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music live show reviews

Punk Rock Karaoke

Nov. 2 @ **The Roxy**

If you had told me when I was 15 that I'd be in a room with members of bands like Social Distortion and Agent Orange talking about karaoke, I would've lost my shit. But there I was at the Roxy doing just that (fully composed, I might add).

Punk Rock Karaoke is the brainchild of Bad Religion's Greg Hetson and friend Fred Eric. They brainstormed the idea that made its debut on New Years Eve of 1996. It's been a critical and fan success ever since.

The show itself is GENIUS. You take Derek O'Brien from Social D, Steve Soto from Agent Orange/Adolescents fame, Hetson and NOFX's Eric Melvin and watch them back John and Suzie Q. Public as he or she sings the hits from punk's heyday. Wrap your heads around THAT one, people.

The hardest punks and rockabilly kids this side of SoCal took the stage one-by-one and belted out the best jams of the genre. All it took was a signature next to their desired song and a shot of hooch for courage. Just one warning for future reference: this is NOT karaoke for the Avril Lavigne or Hot Topic set.

—**Ebony March**

Whispertown2000

Nov. 2 @ **The Echo**

Whispertown2000, who just followed up their debut, *Living in a Dream*, with the wonderful *Swim*, have a lot of fans. In three years, they've toured with Bright Eyes and Jenny Lewis, garnered accolades from Conor Oberst, worked with members of the Postal Service and signed to Gillian Welch's Acony Records as the icon's first acquisition.

In case there's any doubt, let me just say, they're pretty damn good, and anyone at the Echo found out. Call it roots music, indie Americana, bluegrass-inspired folk rock, alt-country, whatever. It's moody, it's catchy and you can sway, dance and sing along to it.

Founder and frontwoman Morgan Nagler's voice soars and cracks in the most sexy of ways; brothers Tod and Casey Wisenbaker bring those strummin' and pickin' roots a-comin' on guitar and bass; and drummer Vanesa Corbala colors in haunting shades with her background vocals.

If you don't already have it, buy this L.A. band's sophomore album for a new take on old-time music ... and see what all the whispering is about.

—**Rayhanés S. Sanders**

Ingrid Michaelson

Nov. 6 @ **The El Rey**

Ingrid Michaelson collapsed all sense of expected genteel ladylike-ness on stage, throwing the audience with clandestine, backroom chatter in between songs that shot out in spastic spurts throughout her soft, honest set. Her voice is immutable, it speaks

an old love song against a solo ukulele – the kind of ballad we don't hear anymore, the kind our grandparents sing themselves to sleep with.

She really is timeless, talking love, inciting peace. Some Republicans might even call her socialist: "Don't you worry there, my honey. We might not have any money, but we've got our love to pay the bills ... Let's get rich and buy everybody nice sweaters and teach them how to dance."

In between songs, she was honest and paid no mind to whatever social tact we might be used to: "My girlfriends always tell me I shouldn't talk about bowel movements



Ingrid Michaelson says – and sings – what she feels.

onstage because it makes me seem less sexy. But I don't really care."

She didn't care what she said or what we thought, and that's really her message: Whipping up a carefree provocation to the rigid rest, to get loose and say what you feel.

—**Anna Webber**

Old Crow Medicine Show

Nov. 6 @ **Henry Fonda Theater**

Some call Old Crow Medicine Show roots music; some say bluegrass, folk or alt-country. To me, the latter implies some sort of revivalism, though, and that is not what OCMS is about. They're authentic Nashville boys, playing old-time music straight from Appalachia – the kind of music that never gets old.

On banjo, fiddle, harmonica, guitar, bass and sometimes even saw – yes, saw – Critter Fuqua, Kevin Hayes, Morgan Jahnig, Ketch Secor, Gill Landry and Willie Watson break out timeless ditties about contemporary stuff, like, um, well, meth and rehab. But the boys are best when they keep it simple and take a crack at their cracker-ass selves.

They got their start busking in the streets of Nashville. They got their big break – and their

AMOEBAMUSIC TOP 10 Independent Local Artist Releases

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- 1) **The Binges** — *Self-titled*
- 2) **Patti Smith & Lenny Kaye** — *February 10, 1971*
- 3) **Black Tales** — *Self-titled*
- 4) **Psycho Realm** — *War Story Book 2*
- 5) **Flycat** — *Our Sign*
- 6) **Ectoplasm Girls** — *Forever Nothing*
- 7) **Olmecca** — *Semillas Rebeldes*
- 8) **Elzhi** — *Witness My Growth*
- 9) **Laughing Light of Plenty** — *Rose/Listen Here*
- 10) **Dirt Nasty** — *Self-titled*

name – by impressing a North Carolina doctor with their banjo-pluckin' and fiddle-scratchin' outside a local pharmacy.

And although they've veered into some dangerous college fraternity territory with the success of their one mainstream country crossover hit, "Wagon Wheel," they've also managed to churn out seven critically acclaimed albums to date, the most recent of which was this year's *Tennessee Pusher*.

Despite selling out huge auditoriums across the country, they still like playing on city streets, with a profit hat front and center, the best. Yup, pretty great.

—**Rayhanés S. Sanders**

Brett Dennen

Nov. 8 @ **Hotel Café**

The small stage at Hotel Café didn't do justice to the power of Brett Dennen's vocal abilities. But his infectious, soft-spoken folk songs hit a chord with the crowd and moved the packed house.

The fans screamed that they could "feel it," referring to the love and music in the room. The simplicity of his style is what has people coming back for more, and from the looks of the venue, they're bringing their friends.

Throughout the night he brought up guests to help sing his tunes and give each song a new take that can only be heard live. One of the best qualities of Dennen is his ability to take a song that's been played a hundred times and make it sound fresh and inspired at every show.

—**David Tobin**

Travis

Nov. 11 @ **The Troubadour**

Travis has never really gotten the recognition in the states that they deserve, and it's somewhat of a mystery. Anyone who was lucky enough to attend their only stateside show this year at the Troubadour can attest to that.

Their nearly two-hour set began with the opening tracks from their latest "return to rock" album, *Ode to J. Smith*, but they soon segued to fan favorites from their entire catalogue, including several from early albums *Good Feeling* and *The Man Who*.

Frontman Fran Healy, in between singing every song with a striking intensity, charmed the room with anecdotes. Before going into live show staple, "Turn," he commented on the worldwide significance of electing Barack Obama, and later on, in a touching moment, dedicated the entire show to KCRW's Nic Harcourt, a strong supporter of the band from the very beginning.

Soon after a Katy Perry cover (a fitting update to their famous Britney Spears cover), they closed the night with "Why Does It Always Rain on Me?" as the entire crowd joined the band in jumping up and down in a shared moment of unabashed bliss.

—**Sandra Fernando**