

that, while his backing **THE ROUNDHEADS** are OK, if too slick by half (and **THE SHIRELLES'** "Boys," is deplorably bad bar band!), Starr's vocals sound flippant, as if trying to be Mr. Entertainer, rather than the serious singer he was, in his own way, on the studio versions. There're two words for this: pandering schlock. As for his new LP *Choose Love* songs, well... Choose eject. (kochrecords.com)

rich mcculley

CERRO GORDO

(RICH MCCULLEY)

For his fourth LP, Fresno-to-San Fran-now-L.A. vet McCulley remains the consummate polite guy with all plain charms. He plays an inoffensive-to-the-point-of-routine guitar pop that would only provide reasonable "Lite FM" action were it not for supreme earnestness, simple sincerity, and actual talent as a barroom-tinged quiet singer and bright pop tunesmith. Call it sneaky appeal; he's got the benign power-pop and airy roots rock thing down pat, as if it were easy, with plentiful hints of '70s singer/songwriter Canyon Rock—down to jangly Rickenbacker guitars on "Take Me Down" and "I Never Really Loved You," and a couple of female duets. Though he's less heartbroken than on 2005's *Far From My Angel*, you'll still fall for the honey, wonderfully string-laden "By the Way" and "Hearts on Fire," like a lovelorn Jeff Tweedy. Mmmmmm... (richmcculley.com)

mia and jonah

ROOMS FOR ADELAIDE

(MIA AND JONAH)

This cute Oakland couple plays and sings a bright but punchy acoustic folk-pop that's completely NPR-ready, and should be featured there soon. For their second LP, following 2005's *Shine I*, they blend in choice hints of Americana, a little bluegrass-country (the world-weary Neil Young harmonica on "Silver Moon" and "Adelaide"), a little rockabilly (the slinky "Junkyard Dog"), a little jazz, and even a little '20s blues-gospel (the chain-gang rhythm in the end of "Morning Hymnal"), with a little help again from a few **TOM WAITS** and **BONNIE RAITT** sidemen on guitar, upright jazzy bass, and tapping drums. Her: darkly romantic, almost husky voice. Him: a lighter tough, a calmer soul. Together: harmonies and quietly poetic souls entwined. How sweetly perky-pretty the product is! (miaandjonah.com)

nada surf

KARMIC EP

(HI-SPEED SOUL)

What a good idea to reissue this roaring New York power-pop trio's debut EP, 1996's five-song *Karmic* EP—originally on No. 6 Records—with an even rarer 7" bonus track. For *Karmic* isn't stumbling baby photos; a couple of tracks, such as the prototype-catchy Dinosaur Jr./'89 MBV-ish "Sea Knows When," show the full promise as well as a blueprint that's been realized on their

four LPs since (a fifth LP is in production). Meanwhile, interestingly, four other quickened songs betray a slight, perceptible **SWERVEDRIVER** influence (note: new San Diego label Hi-Speed Soul also signed that band's **ADAM FRANKLIN**), similar to Nada's louder contemporaries, Ash. As an example, this original "Treehouse" is more vicious than its re-recording on the following *High-Low*, wherein **RIC OCASEK**'s production made them brief MTV stars (via "Popular"). Considering that these songs, going back to 1993, were plucked from a finished LP abandoned when an overseas record deal collapsed, it's too bad the missing wasn't unearthed. But this reissue nevertheless provides a double service: making the material available again, and reminding all that leader **MATTHEW CAWS** had a songwriting knack, and a kickin' guitar, right from the git-go. Also on colored vinyl. (hispeedsoul.com)

ok ikumi

SPIRITS

(BLUE BELL)

What an odd little solo pop record. Provo, UT's **KARL JØRGENSEN** (with some vocal help from sister **KARI**) creates little bed-sit electropop songs, almost childlike in their execution and direction, with funny little bunny rabbit electro beats, mild vocals, and a gentle early morning pre-coffee feeling rather than an in-your-face, midnight on the dance floor, pump up the volume drive. Is he the poor man's home-recorded New Order or the lighthearted DNTEL/Postal Service for the '00s? You decide! (bluebellrecords.co)

ol' snakeys bluejass ramblers

SNAKEY'S RANT

(OL' SNAKEYS BLUEJASS RAMBLERS)

That three members of Davis, CA's **MAD COW STRING BAND** moonlight in Ol' Snakeys is cause to listen. Them Cows are an entertainingly loose modern jug band, and given their covers of **BILL MONROE** and **DJANGO REINHARDT** (among others), it figures they'd give similar treatment to bluegrass. Which they do, with equal measure of Monroe's pickin' Appalachian accents and Reinhardt's gypsy roots, and great corn-pone fiddlin' (some mandolin and accordion, too). It's an easygoing, unfastened jumble of 100 years of Southeastern Mountain music, a poor-man's hootenanny, *O Brother Where Art Thou?* style. But it's not stuffy classicism; their hearts are equally in '40s country swing (a dance through **RED FOLEY**'s "Tennessee Saturday Night") and '30s jazz-R&B (covers of the brilliant **FATS WALLER**'s "Honeysuckle Rose"—sans vocal—and **LOUIS JORDAN**'s "Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby!"). Yee-haw! (olsnakey.com)

the pointed sticks

"MY JAPANESE FAN" 7"

(SUDDEN DEATH CAN)

First this great late '70s/early '80s Vancouver quintet reunites with all five original members—see our feature—now they go and make a new record, too! You expect

a falloff after, what, 26 years. Yet the aside is one of those silly, fun, Barracudas/Undertones-like power-pop punk songs they always excelled at, even if it isn't one of their standard heartbreakers. A hammy love postcard to the Japanese obsessives who single-handedly brought them out of their permanent retirement, it's sure hokey, and it's sure damn good. They hedge their bets by re-recording an old song—albeit a rather good one, the rotten-jealous "Found Another Boy"—on the b-side, though. Should have written *one* more! (suddendead.com)

robert pollard

COAST TO COAST CARPET OF LOVE/STANDARD GARGOYLE DECISIONS

(MERGE)

Two LPs quite apart in character, released in one package. Of the two, *Coast* is unusually skippable. It's not terrible, and it doesn't suffer from the persistent bug of Pollard's solo catalog, ill-considered scraps instead of songs. The problem is that the songs seem so low-wattage in execution—which would be fine if the tunes themselves weren't so B- or C+ in relation to his back catalog. Newcomers might love this, but to those with a Pollard-related CD shelf larger than many's whole collections, this feels underwhelming.

Fortunately, *Standard* is everything *Coast* isn't. Its jagged turns, abrupt bursts, unorthodox rhythms, crouch-than-spring penchant, and more vigorous singing are so much more inspired and wild, one wonders why it's listed second on the cover. Mind, outside of the floor-tom-kicking "Shadow Port" and a few others, the tunes again are not *quite* the instant classics that his **GUIDED BY VOICES** career produced like a one-man Brill Building. And one wonders if he hasn't finally, really hit that burnout wall that critics think they've detected every year. Yet most selections like the flailing, serrated "Psycho-Inertia," and "Motion Sickness Ghosts" are impossible to ignore or dislike. Pollard is still one of the great artists of our time; he probably just needs a greater range of collaborators than just **TODD TOBIAS**, or more likely, an actual *band* to feed off, to inspire him anew. But for now, *Standard* is plenty good. (mergerecords.com)

iggy pop

LIVE IN SAN FRAN 1981

(MVD AUDIO)

It's not clear why an audio version of this concert would materialize long after its DVD release (itself from a 1981 Target Video). Why be deprived of watching one of the greatest frontmen ever, with an exiting looking band (like **BLONDIE** drummer/showman **CLEM BURKE**)? But those starting here will learn, again: 1) With the right band, Iggy was and is godhead live, and 2) with a band this good and exciting production instead of drab and lifeless, the pathetic dud that was 1981's *Party* could have been as good as 1979's *New Values* and the best of 1980's *Soldier*, especially "Bang Bang." (Comes with two unreleased 1983 songs that are nothing

special.) (mvdaudio.com)