

with the arrangements on the cover tunes being the standout for them, and the songwriting being the best part of the original material. That's not to say the musicianship of the originals suffers, however. The title cut, written by friend Kenny Hays, is a crunchy Blues-Rocker that fits the framework of the band well. Stephenson guests on organ here, but Isbell's guitar is front and center, from an instrumental standpoint. "Suga' Mama" is the second of Matt Isbell's songwriting credits on *Dust the Dust*, and one of my favorites from the album. The song, a slow Blues, really excels in every department. The songwriting is very well done, with the common theme of a sinfully sweet lady. Isbell growls the lyrics and plays his guitar with beautiful tone at times, turning on the wah for the solo. "Comfortable Way" is another cool original, with some fantastic organ work by Stephenson. Again, I can't help but mention the songwriting here, as Isbell does a wonderful job describing his love of a T-shirt and jeans kind of gal.

"Give Me a Minute" is the next original composition. At this point, you start to catch on to the fact that the arrangements for the band's own material doesn't stray too awful far from one another. This song is a lot like "Comfortable Way," and equally as entertaining. I will add that "Give Me a Minute" features, in my opinion, some of Matt Isbell's best vocal work. "Move On" is the final original song on *Dust the Dust*. It's a story song in the vein of "Take the Money and Run." Sikes and McEwen really lock in behind Isbell, and do a great job keeping this one on the rails in a fun and entertaining way. Some standout work by the rhythm section, here.

-- John "Johnny Full-Time" Luttrell

U.S. Christmas – *Run Thick In the Night* (Neurot Recordings)

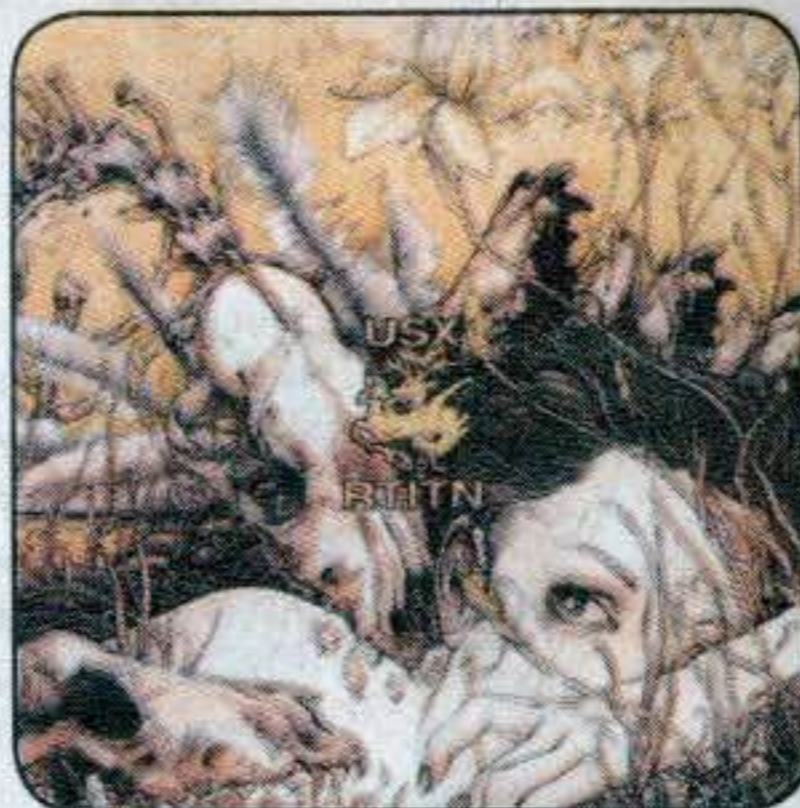
★★★★★



TODD ZACHRITZ
Contributor

What this Appalachian (Carolina/Tennessee) psychedelic/metal act does so well, can't be easily pinpointed. They write strong, epic, bewildering rock songs with a bluesy side, but their massive, dense sound aligns them closer to post-rock psychedelia. They are as comfortable writing acoustic mountain folk as they are

performing deep, crunchy space-out jams. And that is damned cool. The 13-minute "In the Night" opens with an impressive Hawkwind-meets-SWANS astral dirge. It's a powerful introduction, and a perfect harbinger of what is to come on this 76-minute album that dares to send plumes of smoky drones and lysergic effects into the stratosphere. "Wolf on Anareta" is a feral, tranced-out beast, whereas "Ephraim in the Stars" is a memorable and melodic piece with strings. "The Leonids" is a haunting strings and guitar interlude, and the band amp it up for "Deep Green," which swarms with their powerful noise/drone psychedelia that's both imposing and alluring. "Devil's Flower in Mother Winter" is a woozy

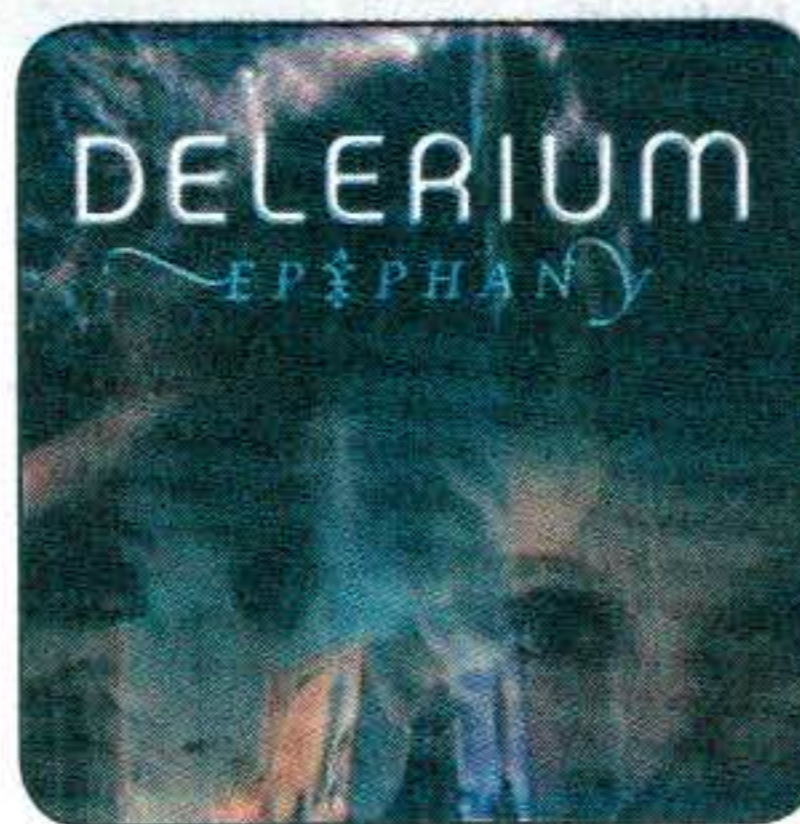


folk number with Megham Mulhearn's prominent violin. I could go on an on regarding this album, but suffice to say it's one of my favorites of this year.

-- Todd Zachritz

Delerium – *Epiphany* (MVD Visual)

★★★★



The first DVD from this longtime ethereal-exotica-electropop act is a well-done multi-cam live recording from the group's 2008 North American tour. Helmed by Front Line Assembly mainman Bill Leeb (who recedes to the background here, performing synths), this incarnation of Delerium was fronted by both the alluring Kristy Thirsk, and former Sixpence None the Richer frontwoman Leigh Nash.

The group faithfully recreates the group's rich and seductive moods with primarily live instrumentation, and minimal electronics. It's a charming and worldly set that includes hits like "Afterall," "Flowers Become Screens," and of course "Silence," (originally sung by Sarah McLachlan) which the girls handle quite well, thank you very much. Complete with textural and abstracted backing films and with plenty of post-production video effects, *Epiphany* becomes a pleasantly psychedelic viewing experience. My only complaint would be the exclusion of Delerium's promotional videos, but that's splitting hairs. This is a superb experience and proves that this studio project is a more-than-viable live entity. Kudos to Bill, Kristy, Leigh, and the boys (and producer NastyByte)... this is a winner.

-- Todd Zachritz



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