

Springsteen piano licks on "Stuck Between Stations," singer Craig Finn is a man on a mission. His frantic delivery is far more melodic than it was on *Separation Sunday*. He could never be accused of being a great singer, but his staccato shouts suit The Hold Steady's classic rock sound to a T. "Chips Ahoy!" features one of the best organ solos in recent memory. Finn nails balladry on "First Night," and his lyricism is compelling throughout the disc. The Hold Steady aren't for everyone, but they should be. On *Boys & Girls*, they're certainly trying to make fans out of everyone who's been listening to real rock (see: not alternative) since the mid-'70s.

www.theholdsteady.com—NL

CCCC½

JOANNA NEWSOM



Ys (Drag City)

Few musicians these days possess the ability to polarize listeners without resorting to political posturing. Joanna Newsom, a 24-year-old American harpist with an odd, squeaky voice, is unique for her ability to inspire equal amounts of awe and disgust among listeners simply by making the brand of music she makes. Cited by critics as a member of an avant-folk revival when her debut album was released, this follow-up is a grander and gutsier effort.

Consisting of five long songs with sprawling

orchestral arrangements by composer Van Dyke Parks, and wrapped in cover art that provocatively screams medieval fetish-nerd, *Ys* has an earnestness that's strangely compelling and intimate-sounding in spite of its lush, florid production. There are few moments when Newsom stops singing and allows the music to take over. Her voice is very much at the forefront, furiously twittering and fluttering over impressionistic lyrics like, "It is terribly good to carry water and chopped wood." Although it meanders a little, *Ys* is certainly a determined, visionary and unusual record. www.dragcity.com—Kevin Ritchie

CCCC½

K-OS *Atlantis — Hymns For Disco* (EMI)

Hip-hop fans, rejoice. K-OS' third full-length is one for the ages, and I do mean all ages. "FlyPaper" is a far more tolerable version of the bebop R&B style Andre 3000 wanted to so desperately emulate on the new Outkast record. "Equalizer" samples an Elvis guitar riff and expertly balances K-OS' newer direction with his old one. Then the indie kids come out to play. "Sunday Morning" is driven by a stellar drum line produced by Death From Above 1979's Sebastian Grainger. Justin Peroff adds similar depth to the Bloc Party-esque "Born To Run," and Sam Roberts and Kevin Drew bolster the esoteric "Valhalla." At the end of it all is the soulful rap of "Ballad Of Noah," featuring a blistering Buck 65, the record's best chorus and K-OS' most sincere lyrics. The lyricism definitely takes a back seat to the beats, but who cares? *Atlantis* sounds nearly perfect. www.kosmusic.com—NL

CCCC½

MAYOR MCCA *Cue Are Es Tea You* (We Are Busy Bodies)

For those who don't know, Mayor McCa is a one-man band sensation. His shows are a flurry of energy and his songs range from gut-wrenching to hilarious. The lyrics are often corny, but can you blame a one-man band? The songs on *Cue Are Es Tea You* shift into high gear when McCa starts to wax philosophical and his typical instrumental chaos gives way to simple sermons "DGU," "Dear" and "Take Care." Paul McCartney-level chords and melodies back words such as "Try not to waste a minute, second, day," and "You make some mistakes as you give and you take, then try again." McCa's gentle, generous personality shines through on these songs, as does his considerable pop sensibility. www.mayormcca.com—GK

CCCC

MEAT LOAF *Bat Out Of Hell III: The Monster Is Loose* (Virgin/EMI)

Like a Wagnerian case of genital herpes, Meat Loaf's *Bat Out Of Hell* series keeps returning. Loaf may have fallen out with songwriter Jim Steinman — the baby mama to the first two *Bat* outbreaks — but that doesn't stop him from once again beating us over the head with blatant badness until we get so dizzy and disoriented that we're convinced it's fucking awesome. Along with salvaging some of Steinman's gloriously overstated odd ends, Loaf also hooks up with songwriters including Nikki Sixx (Mötley Crüe) and Diane Warren (Grammy-winning supplier to everyone from Aerosmith to Ace Of Base). *The Monster* is a satisfyingly ridiculous blend of melodramatic musical theatre metal, cheesy popera and, of course, enough geeky Barbra Streisand-in-a-hobbit-costume balladry to leave a trail of tear-stained Dungeons & Dragons boards in its wake. www.meatloaf.net—JS

CC½

MIRAH *Joyride: Remixes* (K/Secretly Canadian/Sonic Unyon)

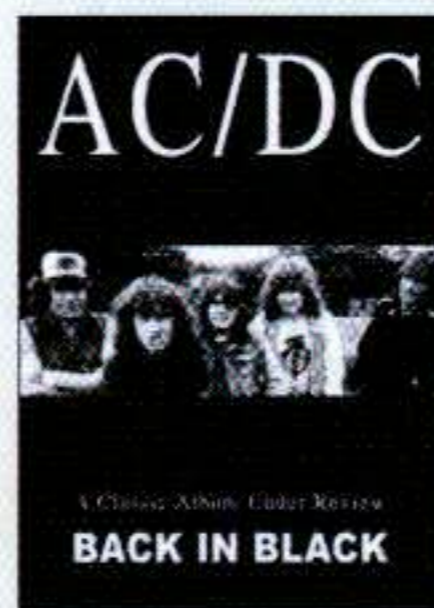
The beauty of having 11 different electronic musicians remix Mirah songs is that you're guaranteed to like something. Her eccentric indie pop has been reimagined on *Joyride* by the likes



BLOODIED BUT UNBOWED:

BLOODSHOT RECORDS' LIFE IN THE TRENCHES (Bloodshot) The little label from the Windy City turns 10 and, to celebrate, the folks at Bloodshot offer 31 videos, live performances and documentaries of the dozens of denizens who've called this artist-friendly label home. Fuelled by whiskey and wickedly insurgent country music, Bloodshot parlayed a business model based on a passion for music into an indie label success story. This DVD documents it all, from a raucous live version of Alejandro Escovedo's "Castanets" to an intimate road diary following the release of Ryan Adams' first solo disc.

—DM CCCC



AC/DC *A Classic Album Under Review: Back In Black* (MVD/Sexy Intellectual)

It's always interesting to watch a legendary band get picked apart and, while AC/DC have had their share of dissection, the *Under Review* series takes its turn. The documentary focuses on the period surrounding the recording of *Back In Black*, but also examines the unexpected death of Bon Scott and the arrival of Brian Johnson. With each track's in-depth expert analysis, and anecdotes from those close to the band, the doc's extensive coverage provides new insight into one of the biggest-selling albums of all time.

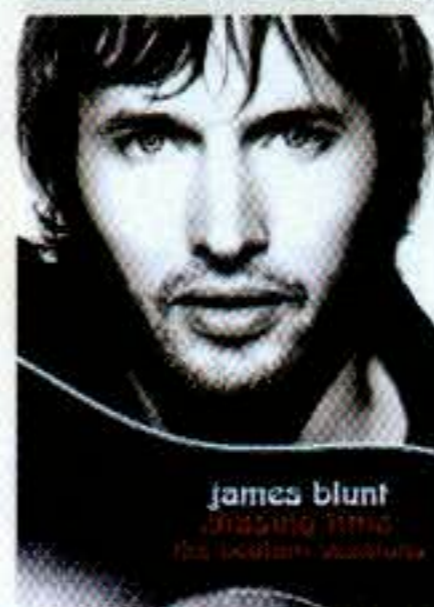
—SJ CCCC½



BAD BRAINS *Live At CBGB 1982* (MVD)

The Bad Brains were a phenomenon 25 years ago, and there hasn't been another band quite like them since. They were an all-black, Rastafarian quartet that played harder, faster and better than just about every hardcore group at the time. Every few songs they'd abruptly slow things down and drop some heavy reggae rhythms that would bring the crazed moshing and stage-diving to a halt and enthral fans. Visual documentation of this era is rare, so this concert DVD is a valuable piece of history, though it's only 60 minutes long and has few extras.

—SM CCC



JAMES BLUNT *Chasing Time: The Bedlam Sessions* (Atlantic/Custard)

As a performer and songwriter, James Blunt is about as subtle as Jim Carrey covering Andrew Lloyd Webber. But who needs subtlety when you've got dreamy John Mayer-style male sensitivity and too-busy-weeping-to-shave facial hair? *Chasing Time* documents said dreamy stubble on stage in a full-length live performance, in the *Being Blunt* documentary and in four videos with accompanying making-of featurettes. If you're a fan, go for it. If not, your money will be better spent on hate mail postage.

—JS CC



BURN TO SHINE 3: PORTLAND, OR 06.15.05 (Trixie)

The *Burn To Shine* series, organized by Fugazi's Brendan Canty, sees musicians assemble to perform in spaces that are about to be demolished. In this third installment, The Decemberists' Chris Funk gathers Portland's finest musicians to each play a song in a house that's about to be burned down. Performances by Sleater-Kinney, The Shins and The Thermals are all note-perfect and expertly shot. The footage of the house's destruction is haunting, but the film's short running time and lack of extras make it difficult to wholeheartedly endorse.

—NL CCCC½



THE PIXIES *Acoustic: Live In Newport* (Eagle Vision)

In what was perhaps an effort to pander to Newport Rhode Island's beach hippies, The Pixies performed a single show at the locale with only acoustic instruments. Though the event was beautifully filmed, the band's set will leave most fans wanting more. This isn't really the way you want to hear The Pixies. Who wants an alternate take on "Monkey Gone To Heaven?" Why mess with perfection? An accompanying doc on the band's show rehearsals is boring at best. This package is a true sell-out.

—NL CCCC½