

Music

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Section **B**

Migratory masterpeice



Mastersons take off with 'Birds Fly South' debut

THE MASTERSONS, "Birds Fly South" (New West) ☆☆☆½ — Chris and Eleanor Masterson are respected musicians in their own rights, with both having carved out impressive careers in other bands and as solo performers. But the married couple struck sonic gold by joining forces as the Mastersons, as evidenced by their remarkable "Birds Fly South" debut. With pals George Reiff (bass) and Falcon Valdez (drums) rounding out the band, Chris and Eleanor have cobbled together a delightful 11-track collection of folksy Americana.

From the opening notes of "You Don't Know" clear through to the final strains of the set-closing title track, the Mastersons don't miss a note on this pitch-perfect release. Chris and Eleanor work the boy-girl singing dynamic to perfection on such stellar tracks as "Crash Test," "Tell Me It's Alright," "Would It Really Be a Sin?," "One Word More" and "Fool" — though truth be told, there's not a clunker to be found. Here's hoping that "Birds Fly South" is just the first of many Mastersons records. (Jeffrey Sisk)



JOHNNY CASH, "Bootleg Vol. IV: The Soul of Truth" (Columbia Legacy) ☆☆☆ — The latest in the outstanding Johnny Cash bootleg series focuses on the Man in Black's spiritual side. "Bootleg Vol. IV: The Soul of Truth" is a two-CD, 51-song compilation of gospel recordings Cash made in

the 1970s and 1980s — many of which were previously unreleased.

Disc 1 opens with 20 tracks that comprised 1979's "A Believer Sings the Truth," four tunes that appeared on 1984's "I Believe ..." and the previously unreleased song "Truth." Highlights include "Gospel Boogie (A Wonderful Time Up There)," "When He Comes" (with daughter Rosanne Cash & the Carter Family), "Children Go Where I Send Thee" and "I'm Just an Old Chunk of Coal."

Disc 2 opens with a dozen songs recorded for a 1975 album that never was released. There also are the 10 tracks from "Johnny Cash: Gospel Singer," a rare LP recorded in 1983, as well as four previously unreleased outtakes from the "Gospel Singer" sessions. Highlights include "Back in the Fold," "That's Just Like Jesus," "Half a Mile a Day" and "Gospel Road." Good stuff. (JS)



ALEX WINSTON, "King Con" (V2/Cooperative) ☆☆☆ — Twenty-four-year-old Detroit native Alex Winston caught our ear early last year with the release of her promising "Sister Wife" mini LP. Classically trained in opera, Winston used her piercing soprano to great effect on a record that figured to appeal to fans of Kate Bush and Lykke Li. Winston is back with a proper full-length and "King Con" builds on her early promise.

Happily including my favorite tunes from the mini LP ("Locomotive," the title track, "Choice Notes"), there aren't any missteps on the 11-track "King Con."

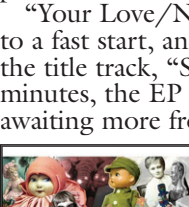
Additional standouts include "Velvet Elvis," "Medicine," "Shock Me" and "Run Rumspringa." I said it last year and am more convinced of the fact than ever: Winston is a star in the making. (JS)



THE VIOLET LIGHTS, "Sex & Sound" (self-released) ☆☆☆ — With their infectious mix of indie rock and Britpop, plus just enough garage rawness to keep things interesting, things are looking pretty bright for Wisconsin-bred, Los Angeles-based newcomers the Violet Lights. The duo,

comprised of Joel Nass and Amber Garvey, show lots of promise on their enjoyable "Sex & Sound" debut EP.

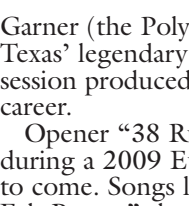
"Your Love/Not Enough" gets the five-track slab off to a fast start, and the Violet Lights additionally shine on the title track, "Substitute" and "It'd Be Fine." At just 16 minutes, the EP flies by too quickly. That has me eagerly awaiting more from this talented twosome. (JS)



SALIM NOURALLAH, "Hit Parade" (Tapete) ☆☆☆ — For latest project "Hit Parade," singer/songwriter Salim Nourallah gathered together an all-star collective of supporting musicians — Joe Reyes (Buttercup), John Dufilho (Apples In Stereo), Richard Martin (Shibboleth) and Jason

Garner (the Polyphonic Spree) — to record in Austin, Texas' legendary Treefort Studio. The resulting recording session produced some of the best material of Nourallah's career.

Opener "38 Rue De Sevigne" is an ode to Paris written during a 2009 European tour and sets the tone for what's to come. Songs like "Unstoppable," the title track, "Never Felt Better," the rollicking "Goddamn Life," "Warriors of Love," "The Quitter" and the affecting "Friends for Life" worm their way into your head and figure to stay there for quite a while. Great stuff. (JS)



EMILY WELLS, "Mama" (Partisan) ☆☆☆½ — If you don't warm right away to the latest album from singer/songwriter Emily Wells — and if you've never heard her sing before, there's a decent chance you won't — I'd advise utilizing a little patience. On subsequent spins, I'm guessing "Mama" will

start to grow on you. Wells is cut from a different cloth — from her vocals down to her arrangements, and it can take some getting used to.

But for those who get it, this 10-track platter is sure to become a favorite. Songs like "Passenger," "Mama's Gonna Give You Love," personal favorite "Let Your Guard Down" and "Darlin'" are really, really good. And even some of the odder-sounding entries — "Dirty Sneakers and Underwear," "Fire Song" — are more quirky than unpleasant. (JS)

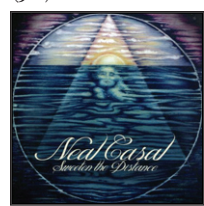


STEEP CANYON RANGERS, "Nobody Knows You" (Rounder) ☆☆☆ — Casual listeners might know the Steep Canyon Rangers best for their Grammy-nominated collaborations with actor/banjo player Steve Martin,



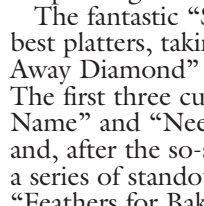
but hardcore bluegrass fans have been following the talented five-piece for well over a decade. Latest effort "Nobody Knows You" finds SCR at the top of their game on an album every bit as good as last year's "Rare Bird Alert" with Martin.

Whether you prefer Graham Sharp's banjo, Mike Guggino's mandolin or Nicky Sanders' fiddle, this is bluegrass as it was meant to be performed. Among the many highlights are the title track, "Easy to Love" personal favorite "Between Midnight and the Dawn," "Natural Disaster," "Ungrateful One" and "Knob Creek." (JS)



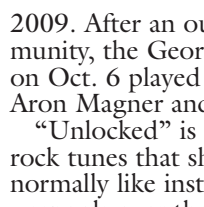
NEAL CASAL, "Sweeten the Distance" (Royal Potato Family) ☆☆☆ — Neal Casal is one of those guys who's highly respected by his peers, even though he's never been a household name. With 10 studio albums to his credit, not to mention a successful stint in Ryan Adams' backing

band the Cardinals, it's time everyone got to know Casal's ear-pleasing brand of country-leaning rock. The fantastic "Sweeten the Distance" ranks as one of his best platters, taking a spot alongside Casal's 1995 "Fade Away Diamond" debut and 2006's "No Wish Reminisce." The first three cuts — the title track, "Bird With No Name" and "Need Shelter" — are breathtakingly good and, after the so-so "Let It All Begin," Casal rolls out a series of standouts in "White Fence Round House," "Feathers for Bakersfield," "Time and Trouble" and "The Grls of Wynter." Highly recommended. (JS)



CONSPIRATOR, "Unlocked: Live From the Georgia Theatre" (SCI Fidelity) ☆☆☆½ — I spent many a night at the Georgia Theatre during my college years in Athens, Ga., watching bands both good and bad, and was deeply saddened when the landmark structure was gutted by fire in June 2009. After an outpouring of support from the community, the Georgia Theatre reopened last summer and on Oct. 6 played host to Conspirator, a project featuring Aron Wagner and Marc Brownstein of the Disco Biscuits.

"Unlocked" is a powerful collection of 11 electronic rock tunes that should appeal even to those who don't normally like instrumental music. Opener "Park Ave" unspools over the course of nine glorious minutes and leads into hard-hitting keeper "So Much More." Conspirator, who performed at Mr. Smalls in Millvale last month, also score with "Feed the Wolf," "S&M" and "Gypsy Lane." Great to see one of my all-time favorite venues being put to good use again. (JS)



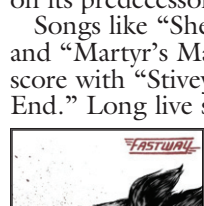
SLEEPY SUN, "Spine Hits" (The End) ☆☆☆½ — My first exposure to trippy rockers Sleepy Sun came a couple years ago with the release of superb sophomore effort "Fever." The California natives captured my fancy, even though I don't normally dig psych-rock, and I've been eager to

hear what frontman Bret Constantino and his mates came up with next. The answer? "Spine Hits," a solid record that entertains, even though it doesn't necessarily improve on its predecessor. Songs like "She Rex," "Siouxie Blaqq," "Boat Trip" and "Martyr's Mantra" are terrific, and Sleepy Sun also score with "Stivey Pond," "Still Breathing" and "Yellow End." Long live stoner rock. (JS)



FASTWAY, "Eat Dog Eat" (MVD Audio) ☆☆☆ — It's been more than 20 years since we heard from British metal outfit Fastway, and the lads are back with a new vocalist in tow on the solid, though unspectacular, "Eat Dog Eat." Ex-Little Angels frontman Toby Jepson steps to the microphone and breathes life into the words of guitarist, and former Motorhead icon, "Fast" Eddie Clarke. Drummer Matt E rounds out the trio.

There's nothing particularly original about the 11-track release, but Fastway inject enough life to make the riff-heavy slab appealing to metal fans. Standout tunes include "Leave the Light On," "Dead and Gone," "Sick as a Dog," "Who Do You Believe?" and set closer "Only If You Want It." Rock on. (JS)



IGNITOR, "Year of the Metal Tiger" (MVD Audio) ☆☆☆½ — For their second album with vocalist Jason McMaster, Texas-based metal purists Ignitor go old school with "Year of the Metal Tiger." The seven-track release sounds like a cross between the New Wave of British Heavy Metal and thrash with plenty of falsetto screaming, screeching guitars and punishing drums.

Opener "Heavy Metal Holocaust" is almost comical in its bombast, but works in a retro kind of way. "Beast



Dutch band The Devil's Blood will perform as part of the Decibel Magazine Tour at Mr. Smalls on Thursday.

Decibel Tour promises a devil of a good time

By **BRIAN KRASMAN**
For The Daily News

Thursday night will be one of the stranger events ever hosted by Mr. Smalls, the former church that now is one of the area's most active show venues.

It will house a night of heavy metal music that, in the past, likely would have sparked outrage and protest.

Decibel Magazine Tour

It still may. The Decibel Magazine Tour will hit town, and in tow will be three devoutly Satanic bands — Behemoth, Watain, and the Devil's Blood — as well as a fourth, In Solitude, that draws on occult themes to power their music. But fret not. These bands mean no physical harm, and you might even be able to go and just enjoy for the love of music. Here's a quick look at all four:

Behemoth: Returning to the road after leader Adam "Nergal" Darski recovered from leukemia, the Polish blackened death crew will headline this whole affair with their normal furious, infernal compositions that'll bring out the evil spirits in you.

Watain: If you're wearing light colors, maybe don't go near the stage when these Swedish black metal heathens are playing. There will be blood (real blood), and you will be doused. There also will be great metallic carnage from this feared group.

The Devil's Blood: Easily one of modern metal's catchiest, most infectious bands, this Dutch group is led by the Mouth, whose incredibly emotional vocals and charismatic performances make her one of the more interesting vocalists in music. Heart and Blue Oyster Cult fans would eat this stuff up.

In Solitude: This Swedish band sounds like a mix of Mercyful Fate and Ghost, and their retro-tinged metal has made them one of the most talked-about groups going. Their second album "The World, The Flesh, The Devil" is a must-hear record.

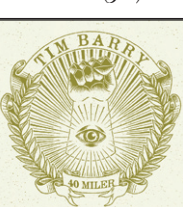
in Black" features a frenetically fast guitar line and iconic imagery such as Knights Templar and virgin warriors. "Shadow of the Needle" and "The Kaiser" also are effective. At 37 minutes, "Year of the Metal Tiger" doesn't outstay its welcome. (JS)



IT'S A MUSICAL, "For Years and Years" (Morr Music) ☆☆☆½ — Things don't get much more collaborative than with German indie pop duo It's a Musical. Members Ella Blixt and Robert Kretzschmar write the songs together, share (and often combine) the vocal duties and even rotate between organ and drums repeatedly during live performances.

That democratic approach is evident throughout sophomore release "For Years and Years."

It's a pleasant, if not essential, smattering of 12 songs that finds It's a Musical putting their best foot forward. Tunes like the title track, "As Soon As I," "Peace and Trees," "The Team That Never Wins," "Pictures" and "Bring It On" are ethereal and delightful, making up for occasional missteps "The Nap," "Fish Song" and "The Dream." (JS)



TIM BARRY, "40 Miler" (Chunksaah) ☆☆☆ — Having long since left his hardcore punk roots behind him in exchange for the more intimate world of indie folk, Virginia native Tim Barry has emerged as one of my favorites. I've been a fan since 2006's "Laurel Street Demo 2005" and Barry cements my admiration for his music on latest LP "40 Miler."

Barry has again tweaked his sound, adding electric guitars to give the 13-track release more of a rock feel than usual. The new approach works, as Barry rolls out a series of standouts in "Wezeltown," "Driver Pull," the title track, "Shed Song," "Bankers Dilemma," "Hobo Lullaby" and "Amen." The addition of supporting vocalist Julie Karr was a stroke of genius. Maybe this gem will bring Barry some deserved mainstream acclaim. (JS)