

"Rock Around the Clock," which sounds sorely limp despite all its raucous pomp.

When news of the Walkmen's intentions for *Pussy Cats* surfaced, it looked like little more than a self-aggrandizing douchefest hosted by one of today's most confident acts. Hell, they so much as called it "a gift to ourselves" in early interviews. But even though that sentiment surely exists here, it's never so insular as to fence off the listener. And for that we should be thankful for the Walkmen. Their predecessors only left us headlines to flip through and a haphazard soundtrack to spin. **TRISTAN STADDON**

ISOBEL CAMPBELL

Milkwhite Sheets

84%



V2

Welcome to the second album in a year from the increasingly less twee Isobel Campbell. Her earlier release from 2006 was the collaborative effort with the leonine Mark Lanegan, an album that seemed—dare it be said—sexual. Now I realize this is sort of anathema to the whole pastoral elegance thing (nobody in Belle & Sebastian, Trembling Blue Stars, the Pastels, or any of the Sarah Records roster ever had sex, right?), but there it was, staring us in the face, *in flagrante*. This time out, Campbell escapes to the seaside to ramble in the briar and roam with bonny lasses in the bramble. This is an album of rural escape, countryside songs and standards taken from the songbooks of Shirley Collins and Anne Briggs, and owing to the soundtrack to *The Wicker Man* (no, not the recent atrocity). *Milkwhite Sheets* is a female counterpoint to the meticulously crafted Brit-folk that Alasdair Roberts has been revisiting for years. Not especially psychedelic, just wondrous, wide-eyed folk tunes filtered through an early morning fog of finger-picking and restrained strings. **JONATHAN PRUETT**

PJ HARVEY

The Peel Sessions 1991-2004

86%



ISLAND

Nary a bad word is spoken about a blues punk princess named Polly Jean. From the raw emotion of her albums to the thick lust of her live shows, you expect nothing but brilliance. So when a collection like this mixed dozen picked from past Peel sitdowns is just okay, it can be a disappointment. The legacy of John Peel's eclectic invite-only recordings lie in the delight of hearing unearthed rarities and seldom-played covers, but surprisingly this is where PJ falls flat (or sharp, if you're a vocal coach). Both Willie Dixon's "Wang Dang Doodle" and Rainer Ptacek's "Losin' Ground" dissolve in the playful shrill of her highest octave, while the John Parish collaboration "That Was My Veil" succumbs to a grating, tuneless wail. Thankfully those three missteps are sandwiched by excellently angry early album classics like "Sheela-Na-Gig" and "Water," B-side shredders "Naked Cousin" and "This Wicked Tongue," and a searing live acoustic version of *Uh Huh Her's* "You Come Through." The lesson learned here: Stick to your own blues, sister. **BRYAN CHENAULT**

DAMIEN RICE

9

77%



WARNER

Not long ago, in this very magazine, I used Damien Rice as the centerpiece for an argument defending the oft under-appreciated singer-songwriter. With *9*, Damien is again an exemplar for many artists in the overpopulated genre—just not the same artists. Most songs extend beyond the five-minute mark, beginning with close-mic'd guitar plucks, introducing a cello at the midpoint, and evolving into a full symphony for the "big finish." Here, the Irishman has turned into Jacques Brel, talk-singing his devastating lyrics (with subtle lines like, "I love your depression," "Explain to her your weakness...then rollover and die," and, "Even if I could scream, I couldn't scream that loud") as if he's simply too sad to lift his voice to the rhythm. It's an aggravating affectation that continues through most tracks, with the exception of a Top 40-ready single that defeats itself with a chorus of "Fuck you." The album's bookends are its strongest points, where Damien is at his most minimally raw. But even here, if your girlfriend didn't just

die in a puppy-related car crash, it's hard to listen to someone so intensely miserable with a straight face. **LESLEY BARGAR**

DEERHOOF

Friend Opportunity

91%



KILL ROCK STARS

As with Deerhoof's eight previous albums, *Friend Opportunity* is preordained to evoke an initial response of, "What the fuck?" That reaction is usually warranted by one or more of the following musical attributes: the Japanese chick cooing cut up ironies, the song structures organized like an obsessive-compulsive's kitchen a thousand years in the future, the exceedingly minimal nature of most tracks, the bizarrely precise (or calculatedly imprecise) musicianship throughout, the sing-along sunshine hooks balanced against the passages of flowing atonal inanity, etc., etc...

But what matters when listening to Deerhoof isn't that initial response, but the one that follows it. Point B: "What the fuck makes this so good?" The main problem with a band as idiosyncratically singular as Deerhoof is that without any proper points of comparison, it becomes difficult to describe exactly what it is they are accomplishing.

The accomplishment of *Friend Opportunity* is its ability to place the myriad weirdnesses of Deerhoof into clear relief. With the loss of guitarist Chris Cohen, the sound is thinned out (although not thin), leaning on synth and Satomi's vocals more than before. And while all references are indirect, Deerhoof are amazingly adept at swallowing sounds and spitting them back out in ways that make sense in terms of their fidgety imagination. In 10 tracks there are quirk-pop takes on Q and Not U-ish percussion jams (opener "The Perfect Me"), electro ("Kidz are So Small"), big time anthem rock ("Matchbook Seeks Maniac"), shimmering post-rock, and discordant, disfigured no wave (both buzzing in and out on the one-third-of-the-album closing track "Look Away").

All the songs have a sparkling tidiness to them: no wasted space, no extra notes, every hit the fruition of a crystalline intention. Nothing is hidden from the listener; every sound is an integral piece to the 36-minute-long puzzle. *Friend Opportunity* is one you can't afford to pass up. **SAM ROUDMAN**

DESMOND DEKKER

In Memoriam 1941-2006

87%



SECRET

It's important to be reminded that reggae isn't just an excuse to roll a fat one and lounge poolside. Listen closely to Jamaican roots music and you'll discover a genre with a keen eye persistently focused on social ills over ganja glorification. Of course, with the passing of reggae luminary Desmond Dekker last May, it may be time to revisit both of the culture's fortes—partaking in the latter while ruminating on the former.

The self-proclaimed "reporter" of the Trench Town experience became a rude boy icon through groove-laden ghetto reflections about poverty, violence and political corruption. This final recording—an eerily timed career-spanning collection of re-recorded socially conscious sunshine tunes—is a testament to the power of Dekker's joyous falsetto wail, transforming unimaginable struggle into a reason to celebrate life. His unrelenting optimism and be-thankful-for-what-you've-got persona is beyond contagious. Pick this one up and raise the flame for Desmond "happy ever after" in a better place. Ob-la-di. **PHIL EASTMAN**

PAVEMENT

Wowee Zowee (Sordid Sentinels Edition)

**reissue
original**

**93%
90%**



MATADOR

For those who remember, or who have at least done their homework, the third Matador album from Pavement was the one that seemed to derail the alt-rock gravy train. *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain*, their most consistently melodic record, put them on the radio—even the lyrics sort of made sense—then along comes *Wowee Zowee*...and blammo! You'd think the band had dropped *Metal Machine Music* out of their freckly behinds. Suddenly they weren't in *Sassy Magazine*, the "important band" buzz dissipating so