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## Now Hear This



New music from: Elizabeth Cook, Horsehead, New Pornographers and more.

### New Pornographers, "Together"

A. C. Newman and company have nailed the art of creating unsuspecting pop songs that start small and flourish into epic grandeur with rousing choruses and irresistible rhythms. After five albums, one might argue that it's the perfect formula and not entirely a bad thing because it's delightfully unpredictable every time. Newman's words remain ever-engaging and quizzical, keeping things fresh on the lyrical front. Musically it's another shiny-happy affair that rocks a little harder than the last go-round, boasting some impressive arrangements. As always, the harmonies are tight and crisp with Neko Case and her pipes stealing the spotlight on a few tracks. The Pornos also enlist a host of notables for this effort, including Beirut's Zach Condon, Annie Clark (aka St. Vincent), and a few of the Dap-Kings, which may have been an attempt to regain some indie cred lost when they sold out a few songs from "Challengers" to mainstream advertisers. By all accounts, they're forgiven and applauded for a near-flawless disc. HHHHHI — **Hillary Langford**



### DVD: "I Need That Record! The Death (Or Possible Survival) of the Independent Record Store" (MVD Visual/Creative Commons)

There's been plenty of talk about the future of independent record stores — more than 3,000 have closed in the last decade. Most discussion has focused on financial viability in the age of free downloading and iPods, but there's an important angle often overlooked: What are we losing in terms of community? In this documentary, director Brendan Toller explores the nostalgic human angle, glossing over a variety of contributing factors: industry greed, media consolidation, homogenized radio and technological shifts. The usual suspects pop up in interviews (indie demigods Ian MacKaye, Thurston Moore, Mike Watt) with a few surprises, like Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Noam Chomsky. Elegiac in tone, Toller keeps returning to real-world repercussions: visiting his own hometown store as it closes shop, gauging the aftermath with customers and employees. It would have been a better if the characters were more developed, and we saw interviews with more industry figures as well as younger fans with no attachment to physical copies of music. Also, we may be rounding a corner — at least seasonally — with hardcore fans (especially vinyl) hitting local record stores in droves; a Rolling Stone article on May 13 about the annual Record Store Day featured Richmond's Plan 9 Music and noted national indie sales were up 10 percent in

the first quarter and down 33 percent for big chains. As is, this movie plays like a cautionary tale with familiar applications in a country where most cities are blending into one big cookie-cutter strip mall where nobody knows your name. HHHHHI — **Brent Baldwin**

### Elizabeth Cook, "Welder" (31 Tigers)

Elizabeth Cook sings like Dolly Parton with a dirty mind and writes like Tom T. Hall on a bender, so is it any wonder she didn't last a full album on a major label? Or that she's released the country album of 2010? "Welder," her fifth full-length, is full of sad, funny songs that showcase her sense of humor as well as her sense of gravity, her lyrical chops and her vocal charms. "El Camino" is about falling for the wrongest sort of guy and rhymes "annul it" with "mullet," and the bawdy sing-along "Yes to Booty" is an anthem for any woman who's bedded a drunk man. If those songs crack you up, the songs about her family will make those laughs catch in your throat. "Heroin Addict Sister" chronicles a troubled loved one whose life Cook both envies and mourns, and "Mama's Funeral" derives its power from an unpoetic matter-of-factness. So why isn't Cook famous yet? HHHHHI — **Stephen M. Deusner**



## Local Bin



### Horsehead "Before the Bright Lights" (Emerald City Sounds)

Horsehead seems to have more fun on each album it writes. The tales told on "Before the Bright Lights," the band's third full-length, continue to cover the standard Americana fare of family, friends and risky women. Big pop hooks and heartfelt harmonies take center stage, however, lending an air of casual optimism even during the bittersweet moments on songs such as "Lie Lie Lie" and "Blood From the Stone." You could point to any number of blue-collar rock bands that share Horsehead's sound, but the quartet has done well to set the lead vocals of Jon Brown up front, which at times suggest a Southern Dave Grohl. Spirited lead and rhythm guitars are also given the necessary clarity, no doubt from the recording and mixing talents of Dan-O Deckleman at Snake Oil Recording, along with Brown's production. Enhancing the quartet's Stones-like giddy-up are piano and organ parts from Bruce Courson, pedal steel from Gutterball's Stephen McCarthy, and the vocals of local soul singer Buttafly Vasquez on "Marlene." Just about everything on this album works, including a horn section which is most prominently featured on "Think of Me." I swear these songs could have ruled FM-radio in the '70s and '80s, and it's not because of their fine cover of Fleetwood Mac's "Gold Dust Woman." HHHHHI — **Mike Rutz**

### Fight the Big Bull, "All is Gladness in the Kingdom"

For all its national acclaim, Fight the Big Bull's breakthrough EP, "Dying Will Be Easy," was conceived as a small-scale demo. Its successor, "All is Gladness in the Kingdom," significantly ups the ante. Recorded in

multiple sessions during a nearly two-week residency by slide trumpeter and composer Steven Bernstein, "All is Gladness" is a polished realization of the charms of this little big band. Bernstein supplies two pieces: the contrapuntal science-fiction rave-up "Mothra" (a salute to exotic music pioneer Martin Denny) as well as a raucous arrangement of the Band's "Jemima Surrender." The rest are by White, crafted around the skills of the core band, augmented ably by Richmond semilegends Brian Jones on percussion and J. C. Kuhl on sax, as well as Bio Ritmo electric bassist Eddie Pendergrast on a single track. The compositions explore a variety of paths to coalescence: tribal experimentation gives way to solos, dueling solos and swelling ensemble horn sections. The experimentations occasionally converge into driving, unified crescendos that, just as quickly, unwind into contemplation. The band can switch gears instantly, and does so often enough to keep any one idea from running out of steam. There are some extended quiet moments, such as Jones' percussion sections in "Rockers" and the melodic saxophone solo opening "The Sacred Harp." But the Big Bull is a rock as much as a jazz band — its strategies of engagement developed in front of notoriously nonlistening crowds in Fan venues. This recording captures the band in full voice at a pivotal moment. HHHHHI — **Peter McElhinney**

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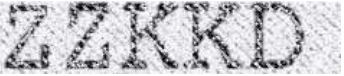
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