



High-Flying
Hip-Hop
w/ Aer

In The Five:
Death Grips

Shake It to
the Band
from
Alabama

7 Festival
Essentials

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Letter from the Editor

People always ask me how I became editor-in-chief of 20 Watts. My initial response is usually something about being in the right place at the right time, and about grabbing life by the balls when you want something. I was sitting across from Harriet Brown in her office, asking her about extracurricular opportunities related to music. "Well there was this," she said, and tossed me the last printed issue of 20 Watts. She probably didn't realize at the time that I was going to take that issue, pick apart the masthead until I found an old staffer on campus, and work to bring back a piece of SU's history that exemplifies its cultural happenings.

There's no manual on how to revive a magazine. There are no rules on how to manage ten of your peers. There's certainly no quota on how much work it takes to do something like this. It all started happening one day, and I've been rolling with the punches ever since. Sure, my grades suck this semester and my social life is as bright as the computer screen I sit in front of for hours on end, but my dedication to this magazine is something I'm willing to make sacrifices for.

I'm willing to dedicate my life to music journalism. It would be uber-corny to go into why reporting on the arts is important, but the music scene in Syracuse is not dead. As a matter of fact, it's kicking ass and taking names right now, and it's something we're all a part of.

The embedded memories inside the songs that bring you back to your childhood, or to your freshman year of college, or to your graduation, make up whom you are. The Syracuse music scene makes up who we are as a college, and says something about the city we live in. Like our feature story on Syracuse rappers overcoming music piracy (pg. 22), 20 Watts bridges the gap between the musical community and the cluster of buildings we call campus, and the people who inhabit them. 20 Watts is back, and it's here to stay. 🎧

A.L.



Left: Carter Schultz
Right: Dave von Meering

Home Base

By B. Hilton Hale
Photos by Altan James

The boys of Aer discuss their new album, mitten shopping, and, uh, something about Tyler, The Creator?

Aer (pronounced “air” or “heir,” *not* A.E.R.) warmed up an otherwise freezing crowd with their high energy at SU’s Mayfest on Walnut. Afterwards, Aer’s David von Meering and Carter Schultz made their way through the high fives and dapping up handshakes of manager Max Gredinger’s fraternity brothers at Alpha Epsilon Pi. The guys crashed on the mattress and motley collection of furniture in Max’s room, where I was able to join them and discuss their rising fame over the past year.

20 Watts: When you scheduled this show at Mayfest, did you have any idea you would have to wear gloves and mittens?

Dave von Meering: No, because we heard it was “Mayfest.”

- Q** **20W:** Carter, where did you get those stylish mittens you were showing off to the crowd?
- A** **Carter Schultz:** I got them from Martin and Osa.
D: Those are limited-edition.
C: Only two were made. Michael Jordan has one pair and I have the other. Don’t fuck with me and my mittens. (*Laughs.*)
- Q** **20W:** You played at SU this time last year, as well, for AEPi’s Chillin’ in the Park Philanthropy, and you played a show at the Westcott last winter. I figured you’d be tired of the cold by now. What keeps you coming back?
- A** **D:** It’s more fun every time because more people know our shit. We have our homeboy Max who’s our manager and he spreads the word. It’s like a home base.
C: It’s like a second home, or a home away from home.
- Q** **20W:** You filmed the music video for “The Reach” here a few months ago. Why isn’t the video available online?
- A** **D:** We just kind of felt like, as artists, we didn’t know what we wanted to go for visually. Looking back on it we say we don’t really want that to be what people come across. Maybe later we’ll put it out there in public again to see the progression...We’re kind of the underdogs so we want to keep that first impression.
- Q** **20W:** Talking about first impressions, your EP *What You Need* rose to the #1 album on the iTunes hip-hop charts on its release day. One word to describe your immediate reaction to that news:
- A** **D:** What?
C: Peanut-Butter-Jelly-Time.
B: All one word, right?
C: No spaces, with hyphens because I just went nuts. It was Peanut-Butter-Jelly-Time when I saw that shit.
- Q** **20W:** So let’s say after you release your upcoming album, *The Brightside*, you come back to Syracuse to play another show. What’s it going to be like?
- A** **C:** It’s going to be beautiful fucking weather out, I can tell you that much. It’s going to be sunny, 72 degrees, shorts, tank tops, girls in sundresses. The album will be out. New material, totally revamped live set, get ready!
D: Aer on another level. We’re just trying to build on top of what we’ve done.

Q

20W: You guys are going on tour this summer to promote *The Brightside*, and on that tour you'll be playing at Bamboozle, your first festival appearance. What are you expecting?

A D: (*Shakes head.*) I don't know, dude.

C: A shitload of people trying to get down. And ready to do whatever, and we're just going to be there, give it to them hard, and go swimming in the ocean after!

Q

20W: You've talked about venues, college campuses, festivals; now let's get hypothetical. Say the Dropkick Murphys bail on a Boston sporting event. So they call up you guys, their Wayland, Mass. boys. What team is it, what game is it, and how's it go?

A C: Celtics, Playoffs, Game 7, Halftime: Bring the morale back up when the Celtics are down a little bit. Gotta get that fucking crowd morale going, getting fucking wild...(*Claps.*) And then our team wins. We bring it home.

Q

20W: What song do you play to bring it home?

A D: Ooohh. Probably...

C: We play "Bang!" That's the new flake off the album we played earlier today. That's a motivational ballad.

Q

20W: Final question, one for the college kids, what's the best party story that can run in 20 Watts?

A D: That's tough. See, I don't know which lane to take in terms of gross, crazy, sexual...

D: One of my friends, he won't be named, he was involved in some...

C: Mysterious actions...

D: ...With Tyler, The Creator.

C: Here at Syracuse. Quote, Tyler, The Creator, Unquote.

D: That's all we're gonna give you. 🎧



Want More Aer?

Hit up Aer's YouTube page or our website to check out the brand new music video for "What You Need," filmed by Exodus Productions.

Between his pulsating remixes and feel-good originals, German DJ/producer Justin Faust knows how to command the dance floor. As an emerging beacon at the epicenter of Europe's nu-disco dance scene, Faust first garnered attention with his two latest EPs: *Girl Talk* and *Holdin' On*. Released via DISCOTEXAS, the records showcase his knack for synth-heavy aesthetics and electronic funk. Since then, his disco takes on Picture Book's "Sunshine" and Childish Gambino's "Heartbeat" have been his most successful tracks on SoundCloud, accumulating over 96,000 plays combined. By spinning Picture Book's already-dance-oriented "Sunshine" into a sharpened boogie dream, Faust displays his stylized infectious energy. Yet it's his stunningly vibrant reworking of the somber and atmospheric hip-hop hit "Heartbeat" that has smoothly cemented his status as a rising star in dance halls and club scenes alike.



Justin Faust

By Daisy Becerra

If you thought the age of passionate and honest songwriting was over, you were wrong. We'd like to introduce you to Andy Gruhin, a Yellowcard-meets-New Found Glory-pop-punk alternative rocker from Syracuse University who epitomizes an emerging age of storytelling.

This junior in VPA has showed great potential since he first arrived at SU, and continues to strive towards getting better. Never satisfied with his work, Gruhin said, "I still don't believe I am a gifted songwriter. I just write how I feel. The songs just kind of build up inside of me."

It is exactly this sort of genuine approach towards songwriting that landed Gruhin a deal with Sony/ATV Music Publishing Company in March. Not only will this deal help fund his musical endeavors, but it will also allow him the opportunity to collaborate with some better-known artists. He hopes this will help his ever-growing fan base double by the end of the summer. Sample his tracks on Myspace.



Andy Gruhin

By Jon Stenz



GASHCAT

By Emmie Martin

As summer draws closer, so, too do those warm, carefree afternoons that couple perfectly with upbeat, hazy nights. Days and weeks begin to blur into one blissful memory. For those still looking for a soundtrack to match this summer agenda, your search ends with GASHCAT.

GASHCAT's debut album, *Reunion!*, recently released in March, uses folk melodies to create a record both elating and easy to listen to. Tambourine beats and pulsing drums balance alongside the undertones of the synthesizers, blending flawlessly to create a flowery psychedelic pop feel.

The band made its mark in Austin, Texas as part of this year's South by Southwest lineup. Their appearance was so impressive, the music know-it-alls at NPR couldn't stop talking about them. As they spend their summer planning an upcoming fall tour, you can spend yours lost in waves of their buoyant melodies.



Deathgrips

By Tom Charles

Deathgrips make crass new alternative hip-hop groups like Odd Future and Das Racist seem as family-friendly as The Fresh Prince. Show them to your grandparents and they'll surely be convinced the world's gone to shit. The Sacramento-based trio doesn't taste like honey; they're not easy to swallow. Deathgrips are abrasive, chaotic, and experimental. Frankly, they're a horrifying new take on industrial hip-hop. But let's face it, that's exactly why we listen.

Sure, their debut mixtape, *Exmilitary*, was heralded by critics at the end of 2011, but after signing with Epic Records this February, that's already a thing of the past. In late April, the group released their first studio album, *The Money Store*, which maintained their hardcore, break-meter aesthetic while continuing to extend technology's role in the realm of hip-hop. Tracks like "Get Got" and the bass-heavy "Lost Boys" are almost completely electro-reliant, yet they don't compromise the in-your-face aggression of *Exmilitary*. And with their follow-up LP, *No Love*, set to drop this fall, it isn't likely Deathgrips will calm down any time soon.



Code Orange Kids

By Ibetobong Inyang

The title track of Code Orange Kids' most recent EP, *Cycles*, kicks off the record with an impassioned grunt and a sludgy bass line that can't be ignored. The EP starts with four short, energetic bursts of songs before building itself up into one four-minute finale.

Like those joining the military, this quartet can tour the world before they can buy a beer. With two demos and an EP released before graduating high school, these Kids are well on their way to conquering the

powerviolence punk subgenre. They utilize thrash guitar, oozing bass, and the harshest vocals we've heard since Syracuse's own Blunt Guts. Prepare to mosh.

Now signed to Deathwish Inc., watch for their debut LP, tentatively out later this year. They recently played Syracuse with Touche Amore and are set to tour Europe this summer. Hit them at the Essigfabrik if you happen to be in Cologne, Germany in July.

The FIVE

M83

We Own the Sky

20 Watts takes a look at Anthony Gonzalez's six electropop-pioneering albums

By John Luposello

When considering the past ten years of electronic music, it's impossible to ignore the influence that France's M83 has had on the genre. By seamlessly meshing electronic and indie rock influences, Anthony Gonzalez as M83 has turned out consistently genre-challenging records that individually attest to his innovative writing style. Each record has possessed a separate and iconic sound, leaving M83's undeniable imprint on the modern music landscape. 20 Watts breaks down the best—and worst—moments of each of the six efforts.

The Essentials:

M83 – “Last Saturday”
Dead Cities, Red Seas and Lost Ghosts – “Run Into Flowers”
Before the Dawn Heals Us – “*”
Digital Shades, Vol. 1 – “Coloring the Void”
Saturdays=Youth – “We Own the Sky”
Hurry Up, We're Dreaming – “Midnight City”

1 M83

In 2001, French natives M83 released their self-titled debut to a European audience only, marking the beginning of what would become an impressive, genre-defining journey. The record, *M83*, represents an essential time in the group's career when members Anthony Gonzalez and Nicolas Fromageau searched for their signature sound. The broad, static synths of the record are paired with electro-influenced beats and accentuated by sometimes cliché-sounding, melodramatic movie clips as in “Night” and “I’m Getting Closer.” Although the track names, if read in order, tell the story of a brief, possibly romantic interaction between two partygoers, the tracks hardly play through like a concept album. In the end, *M83* remains an impressive debut effort, introducing the quirks and signature sounds that would establish the rest of the band's career.



2 Dead Cities, Red Seas and Lost Ghosts

M83's sophomore effort, *Dead Cities, Red Seas and Lost Ghosts*, was released in December 2003 to enormous critical acclaim. Unlike the tracks on their debut album, each song

translates seamlessly and naturally into the next, building familiar analog sounds into spiraling peaks that feel organic. The droning “Run Into Flowers” and intensity-driven “America” meld into one another to lull listeners into a sonic trance that makes for a more experiential listen. *Dead Cities, Red Seas and Lost Ghosts*, reveals a growing maturity in M83 that earned them the respect of critics and listeners alike, establishing the band as one of the world's most formidable forces in the electro-pop genre.

M83. Dead Cities, Red Seas & Lost Ghosts





3 Before the Dawn Heals Us

Following the departure of co-founder Nicolas Fromageau, remaining member Anthony Gonzalez set out to create his first solo M83 release. *Before the Dawn Heals Us* has a more defined rock-focused base than any of the band's other albums. The opening track, "Moon Child" features

a deceptively gentle piano pulse accompanied by vocal tracks spoken by actress Kate Moran that lead into a familiar explosion of broad synth and rudimentary, but undeniably powerful, percussion. When placed beside the dream soundscapes of *Dead Cities*, this record feels much darker and more cinematic. While the album appears as complex and mature as *Dead Cities*, it's more disjointed and chaotic. On a track-by-track basis, this works well, but as an album it doesn't play through as cohesively as their earlier works. This darker, more intense effort from M83 stands as one of their redefining releases.



2008's *Saturdays=Youth*, the first album released on major label, Virgin, marked a shift in M83's history that was received to mixed reviews. *Saturdays=Youth* is the group's most '80s-focused release to date. The opening piano on "You Appearing," the first track on the album, paints chords that one would expect to hear in a previous release by Gonzalez, although void of an effects-heavy synth. Their admiration for the sounds of that era can't be missed in tracks such as "Kim & Jessie" and "Couleurs," which drip with the same lusty, emotive sentiment that defined the 80's, as well as the synth-pop sounds that coated the era. Soaring guitar lines and percussion resembling the organized pulse of a drum machine hold the album together and identify the tracks. Gonzalez's vocals are often delivered in a heavy whisper that wouldn't sound out of place on a Depeche Mode record. The result is a polished, coherent record that, while a bit experimental, manages to exhibit M83's mastering of yet another sound.

Saturdays=Youth 5

Two years after Gonzalez's solo release came *Digital Shades*, an effort venturing back into the calm beginnings the group displayed in their self-titled debut and sophomore effort. The sounds that make up *Digital Shades* dramatically contrast those on *Before the Dawn Heals Us*. Tracks rely on broad, soft soundscapes and shorter, less compositionally predictable arrangements to remake M83's signature hazy sound. The record seems to reference one of Gonzalez's most revered idols, ambient guru Brian Eno. Tracks like "Waves, Waves, Waves," and "Coloring the Void," consist of predictably constructed, pulsing synths with minimal percussion, bringing the listener back to the sonic experiments that can be found on the first record.

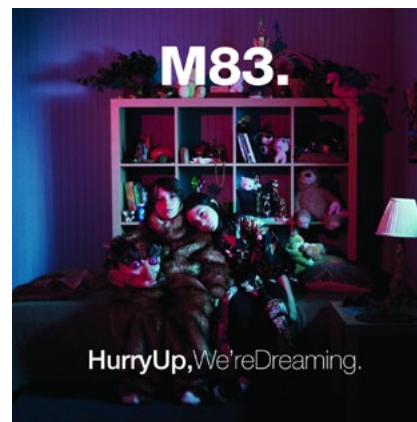
4 Digital Shades, Vol. 1



6 Hurry Up, We're Dreaming

M83's 2011 release, *Hurry Up, We're Dreaming*, marks a high point in the group's career. Debuting at number fifteen on the Billboard 200, it stands as M83's best selling record to date. The tracks are constructed similarly to those found on *Saturdays=Youth*, with '80s-inspired instrumentals and vocals, but a more pop-centric structure. *Hurry Up, We're*

Dreaming's public and critical reception has further pushed M83 into the pop music realm, aided by the accessibility of the tracks constructed by Gonzalez. He describes the record as, "a reflection of [his] 30 years as a human being," and the grandeur of this statement is reflected masterfully in the record. The album's debut single, "Midnight City," is M83's most commercially successful track to date, encompassing the wistfulness of their early work with a pop-focused progressive. *Hurry Up, We're Dreaming* hints that Gonzalez intends to continue creating extremely accessible, yet complex music that defines and constantly recreates the electropop genre.





The Miscreant

Column

After The Miscreant shared space with us to announce our exciting relaunch news, 20 Watts asked the miscreant herself, Jeanette Wall, to dish what's new with her record label and the local indie scene

Recent months have opened a new and exciting chapter in the live music scene here in Syracuse. The practice space on Midler has hosted some great shows, bands are coming back to play at the Wescott Community Center, student's houses as a performance space are presenting more opportunities for bands, and two indie bands just played the Carrier Dome. Musicians have started bridging the gap between the University and the community it resides in, and this comes at a time when both settings are thriving with talented individuals. We've become growing musicians, great friends, and good neighbors (no pun intended).

Take SSWAMPZZ for example, a noise rock band formed by two Syracuse natives and an SU student. Working with these guys has been a real treat! They've grown into their identity quickly by playing several shows around the Syracuse area, taking advantage of any opportunity to get their music out there. These three boys are a testament to what the Syracuse music scene has to offer. Through playing shows with a variety of other Syracuse acts, they've developed their sound and built up a fan base.

In the midst of all the basement shows, funk with waffles, and Juice Jams, it can be easy for even the artists to forget how important their performances are to their audience. They have this thing that

is so much a part of them, something they have created that is in some way unlike anything else anyone has done. But the artists are out there on their own. At a very deep level it is important that the artists love themselves and what they want to share with others. But there's the root of the riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma: only by sharing their creation do they open themselves up for rejection and hurt.

A few weeks before the show, I interviewed SSWAMPZZ for a feature in The Miscreant, a zine I started last year. When I asked guitarist Ray McAndrew what being a miscreant meant to him, he put into words what I had felt about music, but just had not been able to express. He said being a miscreant, "means learning to love myself the way I am." So here's to being you, being a miscreant, and doing so without a second thought. Let the scene in Syracuse continue to thrive! 🎧

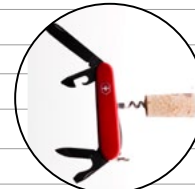
THE MISCREANT

There's no such thing as free love. Either invest in some protection or be ready to pay your new-age flower child's college tuition in 18 years. We suggest **glow-in-the-dark condoms**. It can be hard to see at 4 a.m. in your hook-up's two-person tent, so save yourself the embarrassment and skip the fumbling around.

Tickets are expensive, but the conning doesn't stop at StubHub. If you don't bring your own **water bottle**, prepare to have your day-drunken, summer-sun-soaked-self taken advantage of. So bring your own and save yourself the financial burden of a weekend's worth of \$6 ice-cold Aquafinas.

If all else fails, you be the photographer. But your iPhone Instagrams simply won't replace the quality of a **real camera**. Bring along something more than a point and shoot. For all you know, that picture you snap of Alexa Chung making out with Justin Vernon just may earn you back what you paid for a ticket. Maybe.

And of course, you're going to need a **slim and sleek bag** to store all of your essentials. For girls, a small cross-body bag works. A traditional backpack should suffice for guys. Just make sure to test your bag out before you buy. Jump around a little; make sure it's not going to whack anyone around you. You don't want your accessory to be starting fights.



7 Festival Must-Haves

By Ashley Collman

You need to be ready for anything (and by "anything" we mean beer caps and wine corks), so keep a **Leatherman or Swiss Army Knife** on your keychain. They're the basic essentials of any pocket tool. You're going to want to make sure there's a pair of scissors to cut your wristband off at the end of the weekend and a file so you have something to do during those early sets.

Some festivals have showers, most do not. Either way, your personal hygiene is going to be less than adequate for the weekend. Bring along a **pack of baby wipes** to freshen up, and to use as backup TP when the line for the Port-a-Potty is too long. Ladies—and guys with long hair—should bring a travel size bottle of **dry shampoo**.

Music festivals are the new fashion weeks. So you need a **statement piece** if you want to be snapped for a street style slideshow. Anything crocheted works for girls—the key is to look like a hippie fairy. The look for boys is Kennedy lost in Williamsburg. A classic straw trilby should do the trick.

Tapes Around

By Chris Ballard

Cassettes seem to be making some sort of Tupac-like comeback these days, but are they here to stay?

Bands stack their concert merchandise tables with a potpourri of extraneous items to desperately peddle, usually so they can afford a turkey sandwich after the show. Lately, though, something new has been added to the mix, in the form of an old friend: the cassette tape.

These plastic houses for magnetic tape are once again gaining popularity among both individual music aficionados and bands who can't afford a large vinyl pressing, says Jeanette Wall, owner of local label Miscreant Records (and 20 Watts contributor).

"It's frustrating to see these bands trying to put out vinyl and having absolutely no idea what they're doing," she says. "You have to invest, and it takes a long time. Cassettes, not to write them off as too easy, will take two weeks instead of two months."

While CDs may be a more practical and frugal route, collectors of non-digital music have generally split into two camps—the lo-fi, gritty texture of tapes, and the crackling, refined sound of vinyl. Wall says she has observed this split:

"There's a lot of overlap, but people who are obsessed with vinyl might not be obsessed with cassettes," she says. "Our ears do love that analog sound and those imperfections, and that's definitely there with cassettes."

Nielsen SoundScan, a media and entertainment company that logs music sales, reported a 46-percent increase

in album sales from last year—that's 22,000 units sold compared to last year's 15,000. Vinyl sales are up, too, by about 37 percent since last year, selling an astounding 2.7 million in 2011. While tapes aren't infringing on vinyl territory in terms of sales, they're definitely carving out a niche of their own in the indie scene among collectors.

Sam Sodomsky, a sophomore in the Bandier program, runs a popular tape blog called Zen Effects. But he's quick to admit that he doesn't love, or even like cassettes. After purchasing Oneohtrix Point Never's 2009 release *Rifts*, though, he delved into the tape scene and found a score of tape labels putting out new analog releases.

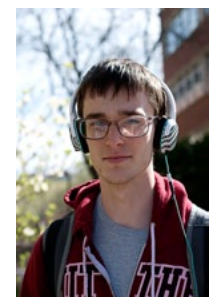
"To me it felt like one of the most exciting things in music; all these tape labels felt really pure," Sodomsky said. "Though I'm really open about not liking tapes as a format, there's something about the format that makes it really beautiful and pure to me because there's the idea that you can't really make it digital."

That said, it's hard to tell how long this surge in popularity will last. There's definitely a market for it, and certainly a collector's value in the artistic packaging and nostalgic aesthetic. But beyond that it's hard to picture cassettes as having staying power. To me, they just seem like another step backward following the vinyl craze. What's next: 8-tracks? Phonographs? 🎧

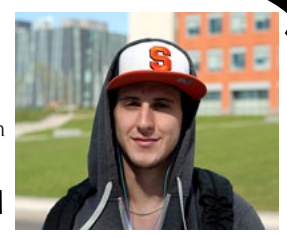
MAN STREET

Interviews by Brittany Leitner
Photos by Greg Babcock

20 Watts took a stroll around campus without our own headphones blaring for once to find other people plugged into their own worlds. We asked, "What song are you listening to right now?" Here's what we got.



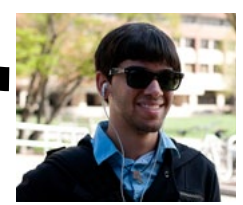
Alex Keeling - Junior, chemical engineering
Listening to: "Straw Dog" by Something Corporate



Evan Williams - Senior, broadcast journalism
Listening to: "It's My Time" by Fabolous



Victoria Pane - Freshman, psychology
Listening to: "Tonight, Tonight" by Hot Chelle Rae



Victor Sanchez - Junior, foreign languages
Listening to: "Birthday Cake" by Rihanna and Chris Brown



Marie Morrow - Junior, international relations and communication rhetorical studies
Listening to: "Turn Me On" by David Guetta ft. Nicki Minaj



Backstage Pass

By Annie Licata

Meet Nick Jeen, a production and tour manager who worked with INXS when they were just a garage band (you'd recognize their single "Need You Tonight," the second you heard the riff in the chorus), and has done nothing but add to his impressive list of artists and performers ever since. Born in Australia, raised in South Africa, and currently living in Los Angeles, Jeen opens up about what it's like to live in the biz and run a live concert.

On the subject of job description:

A Nick: I do two jobs, and they're very similar except one's a production manager and the second one's a tour manager. Put it this way, a production manager puts the tents up and puts on a show and the tour manager moves the tents, like in a circus.

A typical day in the life of a production manager or a tour manager:

A NJ: Very long. I'll give an example: The Eagles at the moment, we have 17 trucks. So we can't load in the show the day of the show. We have to do what they call a pre-rig, which is loading in the day before. It's pretty much anywhere between 14-20 hour days on show days and workdays. A travel day for us is a day off, because we don't have to worry. So we take the travel days as time to sleep on either the airplane or the train or on the bus, and we love that. We love travel days.

"Advancing" in the biz:

A NJ: It's all about the advance and preparation. Knowing what type of building you're going into: whether it's an arena, a stadium, a theater, if it's a festival situation. It depends on the size of the show and the design of the show. You try to keep the integrity of the show as close as possible. So you have to do a lot of phone calls, a lot of pre-production, and a lot of advance work with the local people at the venue. We call it advancing. Then, of course, when you get there hopefully you've advanced it correctly so you only need to troubleshoot minor things on the fly, and you don't have to troubleshoot something major. Like, "Oh shit, the show doesn't fit in here." That's why you need to do your homework.

How technology is changing the industry:

A NJ: In the old days, before cell phones and Internet and all that stuff, I wouldn't say anybody could do it but it would be a lot more easier to have done it back then because all you needed was a bag full of quarters—a bag full of money, and a fax machine, and a credit card so you can make international phone calls. Now with the Internet and everything the expectations of your client that you're working for has gone up dramatically. Now you've got to do spreadsheets for the accountants and everybody wants a daily call sheet electronically instead of putting one under the door for them. It's come a long way.

Nick Jeen's favorite tour:

A NJ: As far as fun goes, Whitney Houston. *The Bodyguard* tour in 1992, '93, '94, '95, that was a lot of fun. She was so successful with that album and movie, the money was flowing, the times were good. She was a great person to work for. We really traveled the world and toured the world then. She was number one in 81 countries simultaneously, she sold more records than The Beatles in the U.K. so when you're working with somebody like that, the cash flow is huge. I mean huge. People who have been away from home for six months to a year at a time take good care of their people because there aren't any budget restraints. Not to mention she was an amazing singer. That definitely made all of the hard work worth it.

Q

Advice on travel and the real world:

A NJ: This is an important thing that everybody always misinterprets. Everybody always thinks it's such a glamorous thing. Yes, of course you get to travel the world, and if you're lucky enough you get maybe a half a day to go see that city that you're in, but the majority of the time, it's a lot of hard work. It's a hell of a lot of hard work, and dealing with time zone changes, and of course because budgets have gotten so tight, you don't get a lot of days off.

Q

The stuff you can't learn in a classroom:

A NJ: Listen, the job of a production manager or a tour manager, it's all about experience and hands on. It's not something you can learn from a textbook, it's not something somebody can teach you. Of course, you can have a mentor if you have the opportunity and are lucky enough to work with one of us on a major tour, and you learn a lot from that. It's all job related experience—on the fly work. It's not really something you can study yourself.

NJ: Understand travel a lot: Visas, passports. You don't have to speak any international languages even though if you do decide to work for a production company in another country it would help to be bilingual, but as far as the touring goes, English is the language of the jungle. And you know, everything comes with experience. It's what you learn on the road. 🎧



5 Minutes with **Two** Music School Grads

By Annie Licata

After music school, Alex Alessi, graduate of SAE Institute in NYC, and Nick Campanile, graduate of The Conservatory of Recording Arts and Sciences

in Tempe, Ariz., earned degrees in audio engineering yet took jobs in other fields. They created the group Marcus Fathom to keep their love of music alive. For more on what it's like starting from the ground up, and where to find Marcus Fathom's album, *Hard to Imagine*, read the full interview on 20Wattsmag.com.

20 Watts: What was music school to you?

N: It was everything. When I decided to go out to school, I mean, I don't want to sound corny but music was my life. It put everything together for me. It was that missing element in my life. Because I wanted to make a career out of music and without that, there's no way I could've done that.

A: It was A) finally coming to terms with what I wanted to do with my time. I'm getting to be a grown ass man, I'm 23 years old, and I can't keep playing games. Last year I really wrapped my mind around that reality.

20W: What is it like applying what you learn in music school to real life? Is it relevant?

A: I definitely needed it.

N: I don't think we would be where we are without an education.

A: I agree entirely. We've got the whole circle of it covered. I think the fact that we both went to school ended up becoming beneficial because I now have the opportunity to write music on my own and put songs together, and then come to Nick and say "Yo, this is what I've done so far."

N: No disagreement there. Without that education we would be just two dudes sitting in a basement writing music. Without that education we would lack the professionalism of being an artist and being an engineer or being a producer.

20W: What would you say to kids who want to be you...Kids who want to go to music school and live their dream?

A: It's a lot of hard work. Harder work than you could ever imagine.

N: It's a commitment.

A: Hell yeah it's a commitment. It's a full on dedication. You should invest 100% into it—you need to—if you want this to become a reality. We're still grindin' for it over here. You have to learn how to prioritize your shit and stay focused even when it's not convenient. We both work full time as Apple employees now and it's hard to have the time to still work on music. But that'll never stop us because we love it. When the day is over I put on some music and forget about everything else, and I get back in that zone. Nothing will ever take that away from me.

Rap Trap

By Jillian D'Onfro
Photos by Sean Horan
and Anthony Washington

Young rap artists figure out how to make it big in a world that now demands free music

Marcus Neal's eyes shine with confidence from the center of the screen. The words practically tumble from his mouth; they flow out so rapid-fire. In the background, Grant Palmer and Jordan Foster let their bodies move to the beat. The video, 'Cuse Cypher, features the verbal talent of three Syracuse rappers Indo (Neal), lamG (Palmer), and Jay Foss (Foster).

The beat in the background has eastern influences and stays simple; the focus is meant to be on the rap. Although each rapper's demeanor suggests they have something to prove, the vibe of the video remains playful and light. For a moment, during Indo's verse, Jay Foss wields nunchucks. Gathered at the crest of Crouse Hill, the three seem to reign over the S.U. campus visible behind them as they take turns shooting out their rhymes.

Indo raps lines like, "My future is not a game/I told you I'd make a killin'" glaring at the camera halfway through the verse with such defiance, it's hard to believe he won't. Except, making a killing in the music industry these days is different than ever before.

We're a generation of guiltless thieves. Hunched in front of computer screens, we right-click and download

for hours on end, with little (if any) thought as to how many hundreds of dollars we're not paying for our music. Obviously piracy is wrong, but it's become so ingrained into the cultural norm that a discussion of its illegality feels almost yawn-worthy. However, the accepted reality of rampant piracy hasn't lain barren a musical wasteland. Basements across Syracuse still pulse with late-night band practices. Local venues like Spark Art Gallery, The Lost Horizon, and Westcott Theater still book acts hungry to prove their talent on stage. Performers pour hours into making music videos like 'Cuse Cypher. Artists haven't given up on the idea of "making it" through their music even though the public refuses to pay. They've just had to adjust their strategies. The focus has shifted to playing shows, creating deeper personal connections, and sustaining as much self-management as possible.

Instead of recouping cash through jewel-cased CDs or iTunes downloads, Syracuse artists like Jay Foss and Indo know the importance of stepping out of the studio and onto the stage.

"The shift in monetary value has moved from an individual's music and intellectual property towards their performance," Jay Foss explains. "You can't steal someone's act."

For both rappers, live shows mean a lot. Both recently dropped new mixtapes online completely free of charge. "I've given almost all of my songs away," Indo says. "I just want people to—what's the polite way of saying fuck with me? Support me first. I want that genuine reaction, and then I'll worry about you buying stuff."

Playing a live show meets that idea in the middle. Audience members don't pay for the music, they pay for the experience. It's about the pre-show banter, being able to look the performer in the eye, feeling the thrum of the speakers through your toes, and the drinks you nearly spill while dancing. Five dollars spent on a concert experience with friends feels easier to shell out than five dollars siphoned off your credit card from the iTunes store.

"A generation ago, [...] everything was in the hands of record labels," says television, radio, and film professor and professional musician Doug Quin. "I think one of the things that's happening with piracy as an issue, is that a lot of artists are self-publishing, because of social media, because of the internet, they can get their work out there, even well-known bands, like radio head, they have control over their own music production and distribution," he says.

Thanks to social media, building bonds has become a 24/7 job. Twitter acts as a well-oiled machine for self-promotion.

"It's all about keeping a regular personality," Foss says about Twitter. Foss and Indo use the site to connect with users more personally. To date, both rappers have over 2,000 followers and Indo has sent more than 18,000 tweets. Coping with piracy gets easier the more fans an artist has. The greater the number



Above Rapper Jay Foss performs at Spark Art Space

of people who like the artists, the greater chance they have of gaining fans willing to cough up money for their music.

"It's all about keeping a regular personality."

On a college campus, Twitter connects artists to more than just their fans. If college artists send a tweet recruiting someone to film their next video, a film major would likely respond and do the job free of charge to score a clip for his portfolio.

Another equally important form of connection is the unity built up within the Syracuse music scene itself, artist to artist. For Jay Foss and Indo that can mean anything from making music videos like 'Cuse Cypher together to making sure that both of their names appear on a show's roster. They don't necessarily want people to always associate them with each other, but they do want to use their combined popularity to win each other more fans. The two started out as musical acquaintances but have since become friends.

"Because I think he's a good artist, and I feel vice versa, we want each other on our songs," says Foss. "Because for that song, it's going to be great to see both names on it."

Fans of Indo may easily become fans of Jay Foss. The person downloading Jay Foss's album sees Indo's name and decides to check out his website too. And not only that, but the spirit of friendly competition pushes each to try harder.

"Seeing him do well is going to make me want to strive," says Foss.

"And seeing him do well, that makes me want to go harder too," counters Indo. "When I heard Foss's tracks I was like, this kid is an animal."

The benefits of connection aside, strategically releasing music is another piece of the puzzle, one that Indo knows how to handle. If you give your fans enough for free, it's easier to coerce them into actually paying up

when the time comes.

"I'll give you five free mixtapes," Indo says, pleading to an imaginary audience of fans. "Just buy my fucking one single. Do it. The rest of the EP will be free, you just got to support me and buy this one song."

Indo reeled in a solid profit in response to the single, "I Want Her With Me," which he released last year. Selling via iTunes was easy, and the company didn't take too big a cut from his paycheck per download. He plans to release another track in the near future.

Although piracy sucks, it has yet to drain the ambition out of young artists. Musicians remain resilient. We can rip their songs off YouTube and they'll still strive to make that next music video even cooler than the last. We can refuse to buy their

albums, and yet they'll still leave the stage drenched in sweat after every show. Even when we gush about how much we love a song, and yet we refuse to scrape up the money to pay for it, the artists continue to play hard.

It boils down to the music, and the fact that wanting to be a musician stems from passion, drive, and genuine desire to create a unique sound.

"I just love making music," Indo says. "I just want to work, and get it out to the people. So I see myself being a working artist, but doing well. I don't want to be a starving artist. But I still see myself as an artist. Grinding every day." 🎧

"When I heard Foss's tracks I was like, this kid is an animal."



Rapper Indo entertains a crowd at Funk N' Waffles. Photo by Sean Horan

Play It Safe

Piracy gets punished both by Syracuse University and copyright owners, who can fine a thief up to \$250,000 under the No Electronic Theft Act. Here's what you need to know to hold on to your friendship with AirOrangeX:

1. Most often, ITS gets notified about a piracy problem by copyright owners or agents, who send SU violation notices when they discover illegal sharing of their files. **Your computer can be traced. Easily.**
2. ITS deals with culprits using its **three-strike policy**: each time you're caught, your computer gets temporarily quarantined from the network. First time, you have to read and understand SU's Computing and Electronic Communications Policy. Second, you attend counseling sessions with ITS. Third time, you go to Judicial Affairs and might lose your network privileges permanently.
3. Although ITS doesn't actively monitor its network for the sharing of copyrighted material, it can investigate suspicions by checking **a log of everything you've ever downloaded** on the SU network.
4. In addition to sending complaints to SU, **copyright owners have the right to take direct legal action**. Lack of knowledge about copyright infringement laws doesn't excuse anyone from legal consequences.

Charged

With a D.I.Y. philosophy, New Jersey's Static Jacks made it out of their parents' basements and onto main stages.

By Erin Scialabba
Photos by Ben Rowland,
Alex Chaves, and Joelle
Rasoarivelo, courtesy of
The Static Jacks



The Static Jacks are (left-to-right) Nick Brennan, Henry Kaye, Ian Devaney, Michael Su-Poi: *Photo by Ben Rowland.*

In their first music video for “Into the Sun,” a catchy rock anthem with energetic vocals, The Static Jacks tear down a wall of TV monitors to create a visual crescendo that leads to the final chorus. During filming, not all the monitors hit the ground; one landed on their temporary bassist’s head.

Just days after the accident, The Static Jacks left for the first of three consecutive tours across the country that would keep them traveling for two months. First stop, however, was at Crouse Hospital in Syracuse, NY, where a doctor unstapled the back of bassist Andrew Santora’s head—an inglorious start to a series of career-defining months for the band pioneering a garage-rock revival.

As a surprisingly soulful rock band, The Static Jacks define momentum. In the past year, the Westfield, New Jersey natives padded their already impressive resume with a record deal, their first music video, and a laundry list of shows with big name headliners like Best Coast, Manchester Orchestra, Howler, and living rock legends The Crips.

After playing New Orleans’ Voodoo Fest and New York’s CMJ Music Marathon, the band performed live on Fuel TV and graced late night viewers with an interview on “Last Call with Carson Daly.” At the conclusion of their 11,000-mile, cross country tour with The Wombats, The Static Jacks finished out the year with a week’s worth of gigs in London. The band’s newest musical installment, *Spray Tan*, a four-song EP, is set to release on May 14th.

Syracuse University alumnus Andrew Maury, a member of the Remix Artist Collective (RAC) and front of house engineer for Ra Ra Riot recorded the new EP and works closely with The Static Jacks. “There’s nothing gimmicky about them,” says Maury. “There are a lot of bands that do what they do, but what

sets them apart is that they really are what they feel like—a high school band that’s about to make it.”

Lead singer Ian Devaney, drummer Nick Brennan, and guitarist Henry Kaye have worked and waited for their rewards. The uncertainty of getting signed, coupled with the downtime between shows, took a toll on the entire band. Especially Brennan, who struggled to get through 2009—the year before the band signed to Fearless. While his friends were in college and going abroad, Brennan felt trapped in his parents’ basement. Over the course of one year, Brennan gained 15 pounds, often driving to McDonalds at 3 a.m. midweek.

“I wanted to fucking die,” Brennan said. “My entire week would revolve around watching the new episode of *Community*.”

Even after landing a record deal and

“...they really are what they feel like—a high school band that’s about to make it.”

tour dates, the work hasn’t gotten any easier. Months spent sleeping in motels in close quarters, and full days spent driving in the van wear at the band’s brotherhood and their mental stability. To this day, Brennan experiences night terrors about being in a moving vehicle. Upon hearing the fridge motor humming and sensing the lights shining through his window, Brennan bolts up in the middle of the night yelling, fearful he is back in the van.

But playing live shows is worth the agony, Brennan says. The Static Jacks’ charged, live performances and high-school-rock-band sound often leave them compared to bands like The

Strokes and The Replacements. On stage, Devaney, the lead singer with a boney, boyish face, half covered by freckles and a long tuft of wavy hair, throws his rail-thin body around with just enough restraint to keep from falling. The real tour de force, however, is the gang vocals. With each member leaning into a mic, the band resembles protestors at a rally—their five impassioned voices hitting audiences with heartbreakingly honest lines like, “I’m afraid for the future/ I don’t wanna share it with you.”

Fenway Recordings’s Nick Palmacci, who manages both The Static Jacks and MGMT, said he went to see the Jacks perform after being tipped off by a friend at Columbia Records. “Instantly, I was like, ‘Wow, this band is fucking awesome,’” Palmacci said. “It’s very rare that you find a young rock band that’s really captivating, honest, and kind of in your face—but in a good way.”

The same polish and raw energy that attracted Palmacci also attracted Chris Foitle, the head of A&R at Fearless Records. Foitle said the band’s

sound is unique, yet palatable to a diverse group of people. Adam Kaye, co-manager and brother to The Static Jacks’ guitarist, agrees. “They’re an indie-rock band with punk influences,” he said. “They can be clean, or they can be dirty. They could write a softer, 80s influenced song like ‘Mercy Hallelujah’ or a punk influenced song like ‘Walls.’”

It was the song “Into the Sun” that sealed the deal for Foitle, prompting the exec to offer The Static Jacks their first record deal. The band seized the opportunity and signed with Fearless in 2011.

Regardless of a record deal, The Static Jacks follow a D.I.Y. philosophy. It is their self sufficient model that adds an exposed sincerity and personal touch to each project they take on. Kaye was a graphic design major at Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute before dropping out after his first semester. His personal drawings were used to create the artwork for “If You’re Young,” the band’s first album on Fearless. The guitarist also designs the band’s posters and t-shirts, and films and edits their promotional videos.



The Static Jacks in concert. Photo by Joelle Rasodrivelo.

Kaye isn't the only crafty Jack. In the warmer months, the guys meet in Brennan's back yard with cardboard, spray paint, and homemade stencils to create signs for the stage. In an act of self promotion, the band often scrawls "The Static Jacks" across the cardboard on top of their de facto logo: a color-blocked silhouette of their home state, New Jersey. One sign features the words "together" and "follow," lyrics from the song "Into the Sun," which Devaney holds up to encourage crowds to sing along. Another sign displays an outline of Abe Lincoln, just for the hell of it.

The band also ditches a cookie cutter formula for writing music. Most songs are born through a collaborative effort in Brennan's parents' polka-dot-covered basement, where The Static Jacks have rehearsed for over seven years. Kaye often starts the process by bringing in demos of original guitar rifts or verses, playing them over and over until the band can build on another part. Devaney, who plays multiple instruments outside of the band, and Brennan, a natural born drummer who plays without reading music, both construct melodies and contribute the bulk of the lyrics. Mike Sue-Poi, the guitarist who joined the band in 2009, writes better alone, presenting songs only after they've been fully realized.

"They're all amazing at their respective trades," Foitle said. "There isn't a weak link in the band."

The Static Jacks officially formed in 2008, in their senior year at Westfield High School. However, the band had been playing together under a different name, "Waterdown Clockwise," since 2005. When they were 14 years old, Brennan, Devaney, and Kaye, made their debut at "Folio," their high school's monthly coffee house. They played one original song and one cover: "Jenny Was A Friend Of Mine" by The Killers. Five years later, after the band decided to leave college after one semester, only four original Static Jacks remained. After responding to an ad the Jacks had posted on MySpace looking for a new guitarist, Sue-Poi—a spacey yet musically brilliant character from Roselle Park, NJ—auditioned and eventually became the band's new guitarist in 2009.

"There isn't a weak link in the band."

It took time for Sue-Poi to get acclimated to the tight-knit group, and vice versa. "We're very awkward," Devaney says, laughing. "When rehearsal ended, we didn't have the heart to tell [Sue-Poi] to leave." On several occasions, the original band members would go as far as pretending to drive home, circling back to Brennan's after Sue-Poi finally left.

Spencer Kimmins, the original



The Static Jacks, in high school. Photo by Alex Chaves.

bassist, left the band in 2010, just five months before the Jacks secured a record deal. But Kimmins, who chose to go back to college, stands by his decision. "I didn't leave the band because I didn't think anything was going to happen—I knew something would," Kimmins said. "I left because I didn't want that lifestyle."

However, Devaney works to alleviate his stress rather than allow it to overcome him. Being the front man comes with pressure. Devaney, who dislikes ostentation, finds his reserved personality in conflict with his stage presence. "Me talking to people is such a different person than me singing," Devaney said. "I don't want to have to be both people at the same

time." Consequently, the singer speaks infrequently between sets and shies away from interviews.

The Static Jacks team has full faith in its front man. "No matter what song [Devaney] is singing, you know it's him—you know it's The Static Jacks," Kaye says. If anything, Devaney's modesty helps keep the band grounded. "They do not have any ego," Foitle says. "All they want to do is grind away and get out there."

For Devaney the thrill of performing overrides his desire for financial success. "It's just about trying to grow and be better all the time," he says. "I would like to be big—yes—but I want to do it the right way. I don't want to lose touch." 🎧

Aristotle & Douchebags

By Ben Aaron

Have you ever been to a show and overheard someone insult the headlining band? It's just weird. If you're complaining to your friends about how you wasted your paycheck on Lupe Fiasco tickets at a Lupe Fiasco concert, something's off.

Paying for tickets to a show seems to necessitate actually liking the performing artist. So I'm at this concert, trying to enjoy the song I've driven an hour and paid \$30 in tolls and parking to hear, and this kid in front of me keeps going off. He's loud, but I tune him out. I remind myself of how excited I am to be hearing Fiasco's "Hurt Me Soul" live, instead of through my busted headphones.

With his trendy thick-rimmed glasses and polka dot bow tie, this kid starts insulting rap music, saying how it's "all the same." I can't count how many times I've heard people talk this way about certain bands or genres, like it's a competition. These people often say other music styles aren't "real music." Of course, their taste is the stuff of legends.

Whichever artist or genre this kid adores, it's probably the only one he ever listens to. Like talking up Coke when you've never tried Pepsi. Regardless of whether or not you believe what you're saying, when you shove your favorite band down everyone else's throat, it just makes you sound foolish.

I'm not saying you should be ashamed of the music you love. Music's meant to be shared. I love The Strokes, and First Impressions of Earth has long been one of my favorite albums. But that doesn't mean I should throw it in everyone's face and claim it's the best, just because it's what I prefer. People are always doing this, making condescending statements about how whatever they like is obviously better, while offering no substantial evidence for their claim.

In the study of philosophy, an argument is invalid if the truth of the conclusion does not follow from the truth of the premises. In other words, "all rap music" isn't the same because you say so.

You may have read about Aristotle in any class, because he contributed to so many fields, but he also wrote some fascinating—always annoying to read—stuff


about music. Most of it's found in Book VIII of his *Politics*. He was considering music's role in education, and how different styles of music can affect one's disposition in a multitude of ways. He would have chewed this kid out.

Aristotle lauded the power of music, believing it can profoundly affect our emotional and mental states. The way in which we're affected naturally depends on the type of music we're listening to at the time. It seems simple, but it explains why your broken-hearted friend has "Someone Like You" on repeat. Differences in melody, he argued, are what determine which emotion the listener feels.

He might say I like The Strokes so much because that's how my "soul" is predisposed. Put simply, I like the way I feel when I hear them, and I want to feel those feelings again. I don't know anything about my soul, but I do know the Vitamin String Quartet's cover of "Reptilia" made me tear a little the first time I heard it.

That's what makes music great. It's pure emotion, individual and impressionistic. Our bow tie-wearing friend from the show may think his music style is the best, but that just means it's the best for him. Aristotle might say he enjoys feeling whatever emotions those songs invoke in him, but that says nothing about how other people receive them. Music is art. All art is subjective.

Ultimately, it's fine to like certain types of music over others. In fact, you should. But you can't forget that no single person is the final authority on what constitutes "good music." And listening to one genre or band all the time isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it must be boring. It's like ordering a hamburger every time you're at the diner because it's reliable. Sure, it's safe, but so is being a virgin.

So branch out. Stick some old blues in between those dub step wub wubs, and remember Aristotle the next time you hear someone insult the song or band you love. Music taste is nothing but preference. My obsession with The Strokes may be slightly weird, but that's just me. There's a sea of people who think they suck. And I'm fine with that. 

REVIEWS

Alabama Shakes

By Nate Hopper

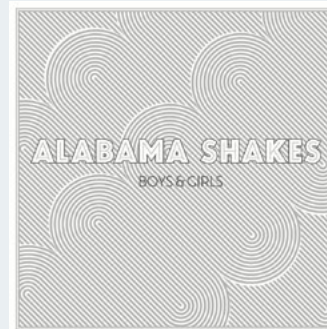
Boys & Girls

Rating: 4

Toward the end of *Boys & Girls*, about halfway through "Be Mine," there's a moment. Brittany Howard, the Alabama Shakes' singer, rips the "e" in the line, "I feel good." And after, someone cries out, "Woo-oo!" It sounds like that speaker took a hit of a beloved, but too-long-neglected drug—named soul.

The band's debut album after CMJ's and SXSW's hyper buzz, fits the popularized "neo-retro soul" label. They jive in tight, bluesy, well-trodden grooves of guitar jags, organ throbs, and bass-and-drum thumps. Howard's vocals rumble and pop as she belts familiar melodies. And the album will reignite the debate over whether the recent cohort of soul music amounts to commendable original compositions or lowly imitation of Stax and Motown. But kill that noise: music is fluid, continuous, and kleptomaniacal. And soul is soul. So while little on *Boys & Girls* establishes much of anything new (especially through the middle of the album), it rocks an original take on a tested form, with timeless foot-stomping, head-rocking, and heartbreak.

But regardless of the lineage trailing the band, Howard's voice sets them apart. While Aretha and Etta, or Adele let the fullness and warmth of their notes escape their throats unscathed, Howard just lets them loose. Chords be damned. It's as if Sharon Jones took a long drag of Jack White. At the end of the southern blues ballad, "Heartbreaker," you can hear the lines scrape and crackle, and when drop-jawed, seemingly on her knees, she just opens and rattles. Or at the close of "Be Mine," after the "woo," when you can hear her intoned change from asking the title, to telling, to demanding it. And with a voice like that—like maybe no singer before her—god dammit you should obey.



The 20 Watts Ratings Guide

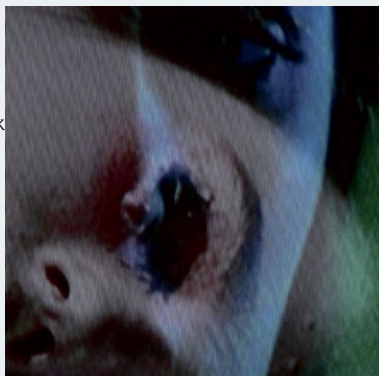
- 1 Chris Brown // Rihanna
- 2 Justin Bieber // Selena Gomez
- 3 Wiz Khalifa // Amber Rose
- 4 Gwen Stefani // Gavin Rossdale
- 5 Jay-Z // Beyonce

It's been two years since Ontario's PS I Love You released their explosive debut *Meet Me at the Muster Station*, but they're back at it. The self-described "heavy pop" duo has been hard at work composing their follow-up album, *Death Dreams*, for Paper Bag Records after releasing a compilation of B-sides and rarities in 2011.

Death Dreams sticks close to the formula that Muster Station made unique. Paul Saulnier delivers the squalling guitars and wailing vocals complimented by Benjamin Nelson's steady cymbal crashing. As a result, the album comes off as one you might find playing in the background of your favorite movie from the '90s. Those who can't find a hysterical pleasure in Saulnier's presence on the mic will be hard pressed listening to the band's sophomore set.

The aptly named *Death Dreams* opens with the instrumental title track, where soft cymbals and spacey guitars introduce the listener to the dark dreamscape that PS I Love You hopes to paint. This leads quickly into the abrasive single, "Sentimental Dishes," where the band exhibits the lighter side of adolescent angst with lyrics, "I don't want to do these dishes, she don't want to do these dishes, they don't want to do these dishes." The third track, "Don't Go," delivers another album highlight, with dark lyrics relieved by joyful handclaps.

Although *Death Dreams* is front-loaded with stand-out tracks, the midsection falters with droning, less melodic cuts like "Toronto" and "Future Dontcare." The album ends on a high note with the lengthy guitar solo on "Red Quarters." Here, the duo is able to cling to their brooding themes while pairing it with what they do best—releasing frustration through sick guitar shreds.



PS I LOVE YOU

Death Dreams By Shea Garner

Rating: 2.5

Best Coast

The Only Place

By Brittany Leitner

Rating: 3.5

After two years of touring with songs off their debut album, *Crazy for You*, Best Coast's highly anticipated sophomore album, *The Only Place*, drops on May 15. The album features 11 tracks, including "Up All Night" and "Dreaming My Life Away," which were released to the blogosphere over two years ago.

Front woman Bethany Cosentino and instrumentalist Bobb Bruno's latest vinyl transmits a smoother sound, perfect for the chill California vibe they strive to deliver to surf-rock diehards. Whereas their old tracks drowned out much of Cosentino's vocals with heavy guitar riffs and sharp drum beats, the new album is a much better showcase of Cosentino's vocal talent. Her dream-tuned vocals have a soothing effect that matches well with slowed down rock ballads.

The stand out track of the album is titled "Last Year," which Cosentino refers to as the head-banger jam of the album. Although in Best Coast terms that translates to far from mosh-able, it's the only track on the new album that a packed crowd can effectively bop to.

The rest of the album struggles to keep "heart on your sleeve" song writing interesting. Although writing simple lyrics worked for Best Coast in the past, lines like "When I wake up in the morning or the middle of the night/I wonder who's there/and what they've said" paired with light acoustics makes many songs like "How They Want Me To Be" a snooze.



Over the past nine years, Spencer Krug has released work under several different monikers; Swan Lake, Fifths of Seven, Sunset Rubdown, and most notably, Wolf Parade. With each release came a surprisingly inconsistent, albeit impressive, sound. Most recently, he's released work under the solo moniker Moonface, which is the identity he assumed for his latest release *Heartbreaking Bravery*. For this effort, he paired up with Finnish Krautrockers Siinai, whom he met while on tour with Wolf Parade and the result feels collaborative in the best way possible.

Krug's intentions with the record are clear from the start. The opening titular ballad "Heartbraking Bravery," begins steadily and confidently, but never hurried. A lone guitar provides a reliable drone for the slow, deliberate percussion. Airy guitar strums and piano splashes are capped off by Krug's low crooning. The lyrics are simple, but unapologetically powerful. As he reminds us that "Heartbreaking bravery exists," the lyrics seem to fall out of his mouth. His delivery seems genuine, if nothing else.

It's easy to see that *Heartbreaking Bravery's* greatest strength lies in Krug's ability to stick to what he knows. Throughout the course of the record, Siinai provides precise, impressive instrumentals for Krug to accent with vocals or the occasional piano splash. It works extremely well for them. Siinai's stellar instrumental tracks may be the most underrated part of the record. Krug excels in his role as a frontman, and Siinai holds up their end of the bargain beautifully. The weakest points of the record happen when the dynamic between Krug and Siinai feels disjointed.

"Quickfire, I Tried" highlights a notable division between the two acts. The track seems immediately too crowded to accommodate Krug and, thus, his additions feel forced and cramped. Here, the pairing seems less like front man and band, and instead more like collaborator and collaborator. The "band" dynamic is executed well at some points, though, like in "I'm Not the Phoenix Yet". Here, Siinai seems to let Krug interact with them more, allowing him into the group as a member. The dynamic is noticeably improved and the music undeniably better off for it.

Krug and Siinai accomplished a lot with *Heartbreaking Bravery*. Krug and Siinai build a relationship that feels developed, organic, and extremely comfortable. And from this pairing comes an impressive title to add to both artists' discographies.

Moonface

Heartbreaking Bravery

By John Luposello

Rating: 4



It has been four years since Spiritualized's last album, *Songs in A&E*, when band creator Jason Pierce was treated for a life threatening case of pneumonia. *Sweet Heart Sweet Light* was created in a similar situation as Pierce went through treatment for a degenerative liver disease. Pierce's journey, both mental and physical, is felt throughout this album. At some moments it's upbeat or low, at others it's transcendent or psychedelic. In the opening track fittingly entitled "Huh?" soft whistling and soothing orchestral tones set an ethereal mood for the album

only to be turned upside down by the next track; a nine-minute, upbeat, Britpop song called "Hey Jane." In "Get What You Deserve" Pierce takes us through what feels like a serious drug trip. We feel pain and love in the song "Little Girl" moaning lyrics "Before we ride into the sun/get it on." In the gospel-like track "So Long You Pretty Thing," along with the last song on the album—a sweet, orchestral piece "Life Is a Problem"—we hear Pierce's pleas to God seeking guidance and comfort.

Despite the wide range of songs, from jazz to psychedelic to punk to gospel, there is a certain ethereal feeling and cohesion that brings the album together. As a whole, the album is an easy listen—you can get into each song without feeling too lost or overwhelmed. While listening, you connect with the highs, the lows, and all the feelings in between Pierce's treatments. In *Sweet Heart Sweet Light*, Pierce and his bandmates take you on a gentle ride through their explorations of love, drugs, and faith.

Spiritualized

Sweet Heart Sweet Light By Maddy Jones **Rating:** 3.5

The Jarman brothers aren't getting any younger. In fact, they seem to embrace their aging in due stride. Their collaboration with former Smiths guitarist Johnny Marr led to the much-matured *Ignore the Ignorant*. However, with his departure from the band comes a return to their indie-punk roots—while also retaining their newfound sophisticated Brit-pop grandeur.

"Glitters Like Gold," *In the Belly of the Brazen Bull*'s lead track, immediately signifies the band's semi-oxymoronic retroactive progression. Calling to the youthful aggression of days gone by, the track both begins and ends with the howling squeals of distorted guitar feedback. While the punk attitude at the core of the album remains notorious for its mainstream inaccessibility, *In the Belly of the Brazen Bull* is littered with addictive pop hooks, perhaps most notably on the album's first single "Come on, Be a No One."

Yet "pop" mustn't always entail simplicity. The album ends with an eleven-minute epic, broken into four tracks. Right off the bat, a jazzy drum march establishes itself as the leitmotif during the first track, "Stalagmites." It then segues into two airy summertime tracks: "Like a Gift Giver" (which reprises "Jaded Youth") and "Butterflies." The breezy aesthetics of these middle movements are a bit deceptive. After his real-life breakup with singer-songwriter Kate Nash, front man Ryan Jarman's self-confirmed mental illness during the album's conception is reflected lyrically.

Sure, it's upsetting, but Jarman lifts himself out of depression during the finale, "Arena Rock Encore with Full Cast." Backed by a wall of sonic power, he broods, "Sorry that its taken years/we were victims of our own ideals/but I'd rather be tied to myself than to anyone else." Ms. Nash, a breakup is never easy, but thanks for inspiring a pretty killer album.



The Cribs

In the Belly of the Brazen Bull Tom Charles

Rating: 3.5

Rating: 4.5

By John Luposello

Ufabulum

Squarepusher



Rating: 4.5

Ufabulum, the latest release from Engln'd's king of intelligent dance music (IDM), also happens to be his fifteenth full-length studio album. Squarepusher, whose real name is Tom Jenkinson, explains that he has "started thinking about pure electronic music again. Something very melodic, very aggressive." *Ufabulum* couldn't be any truer a product of these sentiments.

Throughout *Ufabulum*, Squarepusher never once attempts to gently assimilate his listeners into the soundscapes that he creates on the record—it's always aggressive. He opens the record with "4001," which drops immediately in a glitchy, 160-bpm symphony of percussion. The track builds into a driving chorus of simply produced (but full nonetheless) synthesizers and a classic drum and bass beat that would not sound out of place in any of Squarepusher's older work, like *Hard Normal Daddy*. The tracks that follow take on equally epic forms built from a limited palette of sounds, such as on the lighthearted "Stadium Ice."

The second half of the album is much more eerie. This shift is most clearly noted in "The Metallurgist," which throws a series of ominous synth stabs into a swirl with an industrial beat full of distortion. Next comes "Drax 2," which brings the tempo down to a purposeful bounce with the help of plenty of the same low, clean bass that defined the UK's earliest forms of dubstep. The album closes with "Ecstatic Shock," which provides an optimistic farewell to listeners. Squarepusher again brings the tempo back to his signature 160-bpm mark for the final moments of the record, delivering a line of off-time synth. Each track possesses a complexity only achievable by true experts of their genre. In this release, it seems as though Squarepusher has truly mastered his craft, producing excellent tracks.

From top to bottom, the record plays extremely well. Each track builds on the successes of its predecessor. More importantly, though, each track contributes a completely original and impressive sentiment to *Ufabulum*. There's a maturity to be found in the album that suggests that after a staggering fifteen releases, Squarepusher might just be entering his prime.

Four years after the release of 35-year-old Santigold's self-titled debut album, her sophomore album, *Master of My Make Believe*, has finally dropped. As the title implies, the record contains Santigold's most confident effort to date. *Master of My Make Believe* lacks much of the glitter that made her debut eponymous release such a success, but has allowed audiences to acquaint themselves with a much darker side of Santigold.

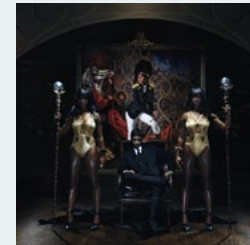
The record's instrumentation is full of sinister synths and reverb-soaked tribal beats. The Caribbean influences within the album are the extent of any similarities to her earlier work. Tracks like "The Keepers" benefit nicely from Santigold's use of deep dub rolls, which ultimately establishes a more serious tone than her prior works.

At times, Santigold fans may feel as if she's venturing too close to the realm of pop, moving away from her grimy roots. She undercapitalizes on the visceral quality of her genre, and the result seems too polished at times. Her best tracks are hypnotically rhythmic, accompanied by thick bass lines, as seen in "Fame" and "Look at These Hoes." Paired with her aggressive delivery, the tracks mark the most memorable moments on the record.

While it likely won't be met to the same fan craze as Santigold's first release, *Master of My Make Believe* is far from a disappointment. For the majority of the record, Santigold's darker sentiments feel genuine. At other times, they feel unnatural. Yet her new style is a welcomed change and seems, most importantly, like one that she is quite comfortable with.

Santigold

Master of My Make Believe By John Luposello **Rating:** 3



Playful lyrics like "If there's room in your tree, honey, I won't shake off the leaves," add to the overall sun-kissed feel of Suckers' sophomore album, *Candy Salad*. Sounding like a mix of Kings of Leon, MGMT, and The Verve, this tribal indie Britpop-ish band of four from Brooklyn, N.Y., made their mark in 2009 when they released their debut album, *Wild Smile*.

Candy Salad is an entire album, but it seems as if each song is the start of a whole new concept. After getting used to the light-hearted sound of the beginning tracks, "Roses" throws the listener a curve ball. As the last song of the album, an unfamiliar piano intro seems out of place, creating a dreary conclusion. The sweet stuff in the middle, the payoff for the listener, comes in the catchy hooks and sing-along anthem-like vocals and instrumentals. An effect-heavy guitar lives within all tracks, repeating riffs unchanged.

The feel good rock quality of songs like "Chinese Braille" has the "Tiny Dancer" feel to it that makes you want shout it out loud during a road trip with your friends. However, Suckers also offers gut-twisting lyrics like "Home, your love is home, from the bricks to the bones" from the song "Bricks to the Bones," that serve to heal your broken heart.



Two years ago, Syracuse's college music magazine stopped publishing. Let that sink in. For two years, no dedicated college music journalism was produced in Syracuse, N.Y. Sure, you had some great general-interest stuff in the campus mags, maybe the Daily Orange every once in a while, maybe the New Times, and there are a couple decent local blogs out there, right? No. As far as I'm concerned, everything else is human interest. I am talking about music journalism.

When 20 Watts failed to put out an issue in fall of 2010, we failed our readers, and we failed Loftus, Baitz, Dewey, Restuccia, et al. They built this magazine from a trifle of a college zine into an internationally ~~read~~ blog, and a campus publication people would ~~pick~~ pick up. They published some of the longest stories, designed some of the edgiest spreads, and shot interesting band photos (if you can believe that), every two months. A lack of organization paralyzed us, partly my responsibility, partly that of others, but in the end, you — our readers — suffered the most. For that I apologize.

We're back now, because this is the end of all that. With the help of ~~old~~ willing recruits and old dogs like me, we've produced a renaissance people can get excited about again. Re-entering a campus media void of anything quite like us, and a music blogosphere devolved into reblogs and aggregation over the past couple years feels like coming home. It's a new trail on an old path. It means we have to be even better, all the ~~the~~ time.

And Fuck us if we Falter.


ERIC VILAS-BOAS

Suckers

Candy Festivals

By Annie Licata & Brittany Leitner

Rating: 3

As the Thurlow sisters read the eulogy for their band Vulgarians, they prepped for the birth of another. Named after a moment at the two minute, 54 second mark in the Melvins song "A History of Bad Men," London's 2:54 is the latest duo to ride the resurging popularity of female-fronted indie shoegaze.

2:54 is structured on cycles of repetition intricately overlaid on top of each other at perfect intervals to continuously reinvent each track. While many of their songs begin with introductions similar to their newfound touring buddies, The xx, lead singer Colette's low-octave heavy vocals have allowed the band to cultivate a sound all their own.

2:54 immediately received attention from alternative music blogs like Gorilla vs. Bear with their debut single, "Creeping," but it is "You're Early" that has been most successful and seems to have the broadest accessibility. However, the album lacks variety, leading many of the songs to eventually bleed together.

It's easy to imagine listeners growing tired of Colette's monotonous, only half-coherent vocals played over 2:54's one-track take on '80s inspiration. Regardless, the band's self-titled debut offers an interesting new take on a genre in the midst of a booming rebirth, and, for that, it's hard to say it doesn't deserve some love.

2:54

2:54

2:54

By Ibetobong Inyang

Rating: 3



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