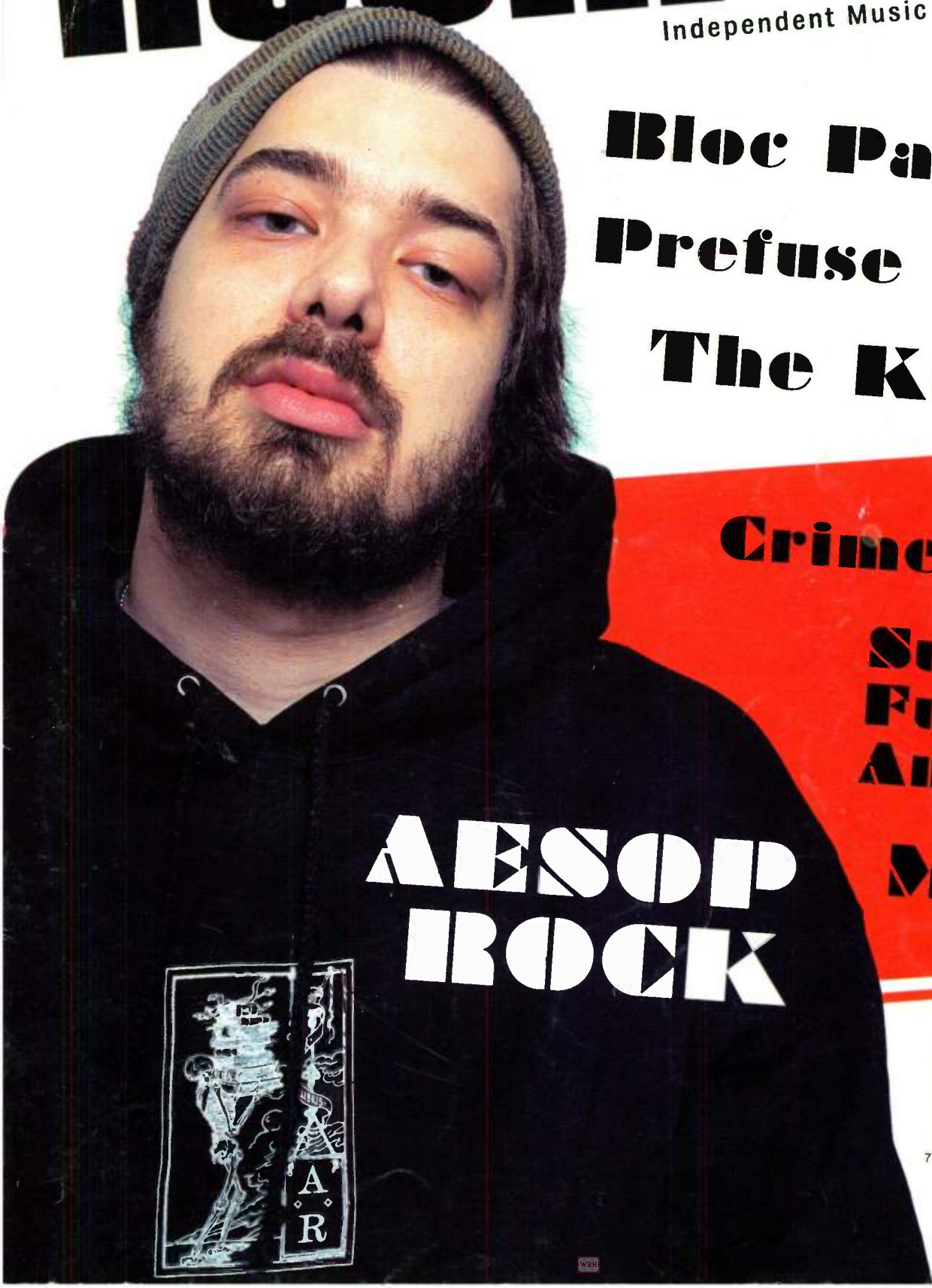


#112

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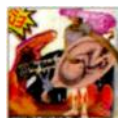
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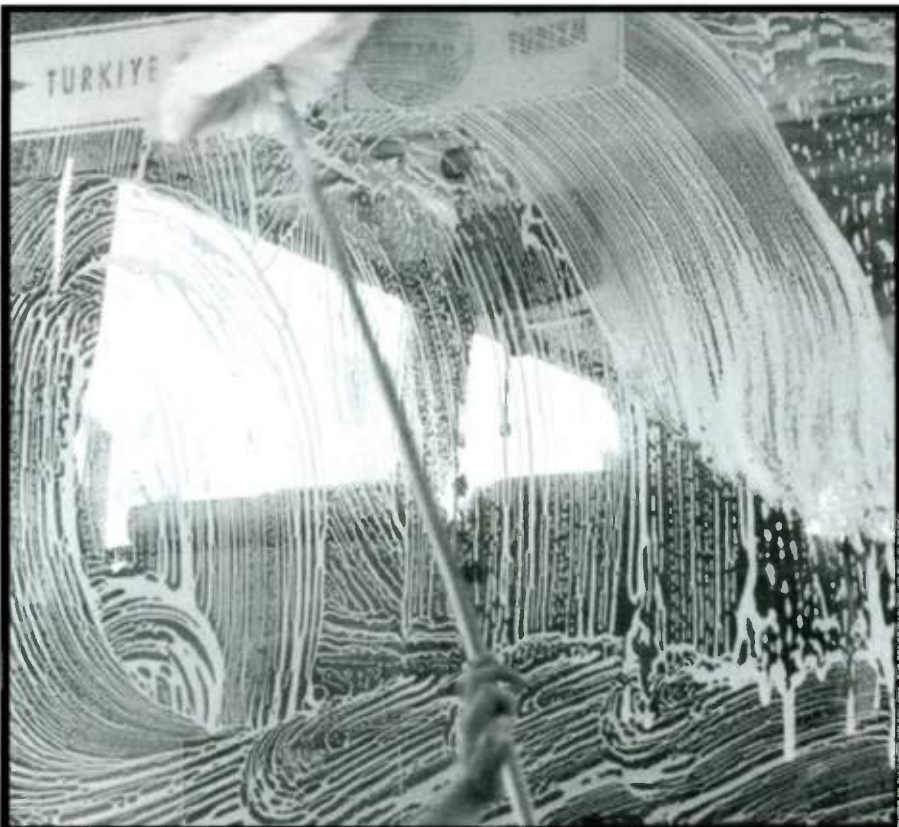
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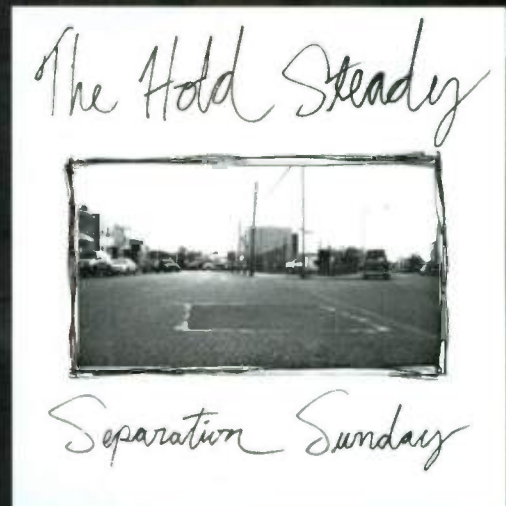


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PUBLISHERS

Advertising Director
Allan Martin Kemler

Art Director
Matthew McGlynn

Editorial Director
Michael McKee

STAFF

Fashion Director
Pearl Bell Pearl@rockpile.net

Lifestyle Editor
Adam Salo Adam@rockpile.net

Founder
Joseph Kirschen

Copy Editor
Joe Paone

Review Editors
Abigail Bruley, Matt Siblo, John Vogel

Web Developer
Joe Fritz

CONTACT

Distribution
Rider Circulation Services 323.344.1200

Rockpile Online
Rockpile@rockpile.net

Rockpile Editorial and Advertising
P.O. Box 63967, Philadelphia, PA 19147
TEL (215) 592-0592
FAX (215) 592-0591

SUBSCRIBE

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CONTRIBUTORS

Artists

Rob Barber
Angela Boatwright
Grant Brittain
Damien Correll
Jim Datz
Peter Ellenby
Pat Graham
Andrea Hackman
Dan Keenan
Nick Martin
Daragh McDonagh
Dona Monroe
Marcus Olsson
Pete Panciera
Mike Perry
Chrissy Piper
Pat Pope
Beowulf Sheehan
Jason Varney

Writers

Brian Baker
Kristina Francisco
Erica Gallagher
Kory Grow
Reed Jackson
Molly Knight
Kim Newman
Andrew Parks
Dan Pastorius
Jennifer Przybylski
Austin Ray
Kate Carolan Reed
Aaron Richter
Jay Riggio
Terry Sawyer
Maggie Serota
Janelle Smarella
Megan Timmerman
Sarah Tomlinson
Dominic Umile
John Vettese
John Wenzel
MacKenzie Wilson

lovitt records 2005



DEL CIELO

DEL CIELO
US VS THEM



BUGHAMMER
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The ladies of Del Cielo triumphantly return with their second full-length, *Us vs. Them*. A follow-up to 2001's *Wish and Wait*, *Us vs. Them* is a collection of charged rock songs and contemplative ballads that alternately evoke passion, rawness, and a carefree outlook that are both refreshing and vital.

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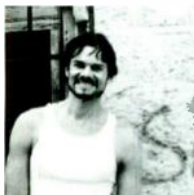
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Connect Design

Pete Panciera is a freelance artist. He is currently working on his BFA in communication design at the University of Connecticut. You can view his work at Connect-Design.com.

SEE → [The Weird World of Fairy Folk](#) → PG.18



Beowulf Sheehan

Beowulf had little more than a New York minute to photograph M.I.A. before her flight back to London. OK, he had eight regular minutes, but that's still not much time. Fortunately, he was rehearsed, ready and swift. Unfortunately, M.I.A. missed her flight. Sorry.

SEE → [M.I.A.](#) → PG.46



Angela Boatwright

Angela was born in Ohio, but she's lived in New York for almost 12 years. She has two cats and spends most of her money ordering vinyl from England. She counts not being able to see *Immortal* as one of her greatest regrets (especially with *Manowar*). She's planning a trip to Scandinavia this fall, hates mayonnaise and was the photo editor for *Mass Appeal* for a billion years.

SEE → [Crime Mob](#) → PG.48



Paulina Pobocho

Paulina is a former research assistant for *Art Forum*, a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Fine Arts NYU, and a contributor to *Themes and Movements: Abstract Impressionism*, to be published by Phaedon Press later this year.

SEE → [Crime Mob](#) → PG.48



Nick Martin

As a teenager, Nick became interested in visual consumption and the layers of saturation inside contemporary communication. He found his way to Richmond, Va., to study graphic arts in order to dissect and combine words and images. He thinks he smokes too much and enjoys the moonlight.

SEE → [Prefuse 73](#) → PG.50



Dona Monroe

Having recently relocated from Seattle, Dona keeps herself busy shooting photographs for labels and magazines like *Time Out NY*, *Resonance*, MTV.com and Vice Records, to name a few. When she's not shooting, you can catch her plotting her escape from New York (read: making arts and crafts in her apartment).

SEE → [The Kills](#) → PG.52



What Ever Happened to the Teenage Dream?

The design group is made up of Damien Correll, Dan Keenan, Mike Perry and Jim Datz: four Philadelphia designers who share a day job, a habit for drawing all over everything, and mixed feelings about hippies.

SEE → [Gallery](#) → PG.28



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The Kills |52

Alone together: The British-American duo finds solace and solitude in the Michigan wilderness.

On the Cover » Aesop Rock
photos by Chrissy Piper

On this Page » The Kills
photos by Dona Monroe

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Nerd Rap. Emo hop. backpacker? Classifiers keep indie rap in the margins, and Def Jux's Long Island super hero would like to save the day.

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London's 28-year-old Maya Arulpragasam distills rebel music from Sri Lanka to Jamaica.

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Five teens get the Dirty South marketing treatment.

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Scott Herren finds a new voice through collaboration.

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Life's a gas when you're Welsh.

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The latest British infatuation discourses on identity politics.

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Sound

Lonely

FORWARD >>





Two years ago we put a relatively unknown MC named Aesop Rock on the cover of our magazine. The month before we'd done the same thing with a guy named MF Doom. At the time, neither artist had much recognition outside of dedicated underground obsessives.

What a difference time (and talent) makes. Doom made numerous year-end lists in 2004, with a cover spot on *The Wire* and rumors of a Ghostface collab in the offing.

Aesop's name, meanwhile, continues to infiltrate new homes, locking in amped up, young listeners in a way usually reserved for rock acts on the summer festival circuit. In a way, it should come as no surprise. There's always been something about the Def Jux camp that's resonated pretty equally with backpacker poets, production-minded intellectuals and would-be suburban meatheads. The label's heaviest hitters today form a colorful trinity with El-P's apocalyptic tone, Aesop's troubled Romantic and Mr. Lif's rhetorical roundhouses and '90s throwbacks. With something for everyone, it's as simply and classically populist as rap's first big explosion into mainstream America. So, why isn't it resonating with the masses?

Looking for an answer solely along racial lines is futile—it ignores the situation of artists like Beans, MF Doom, Brother Ali and Diverse, to name just a few. Meanwhile, anyone still shocked by the idea of a white MC defines culturally out of touch.

Some insight might come from taking a step back from the brainy sort of hip hop most indie heads associate with innovation. This month we interview Crime Mob, an Atlanta group of teenage MCs recently picked up by Lil' Jon's Warner Bros. subsidiary. Their singles, "Knuck if You Buck" and "Stiletos," initially caught our ear, while their contagious enthusiasm defined the interview. Despite a handful of memorable tracks and their refreshingly down-to-earth dispositions, Crime Mob's mainstream success—should they see any—will most likely come through marketing (keyword: Dirty South) and the intangible validation club music inherits from thug chic.

A bevy of dubious tags await hip hop's square pegs, from "nerd rap" to "emo hop," while mediocre acts like 50 Cent, Nelly and Ja Rule are simply "rap," remaining free of extra modifiers. One can't help but wonder at the absurdity of entities like commercial radio and gossip rags acting as the arbiters of "who's real." After all, when *XXL* defines what's "street," what space is left for the local, mixtape DJ or the talented MC without a Hollywood connection?

Although, as a music magazine it's supposed to be our bread and butter, big-thing predictions have never settled well with us. I don't know if artists like Aesop Rock have much of a chance at crossover, or if he'll one day simply be considered a rapper like any other. Frankly, I doubt it—not because he lacks talent, and not because commercial rap fans aren't "ready for it" (people recognize good music when they're given the chance). When you get right down to it, decades of classification, packaging, branding politics and industry jazz have left a lot of us saddled with hang ups about how, where, why, with and from whom we're hearing what we're hearing.

Genre-defying collaborations from big names in both camps are becoming increasingly more frequent and impressive. If Ghostface fans are turned on to El-P and Prefuse 73—and fans of the latter two can appreciate the very real push forward Pretty Tony is making—we may very well someday enjoy a indie-commercial meeting of the minds.

Hopefully, this crossover will benefit artists and music lovers, and not just marketing execs.

Mike McKee
Publisher/Editor
Rockpile Magazine



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4 The Kaiser Chiefs

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Hype Named for a South African football team
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5 Dr. Dog

Representing Philadelphia
Sounds Like Pavement meets Neil Young harboring a huge Beatles infatuation
Hype Toured with My Morning Jacket and M. Ward
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6 The Duke Spirit

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7 Styrofoam

Representing Belgium
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8 Consafos

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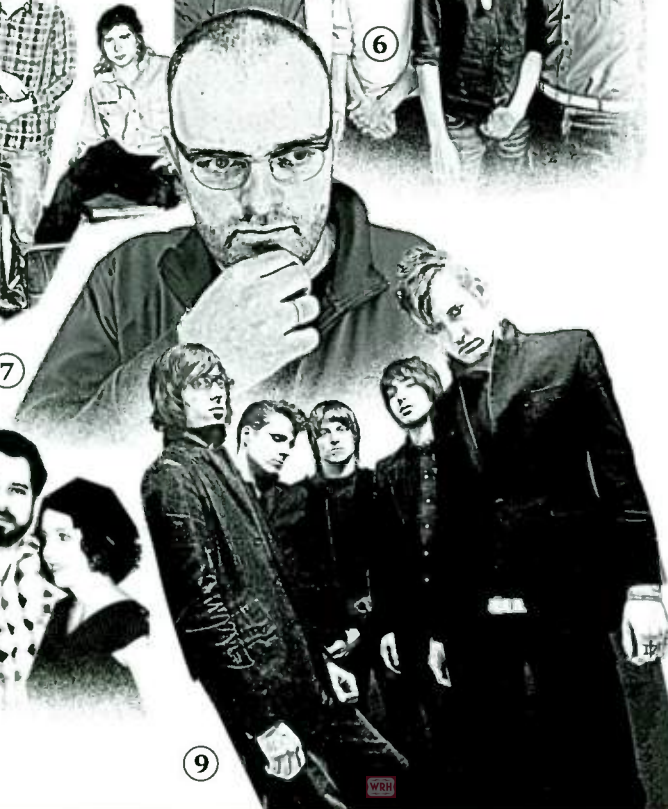
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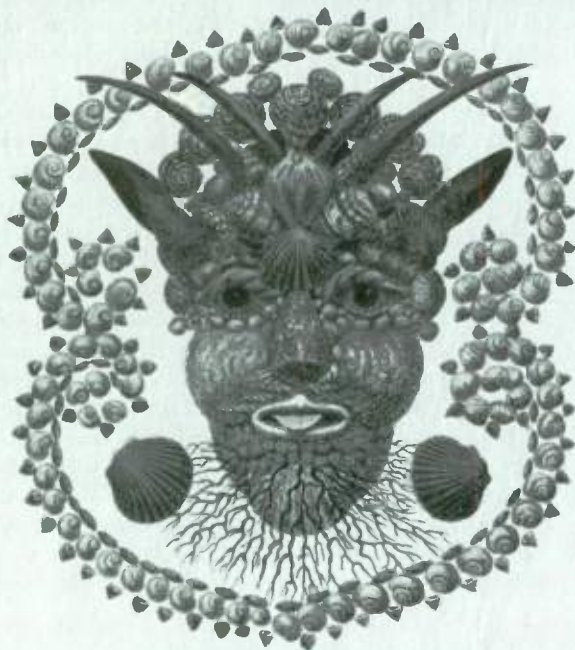
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Medications

Text~Chad Molter § Interview~Dan Pastorius

When Faraquet's debut dropped on Dischord, the remaining stiffs too priggish to air-guitar soon changed their tunes. It's not that we haven't heard anything like it before, it's that—with the possible exception of Don Cab—no one really does it better than Washington, D.C.'s Devin Ocampo. Rising from the ashes of the now-defunct Faraquet, Medications began as an untitled songwriting project between singer-guitarist Ocampo and drummer Andrew Becker. As the creative wheels spun and their output increased, the duo began playing live throughout the Beltway area with a revolving cast of bassists. Eventually, Ocampo called upon former Faraquet partner Chad Molter to complete the lineup. Molter likes to call it "the power of the trio." Full of the crisp, winding guitar intricacy, pounding drums and dueling vocal harmonies you've come to expect, Medications' new EP, again courtesy of Dischord, sets the blueprint for yet another round of indie wallflowers sneaking some hard solos.

What ties Medications in with your previous projects?

Devin and I are serial tinkers in the studio. We're attracted to the economy of drums, bass, guitar in the live setting and still firm believers in the power of the trio.

So, your bio says Medications is "a juxtaposition of religious adherence to—and an atheistic rejection of—the traditional pop song format." Could you please explain this?

It's supposed to mean that we make good music. I'll be the first to admit that perhaps that message got lost in there somewhere.

What kind of effect has living in Washington had on the band's style and sound?

It's city music. I think that Washington is a great place for young bands. It's a city with a small-town attitude. One doesn't get the feeling that people are jockeying for position in the scene—no arguing over who's going to headline the big club. Bands here would be more likely to argue over who opens. There are quite a few places to play here and in my experience, if you really want to put on a show, there's a way to do it.

Why should someone who has never heard you guys pick up your record?

Because our music employs "a juxtaposition of religious adherence to and an atheistic rejection of the traditional pop song format."



Dälek

Text~Dälek § Interview~John Vogel

In a world of pop-up houses and disposable music, occasionally something comes along that gives you hope that there's still intelligent life on this planet. Such is the case with Dälek (pronounced dialect). On *Absence*, the group's latest album on Ipecac, dark, deep, industrial production from producer Öktoopus and turntablist Still meld with the acerbic lyrics of one of the few MCs from Newark, N.J., to name-drop Flying Saucer Attack and Glenn Branca alongside Boogie Down Productions.

Literally, who has influenced you over the years?

As far as hip hop, definitely Chuck D, KRS-One, Rakim.

How about production-wise?

Definitely the Bomb Squad, Public Enemy. I grew up with traditional hip hop, like Bambaata, De La Soul and Prince Paul's type of production.

Dälek is known for drawing from underground or indie rock—My Bloody Valentine, collaborating with Eric Bachmann. What are your views on when the mixture is made by more pop-level artists? I'm thinking about that Jay-Z collaboration with Linkin Park...

Honestly, I think it's good that bands like that are working together, because I never really thought there was that much difference between mainstream hip hop and, say, Britney Spears or Christina Aguilera. I mean, all that stuff is pop music, you know. I would say with the exception of Jay-Z's *Black Album*, because I think that had really great songs on it that showed that he dumbed down his art to sell more records. I never really thought that mainstream hip hop or rap had anything to do with real hip hop, anyway. To me, that's like saying, you know, "How do you feel about Blink 182 and punk music?" That has nothing to do with Bad Brains, the Dead Kennedys or Black Flag, so it's apples and oranges, really. That's with any genre once the corporate world gets money involved. They find that cookie-cutter shape that's going to sell, and they're just going to keep pushing it till it's dead. To me that's just a different world.

How's working with Ipecac Records?

Oh, it's great. I guess at first glance, people would kind of be like, "Why?," but honestly, the thing about the label, even though all the artists are very different, is that all the artists really believe in the music that they're making. All the artists are willing to work hard for what they believe in, so there's that common thread that runs through the Melvins, Isis, Tomahawk, whoever.



A Frames

Answers~Erin Sullivan | Interview~Dan Pastorius

You really can't go wrong with a solid three-piece. Of all people, the folks at Sub Pop, who released the Thermals' record, should know this. So it figures the label should now bring us the bare-bones rock minimalism of Seattle's A Frames. Recorded and produced by the band itself, its third album (the group's first for Sub Pop), *Black Forest*, is as loud, obnoxious and discordant as anything fans might have heard in the past, all the while displaying a multi-textured maturity sprung out of in-studio experimentation. With heavy, artfully spliced riffs and slow, building bass lines, the A Frames construct a cluster of frantic, stripped-down songs reminiscent of the Jesus Lizard, Wire and early Butthole Surfers. Regardless of its influences, the band maintains a distinctive tone while concurrently creating a new standard in heaviness. *Black Forest* makes you want to dance and break something all at once, providing the perfect soundtrack to your Friday night post-week bender.

What do you remember most about recording the new record?

There were several different recording and mixing sessions. One involved a visit to the emergency room, where we ran into some asshole who had taken too much of some unknown drugs. He had shit himself and kept yelling, "I love you man!" His friend asked if he was gonna be stuck like that. We hope he was. Also, we had some technical problems and some performance problems the first time, so we decided to redo some songs. In the end, we used material from both sessions.

What's currently on your iPod playlist?

Min [Yee] is the real music geek in our band, and he keeps me loaded up with tons of music. I just set the thing to shuffle and get the best radio station ever. I can't even really list stuff because there's so much—about 30 gigabytes.

You know that question interviewers always ask? 'What's the most embarrassing moment you've had on stage?' I'm asking.

My thong got stuck on the pole while I was dancing and went right up my asshole.

You're all in other bands. How do you balance between A Frames and your other commitments?

Lars is the only A Frame currently playing in Intelligence (me and Min both had short stints on bass a while back). Lars and me are in the Dipers, but that band hardly ever plays. The priority is whichever band has a tour, show or recording coming up. We all just like playing music and having fun.



Del Cielo

Answers~Basla Andolsun | Interview~Caroline Borolla

Del Cielo hails from the Nation's Capital, and while the band's music might not come across as political, the trio is strikingly conscious. Remember when bands like Tsunami and the Softies made punk get all cute, separating the revolutionary acts from the revolutionary gestures? Recognize. Del Cielo deftly channels and updates the best elements of '90s alt-rock (think Velocity Girl) and indie arena rock (think Alkaline Trio and Sleater-Kinney). *Us Vs. Them*, the band's Lovitt Records debut—by far the group's most confident release to date—shows just how good it can be when a band can walk that tightrope between poppy love songs and behind-the-scenes political bangers.

What is your earliest musical memory?

My parents recorded children's songs, and my brother and I sang on them. I was five and my brother was three. They put them out themselves. One of the songs was called "Give Me Five," which was just counting out the five times table. That was how I learned how to do multiplication.

Being in a band from D.C. and being very active in your community, are you nervous about being tagged as a political band?

We are each political in our own way. Katy [Otto, drummer] is definitely the most active. A lot of the benefit shows that we do are things she suggests and we agree on. Andrea [Lisi, guitar] will have a very open conversation with someone about their political views. She's really strong, because it takes a lot to connect with people on a personal level and try to influence them.

You're a firm believer in animal rights. There's a rumor you once kissed a wolf.

In college, I took a class on animal rights, and one day the professor brought in someone from a wolf rescue center, who brought in a wolf that had been domesticated. He said the way wolves greet each other is that they lick each other's mouths—it's a trust thing, like, 'I trust you enough to lick inside my mouth.' So, the people who work at this rescue center let the wolves greet them this way. He asked if anyone wanted to volunteer to kiss the wolf. I think he was joking, but I volunteered and let the wolf lick inside my mouth! I figured when would I have the chance to french a wolf again?

There are quite a few songs on *Us Vs. Them* that focus on relationships gone sour. Are there ever guys in the audience who think certain songs are about them?

There have been times when we didn't play certain songs, because certain people were in the room. We have also played some of the more scandalous songs in front of Andrea's parents. Luckily, she knows when to mumble.

Stranded on Summer Isle

The fantastic world
of today's indie folk

If the '70s were marked by rock's bloated excesses and punk's acerbic response, and the '80s were characterized by increasingly toothless new-wave adopters, you might posit that, among some other qualities—some laudable, others deplorable—the artists of the '00s have shown a consistent tendency to reference the not-so-distant pasts of particular genres.

Contrary to this notion, folk music enjoys a certain level of timelessness. Like their more creative peers in other genres, a particularly gifted strain of folk musicians has been channeling the bygone vibes of its own influences. Bringing a fascinating, emotive, sometimes eerie vision to forms generally associated with Fairport Convention, Pentangle and Bert Jansch, new artists are lending a brooding fantasy to an ageless, adaptable genre. Your parents' folk music? Hardly. This is the soundtrack to the as-yet-unmade *Wickerman* sequel, the stuff the gnome under your bed listens to while he plots how to steal your breath.

Espers

Formed a few years ago by songwriter Greg Weeks, Espers takes a decidedly less urban direction than you'd expect from Philadelphians. Typical Espers output is glacial, layered and intense, with molasses-paced arrangements giving audiences time to walk around and get lost inside the songs. Throughout the band's self-titled debut on its Locust label, Appalachian ghosts come gently by train. After all, you can't get to heaven on the Philadelphia El.

Damien Jurado

Like so many other brilliant minds, Jurado started out as a punker before transplanting the aggro to the darker sides of folk. Releasing criminally overlooked albums for close to a decade now, Jurado's live EP, *Just in Time for Something*, dropped late last year, fascinating listeners with its lo-fi glory. His voice cracks, the songs are spare as can be and the whole thing feels like it was recorded by someone in the audience.

M. Ward

A tireless modern troubadour, M. Ward has gone from releasing solo albums in relative obscurity to playing shows around the country on the "monsters of folk" tour with Conor Oberst of Bright Eyes and Jim James of My Morning Jacket. Along the way, he's applied his rustic, Waitsian voice and adept guitar playing to scads of quality original material (to say nothing of his inspired covers of everyone from the Beach Boys and David Bowie to Bach). His latest, *Transistor Radio*, is on Merge.

Joanna Newsom

Newsom's elfin timbre is downright adorable, if not a little unsettling in its not-of-this-world innocence. Listening to her sing about fruit, love and animals on her 2004 debut, *The Milk-Eyed Mender* (Drag City), one gets the feeling of utter innocence and beauty, like the child empress from *Neverending Story* is treating you to a private harp recital. Newsom adopted her instrument at the age of seven and now, despite her petite frame and soft-spoken demeanor, she is an arresting, spell-binding presence on stage. She's also been known to lullaby unicorns to sleep in her lap, her harp strings are made of fairy hair, and animated songbirds follow her around everywhere she goes. Oh, and Fugazi are monks who think it's a sin to use toilet paper or telephones.

Devendra Banhart

Examining the strange beast critics have dubbed "freak folk," it's tempting to classify the participating critters within their own animal kingdom. Here's its warble-throated king. Banhart released two impressive albums last year (*Rejoicing in the Hands* and *Nino Rojo*), each filled with a myriad of eccentricities, the most memorable of which is Banhart's voice. Landing at different times in the realm of an old swamp witch's raspy tremolo, a time-tested bluesman's croak and an unstable mental patient's squeak, his vocal work is as unpredictable as it is pleasing. Check *Rejoicing's* "Poughkeepsie," where over a finger-picked acoustic, Banhart name checks several Elvis Presley songs, repeating the first letter sound of "Viva Las Vegas" to the point where you'll think your CD is skipping.



Folk's Weird Past

Every movement has its influences, and for as long as there have been boring hippies crooning versions of "Blowin' in the Wind" in coffee shops, there have been gifted, twisted, left-of-center innovators working at folk's freak fringe (alliteration is your friend). Here's a few worth remembering...

Vashti Bunyan

Referenced by Banhart in countless interviews, this '60s British folkie even turned up on Devendra's *Rejoicing in the Hands* album for a cameo. Her classic (and ugly) album *Just Another Diamond Day* recently received a long-overdue release on CD format.

Marc Bolan

Perhaps better known for his output under the abbreviated T. Rex moniker, Bolan's earlier Tyrannosaurus Rex helped pioneer the oddly soulful warble affected by all the best broken-hearted poets revered today.

Jandek

The Salinger of indie folk, Jandek's 25-year career has yielded 35 records with nary a single live public appearance. With a portfolio as haunting and mysterious as his reclusive lifestyle, Jandek is the sort of allergic-to-celebrity genius that future generations will revere, wondering why we were so hung up on Captain Beefheart.

Other Recommended Listening

»Sufjan Stevens *Greetings from Michigan: The Great Lakes State*

»Faun Fables *Early Song*

»The Shygreen Leopards

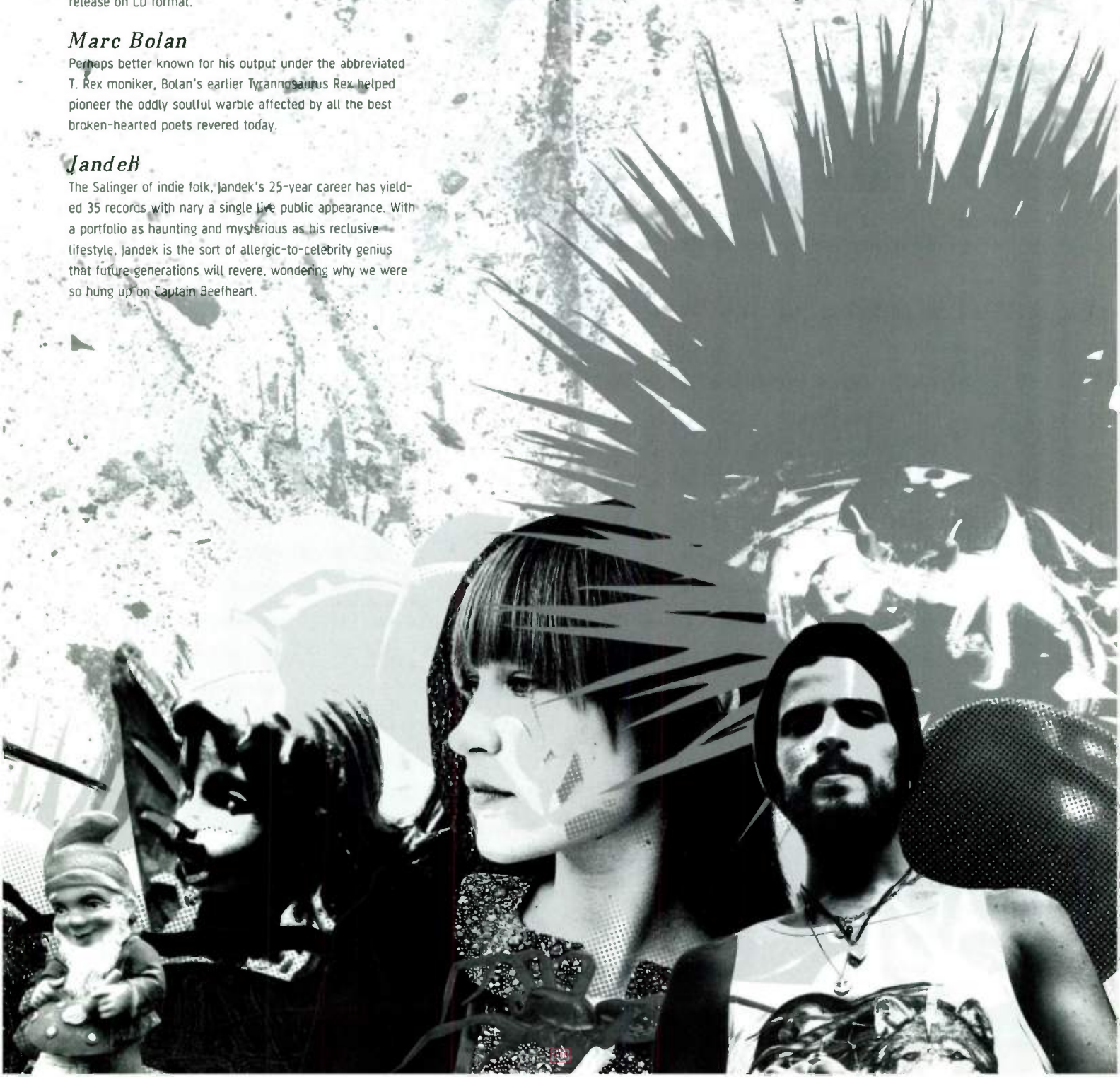
Life and Love in Sparrow's Meadow

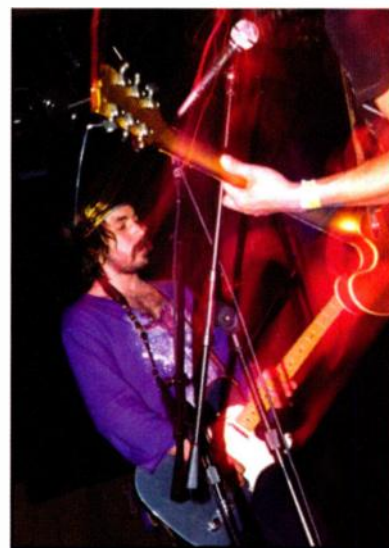
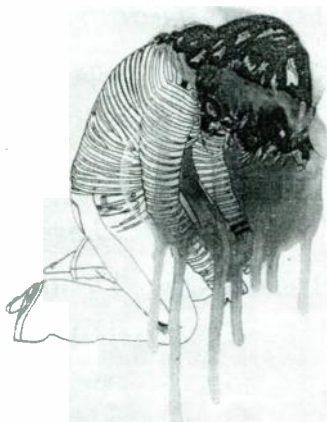
»Iron and Wine *The Creek Drank the Cradle*

»David-Ivar Herman *Düne Ya Ya*

»Feathers *Gnomeozoic Live*

»Josephine Foster and the Supposed *All the Leaves Are Gone*





Peter Ellenby

Shitty Art

FecalFace.com Has Better Taste in Art Than URLs

Everybody wants to let their friends know about the art show they're hosting in their basement, the one that features pictures of how drunk they were last night or, as the case may be, showcase samples from their new spring line of fashionable underground haute couture. Well kids, the Information Age is upon us and we no longer have to hang hastily prepared fliers to draw a crowd at our various arts events. Thanks to websites like our friends at FecalFace.com, art and antics from the über-hip and the under-appreciated are getting a forum to promote their various endeavors.

The brainchild of John Trippe, formerly of *Slap Magazine*, Fecal Face has been promoting indie art since 1998. The site gives artistic heavy hitters like Michael Leone, Dave Kinsey and Silly Pink Bunny creator, Jeremy Fish, space to do their thing. The site has also played host to the photographic stylings of talented shutterbugs like J. Grant Britain and Patrick Dell (of *Thrasher* fame).

Apart from the barrage of art available for perusing on the site, it also includes events listings and an online shop peddling music, art and books from featured artists and friends.

FecalFace.com

Bring the Noise (Pop)

Highlights from the 13th Annual Noise Pop Festival

San Francisco's Noise Pop Festival is a bookie's worst nightmare. The event seems to possess psychic powers of forecasting when it comes to the next big thing. Bands like **Modest Mouse**, **Bright Eyes** and the **White Stripes** made their big stage debuts through the festival at venues such as San Francisco's Great American Music Hall. With 13 years under its belt, this year's festival was no exception.

What began as a screaming little party at San Francisco's Kennel Club has grown into a mutated extravaganza on par with Ozzfest. Running from February 22-27, San Francisco was visited last month by seven nights of music in several venues showcasing the talents of more than 70 bands. As in the past, the festival was an opportunity for bands on the brink of commercial success to play some larger venues and for lesser-known acts to play on bills with big-name talent. Major attractions included **Polyphonic Spree**, **Hot Hot Heat**, **Bob Mould** and **Galaxy 500** alums, Damon and Naomi, but the heart of the Noise Pop Festival continues to beat loudest in notable up-and-comers like **Joanna Newsom**, **Vietnam** and **Rogue Wave**.

Apart from the musical blowout, this year's festival also included an art and film element highlighted by a sneak preview of the highly anticipated **Flaming Lips** documentary, as well as a photography and poster art show.

NoisePop.com



Got Cotton?

Triple 5 Soul Announces Designers Selected for the Ludlow Residency

In hopes of continuing support from emerging designers, some familiar companies including Cotton Inc. and Triple Five Soul (T5S) have joined to introduce Red Toe Nails as their most recent featured line at the Ludlow Residency.

A cotton products branding and publicity campaign, the Ludlow Residency program was created in 2004 by Triple Five Soul to showcase new designers hand-picked by a T5S jury. Selected designers enjoy three months on display at the label's Williamsburg boutique in Brooklyn. So far, Blaise Delecroix, Subscript and Dirty Bandit have all landed residencies, with Red Toe Nails' launching this month. Not surprisingly, the residency historically favors clothing made chiefly of cotton. Since its inception in 1989, Triple 5 Soul has developed its signature cut-and-sewn streetwear aesthetic with this material. As the latest label featured in the program, Red Toe Nails' spring line makes ample use of hand dyeing, screen prints and various treatments of, you guessed it, cotton.

RedToeNails.net

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ONSTAGE » Dan Snaith of Caribou

Even some of the strongest electronic acts can be mind-numbingly boring live. After having a CD transport you to sweeping, futuristic soundscapes, it can be quite a disappointment when the live show looks like a guy checking his email. Dan Snaith is a doctor of mathematics and the brain behind Caribou. He's also devised a plan to make his live shows the antithesis of the dull laptop set. Having released *Start Breaking My Heart* in 2001 and *Up In Flames* in 2003 under the name Manitoba, Snaith was recently wrestled into legal submission by laughable ex-Dictators frontman "Handsome" Dick Manitoba. Shamefully, the denizens of the Canadian province of the same name stood by, doing nothing.

Interview~Mike McKee

People don't always think of heady, laptop-rock hybrids as having much going on visually? What's the idea behind your live shows?

There are lots of parts on my records that are a big sensory-overload fuckfest, and I wanted the live show

to take that direction to it's logical conclusion. It's the opposite of your average laptop show. I wanted there to be too many things going on to take in at once, so we commissioned a group of animators to do visuals synched to all the music, and we have two drummers playing together a lot of the time, running around like idiots trying to play as many instruments as possible.

Where do you find those insane props?

The masks—there were bears, pigs, birds, dogs, even a small silk leopard and a dancing horse-woman—were things we found along the way and thought looked weird. This time the masks are off though. The music from this album is so good live that it's going to be overwhelming enough without having to watch a pig playing drums at the same time. We'd hospitalize the audience.

So, why "Caribou?"

We were on tour in Canada at the time, and we decided the only way to get a new name was through a vision quest. So we hired a flatbed truck with three crucifixes on the back, put on bandannas dipped in liquid acid and tied ourselves to the crucifixes until a new name came to us... *Caribou*.

Domino's a terrific label, but I can only lament the fact you've not yet been armed with a seriously indulgent for your show. With unlimited resources, what are some augmentations you think you'd make for the next tour?

We would have two Komodo dragons in enclosures—one on each side of the stage—with a theremin in the middle of each enclosure, so that the theremins are going off randomly the whole way through the show. The whole concert would take place inside a transparent hot air balloon over the salt flats in Utah.

LOCATION »

Ian Svenonius of Weird War Gives Us a Tour of Washington, D.C.

Tell us a bit about the monuments you choose to visit and why?

The Sphinx monument is in front of the Masonic temple and, though not a proper monument, provides a kind of key to the city. It hovers 13 blocks directly-north of the White House, which provides the bottom anchor to an upside down pentagram created by the street grid. The D.C. map is, of course, a mess of occult symbols designed to invoke the New World Order. Pierre L'Enfant, the architect, ensured that the three rotaries which form the top of the star would each have six major street arteries (666).

The Joan of Arc is a bronze copy of the Paul Dubos statue featured at Rheims cathedral and can be found in a place called "Malcolm X Park" by residents. It is the only statue of a woman on horseback in the city. Joan was, of course, burned for witchcraft and for "wearing men's clothes persistently". The park also features a great statue of Dante and a dreary one of Buchanan.



Andrea Hackman

What are some monuments you think need erecting?

A good, old fascist arch seems missing. Every other imperial power has a vaginal arch, which the conquering heroes march through as a symbolic deflowering of the enemy. Also, maybe one for NAFTA.

What's the best thing about living in your city?

Getting the opportunity to give the president the finger as he drove by.

INFLUENCE » Lexy Funk of Brooklyn Industries Clothing



Lexy Funk is a co-founder, CEO and inspirational muse over at the Brooklyn Industries fashion label. Since 1997, the company has designed and developed all of its products right in its studio in Williamsburg. Consciously or not, Funk is a walking poster girl for the label, often sighted in BI's signature printed, sheer jerseys and caps. Aside from just making decent clothes, it seems the folks at Brooklyn Industries obsess about music nearly as much as they do their own sense of fashion. This month's cover boy, Aesop Rock, pops up in a good number of their ads, a spokesperson position generated on the fly through mutual admiration.

Interview~Pearl Bell

How does your personal style influence the Brooklyn Industries line?

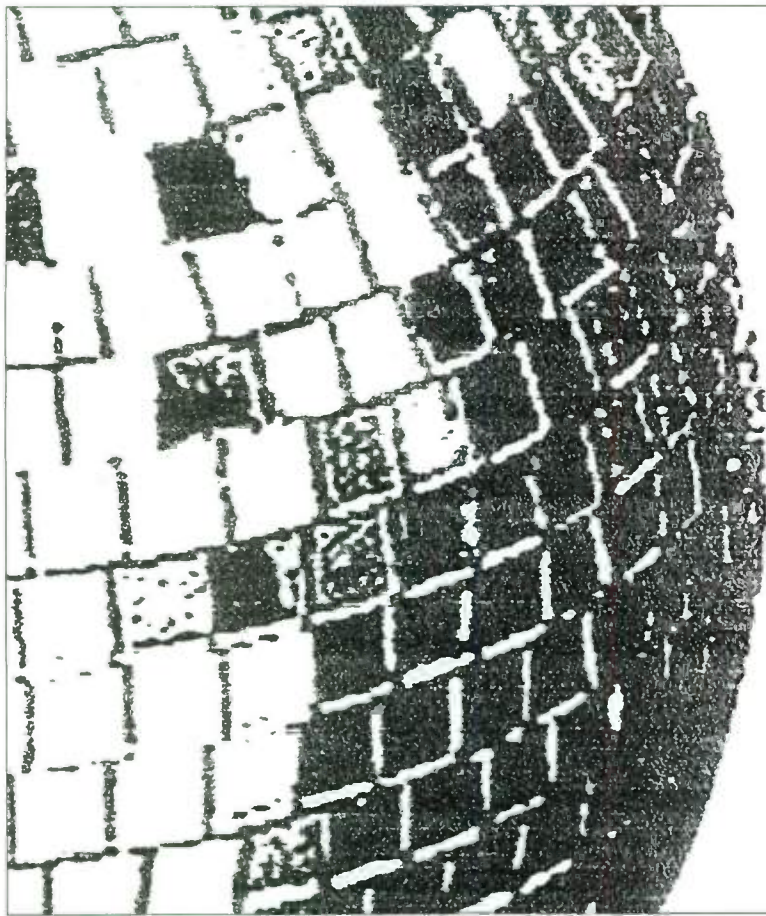
It's less about personal style than individual ideas. Our team meets daily to discuss ideas and how to best translate the abstract into the reality. This week I've been thinking about Haruki Murakami's strange, ethereal novel, *Norwegian Wood*, while our graphic designer, Shino Urano, has been mo'ping '70s movie posters with hand-drawn patterns for our summer women's T-shirt line.

Who are some designers that you look up to or influence you?

Miucci Prada for her ideas and color sense, Rem Koolhaas for his playful modernism, Roni Horn, a photographer and installation artist whose serenity is transformative, Futura from Williamsburg and Andrea Trolfe, an artist and author who just designed a killer T-shirt line for us. For 2005, Modern Amusements, Franklin and Marshall and Betty Blush.

Music seems to play a big role in defining the Brooklyn Industries style. How do you choose the artists you work with as models, and what's some music you're feeling right now? What's the last CD you spun in your player?

We affiliate ourselves with any music that is original and creative. We are friends with a variety of great musicians from Aesop to Pete Miser to Antibalas and Maya Azucane. My last CD? Of course, Aesop Rock's *Fast Cars, Danger A Fire and Knives*.



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Carolyn Mark with friends. Lots of them. Including Amy Honey from Clover Honey, Carey Mercer from Frog Eyes, Robyn Carrigan from Bottleneck, and others.

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Age 41

Provenance Las Vegas, Nev.

Achievements A member of the original Powell-Peralta Bones Brigade skate team, appearing in such classic videos as *Bones Brigade Video Show* and *Future Primitive*. Spade Skateboards recently reissued his old board.

Much like wine, cheese and Neil Diamond, skateboarder Steve Steadham is one of those things that just gets better with age. Anyone who was a fan of skateboarding in the '80s knows him as a formidable member of the elite Powell-Peralta Bones Brigade. During his time in the Bones Brigade, Steadham helped define the sport alongside such luminaries as Tony Hawk, Christian Hosoi and Lance Mountain.

So, you recently started your own board company. What's the background behind that? Who do you have riding for your team?
My new companies are called Steadham Skate Industries and The Big Generator. I started them in the beginning of 2004. I have two people that really support and work with me—Bob Petraglia and Dave Lange. Bob is someone who I consider a business partner and friend. He got involved with me originally through music and then helped me start my skateboard companies. My riders include Phillip Beausejour, Patrick Jacques, Kevin Whelan, Todd Hohberger and Mik Fife. I am confirming more.

If you had to pick one accomplishment you are the most proud of, what would it be?

Being part of the original Bones Brigade and becoming the biggest black skater in the sport. Back in the '80s there were no black skaters that won or were considered to be as good as anyone else. I influenced a lot of ethnic skaters around the world. Even to this day I meet people everywhere I go that remember me and my image. It is so humbling and inspiring to feel that I inspired people. It makes me feel that I let myself down and some of my fans by getting out of skateboarding for so long.

You've been involved in music for nearly as long as you've been skating. What are you involved in these days?

Currently, I have been producing five groups that I write and perform in. I am doing all of the lead vocals now and I started playing the keyboards about six years ago. My biggest project that I am setting up now is a music-skate video featuring Tony Hawk, Mike McGill, Lance Mountain and Stevie Caballero—the original Bones Brigade and the most insane skater now, Danny Way. Other killer notable skaters that will be in the video are Eric Koston, Stevie Williams, Kevin Staab, Per Welinder, Christian Hosoi and PJ Ladd.

If there is one more thing you would like to accomplish with your career, what would it be?

To become a major recording artist, travel the globe again and spread a good message through my music.

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Label Mute.com



Lead troublemaker Gustaf Norén of Sweden's Mando Diao has a vision.

"It's all about making rock 'n' roll less intelligent than what it is right now," he says knowingly. "Today, it is all about being smart, arty, trendy, and you lose the kids. You get more people that are 30, but you want the 15-year-olds, the obnoxious kids with tons of energy."

Norén's take on the modern mediascape can be viewed in a variety of different ways, as can his dreams of harnessing all this restless teen angst. There's certainly something to be said for all those post-millennial, apathetic slackers and their urgency to fill the white space, to pursue what Oscar Wilde called "the serious, aristocratic study of doing absolutely nothing."

If indifference can be an instrument of revolution, then let us consider the town of Borlänge—a dreary, industrial, mundane little town in Sweden with virtually no history, architecture or reputation worth romanticizing. According to Norén, it's the dirtiest, ugliest, most hated town in Sweden.

"Everyone hates Borlänge. They think we are poisoning the nation," he says. "We've got two big factories and no nice river or lake or park."

Imagine portraits of ash-faced workers making their way home at night, spitting and cursing into their beers, while outside, skulking gangs of adolescents try desperately to construct a music scene in a town where most bands refuse to play.

For Norén and his mates in Mando Diao, the whole town's attempt at a vibrant music scene revolves around the Hurricane Bar, a local dive and namesake of the band's new album. For those unable to borrow cars and head to rosier, more enlightened towns, the bar's well-stocked jukebox serves as a life-preserver.

It is easy to mistake the reticence of youth as malice, though growing up in the social incubator of boredom, conversation can be a disappointing pursuit. Music, when done right, can be far more rewarding.

"Growing up, we always liked the music with more attitude," says Norén. "Punk was very big, not because they were good songwriters, but because they were cocky and aggressive. If you don't have that, you won't make it, especially in Borlänge. That's why we play until our fingers bleed."

The Mando Diao boys have developed a simple but effective pop proposition, one they hope will register with the new generation of indie rockers convinced everything is retro. Norén believes that Mando Diao is the unequivocal answer to modern rock with no pretensions, a music for the people.

"We're more important than the Rolling Stones, because we can play at our height tomorrow and they could never do that," he scorns. "They are the worst example of a rock band in the world. A few good years in the '60s doesn't cancel out the last 20 years. Rock 'n' roll is not supposed to be nostalgic."

Norén has never paid much attention to icons, nor kept in awe of a reputation. In fact, when pressed to name his influences, he talks mostly about the only band he considers worth his time—his own.

"I haven't heard a band better," he muses. "I think we are the most important band right now, because we say we are. I couldn't even imagine a better band."

This cocksure, better-than-you attitude has gained them as much buzz as their albums, not just among the disenchanted Borlänge youth but to kids all over the States, and the screaming fans of Japan.

Chatting with Norén, one gets the impression confidence and a positive self-image are tough to come by as a Borländer. When you get in that groove, you stick with it. He and the rest of Mando Diao seem committed to buying into their own cult exclusively. Life outside the band is pretty much negligible.

"We don't make friends," Norén levels. "We can amuse ourselves and we masturbate... a lot." ■

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“ always think it’s interesting that there’s a common misconception about the Ten Commandments,” is the introduction I get from Cass McCombs. “Never once does it state that there are precisely 10. God gives Moses an infinite amount of commandments the human race must live by—among them, burnt offerings and the slaughter of animals. Discovering this taught me that obtaining joy isn’t a 10-step program. You must continue the quest without pride, until you are relieved.”

This is how we get to know McCombs—through disjointed morsels of theology—and what we find out is that all we’ll ever know about him, with even the faintest certainty, will be imagined and wrong, hypothesized and overextended.

He’s a difficult man to crack, that pock-faced drifter with but one tawdry gray suit coat to his name. The dense mosaics he burns together with elements of Greek mythology, Old and New Testaments, medieval times and a strong connection to the cosmos lead one to solve his mysterious aura with the flimsy detective tools equivalent to a basset hound and a big-ass magnifying glass. He could spin us into circles, pirouetting our legs into the ground like big-top stakes, but do it just as easily with an utterance, a lyric or silence.

The 27-year-old native of Baltimore, London and Los Angeles keeps a close watch on the information disseminated about him. He insists on a minimal bio on his record label’s website, choosing to tip-toe around subjects and answer as incompletely as he sees fit. He has no home, no land line, no cell phone, which means every interview conducted with him is done electronically. This affords McCombs the luxury of remaining blurred, carefully selecting where to pull back and what to divulge. For instance, when asked if he’s ever had a near-death experience, he gives all of the elaboration of a “Yes.” So you change the subject and ask about the shows he’s been playing with Modest Mouse. He writes, “In Berkeley, there was a fire backstage.” Details are not forthcoming.

But on his debut LP, *PREfection*, McCombs leaves *only* the details, dovetailing one to the other as fingers lock with fingers and a spectral romance shuffles out from behind dusty curtains. His oral and visual Britishness alludes to a younger, *Bona Drag*-era Morrissey colliding into a less soul-baring version of Neutral Milk Hotel’s Jeff Mangum. His casual way with the unrelated subjects found in unfamiliar folds of a Britannica or the book of Psalms is not posturing.

Although never as didactic or severe, McCombs’ *PREfection* hints at a classic, Renaissance piety. Even the album’s cover art and bold, minimalist layout invokes Peter Saville’s designs for Factory Records. Where some of his peers have also tried mining the sounds of bygone new wave heroes, McCombs appears singularly unique on his new album—less an inheritor than the author of a bold, new Decameron.

Listening to *PREfection*, one gets the impression of being led in some discreet back door where the secrets are kept—here’s what Radiohead is *aiming for*, here’s what Wilco *wishes* it could pull from its influences, here’s what makes My Bloody Valentine’s *Loveless* still a classic.

If this sounds like hyperbole, relax; McCombs will never have the big profile of these other acts. Besides, he’s not approaching it with such grandiose plans, just passion and a keen sense of design.

“I’m glad you see the casualness,” McCombs says. “These subjects are things I am honestly interested in. I don’t put them in to impress anybody. To me, it doesn’t seem odd at all. I learn new things and want to appropriate them into my world view. I think it’s odd more songwriters don’t do the same.”

Most songwriters aren’t capable of making references to Fontainebleau—a French palace of grandeur built in the 1500s—and lines of scripture seem such natural bedmates. He admits he doesn’t know how his music is made. Immaculate conception seems as good a guess as any. ■

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The Stone Roses and James were polar opposites when given a cursory examination. The Roses were the epitome of British cool in the late-'80s with unforgettable tunes like "Waterfall," "Elephant Stone" and "She Bangs the Drums." Of course, over the course of 11 tumultuous years together, the Manchester foursome managed to only release two albums—the classic eponymous debut and its almost universally-reviled follow-up.

On the other hand, James was never considered that cool to begin with, though Morrissey publicly endorsed the group at the start of its career, and it always commanded a strong following among college students here in the States, and nearly everyone in the United Kingdom. Many accused the band of jumping on the baggy-pants bandwagon with its 1991 hit "Sit Down," which despite criticism landed at No. 2 on the British charts. However, the group's discography, spanning two decades, boasts 10 studio albums, including the Brian Eno-produced *Laid*, which gave the band a runaway American hit with its title track, something the Roses never managed to achieve.

With the release of former James frontman Tim Booth's *Bone* and ex-Stone Roses vocalist Ian Brown's *Solarized*, it becomes apparent that these two men—coming from different places sonically, lyrically and mentally—actually share a good amount of common ground.

Strangely enough, they've both recorded puzzling tunes about simian evolution (Brown's "Dolphins Were Monkeys" and Booth's "Monkey God"). They also both have high profile collaborations on their new solo albums and are adamant that they've no intention of reforming the groups that made them famous.

"I would definitely work with Mani again," Brown hedges. "I think he's the best bass player we've ever had out of the U.K., behind Paul McCartney. I think it's highly unlikely the Roses will get back together, though. I haven't even spoken to John since he left the band eight years ago. I feel like I've done that and we took it as far as it could. I've had such a great time as a solo artist and have built a whole new life for me self. Right now I'm a free spirit and I don't want to do anything to impede that."

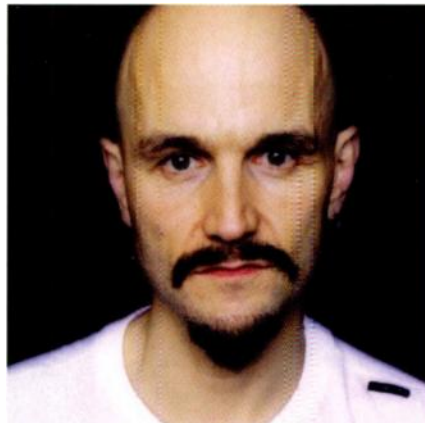
"It's done," Booth says, sounding firm, before relaxing his stance a bit. "I believe it's done. If we all end up on the street in six years time, maybe we'll all completely bite the bullet, but I can't see that happening."

Realizing his inability to make a concrete statement, he finally relents with a chuckle.

"It's not a plan, but, I'm aware of my own humanity," he concedes.

No matter, both artists are flourishing on their own, in their own unique ways. While Brown employs dubby beats, Bacharach-style horn flourishes and heady melodies to complement his unmistakable, hypnotic voice, Booth's debut solo set

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is far more new agey, relying on swirling melodies and world music rhythms to act as a foil for his soaring vocals.

On paper, this sounds somewhat like what he was doing with James. Working with a pair of up and comers—rising producer-songwriters Lee Muddy Baker and producer/songwriter Kevin Kerrigan (Björk, Madonna)—Booth has fashioned a collection of songs that stand on their own. His collaboration with American composer Angelo Badalamenti, *Please Fall in Love With Me*, is actually an older song that originally appeared on the duo's 1996 album, *Booth and the Bad Angel*.

"When Angelo and I wrote that, we both said that we had written the best song we had ever written," says Booth. "But it never really got much attention and I don't think we recorded it very well. It's the most fragile song I've ever written."

On the other hand, Brown's collaboration with Oasis' Noel Gallagher on *Solarized*'s first single "Keep What Ya Got," came about through their long-time friendship.

"He said that he'd been working on a tune, but that every time he tried to work on it, it sounded like me," Brown recounts. "So I said, 'You'd better give it to me then.'"

Speaking of rock 'n roll, what still inspires Ian Brown these days?

"The main thing that inspired me was that Cali weed you've got over there," he candidly reveals with a droll laugh. "And then you've got that huge sky, amazing food and everyone's really friendly, so that rubbed off on me. I love America. It's a shame that half of the people over there are cowboys, because half of you voted for Bush."

It must have taken a lot of that Cali weed to inspire Brown to write a tune called "Dolphins Were Monkeys." The curious tune appeared on his 2000 LP, *Golden Greats*, which will be reissued on this side of the pond later this year on Koch Records. Press him on it, and Brown invokes science as a defense.

"There's a theory that dolphins were once on land, but they returned to the sea, because they didn't like what was on the land," he explains patiently, as if this were common knowledge. "In the British Museum they have a creature that's the missing link between the dolphin and the monkey. It looks like an afghan hound. It has waterproof fur like an otter—no ears and eyes like a fish and webbed feet like a sea creature."

No matter how odd either artist's lyrics may seem to listeners, both Booth and Brown have kept audiences intrigued for the better part of 20 years. Sure, you may not believe that prototype dolphins once walked amidst the dinosaurs, but you still can't help singing along. At the end of the day, sometimes that's all that matters. ■

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It's not uncommon for great bands to find themselves over a decade into their careers. Look at groups like Guided By Voices, the Flaming Lips and Radiohead, whose signature sound didn't congeal until well after they had released several albums.

The Frames, on the other hand, blow that theory all to hell. They've been around since 1991 and have arguably already hit puberty, but their latest platter, *Burn the Maps*, jumps genres and influences like a skateboarding astronaut, barely content to hit the dirt before taking off again.

Consider the luxuriant strings, chiming guitars and impassioned vocals of "Finally," which sounds like Cat Stevens dreaming about Sebadoh while crashing at Thom Yorke's flat. Or the measured rhythms and lilting melodies of "Happy," the best song Coldplay never wrote. Or the Will Oldham-by-way-of-Wilco stomp of "A Caution to the Birds," which mutates, Hulk-like, from dirge to anthemic sing-a-long without ripping a single stitch.

The mild schizophrenia of styles may have something to do with the Dublin band's new drummer and guitarist, both of which had never written with the Frames before *Burn the Maps*.

"It's a bit like the first record of Frames Version 3.1," says new guitarist and former Chicagoan Rob Bochnik, the only American member of the mostly-Irish group. "The new record's a bit of a departure, but it's not very deliberate. It's more just what ended up happening."

Though the Frames are big at home, they have yet to crack many American skulls. But shed no tears for them—with three platinum records and a recent Meteor award under their belt, the Frames' cult trophy is in

some danger of being polished by commercial legitimacy. *Burn the Maps* will see stateside release in February on Anti-Records, the Epitaph imprint that's enjoyed a string of remarkably well-received albums from Tom Waits to Neko Case to Elliott Smith.

"It's a bit like Touch and Go," Bochnik says of Anti-'s Los Angeles headquarters, where all staffers work in proximity to one another. "It's not this monolithic, huge thing where accessing the people who are working for you is not easy. But I'm just happy to be touring, really. Anything that enables us to keep doing that and at least break even is gravy for me."

It was touring that brought Bochnik and the Frames together. A former engineer at Chicago's storied Electrical Audio studios, Bochnik assisted Steve Albini in recording the Frames' 2000 album, *For the Birds*. After a few more meetings and a spot filling in for ex-Frames guitarist Dave Odum, Bochnik was in. The work habits he brings to the band have contributed to the abundance of new Frames material, though Bochnik notes that singer-guitarist Glen Hansard never has trouble coming up with material (case in point: the Frames' next record is already completed).

"Glen just has songs and songs pouring out of him all the time. After working in a recording studio for eight years, I was pretty much in the habit of being there with any kind of recording (device), like a mini-disc, just to get the idea while it's there and fresh," Bochnik says. "Putting a song through the studio process is like putting a pizza through a conveyor oven machine; it takes a good bit of time for it to bake."

"You could say we've got a lot of pizzas waiting to go through the oven. It's a great complaint to have." ■



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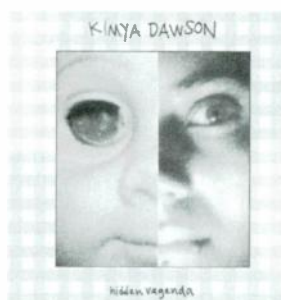
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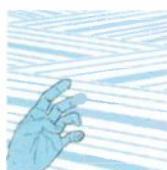
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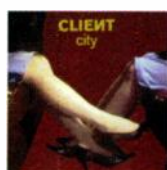
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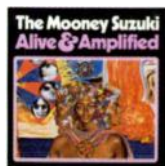
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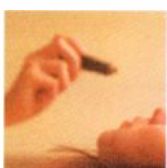
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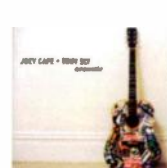
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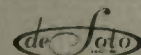
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So many closets are full of clothes that are never worn, neglected items that end up feeding moths until eventually becoming fashion relics. In response to the desire for new garments, people constantly update their wardrobes with the wrong things, not realizing the value of what they already own. Most people just need an outside source to take them by the hand and open their eyes to the endless possibilities of a change in their style. This may sound like the beginning of a pitch for the latest reality TV show, but it is the reality that has driven Barbra Horowitz to come to the aid of the clothing pack rat with her so-called Closet Therapy. Like a magician with a magic wand, Horowitz has her poignant sense of style and a pair of scissors.

Working with a client's existing wardrobe, Horowitz helps revitalize favorite pieces. She also creates new ways to approach the clothes you already have by editing down and selling pieces that you either never wear or, for your own good, should never wear. Horowitz suggests taking that money and purchasing some crucial pieces for the season. This self-made style guru is dedicated to breathing new life into the exasperated fashion victim.

Horowitz knows first hand about reinventing a new image. Closet Therapy was born out of her search to find her true self. After years of working as an agent for modeling agencies, Horowitz felt that she needed to pursue something she was more passionate about. She left behind a comfortable life and began what would soon be the foundation of the empire known as Rigged Tee Couture. Her experience with models taught her a lot about developing an individual's image and gave her a certain understanding of women's bodies and what makes them feel sexy. With no sewing experience and only a pair of scissors, Horowitz started to re-design and re-configure pre-existing men's vintage T-shirts into beautiful and stylish works of art. Each piece starts out as a simple, boxy men's T-shirt. Using her inherent understanding of the effects of the corset design and how certain lacing compliments a woman's curves, she creates unique pieces of couture with just a few snips.

Horowitz is an inspiration to the women she aims to please. She went from selling at flea markets to captivating some of Hollywood's leading ladies, including Britney Spears, Heather Graham, and Cameron Diaz. Rigged has expanded in only three short years to include skirts, dresses, scarves, shawls and more. Now with her two businesses, Rigged Tee Couture and Closet Therapy, Horowitz offers her keen vision to help revive your style, space and spirit. ■

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ВЕСЕЛЕНА ПАРОВОД

Fables of the Deconstruction

Aesop Rock's Rhymes Have the Ring of Truth, But Can This Long Island White Boy Join Rap's Hall of Fame?

Urb Magazine has a new cover boy. His name is Carlos D and he performs in an gloomy indie band called Interpol. No joke. The same supposed tome of urban alternative culture that has featured Kanye West, N.E.R.D. and the Beastie Boys on its facade, this month highlights the death-warmed-over visage of the man who would be king of a new generation of Goths and fashionistas. Sure, he spins cool records at parties, but he's a DJ? It's a sure sign of the hip hop apocalypse.

And to think, 18 months ago, it was news when Aesop Rock and Slug of Atmosphere shared the same cover as the new face of underground rap—not that they didn't belong there. Both had come up on the intensity and freshness of their rhymes, but they aren't like other rappers, and they know it. Their beats are *too* original, and their rhymes are pitted with insecurities. Instead of luring fans with the luxury of their ride, the viciousness of their crew, the brightness of their bling, they outshine each other with the verbal torches they cast on their doubts, fears and deep sense of unease in the world.

Call it nerd-rap, art-hop or space-hop, this super brainy brand of rhymes has the impressive vocabulary and broad cultural perspective that just could make it your mother's hip hop. And at its forefront is Aesop Rock, who raps as if he's looking at his shoes, but with enough sly, sarcastic bite to let you know he's looking at you (yeah, you), while spitting out his message.

The you's looking back, in Aesop's case, however, tend to look a little different than the fans of rap's big names. His fans are almost entirely white and under 30 years old (as is the case with most indie hip hop), many of them branching out from having their alienation voiced by rockers like Elliott Smith and, well, probably Interpol, to embrace Aesop and his offbeat lyrics. Like the gateway drug to the hard stuff, Rock's opening their minds to a whole vibrant world of visions. At its hub is the colorful Def Jux label, which Rock has called home since it released his second official full-length, 2001's *Labor Days*. After a bold and refreshing ascendancy with groundbreaking albums from Aesop, RJD2, El-P and Mr. Lif, the label now teeters at a pivotal point, with many wondering if perhaps the lightning rod imprint has peeked.

It's at the label's downtown office that Aesop pauses from the mind-numbing task of signing 600 stylish, limited-edition books of his lyrics to talk about where, and if, he fits into the current musical morass. If doubt circulates about the longevity of his label, Aesop's career, for one, appears ready to enter a whole new arena.

The book signing is to promote *The Living Human Curiosity Sideshow*, the bonus accompanying his latest EP, *Fast Cars, Danger, Fire and Knives*, standing in for the now ubiquitous DVD seemingly required with all new releases.

I'll Take What I Can Get

Tall and slouchy in baggy jeans, a Fab 5 Freddy T-shirt and brown plaid high tops, Aesop Rock exudes sleepy cool amid the chaos, not spaced out so much as casually observant, out of his element in any office these days, even one staffed by friends. Still, he's clearly right at home with the people, even though he looks fit to blush when longtime friend and labelmate C-Rayz Walz demands a personalized autograph, declaring himself an Aesop groupie and gleefully razzing the MC in front of this journalist.

The vibrant, inventive environment cultivated by the label's founder, former Company Flow MC and scathing Rawkus critic, El-P—who himself knows a thing or two about defying categorization—has made his label a bastion for emerging rappers. He supports and encourages his artists, while getting the hell out of their way. For Aesop, this has given him a crew including artists like Mr. Lif, with whom he often mounts electrifying, stage-sharing tours, Living Legends crew's Murs and CamuTao (of S.A. Smash). Meanwhile, label captain El-P himself joins Aesop for the *Fast Cars*' nonchalantly droll "Rickety Rackety."

The creative freedom encouraged by the label has allowed Aesop to throw down a torrent of releases in quick succession, from his probing condemnation of the nine-to-five grind, *Labor Days*, to 2003's dense, dark and chewy torrent of verbal ticks, *Bazooka Tooth*, on which he adopted an acerbic alter ego to handle the attention he was receiving from fans press.

Always a master of sly self-deprecation, Aesop is clearly less than psyched with such scrutiny, particularly from the press. On the new EP's opening track, he's on the offensive:

Never mind the bollocks.

*Like every other week these hipster tabloids
jumping on and off my sex pistol's bullets.*

Like every other week he spins the bottle.

*Like every other week these fucking fanzines
forget if they spit or swallow.*

*Too bad your inner sheep never forgets to follow,
'cuz my inner greed to feed your hate for loving
us is hostile.*

*Fortunate for me it coincides with what comes natural,
So the mongrels that I run with turn the "fuck you"s
into fast food.*

Far from caustic or embittered in person, Aesop Rock is a charming, low-key, presence, even while dishing on the clearly touchy subject of his place within the rap landscape. His slouchy persona and low-slung camouflage-print knit cap conceal an easy humor and a torrent of intricately linked thoughts with the same clever density as his rhymes. Trying to eke out one more meal from the bloated carcass of the music industry, Aesop's savvy enough to avoid talking trash or alienating others in the scene, especially as the success itself still seems miraculous.

"I used to worry about that shit, and just like wonder what it was," says Aesop. "Is it a race issue? Or, why are some of my fans rock fans and some rap fans? Or like, why do I get the kids at my shows who are like, 'I hated rap until I heard you?' Nowadays, it's like, fuck, I'll take what I can get. I'm shocked that I sell any records, so the last thing I'm going to be is picky about who's buying them."

Chuck D Likes My Shit, So I Don't Give a Fuck

It wasn't always like this. When Aesop was getting his start, back when he was just a nerdy kid named Ian Bavitz, raised with two brothers by devoutly Catholic parents on Long Island, he didn't have to think about such things. He didn't pay much thought to being one of the few hopeful MCs moved as much by Fugazi or Jawbreaker as by Public Enemy. In the early '90s, Aesop began earning a name for himself in New York, rapping outside of clubs or onstage at open mic nights. Hip hop was a compulsion for him, and while he remains modest about his talents now, and he doubted he'd make anything out of his rhythmic wordplay then, Aesop just couldn't help himself.

It was part of a general vibe of passionate creativity that was happening in the city during those years, he says. To an obsessive young Ian Bavitz, it seemed like *everyone* he knew was rapping, regardless of race, background or presentation. And because it seemed like everyone he knew was rapping, black and white all together, he never thought about race, or rap style, one way or the other. With a diverse crew, both on Def Jux and the streets, issues like race and cultural currency have remained a non-issue for Aesop.

Not so for everyone else.

Aesop Rock tends to be corralled in with the legion of MCs like Slug, Sage Francis, Buck 65 and his former Mush labelmates, characterized as a pied piper wooing a new generation of white, indie-ready fans.

Although Aesop counts Atmosphere's Slug as a close friend, and does rhyme in a similarly dense, deeply literate style, he doesn't see much of a similarity between their styles.

"I'm sure other people have different opinions, because I've heard all of our names mentioned in the same sentence a bunch of times," he concedes.

The 28-year-old MC has been passionate about hip hop for so long that he knows just what kind of respect he really wants to earn, and from whom. As he amasses praise for his newest record, however, he tries to kill any reservations about his career.

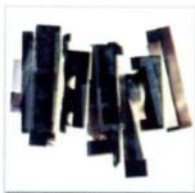
"Nowadays, I'm like I'm not going to fucking complain about who my fans are," he says. "I'm going to be 30 soon, I don't have time hand-pick or to be like, 'Why is this happening,' or 'Why do *these* people like my music and not *these* people?' I mean, I had fucking Chuck D give me a fucking compliment and tell me he liked my shit this year, so I don't give a fuck." ▶





What's Aesop Rocking?

It must be nice to be a celebrated MC. You probably get to hear a lot of unreleased songs from different artists, and without the clutter of anti-piracy samples. Famously curious about different sounds, Aesop has listed groups like Jawbreaker as influences, while keeping up with output from peers like Atmosphere and Murs. On any given week, you're liable to get wildly different answers about what makes up his personal playlist. Here's a sampling of some of Aesop's current favorites...



Mountain Goats *We Shall All Be Healed*

A self-proclaimed Mountain Goats obsessive, Aesop says he has his own massive mix of John Darnielle's music on his iPod. It makes sense Aesop would be feeling this, both artists maintain diverse tastes. Darnielle is all acoustic guitar, but his playlist is all death metal, MF Doom, blah, blah.



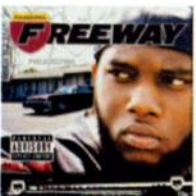
Cage *Hell's Winter*

A new addition to the Def Jux roster, this label debut is recorded and ready to go. No official release date is set yet from Def Jux, but, ya know, if you want Aesop can probably burn you a copy. Just kidding. No, really.



Leaf Hound *Growers of Mushrooms*

Aesop credits his fiancé with getting him into this esoteric '70s rock rarity. Yeah, that and the fact he's a massive burner.



Freeway *Philadelphia Freeway*

The Roc-A-Fella debut by this supple-voiced MC with Muslim roots is still on heavy rotation for Aesop Rock, even though what he does is wrong... wrong... wrong. Crack a 40 when the sun goes down.

Just Shut Up and Keep Making Music

Suggesting that Aesop Rock doesn't give a fuck is like calling Prince macho. Who's really going to believe it from the man whose rhymes are full of so many questions, internal debates and barbed cultural critiques of all kinds?

During a conversation littered with the kind of long pauses reserved for watching the tape recorder spin and choosing words *very* carefully, it becomes clear Aesop Rock does scratch his head about where he finds himself. And he's not alone. His labelmates and indie rap compatriots are in the same position. It's just not easy to talk about it because it's a touchy subject littered with social land mines.

"The final question is, well, 'I'm Caucasian, and I grew up listening to rap music, and I love rap music, and I started making it, so it's like, do I end up apologizing for that or something?'" he says. "I don't know. When we were doing all of these shows, it was strange, because the fanbase progressively is getting more and more Caucasian, and I was like, 'Is this weird, or is this just like rap in 2005?'"

Weird or not, Aesop doesn't believe that anyone should try to control the direction of hip hop. Rather, the consistent courage and conviction of individual artists is needed to keep it thriving and growing and staying fresh.

"I think people that concern themselves too much with the quote-unquote state of hip hop, that's kind of just a waste of time," he says. "It's more like your responsibility is to just shut up and keep making music. I think that the best thing I can possibly do for the history book of rap music is to just like shut my mouth about the state of rap and just keep doing shit that I think is kind of interesting. In 2030, they're going to look back at us, and I'd like to be the sound of 2005."

That's right, Aesop Rock and Carlos D: the sound of hip hop in 2005. Well, at least we know one of them has got the rhymes. ■

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Refugee All-Star

M.I.A. Sparks Revolution
Rock on the Dance Floor

So, you think you had a fucked-up childhood? Before you conjure up waterworks for your playground beatdowns, we'll remind you that M.I.A. has got you all beat.

Not that she's keeping score, but M.I.A. (a.k.a. Maya Arulpragasam) grew up in civil war-torn Sri Lanka during a bitter conflict between the Tamils and the majority Sinhalese population. Her early years were spent moving back and forth between different villages in Sri Lanka and India with her mother and siblings under concerns for their safety. Arulpragasam's father, estranged from Maya and her mom, remained underground, a prominent member of the Tamil Tigers, a guerrilla separatist group now labeled as terrorists by the U.S. government. Eventually, as the violence escalated, Mrs. Arulpragasam took her children and fled to London, where they were granted refugee status.

The new location turned out to be far from welcoming, as the pair settled in one of the city's most notoriously racist housing projects.

Throughout the next decade, Maya would discover hip hop and dancehall music, channeling elements of both into her newfound releases: painting, graphic design and filmmaking; music didn't come until later.

Arulpragasam was already studying fine arts and art at Saint Martin's College when she was approached to design cover art for an Elastica album. When she joined the band on its next tour, opening act Peaches introduced her to the Roland 505 Groovebox. Arulpragasam's earlier artistic ventures helped keep her muse sharp when the time came to make the jump to music.

"Sometimes, if I get a block or I get into some weird formula about making music, then I just stop and do some paintings and that breaks away my formula," she reveals. "Then I come back to the song and

it's really spontaneous again. I use each medium to take time out and change the way I think."

Her head-spinning debut, *Arular* (lifting the rebel name of her Tiger father), very well may change the way you think. It's a wonderfully unclassifiable set of mashed-up tunes that take their cues from hip hop, electro, Tamil nursery rhymes, dancehall, grime and bubblegum pop. The production end is held down by ex-Pulp bassist Steve Mackey, slick hitman Richard X and electronica maestro Ross Orton, while M.I.A. concentrates on the attitude and lyrics. She attributes the fresh, schizophrenic style to her hectic upbringing.

"My experiences have been so crazy extreme and all over the place," she declares. "I really do believe in not living by a certain structure or formula, because that formula can always disappear. And I'm not reliant on expensive things to get me through, because it just doesn't work like that for me. You always have to rely on being the most useful and efficient you can be for yourself. Whatever you generate has to come within you. At the end of the day, that's all you have."

Though a lot of her lyrics read like acid-washed Beat poetry, there are plenty of concrete references from her past that she's purposefully injected. M.I.A. (more than just a clever take on her first name, as she notes she has several cousins listed with this status back in Sri Lanka) has had to work at being accepted, something she admits freely.

"Inside, you have to feel like a fighter all the time," she says. "It's OK if you feel like shit today, as long as you think you're going to be right one day. There were moments in my life when people wouldn't even give us food, because people didn't think we were worthy. You have to get through it."

Such candor comes naturally for M.I.A., though one has to wonder how her family has dealt with her

open-book lyricism. As you might imagine, some of her rhymes are shocking by traditional Sri Lankan standards, though it's not hard to turn heads singing, "Like PLO, I don't surrend-o."

In her stencil art, modified clothes and onstage video projections, tigers and bold, paramilitary resistance imagery meshes with her gritty, though ultimately dance-minded, concoctions.

Towards the end of her second single, "Sunshowers," Arulpragasam toasts in a deadpan, Joe Strummer righteousness, documenting the fate of a particular detainee—binary tags like freedom fighter or terrorist seem entirely too clumsy.

*Semi-9, they snipered him
On that wall they posted him
They cornered him and then just
murdered him.
He said that he didn't know them,
That he wasn't there, they didn't
know him.
They showed him a picture, then,
"Ain't that you with the Mus-
lims?"*

It might sound brash in the wake of Bush's declaration of all-out war on terrorism, but despite her unorthodox approach, Maya says she feels wholly supported by her family.

"In the beginning, I was worried that everyone was going to judge me for being really rude and making dance music that doesn't follow any traditional methods of making Asian music," she confesses. "But now, my Mum reads about me in the Tamil papers and is really proud of me. And the papers say," she giggles, then affects Sri Lankan accent: "Look, we don't understand what she's doing. This is some rap stuff. We need to support her though, even though we think she's a rebel. She still cares about us and that's what counts." ■

The Filth and the Fury

Crime Mob's Dirty Reputation



Don't let the PR team at Warner Brothers fool you: Crime Mob is anything but.

I should know: I'm a fourth-year PhD student in one of the most haute bourgeois of disciplines—the history of art. On surface, I seem the least qualified person to make the call.

Still, with all that going against me, even I can figure out that Crime Mob is getting a treatment of what I'll call "Sex Pistols marketing."

If you think Cash From Chaos began and ended with Malcolm McLaren and Sid and the boys, best check NWA, Ice-T's shameful Body Count, Marilyn Manson and, now, Crime Mob.

Not familiar with the band? Here's the 411: Crime Mob is an Atlanta-based coed group of two women (Princess and Diamond) and three men (Lil J, MIG and Psycho Black). The group of teens is steeped in the Dirty South sound, and is the most recent signee to crunk kingpin/Dave Chappelle fodder Lil Jon's BME imprint. The Mob quickly gained attention with its rallying track, "Knuck If You Buck," though its real gem seems to be the single "Stiletos (Pumps)," a track showcasing the two vibrant female MCs.

But that's not what the carefully worded bits of press out there have chosen to emphasize. Rather, we're treated to unsubstantiated rumors that the group funded its recording with auto theft, a sort of hyper-driven, youth-gone-mad affair.

"Stiletos" had already stopped a few crate-digging *Rockpile* staffers in their tracks before the group's full-length dropped this winter. So, putting aside Buchloh's *Figures of Authority*, *Ciphers of Regression*, I got in a cab and headed to the midtown Warner Bros. offices to suss out the real story.

I was nervous about my lack of credentials (research for Phaedon Press doesn't carry much weight with urban bad seeds). When a nonchalant Tommy Hilfiger beat me to the reception desk, however, I had a suspicion the Crime Mob press camp was a little more calculated than the Trillville videos would have you believe.

Eventually, I was led into a small office where five teenagers were almost sitting on top of one another. This was Crime Mob.

Admittedly, the ice didn't break at first. When I asked how the group would describe crunk to an audience who might not be familiar with the term, Lil J, the

oldest at 19, stepped forward.

"A lot of bass, a lot of instruments, make you want to get up and throw some 'bows or something, beats, club music, fight music," he offered.

I took a deep breath and countered that I'd listened to the CD and it didn't make me want to fight. Lil J seemed nonplussed and just shrugged. Princess, his 16-year-old sister, chimed in and took over.

"Yeah, it just has a lot of energy," she reasoned. "Kind of like when you're in church, you got the Holy Ghost that make you feel good. You may not want to fight, like you said, some people may just want to dance and nod their head."

"Teachers want you to grow up to be doctors and stuff, and that's good, but I'm a kid now and I'm making money, so why not do it. I'm still going to go to college."

I talked with them for about 30 minutes, with questions picking their brains on the differences between Southern and Northeast or West Coast hip hop ("Up North it's more about the lyrics, down South it's about beats and chants," they offered) and whether their high school teacher supported their decisions to home-school and pursue music careers (the answer here was a resounding "no").

"Teachers want you to grow up to be doctors and stuff," Princess said. "And that's good, but I'm a kid now and I'm making money, so why not do it. I'm still going to go to college."

Most of the interview sounded uncannily familiar, with the sentiments echoing the teenage days of myself and my friends, minus the part about making money.

If anything, my time with Crime Mob didn't have me wanting to ape urban slang or reserve my place in a gated community. Instead, it reminded me of the premium placed on (oftentimes) mediocre education, the pressure to obtain middle-class security and, of course, the stigma surrounding rap and hip hop perpetuated by the record industry to generate sales.

These five kids, sitting down to answer my outsider's questions, seemed to have little, if anything, to do with their press personas. I'd be lying if I said they were always polite with hands crossed on their laps. These were not the Von Trapp children, but after a half-hour with them, I was reminded of that infamous Johnny Rotten quote: "Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?"

The big letdown comes not in any failure on Crime Mob's part, but in an industry and an environment where the sensational and the novelty take a front seat over talent. Princess, Diamond and company aren't revolutionizing hip hop, and, truth be told, the album isn't exactly "content-heavy." It's not supposed to be. The wordage is functional, conversational, locked on the immediate and the everyday. Crime Mob isn't reporting for anyone; you're more likely to find a "Pretty Vacant" than a "Fight the Power." It's physical, contagious and energetic, even if, to Lil J's dismay, it doesn't make just anyone want to throw 'bows.

Strip away the hype: these are kids with the potential for success doing what they love, making music. That, in and of itself, seems to suffice as a press pitch for most of their white, guitar-slinging counterparts.

For most people, like the groups' teachers back in Atlanta, that sounds like a deviant career path. Would it really be better that they eschew fame and careers in favor of college and mortgage payments? This, of course, is neither the best- nor worst-case scenario, but it may be the most likely. How much different would the prognosis be if they were (temporarily) leaving school to pursue classical ballet?

Ballerinas they are not, but there are excellent moments to be found on the Mob's record. Are they street? Are they real? Probably as much as the bevy of other thug lifers to whom you jam but have yet to meet. As far as I could tell, the only one packin' heat was author of the press release, and—even then—it was just metaphorical. ■

Silent Command



Silent Command

Prefuse 73 Finds New Direction in Collaboration

He may have cut his teeth in Atlanta's hip hop underground, but Scott Herren never fell for the blingin' and big pimpin' of the dirrrty South. Traversing a more enlightened and art-driven path of post-rock experimentation, Herren flourishes in the cracks between electronic psychedelia and mutant hip hop, continually striking up new and intriguing collaborations. With *Surrounded by Silence*, his third Prefuse full-length, Herren dives headlong into realms of straightforward hip hop, adding salient new levels to his already multifaceted body of mechanical funk.

These days Herren bounces between Barcelona, Spain, and New York, while overseeing releases from others on Atlanta-based Eastern Developments, a label he co-founded in 2001 to release material by lesser-known, like-minded artists, including Dabrye, Bear in Heaven, Eliot Lipp and long-time Prefuse collaborator Ryan Rasheed's solo project, LeBlaze.

The Medium and the Message

Beginning with his 2001 Warp Records debut, *Vocal Studies + Uprock Narratives*, Herren has tweaked a torrent of jumbled voices over loungey and futuristic melodies. All the while, he's cultivated a coterie of innovative underground producers and MCs—everyone from former pro-skater-turned-songwriter Tommy Guerrero to hip hop supervillain MF Doom have appeared in Prefuse's liner notes.

With each release, the presence of the MC has been shattered into a million pieces and reduced to a rhythmic texture; the presence of a human voice is made plain, but any

message is lost in the mix. From his breezy offerings with Delarosa + Asora and Savath & Savalas to his more assertive, conceptual flow with Prefuse 73, Herren relies on precise, instrumental prowess while the vocals maintain a continually nebulous role.

With *Surrounded by Silence*, however, Herren takes a large leap, pitting his trademark beats, clicks and clusters of sound over a deluge of coherent vocals. Luminaries Beans, El-P and Aesop Rock pop up alongside Ghostface and Blonde Redhead's Kazu Makino, all spitting fire for real.

The weight of this unexpected lyrical jolt takes hold with *Silence*'s second track, "Hideyaface." Wu-Tang alum Ghostface Killah and Def Jux label founder El-P spar off with terse buoyancy, transcending the boundaries of urban indie grit and post-thug decadence. This kind of collaboration is nothing new for Prefuse, but the polarizing clout of Ghostface and El-P's respective styles draws a clear line in the sand between this and previous records. Rarely before has such a clearly-defined and hard-hitting lyrical crawl guided his cluttered arrangements.

The pairing gives rise to a myriad of new faces entering the repertoire of Prefuse's cohorts, including verbal and nonverbal contributions from Battles' frontman Tyondai Braxton ("TV Versus Detchibe" and "Mantra Two") and Makino ("We Go Our Own Way"). The results are a swirling assortment of fluid and reflexive soundscapes merging beats and rhymes that waft between experimental and more traditional, though no less austere, pop and hip-hop structures.

Breaking the Silence

The concept behind *Surrounded by Silence* has been taking shape since Prefuse's debut.

"I was on tour for the first Prefuse record with [Tortoise drummer] John Herndon and he said to me, 'Okay, so now what? You've done the *Vocal Studies* record, where else can you go with this?'" smirks Herren, his voice dropping an octave, taking on a devious tone. "I thought, 'I'll show you.' So I approached vocalists that I had the means to link up with and paired them up with people and places where they wouldn't normally be. That forced me into a domain where I had to adapt my style to how these people work."

Herren approached each artist with a defined, though open-ended, idea to craft their individual parts. Guest vocalist Camu was given the open-ended direction to imagine a recent, arresting encounter with a beautiful girl ("Whether it's good or bad, you decide"), while Ghostface and El-P were prompted towards more basic ends ("Be on some b-boy shit").

"I don't want to see these people as commodities as much as I don't see me that way," says Herren. "People may see the lineup and say 'Oh Ghostface is on it, but who the fuck is Kazu or Ty-uhn-die Braxton,'" he adds with a deliberate Neanderthalic drawl. "These names can be just as much of a distraction and drive people away. The essence of hip hop is collaboration and connecting with people and making something new out of something that already exists. I'm not creating anything new." ■



Exile on Main Street

It's *The Kills* Versus the World

The Kills believe in the total immersion approach to rock 'n roll. But while many musicians submerge themselves in an exciting, unknown city or a comforting musical community when recording a new album, this Anglo-American duo is most inspired when completely engrossed by its own insular world.

After strutting to the forefront of the indie garage rock pack with a snarling, sexed-up debut, 2003's *Keep on Your Mean Side*, and raw, smoke-and-pheromone-drenched live shows, the duo retired to the seemingly inauspicious backwater of Benton Harbor, Mich., to write the follow up, *No Wow*. In less than three weeks, they had stripped their moody, minimal sound even further, emerging with a tautly visceral exercise in renounced desire and audio simplicity that cuts to the core of their fuzzy weave of scratchy guitar, dominatrix vocals and hemorrhaging bursts of drum machine loops.

"It's a quite anti-rock thing, because rock is about tempo changes and explosions and things like that," Hotel shares in his lazy British drawl. "With a drum machine, we've never been afforded that luxury of exploding, and it's become something that is really important to me now, that we're kind of always holding back against this metronome. It just makes for a lot of tension and a lot of space in the music. And that seems to be our sound, man."

While the British-bred Hotel (born Jamie Hince) and Florida-born VV (nee Alison Mosshart, a.k.a. that girl from Discount) exude perfectly indifferent downtown chic with their gaunt, black leather jacket-clad frames, tussled coifs and the haze and halo of cigarette smoke, they actually have a playfully clever perspective on themselves and their image. They can even poke fun at the drunken bravado that caused them to change their names and renounce their past bands and lives. It's all part of embracing the total experience that is the Kills. Good humor aside, they are quite serious about the aesthetics and intensity of their partnership, which honors the art-as-life-as-art philosophy of the Factory-era Warhol clan.

"Everything was incorporated into it," says VV. "It was like film and art and music and these characters and these incredible gatherings and parties and happenings, and it just never seemed very segregated. Everyone mingled together, and everyone was quite proud of it and strong because of it."

The Kills have managed to create such a hotbed of artistic endeavor and creative community with just the two of them. And so, a burned-out, flyspeck town far from their lives in London was the perfect locale to distill the journal entries, Polaroid pictures, sketches and poems with which they documented the whirlwind of touring and critical acclaim that accompanied their first album into fresh material for *No Wow*.

"You have to have an inspiring place to be in order to do inspiring things," VV muses.

Part of the studio's stimulating vibe was the fact that it is home to a rare Flickinger console originally custom-built for Sly Stone. Studio lore says the machine is haunted because of the complete and total freakout Sly experienced while recording on it.

Both halves of the Kills, particularly Hotel, get hot for the look and sound of vintage equipment. This sort of cultural folklore is creative manna for the duo. In a time when any and all information is available with the click of a mouse, they are inspired not so much by the history of past artistic and musical movements as by the myths that have grown up around them.

"All we have left to make precious is the legend and mystery of things," says Hotel.

Both he and VV say they are committed to drawing their own meanings and musical expressions out of these marvels from the past, rather than being beholden to the music that came before them.

"With guitar music, it always seems like pretty much everyone sort of observes and studies and researches the history of music, and rock becomes something that's not all that forward-thinking," says Hotel. "Somewhere along the line, I want to build up to not think about anything that happened, because that seems like the only way to discover anything new." ■



Wild Life

Super Furry Animals Push the Welsh Agenda

“What’s that?” I ask, pointing to a little wooden bird cage on the Tonic stage, peaking out amongst a jungle of cords and samplers, tape players, drum machines and thrift store synthesizers. Gruff Rhys’ stubbled face breaks into a smile as he leaps across the room. He grabs the toy from the stage, and takes a seat on a stool across from me. His fingers wind a gear on the cage’s bottom, and the wooden bird inside the cage begins to move and chirp.

“It’s just to add to the rural atmosphere to some of my songs,” he explains with a grin. “Certain songs need that rural feel, and I’ve got a sampler, so I can sample it.”

Seconds after meeting the lead Animal during his one-off American solo show in New York City, it’s clear that Rhys is a big kid, and the world his candy store. In a business where far too many people take themselves far too seriously, Rhys is happy to be onstage, playing with toy birds.

“We’ve been given an incredible opportunity to be in a rock band, which is kind of a fantasy anyway, and a ludicrous thing to decide to be,” he laughs softly through a thick south-Wales accent. “We’re going to form a gang and tour the world. It’s very romantic.”

It’s a romance that has yet to fade—for Rhys anyway—after 21 years of playing in rock bands.

His philosophy is simple: Fear is a great motivator.

“Every album we put out is the product of us thinking, ‘Fuck, we might get dropped with this record. Let’s do it really fucking over-the-top.’”

So far, for Super Furry Animals, “over-the-top” has included dressing like a Yeti, and hiring a 16-piece Brazilian orchestra and a tank (the latter paid for by the visionary Creation label).

The group’s roots are a touch more humble than their tank-driving tendencies might lead one to believe. SFA’s members were born in small villages throughout southern Wales, raised on the American and British rock that wafted in from England and Ireland.

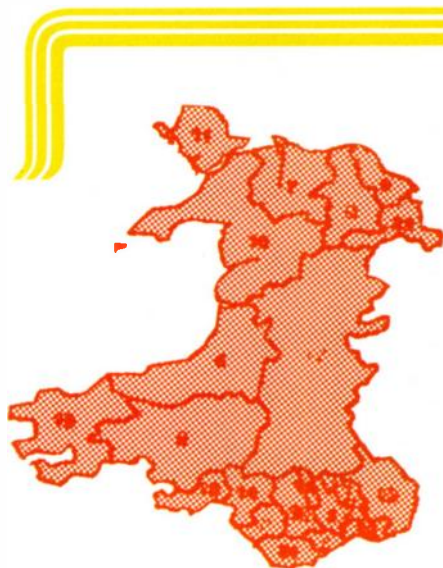
“We’re huge Beach Boy geeks,” Rhys admits, though anyone who has given *Rings Around the World* even a passing listen knows this is one of the band’s most poorly kept secrets. “We bonded over the Beach Boys. We got into them quite late, and it was one of the things we got into together as a band, so to a certain extent, we’ve been kind of defined by our love of the *Surf’s Up* album.”

Rhys fesses up to a bit of Welsh pride as well—not the flag-waving, nationalistic variety, from which the band attempted to distance themselves after the release of 2000’s Welsh-language release, *MWNG*.

“The first place we toured with it was in the U.S., because at the time there were a lot of bands in Wales flying Welsh flags, and we wanted to disassociate ourselves from the nationalistic aspect of it. To me, music is an international language, and it has nothing to do with nationality.”

Still, one can’t help but gain some satisfaction when a fellow countryman makes the big time.

“John Cale came from there, a rural Welsh-speaking village, and became a member of the Velvet Underground,” he notes. “So we used to listen to Velvet Underground records. I actually thought they were Welsh, because the first song I ever heard was ‘The Gift,’ and his English accent is so Welsh-sounding. I thought Lou Reed was Welsh.”



A Native Tongue Posse

Like everything else in the Super Furry Animals canon, frontman Gruff Rhys’ first solo record, *Yr Atal Genhedlaeth*, is a celebration. In this case, it’s a celebration of Welsh, his native tongue.

“It’s something that came together kind of accidentally,” he says.

Once a year, Rhys makes a habit of visiting a recording studio buddy of his and tracking anywhere from 20 to 30 songs. This year, a particular group of raw songs sung in Welsh struck Rhys as exceptional. Inspired, he returned to the studio a few days later and recorded another four songs. His happy accident led to the inevitable solo tour, Rhys’ first. “I’ve been playing in bands for 21 years, so I decided I should maybe tour on my own for a month,” he says. Rhys did a two-week tour of Europe, a single American show and a small tour of Wales. After one last show, Rhys anticipates some creative differences. “I’m going to do a festival in Iceland and then I’m going to split up with myself, and rejoin the band.”

Ring the Alarm

Bloc Party Wants to Silence the Hype



“We’re not looking to share goals and ideals with anyone.”



“We don’t read the papers, we don’t read the news,” Bloc Party singer Kele Okereke declares in the band’s fiery anthem, “Banquet.”

Maybe it’s simply a cursory observation, or perhaps the band likes to avoid the hype onslaught that surrounds its debut album, *Silent Alarm*. The disc hits stores in America this week—our friends in England have had it for a month—courtesy of Vice Records. Not surprisingly, the *NME* has been banging its drums already, calling the album “the unpigeonholed soundtrack to 21st century life as a cast-off.”

Hype can be an ugly word, and depending on the payoff, the popular response could either be “I’ve loved them since the demos” or “I always thought they were shit!” Fortunately with Bloc Party, a congenial nature matched with an intelligent take on rock music borne on the dancefloor will quash most haters.

With bands such as The Killers, Interpol and Franz Ferdinand doing so well on both sides of the Atlantic, the time seems right for Bloc Party to turn all of the favorable ink that’s been devoted to it into gold.

The band formed in the early ‘00s when Okereke and Russell Lissack, the band’s guitarists, met at age 18; bassist Gordon Moakes drifted into the unit a short time later.

“We played songs in Russell’s front room at home, no drums,” explains

Moakes. “I’m not sure if any of us knew what would come of it though. We played with so many drummers... but that’s all history now!”

In order to stray from British mainstays of the time like Travis and Starsailor, the band was conscious in its attack.

“You have to stand out musically for people to really pick up on you,” says Moakes.

The band’s influences seem to run the gamut, though most are easily discernible, from Wire and the Fall to Les Savy Fav and the Cure. They’re not reinventing the wheel, but Moakes and company generally hit their target with entertaining results. Some songs recall Blur’s dance tendencies while deftly avoiding the current fascination with American culture and globe-trotting exploration. Others touch down on more jarring Buzzcocks moods.

The group’s stateside debut came by way of the frighteningly prolific Dim Mak label, which released Bloc Party’s self-titled EP. Word-of-mouth endorsements and spirited live performances quickly whipped up a strong reputation for the group; some felt they’d found England’s answer to the Rapture.

“We’re not looking to share goals and ideals with anyone,” cautions Moakes. “Bands like Franz Ferdinand and the Strokes have been important in changing how guitar music is viewed

now. We have things in common with both bands, but we’re also trying to do something new.”

Jumping to Vice Recordings (the Streets, Panthers, Vietnam) for the full-length, Bloc Party drops *Silent Alarm*, an album people on both sides of the Atlantic are eager to hear. Even Daniel Radcliffe (cinema’s Harry Potter) is a big fan.

“No one’s anticipating it more than we are,” Moakes gushes.

While some train-spotting opinion leaders have been stirring up the hype, for the musicians, Moakes says, the last eight months have made for a strange journey. Although the record was recorded over the summer, the rest of the world is just catching up to it now.

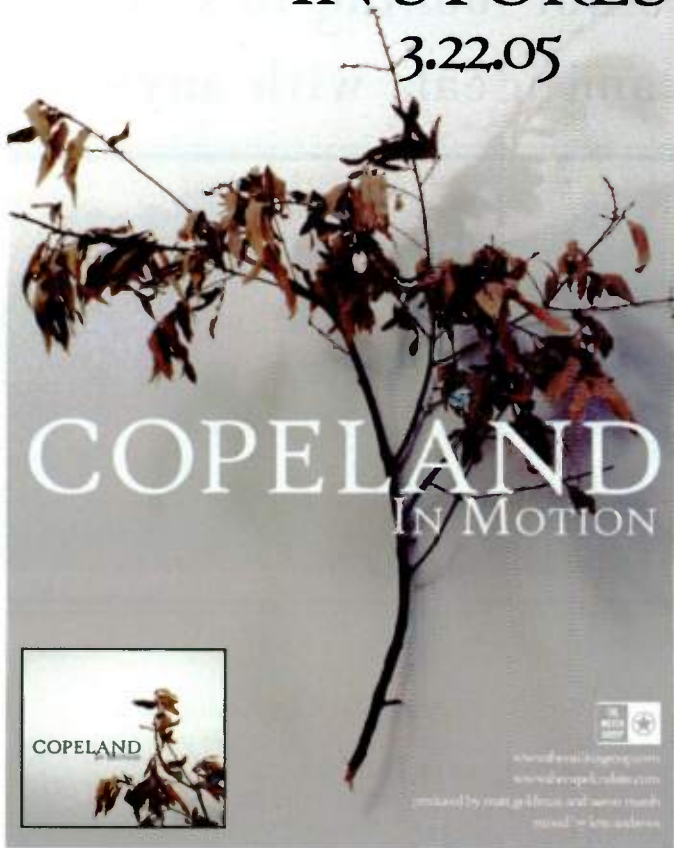
After tours with the Killers, the Futureheads and Interpol, the band comes to America this month for its own headlining tour.

Surely it’s tempting for such hyped young musicians to develop a much-enlarged collective head, but Moakes maintains he and his mates aren’t too concerned with all the pomp, preferring to just continue doing what they love.

“We’re a fighting, fit professional unit now,” Moakes boasts. “We’re not vastly different to the band we used to be, but we’ve just taken the opportunities that we were given seriously. People don’t offer recording and publishing deals for fun.” ■

IN STORES

3.22.05



...so loathsome the earth
itself turns black with shame,
history digested in the great
unholy stomach, where the
black river meets the blood
of time, there is no nothing,
no something, there is only
what there isn't, vacuums of
mist and dust that bite and club
your sanity, you are complete
and forgotten, a final sacrifice
by gods so ancient they have
misplaced their temples and
forsaken their pacts
with eternity

—Seldon Hunt, Malbourne 10.04

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A couple years back, Alan Vega joked around in interviews about people on the street calling him a has-been.

The Suicide co-founder took the slams in stride, reasoning it was impossible to qualify as a has-been if you're a never-was.

At the most superficial level, Vega and Martin Rev were punks without guitars, synthpoppers with teeth. Examine more deeply, and facets of their innovation stretch into a canopy.

While you can practically trace a family tree straight through some bands, like Throbbing Gristle to Cabaret Voltaire to Ministry, with Suicide you have a band so ahead of its time, the most direct influence doesn't seem apparent until the past five or 10 years.

Sure, the duo's attention to deriving beauty from dissonance must have trickled into the blueprints for avant garde experimentalists like Einstürzende Neubauten and, by extension, more contemporary noisemakers Liars. And, yeah, new wavers like New Order and Nitzer Ebb probably looked to the smoothed-down danceability of Rev and Vega's '80s output, while the experimental elements seem echoed in glitch lovers like Aphex Twin and Pan Sonic. The real Suicide rediscovery seems to have blown up within the last decade, informing a mob of stripped-down synth-and-drum-machine outfits, from Tracy and the Plastics and Peaches to Chicks on Speed and Black Dice.

The band claims fans like Henry Rollins and Bruce Springsteen, yet it spent most of its career starving.

Vega and Rev formed Suicide in the early '70s—considerably earlier than their discography lets on. Vega was working in New York City as a visual artist when a friend took him to a Stooges show. He was floored, and quickly formed a straight-ahead rock troupe with some fellow scenesters, including Rev. Members came and went until, by the middle of the decade, only Rev and Vega remained. By then the pair was more excited to try something different to test audiences' endurance.

The duo began to inhabit the performance art scene of Manhattan's

Lower East Side, with Rev creating a brutish noise of buzzing, scratches and clicks, while Vega hollered, spoke, trembled, but never outright sang.

This earliest work is collected on the compilation *Half Alive*. While far from perfect, the collection (not released until 1981) captures an early version of Suicide mixing sometimes frightening affronts upon crowds (and song structures) with cuts of vicious white noise and static. In the midst of all this come oddly pleasing, melodic moments like "Dreams," which features a melody (later aped in Bowie's "Heroes") and relatively optimistic lyrics.

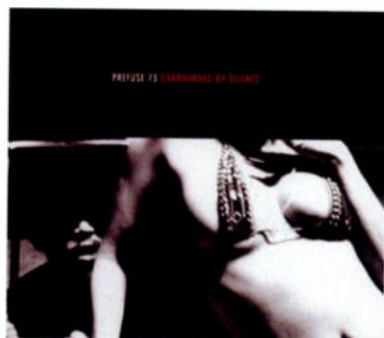
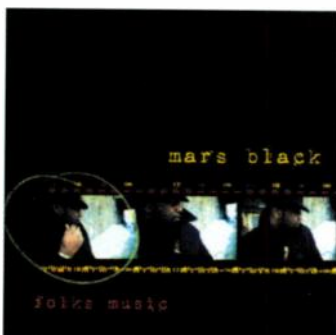
Half Alive also documents a few live tracks, and it's safe to say the performance cuts were likely from very short concerts. Suicide wasn't a band that enthralled crowds in its day—Vega claims he once had an axe thrown at his head opening up for the Clash.

"Everybody came to see Suicide to be entertained," Vega shared in a 2002 online interview. "All we did was give them back the street, in all its glory. That's what they wanted us for, because that's what bands are supposed to do. You're supposed to come to a show to get out of your life. But we did the opposite, we gave them their life back in their face."

When the band unveiled its 1977 self-titled debut, the select few who were paying attention would be treated to the group's strongest (and arguably most important) statement. Rumbling like a motorcycle from the opening, slow dance grooves of "Ghost Rider," *Suicide* maintains through a confrontational, cacophonous seven tracks touching on the band's many faces. The 10-minute "Frankie Teardrop" is as abrasive as it gets, describing the miserable life story of a factory worker/Nam vet. Despite its shrieks and rough rhythms, the cut made Springsteen a fan, while the ethereal "Cheree" allows for a gentle respite.

While Vega and Rev now seem to have a positive outlook towards the band's future, they're not above chuckling along when people insinuate that their best work is long in the past.

After all, crafting a debut that essentially predicts much of the next two decades of underground music is a tough act to follow. ■



Yann Tiersen
& Shannon Wright

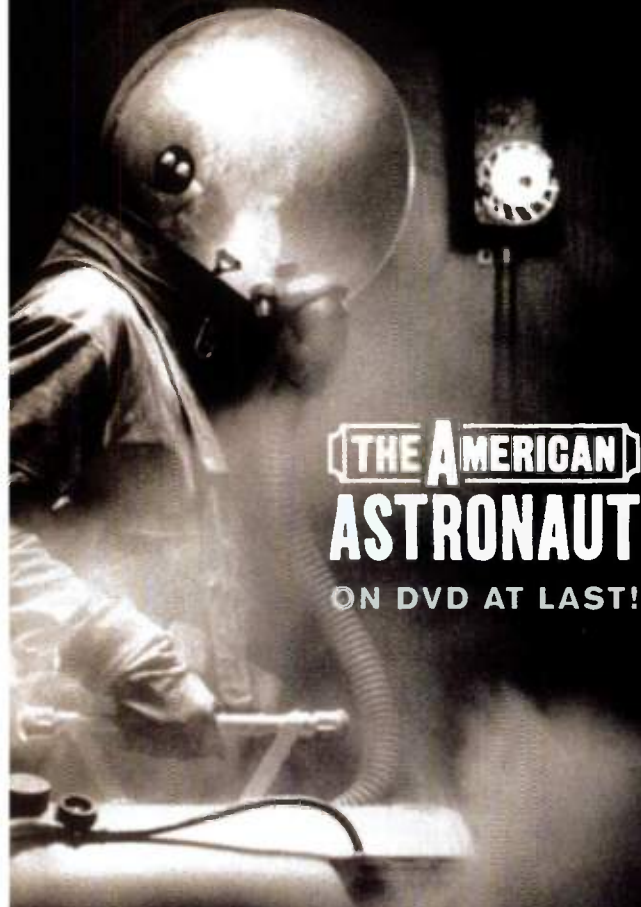
On 64-'95, XL Recordings' *Lemon Jelly* sends big-beat aftershocks through its trademark ambience, creating a record organized on the axis of opposing forces. It's impossible not to hear the Chemical Brothers on a track like "Only Time," where the beat explodes at the song's nadir surrounded by background mess of guitar feedback, all its edges enveloped in aural plush. "Stay With You" turns guitar fuzz into a distorted siren sent rippling through the deep-pocketed song space. *Lemon Jelly* never fully concedes to writing traditionally structured songs, preferring the cycling hypnosis of the mantra over the verse-chorus infection of a pop track. Thankfully, on many tracks, the entrancing loops and flutter has boom in its ass, a welcome shift in style that smoothly disturbs the placid soulfulness... Whenever Omaha, Neb., gets mentioned, it's usually for that geyser of sensitivity, Conor Oberst, not hip hop. The debut *Mars Black* album on Oberst's own *Team Love* label aims to flip that script. With its socially conscious lyrics and minimalist production reminiscent of early N. W. A, *Folks Music* defies the commercial hip hop status quo of opulent personas and overly sampled hooks... *Warp's* highly hyped Brit-pop signing, *Maximo Park*, goes more than halfway towards meeting the expectations built into all its blustery press quotes. On the group's debut, *Apply Some Pressure*, singer Paul Smith loves to ride kissing-close to the tightly coiled guitar, dropping his smutty accented bellow in somersault stop-start spurts all the more infectious for their polyrhythmic bounce. "The Coast is Always Changing" reeks of dandyish posing, but manages to dilute the Morrissey whiff in crunchy riffs reversing the tempo. Those moments where the song's structure ducks and weaves in on itself, like *Wire* or the *Futureheads*, prevent *Apply Some Pressure* from being just run-of-the-mill pop rock from British grad students. This introductory EP displays a tension-filled pack of hook slingers, bitterly anthemic, with every prerequisite needed for a gamer from a across the pond to make a big splash... *Prefuse 73* prefaces his latest with an intro, "I've said all I need to say about them," but 21 tracks later, he proves that he's really got some stuff for the biters. In the quirky, Atlanta-Barcelona producer's tradition, *Surrounded by Silence* challenges levels and scales, but is still easy on the ears. Never one to shy from mixing and matching names and tonal equations, *Prefuse* romanticizes with abstract MPC 2000 beats, sporadic synths and spooky plug-ins. His latitude extends from instrumentals to smooth blends from master MCs. "HideYaFace"

features Ghostface and El-P's explosive consonants in wicked lines, "Painting obituaries with a Krylon scepter/Last of the unforgivens spitting the same lecture." These lyrical moments come framed by *Prefuse's* orchestral tones nestled atop meandering rhythms. Tyondai Braxton leaps into the equation in the midst of dirty loops that twist and turn every four bars. "Now You're Leaving" is a hip hop ballad to boot by CamuTao, while our coverboy, Aesop Rock even pops in for a cameo. Here's another bold record from Scott Herron modifying electronic music and hip hop's factory settings ... A name change for a semi-established band can be an irreparable blow to its recognition, never mind creating a huge hassle for promoters: "Tonight! The band formerly known as _____!" In *Supersystem's* case, a band who might be more familiar if referred to by its original name, *El Guapo*, a new moniker couldn't be more apropos. After the addition of drummer Josh Blair and the group's recent move from *Dischord* to *Touch and Go*, *Supersystem* has tapped into its inner boogie, opting for more straightforward, keyboard-laden dance numbers instead of acting like its former quirky, more *Dischordian* self. One could hypothesize that the relocation of some band members to Brooklyn precipitated the shift in style, (or cross-dressing side projects) as songs like "Defcon" and "Miracle" seem poised to receive the DFA treatment in the very near future. Although this new album, *Always Never Again*, suffers at times because of a noticeably flat mixing job, it still manages to capture the intensity of the *Guap's* live show in a way its old records never did. So break out some Sparks, invite over some girls with legwarmers, and let the System take you home... Here's the most unanticipated but beautiful collaboration of the year: *Touch and Go's* emotive, fractured muse, *Shannon Wright*, and *Amelie* sound-tracker *Yann Tiersen*. A little drama makes it supple—a violin is plucked while the lull of a bow gently moving across a string gives way to crystalline synthesizers and the prickly little voice of Ms. Wright. Straight away, "While You Sleep" rocks out of nowhere. Congratulations to the *licidailleurs* label: this is music for pondering life's finer points. Lolling piano melodies succumb to Wright's frothy vocals in "Ways to Make You See" and "Callous Sun." "Sound the Bells" finds refuge in a retreating decrescendo, while "Pale White"—the final cut—feels like a bittersweet goodbye. "Nobody will come dance on our grave/Nobody will come dance with us," and with that, Tiersen and Wright remorsefully bid adieu. And, so do we. ■



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AESOP ROCK FAST CARS, DANGER, FIRE & KNIVES

My admiration for this New York City MC and his recorded output has increased exponentially over the years. Simply put, I've been dying to hear this. At first I wasn't sure that *Fast Cars* would live up to my expectations, but then I remembered that Aesop's last release, *Bazooka Tooth*, initially confused the hell out of me before becoming one of my favorite albums of 2003. The production on *Fast Cars* sounds sparse, substituting simple, futuristic grooves for the dense, sometimes suffocating soundscapes found on *Bazooka Tooth*. While some will miss the layered, hallucinatory aesthetic, the more minimalist approach to production on this EP

serves to highlight the vocals in a new way. Addressing war and religion, among other themes, Aesop continues to distill the experiences of alienation, paranoia and urban living into a jarring musical experience that pleases on both a visceral and intellectual level. Guest appearances by El-P and CamuTao only add to the record's appeal. The only low point is the appearance of everyone's least favorite homophobe Cage, but I try to close my eyes and pretend it's not happening. The first 20,000 copies of this EP come with an 80-page book of lyrics, artwork and photos. —Dan Yemin

DefinitiveJux.net



22-20S 22-20S

On its debut, self-titled album, British blues rockers 22-20s shirk the recent faux-British punk dance-rock craze by crafting ten songs that probably belong on a White Stripes revival record in 2035. The good news is that Martin Trimble's vocals are nowhere near as grating as Jack White's. Already hits overseas, "Why Don't You Do It for Me" and "22 Days" will likely be popular with prep-school hooligans bumming cigarettes from older women on this side of the Atlantic, as well. The bad news? Downtempo jams "Baby Brings Bad News" and "The Thing that Lovers Do" come into a world still scarred by that Jet ballad. —Molly Knight

EMIRecords.co.uk

25 SUAVES WANT IT LOUD

25 Suaves is an old-school metal band that truly celebrates the classic metal-head mantra, "I want it loud." In fact, that's the name of the group's new record. *I Want It Loud*, the second disk from this Michigan-based trio, is a heavy, anthemic, guitar-driven rock record that serves as a throw-back to heavy metal's origins and the hey day of such veterans as Motorhead, Kiss and AC/DC. Tracks such as "Turn up the Music," "Us Against You" and "All But Nothing" are heady rock tracks harkening back to a pureness in heavy rock music that has been missing lately in these days of hyper trends and one-hit wonders. With a crunching sound and ferocious tempo, 25 Suaves bring the noise right to your eardrum and will not be denied. So if you want it loud, this album will deliver. —Don Sill

BulbRecords.com

50FOOTWAVE GOLDEN OCEAN

Throwing Muses' Kristin Hersh's newest project stems apparently from inner unresolved anger and frustration that has therefore resulted in a smart blend of punk guitar tones and sassy sentiments such as, "You know what? Shut the fuck up." Not something to share with the kids, obviously, but Hersh's vocal command over this deafening three-piece is truly overwhelming. Her throaty misery comes across in the most colorful of phrases such as the neighborly "I'm looking for a fight" announcement that sneaks into the dragging "Sarah is a Girl." She's definitely thuggin' here, and may find a worthy friend in the Shady/Aftermath camp. All in all, *Golden Ocean* is a furious, maniacal record that shockingly follows the acoustic *Grotto* album, which dropped only two years ago. Maybe the next one will be calypso? —Dominic Umile

ThrowingMusic.com

AKRON/FAMILY AKRON/FAMILY

Repeated searches for Akron/Family on All Music Guide come up with nothing. The label's website (Young God, the folks responsible for the work of Devendra Banhart) is similarly lacking, with only a few tour dates to offer. Even Google can only muster a single webzine review of the album alongside a slew of hotlinks to family owned hotel chains and law firms in Northeast Ohio. It's interesting, then, noting how difficult it is to describe the band's music, and by extension, the unlikelihood of the band's existence in general. Sure, "Before and Again" starts out like a traditional folk song, but then what sounds like an entirely new piece (complete with count off) begins at the 3:43 mark. Other tracks shift through movements as well with inexplicable sounds and electronic flourishes. Could this group be freak folk's most mysterious character yet? —Austin Ray

YoungGodRecords.com

BELLAFEA FAMILY TREE

Hailing from the fertile indie-rock breeding ground of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Bellafea are another prime example that those Tar Heels sure know how to kick out the jams. *Family Tree* is a distinct and full-sounding EP, which shows the duo seamlessly weaving minimalist chamber pop ("Seasons" and "Be Still & Know") with more abrasive (read distorted) tracks ("While We are Still Young"). Closing the all too brief six-song offering is the haunting title-track, whose building guitar line is accentuated by Heather McEntire's raw, yet soothing, vocals. *Family Tree* is a wonderfully versatile sampling from Bellafea and a promising taste of greatness to come. —Matt Siblo

PldgonEnglish.com

BETTIE SERVEERT ATTAGIRL

Known in the early '90s for its jangly, distorted guitars, Netherlands' Bettie Serveert helped launched Matador as the über indie rock label of that decade. It may seem like that time has passed, and surely the band with it, but nope! Turns out, the band's just traded its crushing guitars for a softer, more orchestrated pop sound. In the process, the band has reinvented itself with the likes of the lazy and downtempo dance track "Dreamaniacs" and the acoustic power ballad "You've Changed." It's not surprising, then, that Bettie Serveert's latest, *Attagirl*, is on Minty Fresh, the home of effervescent pop. —Kim Newman

MintyFresh.com

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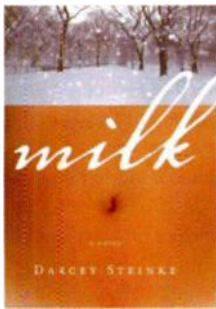
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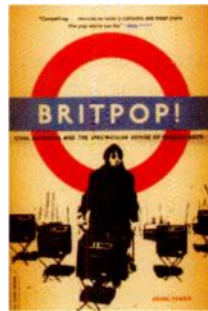
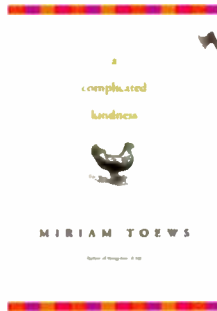
Milk tracks the lives of three lost souls—a new mother, an ex-monk and a conflicted priest—as they navigate the depths of their faith to assuage the terrible loneliness of their existence. Try as they might, none of the characters finds redemption through their efforts to refine their connection to the divine or the lives which intersect their own. The heavy atmosphere saturating the characters' world is both engrossing and chilling, but Steinke rushes too many of the scenes in this sliver of a novel, and interrupts our ability to fully understand any of the characters, except the lapsed monk, whose heartbreaking journey to reconcile his driving loss is the most powerful section of the book. Steinke's erotic prose is sometimes gratuitous and steeped in unexplained metaphor that waits to be clarified but, alas, never is. Maybe her intention is to juxtapose the ineffective curative properties of both religion and sex, but the truly poignant moments come only when the debilitating desire for connection—through God or another person—is drawn to the foreground. —Jennifer Dionisio

BloomsburyUSA.com

A COMPLICATED KINDNESS MIRIAM TOWES

Nomi Nickel is not much for the interior life or, more exactly, someone else's idea of who she should be at her age. While that could describe just about any teenager, this constraint runs much deeper in the East Village, a small Mennonite township in southern Manitoba. No drinking. No sex for fun. No rock 'n roll. The only thing more pressing is avoiding a lifelong spot at the chicken abattoir, Happy Family. While it would be very easy to present a religious community subdued by gray compliance to skewed lesson plans and hypocritical elders, instead Miriam Towes gives you a 15-year-old girl who wants to take her family to New York City so they can all work as Lou Reed's roadies. She lives to be lifted out of her existence. If you feel alone, how do you come by your self-worth? Towes chose a strong, weird and breaking tale to try and answer that question. *A Complicated Kindness*: tenders growing-up and out in an authentic, intelligent voice. —Jennifer Przybylski

Counterpoint.com



BRITPOP! JOHN HARRIS

Chronicling the popular music of the United Kingdom during the '90s, journalist John Harris writes largely from his experiences covering the various groups of the time, most notably Oasis and Blur. Obvious subject matter includes their various disputes, though Harris makes efforts to show those involved in a personal light. Beginning with the genre's backstory, including the inevitable influence of the Beatles, as well as the influence of '80s and early '90s British punk and rock, Harris does a fair job of setting the stage for Brit-pop's eventual explosion. As you can imagine, while America was turning towards Nirvana and grunge, Britain was giddy over Oasis and experimenting with the sounds of My Bloody Valentine, Blur, Suede, Elastica, Pulp and the lot. Harris includes interviews with members of the bands and personal accounts in fly-on-the-wall journalistic style. This is the sort of book you read wishing Everett True had penned. Harris makes a good go of it, though, a veteran reporter of "Cool Britannia" himself. Oh, fuck it, put on *Parklife*. —John Vogel

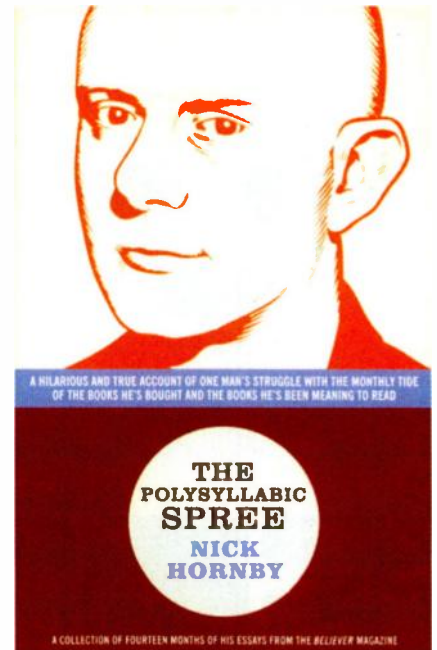
DaCapoPress.com

CHUNKLET THE OVERRATED ISSUE PART 2

If you don't know about *Chunklet* by now, you should. It's funny as two Chris Rock's, four Jon Stewart's and 10 Bill Maher's. But instead of taking the piss out of hip hop or international politics, the Athens, Ga.-based magazine joyfully (and mercilessly) skewers every sacred cow in the indie-rock cultural domain. Picking up where Part One left off, Part Two continues the massive beat down of every record you ever dug or held dear. Unfortunately, where the first installment took on such sacrosanct records as the Stones' *Exile on Main Street* and the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*, the new installment (Overrated Records After 1991) sets its sights on such fish in a barrel as Bush, Counting Crows and John Mayer. Features on the Stella comedy troupe, Winona Ryder's sex life ("The 7 Degrees of Winona Ryder"), a critique of mic-usage techniques and snarf-inducing lists of the most overrated guitarists, drummers and filmmakers rescue the issue from ending up a letdown. Possibly the best bathroom book ever.

—Allan Martin Kemler

Chunklet.com

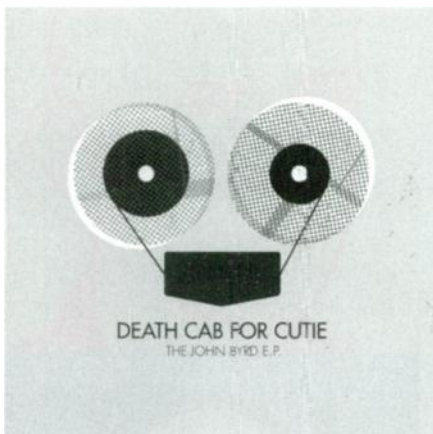


THE POLYSYLLABIC SPREE NICK HORNBY

Nick Hornby, although a published and celebrated author, is first and foremost, in my mind, a supporter of the Arsenal soccer team, and therefore, well beyond reproach. As an aside, he's also put together a terrific document of "one man's struggle with the monthly tide of the books he's bought and the books he's been meaning to read." For further backstory, *The Polysyllabic Spree* collects a year's worth of columns Hornby has dedicated to *The Believer*, a fantastic literary magazine I suggest you look into—after all, you don't live solely off whatever we pass off as commentary on Interpol or MF Doom and expect to be considered worldly and well-read, do you? Hornby's greatest strengths—in essay form, at least—seem to be his very real passion for the printed word. In a moment of autopilot, I found my editor-self nearly dropping an overused adjective like "inexhaustible" right there, but that'd be doing Hornby a disservice. His love of literature isn't inexhaustible, it's vulnerable and very, very human. Like you or I, there's moments he wants to toss some overly obtuse tome out his window in favor of a football match or a nap. His casual, conversational tone never allows the reader to lose sight of this, whether his sights are set on nonfiction, Martin Ames or Charles Dickens' densest works. Hornby's on your team. We all want to be well-read, but, for chrissakes does there have to be so much reading involved!? —Mike McKee

BelieverMag.com

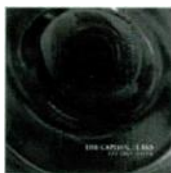
DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE JOHN BYRD EP



Someone once wisely noted that record collectors are pretentious assholes. In my usual, self-effacing tradition, I tend to agree, but you can't argue that there's a real kick that comes with the rarity, the special event, the bonus track or, as Bis once described it, "the limited edition with a personalized number." Death Cab for Cutie knows what I'm talking about. The band's latest EP is a limited run, live CD EP available only at indie shops the band feels have been supportive. Death Cab's website explains the idea was hatched shortly after the group's last tour for its *Transatlanticism* record. Even the band members admits they probably missed a few stores who have their back,

but I was delighted to see our my favored local displaying it promptly with its late February release. For those not fortunate to live near an Other, a Spaceboy, an Amoeba or a Reckless shop, the *John Byrd EP*—named for the band's touring soundman—is also available through Barsuk Records. This is to be the final Death Cab release on the label as the band announced last month it had signed to Atlantic. Want the tracklisting? "We Laugh Indoors," "Why You'd Want to Live Here," "Lightness," "Photobooth," "We Looked Like Giants," "405," "Blacking Out the Friction" and a cover of Sebadoh's "Brand New Love." —Mike McKee

Barsuk.com



BLACK LIPSTICK SINCERELY

As if written directly to the earnest college rock devotee, *Sincerely* is Black Lipstick's love letter to the band's rock predecessors. The sing-song lament of vocalist Phillip Niemeyer's style begs to be compared to Lou Reed; however his band sounds like they're influenced more by the Strokes than the Velvets. This juxtaposition of distinctly classic but contemporary influences transpires throughout all of *Sincerely*, toeing the line that bands such as the Walkmen or the French Kicks already defend. That being said, if bands such as Black Lipstick hope to retain any sort of pertinence in such a crowded sub-genre, they need at least a few defining characteristics to make an impression on such a classic sound warranted. Unfortunately, Black Lipstick's *Sincerely* never convinces of any such traits, creating yet another meek record that could be so much more. —Matt Siblo

PeekABooRecords.com

THE CAPITOL YEARS LET THEM DRINK

Those who lucked into the shorthand 2001 debut *Meet Yr Acres* could not stop talking about it. Philadelphia songwriter Shai Halperin, credited with writing the songs and playing all of the instruments, created some aural, lo-fi midway, drawing comparisons to Pollard's clever psych-pop, the Beatles and the Byrds. Add to that a couple more musicians—and a louder sound—and the comparisons tend to change. Okay, so maybe he's no longer a sort of Faded Captain, but Halperin and his band have found themselves right on time for the return of the taut guitar lick. *Let Them Drink* delivers on more of said bigness with expert harmonies and a classic sound. Slightly hazy, and then not, the Capitol Years excite that worn, favorite hook of yours while cueing the requisite rocker material: talk of women and drink. —Jennifer Przybylski

BurnAndShiver.com

CHEMICAL BROTHERS PUSH THE BUTTON

There's a dichotomy in the new Chemical Brothers' album. On the one hand, it's not a bad listen. For those of you who are fans of electronic music in its many forms, you can put this album into your collection with the confidence that it will, at times, entertain you. On the other hand, though, there's a blandness and forgettable quality about it. The Chemical Brothers that we loved for their inventive sound in the mid-to-late-90s have become a recycled version of what they used to be. Q-Tip opens up *Push the Button* riding a stolen lick from a Bollywood feature, and then it pretty much coasts from there with little in the way of anything on par with *Block Rockin' Beats*. Sometimes it just doesn't seem like they're trying anymore. —John Vogel

Astralwerks.com

CHIN UP CHIN UP WE SHOULD NEVER HAVE LIVED LIKE WE WERE SKYSCRAPERS

Fans of Bright Eyes' wistful, literate rock or Echo and the Bunnymen's shimmery jangle take note, Chin Up Chin Up is here. Balancing restive guitars, chiming, bell-tone keyboards and understated drumming, Chin Up Chin Up seem like perfect candidates to appear on an upcoming episode of "The O.C." or a Gap mix CD. The band isn't doing anything wrong, it's just that these songs are so lukewarm in scope and execution that it's hard to imagine anyone getting emotionally attached enough to bother thinking of them after the initial trip through the changer. Underneath this somewhat passionless veneer, though, there is a band that wants to make a connection with its audience. Unfortunately, on *Skyscrapers* they were just a bit too shy to get that across. —Allan Martin Kemler

FlameShovel.com

CLEM SNIDE END OF LOVE

As Clem Snide frontman Eef Barzalaey attests, "Happiness is boring/It's always black and white." It should come as no surprise then, that his alt.country outfit is back to doing what it does best on this, its fifth album; tempering oblique lyrics with lush, cinnamon summer arrangements. Barzalaey's famously pungent wordplay in "Made for TV Movie" is once again startling and tender ("Well I heard he used to beat her like she was a conga drum/They always slept in separate beds but somehow they had a son"). Standout tracks "End of Love" and "Fill Me With Your Light" subtly conjure the catchiness of sunny Counting Crows hits without having to ascribe different shades of grey for every variation of sadness and disappointment. But most importantly, *End of Love* is a mesmerizing journey that respects the pulpy, symbiotic relationship between triumph and loss, and is too smart to ever completely separate the two. —Molly Knight

SpinArtRecords.com

COLD BLEAK HEAT IT'S MAGNIFICENT, BUT IT ISN'T WAR

I'm not afraid, I'll say it: I am not a fan of jam bands, be their influence Phish or Miles Davis. But I'll sit through a set of String Cheese Incident covering Phish before I throw this record on again. Even jam bands have a destination, and a melody that invites the listener into their music as an active participant instead of a spectator. However, the free-jazz stuff of Cold Bleak Heat's *It's Magnificent But it Isn't War* proves to be alienating and cold, and almost lofty, as if to say, "You'll never get this, man, so it must be brilliant." Bullshit. Marked by stabbing bites of trumpet and screeching saxophone, tracks like "Love Conquers All Motherfucker" and "Raising the Dead (Freezer Fight)"—whose names alone would usually wet my whistle—prove there is little here to sink my rock'n roll teeth into. —Janelle Smarella

Family-Vineyard.com



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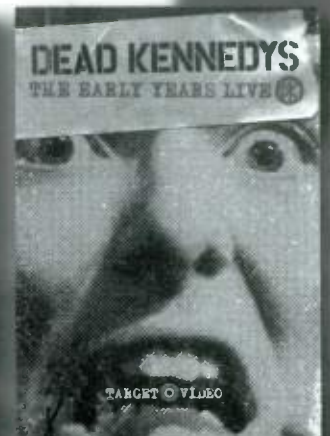
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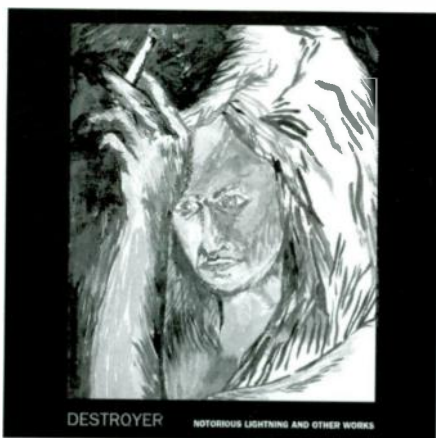
"...a display of nihilism that, perversely enough, felt cathartic and just right, capturing the frustration of an early generation of punks before the music became codified and commodified."
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DESTROYER NOTORIOUS LIGHTNING AND OTHER WORKS

Everyone's favorite New Pornographer, Dan Bejar (no, not Neko), is back with an EP's worth of reworked songs from last year's trip down to Electric Avenue, *Your Blues*. Recorded in a single weekend, Bejar invited his friends and former tour mates, Frog Eyes, to help reorchestrate/deconstruct half the record. With that in mind, *Notorious Lightning and Other Works* sounds exactly like what you'd expect from this sort of collaboration: it's rougher, a little less

focused, and a whole lot more fun. Bejar's moody and theatrical voice once again takes center stage, recalling both early Bowie and Lou Reed with a pinch of Jarvis Cocker. The addition of Frog Eyes certainly adds a menacing and rollicking element to the more subdued *Your Blues* material, making this release a fresh and interesting interpretation instead of just fans' only fodder. —Matt Siblo
MergeRecords.com



ETHAN DANIEL DAVIDSON FREE THE ETHAN DANIEL DAVIDSON 5

You've gotta give Ethan Daniel Davidson some credit: He's got passion. And on songs like "Conquered Beneath a Box-Car Moon" and "I Need You Like a House on Fire," the equal parts Woody Guthrie and Pogues-inspired songwriter crafts melodies that stick to the insides of your brain. However, a selection like "Your Flag Decal Won't Get You Into Heaven Anymore" (a riff on the classic John Prine song) shows that even when you agree with the sentiment of a song you can still be annoyed by how overblown it is. Unfortunately, the annoying aspects of this record frequently win out over the charmingly melodic ones. But hey, his heart's in the right place. —Austin Ray
TimesBeachRecords.com

ANI DIFRANCO KNUCKLE DOWN

Is there anyone more graceful, more pointed in her consciousness than Ani DiFranco? Humbly unfettered, while at the same time a *Spin* curiosity with her folk-punk attractant and tribal tattoos, the singer-songwriter has helmed her own label Righteous Babe since identity politics became part of artistic expression. *Knuckle Down*, her seventeenth DIY studio album, is not the solitary effort of last year's *Educated Guess*. Producer Joe Henry brings the same shadowy beauty heard on his own *Tiny Voices* to DiFranco's warm, reflective tapestry. Violin, glockenspiel and piano samples ghost the sometimes spoken word-like delivery, fragments of friends, confessions and what her family means to her. Shades of Joni Mitchell in a feathery, personal rendering, *Knuckle Down* is as enveloping and full-grown as any release you could hope to hear. —Jennifer Przybylski
RighteousBabe.com

EDIE SEDGWICK HER LOVE IS REAL ... BUT SHE IS NOT

Justin Moyer from DC's El Guapo has revived the spotlight-grubbing ethos of Edie Sedgwick, the partying pop socialite from Andy Warhol's factory posse. As Warhol's posse rolled 20-deep at times, gettin' all crunk and needled up, Sedgwick couldn't hang and died at 28. With the help of makeup, dresses, simplistic electro backdrops and tabloids, Moyer exhumed Sedgwick to celebrate celebrity. The songs on *Her Love Is Real ... But She Is Not* each take the name of an actor or actress, everyone from Martin Sheen to Sally Field has earned a spot on this ludicrous red carpet, and pairs them up with Moyer's bright, and rather funny, ideas. However, these songs aren't for the intolerant, as his shouted sermons lose novelty faster than the brand described in album closer "Haley Joel Osment." —Dominic Umile
DesotoRecords.com

JOHN DOE FOREVER HASN'T HAPPENED YET

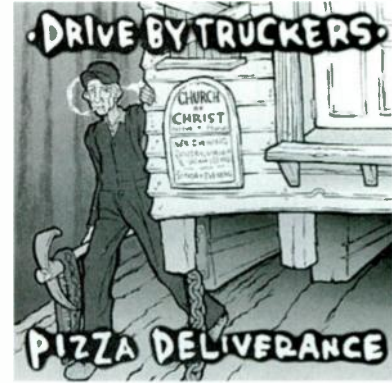
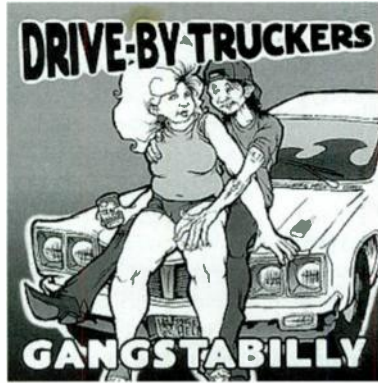
John Doe has always been more than the sum of his parts. The tumult he created in X was punkish to be sure, the sound of a band messily and deliberately painting outside the lines, and his solo work has followed a similar if slightly rootsier tack. On Doe's latest, *Forever Hasn't Happened Yet*, he once again incorporates everything he knows and loves about American music into a blazing 11 song, half hour set. "The Losing Kind" mixes country blues with soulful B3 organ fills and shimmering roots guitar while "Heartless" punk slaps the blues and "Twin Brother" finds Doe in folksy Everly Brothers mode with Grant Lee Phillips. For a real thrill, though, check out the roots punk shiver of "Ready," made even more visceral by Kristin Hersh's hair-raising harmonies. Too short? Press play twice. —Brian Baker
YepRoc.com

ELUVIUM TALK AMONGST THE TREES

The ambient game is a tough one, seemingly so because many people take a crack at it and the victims are strewn along the experimental highway, shivering with boredom and apathy. Eluvium will produce no such results. Matthew Cooper lingers casually behind the layers of sound that he casts as Eluvium, channeling his instruments through effects until they are no longer single elements; rather they become one rush of soothing tide. The tide is nearly motionless on *Talk Amongst the Trees*, an atmospheric wall of dreamy consonance that may have once been synthesizers, guitar and keyboards, but is now Cooper's haunting manifesto. "Taken's" haunting presence nears 17 minutes and while fans of Yes might appreciate such interminable length, it can be intimidating to the average listener. With its gentle prodding and warm subtle tones, "Taken" feels more like 16 and a half minutes instead of the extreme 17. Gorgeous stuff. —Dominic Umile
TemporaryResidence.com

FFA COFFI PAWB AN BYTH

Ffa Coffi Pawb translates roughly from Welsh to mean "everybody's coffee beans," but when said quickly in its native tongue, your mother will surely blush. It doesn't make much sense, really. What does make sense is that *An Byth* is a fantastic collection of Welsh-language songs from 1986 to 1992 made by the band that eventually spawned Super Furry Animals. In the Ffa Coffi Pawb roster, SFA vocalist Gruff Rhys and drummer Dafydd Ieuan perform in intriguing form as they plant the early seeds of SFA's playful sound ("Arwynebol Melyn") and emulate the fuzzed-over punch of The Jesus and Mary Chain ("Valium" and "Gwneud Fy Mhen I Fewn"). —Aaron Richter
EmpyreanRecords.com



It's the end of history. Most of the reissues this month were initially released within my lifetime. Not that, like, unearthed caveman demos would get me jazzed or anything. What can we do but start this whole thing off with an '80s reference? If video killed the radio star, then the Internet saved him from obscurity. Take Crain, for instance. The relatively obscure band put out an album in the midst of the vibrant '90s indie scene—the original release was only 1000 LPs, a minor footnote to the history of Louisville, Ky.'s rich tradition of spidery post-hardcore. But by the glory of mother technology, one person can inexpensively put out an obscure record from the past and have a chance to reach those who would appreciate it most. Recorded in the fall of 1991 at Steve Albini's Electrical Audio studios, *Speed* is all about the mathy dynamics and crisp production you've come to associate with the engineer/musician's work, both in the studio and with Shellac. However, where most in the genre insist on sustained seriousness, dotting out melodies in miserly drops, Louisville's other electric warriors deliver more memorable compositions, eschewing ponderous interplay in favor of riffs you can actually hum. Four previously unreleased songs recorded in 1992 by Don Zientara at Inner Ear in Washington, D.C., round out the re-release and hint at the more straightforward direction Crain would take next. Thank *Temporary Residence* for the redux ... There's a rumored, low-end bass frequency that causes involuntarily bowel release. The military has been laboring away in secret labs trying to harness it for years. Meanwhile, the audiophiles of Sunn 0))) (don't bother trying to pronounce the "O))), it's meant to represent the famed Sunn amplifier logo) mastered the technology in the mid-'90s with relatively less funning and fanfare. Recorded in 1998, *The GrimmRobe Demos* enthrone everybody's favorite sloth-paced, cloaked metal miscreants at their planet-crumbling best. This record was recorded before the duo settlec on a (very patient) drummer, and slightly after it evolved from merely being an Earth tribute band. These early recordings also prove that Greg Anderson and Stepher O'Malley's sideprojects (including Khanate, Goatsnake and Burning Witch) cannot capture this kind of bowel-heavy energy outside of Sunn 0))). If Southern Lord Records has a knack for marketing, they'll package each CD with a Depends coupon ... Hard-bitten women, easy drinking and what life's wrought, that's the plain song of the Drive-By Truckers. Unfortunately, keeping records in print hasn't always been their strong suit. Luckily

their label, New West, is here to save the day for the colorful cast of outcasts the band has authored thus far. Not one of these characters are cheats, propped up by someone who has no business telling their stories. The Drive-By Truckers couldn't be more authentic, here are Southerners who love where they came from in spite of where they came from (like so many others). The band's strength lies in clear truths rather than the easy swipe, despite what song titles like "Panties in Your Purse" and "Wife Beater" might lead you to think. Before the release, but during the immense conception of 2001's *Southern Rock Opera*, the ambitious banner wherein a native son is lost to punk rock and then found nearer to his roots, came the band's first two records, *Gangstabilly* and *Pizza Deliverance*, long out of print and now re-released and remastered by New West. There you'll find the most somber recollection of G.G. Allin, a wound-up, coked-up couple on the make and a song dedicated to mom's trucker nuptials (alongside the aforementioned titles mentioned above). Country, its luckless insides, roughed up by '70s rock 'n roll and saved by Sam Phillips ... Blessed be the prolific. Everyone knows that artists like Robert Pollard and J Church average, like, an album a week, but what about those unsung heroes the Field Mice? Formed in Croydon, England in the late '80s, the Field Mice were one of the many gems to be found on the classic Sarah Records. Now, the British label LTM has released three CDs worth of the band's full-lengths, singles and probably everything else. These days most bands seem terrified of the labels attached to their music—no matter how well it does for them at the bank—emo bands hate being identified as such. As "Sensitive" as they may be, at least bands like the Field Mice stand up proud, crooked smiles and all, to accept their status as straight-up twee. Still, for a band so easily classified, the Mice do manage to cover quite a bit of ground over the course of this trilogy of reissues, from *Snowball* to *Skywriting to For Keeps*, with all the singles and rarities in between. By the time we get to the *For Keeps* disc (beginning with the group's final proper album), we're hearing a band well acquainted with electronic tinkering (think the Vaselines meeting St. Etienne). There's a lot more history should you bother to investigate, but mostly the Mice can be distilled down to the essentials, just like their short and sweet pop tunes. This is why nerds have better sex. In fact, come to think of it, Teen Beat Records is hosting a Tuscadero reunion right after we go to print. More next month! ■

THE EVENS

THE EVENS



In its purest form, punk has always been about challenging the current lay of the land. So, it makes perfect sense that one of the movement's elder statesmen should come forward with this latest objection: Why should intensity be equated chiefly with volume? The Evens is the duo of Dischord cofounder and Fugazi frontman Ian MacKaye and Warmers drummer Amy Farina. Musically, the Evens peels things back to the essentials—MacKaye plays baritone guitar, Farina helms the drums, natch, while both harmonize and song. While the group's portfolio includes both glacial whispers and galloping anthems, the Evens eschew nonessentials—I'm not sure there's an overdub on the entire record. Following the same model, the lyrics focus in on the happenings of one's own backyard: gentrified street corners, crowded

commercial radio dials and neighborhood shops compose an irreducibly relatable setting to the larger themes that have a way of globalizing throughout the course of a song. The album begins with the slow trot of "Shelter Two," with a road trip and a visit to an Arlington hardware store, but by the next song, the duo laments, "There's no around the corner anymore." While a local perspective seems appropriate for the Evens' sometimes hushed excursions, the approach is never myopic. Far from pop, the Evens mantra suggests it's time to take a "stand in the place where you live." The alternative, laid out in the barest, most haunting track on the album, becomes clear in "On the Face of it," a chilling condemnation of our national tunnel vision. —Mike McKee
Dischord.com



GENGHIS TRON

CLOAK OF LOVE

Cloak Of Love is a five-song EP which blends electronica with hardcore and ultimately leaves you wondering whether to bust out the glow sticks and dance or throw up the rocker horns and bang your head. Genghis Tron, a three-piece hailing from upstate New York—Hamilton (guitar, drum machine, programming), Michael (keys, beats, vocals) and Mookie (vocals, theremin, lap steel)—have put together a mind-bending sound that blends techno drum machines and computer Pro Tools programming with furiousness hardcore screams and metal guitar riffage for a musical mish-mosh that somehow makes sense. Tracks such as—"Rock Candy," "Arms," "Ride the Steambolt," "Laser Bitch" and "Sing Disorder"—intertwine the two genres into one exciting sound that, for better or worse, may be a bit ahead of its time. —Don Sill
CrucialBlast.net

GORE GORE GIRLS

7X4

Equally informed by Brill Building pop and the *Psycho*tronic Film Guide, this Detroit band has a dark sense of humor to go along with the garage beat. Vamping like Poison Ivy Rorschach on one album cover and zipping up the go-go boots for another, the Gore Gore Girls have wisely stuck by Amy Surdu to belt out the vocals and write the songs since getting together in the '90s. This is trouble byway of *Teenage Gang Debs*, *Thee Headcoatees* and punk rock in general. "Loaded Heart" rocks the "Cool Jerk" guitar line a little bit harder while "No Big Thing" has the six-foot-tall call-and-response of *The Marvelettes*. For a band named after a zero-budget film with a black laugh at go-go girls, it's just that much fun. —Jennifer Przybylski
G4Recordings.com

ADAM GREEN

GEMSTONES

Adam Green should make you squirm in your seat. This is the guy who gave you the go ahead for that illicit summer love affair by assuring you there was no wrong way to fuck a girl with no legs. He's made you smile with the cleverly awkward anti-folk that was the *Moldy Peaches*. But the only thing awkward on *Gemstones*, aside from the surprisingly infrequent shock lyric, is the crystal production paired with Green's horrendously crisp vocals. "Crackhouse Blues" plays like an obnoxious amateur-night lounge singer pleading for the attention of an uninterested audience, and "Carolina" cracks a few one-liners but fails to follow up with any true humor. If the production choices on this album are a joke, consider the punch line lost. —Aaron Richter
RoughTradeRecords.com

DAMIEN JURADO

ON MY WAY TO ABSENCE

Managing to remain equally prolific and heartfelt since emerging as a gifted indie singer-songwriter in Seattle in the late '80s, Damien Jurado has mastered understated and folksy, edgy and electric, and ambient and experimental. His latest album, crafted with longtime collaborator Eric Fisher, is muted and taut, expressing deeply felt ruminations on jealousy with the loosest melodic sketches. His careworn voice is sweetened by the airy harmonies of Rosie Thomas on "Lottery," while the mood is as reverent as a hymn on his treatment of "Big Decision." Even fuller songs exude hushed sadness, like the guitar scratched rocker "I Am the Mountain." *On My Way to Absence* is simply a passel of intensely narrated tales of loss and rediscovered hope from a master of daring, modern folk. —Sarah Tomlinson
SecretlyCanadian.com

KAOS

HELLO STRANGER

Everyone from Prince to Peaches deserves an ample slice of blame for *Hello Stranger*, a collection of featherweight funk and tin-roof electroclash, cheaply aged, to crutch its creative paucity on the tedious revival of '80s synths. While some of the instrumentals have smirking backdrop appeal, something akin to Animation playing Kraftwerk, there's still nothing in the sum total of this record that has a groove you can sink your teeth into or a song that's not just discothèque irony eating itself out of relevance. Even cameos from people like Erland Oye ("Lessons in Love") or the Rapture's Matt Safer ("Feel Like I Feel") fail to lift these songs out of their dusty strobe light hang-over. If you like your C&C Music Factory with art house delusions, this is your answered prayer. —Terry Sawyer
K7.com

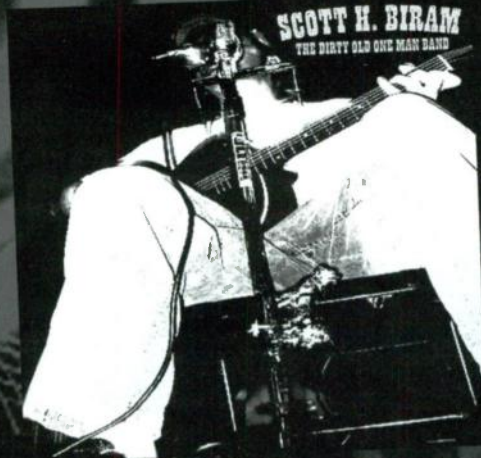
KITES/PRURIENT

THE HIDDEN FAMILY/WHITE

Far out on the perimeter of modern music there are a few scientists exploring the art of arranging noises and electronic sounds into structured sequences intended as performances. Most people find this kind of stuff totally offensive. I mean, total pacifists will kick you in the nuts faster than you can say *Wolf Eyes* the instant the first piercing screech becomes audible. The *Hidden Family/White* is exactly this kind of record, and could probably be used to smoke terrorists out of holes. Building on an earlier pairing on Load Records' *Split #4*, these Providence, R.I. noise sculptors team up for another pedal-tweaking riot intercut with a few vibrating drill passages and a speck of acoustic guitar. Organs, insect electronics, squalling squeals and percussive explosions abound on this occasionally almost melodic album. —Allan Martin Kemler
LoadRecords.com

SCOTT H. BIRAM

THE DIRTY OLD ONE MAN BAND



It's been said that rock and roll came from the blues on the right hand and country on the left; Scott H. Biram is the middle finger on both.

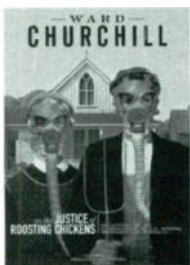
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ON THE JUSTICE OF ROOSTING CHICKENS

Reflections on the Consequences of U.S. Imperial Arrogance and Criminality

BY WARD CHURCHILL

The book that caused a media firestorm. An expanded and meticulously annotated version of Churchill's essay "Some People Push Back: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens," which had the honor of being attacked by both Bill O'Reilly and Rush Limbaugh.

As far as Ward Churchill is concerned, the record speaks for itself. The "Most Peace-Loving of Nations" has been engaged in brutal military campaigns in every corner of the globe, unceasingly, since its inception. In attempting to forever alter Americans false self-concept, Ward Churchill contextualizes US aggression and the most effective response to it yet—the attacks of Sept. 11th—in a readable format. Churchill has meticulously chronicled both U.S. military campaigns—domestic and foreign—from 1776 to the present and U.S. attempts to violate, obstruct and/or subvert International Law from 1945 to the present. Drawing from US military and interventionist history, lessons from Nuremberg and the UN's own voting records, the two Chronologies, exhaustively researched and annotated, illustrate a heart-wrenching history of senseless butchery and democracy derailed. In this context, the only fitting question for a nation still reeling from the wake-up call of Sept. 11th is "How can they not hate us?" In his newest offering, Churchill demands that the American public shake off its collective unconscious and take responsibility for the criminality carried out in its name. Introduction by Chellis Glendinning.



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THE TROUBLE WITH MUSIC

BY MAT CALLAHAN

As a member of the Looters and one of the founders of Komotion, Mat Callahan has inspired many of us who have been both musicians and activists. *The Trouble With Music*, raises fundamental questions about the role music can play in our troubled world and the struggle each of us go through to bring about change. This book is must reading for music lovers and makers alike." —Michael Franti, Spearhead

"*The Trouble with Music* isn't anything like most books about music. Those other books start by assuming that today's music world looked just the same yesterday and will be the same tomorrow. Mat Callahan understands that today's music world is a product of the past, struggling to bear the future. His story begins with reexamining what all music fundamentally shares, then sets about showing the ways in which those fundamentals have been distorted, all the while insisting we can free the music—and ourselves—to achieve a future worth celebrating. This isn't just a theory: Callahan, a working musician, crams his book with as much detail as opinion—and there's a LOT of ideas. Making music is a process as old as the human species, which means that if the music's in trouble because humanity as a whole is in trouble. *The Trouble with Music* speaks to those troubles and it maps a way out. It's invaluable." —Dave Marsh, Rock and Rap Confidential



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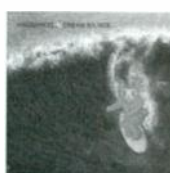
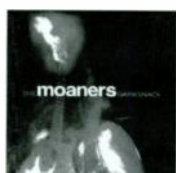




THE FIERY FURNACES EP

Calling a 41-minute release an EP is a stretch—or in this case, a treat—but when you're The Fiery Furnaces, 41 minutes is like the blink of an eye. With *Blueberry Boat*, the Friedberger siblings proved they could pack all 80 minutes of a CD with songs using structures of both types: short and long. On the duo's succinctly titled *EP*, they stick with the brief pop-centered tunes by collecting B-sides in a way that plays like it could be the Furnaces' highly accessible third album. "Single Again" spits a wicked break beat that oddly complements a tale of an abusive relationship. The song

blends seamlessly into the super-melodic "Here Comes the Summer," which smoothly mixes into the slower "Evergreen" with its percussive loops and cutting guitar solo. "Tropical-Iceland," a retooled version of the *Gallowsbird's Bark* song, boasts an unimaginably catchy hook in which Eleanor harmonizes over her own backward-looped vocals. Just as it works as a companion to the band's two albums, this EP also works as a phenomenal starting point for any poor uninitiated souls still unfamiliar. —Aaron Richter
RoughTradeRecords.com



ERIC MATTHEWS SIX KINDS OF PASSION LOOKING FOR AN EXIT

After Cardinal's one-album-and-out career, Eric Matthews' first two solo records of perfectly creased baroque pop were so ephemeral they threatened to float out of the CD tray. Matthews', whispery Scott-Walker-on-downs vocals stood in contrast to his lushly bombastic pop orchestrations. The tension between the two was the inherent magic of both albums (1995's *It's Heavy in Here*, 1997's *The Lateness of the Hour*). After an eight-year hiatus (save for session gigs with Ivy and Tahiti 80, among others), Matthews offers *Six Kinds of Passion Looking for an Exit*, where he narrows the gap between his subdued vocals and his ambitious pop by singing more forcefully and streamlining his lush arrangements. There's still plenty of atmosphere, drama and beauty illuminating Matthews' emotionally wrought songs, and the good news is the magic is gloriously intact. —Brian Baker

EmpyreanRecords.com

MINUS STORY HEAVEN AND HELL

Part off-kilter dreamy psychedelic of the Flaming Lips, part the plaintive sigh of Colin Meloy from the Decemberists, the Minus Story are indifference and detachment in a song. Their six-song EP "Heaven and Hell" is hypnotic, even bordering on harmonious at points. You might think that the unwavering down tempo would ultimately fall flat but thanks to Minus Story's complicated instrumentation, which includes harmonica, trumpet and xylophone, and an intricate and lush layering of these various sounds the stupor is altogether welcoming. —Kim Newman

Jagjaguwar.com

MOANERS DARK SNACK

Don't let the foxy Free Kitten gear fool you. Despite the French-cut T-shirts and Jackie-O sunglasses, the Moaners have more in common with delta churn than anything downtown. Trailer Bride's Melissa Swindle (guitar, vocals) and Grand National's Laura King (drums, sometimes guitar) have elicited comparisons to the White Stripes, what with the two-people, but no bass, minimal blues approach. It seems all too confining for a charge that invites both Flannery O' Connor asides and talk of whetting an undeniable thirst. Swindle's drug-buddy quaver alongside King's tough drumming is rousing. Women saying what they want, slapping down the loser in song. Dark Snack torches a guitar and drum kit for its cover art. How better to convey both rock attitude and a certain appetite? —Jennifer Przybylski

YepRoc.com

MONADE A FEW STEPS MORE

Once again, signature Stereolab voice, Laetitia Sadier has unwittingly provided the soundtrack to many late night grope sessions in art school dorms the world over. Given the smooth, effortless, and ephemeral quality to *A Few Steps More* that's not necessarily a bad thing at all. In fact, this exudes the same subdued, hypnotic appeal of early Mazzy Star. Although Monade isn't that much of a musical departure from Stereolab, its still a nice thing to have in the CD changer for certain "come hither" moments. —Maggie Serota

Beggars.com

NAGISA NI TE DREAM SOUNDS

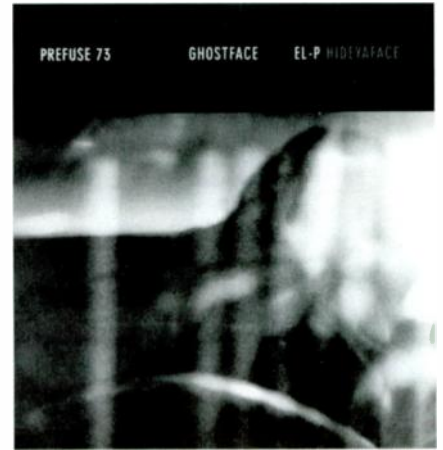
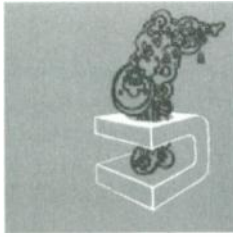
Nagisa Ni Te (Japanese for "on the beach"—a nod to Neil Young) plays drifting psychedelic indie rock, with occasional jammy noise tangents. But while this EP's four songs are accessible, most play out in epic proportions:

"The True Sun" clocks in at over 20 minutes. The (translated) English lyrics are equally protracted: "I knew, before I remember that this is not a lie / Because sorrow's been given wings returning to the light," on "The True World." Rather than over-intellectualize Nagisa Ni Te's wordy mindfucks, it's best to sit back with a beverage of choice (or whatever pills you got handy) and envision the surfing, pink bunny on the disc's cover crashing waves in your head. Enjoyable, but not essential. —Kory Grow
Jagjaguwar.com

NEVA DINOVA THE HATE YOURSELF CHANGE

It's one thing to be able to rock the heartfelt ballad bursting with tender authenticity, and it's quite another to wail on your guitar and exude the tough humor born of plenty of hard knocks. But to do both together, as Neva Dinova does on their third full length album, *The Hate Yourself Change*, is to craft an album that transcends easy categorization and radiates well earned emotional authority. While the band is masterful at delicately crafted ballads featuring flutters of emotion, like the wryly worded, gently strummed ballad "The Champion," it can also kick it up a notch for intense rockers, like "AHH," which features richly resonant vocals, heroic backing harmonies and fractures of wiry electric guitar, or like the sly old timey intimacy of "Yellow Datsun." Sometimes both gentle feeling and frayed guitar are mixed and matched for a sound that is tough yet emotive, as on "Can't Wait to See You," where gently urgent vocals emerge from a fuzz of distortion. "A Picture in Pocket" has a dark, vibrant beauty that evokes Leonard Cohen. "scratching my nuts right at God," on the stripped down countrified ballad, "I've Got a Feeling." They've given us the perfect album for those sad saps who can't help ribbing themselves for how pathetic their reflection looks in the bottom of their beer mug while they're crying in their lager. —Sarah Tomlinson

CrankThis.com



SOLE THE NEW SINGLE 12"

You don't think of underground music as really producing singles. Sure, singles as in EPs, maybe, but not *singles* singles. Not brilliant tracks that shine overtly brighter than the others. The last group of people you'd expect to single out would be the avant hip hop weirdos of Anticon, but I guess they're just so addicted to confounding our expectations that they made it a point to do just that. This radiant track comes in the form of "Sin Carne," from Sole's recent full-length, *Live From Rome*. Production from Odd Nosdam, Jel and Alias thunders, shakes and cracks, putting aside tinny glitch for thick, cavernous low end, controlled distortion and cable-humming atmosphere. Anchored around a menacing, speaker-heaving kick drum and a gloom-bundled jazz bass arpeggio, Sole aims at confrontation with everyone sick of hearing him "talk shit on the government," while taking a moment to deny claims of biting Noam Chomsky—and, really, how many MCs have to put out that disclaimer? "Every Single One of Us" and the downtempo "T.I.M." fill things out, along with their instrumentals, making for a six-song EP. There's even a radio mix of "Sin Carne" (though, I still don't expect to hear Sole next to 50 Cent or Ja Rule any time soon) and a previously unreleased B-side from Jel.

Anticon.com

THE ROSEBUDS/THE CLOSE WE'VE HAD ENOUGH/CODE OF ETHICS 7"

The early- and mid-'90s were abuzz with hundreds of satellites transmitting different frequencies of melodic indie rock and pop. For a while, a galaxy of fanzines, college radio shows, house-party and warehouse promoters, mixtape swaps and split seven-inch labels filled the uncharted gap between your favorite local band and major-label alt-rock supergroups. This small-run split between Chapel Hill's the Rosebuds and Atlanta's the Close seems like a welcome throwback to the days when you'd tear open a Merge catalog to see when the new Polvo album would be out. Both bands deal in melodic,

guitar-driven indie pop—a style that always seems to sound special on crackly, lo-to-mid-fi vinyl. If the slick shimmer of full-length CD production is lacking, it's only to trade off for that members-only, you're-in-a-special-club-called-indie-rock feeling when the needle hits the record. Naturally, it's the Rosebuds whom most will recognize—the duo of Ivan Howard and Kelly Crisp caught a lot of attention with its Merge debut, *The Rosebuds Make Out*. The Close, meanwhile, come off a bit edgier with "Code of Ethics," a hooky track showcasing keyboardist Theresa Fedor's near-Tullycraftian vocals.

GoodnightRecords.com

BEN LEE/PONY UP! FLOAT ON/I HEARD YOU GOT ACTION 7"

Australia is upside down and everything is backwards there. Cats say, "Woof!" and cops are nice and drum and bass is popular and stand-up comedians are funny and Ben Lee has really good taste in music and signed a really, really good band as the first act on his label, Ten Fingers. In all fairness, Pony Up! has a full-length now on Dim Mak, which has at least a handful of redeeming qualities. The Canadian group's introduction on this split, however, is the rankest display of the gag-inducing, age-inappropriate pap they to which the ladies of Pony Up! sometimes stoop. "I Heard You Got Action" makes something like All Girl Summer Fun Band sound like a seminar of Derrida scholars. Remember when Hayley Mills and Hayley Mills sang that cutesy duet together in *The Parent Trap*? Imagine there were like three more Hayley Millises. I'm sure their friends think they're a riot, but divorced of the backstory, I'm left feeling like I've been dropkicked into some bizarre, *Twilight Zone* version of twee revisited by Canadians in their late 20s who really ought to know better. An all-around horrible first impression from a band who might well be very fun live. Ben Lee, meanwhile, does a Modest Mouse cover, which, surprisingly, comes off sincere, a little vulnerable and all around right-side up.

DimMak.com

PREFUSE 73 (FEATURING GHOSTFACE AND EL-P) HIDEYAFACE 12"

Prefuse 73's Scott Herren has flirted with MCs in his busy production for years, from Diverse and Mr. Lif to MF Doom and Daedelus. Few would've guessed, however, that his newest record, *Surrounded by Silence*, would boast a cameo from Pretty Tony himself, Ghostface. What's more, this MC spot is shared with Def Jux founder/Kiefer Sutherland ringer El-P, making "Hideyaface" the album's definitive single. This 12" begins with the album version and follows with Prefuse's instrumental edit and a mix from El-P. Straight away, Prefuse makes a strong impression with "Hideyaface," arguing brilliantly in favor of more crossover between the bold, sometimes bling, and the left-of-center underground. Dangermouse and Kanye West? We're ready. Madlib and Gwen Stefani? Bring it. El-P's remix takes a decidedly more, um, Aggropocalypse Now turn, with distorted, four-story industrial pistons pumping through the neon haze of a *Blade Runner* future. (Jesus, chill, it's just a record.) I guess this just highlights the difference between someone who lives in temperate Spain, home to calming, Mediterranean breezes, versus someone renting out a boxy apartment in the manic depths of New York City. Sadly, after this intense "Hideaway" retelling, even the promisingly titled closing track, "Shaolin Finale" (which I expected to come stuffed with Rza-tinged Japanese warlords battling it out on wax), is anticlimactic.

WarpRecords.com



HELLA CHIRPIN HARD/CHURCH GONE WILD

For those of you new to the statistically dense madness of Hella, let me go ahead and brief you. Hella is the deranged child of celebrated drummer Zach Hill and math-rock guitar virtuoso Spencer Seim. Reigning from the heart of Sacramento, Calif., the pair have continually pushed the envelope of indie rock and an uncompromised musical experimentation sound. The band's newest release is a double CD entitled *Church Gone Wild/Chirpin Hard*, respectively. Hill is responsible for *Church*

Gone Wild, mixing feel good pleasantries with ferocious, hard-edged vocals and instrumental aggression. Seim's baby is the second CD, *Chirpin Hard*. Similar to Hill's experimentation, Seim technically redefines the pop-punk genre by administering a unique array of computer sounds and digital beats. For Hella, these records are a big step forward, crossing its disjointed sound with a more listenable sensibility. —Jay Riggio
SuicideSqueeze.net



NOUVELLE VAGUE NOUVELLE VAGUE

Love Joy Division? Why not sample a lounge cover of "Love Will Tear Us Apart." How about some bossa nova with your Depeche Mode ("I Just Can't Get Enough") or P.I.L. ("This is Not a Love Song")? Everyone's got to have a gimmick. For *Nouvelle Vague*, it's a cover album of some of the greatest new-wave and post-punk hits done for your lite jazz electronica enjoyment. In fact, *Nouvelle Vague* is "new wave" in French. How clever! This self-titled debut is akin to an hour of *Dr. Demento*, a man whose "crazy" radio show should have been left in the '80s. Where else could you find a French cocktail version of the Dead Kennedy's "Too Drunk to Fuck?" Please just make it stop. —Kim Newman
PeaceFrog.com

OKAY LOW ROAD/HIGH ROAD

Confined to his apartment due to a chronic stomach disorder, Marty Anderson wasted little time. The former frontman of *Dilute* went to work on what would develop into two separate debut records under the name Okay: *Low Road* and *High Road*. Shaped by that particular situational neurosis, the songs are textured, dark, and—at times—give off the suffocating sense of slipping into dementia. But really, it's Anderson's weathered and leathery vocals creeping and crawling through each track, and fixated on the repetition of specific lines, that suggest something is amiss. *High Road* is the stronger of the two: *Low Road* sounds more like beloved demos he simply couldn't part with than a fully realized record. Having spent so much time sequestered alone with his music, who can blame him? —Janelle Smarella

AbsolutelyKosher.com

OKKERVIL RIVER BLACK SHEEP BOY

Don't let Okkervil River fool you on *Black Sheep Boy*, the fourth release from this Austin, Texas, group of lo-fi rockers. Beneath the sometimes-pop, sometimes-folky visage of the album's 11 songs lurks something much more dramatic. "Sometimes the blood from real cuts feels real nice when it's really mine," vocalist Will Sheff sings, before screaming his lungs out later on "For Real," one of the epic highlights of the release. Although not many of the other songs stand up as far as sheer feeling is concerned, "Song of Our So-Called Friend" and a couple other shiny pop gems prove that you can't pin this album down even after several listens. —Austin Ray
Jagjaguwar.com

THE PERCEPTIONISTS BLACK DIALOGUE

The Perceptionists consist of Mr. Lif and Akrobatik, two of underground hip hop's most gifted MCs, backed by DJ Fakts One. When I saw them live during the last Def Jux tour, I was blown away. Their onstage energy and chemistry was simply amazing. On record, however, things get problematic. While there are some great songs on this *Black Dialogue*, it does have several moments that can only be described as corny. Now, it may be entirely possible that I hold indie hip hop releases like this one to an impossible standard, expecting them to single-handedly save rap music from itself. On their own, Lif and Akrobatik have released some amazing and insightful music, so I expected a synergy that would transcend their respective solo outputs, especially after their fantastic "Medical Aid" on last year's DefJux sampler. My major complaint is that some of the political content on this record lacks both subtlety and substance, and after being beat over the head with the chorus "Where are the weapons of mass destruction?" 50 times, I can't help but feel disappointed, especially because in the past, politically charged rhymes have been

Mr. Lif's strongest suit. That being said, this record has some hilarious moments, the rhymes are generally top-notch, and the production is excellent. —Dan Yemin
DefinitiveJux.net

PHOENIX LIVE: THIRTY DAYS AGO

Having cut its chops playing Hank Williams and Prince covers for drunk bar patrons around France, Phoenix must feel at ease facing even the most unsympathetic crowds. At least the group's fans are cheering on its new concert album, *Live: Thirty Days Ago*, which was recorded in late 2004. However, it's unclear why, as the band's songs sound slight and dated, and lack the sly irony of bands like the Scissor Sisters. A few moments shine, like the bright hand claps, supple synthesizers and warm vocals of album opener "Run Run Run," and the decent recording quality and intimate mood will please Phoenix fans. But those unfamiliar with the band might wish for some Prince covers. —Sarah Tomlinson
EMI.fr

PITTY SING PITTY SING

Pitty Sing doesn't stand out because it sounds like another era. Pitty Sing stands out on its self-titled album, because Paul Holmes can sing the hell out of a melody. In "We're on Drugs" Holmes nails the high-end, transforming a silly song into a meaningful performance. Only 21, his Manchester roots are audible as he croons Sinatra-like staples "Stay with me and never leave" on "Hanging on Me," a surefire single. Prescribing to a winning formula, the Boston-born, New York-based band meshes happy-synth sounds and warm-toned electric guitar strum with an easy rockin' backbeat. Pitty Sing is staying true to what works in any era—the warm strands of tuned-up pop song—no matter where it gets stashed on the charts. —Tamara Warren
PittySing.com



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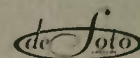
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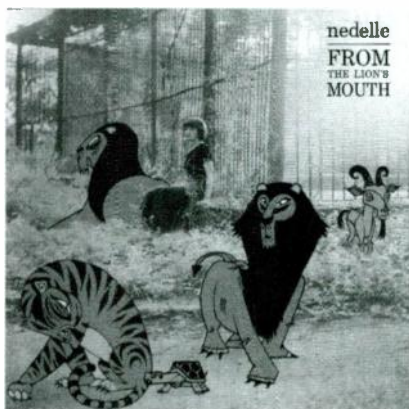


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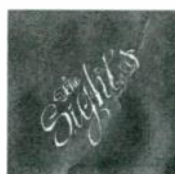
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NEDELLE FROM THE LIONS MOUTH

On her second full-length solo album, this Oakland Calif., singer-songwriter's got the girl with a guitar and a tip jar thing down pat. Offering delicate folk that's more Shawn Colvin than Joni Mitchell, Nedelle delivers wispy lines like, "Say you're stuck with me like branches to a leaf/wouldn't you agree love is such good grief?" with too much trepidation

to seem insincere. Though she frontloads the albums with bare-bones acoustic guitar tracks that seem to be her bread and butter, it's when she integrates drums and keyboards—like on "Begin to Breathe" and "Good Grief"—that she really finds her voice. —*Molly Knight*
KillRockStars.com



MASHA QRELLA UNSOLVED REMAINED

Masha Qrella is a rare kind of singer-songwriter who can firmly remove any and all "Kumbaya" elements from acoustic music. She accomplishes this by adding electronics to the composition resulting in what some rock critics like to call "acoustica." Since I personally, cannot say "acoustica" with a straight face, I will merely describe this record as a happy marriage between Mirah and the Notwist. From the sound of this record, that is quite a happy union, indeed. —*Maggie Serota*
MorrMusic.com

RED SPAROWES AT THE SOUNDLESS DAWN

On *At the Soundless Dawn*, heady-metal supergroup Red Sparowes rip colorful new contrasts from same old instrumental psyche-rock palate. The group, pieced together from current Isis and Neurosis members, among others, creates building, echoey epics recalculating Mogwai's less esoteric work. Despite the group's strong metal heritage, it often treads relatively safe waters, emphasizing the stunningly beautiful over the merely crushing. Guitars awkwardly swell and buzz, fluttering until they fall into the right melody. Red Sparowes keeps its pretense daintily portioned by dishing out its haunting aspects—wind effects, slide guitars and swirling noise—in moderation. As with the group's aviary peers, Pelican, you never really miss human voices because the music more than makes up. Thankfully, the band is too smart to let its sentimentality and delicacy hinder its own unique voice. —*Kory Grow*
NeurotRecordings.com

ALASDAIR ROBERTS NO EARTHLY MAN

This guy's got mad connections. More or less discovered by Will Oldham, Alasdair Roberts also has Oldham as well as Belle and Sebastian alum Isobell Campbell helping out on this new record. Not to mention his side project Amalgamated Sons of Rest with Oldham and Magnolia Electric Co.'s Jason Molina. It's a lot to keep track of, and so is Roberts' latest—eight songs over the course of 50 minutes, all of it rooted deeply in the Scottish music tradition. As spare as each of these tracks are, it's a bit much at first, but the songwriting stands out over time, revealing the depth and talent that Roberts possesses. —*Austin Ray*
DragCity.com

THE RUB IT'S THE MOTHERFUCKING REMIX

MTV called this DJ trio "one of the best kept secrets of the New York party circuit." Last I checked, a shout out from Adam Curry scarcely registers as under-the-radar, but DJs Ayres, Eleven and Cosmo Baker are genuine music lovers who throw a good party at Brooklyn's Southpaw club. Although the group insists it doesn't pander to celebrity, as a measure of status, the Rub has hosted guest spinners such as DJ Zeph, Nick Catchdubs and Diplo. *It's the Motherfucking Remix* marks the crew's first official mixtape CD. True to the party and the DJs' various CD-R mixes, this 49-tracker offers a labyrinthine path of mashups, collecting hip hop classics, '80s throwbacks and more contemporary club bangers. Unlike, say 2 Many DJs, where each source song complements the other, yielding some revelatory anthem, much of *Motherfucking* aims for a groove through more casual beatmatching. There's moments of greatness, to be sure (G Unit meets Wu Tang), there's also moments that come off a bit flat (Mobb Deep over "Ghostbuster's Theme" is a mashup for mashup's sake we could all do without). —*Chris Ricci*

ItsTheRub.com

THE SIGHTS THE SIGHTS

After the hype Detroit has received as the new garage rock epicenter, it takes balls to emerge with a fuzzed-out guitar and classic rock vocabulary. Meet The Sights. They've rocked with desperate conviction since 1998, and their third self-titled album burns up the dance floor as furiously as any classics covered by The Detroit Cobras. While fiercely confrontational on album opener, "I'm Gonna Live the Life I Sing About in My Songs," where guitarist Eddie Baranek unleashes cat-in-heat vocals, they can also be sweet and sunny, as on the lilting pop nugget, "Scratch My Name in Sin." The Sights fresh squall of soulful rock and heartfelt harmonies does their legacy proud. —*Sarah Tomlinson*
NewLineRecords.com

SNOWDEN SNOWDEN

We've all got that friend. You know, the one whose musical world starts in about 1987 and ends circa 1995. This is the same friend who regards early '90s shoegaze as a personal golden age of music and bid a semester's worth of tuition on a long lost My Bloody Valentine record on Ebay. Well, for once in your sorry life make that friend happy and buy him this record. While you're at it, buy a copy for yourself and marvel at the fact that such well-crafted, faux British dream-pop could come out of Georgia. —*Maggie Serota*
Snowden.info



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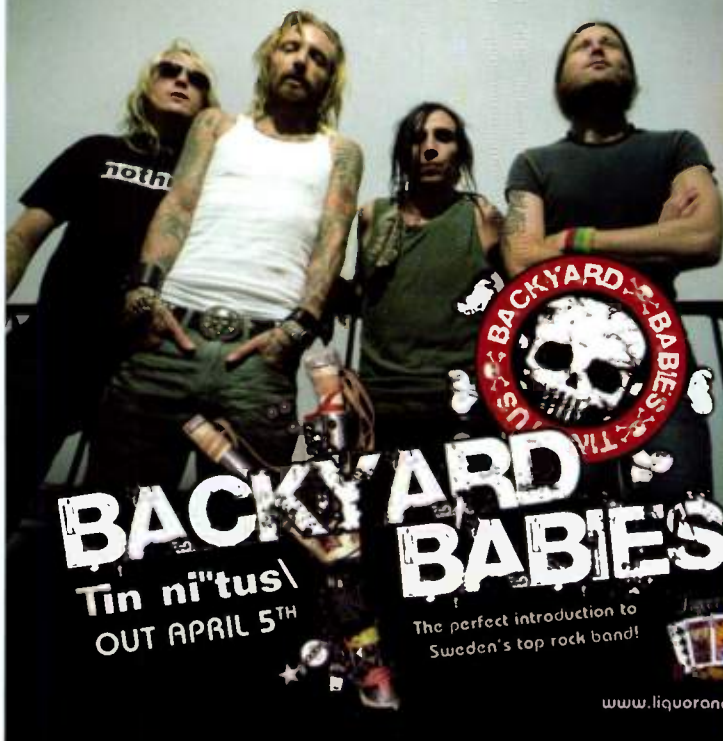
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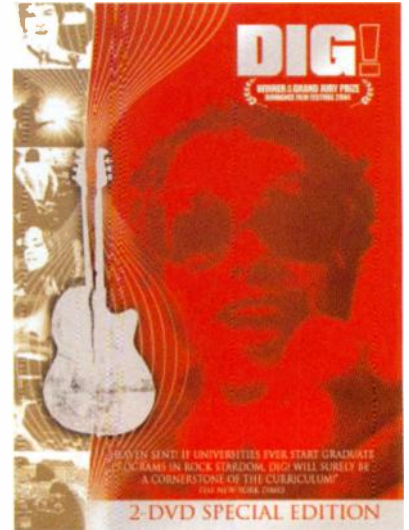
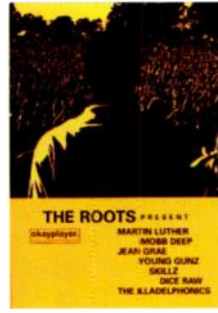
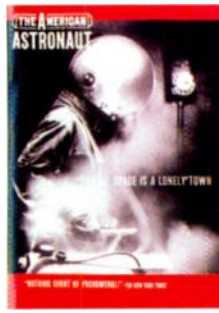
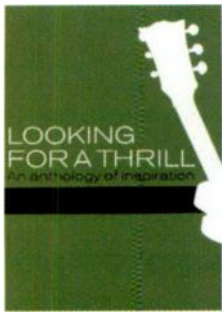
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LOOKING FOR A THRILL
AN ANTHOLOGY OF INSPIRATION

Musicians are often loath to talk about their inspirations for fear of being pigeonholed or too easily defined. For its 10-year anniversary, the famed Chicago label Thrill Jockey has coaxed some habitually elusive artists like Björk, Tortoise and Howe Gelb into talking about this sensitive subject. With 112 musicians interviewed, the five-hour video is as sprawling as the label's vision, wedding post-rock, jazz-fusion and punk acts under the same mantle. Proving the breadth of its scope, the DVD also includes clips with Thurston Moore, Ian MacKaye and Mike Watt. For all the props founder Bettina Richards gets for the undertaking, even some creative camera techniques can't undo the fact that it's a rather tedious film if ventured in toto. Since most viewers will just be scanning for their personal faves, here's a short list: Brian Manan (Slint), Jon Spencer, Steve Albini, Jon Langford (Mekons), Vic Chestnutt, as well as members of Calexico, Sea and Cake, Yo La Tengo, Tortoise and the Boredoms. —Kurt Orzeck

ThrillJockey.com

THE AMERICAN ASTRONAUT
SPACE IS A LONELY TOWN

If someone told me that I'd thoroughly enjoy a black and white musical about post-apocalyptic space travel, I would never have believed him. But, I enjoyed *The American Astronaut*. It's like a strange mix of *Stranger Than Paradise* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. Cory McAbee wrote, directed and stars in the film, playing Samuel Curtis, an interplanetary trader (a roughly cowboy-ish character) who is chased through space. McAbee's band, the Billy Nayer Show, provides all the music for the movie, including musical outbursts by the characters, which somehow seem perfectly natural. While experimental musicals are a notoriously tough sell, *American Astronaut* is an independent film that actually manages to entertain as it challenges mainstream conventions of storytelling. —John Vogel

AmericanAstronaut.com

X
THE UNHEARD MUSIC

Similar in style and substance to 1982's gritty *Another State of Mind*, *The Unheard Music* is a thorough and thoughtful look at one of Los Angeles' most influential punk bands. Unlike *Another State of Mind*'s harsh depiction of the '80s punk scene, *The Unheard Music* is a surprisingly tender and personal glimpse into the ordinary everyday lives of the punk quartet. However, X was steeped in a deeper music appreciation than your average late-'70s punk band, a fact that becomes increasingly clear after watching drummer D.J. Bonebreak gush over his fondness for the xylophone or hearing him praise Captain Beefheart as his idol. As for the production, W.T. Morgan does a great job making *The Unheard Music* stand as an actual film, instead of just vehicle for live performances and mundane interviews. Morgan incorporates a variety of techniques, such as montages of vintage television footage as well as testimonials from various eccentric personalities of the mid-'80s L.A. scene, all of which help depict the zeitgeist of the era. Although the grainy Super-8 footage certainly creates an air of romanticism and nostalgia, *The Unheard Music* is a poignant look at a subculture that can only be found in history books. —Matt Siblo

Image-Entertainment.com

THE ROOTS
PRESENT

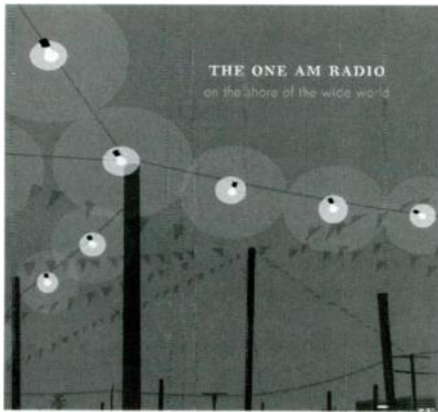
Performance videos are never very exciting, unless they are from some amazing, underdocumented historical event that you missed cut on the first time around. Despite numerous valiant efforts over the years to take it to the stage, hip hop often doesn't come off very well outside the sweaty confines of the club or the smoky environs of the backseats of cars, and this video is no different. On the surface, this is a perfectly serviceable video—good sound, tons of camera angles, a boatload of cameos (Jean Grae, Young Gunz, Mobb Deep, etc.)—but between the low-tech post-production graphics during the segues and the cheesy VH1-style direction this DVD fails to live up to the Roots standards. In fact, our sources tell us that Okayplayer's first move was to decline to distribute the DVD—that gives you some idea of where this video is at. Shot in New York in 2004 at an invite-only party, *Roots Present* is by no means horrible or amateurish, it just does escape the realm of "for fans only." —Allan Martin Kemler

Image-Entertainment.com

DIG!
FEATURING THE BRIAN
JONESTOWN MASSACRE
AND THE DANDY WARHOLS

Half way through *Dig!* you realize that everyone around Anton Newcombe's Brian Jonestown Massacre has gone on to some level of fame while Newcombe himself can't seem to get his career past the critical acclaim stage. On the face of it, *Dig!* provides ample evidence to support this, but if you look past the film's groovy posturing and druggy élan, at the center of it all is a troubled soul who looks as if he isn't long for this world. Troubled by drug abuse and bad genes (Newcombe's estranged father committed suicide on his birthday), the 37-year-old musician seems truly unable to do anything more than get high and make records. Ostensibly a documentary, director Ondi Timoner's film takes us from one strung-out bummer to another as we watch Newcombe spiral from the heady days of his Stones-Beatles rivalry with the Dandy Warhols to an embarrassing fruit-throwing incident at a club in L.A. So, near the end, when it's pointed out that most bands get heavily involved with drugs after they've had a few hits, it becomes crystal clear that try as Newcombe might to "make it," he's just not capable. Success itself is not Newcombe's *raison d'être*. Whether his lack of success is attributed to drugs, chemical imbalances or foolish pride, Newcombe's recording career has been one long paean to the dark and sexy side of debauchery and indulgence. Sadly, as soon as it's all over, Newcombe will likely chose to succumb to his indulgences and burn out rather than fade away. —Allan Martin Kemler

PalmPictures.com



THE ONE AM RADIO ON THE SHORE OF THE WIDE WORLD

The One AM Radio's critically acclaimed, "A Name Writ In Water," consisted of subtle, beautiful songs that seemed to be crated solely for the accompaniment of introspective star gazing. Without much warning, The One AM Radio has just released *On the Shore of the Wide World*, an EP that features remixed tracks from *A Name Writ in Water*. Jazzy, funk inspired dreamscapes are expertly crafted with the help

of big name DJF's and producers like, John Tejada, Alias, Daedelus Caural and Brian Alfred. Smooth, easy and trancelike, this 7 track recording adds multiple touches of brilliant elegance to that which was amazing in the first place. Slip on your headphones, lay down on some grass and look up to The One AM Radio's dancing stars. —Jay Riggio
Level-Plane.com



STEREOPHONICS LANGUAGE. SEX. VIOLENCE. OTHER?

Did you miss Gavin Rossdale and his cohorts from Bush? Apparently Stereophonics have. With *Language. Sex. Violence. Other?*, the Welsh band has made one of the most boring rock 'n roll album—ever. There's just no bite on these eleven tracks as the Stereophonics seem to follow stage direction on how to make anthemic stadium rock, particularly on songs like "Rewind" and "Dakota (You Make Me Feel Like the One)." *Language. Sex. Violence. Other?* is just simpering rock with sometimes nostalgic, sometimes guttural vocals over shrill guitars that seem to be attempting to build to a rather dramatic less crescendo. —Kim Newman

V2.com

SUBARACHNOID SPACE THE RED VEIL

San Franciscan psyche-metal quartet Subarachnoid Space constructs that missing instrumental bridge between Tool and Pelican, on its latest, *The Red Veil*. Although the band occasionally lapses into an "everybody-improvise-while-I-play-a-bass line" mentality, when the music clicks, it really clicks. Each member, especially the drummer, pushes its instrument's musical boundaries (sometimes balancing skittish rhythms with jagged melodies), but remains tight enough to elude the "prog" label. Despite artsy pretenses like its Daliesque album cover and (moreover) its name, Subarachnoid Space could easily match stereotypically indie metal acts like Dead Meadow and the Fucking Champs for working class appeal. But it's the rollicking wallop that'll impress the heavy-hungry metalloids. —Kory Grow

Strange-Attractors.com

THUNDERBIRDS ARE NOW! JUSTAMUSTACHE

It's so easy to be freaked out by a band that you've never heard before, especially when they sound totally awesome. From one track to the next, I found myself saying, "OK, this is where they're gonna fuck up." But Thunderbirds are Now! don't fuck up. Weird, layered and often uncentered is what these fellas from Detroit are all about. On *Justamustache* this crew of musicians flawlessly lay down some of the most danceable, catchy, original, free-flowing jams that I've heard in a long-ass time. TaN! execute a new wave, Devo-ish sound, but never exhausts its obvious influences. Instead these Great Lake stagers create a fresh energy using quick drums and flowing post-punk vocals with the help of Ryan Allen's mighty throat. Extravagant, maniacal and miraculously smooth, these guys make ingeniously crafted songs that practically suit any mindset or regimented venue. Don't be scared. These guys are good. —Jay Riggio

FrenchKissRecords.com

MARTHA WAINWRIGHT BLOODY MOTHER FUCKING ASSHOLE

Wouldn't it be great if Martha Wainwright, with her perfectly culty bloodline (spawn of Nor'easter folk smartass Loudon Wainwright III and Canadian songbird Kate McGarrigle) had a Britney-scaled hit with her debut five-song EP? It's not likely—look how long it took Emmylou Harris to do the same thing in *Spyboy* mode, without the electric tribal quirks of "It's Over," the visceral impact of the title track and the droning folk heartache of "I Will Internalize." Still, it would be a hoot to see Michael Powell's face (or whichever conservative douche nozzle succeeds the FCC's top gasbag when he resigns) after he saw this title, perhaps poetically named for him, at the top of the *Billboard* chart. Fucking A. Buy two. —Brian Baker

Rounder.com

YUMA NORA RED TRAIN GRAPHING THE SUNSET OF ALL

Experimental glitch-rock duo Yuma Nora could easily match boho darlings Gang Gang Dance or the Black Dice in asymmetry or, going back, tackle the Silver Apples for electronic caterwauls. The two Portlanders that comprise the group have played in Hux, Gang Wizard and Antelope. Mostly, *Red Train Graphing the Sunset of All* is a just a half-hour collage of found sounds, oscillations and musique concrète up until its final cut, "Fall O Never," which introduces a steady (and often symmetrical) drum beat tying the cacophony together. Yuma Nora's adventurousness often pays off. The duo uses a wide enough variety of sounds that *Red Train* rarely sounds haggard, and it's still weird enough to drown out your neighbor's noisy cocktail party with harsh shrieks and juggernaut drums. Yuma Nora is content in its own little world. —Kory Grow

DeathBombArc.com

ZS KARATE BUMP

Zs's sound is an odd mixture of skronky, jazz elements, yet for all the bleating and braying, there really isn't very much variation. Each song is repetitious, but in a very soothing way. Most of the music is carried by the saxophone, whether it be the band's odd, Zorn-like playing or just rhythmic breathing and clacking of the keys. Not surprisingly, Zs is contributing a realization of one of avant-garde composer Earl Browne's scores for a tribute being released on Tzadik Records (Zorn's label). The only problem with this EP is that I was not at all ready when it ended (it clocks in right around 20 minutes). Leave them wanting more, right? —John Vogel

PlanariaInc.com

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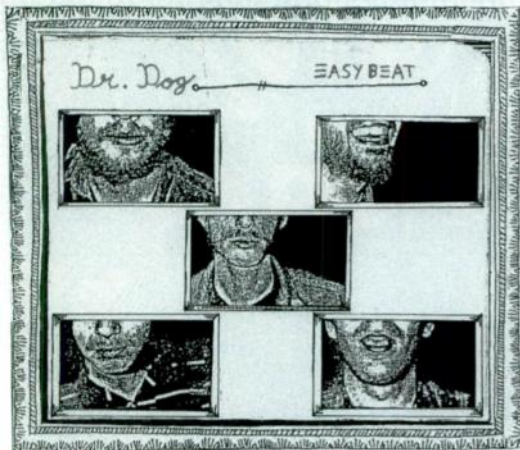
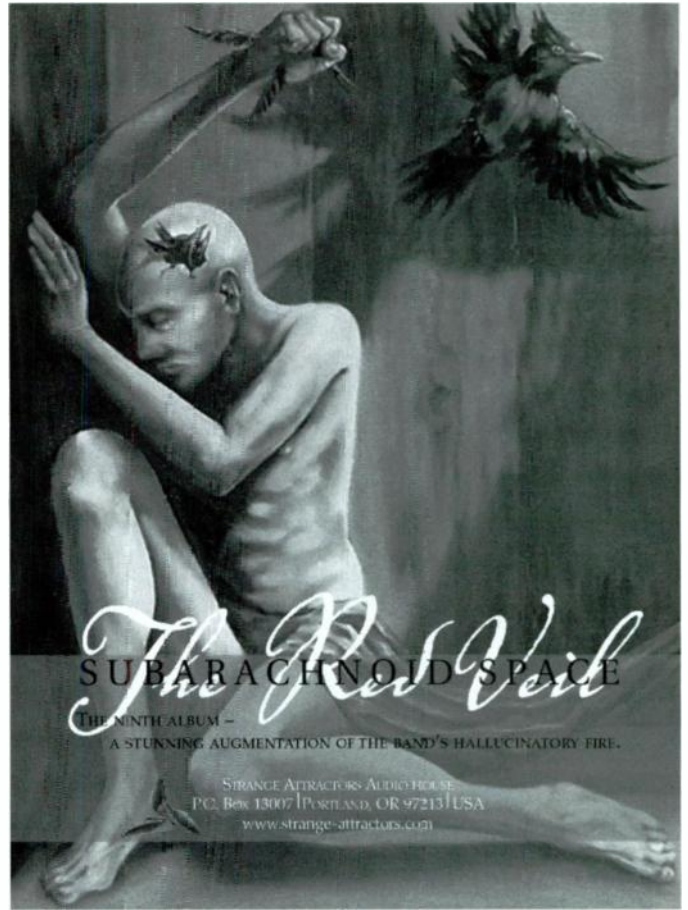
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Dr. Dog. — EASY BEAT.

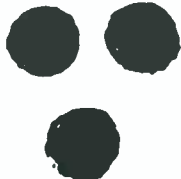
"It's the kind of album that seems sure to attract a rabid cult of indie-rock fans..."
—New York Times

"Not that any great band really comes from anywhere expected or anything, but HOLY FUCK where did these guys come from?"
—The Fader

"There's a little folk, blues, indie rock, soul, bluegrass--and a whole lot of down-home harmonizing. It conjures images of old friends sitting on a porch swapping instruments and just letting the tape recorder run."
—Philadelphia Weekly

"This record goes perfectly with hot boiled crawfish and beer. Yes!"
—Wesley

Dr. Dog's "Easy Beat" is an amalgamation of sounds so enlightening yet so complex that it nearly defies category. With arrangements reminiscent of The Band, three part harmonies that draw on everything from the Beach Boys to the Hollies and a hedonism reserved up until now for albums like Fleetwood Mac's "Rumours", this 21st century band has created what some are calling a classic for the ages.



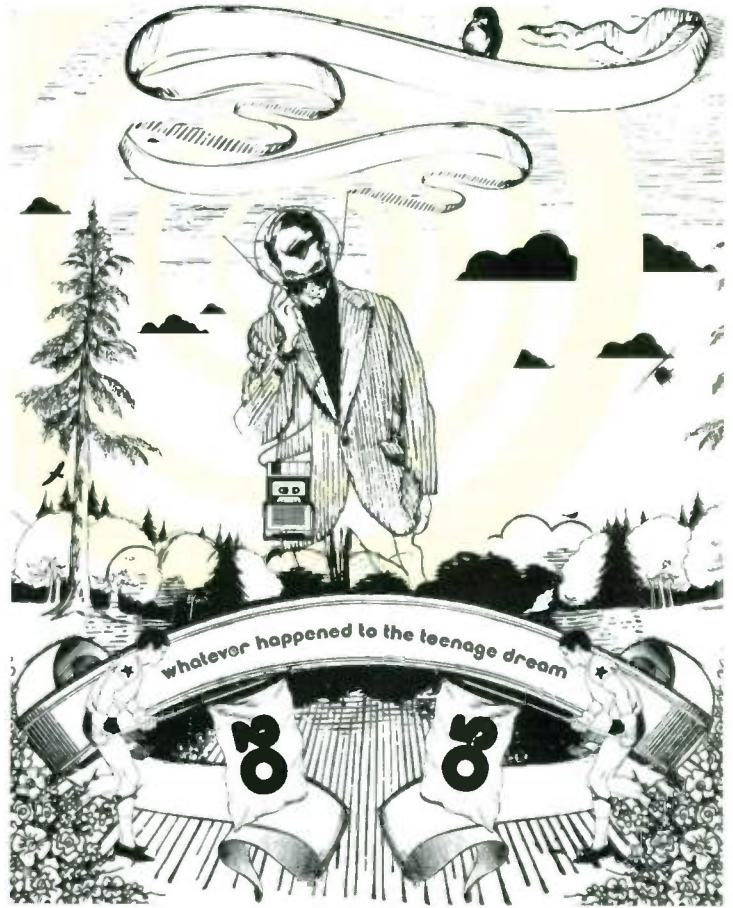
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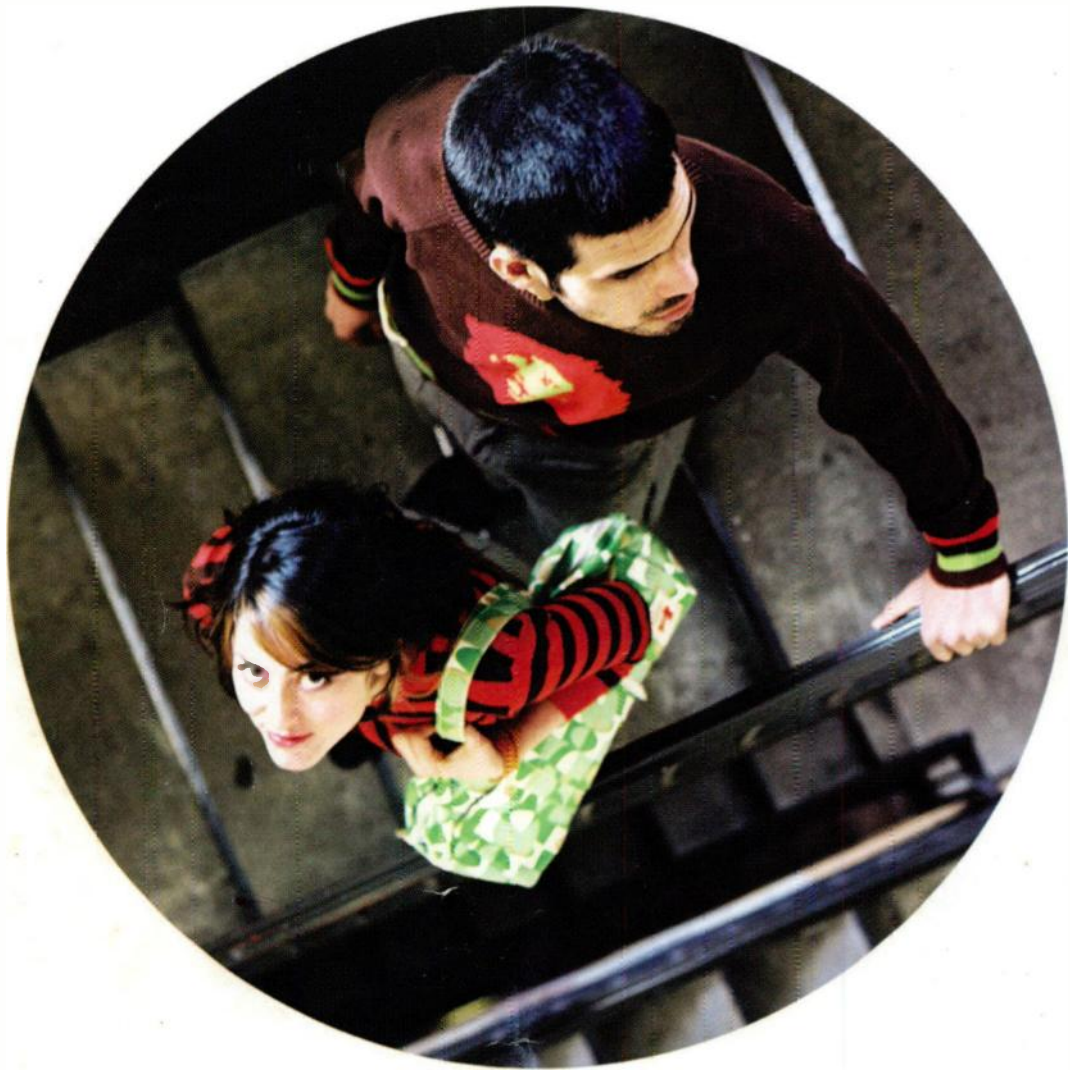
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