

FREETIMESMUSIC

DISCOURSE

THE BLACK SWANS

Change!

(La Societe Expeditionnaire)

★★★1/2

The Black Swans have created the perfect compliment to low-lit, hushed winter days. Whether producing an atmosphere of desolation and gloom that recalls barren cornfields and mud, or the sort of comfort that fits perfectly with a thick blanket and a steaming hot drink, *Change!* is a marching and spacious take on the genre. Front man Jerry DeCicca's playing is toned down, yet emphatic, like a bluesman. The Black Swans do the work of artists like Angels and Calexico and turn it into hum-drum and haunting bits of country and there reverb-doused guitars and melodic strings drift above steady and consistent drumming.

Despite the slow, somber and often melancholic nature of the songs on *Change!*, the album never drags. There are no sore spots, every part seems appropriate and the movement well-timed. Even the instrumental interludes like "Blue Moon" and the outros to "Shake" and "3rd Song" never seem indulgent. *Change!* is a rare find in today's single-track music culture. It's an album that should be played as an album. So free up a little time, find a comfortable, quiet place and let the Black Swans do the rest.

— Matt Whelihan

SIGUR RÓS

Hvarf-Heim

(XL Recordings)

★★★★

If you haven't seen Sigur Rós' new film, *Heima*, your first priority should be to track it down and watch one of the most visually striking music documentaries ever. After you've done that, I need to convince you why you should pick up the limited-edition two-disc companion albums, *Hvarf* and *Heim*, which contain unreleased recordings as

well as rearranged — or, maybe more aptly, reinvented — versions of the band's symphonic masterpieces that will blow your mind all over again. *Hvarf* is a five-song collection of electric rarities from the band (none of which are featured in *Heima*) and contains some of the band's most breathtaking material to date, from cathartic, distortion-drenched tracks like "Í Gær" to the atmospheric, electronically-inflected "Hjómáland" and the wonderfully abstract "Hafsól," which opens with one solitary syncopated string and eventually builds to a glorious crescendo.

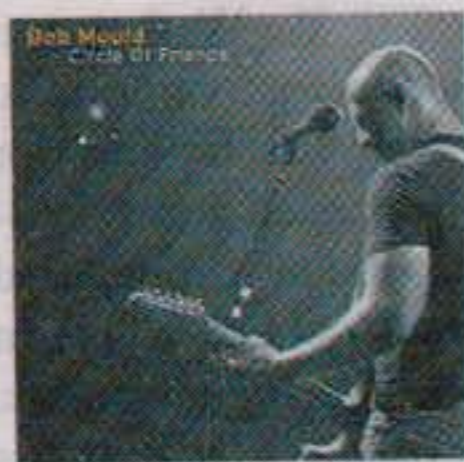
Alternately, *Heim* features unplugged versions of classic Sigur Rós material; however, instead of merely unplugging the guitars, the band implements acoustic and orchestral instruments to give the songs a completely different level of emotional resonance. While on paper, it's difficult to believe that the band would be able to recreate the dynamics of the original versions without the use of amplified instruments, the subtle control of the instruments proves the true genius of Sigur Rós lies more in the players that perform it. This is most evident on the minimalist rendition of "Ágæis Byrjun," which haunts the listener like a lost symphony from the greatest composer the world has never known. — Jonah Bayer

BOB MOULD

Circle of Friends DVD

(MVD Visual)

★★★1/2



Issued two years ago, *Body of Song* was Bob Mould's strongest release since the mid-1990s demise of his band Sugar. Although he played

Cleveland solo, Mould's 2005 tour included a few full-band dates. This DVD preserves one such full-band set of 23 tunes dating back to Hüsker Dü's 1984 *Zen Arcade*. On most extant Sugar and Hüsker Dü live recordings, Mould often screamed more than sang atop the blistering instrumentation. Incorporating variant melodies and new vocal harmonies with the band mates, these new performances sound sweeter without being remotely soft.

In recent tours, Mould has displayed an uncannily objective self-recognition of his

strongest material, and this concert's set list adds up to a bull's eye "best of." The songs were also juxtaposed in a way that revealed stylistic and conceptual connections across Mould's prolific and varied career. Sugar's 1992 *Copper Blue* is arguably Mould's finest masterpiece, and 7/10 of it is deservedly represented here, with that album's first three cuts constituting the concert's first three numbers. The tour album, *Body of Song*, also clocked in with seven solid songs. A couple more Hüsker Dü tunes would have been nice, and pre-Sugar solo work seemed under-represented, but there's little ground for complaint. Visually, it's a straightforward rock show, and as such, repeated DVD plays will probably be more listened to than closely watched. But it adds up to a reasonably definitive documentation of one of alternative rock's finest songwriters/guitarists in live action. — Michael David Toth

AVENGED SEVENFOLD

Avenged Sevenfold

(Warner Bros.)

★★1/2

AVENGED SEVENFOLD
FEATURING
"ALMOST EASY," "SCREAM," "AFTERLIFE"
& "A LITTLE PIECE OF HEAVEN"



Continuing in the same vein of arena-ready metallic rock as its last album, *City of Evil*, over-the-top rockers Avenged Sevenfold's fourth full-length, a moderately disappointing self-titled disc, seems to offer exactly what the band believes their fratboy fans want — raging guitar riffs, overzealous double bass and singer M Shadows' warbling howl in neatly wrapped, radio-driven packages. First single, the throbbing, repetitive "Almost Easy," which boasts a ridiculously lame video involving a lot of fake flames and numerous close-ups of Shadows' rippling biceps, fails to match the fervor (however faked it was) of *City of Evil*'s debut single, "Bat Country." The looping chorus of "I'm not insane/I'm not insane" reveals the artless nature of the band's songwriting, although it's admittedly catchy at points, as are other sections of the album, particularly "Afterlife."

It's all pretty predictable and consumer-driven, with gigantic drums and spotlight-seeking guitar solos, and much of it sounds written specifically to be played in big ven-

ues with lots of lights and on top of. However, Avenged Sevenfold found its niche, and that's a wide. After shedding its predilections after 2001's *Fallen*, the California five-piece found its way into a market where bands like Motley Crüe, and fans like M Shadows, try to ape that aesthetic and image. Shadows defied the odds in fact, he might be acting underneath that new M Crüe sporting. — Emily Zemler

THURSDAY

Kill The House Lights

(Victory Records)

★★★★



outlasted countless musicians, and the one it helped change and, maybe, inspire has been forced to evolve. Inspired, like My Chemical Romance, ascend to mainstream success.

The documentary *Kill The House Lights* is far more than a tour video, running nearly an hour and chronicling the band's humble beginnings in New Jersey to playing with The Cure. Told by the band members as well as those who cast which, in full disclosure (writer), the story is compelling because it isn't the least bit latory. In fact, after the documentary, it's clear that Thursday is the worst critic. The CD package contains three songs that are impressive (most notably "Gentleman: My Brother," which features a cameo by Tim Kasher), as well as live recordings and remixes, which should keep fans over until the next release. It seems like every time a band releases DVDs, *Kill The House Lights* only affirms Thursday's status as the best live recording of the year. — JB

Excellent ★★★★★

Very Good ★★★

Fair ★★

Poor ★

REWIND — REISSUES AND COLLECTIONS

GRAM PARSONS WITH THE FLYING BURRITO BROTHERS

Live at the Avalon Ballroom 1969

(Amgeba)

★★★★

and twang that roared out of Southern California in the '70s could trace its origins to the arrival of Gram Parsons in the '60s.

Soundboard recorded by noted Grateful Dead sonic archivist/legendary acid

troupe sense. And yet, for all its obvious semi-bootleg flaws (the vocals are high in the mix, the instruments in the back), it's thrilling to hear Parsons and the Burritos filtering country classics like "Dark End of the Street" and "Climax" through their

ing for the Dead in April 1969. The April 6 show on the CD is slightly better of the two. This is the best quality live recording of the Burritos yet discovered. Parsons' playing is superb. — JB