

Seven Reviews By Chris Dadge

The Fresh & Onlys

Play It Strange

In The Red

New full-length album from this San Francisco quartet. They've kept up a steady stream of top-notch albums, EPs, and singles in the last couple years, but this release marks their first foray into a 'real' recording studio. The studio in question belongs to one Tim Green, of the Fucking Champs. The enhanced fidelity does little to change the band's lean, economical songwriting, instead allowing for slightly more ornate instrumentation (synth strings, bongos, etc) and a new level of intricacy in the guitar parts ('Waterfall' features some particularly dazzling lines). Tim Cohen's voice veers closer than ever to Magnetic Fields territory, but that's a not a bad thing. Another solid entry.

Rangers

Suburban Tours

Olde English Spelling Bee

This one's a few releases back on the OESB schedule, but it's still worthy of mention. Of all the music coming out lately that gets tagged as "hypnagogic pop", this is the album that sounds most like the *Beverly Hills Cop* soundtrack, the sugary, synth-laden reference point that is so often used. But, as with most of these acts, the similarities are filtered through a haze of cheap instruments (keyboard presets abound), dodgy playing, and modest recording equipment. The occasional vocal is smeared with wipe-out FX, and the mixes are bizarre and cloudy. It's a perverse, disorienting listen, but the hooks are there, which makes it more than just a soulless exercise in referencing. Great cover art, too.

Julian Lynch

Mare

Olde English Spelling Bee

The Brooklyn-based label responsible for this album and the last have been dropping batch after batch of unusually catchy underground music. *Mare*, the third official full-length from Julian Lynch (also of Predator Vision, Ducktails live incarnations, and Alex Bleeker & The Freaks), picks up where its predecessors (*Orange You Glad* and *Born 2 Run*) left off, although it seems like a tighter, more carefully crafted set of tunes. That isn't to say the off-handed charm and inspired, whimsical instrumentation of those first two weren't winning qualities, but the sharpened arrangements and more deliberate-sounding playing allows space for horns, more developed vocal parts, and trickier compositions. If you don't know this guys' stuff, get to it right away.

Todd, Solomon, Russell, Coombes, Beresford

Teatime

Emanem

A major reissue of classic second-generation British free improv. Originally released on Derek Bailey's Incus Records in 1975, this album documents the activities of the five players, breaking down into various configurations, and in the process inspiring Bailey to start his ad-hoc annual, Company Weeks. Nigel

Coombes, a figure who's left the scene since this era, is in fine form, destroying the violin, and it's a treat to hear John Russell, in full-on post-Bailey mode, playing electric guitar, as opposed to his signature archtop acoustic. Drummer Dave Solomon is another no-show these days, and his fine, unbridled Terry Day-ish playing makes one wonder why. Steve Beresford is one of the true giants of this scene and the surreal, post-modern approach to free improvising. A great album, an excellent starting point for the curious, and a deal with bonus tracks and extensive liner notes.

Tyvek

Nothing Fits

In The Red

In The Red nabs another excellent, highly prolific band for their new release schedule. Detroit's Tyvek (who graced Calgary stages on numerous occasions this past Sled Island) deliver their second full-length album, following their previous self-titled Siltbreeze offering, and a million tour CDRs, tapes, a one-sided LP (check *Blunt Instrumental* on Night People), and some 7"s. The songs here are straight up, almost classic punk rock, utilizing Kevin Boyer's rhythmic, chant-y approach to the vocals. The guitar playing is somewhat less ambitious than on previous outings, but they sound more fantastic than ever, lots of old amps getting put to the test, though the interaction between the two is much blunt-er. This album is maybe not as staggering as their self-titled LP, lacking its primitive sophistication and wider scope, but it very enjoyably direct take on the band's vision. Keep 'em coming.

The Woolen Men

Pavillion + Sunday

Eggy Records

Portland, Oregon's The Woolen Men features their label-man (this time, anyway), Raf Spielman, in a trio consisting of guitar, bass, drums, and vocal, straight up. Very nice live band feel on this first tape, *Pavillion*, the sound of a tight band playing their tunes for a four-track machine. Whiffs of Dinosaur JR (lots of open chord-age, and a finely-honed ear for a wistful melody) and the Wedding Present (the vocalist has a unique, Gedge-like slant to the voice, also recalling Alastair Galbraith at times) float about the proceedings, but it seems the band has absorbed these bands in the most essential way; no pastiche here, just good tunes played with little fuss.

Sunday, the more recent of the two tapes, sees the bass player stepping out a bit, adding some nervy momentum to the mix; more overtly melodic, counterpoint-style parts, while the guitar playing is still largely based around chord-y riffs alternating with the odd scrappy lead. A more interesting drum sound and further developed harmonies in the vocal department help the band deliver on the promise of the first tape. Refreshingly unaffected, melodic power pop. Both tapes are still available from the Eggy Label & Distribution site.

Links:

www.intheredrecords.com

eggyrecords.blogspot.com

www.emanemdisc.com

oesbee-shoppe.blogspot.com

(written by Chris Dadge in 2010 for a zine)