the most part steer away from theatrical bloat. Even Calvin Johnson's potentially disastrous cameo as 'The Universe' contributes nicely to the gestalt. (Check his cameo on yesteryear's Heavenly record for a shudder.)

Ultimately, it's unclear why *Mt. Eerie* dwells on death and questionable rebirth. It's hard not to suspect the album could be one big hippie screed cloaked in exceptional songwriting.

"I don't really know what the record is trying to say," he muses. "That we don't *really* die? That we *do* really die? That what's invisible is still there? That the universe is big?"

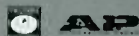
Such open ambiguity and unwillingness to be pinned down provide the engine for The Microphones' eccentric musical journeys, ensuring there will always be an audience waiting to hear them, whether Phil returns to the tree-lined streets of Olympia or not.

—Reed Jackson



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# 5 QUESTIONS **bitter, bitter weeks**

Known for his production work with bands like the Burning Brides and Matt Pond PA, Philadelphia native Brian McTear emerges with a self-titled release under the moniker Bitter, Bitter Weeks on My Pal God Records. The album, a collection of mostly acoustic songs played and sung simply through a microphone, proves he has strong work to show on either side of the soundboard.

**How did you arrive at the title for your project?** ▶ I was driving back and forth to the shore a couple of years ago, and the name popped into my head while I was listening to "Astral Weeks" by Van Morrison.

**You're known for your production work, so why so unpolished an album?** ▶ When I was in high school, I was big into sitting in the woods with a guitar, writing songs. It sort of predates that, and I guess it took me until now to get back to it. It is sort of the core of what I do.

**Is this a group project?** ▶ It is. A lot of my friends helped out on the record, but for now it is easier for me to hop in the car and go play as opposed to having to round everybody up.

**What inspired you to make this type of album?** ▶ Somebody had asked me to play a show, and they asked me to play acoustic, and in preparing for it, I decided to record the practice. As I was listening back to it, I realized it was better than the demoing I'd done. That practice basically became the record.

**Will Bitter, Bitter Weeks continue to release music?** ▶ I'm working on two records right now. The one will be the follow-up to the self-titled record, and I'm also doing a record that I want to bring around to sell on tour. It is going to become the priority, at least for this next year.

*Answers by Brian McTear*



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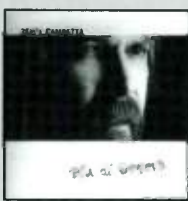
The Contenders (Walter Hyatt, Champ Hood, Steve Runkle, Tommy Goldsmith and Jimbea Walsh) toured and recorded from '76 to '78.



In that brief time they left an album that is an American roots gem. This CD includes the complete original LP plus three bonus tracks from the never-completed, never-released follow-up project recorded by Don Dixon.

### Beppe Gambetta *Blu di Genova*

Guitar wizard Gambetta is joined by Dan Cray and Gene Parsons on this new release of mostly instrumental cuts that showcase his amazing versatility with several musical styles.



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### Deanna Varagona Trio *The Goodbyes Have all Been Taken, Hello*

Singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist Varagona cuts a wide swath with this collection that ranges from folk to twang, and she shines on each track. A member of cult band Lambchop, Varagona will be touring this spring and summer.



### Tonio K. *16 Tons of Monkeys*

The first ever live album from Tonio K. chronicles a 1992 show w/ his Austin supergroup 16 Tons of Monkeys. TK & co. rip through a dozen of his songs, including the unreleased "Blind and Lucky", "The Facts Don't Matter (It's the Feel)", and "Still Not Over You"; also includes two bonus unreleased studio tracks: "I Don't Like It" and "Where's My Baby?"



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## Dot Allison She Blinded Me With Science ▶▶

As the frontwoman for the early-'90s act One Dove, Allison helped pioneer the trip hop/pop crossover pervading all by the end of the decade. Her 1999 solo debut, *Afterglow*, was considerably more subtle, using gentle acoustic strums, keenly crafted hooks and soft electronic loops to demonstrate a fine sense of maturity.

So when Allison's new record, *We Are Science*, boasted a quasi-title track ("We're Only Science") kicking off with a moan and a vigorous synthesizer line flowing like bubbling milk over strict syncopated beats, one has to wonder what's afoot.

"I suppose once I complete an album, instinctively I want to do something to contrast it," says Allison, nursing herself out of a cold, despite the overcast U.K. weather. "It's just expressing other parts of my musical self."

While she confides a love of dance music was the conduit stirring her to songwriting, Allison has actually been a part-time DJ for the past four years. She regularly spins in London, recently holding a residency in Barcelona and even stopping in for a few selector gigs in New York this past fall. While she still fancies it very much a hobby, her time spent behind the decks has certainly influenced her latest output.

"When I'm mixing, sometimes I'll hear something I like—a beat or a loop or a melody," Allison muses. "I'll think that I want to incorporate something like that into one of my songs. It's a collage in a kind of way."

Adding to the collage of *Science* are a small handful of songs falling well outside the body-mover description—gentler moments perhaps more at home on *Afterglow*. "Performance" is an epochal expanse in the vein of Julee Cruise, while on "Wishing Stone" Allison gets all Mazzy Star with just an acoustic guitar and lots of reverb.

For all the forays the record takes into different directions, *Science* continually returns to big beats and a steady dance basis. So what's Allison's main bag—fervent music that sends listeners flailing out on a sweaty disco floor or more subdued melodies meant to mix with a comfortable couch and a bottle of wine?

"I would honestly hate to go without either of those experiences," she confides. "When you're on a dance floor, the music moves you in a completely different way—it goes to your core. But more harmony-based songs, songs that are very much about chord progressions that take an unusual turn, they can be extremely touching, even heartbreaking."

Whichever the direction she's taking, Dot Allison isn't one to consciously force her music into a form it won't fit. She instead allows herself to define her own, eclectic sound.

"You don't think about the music you're making, it just sort of comes out," she says.

Luckily, she's still convincing, even with a light sniffle.

—John Vettesse





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# THE MAN WHO WOULD BE BLING

## SEAN TILLMAN WANTS YOU TO REACH FOR THE SUPERSTAR

BY REED JACKSON



Har Mar Superstar is driving somewhere out in the hot and trackless desert between Las Vegas and Los Angeles, sporty sunglasses stuck squarely to his eyes. In four days, this self-made R&B mogul will be strutting his cocksure moves in front of studio execs and Hollywood's A-list.

"I'm on my way to audition for the *Starsky and Hutch* remake," Mr. Mar tells me from his oft-ringing cell phone. "I'm going to try out for a part as some guy who has a dance-off with Owen Wilson or something."

Har Mar, who takes his stage name from a celebrated, "Denim-spoke-here"-style shopping mall in the Midwest, will forgive those of us who respond to this news with incredulity. The ascendant pop idol hasn't always been in a situation to hang out with hip celebrities and aid the efforts of cheesy nostalgia films.

Once upon a time in the year 2000, Har Mar was just another schlubby guy with a spotty history in basement bands (under his real name Sean Tillman, he is responsible for the cultish Calvin Krime and Sean Na Na) and an aberrant level of self-confidence worthy of a runner-up position on *The Gong Show* perhaps, but certainly not big-time material. Har Mar, his open surroundings putting him in a more reflective frame of mind, agrees with my assessment.

"Three months ago, I never would have imagined all this happening," he confides, with a slightly stunned tone in his voice.

Indeed. For those of you who haven't seen him gracing the glossy pages of *Jane* Magazine or his splashy lifestyle spreads in *Spin*, Har Mar isn't your average pop hustler. With receding locks, a stocky frame and a dainty mustache giving the elusive touch of sleaze, Har resembles a better-looking Ron Jeremy more than the svelte D'Angelo. The notion of this pillowy, awkward marshmallow man pumping out KY-slick sex jams and shaking his scantily clad assets for the shawties in the crowd seems patently ridiculous. The possibility of such an effort finding acceptance appears even more ludicrous. So what's the secret to his sweet, sweet science?

"I guess if you spend enough time telling people you're the best, they start to believe you," Har Mar shrugs.

A critical mass of glitterati has been lending proof to this theory. The Record Collection, a new imprint under the aegis of the Goliath Warner Brothers conglomerate, has picked up Har Mar and given his latest record, *You Can Feel Me*, a well-produced sheen and a fair amount of marketing push. This alone is big news for a guy who released his overly snide first album (self-titled) on Olympia's uber-indie Kill Rock Stars.

The love doesn't stop there. With the teenage girls of *Jane* and the major music press paving the way, our Superstar soon found himself writing songs for media darlings such as J. Lo, and escorting Mad Ozzy's daughter to the *MTV Music Awards*.

But all the hot dates and plush songwriting credits don't automatically a superstar make. *You Can Feel Me* has not lit up the charts or gained Har Mar much play on pop, hip-hop or modern rock radio stations. The songs written for J. Lo did not appear on any of the diva's albums. All the opening spots for big names Incubus and The Strokes still haven't catapulted Har Mar's name into the minds of our nation's youth. Chuckling lightly, Mr. Superstar doesn't have a problem with his position just left of the spotlight.

"Every scene has it's weird freak who just kind of hangs out on the periphery," he reflects. "As it stands right now, I have no problem being that guy."

It is an easygoing attitude serving Har Mar well in his incongruous rise through the ranks of celebrity. To hear him tell it, the dazzle has definitely not gone to his head.

"I'm just happy flying to places and playing shows wherever I want, partying with whoever wants to and more or less being an international playboy," he assesses dryly.



And of course there are the models. Of late, many a paparazzi snapshot has caught Har's lumpy form palling around with slinky fashion models, looking like a guy who got admitted to the party by mistake. For a man who's entire oeuvre traffics in bangin' on the bathroom floor, Har Mar seems a bit modest in matters regarding ladies.

"I don't hang out with that many models, really," he downplays. "More than the average person, I guess, but it's not a huge part of my life."

Well, a guy has gotta have room to improve.

Improvement is currently on Har Mar's mind as well. For this is what makes him special, his easy acceptance of increased fame, recognition and party invitations, paired with his unrelenting focus on what really matters—the music. It is in this area Har Mar still seems dissatisfied, his growing vogue notwithstanding.

"I really wish we had more time with this record," he sighs wistfully. "I've learned a lot from The Neptunes and Justin Timberlake's people. My next record will be twice as good."

**"I DON'T HANG OUT WITH THAT MANY MODELS, REALLY!"**

So there you have it.

You can remove the boy from the indie, but you can't take the indie out of the boy. With the shining members of the cultural elite high-fiving him and courting his presence, Har Mar really just cares about the music, and by extension, the fans. As the man says himself on the intro of *You Can Feel Me*, "You are my friends too."

And *You Can Feel Me* makes it obvious we all are, indeed. For all of Har Mar's occasional braggadocio and overblown persona, he takes pains to make a genuinely enjoyable R&B record. From the provocative gender interplay of "Power Lunch" to the electric slide of "No Chorus," *Feel Me* delivers the goods by way of "that dark, that gooeey stuff," in the words of Jay-Z.

Har Mar's vocals flow like semi-melted butter, coating the fluffy popcorn of sly hooks and choruses like spiked cough syrup, like Vermont snow. While Har Mar's debut relied too obviously on sarcastic humor (song titles like "Girl You're So Stupid") in order to distract from the main man's less than fresh and clean appearance, *Feel Me* is pure velvet R&B, straight-up and old school.

The album takes many cues from the greats—incorporating the supple vocal lines of classics like Bobby Brown and Bel Biv Devoe with the deft beats and classy keyboards of modern maestros Timbaland and Usher.

Lyrically, Har Mar seems very akin to Pink, an artist whom he admittedly admires (despite some reservations about the chick from 4 Non Blondes writing the songs), crowing the joys of partying and getting it on.





**"EVERY SCENE HAS IT'S WEIRD FREAK WHO JUST KIND OF HANGS OUT ON THE PERIPHERY » I HAVE NO PROBLEM BEING THAT GUY."**

"I just want people to party a little bit more," Har Mar proclaims from the Californian road. "Some people get too college about it, thinking too hard about something that's just supposed to be fun."

Any lurking suspicions of Har Mar being an in-joke for record store clerks should be quickly put to rest—this is an album with history in its soul, authenticity at its core and sex on its dirty, dirty mind.

Does the fact that it's a campy former indie guy behind all the shout-outs and booty calls make it harder to accept?

For some, unfortunately it does.

For all the lovely ladies grinding on his gold lame shorts during his concerts, some people just don't get Har Mar's urban style and break dance attempts.

"I was playing a show in Mississippi, opening for Incubus," recalls our beleaguered protagonist. "People were just throwing shit constantly—change, umbrellas, shoes, a syringe. But it didn't bother me, I just played twice as long and went out in the crowd. I think I hit a guy in the face. Some girl spit on me, so I spit on her back. I kind of like hecklers."

Ever looking on the bright side, Har Mar has not let Southern naysayers dampen his dreams. An indie kid who's made it big (sort of) in a genre usually ignored by his ilk, he wears his prosperity well and only dreams of making more hype tunes.

"I would like to make songs that high school girls can sing on the way to the prom," he dreams, the speculative shimmer of the Hollywood sign emerging from the distant haze. "Then I could be majorly rich and not have to worry about shit."

Even with this late manifestation of base capitalism, it's hard not to want to see Har Mar Superstar reach his goal. Especially if that means dancing with Owen Wilson.

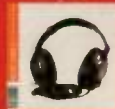


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# “SOLO FOLK GIRL” RETURNS

BY LAURA BARCELLA

**ANI DIFRANCO** has always seemed a poster girl for the fiery, independent female. In 1990 she emerged as an idealistic solo artist, the quintessential “girl with guitar” on a mission to change the world. She merged her radical politics and keen business sense into a thriving indie label, Righteous Babe Records, releasing 14 full-length albums of self-penned anthems about power, strength, loneliness, and loss.

So it's been interesting—if not odd—to watch her transform over the past few years into a collaboration queen. She has worked with everyone from Prince to Dan Bern to Maceo Parker to Gillian Welch. She started out solo but formed a trio, and on last year's live album, *So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter*, seven musicians comprised her backing band. This same group (Julie Wolf on keyboards, Hans Teuber on flute and reeds, Jason Mercer on bass, Daren Hahn on drums, Todd Horton, Ravi Best and Shane Endsley on brass) supports her on *Evolve*, her latest offering.

Ultimately, DiFranco claims this is the end of her experiment with communal music making.

“I've gone solo since recording *Evolve*, so it's kind of the definitive band record,” she says, still groggy from sleep. “I was expending so much energy on the band, on rehearsing and auditioning. It was a rotating chair behind that microphone. I learned so much from my band and I adore each one of them, but it was time for me to focus again.”

“IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO FOCUS AGAIN.”

*Evolve* came together over the course of a year, during which DiFranco was doing what she does incessantly and best—touring.

“I’ve learned to write wherever, whenever, even if there are other people around, because there are often other people around,” she laughs. “I have to go inside my own head.”

Lyrically, *Evolve* is a mix of sad and uplifting, fierce and defeated. DiFranco delivers each tune with her trademark powerhouse vocals, and the sound soars beyond simple folk twang, incorporating horns, brass and drums. “Serpentine” is a 10-minute opus, while fresh funk and Latin influences pepper some of the other songs. DiFranco admits pain and suffering were primary inspirations behind the album, as well as the notions of rebirth and self-discovery.

“For a long time I thought I was going to call the record *Phase*, but I didn’t want it to just exist in a phase or in emotional paralysis,” she explains. Instead, the title is drawn from a song DiFranco penned after separating from her band.

“I was getting back in touch with myself. I wanted the name to evoke a kind of escape hatch, with a sense of change and possibility.”

The album was largely recorded at DiFranco’s new home studio in Buffalo, N.Y., as well as at the Congress House studio in Austin, Texas.




“I HAVE TO  
GO INSIDE  
MY OWN  
HEAD.”

Throughout the process, DiFranco and her band tried to evoke the spontaneity and chemistry occurring during live shows. “The songs always sound best onstage, where they live naturally,” she explains. “So we tried to get that vibe going in the studio.”

Because of the number of musicians involved, *Evolve* was not the smoothest album to record, and it took time to congeal. For DiFranco, the greatest pleasure of the process was doing it herself—for the first time in her career, she mixed the record on her own, minus even an engineer.

“It wasn’t necessarily fun, but it was liberating,” she recalls. “I’m pleased with having done all that learning, knowing I can do it alone for better or worse.”



“I’M PLEASED  
WITH HAVING  
DONE ALL THAT  
LEARNING,  
KNOWING I  
CAN DO IT  
ALONE FOR  
BETTER OR  
WORSE.”

If self-sufficiency were a sport, DiFranco would be its head cheerleader, so the ever-autonomous DiFranco is thrilled to return to her solo roots.

"At times with the band I would feel like the only person in the room not having a good time, or like I was working while they were partying," she says. "But when I'm solo, I can really focus on the song and the moment and the people I'm singing to—it's less like work. I'm more able to lose myself in it."

One thing DiFranco has never lost is her passion for politics. After 12 years behind a mic, her compassionate stances on human, queer and reproductive rights are still center stage in her work. But today her expression of that political fire stems from some place older, wiser.

"I'm almost an adult now, I think," she laughs. "When you're young, you're on the outside, figuring out how society works politically and socially. Now I'm more a part of my society—this country is my job. My political writing is less of myself, less bodily focused."

American women are especially lucky to have DiFranco, who continues to identify as an adamant feminist and spokesperson. "If people can't fucking say the word and call themselves feminists, the situation is not good," she snips, audibly charged upon mention of the subject. "We have a pretty good society in which to be a woman, if you look around the globe. But that word has been taken from us by the Rush Limbaugh, hyper-conservative, dominant media and culture."

As a one-woman enterprise in the music world, DiFranco knows firsthand the ways in which the mainstream media has ghettoized "women in rock." She lists Amy Ray of the Indigo Girls as a friend and feminist mentor, and empathizes with Joan Jett's infamous letter to *Rolling Stone* last winter in protest of the magazine's skimpy coverage of female rockers.

"It's ludicrous, as we all know," DiFranco sighs. "This 'women in rock' business, the way it's fed to us now. If you're still looking in those magazines for information about music, you're not looking in the right place!"

For her part, and for women everywhere, DiFranco plans to continue rocking (or, rather, folkling) on her own terms and on her own two feet. In February she opened for Bob Dylan in Australia, and in March and April she will tour the States in conjunction with the release of *Evolve*.

Is there anything new for her to do—anything she is dying to try?

"What I'm doing now!" she exclaims. "Going back to being solo folk girl, making a record by myself." ■



# Rachael Sage

"Ripe piano-driven songs that blend a rich mixture of pop, folk and jazz...reflecting on love and acceptance."  
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RAWK TAWK WITH JAMES DEWEES

# IN EFFECT ▶▶

ROCKPILE RADIO CHATS WITH REGGIE & THE FULL EFFECT



## ◀ WE'RE ON THE AIR ▶



**HIYO! HIYO! HIYO!** Goo-ood morning folks and welcome to yet another edition of *Rawk Tawk* with your host, Curly McGee—that's me!

I'm here—or hear, I should say, since this is a show all about music—with a pretty special, whipsmart guest today. Yes, I'm talking about Ricky—er, that's Reggie and the Full Effect. Now, Reggie's boring Clark Kent persona is, stop me if I say this wrong, James DeWees from a little band called The Get Up Kids. But, hey, you didn't hear it from me—after all, I'm Curly McGee!

The Get Up Kids are a witty, post-punk coterie from Kansas City. All you *Rockpile* radio listeners know that by now, so don't make Curly have to retell the story. He needs to save his breath for the rest of this one!

Now, it says here Reggie albums are much different than those by the Get Up Kids, and you might even call them the closest to illegal that legal records can get. They break laws left and right, whether it be by way of genre—try your best to define Reggie, Mr. Music-Critic Policeman, instruments and even song length. ▶▶



## HOLD UP NOW, REGGIE-JAMES, YOU'LL GET YOUR CHANCE TO TALK...

The new one, *Under the Troy*, is disco one minute—oops, pardon me, that's *Under the Tray*. Who writes these things!? Anyway, *Under the Tray* is disco one minute, butt-rock riffage the next. There's pure punk, Devo-isms, metal howls, heartfelt and cocky, all at the same time.

His "second full-length effort," as some pubic-hair-ridden journalist would say, has songs like "MOOD 4 LUV," "F.O.O.D., aka, Aren't You Hungary (Featuring Hungary Bear)" and "Megan 2k2 (Even Though it's 2K3 Now)." The album is only 38 minutes long, but in there it sounds like James has taken every note of music ever put to tape, thrown it into a magical oven and created the pie of a lifetime.

Jot this down, so you don't forget: Matt Pryor from Get Up Kids plays on and off throughout the record, and helps James dazzle crowds, too. Even though Matt's on the record, let's make this one point clear; this is James' sundae. In fact he squeezed this one out (*\*insert shock jock flatulent sound-effect here\**) in a mere five days at his home studio. That even includes those head-smashing, swear-you-thought-they-were-sampled beats you hear on many of the tracks.

**So, Reggie-Jim, you seem like a good-looking guy, how you doin' with the ladies? Got a girlfriend?**

My first one was this girl named Amy.

**You gotta speak into the microphone, son.**

I said my first girlfriend was named Amy. She told me she was pregnant when she wasn't. I was 14. The whole school knew she wasn't pregnant except for me. There was this ongoing joke, and I flipped out, and I told my parents and grandparents. My mom called her mom and said, "We've got to do something about this baby!" Then I found out it was all a joke. But I didn't dump her! I was 14 and having sex, so I totally stayed in the relationship! She tried it again, and I was, like, 'No way. Even if you are for real this time, I don't believe you. Show me the baby, then I'll believe you.' Then I didn't date girls until I was 18, because I was a little flipped out. Every girl I date is going to tell me she's pregnant with my kid? Screw girls! Then I dated this girl named Erin for two years. We lived in Columbia, Missouri, and went to MU together. Smoked a lot of pot, and that led to just being bored with each other.

After that, I started dating this girl Megan. I was 22; I'm 26. All the songs on *Under the Tray* are about her. We married about a year and a half ago. It's neat to be married and gone all the time. I'm sure my wife would say the same thing, "It's really neat."

**Ain't that sweet. Got kids on the way, yet?**

We've got a Shitzu! You ever seen one of those? They're funny. And it's a really, really nice one. I feel like I'm talking about a car—"Really shiny; the horn is so loud! It came with eight speakers!" We're going to do some photos of me walking the dog around in a fake fur coat. And we're going to re-release *Greatest Hits 1984-1987* (originally released on Second Nature in 1999) with a couple extra songs. It'll be called *Lord of the Bling*. My dog will be involved on there somewhere.

That girl Erin I mentioned, her dad is a college professor. He used to have a dog named Reggie that had homosexual tendencies. Reggie was such an obsessed dog, the only thing he ever heard was, "No, Reggie, no! Go away!"

**Speaking of beasts, or rather, Beastie Boys, when will The Full Effect make the jump into hip hop?**

I haven't mastered the art of turntablism yet, but I'm getting there real fucking fast. I'll be cutting records, like, "Mix Master Mike, eat my hum-marggh! Honkey!" I'm going to be Mix Master Fred.

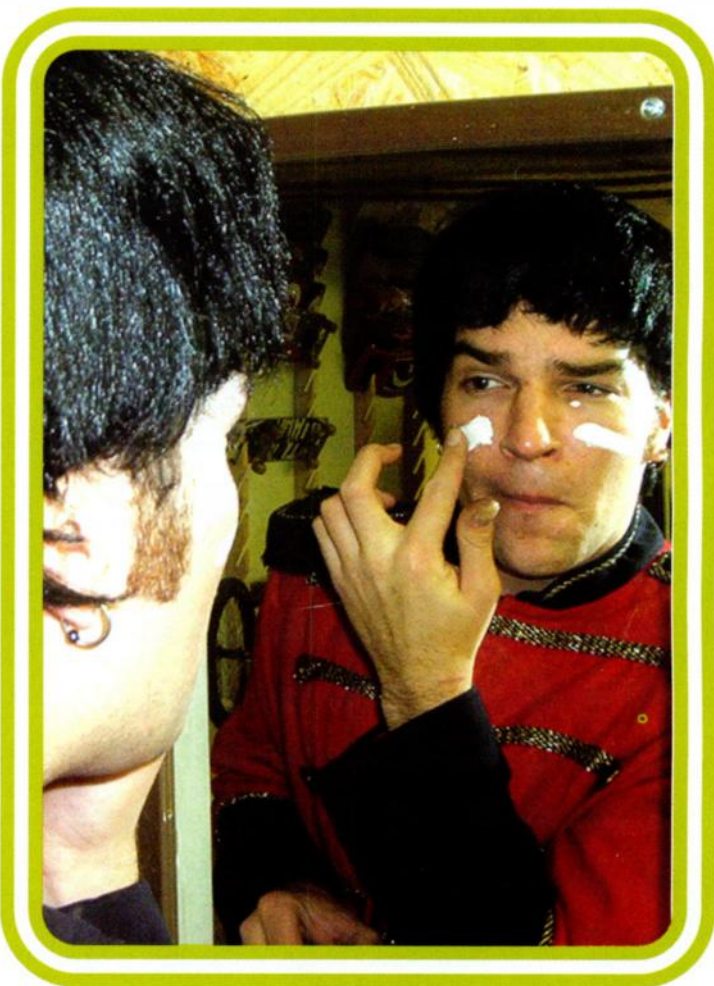
**Working the wheels of steel can really build up an appetite, Jackie. I ought to know!**

I'm really into Starburst right now. They just came out with a whole new type, Sour Starburst! It's the shit. But I don't think people were buying it enough, because this gas station by my house had it, and now they don't. I keep bugging the lady about when they're going to get more Sour Starburst.

That'd be a great job—naming candy. It's probably some total meathead with a communications degree. My brother's a meathead, and he has a communications degree. It's the easiest one in college. They probably said, "Here's a job you can have naming candy." And now that meathead sits around saying, "Cool, let's call this one 'goons.' Let's call this one 'dorks.' Let's call this one 'pussies'—oh, that's right, we can't do that, sorry."

**Easy now, Rickie. We DJs are comm majors at heart. For those of you just tuning in, we're talking with Jamie Dupree, whose alter ego is none other than Renny and The Bell Curve! So, Remmy, what's your favorite station in town?**

Once I was a delivery guy for a long, long time. This one lady would answer the door naked and her husband would hide behind the door. ▶▶



**CRAZY THINGS HAPPEN EVERY SINGLE DAY, IT JUST DEPENDS IF YOU WANT TO PAY ATTENTION TO THEM,**

**◀◀ NORMALLY I DO. ▶▶**



I think they were just getting their kicks. I went one time and hung out on the couch. I was like, "What did you do today?" "Oh, nothing, just decided to have pizza for dinner, 'cause I don't feel like cooking." "Yeah, I know what you mean, I'm going to take pizza home with me, too." Just a boring-ass conversation with a naked lady while her husband's trying to find a pen!

**Haw Hyuk! Folks, is that crazy or what?**

(\*insert bike horn sound effect and laugh track\*)

Crazy shit happens every single day, it just depends if you want to pay attention to it or not. Normally I do.

**So, let's get serious for one minute. On this latest album, despite all the quirky elements, there's an overwhelming sense of the futility of art and the ultimate mortality of man. I believe the Germans call it weltschmerz.**

Well, I'm not really into ribs right now, because I got sick when Get Up Kids were making a video. It blew the system in the front and the rear, if you know what I'm sayin'. Imagine I'm a stereo playing. In the rear, somehow the subwoofer just blew up all over the vent on the floor and went downstairs. It went into the vent and heated up. It was awful. So it was, like, cooked poop. Have you ever smelled cooked poop? I've never had food poisoning before in my life. It was really vicious.

**I'm sure that story will make everyone excited to see your show at the Bonnie's Rock Barn tonight! Again, that's Denny and the Better Halves playing live at Bonnie's Rock Barn—home of the Ground Zero Burger, conveniently located off Pigsknuckle Road and Rt. 48-B!**

Yeah, it's a little far of a drive, but maybe there'll be drink specials?

**Can I bring a plus one?**

Of course!! Anything for WRPL!! Whenever I'm in the area, I always tune to—Say, waitaminute. Do you speak Flemish? ■

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**W**

illiamsburg, Brooklyn, is a short train ride from Manhattan—just “over the bridge,” as they say. But in this somewhat deserted, quasi-industrial neighborhood, where sidewalks are still slick with ice from a recent winter storm, it is easy to imagine yourself a world away from the city. At a diner simply

called “Diner,” Polly Jean Harvey sings about how “the whores all hustle and the hustlers all whore,” her voice draping the atmosphere with a bleak, downtown funk. A cup of hot tea arrives to help shake off an acquired chill. In less than half an hour, the sun will set and daylight will be a memory.

This nearly empty restaurant is an oddly perfect setting for an audience with Chan (pronounced “Shawn”) Marshall, the enigmatic folk-rock chanteuse who records under the deceptively sassy name, Cat Power. Albums by Cat Power (of which there are six, including the just released *You Are Free*) are collections of emotionally cathartic, atmospherically sparse, intensely personal songs which swell and quietly spill over with the dark beauty of Chan Marshall’s inner reality. (One could even venture out on a limb and say Cat Power helped introduce the sound Beck took to the bank on his recent critical blockbuster, *Sea Change*.) No doubt, this afternoon’s seasonal, almost cinematic ambiance will create the appropriate mood for an interview with an artist as sensitive and offbeat as Marshall’s reputation suggests. ▶▶

# THE **NINE** **LIVES** OF **CHAN MARSHALL**

▶ STORY BY GAIL WORLEY ▶ PHOTOS BY CHRISSY PIPER





**“EVERY MONTH  
I GO AND PLAY  
A FEW SHOWS  
SOMEWHERE...  
...WHEREVER  
THAT TAKES ME,  
WHEREVER I AM,  
IS WHERE I AM.”**

**C**lose to an hour after her expected arrival time, she finally enters the diner; her tardiness owed to her record label having packed as many back-to-back interviews and photo shoots as possible into just a few days. There is a method to the madness, but it's likely that three days of Cat Power press leaves

both Chan and her publicist completely drained. At 31, this remarkably pretty Atlanta native, who is as friendly and polite a person as you could meet, is also a walking shrine to obsessive/compulsive behavior. And interviews, to put it mildly, are not one of her favorite things.

There's a song by R.E.M. called "Talk About the Passion," where Michael Stipe sings, "Not everyone can carry the weight of the world." His words come to mind frequently while chatting with Chan Marshall. When she sneezes and I mention having also recently recovered from a cold, she wants to commiserate, to know how long it lasted and what remedies were effective. It is as if the interview process is less invasive to her if she can do a bit of interviewing herself, engage you in personal revelation and thus somewhat level the playing field. It is an interesting defense mechanism, for the interview process clearly confounds her.

"I don't know what the hell I'm doing this for," she says, apologetically. "This really sweet girl was taking my picture earlier and she asked me, 'What's wrong?' I was like 'I don't really understand what I'm doing here.' Then she said, 'Well, you're getting your picture taken.'"

She giggles, an acknowledgment of how silly she must seem.

"It's weird, because there's so much 'projection' going on with the questions and the answers," she continues. "When a writer is trying to create something validating and make sense of something [in my music], it really confuses me. I think, 'Oh, I never really thought about asking myself that question.' The constant cycle of self-examination feels like you're alienating yourself," she offers, her voice drifting off. "It feels like cheating. I always try to relate to the question though, and figure out what [answer to give]."

She illustrates her point by asking the question, "Is the table white?" then repeating the sentence four times, each time emphasizing a different word. It's not difficult to understand how she could be exhausted by her own internal thought processes before an answer ever leaves her mouth. Everything is heavy—nothing is easy.

As we discuss her childhood, her experiences in South Africa, astrology (she is an Aquarius), the educational system and, yes, even her new album, Marshall compulsively fidgets with the collar and buttons on her shirt and often speaks in hushed tones or near-unintelligible whispers. She twists her hair, she gazes off to my left like she's addressing someone only she can see. As if to make herself insignificant or invisible, Marshall frequently covers her face with her hands or makes small fists which she then buries in her eye sockets. It is a startling, childish gesture, but somewhat endearing just the same.

It is challenging to avoid being distracted by her quirkiness, but she is so sweet and uniquely fascinating, to dwell on these various physical ticks would be unfair. While critics have speculated over Marshall's eccentricities, she's not crazy. Rather, she seems in some way haunted by a cache of intangible ghosts, and the only method of exorcism is through her music. In this way, her talent is a blessing born of a curse. Gifted with an intuitive understanding of how to translate inner conflict into music, it is clear to anyone who has heard a Cat Power record that singer/songwriter is her natural vocation. According to Marshall, making music is the easy part—what takes talent is all the other stuff, meaning doing press and promoting her albums. "It's so different! The two things are just so opposite. Art and commerce, God and commerce, politics and God... I don't know."

Though her albums are critically lauded, they are not the type of records that tend to sell more than a few thousand copies. Fortunately, Cat Power resonates with a far-reaching and fervent audience, allowing Marshall to make a decent living solely off her live performances. With a small apartment in New York (which she refers to as her little "Bat Cave") and family ties back in Atlanta, her constant touring lends itself to an itinerant lifestyle with which she's grown comfortable. "When I'm in New York I just come in, throw my bag down, maybe go out and see my friends. Then I get ready to go back on the road, rent the next car, go to the next destination for the next show, meet the next people. I can't decide where I want to live because I'm always going somewhere. Every month I go and play a few shows somewhere. That's all I do. And wherever that takes me, wherever I am, is where I am."

*You Are Free* is a gorgeous, very evenly textured album, with no distinct peaks and valleys to distract the listener from a cerebrally unsettling but melodically gentle ride. Her songs, she says quietly, are "moments in time that are human observations or memories that most people can relate to, probably." Instrumentally minimal, Chan plays all the piano and the guitar parts, with a couple friends helping out on backing vocals and drums. Her ambient piano on "Evolution," the album's final track, is espe-

cially riveting. Similar to Blur's haunting "Sing" (from the *Trainspotting* soundtrack), the minimal keyboard repetitions create a sense of being held in stasis and, because it lulls the listener, it's a perfect way to end the record.

"The thing about my piano playing is, I can't play," she laughs, admitting she's not inspired by any particular pianist. "I fell in love with the piano when I was little. I couldn't figure out the guitar [on my own]. It didn't make any sense to me. But you can just touch the piano keys and it resonates in your bones." She taps her fingers on the table top for emphasis. "It almost hypnotizes you."

It's been four years since Marshall released an album of new material (1998's *Moon Pix* was followed in 2000 by *The Covers Record*, which took reinterpretation of existing songs to new heights). A handful of songs—including the Tom Petty-influenced "He War" and the countrified "Good Woman"—were written years ago, but the first song on the album, "I Don't Blame You," and "Evolution" were written in the studio. "We were mixing the record and really kind of fucking around and not paying attention to what we were doing," she says. "We thought we were done, but then I came up with 'I Don't Blame You.' Then I started to get excited because I had all these other songs that I'd been messing with for so long. What I really wanted was for all the songs to come out at once. That would be great." ➤



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YOU WANT TO DO.**

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FREE.**



**A**sked if any particular individual is the focus of "I Don't Blame You," she replies, "Yeah, but I'm not going to tell you who!" Fair enough.

The slight twang in her voice belies her southern roots, but her vocals on these laid back songs frequently recall Sinead O'Conner's performance of "Nothing Compares 2 U." Chan takes this as a compliment.

"I love Sinead O'Conner. She is a-may-zing," she says, drawing the word out for emphasis. "She reminds me a lot, comparatively, to Bjork. I think Bjork and Sinead O'Conner are very vocally gutsy. I really like Bjork, too. Her voice is like woosh—liquid glass." Just for a moment, Marshall seems to forget she's being recorded.

When music is very, very good—when it reaches an almost transcendent level—there's very little separation between the singer and the song. Chan Marshall is one of those artists who becomes her songs.

"I think I know what you're talking about," she says. "Whether it's a cover or if you're singing what you've written, the lyrics are personal, because they're coming out of your body. I feel completely alone when I do this."

The merging of song and self permeates *You Are Free*, but it is most striking on her mournful cover of Michael Hurley's tortured ballad, "Werewolf," one of Chan's favorite songs on the album. She shares the story of how she felt most validated as an artist after meeting Hurley at one of her shows, where she had covered the song.

"When I first met him, he was trying to figure out, 'who does she think she is?'" Chan giggles. "Which is understandable because he's been all over the place, has done a lot of things and is older, wiser, more experienced. Anyway, he made sure I was looking at him, and then he said, 'I really like the way you covered that song, 'Werewolf.'"

She covers her face with her hands, a gesture silently completing her sentence. "He could have said any bullshit. He could have hung out and made jokes about nothing. But he made a point to really tell me that, which is so inspiring. He made sure that I knew that it was OK."


Marshall's near-crippling stage fright continues to make live performance a challenge of her intestinal fortitude, but she's found ways to lessen her discomfort.

"When people in the audience are making out at my shows, it usually helps me relax, because I can pay attention to something else. Couples come to the show and they'll be making out right in front of me—they're oblivious, you know? They're somewhere else. It's so great, because I can look at them, [imagine that] they're enjoying themselves, and it's such a great feeling. Some people tell me, 'My girlfriend and I made out to that one song you do...'. That makes it more human. I feel like it's really getting closer to people's love and... some sort of really positive vibe. That's important, because you want to really be individually one-on-one with everyone.' Chan admits her apprehension often sucks the enjoyment out of performing. "Sometimes it's fun to forget that you're actually there and [to find] something in the song that makes you feel safe or free or relaxed." Any port in a storm, as the saying goes.

"Sometimes people will tell me they drove 45 miles to see the show, and I like meeting people when it's a normal situation and not set up, you know what I mean?" she asks earnestly, like she really wants to make sure she's understood. "Sometimes younger people get a little freaked out to meet me, and it's really sweet. You can tell they want to be really nice, because maybe they want to play music, too. I just tell them, 'You can do anything you want.' Maybe they'll say that their parents want them to be in school, but it's like, 'Do whatever you want to do: stay in school, drop out of school, play music, whatever.'"

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# IT'S A ROUGH TRADE, BOYS

## ***THURSDAY AIMS FOR SUCCESS WITHOUT VICTORY***

**by John Vetesse**

Amusingly enough, I'm talking to Thursday vocalist Geoff Rickly on a Thursday.

It's a bizarre day of the week, a point where one cycle is about to end and a new one is getting ready to start. Likewise, the humble post-hardcore quintet from northern New Jersey has found itself in a very similar position of starting anew.

After grumbling about an apparent lack of support from its label—Chicago's Victory Records—the band pushed out a final EP for the bulldog label and inked a deal with Island Records. By late January, the band was in the early stages of writing and recording its first major label debut, slated for a May release.

In the meantime, the *Five Stories Falling* EP will sate eager fans with four live cuts from a virulent hometown Warped Tour set and an excellent new studio track, the dark and weighty "Jet Black New Year."

According to Rickly, however, the song is just a taste of the stirring direction in which Thursday is heading.

**The band is at the beginning of a new chapter right now. What's the collective feeling going into this?**

I'd have to say it's one of the most exciting, creative periods we've had. When we signed with Island, a bunch of the stresses we had with Victory disappeared. All of a sudden we were in this spot where we were all enjoying writing together more than we have in the past. We still have the same energy about sometimes disagreeing, but it's in a good way—everybody is excited, not pissed off.

**What's the new material sounding like?**

We brought one of our friends into the rehearsal space and played him the six songs we had, and he was really surprised that the new stuff was so fast. On *Full Collapse*, our mid-tempo songs had the most punch to them and the faster songs were, I don't want to say fluffier, but more classic hardcore. There aren't a lot of different directions we can go because none of us really know how to play our instruments the right way. We just know how to play them together, we know how to play Thursday songs. But it's always exciting when you find a fresh way to make that same thing.

**Throughout the past two years, there's been a lot of focus on the scene in North Jersey and New York, with some attention paid towards bands like Thursday, Midtown, Rival Schools and Taking Back Sunday. How have people back home reacted to Thursday's decision to go to Island?**

I don't know why it's turned out this way, but we haven't gotten much of a backlash from leaving Victory. I know why we did it, and I know our motives are good, but I wouldn't expect most kids to think about it that way. I mean, I remember how many of my friends turned their backs on Jawbox when they signed to a major. But most of the kids that criticize us for it, when we ask why it bothers them, they're really open to talking about it and finding out why we did it. A lot of them are like, "You guys were on an indie label, and now you're corporate, you're part of the machine." But by the end of when we were on Victory, it was as much a part of the machine as anything. Victory was part of Universal. Basically it was the same company we're with now, but it wasn't giving us the same kind of freedom. The other criticism we get—which makes me sad because I totally identify with it—is when kids are like, "Right now, you're the band that I listen to when everybody picks on me at school. When you guys get huge, you're going to be the band that all the kids that pick on me listen to." The worst part is I understand why bands do that and I totally support bands getting bigger because I want lots of people who they can help to hear them. At the same time, I remember feeling like those kids that couldn't take refuge in a band anymore.

**On *Five Stories Falling*, and on tour this fall, you had a keyboardist, Andrew Everding. Will he be incorporated more on the album?**

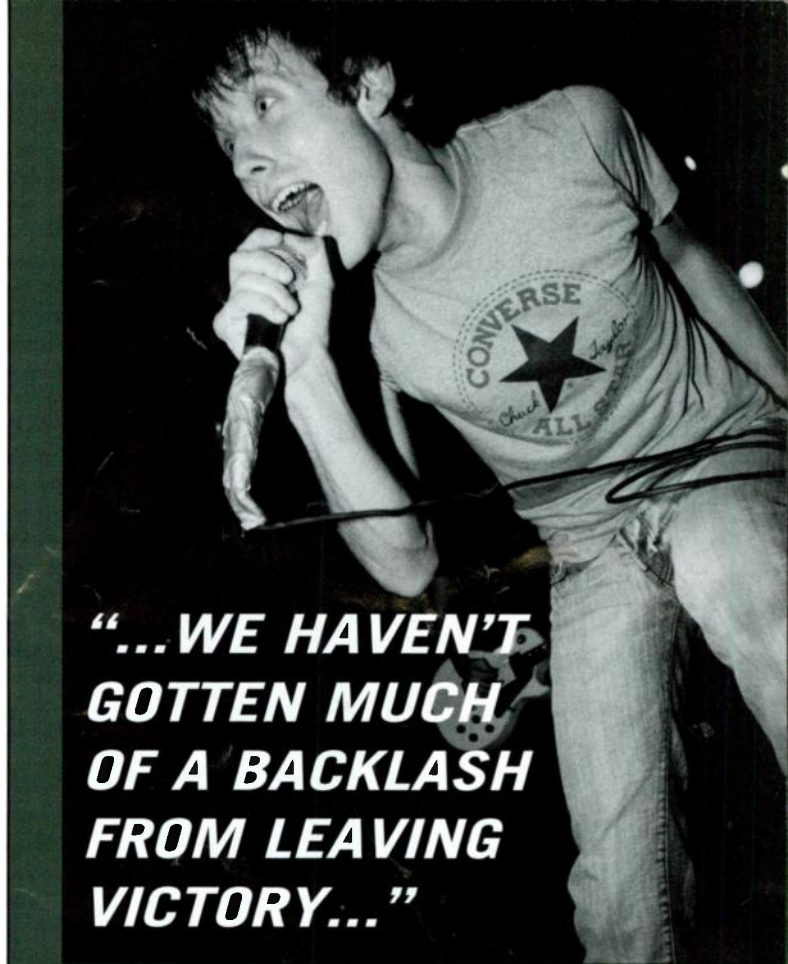
It's kind of like what Sonic Youth did with Jim O'Rourke. He's a touring member, and we're going to find some places for him on the record. We've always tried to incorporate different instruments outside the band on our albums.

**It seems to be a good time for major label music, though. You've got formerly underground bands like The White Stripes and ...Trail of Dead getting these big record deals but sounding as good as always.**

It's really encouraging. One thing that kind of psyched us was that not only did Island let us go to the same producer we've always been going to, but they were like, "Of course that's who should record it! You shouldn't sign to a major and all of a sudden sound slick." It's great that bands are able to maintain a little more integrity than they use to.

**So where does Thursday go from here?**

We try not to think about what the stature of the band is going to be or whatever. We really want to play, we really want to see people, it seems more pure that way. There is a thing for us that makes music special when people really believe in it. ■



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# 21ST CENTURY BOY(S) AND GIRL

## RAINER MARIA MAKES UP NEW RULES FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIA

BY ALLAN MARTIN KEPLER



**M**usic seems to be morphing a lot these days. It seems sleeker than it did a decade or a generation ago. The music of Cole Porter—or Fleetwood Mac even—had a thickness to it. You could feel the song's meaning inside the bends and glissando of each note. It emanated from the wood in the drums, from the solder in the amplifiers and from the muscles in the singer's throat. Music in the 21st century, on the other hand, is often as lithe as a supermodel, as sinewy as a Grecian wrestler and as jaded as a pornstar. It doesn't reverberate with the same quality of life. It doesn't have the same rounded edges as some of its antecedents.

Twenty-first century music is square.

Think about The Beatles, Gershwin, Sinatra—they were all plump like ripe grapes, bursting with life's fullness and able to deftly articulate this fullness using their talent for making music according to its traditional rules.

Post-millennial rock 'n roll, however, is often described as angular. Its practitioners are as likely to play with looping their amps' feedback as clever key changes and chord patterns. But this sleek, new rock 'n roll isn't just another swaggering step down the I-IV-V highway, or worse some hyphenated subset—it's a revelation. It derives power through the economical use of melody and it engages listeners by eschewing traditional verse-chorus

arrangements. Its visceral weight comes from the way it finds rhythm, melody and harmony in sonic textures like feedback and drone and the way it creates and mirrors a new perspective on life itself. At the forefront of this developing aesthetic is the Brooklyn-via-Wisconsin trio Rainer Maria.

Now in its eighth year of operation as one of the most popular bands sprung from the emotional hardcore or "emo" scene, Rainer Maria combines intense, emotionally charged female vocals with precise, lattice-like guitar work and Spartan yet powerful drumming to create an innovative rock 'n roll package beyond rock's old clichés.

Named for the 19th century German poet Rainer Maria Rilke and formed out of the ashes of the band Ezra Pound, poetry is at the heart of Rainer Maria's lyrics. While the words may follow the conventions of the poetical form, the music is strictly DIY.

"I got my start playing the kind of punk in the early '90s that's called pop-punk or emo punk now, and punk tells you it's okay to not be terribly accomplished musically," explains Rainer Maria guitarist Kyle Fischer. "I think innovation happens when you don't spend a lot of your time as a young person imitating your predecessors. I didn't start playing the guitar with any seriousness until age 20. So as a result I didn't have that four-year period of trying to learn all the Hendrix riffs or all the Zeppelin riffs."

Fischer may not have imitated his musical predecessors, but he enjoys poetry enough to have attended the University of Wisconsin poetry workshop where he met bassist Caithlin De Marrais in 1995. Of course, Fischer and De Marrais aren't the first musicians to apply their love of poetry to lyric writing, but unlike the hit-or-miss gonzo psychedelic histrionics of Jim Morrison or the painfully sub-par high school confessions of Tori Amos, De Marrais and Fischer's lyrics possess real magic. Nevertheless, Fischer confesses using his and Caithlin's own poetry as fodder for lyrics was simply a means to an end.

"Particularly with the first album, when Caithlin and I were enrolled in poetry workshops, the quickest way to get lyrics for a song was to raid your own collection," says Fischer. "Now I think there's been a shift away from very poetic, very hermetically sealed lyrics towards more direct speech. Poetry is often meant for the page and it's important in songwriting to be really direct, so we've been moving towards that."

Poetic or not, there is a certain emotionally overwrought tension with which De Marrais delivers nearly every song. Depending on your individual taste, it is either endearing or repellent. Likewise, nearly every song seems to be about the pathos involved in romantic relationships. But if every song seems to be painfully honest about the strum and drang of love gone wrong, Fischer says the band is conscious of its style and is careful not to cut too close to the bone.

"I feel like compared to previous albums this album is much more direct," he considers. "It doesn't go so far as to name names, but it does take a news event or use certain events to illuminate a point. You want listeners to feel the general idea to the extent that they relate, but if you make them too specific to your life, it stops being applicable to everyone."

"As for the elliptical approach, I think right now the number one purveyor of that is Radiohead, where you have a string of non sequiturs culled from the common language used to evoke a sense of dread or anticipation, and he's just going (sings) 'Where'd you park the car,' and you're like 'I'm shitting my soul out my ass! Help!' I don't think we do that so much."

Lyrics aren't the only thing Rainer Maria uses to direct listeners—De Marrais and Fischer are great singers too. In the past, De Marrais han-

dled the bulk of the band's vocal duties while Fischer chimed in for backups or an occasional intertwined counter melody.

On *Long Knives Drawn* (Polyvinyl), De Marrais sings every lead vocal and Fischer's boyish yelp is limited to just one track. But if Fischer is singing less, De Marrais is singing with more confidence.

And sing more she should, De Marrais has one of the most arresting voices in rock right now. By turns her voice is delicate, gruff and sexy, and sometimes all three at once. And though De Marrais is well known for having trouble hitting her spots in live situations, the quirky and heartfelt nature of her band's music lends itself to such bouts of vocal impurity.

Listeners shouldn't be misled, though. According to Fischer, despite the desperate and blue tone of many of Rainer Maria's songs, things aren't always as they seem. Besides, they're not trying to be a regular pop band anyway.

"I think this new record is less dejected. 'Mystery of Mysteries' is effective because the way the song is sung is contrary to what you'd expect from reading it on the printed page," says Fischer. "It sounds dispirited almost, but when you hear Caithlin sing it she's like 'Oh, you're wicked,' and you can tell she's more playful than it might seem from just reading the lyrics."

Despite playing more than 1000 gigs in the last five years, Fischer says he hasn't involved himself in the spoils of rock success—namely sex and drugs. Fischer says his abstinence has less to do with religious conviction of chastity than his relationship with De Marrais for the first six years of the band's existence. Since then Fischer says he's dabbled, but for the most part it's just not convenient.

"We're very conscious of the way that rock mythologizing takes place and so we never refuse to talk about our personal lives," says Fischer. "It's only been the last year or year and half that any booty getting as you say has been had, and even then I think I've only made out with one person or two. Isn't that pathetic? In seven years?"

"I should maybe drink more heavily. I don't drink before shows, what I do is almost gymnastic or aerobic. Every night is Saturday night on tour. If you do seven Saturday nights in a row then all of a sudden you have bronchitis."

EVERY NIGHT  
IS SATURDAY  
NIGHT ON TOUR.

IF YOU DO  
7 SATURDAY  
NIGHTS IN A  
ROW THEN ALL  
OF A SUDDEN  
YOU HAVE  
BRONCHITIS."



## NAPALM DEATH PUNISHMENT IN CAPITALS



Concert videos don't get much more in-your-face than this DVD. The brave cameramen filming Napalm Death last April got right up there with the band on the cramped University of London stage and journeyed into the mosh pit to capture all the raw energy, sweat and

noise of an underground metal show. Viewers can literally peer down guitarist Mitch Harris' throat when he screams his back-up vocals. After 90 unrelenting minutes of full-frontal grindcore insanity, Barney Greenway's grizzly bear bellow and a ceaseless stage-diving aerial assault, *Punishment in Capitals* is downright exhausting. Low-tech bonus documentary footage is equally intimate—right down to bassist Shane Embury's pee-dribbled shorts—and often amusing, though not terribly enlightening. When Embury describes tour-related bowel turmoil, even stalwart fans will probably consider this too much information. (Metal Valhalla)

—Peter Atkinson

## TONY HAWK PRO SKATER 4



With a fluid visual presentation, challenging game play paired with insanely addictive replay value; Neversoft ups the ante on the Tony Hawk video game franchise with *Tony Hawk Pro Skater 4*.

While the game follows the mold of its predecessors pretty directly (the controls and gameplay are pretty much identical to THPS 3), it features an entirely revamped career mode, with multiple challenges to complete before you can unlock the next level. *THPS 4* also ditches the standard two-minute timer, allowing gamers time to complete the almost 200 tasks strewn throughout the game's nine levels. The updated in-game park editor provides players with several preconfigured parks to shred through, a number of cheats and several hidden skaters. Additionally, successful gamers can purchase two bonus levels with in-game cash. Add these bonuses to new tricks like "skitching" and the ever-elusive "spine transfer," and you'll find yourself losing days on end, perched in front of your Xbox. (Activision, 3100 Ocean Park Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90405/www.activision.com)

—Dan Pastorius

## CKY THE BOX SET



Years before *Jackass* was a synapse in Johnny Knoxville's brain, Bam Margera along with Brandon DiCamillo were filming themselves doing reckless, off-the-wall stunts under the Camp Kill Yourself handle. Now, with the lukewarm success of *Jackass* in theaters, CKY have collected their out-of-print videos into a four-DVD box set, including added documentary footage as extra incentive. While the documentary doesn't add much content to the previously released videos (Margera and DiCamillo simply introduce some of their earlier skits, most of which aren't too funny), the videos prove nothing short of entertaining. Go mullet hunting with Bam. Watch naked people do naked things. See various excrement fly across the room. For those who need an excuse, scenes of Margera and others skating various parks and stairwells across the country are intercut throughout the onscreen antics. A must-have for fans of goofy skate culture. (www.bamargera.com)

—Dan Pastorius

## GORILLAZ PHASE ONE: CELEBRITY TAKEDOWN



Without the key map included with this highly involved DVD, viewers just might get lost in the world of the Gorillaz. Stuffed with videos (along with corresponding storyboards), skits, a documentary and live performances (or the band's closest resemblance to such) fans could be kept busy with this DVD for an easy two hours if left to their own devices. Behind the cartoon group is a bevy of top-notch musicians, including Blur's Damon Albarn, Del the Funkie Homosapien, Dan the Automator and visual artist Jamie Hewlett. The most involved and entertaining section of this DVD is Hewlett and Albarn's brief inclusion in the "Charts of Darkness" mockumentary, which takes a look at the connection between Albarn, Hewlett, 2D, Murdoc and the Gorillaz gang. The lengthy film is funny and informational, and it displays Albarn and Hewlett's sense of humor about the whole thing. There's even some good acting to boot. (Virgin, 150 Fifth Ave., New York 10011)

—Shannon McCarthy

## BANJAMIN SMOKE BY JEM COHEN



This compelling and intimate portrait of gay, outsider artist Robert "Benjamin" Dickerson and his band Smoke delivers an unflinching look at Dickerson's life and the impact it had on the Atlanta community. Released in 2001 and directed by Jem Cohen (*Little Flags, Instrument, Glue Man*) and Peter Sillen (*Speed Racer*), Benjamin Smoke follows the HIV-infected Dickerson through the final stages of his life and presents viewers with a collage of interviews and live performances. Dickerson admirer Patti Smith makes a cameo appearance, and the DVD extras include performances by Cat Power's Chan Marshall and Vic Chestnutt. (Plexifilm, 76 Saint Mark's Ave., Suite 2A, Brooklyn 11217/www.plexifilm.com)

—Allan Martin Kemler

## PUNK O RAMA THE VIDEOS: VOLUME 1



Like a family photo album, volume one of Epitaph Record's *Punk-O-Rama* video series chronicles the label from infancy to adulthood, including many an embarrassing haircut in between. Checking in with the label in 1994 (the year punk broke for Epitaph), the collection's 22 videos include the year's hits—Rancid's "Nihilism," Offspring's "Come Out and Play" and Bad Religion's "American Jesus." Videos by newer signees, The (International) Noise Conspiracy and Division of Laura Lee, show how the label's definition of punk has expanded to include subtler, more garagey rock 'n roll, while new videos from label stalwarts Rancid and Bad Religion find them kicking ass and taking names with as much fire as ever. Fun extras include Bad Religion live in 1992, complete with goofy band interviews and Mr. Brett with red hair. Other highlights include a live Bouncing Souls show recorded in 2002 and a Pennywise video shoot. As a partial Epitaph Records documentary, *Punk-O-Rama, The Videos: Volume 1* captures the label's personality and principles, but it occasionally sounds a little too self-congratulatory. After all, they have yet to atone for releasing The Offspring on us all. Besides, such backslapping is unnecessary and redundant, as the quality of the bands in these videos testifies to what Brett and his label have accomplished. (Epitaph, 2798 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles 90026/www.epitaph.com)

—Sarah Tomlinson



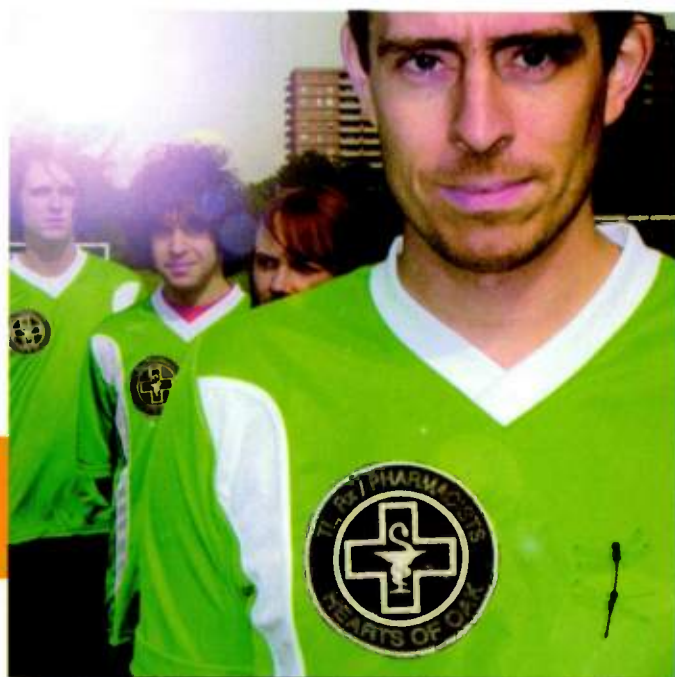
## TED LEO & THE PHARMACISTS

NUMERO UNO

### Hearts Of Oak

**H**as the best record of the year ever come so early in the calendar? While a title track gives it up for the sisters (and all those who'd dare to change their physical world with the act of creation), other anthems celebrate the frustrating pursuit of peace, Two Tone-inspired dance floors, the "actuality of the possible as possible," the value of conviction and a uniquely Hybernian take on mortality. Perhaps the record's most stunning track comes with "The Ballad of the Sin-Eater"—an English major's Odyssean stream-of-consciousness trek from Belfast to Sierra Leone, in which Leo and the listener come face to face with The Ugly American. With settings of bars, country graves and emotional wakes, one wonders just how Leo ever graduated from Clongowes with his Crass patches intact. As always, Leo is unabashed to wear his influences on his sleeve as steps towards an awakening from history. Apparently a Jesuit education only added diligence and clarity to the teachings of L. Golding, A. Nutter, D. Nobacon, B. Bragg, P. Weller, G. Vaucher, Mighty Diamonds and D.C. hardcore. *Hearts of Oak* is a triumphant reply to The Ex's most chilling question. **(Lookout, 3264 Adeline St., Berkeley, CA 94703)**

—Mike McKee



#### TRACK LISTING

01. Building Skyscrapers in the Basement
02. Where Have all the Rude Boys Gone?
03. I'm a Ghost
04. The High Party
05. Hearts of Oak
06. The Ballad of the Sin Eater
07. Dead Voices
08. The Anointed One
09. Bridges, Squares
10. Tell Balgeary, Balgury is Dead
11. 2nd Ave., 11Am
12. First to Finish, Last to Start
13. The Crane Takes Flight

#### FOR FANS OF:

The Smiles, The Jam, Curtis Mayfield



**SUPERGRASS**

**Life on Other Planets**

**SUPERGRASS**  
LIFE ON OTHER PLANETS



Leave it to Supergrass to release one of the best albums of 2003—in February. *Life on Other Planets*, the band's fourth full-length, is an effervescent rock 'n roll album building on the energy of *I Should Coco* and the imagination of *In it for the Money*, using the Kinks, T. Rex and The Jam as its muses. Crafting tight pop songs

bursting with urgent melodies has always come easily for these lads, and *Life* does not disappoint. But it's almost creepy how good this album is. (Now with this third brilliant record added to its oeuvre, it would be interesting to compute Supergrass' score on the website boasting the formula to rate a band's historical importance.) Standout production and patches of Pink Floyd-like levels of sonic frippery and brainpan-frying psychedelia add depth to *Life*, overflowing with the band's affection for writing clever songs borrowing from all the best rock eras. However, let's not forget, it's Supergrass, so *Life* is also an album sure to have you dancing in front of the mirror as you get ready to go out on Friday night. (Island, 825 Eighth Avenue, New York 10019)

—Allan Martin Kemler

**NUMERO UNO**

**ACID MOTHERS TEMPLE & THE MELTING PARADISE U.F.O.**

**ELECTRIC HEAVYLAND**

Paying homage to the acid-drenched, psychedelic rock of the late '60s and early '70s, Acid Mothers Temple strives to recreate the aural and visual elements of this musical era. Even the album title and packaging of *Electric Heavyland*, with its gate-fold cover and psychedelic band photo, invokes the imagery of artists like Black Sabbath, Jimi Hendrix and Pink Floyd. Unfortunately, the band's music lacks some of the more positive traits of the aforementioned artists. Each of the three lengthy tracks on *Electric Heavyland* sound more like a catalog of disturbing aural effects and dissonances, without any real focus on songwriting. In comparison, a non-drug user can appreciate the songwriting talents of Sabbath and Hendrix. The music of Acid Mothers Temple, however, will probably only appeal to someone on hallucinogens. (Alien8, P.O. Box 666, Station R, Montreal, QC, Canada H2S 3L1)

—Dom Dispaldo

**THE AGENDA**  
START THE PANIC

On its debut, *Start the Panic*, The Agenda main howler J.R. Suicide shouts, "This is not the anthem for your generation." Approaching its music with a very tongue-in-cheek attitude, J.R. seems to sense the once large window of opportunity is beginning to get smaller and smaller for his band. With this said, The Agenda's Stones, Kingsmen and Kinks shtick is dead-on. For the most part, *Start the Panic* is full-throttle British rock sounding like it was ripped right out of London circa '65. Employing both style and substance, The Agenda's frenzied pace is balanced enough to keep the listener's interest without wearing ears down. This is one of the few retro bands thrown against the wall able to actually stick. (Kindercore, P.O. Box 461, Athens, GA 30603)

—Jonathan Cholewa

**ASPHALT JUNGLE**  
ELECTRO AVE

After reading Asphalt Jungle's resume, one can't resist feeling a bit skeptical. Perhaps it is the fact the majority of

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Culled from over 400 hours of archival footage shot and collected by lead singer Greg Attonito, and over 50 hours of interviews with the band and their extended family of friends, "Do You Remember?" (approx. 100 min.) is the story of the good times and the bad, and the music that was born out of both.

This double-disc DVD contains the feature length documentary, 50 song "set list" of live performances, 6 music videos, and over an hour of deleted scenes, tour stories, and archival footage.

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its work has been for TV—MTV's *Road Rules*, the *X-Files* and ABC's *Making the Band*. Impressions are everything, while the band's mostly cookie-cutter brand of electronica-meets-guitar jams fails to excite. This certainly will not stop those familiar with the aforementioned TV slop from craning their necks for a peek. Surely the intentions of members Brian Tarquin and Chris Ingram were good, but they unfortunately fail to distance themselves from their boob tube roots. While some of the tracks aren't bad, like the opener, "Last Crusader," the rest sound redundant and mundane. Overall, *Electro Ave* sounds like little more than an attempt to cash in on some notoriety. (Roir, P.O. Box 501, New York 10012)

—Jonathan Cholewa

**JESSICA BAILIFF**  
**JESSICA BAILIFF**

With an otherworldly, dream-like sound based around lulling vocals and layers of droning instruments, Jessica Bailiff creates a chillingly dark and altogether curious piece of music. With an alluringly murky, atmospheric mood, Bailiff's latest self-titled release blends acoustic melodies, piano, light drums and even sitar into a purely drawn sensual experience. The album plays like a romantic film noir filled with sighing moments and sweeping, lo-fi moodscapes. Recorded at home with the help of Red Morning Chorus bandmate Jesse Edwards and former partner Noel Keese, Bailiff's somber sound exceeds previous efforts with its more focused yet still experimental sound placement. There's not a track here not sounding as if it's going to implode, as the tension between Bailiff's strung-out depression and her sublimely downbeat backing stretches to a disquieting taut limit. (Kranky, P.O. Box 578743, Chicago 60657)

—Dan Pastorius

**BLACK NASA**  
**BLACK NASA**

There are always a few who buck current trends and pursue what they truly enjoy. It couldn't be more obvious than with the boys in Black Nasa. Featuring former Atomic Bitchwax growler Chris Kosnik, Black Nasa lays down monster-sized riffs and southern swamp boogie not heard since the '70s when rock dinosaurs like Mountain and Lynyrd Skynyrd roamed the airwaves. Call it 21st-Century, Southern boogie rock. Straddling the line between stoner rock and punk, while still managing to offer

up a healthy dose of bluesy sludge, the self-titled album wins big. From the raucous opener, "Holy Crap," to the eight-minute-plus "Walkin' Talkin' Blackout Mode," listener's can't help but feel a higher power. Don't be alarmed, it is probably Skynyrd's main man Ronnie Van Zandt looking down on Black Nasa from his spiritual satellite, smiling as he takes another swig of Jack Daniels. (Tee Pee, P.O. Box 20307, New York 10009)

—Jonathan Cholewa

**THE BLACK SEA**  
**THE BLACK SEA**

When considering the value of a record, it helps to look at both the songs as individual works and the mood or feeling the album creates as a whole. Sometimes one aspect is stronger than the other. Think of the immature fraternity vibe soaking a Blink 182 record, which, while not a technical masterpiece, might otherwise seem thematically tighter than Neal Peart and John Bonham put together. On the most recent CD EP from The Black Sea, ex-members of Frodus and Mancake team up with Fugazi bassist Joe Lally for an outing both solid piece-by-piece and as a larger work of art. The rhythm section is solid and engaging, the guitar work minimal but exact. Quiet spoken/sung vocals replace Frodus' I'm-such-a-spazz-listen-to-me-scream vocals of old. This is music to listen to while night travelling by camel across the desert in search of ancient treasure. This is the music you hear as your spacecraft careens, uncontrolled, off into uncharted space. This is the music of empty fields and moonless nights, of abandoned buildings and bleak futures. On a more grounded level, it constitutes yet another solid release from the folks over at this fine Virginia-based label. (Lovitt, P.O. Box 248, Arlington, VA 22210)

—Stefan Grudza

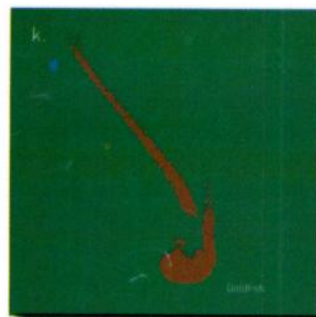
**BLUEBIRD**  
**HOT BLOOD**

The style of Bluebird can be described as guitar-based modern rock, in the vein of such bands as the Foo Fighters or Fluf. Many of the songs on *Hot Blood* feature warm, mildly distorted guitars with varying levels of subtlety and dynamics. As far as the songwriting goes, there is a mixed bag of styles here. Some of the tracks have mainstream arrangements, while others are more experimental, even erratic at

continued on page 52 >>

K

Goldfish



Masquerading as simply K., Karla Schickele brings to her solo project all the impassioned vocals and lovely arrangement she brought to her first band, Beekeeper. But fans may also recognize her stunning, simple song style from Ida as well. Schickele joined Ida as a temporary bassist and wound up sticking around for two albums, bringing to light such tracks as

"Poor Dumb Bird" and "Firefly." On *Goldfish*, Schickele sings like nothing has changed, like ardent female frontwomen have not been burned by marginal amounts of success and an overzealous indie industry. Tracks like "Keep Your Eyes on the Road" and "I am Not Wilting" are lovely testaments to the beauty and benefits of unadorned instrumentation while still demonstrating smart and seamless collaboration with the likes of Tara Jane O'Neil (Retsin, Sonora Pine)—who recorded many of the tracks on the album and played drums on a few songs—along with bandmates Dan Littleton (The Hated, Ida) and Liz Mitchell, Rose Thomson (Babe the blue Ox) and several other great New York musicians. The four-star moment on *Goldfish* comes at the very end, with the closing hymn, "Complete"—a brief but moving final bow. (Tigerstyle Records)

—Cynthia Gentile

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**DEATH BY CHOCOLATE Zap The World**

As a blatant homage to The Who's 1967 magnum opus concept album, *Sell Out*, Death By Chocolate's sophomore CD, *Zap the World* (Jetset Records), elevates Anglophilia to a high art. Meant as a dead-on stare down (rather than a mere sideways glance) at swinging '60s London and its associated pop culture iconography, *Zap* fully encompasses flower power, "Incense & Peppermints" and Austin Powers-style retro kitsch just begging to be experienced first hand. Segueing almost seamlessly from product endorsements to zany choral interludes to recitations of hilariously eclectic shopping lists, vocalist Angie Tillet has created an album sure to delight and surprise over and over again. Favorite tracks include the giddy "Day Out"—resembling a tripped-

out version of Petula Clark's "Downtown"—and the *Sesame Street*-on-acid interpretation of the alphabet song ("A, B & C Part Two"), where "P is for Peanut Butter Conspiracy." Among the album's other revelations are several remorselessly self-indulgent musings on Tillet's favorite car ("Bentley Corniche"), favorite shirt, ("Lime Green Fitted Blouse with Rounded Collar and Puce Cuffs") and favorite breakfast cereal ("Cinammon Grahams"). Liberal doses of authentic period instruments like harpsichord, vibes, era-appropriate guitar affects (see Vox Wha Wha Pedal) plus liberal "Bah bah bah" choruses further allow listeners to immerse themselves in Death By Chocolate's hallucinatory, feel-good vibe. Worth a trip to the local record shop? Oh, yeah, baby! **(Jetset)**



**TONIC Head On Straight**

Though hardly a household name, Tonic has released two platinum-selling albums in an impressive seven-year career, all while maintaining a major label relationship and tenaciously sticking to its roots as a straight-up, hard rock band. Tonic's staying power has everything to do with its core strength—an immensely talented singer/songwriter (Emerson Hart) and a wildly underrated guitarist (Jeff Russo) whose astoundingly lyrical playing ranks up there with Eric Clapton and George Harrison. The band's excellent third album, *Head on Straight* (its second for Universal Records), pretty much encapsulates the qualities of '60s- and '70s-influenced rock adhesive melodies, deeply personal, yet universal lyrics and deft musi-

cianship. Those who dismiss such musical qualities as passé are missing the point entirely. If it weren't for bad timing, Tonic might have become the American equivalent of U2. Even when "Believe Me" shamelessly rips off The Mindbenders' "A Groovy Kind of Love" (guys, some of us were born in the '60s) all is forgiven because the song is just so good. Bob Rock's production inflates Hart's intimate stories to widescreen proportions, and Russo turns each tune (check out the Beatles-influenced "Rest Your Head") into a near clinic on rock guitar arrangement. Overqualified to rock your world on any given day, Tonic's *Head on Straight* is a gift to anyone who thinks albums like The Beatles' *Revolver* just aren't made anymore. **(Universal)**



**SPLENDER To Whom It May Concern**

After releasing a promising major-label debut, *Halfway Down the Sky*, in 1999, the New York-based rock quartet Splender enjoyed minor success with the radio hits "Yeah, Whatever" and "I Think God Can Explain," but failed to maintain a presence in the increasingly fickle mainstream music consciousness. In 2001, the band jumped labels, signing with legendary music mogul Clive Davis' J Records to record its sophomore album, *To Whom it May Concern*. As the title suggests, Splender frontman and chief songwriter Waymon Boone pours his heart into his own brand of diary-rock songwriting—unabashedly honest and personal but never maudlin. Gifted with a truly unique and charismatic rock voice, Boone's passionately direct, conversational

style of singing lends itself well to deeply felt, confessional songs he infuses with subtle, inspirational subtexts. In this manner, "But, Anyway" (continuing his fondness for naming songs after sentence fragments) tosses out heavy lyrics like "I mistake my memories for company" with unexpected zeal. Peer-wise, Splender keep company with Third Eye Blind and Our Lady Peace but most closely resembles a post-new wave '80s band like Naked Eyes. And while Splender comprises talented musicians who are all excellent at their instruments, drummer Marc Slutsky deserves special props for his massive backbeat and tasteful, intricate percussive nuances, which add amazing texture to his band's ultra bright, shimmering guitar rock. **(J Records)**



**JUSTINCASE Justincase**

Signed to Maverick Records, Justincase's self-titled debut sets the bar a bit higher for the sibling rock trio and for teen pop at large. On the way to securing bragging rights among teen rock competitors (Hanson, The Moffats) who also play their instruments and write their own material, the Tosco family—brothers Justin (19, vocals and guitar) and Nick (17, drums) and sister Hannah (16, bass)—rocks harder than one might expect, skillfully combining the maturity, tunefulness and professional song craft of Better Than Ezra with the youthful sass and exuberant delivery of Butch Walker. Teenagers writing contemporary songs in the pop world frequently lack a frame of reference as writers, but Justin Tosco

sticks to what he knows—romantic and interpersonal relationships, reaching goals, not letting the bastards get you down and the like. The inspiring, hook-heavy lead track, "What I Wouldn't Do," and the powerful "Constellation" could easily be hits, but the album transcends pure teen appeal. On a more visceral level, "Without You," a surprisingly poignant tale of lovers separated by circumstance, is particularly effective. When Justin sings "You're in New York/And I'm in L.A.," anyone who's ever struggled with the frustration of a long distance relationship will feel a little pang of heartache. In the temple of teen pop gods, Justincase may attract a fair share of the faithful in 2003. **(Maverick)**



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# "MOUNT EERIE"

BY THE MICROPHONES



## ◀ RECORDS continued from page 49

times. No matter what approach the musicians in Bluebird take, however, their performance is always tight and focused. It is this musical passion characterizing *Hot Blood* as such a respectable, worthwhile release. (DMR, P.O. Box 14041, Santa Barbara, CA 93107)

—Dom Dispaldo

## **BON VOYAGE** THE RIGHT AMOUNT

With Julie Martin's sweet, dreamy vocals, Bon Voyage (Jason Martin's Starflyer 59 side project) can't help but evoke vintage Heavenly. The music on the group's sophomore release, being gentle, groovy and a little psychedelic, would fit nicely on one of those old Sarah Records compilations with the Field Mice, Even as We Speak, Tramway and St. Christopher. It's twee-pop and '60s revival, but with the spacey, My Bloody Valentine edge of a classic track like St. Christopher's "It's Snowing on the Moon." On "All the Traps," Julie Martin sounds so much like Heavenly's Amelia Fletcher, it's uncanny. Maybe this record's not for everyone, but *The Right Amount's* '60s sheen, surf guitars ("The Telephone") and jangle rock make a great late-night companion to the Tyde's California rambling tunes. For those yearning for the Sarah Records heyday, Bon Voyage makes for a nice nostalgia trip combining the label's two flagship acts—in the end, *The Right Amount* is almost an exact cross between the Field Mice and Heavenly. (Tooth & Nail, P.O. Box 12698, Seattle 98111)

—Charles Spano

## **CALIFONE** QUICKSAND/CRADLESNAKES

The members of Califone have a terrible history of naming their band. First they chose the burly, vaguely chauvinistic Red Red Meat when their music was as soft and pliant as a dandelion stem. Now, with a slightly altered membership, these four Chicagoans operate under the name of Califone, and lemme tellya, the sunny stylings of Los Angeles' home state have no place on *Quicksand*. Instead, Califone gives listeners a further refinement of the quicksilver, heartland ambiance it's been whittling down since the Red Meat days. With this installment, the band may have found its snowcapped peak. The band turns sparse arrangements of banjo, guitar and harmonica into wistful and evocative panoramas of clouded skies and descending leaves.

Despite the use of down-home instruments and Tim Rutulli's weathered, soulful vocals, Califone is more than just a band mining the hokey, *O Brother* lode. Atmospheric interludes of long distance satellite chatter and muted, elegant rave-ups such as "Golden Ass" prove Califone has its collective eyes on the city rising on the edge of the woods. This is no doubt one of the most innovative, expressive records of this very new year. (Thrill Jockey, P.O. Box 080838, Chicago 60608)

—Reed Jackson

## **CAMPFIRE GIRLS** DELONGPRE

Those who don't know the facts—this album was recorded in 1995—could almost immediately site the band for a lackluster attempt at bringing back lo-fi distortion and feedback ridden, toned-down grunge. While *DeLongpre* does include all these amenities, in fact, the album was recorded seven years ago, still within authenticity's range. Delivering a punch with each song, but failing to hit home as a whole, *DeLongpre* is an upright narration of where the Campfire Girls were at the time. The songs all blend into one another, barely reaching a medium tempo, but somehow manage to survive until the end. (Mootron, 2658 Griffith Park Blvd., #870, Los Angeles 90039)

—Shannon McCarthy

## **CANYON** EMPTY ROOMS

Formed from the ashes of Boys Life and Bluetip, Canyon is Brandon Butler and Dave Bryson's attempt to transcend their previous outfits with something fresh and new. However, they have trouble coming up with engaging hooks, as the band's latest effort, *Empty Rooms*, proves. Strangely, the lack of memorable melodies doesn't particularly hurt the album—it actually emphasizes the band's instrumental talents. With an array of different instruments, including a Hammond organ, harmonica, accordion and electric and acoustic guitars, Canyon displays a musical palette of different sounds and textures. Unfortunately, as this album proves, variety does not always equal entertainment. Since the absence of strong melodies throughout *Empty Rooms* is so considerable, it's a safe bet Canyon's latest effort might please fans of the band's previous endeavors but won't garner any new ears. (Gern Blandsten, P.O. Box 356, River Edge, NJ 07661)

—Dan Pastorius

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## CENTAUR IN STREAMS

Residing in Where Are They Now land since 1997's *Downward is Heavenward*, former Hum singer/guitarist, Matt Talbott has resurfaced with his band, Centaur, and a spectacular debut album, *In Streams*. Gloriously melodic guitar dirges punctuated with Talbott's melancholy lyrics and Beck-worshipping vocals permeate this album. Propelled by an insistent Black Sabbath riff, *Fields* wanders off into Sid Barrett's Pink Floyd territory, while crying out for a stoner rock comparison. Assessment—the goods were worth waiting for. Like a grunge Sigur Ros, *In Streams* delivers a breathtaking art-rock journey ending all too soon. (Parasol, 905 S. Lynn St., Urbana, IL 61801)

—Gail Worley

## THE CONTENDERS THE CONTENDERS

Ironically, despite the name, The Contenders never rose above the status of country rock also-rans. All the ingredients for success seemed to be there. Formed in early-'70s Nashville by some of the best players from Uncle Walt's Band, The Contenders certainly had the cred to make it. Many fans credit the cult band's lack of success to its members' shrewd intelligence. Whereas The Contenders tried to advance the art form, the public was more interested in getting stoned and spacing out to Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Allman Brothers or The Eagles. This reissue of The Contenders' self-titled debut explains why the public made this choice away from cerebrality. With four songwriters and four lead singers, the melodic ideas are sometimes overwhelming and often conflicted. "Silver Cup" and "Dim the Light" have the guitar hooks and harmonies of sure radio hits, but they're forced to share space with piano gospel/blues ballads like "Chain of Emotion" and syrupy messes like "Lack of Love." Perhaps with a refined focus, the now-defunct Contenders actually could have brought home the belt. (Gadfly, P.O. Box 5231, Burlington, VT 05402)

—Chris Fritz

## DEFIANCE OUT OF THE ASHES

Surely many studded-jacket types will be stoked to learn Defiance has not only re-banded but recorded a new record as well. Known for ripping it up with a strong political presence and a hard, multi-vocal assault, the seminal British punk group returns, backing up its strikes with a strong undercurrent of catchy Oi choruses

and guitar lines. The tradition continues with *Out of the Ashes*, where the output is on par with the Portland band's best so far. "Not For You" and "Into the Dust" are just two of the tracks fetching high-score status on Defiance's latest. Too smart for the spiked-up mall kids, and probably a little too battle-honed musically, Defiance is indisputably tight. Now, someone get The Pist back together. (Punkcore, P.O. Box 916, Middle Island, NY 11953)

—Louis Woodward

## DERIDE FIRST ROUND KNOCKOUT

For those who want something a little harsher than the three-chord ethic currently spilling from Scandinavia's garages, Norway's Deride is the death-metal tonic. Although Frediablo's bowels-of-hell vocals serve the standard message of despair and damnation (religion sucks in "No Cross is Mine" and "The Ten Commandments," TV sucks in "Life Before Death" and "Words of Fools," I suck in "Crusade of Self Destruction"), he's still a notch above the average metal growlers. Deride distinguishes itself with the jazzy and classic rock counterpoints guitarist/bassist Ole Walaunet occasionally throws into his impossibly muscular riffing (especially in the bridge of "Live While You're Alive" and the whole of "Words of Fools"), and the unexpected subtleties of concussive drummer Kjetil Greve, who can follow runs of incredible intuition with an assault on the kit of air-depleting proportions. Deride is built fjord tough. (Music Cartel, P.O. Box 629, Pt. Washington, NY 11050)

—Brian Baker

## JAMES LUTHER DICKINSON FREE BEER TOMORROW

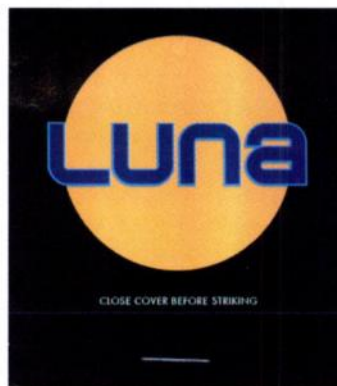
James Luther Dickinson's *Free Beer Tomorrow* marks the first break in his 30 years of solo silence. While he did spend time playing on Dylan's "Time Out of Mind" and won seven production Grammys, Dickinson hasn't recorded music of his own since 1972's *Dixie Fried*. Echoing the very same sounds of blues and country as his debut, *Free Beer Tomorrow* delivers as an album 30 years in the making. "Ballad of Billy and Oscar" is a Tom Waits-style ballad featuring some of Dickinson's best gravelly vocals. "Last Night I Gave Up Smoking" is a fine example of his country cabaret, and the funk rock of "Well of Love" rivals the similar work of his two sons (The North Mississippi Allstars). (Artemis, 130 5th Ave., New York 10011)

—Chris Fritz

continued on page 56 >>

## LUNA

## Close Cover Before Striking



Still wonderful after all these years—even on this abbreviated, seven-song release, Dean Warehem and Company capture all the rapture of those lost indie affectations as blessed-out vocals slide right on up to perfect, Velvet Underground-inspired instrumentation. Some may

ask, "Who doesn't try to sound like V.U. these days?" Luna is certainly not the only band to pursue such greatness, but Warehem and the gang seem to be the few who are able to get there so very well. Take a listen to "Astronaut" and "Teenage Lightning," and lay to rest all quibbles and claims suggesting new music is dead. Find Luna's *Close Cover Before Striking*, and find what's been missing all along. (Jetset, 67 Vestry St., Suite 5-B, New York 10003)

—Cynthia Gentile

## ROCKPILE RETRO REVIEW



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## THE HIGH & MIGHTY PRESENT: East Conference All-Stars III



It's been a long time since the duo of Mighty Mi and Mister Eon dropped the first exhilarating Eastern Conference compilation. In fact, it's been a long time since the duo, known stageside as The High & Mighty, released the celebrated El-P and Mos Def cameo'ed, *B-Boy Documentary 12*". In the time since those fair days, parent label Rawkus enjoyed a blazing peak and a rather whimpering decline, and labels like El-P's Def Jux label have run with the indie hip hop crown. While Eastern Conference has remained engaged in

the label game, this compilation and its recent Cage full-length mark its most significant maneuvering in some time. Despite the time at the drawing board and a new partnership with the 4:20-centric High Times label, All-Stars III strikes with a varying volley of hits and misses. The Smut Peddlers fail to excite, and even a Kool G Rap cameo can't save a track like "Talk Like Sex, Pt. II." The painstakingly wish-I-could-be controversial Cage, meanwhile, scores low with "Special Ladies" and "Ballad of Worms." This isn't to say The High & Mighty has served an absolute disappointment. *All-Stars III* certainly has its moments. Tame One, formerly of Artifacts fame, contributes "Tame as it Ever Was" and "Dreamz," sinking the best basket of the game. Production from RJD2 and J Zone, not to mention Mighty Mi himself, injects flavor where the lyricists lack it, and who could argue with a Weathermen track? So, while this might not rival the glory days of *B-Boy Documentary*, there's no point in living in the past. ([www.easternconferencerecords.com](http://www.easternconferencerecords.com))

—Beau Brendley

## MISTER LIF | Phantom



It seemed like just yesterday Lif dazzled audiences with his *Emergency Rations* EP, a politically charged critique of the state of the Union-Patriot Acts, commercial radio and all. Then, just when it seemed 2002 had wrapped up its hip hop portfolio (an impressive docket, to say the least), this Def Jux MC returns with his first proper full-length. Stretching 14 expansive tracks, *I Phantom* shows Mr. Lif as a mature, confident griot, boasting

one of the land's most impressive flows. Production from El-P and Fakts One keeps the album grinding at an edgy, gut level; don't look for earthtones and played out aesthetics here. Cameos from fellow Juxers El-P and Aesop Rock serve as spicy foils to Lif's accomplished delivery, while the closing track grooves with an appearance from Jean Grae. The conceptualized rhymes on this album are teamed with cover art which folds out into a gameboard, decorated with iconography dealing with the album's content. Thoughtful track-by-track explanations help make *I Phantom* a grounded, provocative experience, verbally as well as musically. Between this and RJD2's full-length, perhaps the only criticism due to Def Jux is its refusal to leave spaces on the Best in Hip Hop Lists open to other artists. The challenge is there... ([www.definitivejux.net](http://www.definitivejux.net))

—Mike McKee

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**THE DIRTMITTS  
GET ON**

Canadian rockers The Dirtmints take a fresh approach to their modern rock sound. Many of the songs on *Get On* are vibrant, mid-tempo rockers, featuring both male and female vocals. As a result, some of the tracks sound like a cross between Smashing Pumpkins and Veruca Salt. Heavy guitar tracks like "Figure it Out" and "The Connection" sit alongside more soothing songs like "Catastrophe" and "Get the Minus Gone." Despite the variety, all of these songs seem to fit quite comfortably on the album. While this sort of infectious power pop might not register at the border crossings at the same volume as back bacon, hockey stars and beer, *Get On* is one of the finest exports from our northern neighbors. (Sonic Unyon, P.O. Box 57347, Jackson Station, Hamilton, ON, L8P 4X2)

—Dom Dispaldo

**D.O.A.  
WIN THE BATTLE**

This record is awesome. Combing over release after release of lukewarm attempts at punk records—with the latest from D.O.A., it's a no brainer. The three winning attributes of D.O.A.'s *Win the*

*Battle*—the band's been around forever, they're still delivering a totally ass-kicking three-man rush of punk rock and the record is immediately fun on the first listen. "Dead Men" shreds, "Redneck" sings and "WTO" stands tall. Thirdly, the album is so catchy it even draws Yankees like myself to scream along to Canadian-centric anthems like "I am Canadian." *Win the Battle* is loaded with obvious winners presenting themselves without much tiresome searching for new and loyal listeners alike. (Sudden Death)

—Louis Woodward

**ENGORGED  
ENGORGED**

Over the years, countless death metal bands have risen to invade the airwaves of unsuspecting listeners. Among these bands there have been varying levels of talent in both musicianship and songwriting. Fortunately, Engorged is one of the few death metal bands capable enough to deliver with an emphasis in both of these departments. In the vein of older speed metal acts like Anthrax, Megadeth and Flotsam & Jetsam, Engorged takes the same approach to structured songwriting the classics used to employ. From a musical standpoint, however, Engorged has a much more bru-

tal sound than any of the aforementioned bands, especially in the vocal department. Even so, Engorged stands out as one of the more talented bands of the extreme metal subgenres. (Death-vomit/Necropolis, P.O. Box 14815, Fremont, CA 94539-4815)

—Dom Dispaldo

**DRAGPIPE  
MUSIC FOR THE LAST DAY OF YOUR LIFE**

With three assaulting guitars, New Jersey's Dragpipe is like the Queens of the Stone Age mixed with East Coast sludge metal and a touch of hardcore. "Puller" comes on hard with a Godsmack attack, while "Glyde Burroughs" grinds along to Jai Diablo's latter-day Soundgarden vocals and "The Cruise" screeches out of control. There's a little bit of Jane's Addiction in the processed vocals and Bad Brains in the stabbing intensity, but probably not enough for most punk rockers. Still, this record is impassioned, caustic and not simply another lame entry from some homogenous nu metal band. *Music for the Last Day of Your Life* is underground metal sure to hit the mainstream in a big way. (Interscope, 2220 Colorado Ave., Santa Monica, CA 90404)

—Charles Spano

**THE ESCARGO-GO'S  
THE ESCARGO-GO'S**

Despite the tres foreign album title and the nod to Gallic cuisine found in the very band name, The Escargo-go's are in no way French. In fact, the snootiest country in Europe would turn up its pointy noses at this CD, and not only for the hellish pun gracing the cover and the even worse joke adorning the inside flap. Despite their well documented love for organic produce and antibody-free meats, Frenchies love their chansons as fake as Peter Seller's accent. (Dur Dur Detre Bebe anyone?) And despite the band's discouraging penchant for bad jokes and oft-sappy lyrics, these bustling snails create some awfully homegrown, free-range music. Mostly the efforts of one very happy man and an eight-track, this album boasts a remarkably ripe sound, recalling Cat Stevens and any one of the better members of California's departed Paisley Underground. Throw in a My Bloody Valentine cover for street cred and you've got some slimy, shell-bound mollusks on the move. (Red Square, 4465 Spring Meadow Circle, Flagstaff, AZ 86004)

—Reed Jackson



# SUGAR DADDIE

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## FABULOUS DISASTER PANTY RAID!

Granted, there's something troubling about a nation of kids who define smoking a bowl at the local mall as a life goal. At the same time, however, there's something utterly convincing about a pop punk band singing about joy riding, partying, crushes and getting tanked. When such jams are delivered with snarly, smoky-throated vocals from a gang of California gals, it just makes the whole experience all the more outstretched-arms-and-convertible-top-down. Highlights such as "Bi-Polar," "Next Big Joyride" and "Hey Girl" recall the infectious melodies of peers like Tilt, Social Distortion and Josie & The Pussycats. This marks the band's third full-length, again released by Pink & Black Records and produced by NOFX's Fat Mike. *Panty Raid* says, "Fuzzy dice for your rearview?" (Pink & Black, P.O. Box 190516, San Francisco 94119)

—Daryl Kahan

## THE GAZETTEERS TERRITORY SONGS

*Territory Songs* is a collection of music for a simpler world. A ukulele strums through the whimsical opener, "Now Let us Flee." "Vacationland" wonders about

heading to Maine. "Rainbow Warriors" is a humorous but heartfelt tale of the University of Hawaii's football team. It's all part of the quirky land of geographer (really) Frank Boscoe's imagination—a project designed to catch the flavor of seven U.S. territories (including places and things like Michigan, Massachusetts, New Jersey, I-95, South Carolina and the Virgin Islands on the groovy "Our Danish Heritage"). Rob Christiansen is in the band too—*Territory Songs* is reminiscent of his indie group the Eggs, but the Gazetteers' work is really a departure for Steve Silverstein (the experimental Christmas Decorations). *Territory Songs* is serious, funny, off-kilter, satirical and fit for Off-Broadway—closest in sound and spirit to the concept albums of guru Stephin Merritt of the Magnetic Fields. (Magic Marker, P.O. Box 9342, Portland, OR 97207)

—Charles Spano

## THE GIFT MACHINE DON'T TURN ME OFF

Originally conceived as a studio project of singer/songwriter Dave Matthies, The Gift Machine has morphed into a collaborative project with its sophomore effort, *Don't Turn Me Off*. In regurgitating key elements of pop music, includ-

ing '60s rock, soul and electronic textures, The Gift Machine creates a diverse sound all its own. During the course of the disc, the band delivers fuzz-drenched anthems, lazy sing-alongs and lo-fi lullabies with craftsman-like ability, piling thick gobs of pseudo-pop guitars over tugging, William Reid-inspired vocals. A guest appearance by Lisa Jackson of The Crabs and a Khaela Maricich cover add even more variety to an already colorful album, making it one of the strangest yet intriguing records to come out this year. (KNW YR OWN, 1717 Commercial Ave., Anacortes, WA 98221)

—Dan Pastorius

## A GLOBAL THREAT WHAT THE FUCK WILL CHANGE?

*Here We Are* was a competent, debut full-length by the Maine-born, Boston-bound Global Threat. Song after song socked, kicked and pummeled listeners like a frenzied folly of helmets clashing after an onsidest kick. *What the Fuck Will Change?* will help bring newcomers up to speed on the out-of-print seven-inches and split EPs peppering the band's past, although the casual observer may sit well with the band's debut. For history buffs, the record includes a wordy center

spread detailing the chronology of the group. Here the band breezes over a summary of ex-members who either left or were "definitely kicked out." A particularly scathing jab is reserved for some band called The Stats. While *Here We Are* was impressively solid, *What the Fuck* is probably best reserved for those fans already painting the band's logo on their jackets. (Punkcore, P.O. Box 916, Middle Island, NY 11953)

—Louis Woodward

## HALF-HANDED CLOUD WE HAVEN'T JUST BEEN TOLD, WE HAVE BEEN LOVED

Much like the music of indie brethren Pedro the Lion, the songs of Half-Handed Cloud barely sound like Christian pop. With a band name pulled from Old Testament verse, one man band John Ringhofer prefers a more subtle, moralistic approach than the heavy-handed semantics of contemporary Christian artists. With a keen ear for melodic brevity, Ringhofer rarely lets any song climb past the one-minute mark. For example, the 24 tracks of *We Haven't Just Been Told, We Have Been Loved* blow by in only 33 minutes. Despite the

continued on page 60 >>

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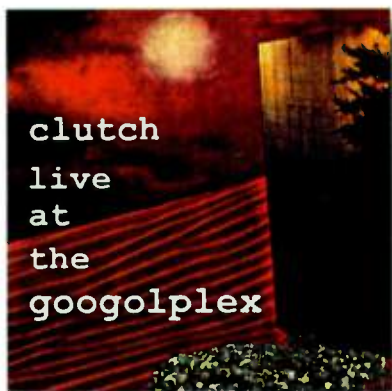
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## STEREOMUD *Every Given Moment*

Stereomud is a bit of a hardcore super group, boasting former members of Life of Agony, Stuck Mojo, The Crumbsuckers and Pro Pain. However, the combined efforts of these players sounds nothing like their former outfits, employing melody and hooks rather than the traditional New York Hardcore sound. Stereomud's sophomore album, *Every Given Moment*, is due in stores this March on Columbia Records. The 11-song set of streamlined, three-minute tunes is reminiscent of Sevendust or Nothingface, with crushingly heavy rhythm parts seamlessly leading into clean, melodic vocals. Splendid tracks like "Yesterday" and "Searching" are just a few of the outstanding moments on the album, as Erik Rogers' vocal range really

soars without watering down the heaviness of the guitar riffs. Once this album hits the streets, look for Stereomud on the concert circuit. They have toured with Saliva, Systematic and Nonpoint in the past, and the band's set is a sight to see. "When we play our live show, every night we talk about how to fix this, what will make this flow better," bassist Corey Lowery told *Metal Edge* in an interview. "We want to be a professional band, work hard and give an entire show all the way around, soundwise, look-wise, everything. We watch video tapes and see how ridiculously we move sometimes, and we're like, 'we're never moving like *that* again,' when I bust the snake out!" (Columbia, 550 Madison Ave., New York 10022)



## CLUTCH *Live at the Googolplex*

After a decade of one-of-a-kind live shows, the Maryland outfit Clutch has finally decided to put out a live album. *Live at the Googolplex* was released on the band's own label, River Road Records, and was recorded during Clutch's stint opening for System of a Down. Similar to the material offered in the band's live shows, the material on the disc spans a lengthy career of writing, from early compositions like "El Jefe" and "12 Oz. Epilogue" to new jams like "Pure Rock Fury" and "Brazenhead." The band did not include many improvisational moments on this live collection, so it

does not exactly capture the true essence of a Clutch performance. However, one highlight comes at the end of "Careful With That Mic" when Jean Paul Gaster's amazing drum solo segues into the next song, "Impetus." The disc also includes "Sea of Destruction," a tune Clutch has been playing live for about a year now but is not included on any of their albums, making this a good item for Clutch completists. The disc may be hard to find in stores since it was independently released, but it is available at the band's official website. ([www.pro-rock.com](http://www.pro-rock.com))



## VARIOUS ARTISTS *Sucking the '70s*

Obviously, the roots of today's so-called stoner rock scene go back to '70s guitar rock, when bands like Deep Purple, Thin Lizzy and Black Sabbath influenced the future generations of rock 'n roll outlaws. Therefore, it's fitting so many of the bands in this genre got together for the *Sucking the '70s* compilation on Small Stone Records, paying homage to their heroes. The collection as a whole does a great job of emphasizing the foundation on which today's rock empire was built. A few highlights include Clutch's dead-on version of "Cross Eyed Mary" by Jethro Tull, Suplex's raw, searing rendition of Rush's

"Working Man" and Novadriver putting a new spin on "20th Century Boy" by T-Rex. Raging Slab recreates "We're an American Band," perfectly complementing the Slab's retro persona. Spirit Caravan, a legend in its own right, does well with Black Sabbath's classic "Wicked World." Other tracks like Halfway to Gone's "Can't You See" and Tumbler's "Working for MCA" stay true to the originals. This two-disc set serves as a decent introduction to stoner rock, or '70s rock, whichever needs to be introduced to the individual listener. (Small Stone, P.O. Box 02007, Detroit 48202)



## SOLACE *13*

Formerly known as Godspeed, the doom masters of Solace have unleashed a new batch of speaker-rattling bass lines and ominous, swirling guitar riffs. Dubbed *13*, the album was released via Meteor City in January. Solace's down-tuned style is just the right mixture of Kyuss and Monster Magnet, blended with a little doomy aggression to make the perfect metal cocktail. The legendary Scott "Wino" Weinrich of The Obsessed and St. Vitus appears on the track "Common Cause," lending his guitar prowess and vocals. "Having Wino come up and spend time in

the studio with us was just so great," says guitarist Tommy Southard. "The recording of the album had been wrought with trials and tribulations, hence the name *13*." Aside from its own thick, murky-sounding material, Solace threw in covers of Pentagram's "Forever My Queen" and Agnostic Front's "With Time" for good measure. The band is slated for an East Coast tour and will perform at the three-day Emissions Festival in Youngstown, Ohio, during Memorial Day weekend. (Meteor City, [www.meteorcity.com](http://www.meteorcity.com))

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brevity of the songs, Ringhofer packs plenty of melody and novel ideas into each one. From trombone to guitar to cello to piano, Ringhofer keeps his brief tunes fresh with innovation. Ranging stylistically from psychpop to children's music, Half-Handed Cloud recalls moments of The Young Fresh Fellows as on "I Got A-Rested" or chamber popsters like The High Llamas ("We Don't Know How it Grows"). (Asthmatic Kitty, 545 Washakie St., Lander, WY 82520)

—Chris Fritz

**THE HOLY GHOST**  
COLOR SYMPATHY

It's nice when the headlines are correct. "Rock is back!" they claim. Of course, the rock they swear by is the Nirvana throwbacks filling the airwaves, the chords and growls and melody identical to the last coming of Christ to the music world. Today, the rock is back in the form of The Holy Ghost. Those who can get past the name will find the Brooklyn band actually moving, a band shifting its weight in every note. The guitars whine and break, tearing in and out of the mix with as much melody as

chaos. Dean Heine delivers his vocals in exceptionally individual tones with ample character. Most importantly, however, The Holy Ghost cannot only reproduce a typical rock sound like no other, but also deliver an album full of interesting twists and turns. Whether through the heavy-handed bash of "Sunday's Calling" or the atmosphere soaked "Summer Scars," The Holy Ghost demonstrates rock is back in a more obscure and progressive way than the magazines could ever dream. (Clearly, 314 23rd St., Brooklyn 11215)

—Brian Sokel

**THE INSTRUMENTS**  
BILLIONS OF PHONOGRAPHS

Sideprojects often share a thrown-together feel, lacking the fire of the original bands from whence they came. The Athens, Ga.-based supergroup, The Instruments, could have fallen into those same between-album trappings with its debut, *Billions of Phonographs*, but instead delivers some of indiedom's most prodigious talent on hand. Composed of Japancakes' Heather McIntosh, Neutral Milk Hotel's Jeff Mangum, Olivia Tremor Control's Will Cullen Hart, The Music Tapes' Julian Koster and Elf

Power's Laura Carter, The Instruments dabble in Elephant 6 territory with an albumful of complex indie pop arrangements. "Sea Chanty" brings accordion and theremin into the mix, giving the dark song some chamber pop touches, while "Carnival" is a darkly lilting waltz with a hint of European dramatic flair. *Billions of Phonographs* is surprisingly strong given the session-like circumstances. (Orange Twin, 475 Forest Rd., Athens, GA 30605)

—Chris Fritz

**JUNCTION 18**  
HEROES FROM THE FUTURE

From the onset of "Life is a Racetrack," the upbeat, hook-filled opening track of *Heroes from the Future*, Junction 18 makes its musical intentions clear. Each of the six songs on this EP convey the band's penchant for warm, guitar-based rock, with plenty of strong vocal melodies and harmonies. Song titles like "Dissonant Me" can be delightfully misleading—there's nothing dissonant about this band's sound. In addition, the band has a strong focus on both the songwriting and the performance of its songs. All of these elements add up to a high-quality, worthwhile release known as *Heroes from the Future*.

(Fearless, 13772 Goldenwest St., #545, Westminster, CA 92683)

—Dom Dispaldo

**KIMONE**  
MERES OF TWILIGHT

Full of swirling keyboards, dreamy guitars and jazzy, melodic textures, Kimone's latest effort, *Meres of Twilight*, is a tough album to pigeonhole. Composed of five multi-instrumentalists, the band incorporates various instruments and synthesized noise into a hodgepodge of psychedelic meanderings and hi-fi indie-pop. Throughout *Twilight*, Kimone moves from mellow, emotional grooves to up-tempo, power-chord rock without batting an eye. Songs like the album opener, "In the Warmth of Meanings Redefined," lull listeners' ear with its otherworldly, dream state buzz, while others like "We Will Write" and "Have Faith" devolve into furious jams, creating a cacophony surpassed only by their quick return to structure. One's first impression of Kimone might be of an instrumentalist free-for-all, however, after a few spins it is obvious the band crafts well-constructed, gorgeous songs, making its latest effort a trip worth taking. (Silverthree Sound, P.O. Box 3621, Fairfax, VA 22038)

—Dan Pastorius

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**THE LOT SIX ANIMALS**

The rock cliché is a band has 25 years to make its first album and nine months to follow it up. The Lot Six has already made a name for itself in Boston over the past three years by setting convention on its ear with its thrashy soul/ punk take on Gang of Four and Public Image Ltd. With *Animals*, the Lot Six dissect the second album cliché by releasing its sophomore full-length a mere four months after its debut album, *Gwylo*. The slight cheat in this scenario is *Animals* and *Gwylo* were recorded at the same July 2001 sessions, so the two works play like halves of a single long-form release. It's a minor point in the face of the Lot Six's magnificent noise, a cacophony emitting perfectly framed guitar shards and vocalist Dave Vicini's cracked whisper to a psycho shriek over a throbbing bed of slippery rhythms, sometimes in homage to the martial melodies of Gang of Four ("Skrahs"), sometimes with brilliant nods to the Pixies ("Deviltown"), and sometimes beyond description (the countryana punk of "My Son," the acoustic Mats demo madness of "Save Yourself"). At this rate, the third album should be

coming any day now, and I, for one, can't wait. (Espo, P.O. Box 63, Allston, MA 02134)

—Brian Baker

**THE LOVERS STAR LIT SUNKEN SHIP**

With songs of love and outer space, The Lovers' *Star Lit Sunken Ship* combines vocals reminiscent of Mazzy Star and Cat Power with acoustic guitar, violin, bass and a variety of other instruments (up moog, up banjo, up accordion, up brass, up vibraphone). All of these parts come together to form some delightfully somber songs. Many of the tracks skirt dangerously towards sounding redundant—several even include the word "lover" in them. Other Lovers lyrics use very original ideas on their descriptions. "Dream Lover/Squid Suit" reiterates, "your squid suit only isolates you." Personification seems to be key in the group's songwriting, with lyrics invoking a detailed, otherworldly tone, reminiscent of Mary Timony. Despite the trippy vibe and the lovesick motif, everything comes together for a gentle ride into outer space. (Orange Twin, 475 Forest Road, Athens, GA 30605)

—Michelle Rush

**LUPINE HOWL LUPINE HOWL**

During the fuzzy bravura of the opening track, "A Grave to Go To," it's tempting to peg Lupine Howl as yet another shrewd metropolitan band grasping onto The Strokes' skinny ties and gritty hustle. But then, in the tradition of countless blue-lapelled prom bands throughout history, Lupine Howl aims to slow it down a bit, unleashing the first line of its next song, (imagine sticking a hypodermic needle slowly into your ass cheek for the appropriate effect), "I've never had much money/ and what I did have, I spent on cocoa-yane." Whee! The album continues from there in this dubious vein, spinning dissolute tales of narcotic dissipation, all to the velvet backdrop of knowing strings and attenuated guitars. These Howlers clearly deserve some credit for mixing the cocksure urbanity of Noo Yawk's finest with the foxy lassitude of U.K. druggies like the Verve. Yet Lupine Howl can't manage to overcome its chemically-spawned narcissism and actually say something clever, dooming the group to a limited—and most likely stoned—audience. (Beggars Ban-

quet, 625 Broadway, 12th Floor, New York 10012)

—Reed Jackson

**J. MASCIS & THE FOG FREE SO FREE**

J. Mascis has always seemed put-out. An unlikely guitar god and subsequent indie-rock legend, Mascis cultivated an audience perfectly in tune with his stoned out, Neil Young-inspired rock trances. Dinosaur Jr, the influential band he led through the '80s, was a perfect blend of over-the-top guitar work, volume and disinterest. After the band's dissolution, Mascis almost become irrelevant—the assumption being he had come, soloed, broken ear drums and left the building. However, with return of Mascis and his new band, The Fog, the artist seems free of the trappings of his earlier days. *Free So Free*, his second outing, continues on what seems to sound like his own joyous return to having fun. It's hard not to listen to the funk-fueled rhythms of the opening track, "Freedom," without hearing a smile coming through the speakers. Gone are the bombastic volumes. Instead, songs like "Free So Free" or "Someone Said" show Mascis in perfect form, blending fuzzed tones over

continued on page 64

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# Punk Rock Times

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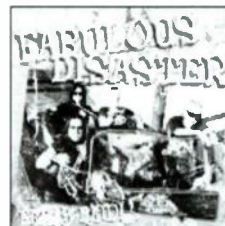
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**THE QUAILS Atmosphere**

In the wild, quails are cute pudgy birds with what looks like car radio antennae where its pompadour should be. In the world of underground music, however, The Quails is a colorful, personality-driven trio from San Francisco. Featuring Seth Lorinczi, former bass mind boggler of Circus Lupus, The Quails dole out hip-twisting, pigeon-toed flights of stripped down, angular, new-wave rock fused with a co-ed, soulful righteousness. Cooing in a common nest with fellow Bay Area-ites Erase Errata and Subtonix, Quails flap in stark form to the dance floor daring naysayers to try to separate the greasy whites of Bratmobile and Slant 6 from the gooey yolk of Wire and The Redskins. *We Are the Quails* waddles over XTC and Raincoats LPs to get to the other side. (Inconvenient, P.O. Box 3288 21st St., #188, San Francisco 94110)

—Mike McKee



**LOOSE FUR Loose Fur**

Some people have a pretty skewed sense of what qualifies as an all-star band. For some it's a new Black Sabbath cover band featuring the guy from the video store. But wherever you set the bar, most would agree an indie trio combining Wilco's Jeff Tweedy and Glenn Kotche with Sonic Youth/Gastr del Sol collaborator Jim O'Rourke would certainly rate. Luckily, Loose Fur doesn't fall short of the promise implicit in its pedigree. From the beginning of this self-titled debut, listeners are treated to some of the rich, noise-heavy experimentation of Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*. Here, although Tweedy's signature songwriting remains intact, he's free from the criticisms of purists afraid to venture off alt-country island. O'Rourke, meanwhile, brings his tell-tale flavor to the mix, fashioning ambiance, tone and mood into a vehicle for some of the day's most original music. (Drag City)

—Mike McKee



**DRESSY BESSY Little Music**

Take out your binder and your paint pen. Wait until the teacher passes so she won't see. OK, now in big bubble letters spell it out—"I Heart Dressy Bessy." Now, do the same on your book bag. Then cut your next class and head to the nearest park with your friends, or better yet, your new crush. *Little Music* is the soundtrack. It's almost hard to believe something so full of sunshine and bubble gum could come from a group with even loose ties to the heady, artistic obscurity of the late Elephant 6 collective. Still, the common threads weave through coy, '60s pop, with heads stuck in the clouds and feet planted firmly in the head-bopping melody. By now, with two other full-lengths under its belt, it's not entirely striking Dressy Bessy should have mastered such good vibes rock. What's impressive is how the band is able to pull this off without obscuring its peans with irony or pretension. (Kindercore)

—Stefan Grudza

**INDIE ROCK CONFIDENTIAL LOSING STEREO LAB'S MARY HANSEN**



Stereolab vocalist/multi-instrumentalist Mary Hansen died Monday, Dec. 9, 2002 when she was struck by a car while riding her bicycle in downtown London. Hansen, 36, was born in Brisbane, Australia, and joined Stereolab in 1992. Hansen worked on six of the band's full studio albums, including its most recent, *Sound-Dust* (Elektra), last year. The album debuted at an impressive No. 11 on *Billboard's* Heatseekers charts, and the band has enjoyed a strong following in both independent rock and electronic music scenes

for more than a decade.

"The suddenness of her death has shocked the band," the members of Stereolab said in an official statement following Hansen's accident.

The influential group has announced no definitive plans either to continue or to dissolve.

Hansen's family has requested those interested in reaching out to make a contribution to CanTeen, an Australian group assisting young people living with cancer, ([www.canteen.com.au](http://www.canteen.com.au))

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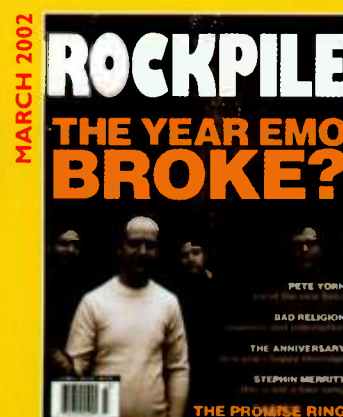
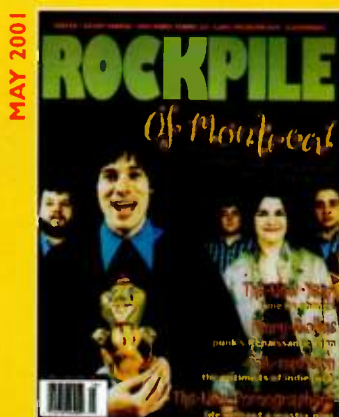
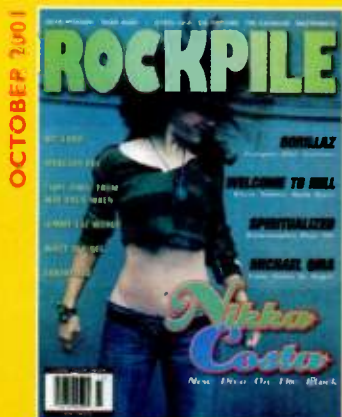
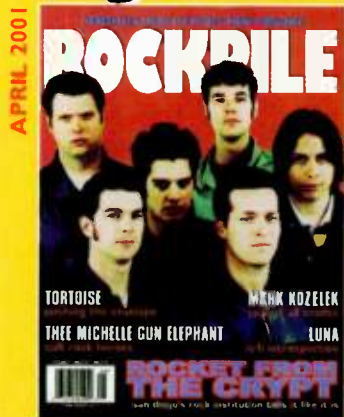
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perfectly scribed acoustic melodies. As a document in the Mascis canon this latest offering may not show anything audiences haven't already seen. Several songs still tear through their notes like wild dogs, but every note now has its perfect, comfortable place, betraying a new blend of stability. Where Mascis may have been the poster boy for suburban drop outs in days of old, here he is reborn as your older brother, newly married, child in hand, with songs just as familiar as the memories you have of him passed out behind the garage. (Ultimatum Music, 8723 W. Washington Blvd., Culver City, CA 90232)

—Brian Sokel

**MECCA NORMAL**  
THE FAMILY SWAN

One Guitar, no overdubs. Both Jean Smith and David Lester sum up several songs on *The Family Swan* in these simple terms. But the album is not simple, easily digestible pabulum. It tells one story of family discord through musical dissonance. The album feels like a complete thought, rather than song placed next to song. Smith's voice is distinct and carries forth so many aches and pains it's impossible to listen unaffected.

In particular, "What About the Boy?" is illustrative of the demanding context of parent-child relationships. *The Family Swan* should not surprise any Mecca Normal fan in its unabashed realism. This is an outfit known for hosting Q&A sessions at its shows, displaying a collection of Smith's self portraits dating back to age 13. *The Family Swan*, much like the rest of the Mecca Normal's discography, does not fade into the background—it insists on being heard. (Kill Rock Stars)

—Cynthia Gentile

**MINUS THE BEAR**  
HIGHLY REFINED PIRATES

The hardest part about music criticism (besides getting over the annoying tendency to believe your opinion actually matters) is dealing with an album weighing in, despite all the hard work and effort, at a mere OK. Such is the fate of Minus the Bear. *Highly Refined Pirates* offers slick production (courtesy of Steve Fisk and Avast!) sure to make the rock-concerned proud and ridiculous song titles sure to make the pretentiously drunk good. Don't believe me? Try this one, "Absinthe Party at the Fly Honey Warehouse." Sober yet? Thick guitars with the traditional Marshall tones deliver enough licks and hooks to hold your

attention through the first few tracks. As the secrets of quickly jerked-about guitar licks dance behind nondescript vocals, however, one feels left with an odd mix of Hey Mercedes' Bob Nanna and your next door neighbor. Ultimately, the album is largely a retreat of the upbeat, alternative rock that looks good on t-shirts. (Suicide Squeeze, P.O. Box 80511, Seattle 98108)

—Brian Sokel

**MOODROOM**  
HUNG UP ON BREATHIN'

One can imagine the panic in the Moodroom boardroom. "Dude. I'm calling a band meeting," says a dejected guitar player one day. "All we've got tune-wise is repetitive modern-rock radio leftovers. We've got every cliché in the book going here—the Smashing Pumpkins' guitar bend and stop, the distorted drum part, the crunchy guitar kick-in. I move that we do what every freakin' band in the world does when there's nowhere left to go. We're hiring a hot lead singer." Whether Stef Magro was brought in at the beginning or later, it's obvious her red hair and tight pants are Moodrooms main (read: one and only) attraction. She's cut right out of the Gwen Stefani-Shirley Manson cloth, and at times—particularly

on "Connection" and "E-Song"—she almost sounds as if she's impersonating the frontwomen. As for the music, it's pure nouveau new wave rip-offs, complete with over-the-top synthesizers and other bleeps and creeps. (Fowl, P.O. Box 3617, Annapolis, MD 21403)

—Peter Bothum

**ONEIDA/LIARS**  
ATHEISTS RECONSIDER

Here! On this split EP! Two titans of the burgeoning New York scene go head to head, battling it out in the real "Gangs of New York!" In the left corner, representing the hipsters of Williamsburg and riding a wave of slavering hype, Liars! In the other corner, representing all the insane people roaming Central Park, and resenting its status as the best overlooked band in Brooklyn, Oneida! Expect a mesmerizing display of force from both bands—the Liars' pseudo-ironic mullets duking it out with the unkempt, leaf-snarled locks sported by the Oneidans. Gape in awe, as each formidable entity tries to out noise the other, unleashing wave after wave of frenzied chaos, gouts of choleric screaming and bizarre effects. Lucky listeners will be shocked by Liars' newfound rage, as the band's jittery,

JON LANGFORD

and his  
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crack-binge funk proves the members are finally capable of more than ripping off Gang of Four! You will not be surprised by the outlandish chaos of the heavyweights of Oneida, who once again take rock through a raging fun-house mirror, but you will be amazed by the spectacle. Whoever the victor may be, it's safe to say the real winners are the fans. (Arena Rock, 242 Wythe, Studio 6, Brooklyn 11221)

—Reed Jackson

**OPERATION MAKEOUT**  
**HANG LOOSE**

Canadian punk/noise pop trio Operation Makeout envisions an odd confluence of the Go-Go's at their absolute garage-simple punkiest and Afghan Whigs at their most accessible. Or maybe it's a scrimmage between the B-52's in their evolutionary tin roof rusted phase and the Slits in raw, DIY mode with Gang of Four officiating. Or, throw out the touchstones and call Operation Makeout a tremendous splice of '70s punk and Gen Y indie-rock chops confidently walking the line between pop hooks and punk dissonance. Bassist Jesse (with the smoking Dulli/Westerberg voice) and drummer Anna fashion a frenetic foundation for Katie's alternately

melodically poppy and jazzy guitar lines and sweetly off-kilter duet vocals. *Hang Loose* is a huge advance over Operation Makeout's previous output and reveals a great punky band just hitting its stride. (Mint, P.O. Box 3613, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6B 3Y6)

—Brian Baker

**THE PARTY OF HELICOPTERS**  
**A SAMPLING OF THEIR PAST**

Spanning the band's career thus far, The Party of Helicopters has released *A Sampling of Their Past*, a six-song EP culling two tracks from each of its previous efforts. In covering all kinds of indie-guitar rock, from Husker Du-style punk to Sebadoh-style aggression with Loewenstein-like vocals, the Helicopters deliver scalding, post-hardcore pop recorded in ragged, basement-style fidelity. While the band's tone essentially follows conventional pop structures, its members clearly hail from the "fast, hard, loud" school of rock. The hooks and melodies the Helicopters incorporate are on the surface, right from the kick-start intensity of "Fire Eaters of Tomorrow" to the unrestrained rage of "Bastard Motherfucker." Anyone unfamiliar with the band's early work should brace themselves for *Sampling*—

it's music informed by indie and punk ideals without being restrained to them. (Velocette, 83 Walton Street, Atlanta, GA 30303)

—Dan Pastorius

**PIPEDOWN**  
**ENEMIES OF PROGRESS**

Despite a well-deserved reputation for vigorous live sets, it seems Pipedown's progressive political punk doesn't translate too well in the studio. Much of the difficulty in *Enemies of Progress* lies not in the Auburn, Cali., quintet's tight instrumental work, but in Ean Elliot's unrestrained vocal shrieks and cries. He sounds close to gagging on "Ris'n' Up," whereas his sung melody on "Struggle" has seemingly little to do with the chords being played. It's a shame, because the lyrics are right on and many songs—like the plucked bass of "Horror"—would be great were it not for Elliot's guttural yelps. On the bright side, some tunes, such as the Bad Religion-inspired "Mid-Tempo Song," are great in spite of the shrill throat. It's up to Pipedown to struggle harder for a balance next time it hits the Ampex reels start turning. (A-F, P.O. Box 72166, Pittsburgh, PA 15213)

—John Vettese

**PLAN B**  
**LIKE A SHIP SAILING**

Plan B is the one-man-indie-electronica show of James Leroy van Leuven. His debut record, *Like a Ship Sailing*, comes across as a minimalist-minded Air. The seven instrumental pieces on the album are sparsely constructed, yet hypnotically atmospheric. Leuven takes the less-is-more credo and gives it some weight, grooving in ways Philip Glass never has, building understated bob-your-head, funk-driven beats. "Come Out Strong" epitomizes van Leuven's search for the gentle groove, nudging listeners to meditate to trumpet player Bill Jones (the only other musician on the record). While Plan B won't blow ever-loving minds, it might well lull listeners to sleep in an interesting new way. (Luckyhorse, P.O. Box 18127, Seattle 98118)

—Joe Sweeney

**RAILROAD EARTH**  
**BIRD IN A HOUSE**

Oh, what a world this would be if Railroad Earth could bring Gram Parsons back from his funeral pyre out in the desert near Joshua Tree! They try for sure, with moving country rock,

continued on page 68

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From Ashes Rise photo by Chrissy Piper

Florida's **As Friends Rust** has changed its name to **Salem** because the band has recruited a new singer and feels the name change represents its new lineup and sound... **On Broken Wings** has signed to **Eulogy Recordings**... **Ex-Drowningman** frontman Simon Brody has formed another new band. The new group, **Black Tie Knife Fight**, draws on metal influences, delivering a harder sound than Brody's other new project, **The Scheme**... **Equal Vision Records** will be releasing an EP by **Breaking Pangea**... A new **Converge** album should surface sometime in 2003. Meanwhile, the group's frontman, Jake Bannon, has a new project called **Blood of Thine Enemies**. Bannon's **Deathwish** label is looking to have a banner year in 2003. The label will release new music by **The Horror Show**, **What Feeds the Fire**, **Sex Positions**, **Cursed** and a **Converge** DVD. The label also welcomes **Breather Resist**, featuring members of **Black Widows** and **National Acrobat**... Philadelphia hardcore band **All Else Failed** is in the studio, while fellow Phillies in **The Curse** are rumored to have called it quits following a U.S. tour with **Avail**... **One Day Savior** has signed **Forstella Ford**... Ex-mem-

bers of **Turmoil** and singer Jon Gula have formed the new band **Kiss of Death...Dead to Fall** drummer Dan Craig has quit the band... **In Dire Need** has signed to **Kill Yourself Records**... **Nemesis**, the new band of ex-Earth Crisis singer Karl Buechner, has changed its name to **The End Begins** (the title of an old EC song) and has signed to **Victory Records**... **Jade Tree Records** has signed **From Ashes Rise**. The Tennessee band contains members of the *real* **Deathtreat** (aww damn!) and will release its Jade Tree debut sometime this year... **Eulogy Recordings** has signed **Bury Your Dead**. **BYD** plans to tour with **Misery Signals** (ex-members of **7 Angels**, **7 Plagues**) this winter... **Buffalo's Every Time I Die** has entered the studio and will release the follow up to *Last Night in Town* through **Ferret** in the summer... Despite last year's reunion, **Coalesce** has decided to disband for good. **R.I.P.**... **Initial Records** has released *Black on Black: A Tribute to Black Flag*. The covers album features **Burnt by the Sun**, **Anodyne**, **Converge**, **Coalesce**, **Dillinger Escape Plan**, **Hope Conspiracy**, **Planes Mistaken for Stars** and **Playing Enemy** giving unique interpretations of **Black Flag** covers.

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### THE RION LIVE IN MIDGARD



Therion are easily one of the most original and unique bands to emerge from the metal genre and their new double disc release, *Live In Midgard*, is their first official domestic live release. Spanning their entire 15-year career, *Live In Midgard*

captures 24 tracks of material performed throughout their 2002 European tour.



### STRAPPING YOUNG LAD SYL

Hits streets on February 11th! Fueled by the events of 9/11, Devin Townsend and company return from nearly a six-year recording hiatus to release what will be one of the heaviest albums of 2003 —SYL! "There's intense and then there's SYL."

—METAL HAMMER

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Behemoth's *Zos Kia Cultus* goes over the imaginable boundaries of violence, speed, disharmony and sonic apocalypse to forge a mighty opus of extreme aggression. Check out all the latest on *Behemoth* at: <http://www.behemoth.metalkings.com/>



### HATE ETERNAL KING OF ALL KINGS

"Florida's Death Metal kings, Hate Eternal, will embark on their historic, first-ever headlining tour kicking off in New Orleans on Valentine's Day. This coast-to-coast tour features support acts **Dying Fetus**, **Kataklysm**, and **Into Eternity**, and promises to be one of the most brutal caravans of extreme metal making the rounds this year!"

support acts **Dying Fetus**, **Kataklysm**, and **Into Eternity**, and promises to be one of the most brutal caravans of extreme metal making the rounds this year!"



### VARIOUS ARTISTS DEATH IS JUST THE BEGINNING VOL. 7

Available as a double-disc import Digipak CD and double-disc DVD, *Death Is Just The Beginning...Vol.7* delivers quality music from **Nuclear Blast Records'** most extreme bands. The CD features hit tracks from **Meshuggah**, **Dimmu Borgir** and many more, while the DVD showcases excellent video footage from each band including the videos from **In Flames**, **Soilwork** and **Hammerfall** seen on **MTV2** and **Much Music**



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"A completely convincing mixture of **Fear Factory**, **Strapping Young Lad** and **Machine Head**, Denmark's **Raunchy** are easily the country's best-kept secret and possibly one of the finest European "modern metal" bands I have heard in quite some time." - *blabbermouth.net*



### DARK TRANQUILLITY DAMAGE DONE

"*Damage Done* is ripe with dazzling musicianship; the songs are ambitious, compact and rich with melody. *God Bless Sweden!*" —**CMJ**  
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Note: Vinyl version only has the 11 new songs. It does not contain the 11 previously released tracks.

making listeners wonder if the barn-burning opening tune, with "fire tryin' to drag him down," could be about Parsons. Despite a strong, '60s, Byrds vibe, Railroad Earth, trades Parsons' Nashville for bluegrass. *Bird in a House* actually evokes the Grateful Dead circa "Uncle John's Band," while "Mountain Time" is a beautiful piece of psychedelic melancholy. No, they don't bring back the "Hickory Wind," but Railroad Earth is really more bluegrass rock than country rock, and *Bird in a House* is one of the best bluegrass records of the year. (Sugar Hill, P.O. Box 55300, Durham, NC 27717-5300)

—Charles Spano

**PLASTIC MASTERY**  
IN THE FALL OF UNEARTHLY ANGELS

This album is simply propulsive. Like Modest Mouse's *The Moon and Antarctica* (though more earth-bound), Tallahassee's Plastic Mastery pushes the listener ever forward while alternating between raucous walls of sound and shuffling, nostalgic moodiness. Songs like "Why Can't You Breathe Again" and "Sidelines" are heavy with a country melancholy sure to make hearts swell for something

lost or forgotten. "Yeah, Tonight," meanwhile, runs through the night with an unstoppable, uplifting momentum reminiscent of Bright Eyes channeling R.E.M. "Remember That Night I Thought I Was Going to Die?" triumphantly continues the Conor Oberst vibe, while "The Bomb Song" is Americana recast with the spirit of punk rock. The fact is Plastic Mastery captures the ennui, angst and search for passion—for something, anything—characterizing youth in the United States. (Magic Marker, P.O. Box 9342, Portland, OR 97207)

—Charles Spano

**PROJECTIONS**  
BETWEEN HERE AND NOW

Just as The Roots are hip hop's live answer to sample-happy rappers, groups like The New Deal and Los Angeles' Projections are the reply to the stale, preprogrammed beats and dub links of club DJs. As electronic music ages and fragments into ever-smaller microcosms, it's becoming unusually refreshing to hear electronic sounds coming from analog instruments. On *Between Here and Now*, Simon James and Danny Hastie have come to reinvigorate the art with the organic. As

members of regional reggae/funk/ska bands such as Orgone, Sounds From the Ward and Loa Rhythm, the two of this duo are well-versed in live sounds and their respective instruments. Incorporating the live aesthetic into its studio sound, Projections creates a unique take on loungey chill-out music. With its piano solos and relaxed bassline, "Backbone" would fit well into any after-hours club. James and Hastie are also comfortable mixing different techno genres, from house to downtempo to broken beat, sometimes all within the course of one song, as on "Kingsburg." (Guidance, 160 N. Halstead St. Chicago, IL 60661)

—Chris Fritz

**THE PULSES**  
THE PULSES

While trying too hard to distinguish themselves, The Pulses actually end up becoming indistinguishable—which surely was not the band's original intent. Throughout this self-titled debut, it's clear the people in The Pulses don't take themselves seriously. It seems as though they try too hard to be artsy fartsy punk rockers, littering what was a promising platter with some real juvenile babble. Take for instance the

two-minute "Pacemaker," with the chant "Beep beep, that is the sound a pacemaker makes," or the song "Make the Right Choice," where the only lyric sung is the name of the song. If only this album had been filled with more tracks like "Metal Man" or "Clone Song," things would be very different. (Dirt-nap, P.O. Box 21249, Seattle 98111)

—Jonathan Cholewa

**RACEBANNON**  
SATAN'S KICKIN' YR DICK IN

For those wondering, the album title is actually an appropriate indication of just how bizarre the music is on Racebookannon's latest. From synthetic hip hop beats and blazing hardcore, to slow and chugging metal, Racebookannon has created a truly disturbing piece of noise here. The liner notes read like a short story, telling "The Story of Rhonda Delight" over the course of seven tracks. Still, it would take some significant effort to decipher exactly what is taking place on this album. From the mangled guitars to the demonic screams, the band seems to try its best to frighten listeners away—effect achieved. (Secretly Canadian, 1021 South Walnut, Bloomington, IN 47401)

—Eddie Fournier

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**RAILROAD EARTH**  
**BIRD IN A HOUSE**

Oh, what a world this would be if Railroad Earth could bring Gram Parsons back from his funeral pyre out in the desert near Joshua Tree! They try for sure, with moving country rock, making listeners wonder if the barn-burning opening tune, with "fire tryin' to drag him down," could be about Parsons. Despite a strong, '60s, Byrds vibe, Railroad Earth, trades Parsons' Nashville for bluegrass. *Bird in a House* actually evokes the Grateful Dead circa "Uncle John's Band," while "Mountain Time" is a beautiful piece of psychedelic melancholy. No, they don't bring back the "Hickory Wind," but Railroad Earth is really more bluegrass rock than country rock, and *Bird in a House* is one of the best bluegrass records of the year. (Sugar Hill, P.O. Box 55300, Durham, NC 27717-5300)

—Charles Spano

band itself, this career-spanning compilation takes listeners back a decade, making a strong case for those heady shoegazer days, long gone and hardly lamented on this side of the pond. Melding My Bloody Valentine's beauty-from-feedback aesthetic with a penchant for catchy melodies, Ride was always one of the best bands of its genre, whether playing airy pop ("Taste" and "Twisterella"), delving into longer jams ("Leave Them All Behind" and "OX4"), or outdoing Oasis at slow-tempo bombast (a cover of the Creation's "How Does it Feel to Feel"). *OX4* shows just how much ground the band covered in its seven-year recording career and is a much-needed boost in America, where Ride is best known as another "band that had that song in that car commercial." (The First Time, 11489 Fellows Creek Drive, Plymouth, MI 48170)

—Charlotte Robinson

for rockabilly, although most purists will tell you others like The Cramps do it better, albeit cheekily. And of course, let's not forget Reverend Horton Heat's place. However, in terms of swing it was The Squirrel Nut Zippers who first broke through. Royal Beat Conspiracy borrows heavily from both rockabilly and swing, yet never really seems to favor one over the other. This utter lack of direction ultimately dooms *Dig It!* The mix is flat, but it appears to have been the intent all along, giving it the mono feel of the '50s and '60s recordings the group tries to ape. The vocals sound strained and often compete with the music for attention. While *Dig It!* is big on ideas, the band fails to follow through with execution. (Bad Afro Records)

—Jonathan Cholewa

nately, the post-hardcore music following this bizarre introduction has a beautiful tenseness and a defiant, nervous angst not really heard since the early SoCal hardcore days. Who would ever have expected this to come out of Iowa? Truly, with song titles like "Never Let Your Girlfriend Go Camping With That Guy She Met in Pottery Class, Trust Me," Ten Grand combines humor and violent rage in the same nervy, awkward manner as Black Flag. The band just needs scarier album art. This record is gritty, noisy and unapologetic. Ten Grand plays hardcore with the frenzy of the originators and the experimentation of a band on a timeline following Slint. "Billy Ray Valentine, Capricorn" is a relentless piece of thrashy, dissonant rock—dark, foreboding, impassioned. (Sickroom, P.O. Box 47830, Chicago 60647)

—Charles Spano

**RIDE**  
**OX4: THE BEST OF RIDE**

If you can't afford a time machine this holiday season, *OX4: The Best of Ride* might be the next best thing. Containing songs selected by the

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**TEN GRAND**  
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**THEORY OF RUIN**  
**COUNTER-CULTURE NOSEBLEED**

Theory of Ruin blends various elements of heavy rock together in an erratic and unpredictable musical stew. Like the metal genre as a

continued on page 72

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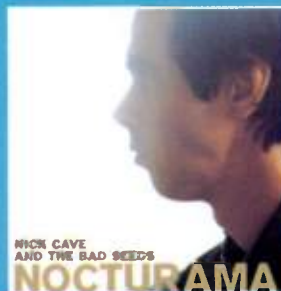
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collective, *Counter-Culture* demonstrates a strong emphasis on guitar-based riffs. As in thrashy hardcore punk, a sense of musical chaos and anarchy pervades the songs on the band's album. Meanwhile, musical dissonances and an uneasy tension tips a hat to the nu-metal sound. Theory of Ruin's music fits into the love-it-or-hate-it category. The band deserves respect, at least, for striving to create a unique musical voice of its own. (Escape Artist, P.O. Box 472, Downingtown, PA 19335)

—Dom Dispaldo

**MICK TURNER**  
**MOTH**

With 19 untitled, meandering instrumental tracks, *Moth* finds Mick Turner delving deeper into the shimmering and scratchy ruminations characterizing the Dirty Three guitarist. For fans of Papa M, David Grubbs and Jim O'Rourke, this record will be heaven. It's experimental while utterly listenable, rootsy, dreamy and textured. Less a song-by-song experience than a whole album, listeners aren't going to find

themselves humming anything off of *Moth*. The overall effect, however, captures the vibe of the waning summer, the humid night lit by a row of lanterns, flickering from the beautiful moths who flutter too close to the flames. (Drag City, P.O. Box 476867, Chicago 60647)

—Charles Spano

**THE UNSEEN**  
**COMPLETE SINGLES COLLECTION 1994-2000**

The members of The Unseen once said in an interview their best advice to new bands was to never say "Oi!" in a song. This thorough roundup of the band's hard-to-find singles, ironically, saves a rare split from eBay obscurity, preserving a volley of the band's Ois permanently on a durable and long-lasting compact disc. Cheap shots aside, The Unseen worked hard to accomplish all it has, and its members deserve anything they've gained—tours, BYO record deals and six-year, 30-song retrospectives (Ois included). If The Unseen's BYO debut marked your introduction to the group, it's a safe bet you may have missed a seven-inch or two from this prolific band. Those expecting this collec-

tion of oldies to come anywhere near the razor-sharp songwriting on *Anger and Truth*, however, have manic panicked their brain cells to death. The Unseen is punk, hardcore and intense, lending credence to its claim, "Fuck the world, Boston's better!" (Punkcore, P.O. Box 916, Middle Island, NY 11953)

—Louis Woodward

**UP UP DOWN DOWN LEFT**  
**RIGHT LEFT RIGHT B A START**  
**AND NOTHING IS #1**

The second track on this linty navel-gazer calls itself "I Know You'll Find Out I'm a Geek," but the band doesn't exactly cloak its geek status very well. Naming their band after a code for extra lives in the classic Nintendo game *Contra* is a pretty big tip-off. Writing songs about fixing your bike and failing to resemble your father only sends the geekdar into major overload. And perhaps it's because my own wallflower days aren't too far behind me, but something about *And Nothing is #1* really agrees with me. Employing a bluff and nimble approach belying the childlike themes found in its lyrics, *Up Up* unravels a sound both

thoughtful and visceral, knotty and melodic. With so many kids turning to the whiny pop-punk (or pounk) cash cow, it's refreshing to see people unafraid of unusual time signatures and shifting rhythms, while still crossing the reflective moping item out of the to-do list in their diary. Post-collegiate geezers who warmly recall the indie renaissance of the late '90s midwest, don a tight sweater and show respect. (World Won't Listen, 218 E. Knight Ave., Apt 2, Collingswood NJ 08108)

—Reed Jackson

**ARI VAIS**  
**WINTER WONDERLAND**

It seems pop music still has a place in this mixed-up world after all. *Winter Wonderland* is a rich musical landscape, which is fitting considering Vais' penchant for painting. A well-rounded artist, Vais was born in the former Soviet Union and has called nearly all four corners of the United States home. He now sifts through inspiration in avant sections of New York. *Winter Wonderland* opens with a winner, the lovely "Long Distance Relationship,"

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and maintains a steady hand throughout, punctuating the album with champs like "Beautiful Lesbian" and the appropriately titled "Pop." The album's shinning star, however, is the last track—an ambitious cover of Billie Holiday's "God Bless the Child." Vais' splendid voice breaths new life into the fantastic ol' standard, renovating it without losing a single perfect note. **(Rub Wrongway)**

—Cynthia Gentile

**YEAH YEAH YEAHS MACHINE**

New York City seems to deserve its title as a First-Tier City. The Big Apple does, after all, manage to jettison forth more "it" bands per year than any other 'burg. The Yeah Yeah Yeahs are so hyped at the moment, it's no wonder this newest EP is on venerated flagship indie Touch and Go. The Chicago-based label, still run by a man who brought us the blistering hardcore attack of Necros, has in more recent years become known for finding the brightest stars in the pantheon of independent music and snatching them up. A few years

ago it was band-of-the-moment Blonde Redhead. These days it is The Yeah Yeah Yeahs—one of a whole new crop of bands with stylistic sights set on the heyday of the '70s Lower East Side, CBGB's scene. In those days, punk was new and scary, with the music, the clothes and the company kept defining the players both internally and externally. Nowadays, it seems more like The Yeah Yeah Yeahs are just playing dress-up, but this doesn't stop them from writing some excellent, gritty, low-fi, dancey punk-influenced numbers backed by whiny female vocals oscillating between irritating and infectious. All Yeahs aside, it's worth wondering if New York's reinvigorated preoccupation with '70s punk shtick is just a gimmick, an homage or the reflection of a general lack of creativity in finding a new niche. Whatever the reason for the trend, this drum-vocals-guitar trio still delivers the goods. It's safe to say all eyes anxiously await the drop date of the YYY's forthcoming full-length. **(Touch and Go, P.O. Box 25520, Chicago 60625)**

—Stefan Grudza

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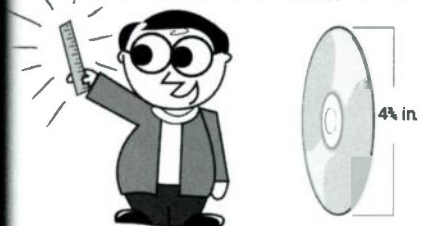
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**THE RED & THE BLACK**  
Plans for Next Year

Don Malkemes is a contributing writer to *ROCKPILE*, a distinguished graduate of Rutgers University's English department and an editor of online obituaries. In addition to an encyclopedic knowledge of the works of Man is the Bastard and Elvis Costello, Don's also very good at passing his work on to other people. *Rockpile* is proud to present its first fully outsourced column of record reviews, commissioned by freelancer Don Malkemes.

Eleanor Rigby Mad Lib...

*"Ah, look at all the boring emo kids!  
Ah, look at all the boring emo kids!  
The band picks up the sound in a  
Brooklyn bar where a rave has been.  
Stroke it in a closet, crying.  
Lunges at the band, wearing The Red  
+ The Black that she keeps in a 'zine*

*by the boy. Who is it for?  
All the boring emo, where does it all  
come from?  
All the boring emo, where does it all  
come from?"*

(The Self-Starter Foundation, P.O. Box 1562, New York, NY 10276)

—C-Train



**RETISONIC**  
Lean Beat

There's been a death in Rock City, her name was Passion. I hear she used to be pretty hot. No matter, for now her remains lay digitally buried in a CD by Retisonic. The album is good, it's fine, but I just wanted more from hardcore's James Dean, former Swiz and Bluetip guitarist Jason Farrell. There is some rock in *Lean Beat*, or at least the reticent remembrance of it, but it appears the grrr and the drive strongly fea-

tured in Farrell's previous bands have been lost. The sixth song, "Unrepentant" promises hope. The guitar actually gets a little swizzy, but the rock harmonies will scare away many hungry listeners. It's hard to feign interest in "all rights" and "okays." Please, someone, make Jason Farrell mad again. (Silverthree Sound, P.O. Box 3621, Fairfax, VA 22038)

—Ashley Caudill



**LORD STERLING**  
Weapon of Truth

This Lungfish-meets-Korn full-length struck me with its duality. As a review I present "Banalities and Angst: Two Poems for Lord Sterling's *Weapon of Truth*."

First—the poem I wrote when I didn't like this record:

*I wouldn't buy this record,  
but should you?  
I think I'd like it  
if I were a boy  
of fifteen years,  
all hate and rage and noise.  
The lyrics that aren't horrible are few.*

*The rhymes are forced;  
the melodrama high.  
Bink Ryan's range consists  
of just one tone,  
a tortured yell that  
masquerades as song  
and just might make  
a music lover cry.  
I'll give them this—  
they do know how to play.  
The sound is tight,  
but this is not enough  
to make up for those lyrics,*

*all the gruff banalities.  
So don't be led astray.  
If you like your music loud,  
try something more unique  
and clever than Lord Sterling.*

Lastly—the poem I wrote when I was in the rare mood to really appreciate this record and its many nuances:

*Mom comes in my room.  
Jesus, I am filled with angst.  
Fuck off, Mom. I'm pissed.*

(Rubric, [www.rubricrecords.com](http://www.rubricrecords.com))

—Linnea Crowther



**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
The Philadelphia Sound

It's very important to know your history, but it's also important not to dwell in it. With the exception of a lone song, "Anniversary" by Knives Out, this compilation is as captivating as a renn-fair or a civil war re-enactment—regardless of how clever Antonio's jousting may be on Saturday, he's still Tony the Tech Guy on Monday. In my extensive travels around the Philly area, I had no idea Orange County (circa 1986) was so near. The Curse and Go!

For the Throat are quick to point out my geographical ignorance. Unfortunately, my positive mental attitude, like my old pair of Vans, is wearing thin. Paint it Black, the predicted frontrunner, reminds us of the curse of the compilation—it's never a band's best material. Knives Out only offers one song to salvage this wreck, while the band's other piece resembles poo in the face. Fans of these bands will surely enjoy this novel grouping. Newcomers, however,

won't be hearing the bands at their best. With bands like Sound of Failure and R.A.M.B.O. populating the same city, I find *The Philadelphia Sound* lacking in its presentation. With this release, Chunksaah might find it hard to find a friend in Pennsylvania. Every hardcore kid ponders how much art we can take, but how much nostalgia can we take as well? (Chunksaah, P.O. Box 974, New Brunswick, NJ 08903)

—Don Malkemes



**ORTHRELM**  
2nd 18/04 Norildivoh  
Crallos-Lomrinx Urthlin

I'll bet these kids are sick of people who are not-quite-in-the-know comparing them to The Ruins. But, I'm not enjoying their album so much so I'm going to go ahead and do it again. Orthrelm, like The Ruins, is a guitar and drums duo playing very complicated little songs. Bringing themselves even closer to the Ruins, the members of Orthrelm have apparently made up their own little language to title their album and songs. Plus, they insist on putting it in an annoying type font, which calls my transcription of the title of this album above into question. Orthrelm really doesn't have much to do with the

Ruins, however. This duo treads the same ground as Lightning Bolt, the most recent Flying Luttenbachers, Hella and Grand Ulona. I guess that makes them part of a "movement" and I'd like to take this opportunity to name the movement. In the tradition of IDM, I want to give this movement an acronymic name, and I'm down to two candidates.

1.) "VCR." I figure we'll all have forgotten about VCRs in a couple of years, so we can reuse the initials to stand for Very Complicated Rock.

2.) "LGC." Let's Get Complicated!

The problem with most of these bands

is while it's clear they all practice a lot and go to great lengths to load their songs with rhythmic and structural complexity, this music basically has no melodic or harmonic content at all.

It's like listening to somebody recite pi to a thousand places. Yeah, pulling it off is evidence of lots of practice and hard work, but, I'm sorry Orthrelm, it's a boring listen—another point distinguishing Orthrelm apart from The Ruins. Fans of the other VCR/LGC bands mentioned will probably enjoy this as well. (Three One G, P.O. Box 178262, San Diego 92177)

—Larry La Loggia

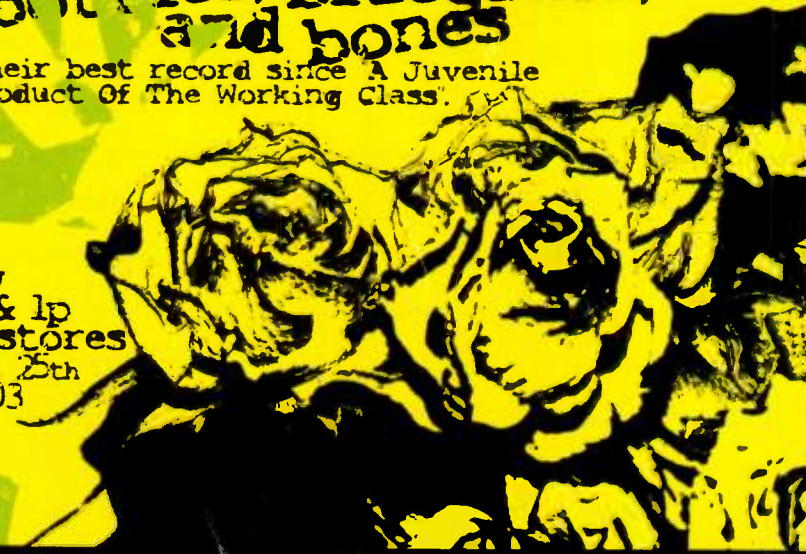
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