



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2011

## Smalls world

# Going for baroque

## Lully's 'Atys' triumphs at BAM



— Photo Courtesy of Dave Gillespie

NEW YORK (AP) — It's a courtly spectacle from a bygone age, combining music, dance and lavish costumes to retell a myth of human lovers undone by a vengeful goddess.

It's also a surprisingly modern psychological drama that moves with growing power toward a tragic ending of madness, murder and suicide.

It's "Atys," an opera composed by Jean-Baptiste Lully in 1676 and now back at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in the same production that first put French Baroque opera on the map in the United States more than 20 years ago.

The elegant performances began last Sunday afternoon, the first of five this week by the Paris-based group Les Arts Florissants, led by founder William Christie, who conducted the ensemble of period instruments.

It's a long, sometimes leisurely work — a prologue and five acts lasting four hours with intermissions — but well worth the time and attention of anyone interested in the performing arts.

The opera's subject — adapted from a story by the Roman poet Ovid — was suggested to Lully and librettist Philippe Quinault by no less than King Louis XIV. Its popularity lasted for a century or so, but it then fell into obscurity until Christie's group undertook a revival in the 1980s.

The story tells of the handsome young Atys and his love for the nymph Sangaride, whose father has promised her to Celenus, king of Phrygia.

Atys in turn attracts the unwanted attentions of the goddess Cybele, a kind of earth mother whose jealousy sparks the denouement. Driven mad, Atys mistakenly kills Sangaride, then realizing his crime he kills himself. A remorseful Cybele turns her dying beloved into a pine tree so that he will remain an object of beauty forever.

Lully set this plot to music of great power and emotional directness, full of subtle harmonies and some unexpected rhythmic variations. Buoyant dances and brooding

choruses punctuate a series of arias, duets and ensembles that are seamlessly connected by sung dialogue.

There's a particularly ravishing trio to open Act 4 in which Sangaride — mistakenly thinking Atys no longer loves her — confides in two sympathetic friends.

The highlight of the piece is an extended dream sequence in which Cybele has her spirits inform Atys of her love. Accompanied by an onstage instrumental ensemble, a quartet of male singers serenades the sleeping youth while dancers reinforce the message. Suddenly, a male chorus of Baleful Dreams rushes in to warn in rapid, menacing rhythms of the dire consequences should Atys reject Cybele's affection.

Director Jean-Marie Villegier has staged this "Atys" in a setting that resembles an ornately decorated room in the royal palace at Versailles. The characters all appear in sumptuous period costumes, complete with powdered wigs. He injects some quirky humor into the proceedings, as with the character of Sangaride's father, who appears as a red-faced drunk, swigging brandy from a bottle.

All the soloists, chorister and dancers perform at an extremely high level. In the daunting title role, tenor Ed Lyons tirelessly sustains the melodic line. Emmanuelle de Negri is his match as Sangaride, her lyric soprano blooming with warmth and charm.

And mezzo-soprano Anna Reinhold, by turns seductive and violent, makes Cybele the true centerpiece of the opera. Her haunting final aria of grief shows her a solitary figure left to reflect on the destruction her passion has caused.

When "Atys" first appeared at BAM in 1989 it caused a sensation and kindled interest in a period of French opera that had been all but forgotten. The fact that it's now been brought back to kick off BAM's 150th anniversary season is due to the generosity of one well-heeled fan, Ronald P. Stanton, who donated the more than \$3 million it cost to reassemble the production.



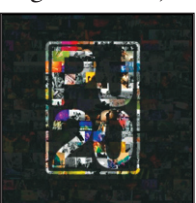
**The Sam Roberts Band, above, take to the Mr. Smalls stage in Millvale Thursday night along with opening act Zeus, left. Tickets for the all-ages show, which gets under way at 8 o'clock, are \$15. Call 412-821-4447 for additional information.**

# New songs, old favorites a 'Natural' mix for Oak Ridge Boys



**THE OAK RIDGE BOYS, "It's Only Natural" (Cracker Barrel) ★★☆☆½** — It's been 30 years since, for better or worse, gospel-turned-country collective the Oak Ridge Boys wormed their way into our collective brains with the crossover hit "Elvira." The song remains a karaoke staple with its "giddy up, oom poppa, oom poppa, mow mow" refrain. The Boys are back in town with "It's Only Natural," an album comprised of five new tunes and re-recorded versions of seven previous hits. And yes, "Elvira" rides again.

Among the new tunes, "What'cha Gonna Do," "Before I Die" and "Sacrifice ... For Me" are the highlights, and it's always nice to hear old tunes "Lucky Moon," "True Heart," "Gonna Take a Lot of River" and "No Matter How High." Hi-ho, Silver, away! (Jeffrey Sisk)



**PEARL JAM, "Pearl Jam Twenty: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack" (Columbia) ★★☆☆½** — Leave it to filmmaker/one-time music journalist Cameron

Crowe to tackle a documentary on Pearl Jam, the Seattle band that, along with Nirvana, brought grunge to the mainstream some two decades ago. "Pearl Jam Twenty" takes a look at the history of the band through archival interviews, live performances and candid new interviews that help us — and Pearl Jam — put their fame into perspective. This two-disc soundtrack is a perfect companion piece for the film.

Disc 1 includes 14 live tracks dating back to a December 1990 performance of "Alive" when they still called themselves Mookie Blaylock and continuing through to a rendition of "Just Breathe" during a March 2010 appearance on "Saturday Night Live." Highlights include a 1992 performance of "Garden" in Switzerland, an "MTV Unplugged" rendition of "Black" from March 1992, and "Thumbing My Way," recorded in Seattle in 2002.

Disc 2 is a collection of 15 demos and rarities, including a 1990 recording of Temple of the Dog's "Say Hello 2 Heaven," the 1990 "Times of Trouble" instrumental duo that the band used to recruit Eddie Vedder as frontman, Mike McCready's "Be Like Wind" from the "Pearl Jam Twenty" film score, and a stirring May 2010 rendition of "Better Man"

at NYC's Madison Square Garden. This collection is a must for Pearl Jam's legion of fans. (JS)



**NURSES, "Dracula" (Dead Oceans) ★★☆☆½** — Idaho isn't considered a hot bed for up-and-coming indie rock bands, but that's where Nurses call home. On third

full-length "Dracula," the guys come into their own with an intriguing mix of psych rock, shoegaze and noise pop. The result is a very enjoyable 11-track collection of tunes anchored by the distinctive vocals of frontman Aaron Chapman.

The opening salvo of personal favorite "Fever Dreams" and "You Lookin' Twice" is tremendous, and while Nurses can't quite maintain that level throughout the record, they additionally hit the mark on "Through the Window," "Trying to Reach You," "New Feelings," "Dancing Grass" and "Eternal Thrills." A busy album with plenty of musical layers, "Dracula" certainly doesn't, well, suck. (JS)



**TEETH, "Whatever" (Moshi Moshi) ★★☆☆½** — So I didn't like Teeth's "Whatever" debut the first time I listened to it. And honestly, the second trip through the 10-track

noise-rock release was only marginally better. Because I effort to give every album I review a fair shot, I forced myself to take another spin. And guess what? By the time I got to track No. 3 ("Care Bear"), singer Veronica So's voice wasn't nearly as grating and I started to appreciate some of the beauty hidden in the chaos.

Kudos to drummer Simon Whybray, whose energetic work on the skins adds a sense of urgency to standouts "Confusion," "U R 1," "Time Changes" and instrumental closer "Street Jams." You're never going to hear a Teeth song on the radio, but they are a band that merits some attention from those who enjoy unconventional music. (JS)

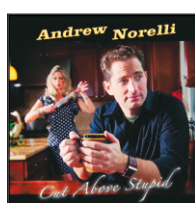


**CORREATOWN, "Pleiades" (self-released) ★★☆☆** — The brainchild of singer/songwriter/guitarist Angela Correa, indie pop outfit Correatown still are seeking to

expand their fan base outside of Southern

California. They may have taken a major step in that direction with the release of sophomore platter "Pleiades," a fantastic collection of 11 tunes that branch out beyond Correatown's early lo-fi days.

"Valparaiso" announces that the band is exploring new musical avenues, and they additionally soar on keepers "Isomer," "Everything, All at Once," "Play," "Shine Right Through" and "La Serena." The one constant throughout is the dreamy vocals of Correa, who adds depth to every lyric she sings. (JS)



**ANDREW NORELLI, "Cut Above Stupid" (Uproar) ★★☆☆½** — I hadn't heard of stand-up Andrew Norelli before "Cut Above Stupid" came across my desk a few weeks back.

So I popped the comedy album into the CD player with no preconceived notions and found myself thoroughly enjoying Norelli's witty — and profanity-free — set. He's someone I'd pay to see if he visits a Pittsburgh comedy club.

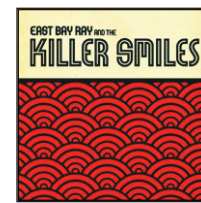
Whether riffing on pop culture ("L. Gaga"), expressing his admiration for deceased actor Patrick Swayze ("Point Break With Swayze"), mocking those who think Sin City makes them cool ("Challenges in Vegas") or eviscerating those who partake of illegal substances to bulk up ("Rage About Roids"), Norelli is consistently funny. You better believe he's on my radar now. (JS)



**JOHNNY WINTER, "Live at Rockpalast" (MVD Audio) ★★☆☆½** — Albino blues guitarist Johnny Winter had kicked a nasty drug habit and was firing

on all cylinders in the spring of 1979 when he and his band took to the stage in Essen, Germany, for a taping of the famed German television show "Rockpalast." Some three decades later, we can hear what the fuss was all about with the release of "Live at Rockpalast," a seven-track, 53-minute set of rollicking blues.

The highlight of the set is 11-minute instrumental opener "Hideaway," but Winter also impresses with "Messin' With the Kid," "Divin Duck," "Rockabilly Boogie" and a spirited cover of the Rolling Stones' "Jumpin' Jack Flash." Only 35 at the time, Winter already had lived a hard life. What better training for the blues, right? (JS)



**EAST BAY RAY & THE KILLER SMILES, self-titled (MVD Audio) ★★☆☆½** — Having earned his stripes as the guitarist for the legendary Dead

Kennedys, East Bay Ray (nee Ray Pepperell) is a punk rock icon. And for those waiting in vain for another Kennedys slab to drop, East Bay Ray's latest project will have to do. This self-titled release is his second effort with the Killer Smiles and features Skip McSkipster on vocals.

While nowhere near hardcore punk, this 12-track release is a driving collection of tunes that, as expected, lets Ray and his ax take center stage. Among the highlights here are opener "Raising the Stakes," "Lipstick Cherry Red," "Area 51," "The Heart Is Something," "I'm a User" and "Safe and Sound." Glad to see that East Bay Ray is alive and kicking. (JS)



**LAURA MARLING, "A Creature I Don't Know" (Ribbon Music) ★★☆☆** — At just 21 years of age and with three albums under her belt already, Laura Marling is one of

those artists the mainstream media should be fawning over.

But she wears too many clothes, actually writes her own music, and has a wealth of talent. So of course she takes a back seat. Her new album might help change some of that.

On "A Creature I Don't Know," Marling kicks up the tempo a bit, adding a bit more country rock and letting her hair down more than ever. She does maintain her folk roots, which show through on jazzy opener "The Muse"; quiet "Night After Night"; and "Rest in the Bed," which sounds like a traditional cut but is one of her own. She adds the aforementioned new color to "Salinas," a Dylan-esque storyteller that rocks out at the end; "The Beast," that begins innocently enough but eventually is consumed by its fiery subject matter; excellent "Sophia," the most impressive song on here that should be rousing live; and closer "All My Rage," that benefits from the spiritual group chorus that rises as the song comes of age. Marling is an amazing talent, and people caught up in the Avett Brothers/Mumford and Sons wave should do themselves a favor and spend time with this gifted musician. (Brian Krasman)