

FLEMISH EYE RECORDS 2010s RETROSPECTIVE

Ghostkeeper – s/t

The decade kicked off with the eponymous sophomore release from Ghostkeeper, appearing here in one of their classic early lineups, a stellar quartet with multi-instrumentalist Scott Munro (later of Preoccupations) and producer/engineer Jay Crocker (JOYFULTALK). This album finds Shane Ghostkeeper and Sarah Houle's deeply personal songwriting style continuing to evolve, power-assisted by their new lineup and brilliantly captured by Crocker's all-analog production style.

Women – Public Strain

The second and final entry into the pantheon by one of Calgary's most beloved and influential bands. Echoes of Women's trademark guitar-focused songwriting style – equal parts Velvet Underground, Deerhoof, and Television – can be heard in the legions of rock band across Canada (and indeed beyond) clearly wearing the Calgary quartet's influence on their sleeves. Members of this band would go on to further successes in post-punk quartet Preoccupations and Pat Flegel's noise-cabaret project Cindy Lee.

Braids – Native Speaker

Following a move to Montreal from their hometown of Calgary, where they were already sweethearts of the local scene, this is the album that delivered on all that early promise, and put Braids on the map. An astonishingly accomplished debut from a young band, *Native Speaker* laid out some of the band's core interests, including a high degree of attention to sonic detail and a robust rhythmic curiosity, but as their discography will reveal, also set the course for a great deal of growth, change, an ever-evolving sonic identity.

Jennifer Castle – Castlemusic

Further branching out from the label's core Calgary constituents, *Castlemusic* is a drop-dead gorgeous collection of recordings from one of Canada's truest writer-and-deliverer of songs. This album featured the fullest instrumentation to date on a Jennifer Castle album, and the extra layers beautifully lifted her timeless and otherworldly music to new heights. Castle has released more wonderful music on the Idee Fixe label, and continues to captivate whomever has the good fortune of encountering her music.

Chad VanGalen – Diaper Island

At this point, Chad VanGalen had firmly established himself in the hearts and record collections of music fans across the globe through his first three albums, and none more so than his third, the perennial favourite *Soft Airplane*. This time, VanGalen sharpened his vision, and pointed it at the guitar, which plays a central role in his fourth full-length LP. His love of classic contemporary guitar worship like Sonic Youth's *Washing Machine* came to the fore, and the results include 'Peace On The Rise' and 'Sara', some of his best tunes to date.

Braids – In Kind//Amends

Released in advance of their sophomore full-length album, this generous 25-minute 12" EP presented a pair of tracks from the upcoming album alongside two b-sides. The stunning-yet-ominous cover art on this EP and the upcoming *Flourish//Perish* made them an excellent companion set, and the music within reveals the band's burgeoning interest in dance and electronic music.

Braids – Flourish//Perish

The band's follow-up to the critically-acclaimed and Polaris Prize-shortlisted *Native Speaker*, and their first as a trio. As singer Raphaëlle Standell-Preston's increasingly impressive voice comes to the fore, the band develops not only a deeper fascination with electronic sounds and textures but also a more rigorous

songwriting process, which was in motion throughout the course of a year. This results in a newfound level of emotional depth and clarity for the band, and sets them on the course of for their next few releases from this decade.

Chad VanGaalén – Shrink Dust

VanGaalén's fifth full-length album pulled back the curtains on a few corners of his sonic universe that had been hinted at throughout his catalogue, but never investigated so openly as on *Shrink Dust*. There was always a certain "twang" hidden within his songwriting style, but he really grabbed ahold of it here. Likewise with VanGaalén's penchant for far-out sounds: he lets rip some of his most psychedelic sprays of texture and sound on this album, and we're all the better for it.

Preoccupations – Viet Cong

The debut album from a quartet who have spent the last half-decade becoming one of the premier post-punk units working today. The rhythm section of highly influential quartet Women (Matthew Flegel and Michael Wallace), rounded out by Scott Munro and Daniel Christiansen – two of spikiest guitarists around – created a synth & guitar-heavy blend of resolutely dark, yet emotionally resonant pop music: an intricate, truly dour songwriting style that also happens to be extremely catchy.

Braids – Deep In The Iris

Braids' third full-length album won them a Juno Award, and presented another collection of intricate, crystalline songs, but also their first major leap forward as a band. The music itself reconciled the previous two albums' inclinations towards either electronic or more organic textures, and Austin Tufts & Taylor Smith provide perfect foils for Raphaëlle Standell-Preston's vocals, which were becoming increasingly important to the band's sound. Her lyrics began to explore contemporary issues surrounding sexuality and femininity, and she used this platform to speak out about various issues during this period.

Braids – Companion

A mini follow-up to the band's third, Juno Award-winning album presented four tracks created during the sessions for *Deep In The Iris*. The music found here draws on that album's sonic palette, but also presents a coherent statement unto itself. Once again, the trio's highly refined attention to sonic detail makes the EP an absolute pleasure to listen to, and the evolution of their own group sound is becoming more potent with each release.

(Chris Dadge, 2019)