

Compact Discs

Disc of the week



THE LAST SHADOW PUPPETS *The Age of the Understatement (Domino/Outside)*

A collaboration between Arctic Monkeys frontman Alex Turner and Miles Kane of the Rascals, this imaginative re-examination of modern-day Britpop has its soul in classic cinema. Final Fantasy's Owen Pallett conducts the 22-piece London Metropolitan Orchestra as if Ennio Morricone and John Barry were hovering over each shoulder. The title track slowly raises the tension like a great Western gun duel, while the bouncy strings on "Black Plant" sound perfect for when 007 is undercover on a remote tropical island. Turner is one of the best visual songwriters today—his narrative-based writing really fits the more grand arrangements found here. **9/10 (Erik Leijon)**



Madonna *Hard Candy (Warner)*

Madonna's a little like Hillary Clinton these days: a hardened pro with a mediocre track record, stubbornly clinging to stardom, with a husband who has so jumped the shark. Madonna is also shaped by stylists and advisors, and flanked by trendy celebs—Justin/Timbaland deliver their same old same old, as do the Neptunes, with a vocal cameo by Kanye West. Even the best bangers here sound at once au courant and out of touch, relying entirely on guys who have spread themselves too thin. To paraphrase *American Psycho*, there is an idea of a Madonna, some kind of abstraction...but she is simply not there. **5/10 (Lorraine Carpenter)**



Portishead *Third (Mercury/Universal)*

Finally, Bristol's enigmatic trip hop trio returns, with Beth Gibbons' spellbinding vocals and Geoff Barrow and Adrian Utley's gloomy pall intact. A rehash would've been inexcusable given the decade that's passed since their last release. Luckily, this record finds Portishead in an experimental mood, playing with pacing and laying down weighty beats, weird synths, sly electric guitars, even a touch of acoustic. *Third* may not be the landmark that their earlier albums are, but the band is commendable for making a comeback that retains the atmospheric frame of old while refreshing the soundscape within. **8/10 (Lorraine Carpenter)**



The Sword *Gods of the Earth (Kemado)*

These Austin-ites blew up with their debut, but this sophomore release actually beats their previous release at every turn. Not reinventing any wheels here, the Sword still worship at the altars of Black Sabbath and Sir Lord Baltimore, but as Ozzy's grey matter turns into guacamole, the Sword could easily be the new heirs to the crown—if High on Fire don't beat them to it first. Songs like "The Frost-Giant's Daughter" and "Fire Lances of the Ancient Hyperzephyrians" are unapologetically pulverizing metal firmly grounded in the roots while continuing to push the envelope. **9/10 (Johnson Cummins)**

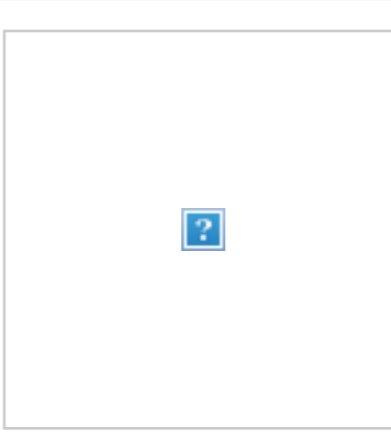
Cavity *Laid Insignificant (Hydra Head/Sonic Unyon)*

While other so-called underground metal labels become more vanilla by the day, Hydra Head remains the true home of heavy. Cavity's pounding hardcore delves further into doomy sludge and lace it with noisy sample elements, but it's singer Rene Barge's teeth-gnashing caterwaul and the guitar's discordance that really makes this shine. Although most songs are peppered with slow doom dirges, when the band speeds things up and show off their crust roots, things really take off. Fans of the last Cursed record should be all over this like white on rice. **8.5/10 (Johnson Cummins)**



Apocalyptica *Worlds Collide (20-20/Sony BMG)*

Funny that a cover song's the oddity on the latest from Finland's Apocalyptica, who began as a Metallica cover act, albeit unique in being a cello quartet. They've gradually moved to original music, replacing one cello with drums on the way. Their last, self-titled release from 2005 saw them hit new heights with their towering, sorrowful chamber-metal instrumentals, but sadly that spark of inspiration sputters here—"Last Love," with their buddy Dave Lombardo, gets by on muscle and menace alone. Moreover, numerous guest vocalists, like Slipknot's Corey Taylor on the gooney, U2-ish dud "I'm Not Jesus," offer little return on the investment. The exception is that cover, "Heroes" (or rather Bowie's German variant "Helden"), graced by the batcave growl of Rammstein's Till Lindemann. **6/10 (Rupert Bottenberg)**
With DJ Ghostsnake at Metropolis tonight, Thurs., May 1, 8 p.m., \$23, all ages



Jamie Lidell *Jim (Warp/Fusion III)*

Many have speculated on what this crazy, golden-voiced white boy would do next, having fulfilled some sweet soul aspirations on his last album, *Multiply*. Like the single "Little Bit of Feel Good" signals, this record is brimming with the most genuine warmth, energy and real soul. From delicate observations like the beautiful "Rope of Sand" to the boogie-bounce perfection of "Figured Me Out," Jamie injects himself into the music, maintaining equal levels of quality and emotion in each and every song. Ballads like "All I Wanna Do" and "Out of My System" find Jamie time-travelling with Sam Cooke and Wilson Pickett, providing another welcome look back to song styles and production of days gone by. It all just feels right though, arriving just in time for spring. **8.5/10 (Scott C)**



Opopo *self-titled EP (Urbnet)*

Sporting hyperactive beats and an abrasive lead singer who shouts inane lyrics at a louder volume than the music, this Toronto-based dance trio harken to the darkest days of '90s techno, when only a bassline and a repetitive vocal sample were needed to get a party started. There are plenty of neat laser-beam sound effects masquerading as hooks, but the EP is all jerky transitions, like a series of big beats with call-and-answer catchphrases coming down a conveyor belt. It's dance music with no build-up, only rapid fire noises befitting a Mortal Kombat movie montage. **4/10 (Erik Leijon)**



The Roots *Rising Down (Def Jam/Universal)*

You never heard the Roots sound like this. For their second effort on Def Jam, and their 10th album to date, listeners are exposed to the dark underbelly of this stalwart band of industry veterans. With Black Thought's vexed, disgruntled, unapologetic lyrics, the diminished role of the Fender Rhodes keyboard, and the debut of squelchy synth lines on several songs, the mood isn't entirely uplifting, but the message is felt. From the quarrelsome conference call from 1994 that opens the record, to the ruggid vibe of tracks like "75 Bars," "Lost Desire" and "Singing Man," the Roots may have delivered a compelling downer, save for a few tracks, but they definitely continue to innovate and play with the genre, using it to its full musical, expressive potential. Guests include Talib Kweli, Peedi Crakk, Common and Mos Def. **8/10 (Scott C)**

LAL *Deportation (Public Transit)*

At the heart of the haunting vocals of LAL's Rosina Kazi, you can find the voices of many, speaking the hardened truths of their experience as refugees and migrants trying to make their way in a less than helpful Canadian society. LAL offers an emotive and delicate musical plate, thanks to electronic producer/composer Nick Murray, bassist Ian DeSouza and percussionist Rakesh Tewari, beautifully combining future sounds with worldly, acoustic sentiment. Guests include spoken word artists Kamau and Leah, but it's the airy voice of Rosina that transports you, and allows you to consider the difficulties that most of us will never have to deal with. Check "February" for a tight, broken-beat shuffle tucked away at the end of the LP. **8.5/10 (Scott C)**
launch/Abdelkader Belanoui benefit with Kader B.B.B. & 23, Sam Shalabi at St. Gabriel's Church (2157 Centre, Pointe St-Charles), Sat., May 3, 7:30 p.m., \$5 donation, all ages



Algebra *Purpose (Kedar/Fontana)*

After stints singing background for neo-soul frontrunners like India.Arie and Musiq, Atlanta-based vocalist Algebra Blessett debuts her own brand of organic soul with this impressive set of love-worn, battle-ready contemplations. Like the artists she's sung for, Blessett emphasizes lyrical substance grounded by a musical base that supports but doesn't overwhelm her vocally. For instance, the starry-eyed "U Do It for Me" floats along an uncomplicated piano riff, while the all-too-real drama of "(Holla Back) Simple Complication" rolls a basic guitar lick alongside Blessett's robust vocals. Throughout, she maintains her composure, doling out tales of joy and pain in equal measure. Whichever way you count it, this Algebra more than adds up. **9/10 (Gerard Dee)**

Nancy Harrow *The Adventures of Maya the Bee (Artists House)* **Nancy Harrow** *The Cat Who Went to Heaven (Artists House)*

Ms. Harrow has been a favourite since the 1960 album she did for Candid. These two, done for John Snyder's label, will appeal to children and adults alike. The first was arranged by Roland Hanna and this tale of a bee is sung by Nancy, Daryl Sherman and Grady Tate backed by Hanna, Bill Easley, Paul West and Tate. The second "story in jazz" has the same singers, and musicians like Kenny Barron, Clark Terry, Frank Wess and George Mraz (and is currently a puppet show in New York City). "Maya" is narrated by Tate, "Cat" by Will Pomerantz—both are delightful stories. **Both 9.5/10 (Len Dobbin)**

Mini CD Reviews

The Stein Brothers Quintet Quixotic (Jazzed Media) The brothers Asher on alto and Alex on tenor are beboppers through and through, and will attract to lovers of that genre. **9 (LD)**

Clara Lofaro Perfekt World (ComeTrue) Versatile soul singer and genre-defying songwriter struts a variety of stuff here, an impressive achievement for this Toronto/Brooklyn dame. **7.5 (LC)**

Heloise & the Savoir Faire Trash, Rats and Microphones (Yep Roc) NYC electro-rockers (feat. Debbie Harry) evoke bubblegum, pop (the drink), coke (not the drink) and other teeth-destroying treats. Their candy is harder than Madonna's. **7.5 (LC)**

M83 Saturdays = Youth (Mute) The French unit scale back the sweeping scope of their synth-gazer goodness on this tribute to teens, but the dreamy essence is intact. **7.5 (RB)**

A Thousand Knives of Fire The Last Train to Scornsvile (Small Stone/PHD) Why is it that the sludgiest rawk-lingers are always goombahs from Jersey? **7 (JC)**

Dead and Divine The Fanciful (Verona) Although promising transcendence through the afterlife, this earthbound Ontario-based scream-metal group keep their feet firmly planted. **6 (EL)**

Young Knives Superabundance (Transgressive/Warner) The chunk-a-punchy pub rock these tweed 'n' argyle-clad weiners kick out is likely the first item of consequence ever from Ashby-de-la-Zouch, England. **6 (RB)**

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