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21 June 2004



Vetiver, *Vetiver* (DiCristina)

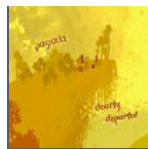
With a cast of musicians that include appearances by Colm O'Ciosoig, Hope Sandoval, Joanna Newsom, and Devendra Banhart as a full member, expectations were understandably high for the debut album by singer-songwriter Andy Cabic's Vetiver. Although the album isn't able to reach the stirring highs of other releases by these accompanying artists, Cabic uses his subtle charms to compile 11 honorable pastoral folk recordings. The tracks mesh together to create a sketch of a highly capable young artist with a keen sense of melody and dynamics. Standouts include a hillbilly cafi re-imagining of Van Morrison's classic "Crazy Love" packaged under the title "Amour Fou", as well as the upbeat jangle-ode "Arboretum". This collection certainly wouldn't have received the same fan and critical attention without the established names, but it may have been a wiser move to allow Cabic's tender songs to stand on their own merits, away from this type of scrutiny and the weight on unrealistic expectations.

— Jason Korenkiewicz

The Locust, *The Locust* (Gold Standard Laboratories)

When you listen to The Locust today, it's tempting to lazily categorize them among other great experimental hardcore bands like Daughters and Ex Models, but upon closer listen, they're something entirely different. The band's self-titled debut seven inch single, originally released in 1997, has become an underground success story, selling 15,000 vinyl copies to date, and thanks to Gold Standard Laboratories, it's now available on CD for the first time, remastered, and complete with bonus tracks. Comprised of 11 insane songs, with a running time of a mere seven and a half minutes, The Locust fuse the adventurous synth sounds of Devo and the progressive melodies of Frank Zappa with extreme grindcore, making for a listening experience you will never forget. Keyboards stab you like rusty daggers, guitar, bass, and frenetically beaten drums pummel you relentlessly, and barely understandable lyrics are shrieked; it's a kind of controlled chaos that is masterfully executed, and is absolutely enthralling to listen to. Packaged as a snazzy little three inch CD, this is a minor masterpiece that has to be heard to be believed.

— Adrien Bégard



Pagoda, *Dearly Departed* (Lazyline Media)

Somebody oughta tell Pagoda frontman Ben Licciardi that high-pitched whispering every track on an album gets tiresome for a listener around, oh say, track four. My notes taken while listening to their debut, *Dearly Departed*, bear this out. Opener "Cajun Prairie" is a beautifully textured instrumental that serves as the album's highlight, so starting with track two, "Superbreakout": "dreamy, high voice -- can't understand lyrics"; track three, "Ham on White": "still dreamy vocals"; track four, "Piano Song": "vocals too precious". And this thread runs all the way through the album, ending with "It Must Have Been Days"'s, "more of the same". It's a shame Licciardi's vocals are such a distraction, because the tunes behind him boast a quiet, shaggy-haired, Beachwood Sparks-y desert vibe. To wit, "Ham on White"'s shuffling steel guitar and "Down to the Road"'s keyboard flourishes; it's all well-crafted stuff drowned under syrupy-sweet vocals. Think of it this way: If golf is a good walk ruined, then *Dearly Departed* is a good batch of tunes ruined.

— Stephen Haag



Pas/Cal, *Oh Honey, We're Ridiculous* (Le Grand Magistry)

Standing in the long shadow cast by Scottish orchestral popsters Belle & Sebastian, Detroit's Pas/Cal offer up a strikingly similar dose of grandiose, geeky, and literate pop. The second in a trilogy of EPs, *Oh Honey, We're Ridiculous* is a five-song romp that equally serves up Nick Drake melancholia, Beach Boys' harmonies, and enough hooks to fill a tackle box. The branchchild of songwriter and producer Casimer Pascal, his group's second EP is on par with the freewheeling, delirious pop that marks Belle & Sebastian's earliest (and best)

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
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
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work. At an all too short five songs, Pas/Cal will definitely leave listeners wanting more. The first and best track, "What Happened to the Sands", pulls the listener in with swirling guitars and soaring vocals that will have you singing along in no time. And though the EP come dangerously close to being too precious for its own good (particularly on the fey "The Handbag Memoirs"), album closer "What Do American Girls Have on Jennifer JoJo" saves the day with its doo-wop flavored operatics. Innocent and winsome, yet deliciously intelligent, *Oh Honey, We're Ridiculous* is the first step in establishing Pas/Cal as the worthy successors to Belle & Sebastian's indie pop crown.
— Kevin Jagernauth



Seekonk, *For Barbara Lee* (Kimchee)

Everyone needs a little space pop/rock in their lives. No? You don't? All right, fair enough. But everyone should sample a little space pop/rock just to see if those mellow guitars, sluggish and plodding drumbeats, crazy synth sounds, and wispy vocals are for them. Seekonk, of Portland, Maine has just released *For Barbara Lee*, the band's full-length debut on Kimchee Records. This is spaced out, stretched out, strung out, ambient rock at its most ... spacey. The band came together in 2002 as a result of two broken-hearted friends finding solace in their music. They soon added singer/painter/sculptor Shana Barry to the mix, as well as a pianist and percussionist. With a full roster, the band recorded *For Barbara Lee* for a Fall 2003 release. They plan to record the follow-up soon. As to whether or not this record is worth listening to, and to answer the question of whether anyone needs space pop/rock in their lives, one must ask, can anyone really grasp this music? Or is it so loosely held together, quiet, and rambling that the mind wanders after a few chords? Well, the answer's "no" to the first three questions, and "yes" to the last one. The rhythms are too hypnotic and plodding. Nodding off to sleep is the best course of action when listening to *For Barbara Lee*. The last track picks up slightly, with a memorable melody and guitar chords that progress rather than wander. However, by the time the record has picked up, it's over.
— Christine Klunk



Joe Rathbone, *I Can Hear The Windows Of Your Heart Breaking* (Zakz)

Hailing from Atlanta, Joe Rathbone co-produced this sophomore album in Nashville with David Henry (who plays cello, mandolin and bass with the eloquent simplicity he leant to the Indigo Girls and the Cowboy Junkies). A multi-instrumentalist himself, Rathbone takes his assured keyboard and guitar playing and constructs fittingly Americana-evoking scenes to couch his songs, sung with straight-forward confidence in a voice of unalloyed honesty that frequently breaks into a pleasingly smooth falsetto. As is to be expected, names like Elvis Costello and Bruce Springsteen are held up as reference points, but Rathbone's musical persona has no traces of Costello's rage or bitter irony, nor does he unleash Springsteen's blood-and-thunder emotional grandeur. Everything remains mature and pensively wistful, Rathbone's poetic lyrics and melancholy musicality keeping things affecting. A little less self-assuredness might have resulted in the playful greatness or spontaneous energy of bands like The Thorns, which elude him - but for the most part, Rathbone knows exactly what he's doing; creating a collection of fine and humble songs for the country-tinged rock faithful.
— Stefan Braidwood



Jim Guthrie, *Now, More Than Ever* (Three Gut)

On Jim Guthrie's third album (and first released in the U.S.), *Now, More Than Ever*, he begins with a traditional singer-songwriter approach. Joined by musicians from Hidden Cameras and the Constantines, Guthrie bases his music on accessible pop lines, but expands his sound by adding piano, banjo, ukele, and georgous strings, along with some odd noises on the instrumental title track. The orchestration and mixing work beautifully, filling out Guthrie's music without ever sounding muddled or distracting from his vocals. That's important -- the lyrics on this CD are smart without (for the most part) being too clever. He asks questions, and he accepts that answers won't always satisfy. With *Now, More Than Ever*, Guthrie takes a strong first step into the international market, and it looks like he's got the pop skills to stick around.
— Justin Cober-Lake



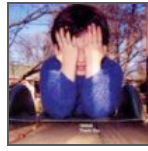
Clemente, *Teeth Measure the Need* (Moodswing)

Clemente describe themselves as indie-rock. But these days, who the hell doesn't. What they are more like is a polished Wilco, especially on the pretty Tweedy-tinted "Now You'd Rather" that has pedal steel and an Americana foundation. Or think of R.E.M. if they took their Southern roots to the extreme, although the melody is near perfect. "Let Go" is another little gem that rarely veers from Clemente's strengths. It's the sort of album you think you've heard before but still can't help but replay one more time. They finally nail it on the beautiful "Bring Your Sore Throat" which sounds like it's off of *Green* or *Document*. If they are to be knocked, it might be the fact that they run the blueprint into the ground, although a more melodic and grandiose "Raising" is a welcomed change. The morose and minimal "Tour Nose Bleeds" with its haunting violins and cellos carries a similar waltz-like effect. The consistency of the record is quite pleasing, especially on the romantic "Tour Heart, The Discipline" which could be mistaken for a Tracy Chapman tune. Lead singer Jeffrey Siler never misses a step throughout as the harmonies have great presence. Only on "Familiar" do they rock out more, and the payoff is fantastic. Ditto for the poppy "Gradually"

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although "Words of a Priest" sags just a touch. Hard to find, but easy to fall in love with.

— Jason MacNeil



Various Artists, TRR50: Thank You (Temporary Residence)

There's something beautifully satisfying about this record. As a label comp, it does a perfect job of encapsulating the best elements of Temporary Residence's eight year history. I will admit to having been mostly unfamiliar with the majority of these artists, but based on the evidence herein there's not a one of them who I wouldn't be interesting in hearing more from. Categories are difficult and feisty creatures, notoriously unreliable and often unnecessary. If there's a unifying theme here it would have to be *quiet*: the kind of conscientious, slow-build intensity that careless listeners often mistake for sloth. Regardless of whether you want to call it post rock or instrumental shoegazer or epic noise pop, it sounds damn good. Special props go out to Fridge's album-opening "Five Combs" . . . but there's no surprise, as Fridge is a side project of Fourtet's Kieran Hebden. Not so quiet but still spectacular is Rumah Sakit's live track, "I Can't See Anything With My Eyes Closed", which reminds me of nothing so much as Soundgarden covering Rush's *2112*. But the album's capstone is the closing track, Sonna's "The Closer", which seems fated to be the closing track on countless college mix-tapes. Good stuff.

— Tim O'Neil



Scarth Locke, Thunkadelicate (CreatioNation)

"I was living in India when I decided that I must rock". A laudable statement well put. Scarth Locke is, on the evidence of his debut, one of those annoying people with the gall to be not only smart, pithy and good-looking, but also exceedingly talented, self-deprecating and friendly. The quirky cover of *Thunkadelicate* even manages to pull off a visual pun on his colourful, charming navel-gazing being the star of the show. It makes you want to spit. Even the title of this self-produced song collection, on which he played virtually everything himself, is descriptive enough of the contents to avoid being annoying. On offer is a grab-bag of folk, funk, R&B, rock and even a little waltz, mostly jumbled together to form catchy little nuggets of soul-pop that never feel contrived. There's "Bucking Bronco", a kid's song about adult horseplay; the relaxed optimism of the sax-infused "Small Step"; the raucous New Orleans garage funk bar-room singalong of "The Curse" and a "Complicated" that is as teasing, thought-provoking and well written as Avril Lavigne's is now annoyingly ubiquitous. Oh, and his singing is delightful too, whilst his voice matches his songs to a T, whether raw, smooth, plaintive or cheery. If you need a bit of tuneful, ragamuffin charm to light up your day, then pick up this CD and pop it on whenever you can to enjoy a little ramshackle grace. Alternately, if you have an evening free and live in or around Portland, make sure you check him out live for the charismatic riot that this album promises. Feel free to give him a friendly punch from me whilst you're there.

— Stefan Braidwood

Rural Electric, Rural Electric (Losers/Weepers)

Rural Electric hails from Waldo, Maine. Rural? Check. The self-described "fuzz folk combo" of Andy Vietze and Alan Gibson often plug in their guitars. Electric? Check. As obvious as their name suggests? No. This disc for the Losers/Weepers label, originally released in 2002, surprises with each listen. Their chosen name may be simple, but it's as apt and evocative as the songs it represents. Obvious forebears are early- to mid-period R.E.M. and songsmiths like Matthew Sweet and even Vic Chesnutt. "Company Town" and "Nicest House on the Block (Is the Funeral Home)" uncannily recall Michael Stipe's reedy semi-twang and Pete Buck's chiming Rickenbacker. "The Grange" opens with an auctioneer's ramble and leads to a beautifully strange banjo figure. "Blue Jacket" is built on a guitar line that alternates between jangly strummer and swirling melodic lines. The home-recorded production mostly suits the songs well, showcasing the writing in interesting ways without being too showy. However, "Mr. Pumpkinhead" falters a bit when a lovely fingerpicking pattern is almost undone by unnecessary vocal processing. But occasional missteps aside, I sleep well at night knowing that Rural Electric is providing the blueberry state with the kinds of sounds normally reserved for bigger scenes in bigger burgs.

— Michael Metivier

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