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# In Tune

The Daily News

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## 'Positive' thinking



**DREW EMMITT, "Long Road" (Compass) ★★☆☆** — Drew Emmitt may not be a household name in mainstream circles, but he knows how to pick some high-profile friends.

For his third solo release, the longtime Leftover Salmon mandolin maestro has recruited a Who's Who of contemporary Americana and bluegrass giants to join a lineup that already included Stewart Duncan and Ronnie McCoury from his five-star acoustic masterpiece "Across The Bridge" in 2005.

"Long Road" doesn't quite rise to "Bridge's" level, but that's hardly a criticism. This 11-track tribute to Emmitt's 25 years of touring is a journey worth taking, made all the more enjoyable by the presence of traveling companions Duncan, McCoury, String Cheese Incident's Bill Nershi, Infamous Stringdusters Chris Pandolfi and Andy Hall, banjo goddess Allison Brown, Hot Rize genius Tim O'Brien, Emmitt's Salmon bandmate Jeff Sipe, and new-grass legend John Cowan.

Emmitt had a hand in writing seven of "Road's" songs, with the CD's bookends (opener "Into the Distance" and closer "River's Risin'") and the track smack dab in the middle (the Tolkien-esque instrumental "Cloud City") being the highlights.

And while there's no filler here, his covers of Supertramp's "Take the Long Way Home" and Van Morrison's "Gypsy in My Soul" are technically fine, but not particularly memorable. After toying with a standard rendition of Marshall Tucker Band's "Take the Highway," however, Emmitt and friends turn it down to a mid-song simmer before allowing the musical stew to boil into what likely will be a feast for concert-goers during Emmitt's next quarter century on the road. (Dave Fennessy)



**NATALIE PORTMAN'S SHAVED HEAD, "Glistening Pleasure" (Team Swan) ★★☆☆** — With a name like Natalie Portman's Shaved Head, this Seattle-based electro-pop foursome is sure to get noticed.

And with eye-catching and/or puzzling song titles such as "Slow Motion Tag Team," "Mouth Full of Bones," "Holding Hands in the Shower" and, wait for it, "Sophisticated Side Ponytail," I was compelled to give their debut record a spin. Smart move.

While the music isn't nearly as original as the band's name or song titles, it's undeniably catchy stuff. The songs might not change your life, but they're all but certain to get your toes tapping. From the synth-heavy opening of "Me + Yr Daughter" clear through standout tunes "Iceage Babeland" and "Confections," NPSH keep things bouncing along.

Additional highlights include the aforementioned "Holding Hands," the slightly creepy "Bedroom Costume" about an unrepentant voyeur and "Beard Lust." In the latter tune, Natalie Portman's Shaved Head pull off ridiculous lyrics like "Look at my sexy facial hair / Oh man, hot damn, it's everywhere." Don't ask me how or why it works. It just does. (Jeffrey Sisk)



**ICY DEMONS, "Miami Ice" (Obey Your Brain) ★☆☆** — If you were to take some indie pop and neo-prog and mix it with a healthy dose of experimentation, you might come up with something approximating the oddly endearing sound of the Icy Demons.

Comprised of members that go by the monikers Blue Hawaii, Pow Pow, Il Cativo and Ali Hawkbar, it's obvious that these Demons don't take themselves too seriously. And it's that playful demeanor that allowed "Miami Ice," their third release, to grow on me over the course of multiple listens.

With nine tracks clocking in at barely more than 30 minutes, the Demons wisely avoid pushing the experimental envelope too far on "Miami Ice." Standout tunes such as the title track, "Summer Samba," "Spywatchers" and "Crittin' Down to Baba's" (whatever the heck that means), are trippy fun and offset lesser efforts "1850," "Buffalo Bill," "Jantar Mantar" and "Who There???"

"Miami Ice" and the Icy Demons definitely won't be everybody's cup of tea. The band isn't afraid to try some different things, and while the results are enjoyable when they work, it can be downright painful when they don't. (JS)



**VARIOUS ARTISTS, "Weeds: Music from the Series Vol. 3" (Lionsgate Entertainment) ★★☆☆** — I'm always a little leery of soundtrack albums because they tend to be hit-and-miss affairs. If those folks who put soundtracks together for a living (and are they hiring?) would follow the blueprint by the good folks at Lionsgate, I might be more inclined to rethink my position.

This is a fantastic collection of tunes from the third season of Showtime's marijuana-themed comedy/drama "Weeds." Filled with 13 tunes from a wide assortment of indie artists (plus Randy Newman singing the "Little Boxes" theme song and series co-star Kevin Nealon's hilarious "Just Like the Superdome"), this is a remarkably strong record.

There are a couple of well-known contributors in Ween and the Dresden Dolls, but the real finds on "Weeds Vol. 3" are lesser-knowns like That 1 Guy ("Buttmachine"), Illinois ("Nosebleed"), Great Lake Swimmers ("Your Rocky Spine") and Mr. Smolin ("The

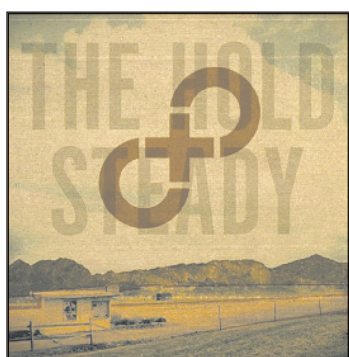


## Hold Steady return with solid new album

**THE HOLD STEADY, "Stay Positive" (Vagrant) ★★☆☆** — You were raised fear-spitting Catholic, you snuck beers behind the bingo halls, you waited for that elusive girl or guy to kiss you. And that is why you can relate to these suburban-Minneapolis-transplanted-to-New-York fairy tales like they hacked into your diary.

The Hold Steady relates to the scorned, confused youth on the brink of early adulthood in the same manner as Bruce Springsteen, or Bob Dylan, or even the Replacements did because their stories sound like yours. And therefore, you could buy their words as gospel. On their fourth record in as many years, "Stay Positive," the band's back with more debauchery that reads like yearbook graffiti or a back-church confessional.

One sad note is "Stay Positive" is the weakest effort



this band has produced yet; but it's still a rousing chorus smasher around a table of liquid tributes. Frontman/ everyman poet Craig Finn recycles a few too many old lyrics (it was charming on "Boys and Girls in America" but sounds reshaped here), yet even on a lesser day, he manages to strike home. "Raise a toast to Saint Joe Strummer / I think he might have been our only decent teacher," he pontificates on killer opener "Constructive Summer," and he revis-

its romance-via-bubbles on "Sequestered in Memphis" when he claims, "In barlight, she looked all right / In daylight, she looked desperate." You've been there. You know it.

There are a couple of clunkers — "Navy Sheets," with its Cars-like synth, and "Magazines," full of gritty, grating backing vocals — but there's enough to soundtrack your next reunion kegger such as incredible "Both Crosses," a modern-gothic retelling of Jesus' crucifixion, that notes, "Hey Peter, you've been pretty sweet since Easter break"; E Street treader "Yeah, Sapphire"; the title track, which wonders what happens to a scene when everyone grows up; and the explosive closer "Slapped Actress," with its nod to the triumphs and tragedies we make on our own, in front of no cameras at all. (Brian Krasman)

Earth Keeps Turning On"). Additional standouts include State Radio's "Keep Sake," Eleni Mandell's "Let's Drive Away" and "Walk in the Park" by Oh No! Oh My!

If you're a fan of the show, which I'm happy to report has returned to form through the first four episodes of Season 4, or simply are looking to expand your musical tastes, give "Weeds Vol. 3" a spin. (JS)



**JOHNNY OSBOURNE, "Truths and Rights: Deluxe Edition" (Heartbeat/1 Studio) ★★☆☆** — Johnny Osbourne has been a fixture on the reggae scene for almost three decades. Now 51, the Kingston, Jamaica, native has more than two

dozen albums to his credit — none more impressive than "Truths and Rights," the 1979 masterpiece that ushered in the dance hall sound of the 1980s. At a time when most people were immersed in disco, Osbourne was helping to pioneer a new sub-genre.

Twenty-nine years later, Heartbeat/1 Studio is giving "Truths and Rights" the "Deluxe Edition" treatment with a remastered version of the original album, plus six previously unreleased tracks and new cover art. Unlike his disco counterparts, Osbourne's music sounds as fresh as ever and he shines bright on tracks such as "Children Are Crying," "Can't Buy Love," "Nah Skin Up," "We Need Love" and "Sing Jay Stylee."

The bonus tracks, however, aren't especially impressive. "Jealousy, Heartache and Pain" is pretty good, as is the dub version of "Luanda," but the extended mixes of the title track, "Sing Jay Stylee" and "Can't Buy Love/Swing Easy" pale in comparison to the originals. (JS)



**REX MOROUX, "These Bricks Are Bleeding" (self-released) ★★☆☆** — If you didn't see Rex Moroux's appearance last weekend at the Rex Theater with Virginia Coalition and the Alternates Routes, you should smack yourself

upside the head. Go ahead, I'll wait.

All is not lost, however, because there's plenty of time to log onto iTunes and download your very own copy of "These Bricks Are Bleeding," the superb collection of 12 uniformly strong tunes that comprise Moroux's follow-up to 2006's almost-as-good "Royal Street Inn."

The first four songs on the record are sure to blow you away, from the longing ballad "Cabernet" to the rollicking "Dust" to the

Dylan-esque "Whatcha Doin' Downtown?" to the pure rockabilly fun of "Jenny Jenny." Almost as good as keepers like the country-tinged "East London Waltz," "Amos McMillan," "Math Girls" and "I Saw Your Ghost."

"If a song can make you cry or laugh, that's a measure of how it touches your soul," Moroux explains. And with "These Bricks Are Bleeding," Moroux will be touching plenty. (JS)



**THROW RAG, "Tee-Tot" (Acetate) ★★☆☆**; **THROW RAG, "2nd Place" (Acetate) ★★☆☆** — Garage punk quintet Throw Rag formed a decade ago in Salton Sea, Calif. (yes, it's a real place), yet they've had a hard time emerging from the desert and into the mainstream consciousness.

Having toured with acts as varied as the Pogues, Gogol Bordello, Queens of the Stone Age and Reverend Horton Heat, Throw Rag have developed a catchy sound that's more melodic than most punk outfits.

"Tee-Tot" is a re-issue of the band's 2001 debut with a pair of bonus tracks thrown in. It's clear Throw Rag were still finding themselves musically at that time, but gems like "Auntie Bert," "Race With the Devil" and "Chief Stinking Sour Blanket" provide a glimpse of the more polished sound to come. Of the bonus tracks, "She Devil Woman" is pretty good, but "King Baby" doesn't make an impression.

Throw Rag's newest studio effort, "2nd Place," is the better of the two releases. Keepers include "Demons in a Row," "Hollywood," "Desert Shores" and "Devil Gone Good" (Have you noticed how often the word "devil" crops up in their song titles? Yikes.) And while the lyrics aren't anything special in disc closer "I'm So Glad, I'm So Proud," the guitar riff is fantastic.

In true punk fashion, there's no excess on either of the albums. You can get through the 13 tracks on "Tee-Tot" and all 17 on "2nd Place" combined in a little more than an hour. Which is about all you'll want (or need) to hear. (JS)

**CORY CHISEL, "Cabin Ghosts" (Black Seal) ★★☆☆** — Add Wisconsin native Cory Chisel to the expanding list of talented up-and-coming singer/songwriters plying their trade these days. Chisel has been touring like crazy with his band the Wandering Sons and offers up an enjoyable slice of soulful country-folk on this six-track EP.



"Cabin Ghosts" was recorded at his family's cabin in the woods and during an intimate live concert in Chisel's hometown of Appleton. The live material works best here, with Chisel scoring on tracks such as "Lovers and Friends," "See It My Way," "It Won't Be Long" and "Home in the Woods." Of the studio tunes, "On My Side" is the standout.

As fortune would have it, Chisel's travels bring him to at Club Cafe on the South Side tonight at 7. Make sure you don't miss it. (JS)



**G. LOVE & SPECIAL SAUCE, "Superhero Brother" (Brushfire) ★★☆☆** — Let's give Philadelphia natives G. Love & Special Sauce the benefit of the doubt and assume that the intoxicating track "Who's Got the Weed" is

the trio's way of calling attention to the plight of those stricken with glaucoma and not an ode to a certain illegal mind-altering substance that rhymes with, uh, marijuana. OK, so maybe that's a stretch.

"Superhero Brother" is the laid-back band's 10th album in a career that has spanned more than 15 years. While not quite on par with their stellar "Coast to Coast Motel" or last year's "A Year and a Night With G. Love & Special Sauce" live effort, it's a fun record that will appeal to the band's cadre of fans. (Not to mention those of Brushfire impresario Jack Johnson.)

G. Love gets things off to a great start with a pair of stellar tracks in "Communication" and "City Livin'" and also scores with "Peace, Love and Happiness," "Grandmother" and "Georgia Brown." He and the Sauce save the best for last, however, with the aforementioned "Weed" (which features the Pharcyde's Slim Kid) and the superb title track, hands down the best of the album's 12 tracks. (JS)

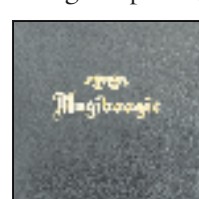


**THE BLACK HALOS, "We Are Not Alone" (Acetate) ★☆☆** — Vocalist Billy Hopeless and his fellow Black Halos often get lumped into the punk revivalist pile, but these hard-rockin' Canadians sound

more like modern pop-punk acts than classic artists like the Buzzcocks or Sex Pistols. With a two previous full-lengths under their belts, including 2005's stellar "Alive Without Control," the Halos continue to refine their sound on "We Are Not Alone."

From the opening notes of "Disbelief" and "Princess St. Princess," it's evident the band decided to replace distortion and feedback with toe-tapping melodies and (dare I say it) some sing-along hooks and choruses. Additional keepers on this 12-track effort include "Love and War," the title track, "Madam Merlot" and "Damaged Goods."

Unfortunately, most of the songs sound the same and blend together over the course of the 40-minute running time. Still, if you find yourself tiring of the more mainstream artists in the genre, the Black Halos could offer a refreshing change of pace. (JS)



**MUGISON, "Mugiboogie" (Ipecac) ★☆☆** — There's eclectic and then there's Örn Elias Guomundsson, better known in music circles (or maybe not, come to think of it) as Mugison. As the pride of his native Iceland,

Mugison has churned out a handful of albums, including the 2005's modestly successful "Mugimama, Is This Monkey Music?" Still, he remains pretty anonymous in our country.

Though he's always dabbled in electronica and trip-hop, the fantastic "Mugiboogie" is his most diverse — and enjoyable — release to date. The dozen tracks are all over the place musically, but in a surprisingly cohesive way. Bouncing from the industrial sound of Marilyn Manson on the disc-opening title track to the modern blues of "The Pathetic Anthem" to the unexpectedly tender ballad "Deep Breathing," Mugison keeps listeners guessing.

For good measure he throws in the lo-fi folk of "My Love I Love" and shows his classic soul chops (with impressive falsetto vocals) on "The Animal" before wrapping "Mugiboogie" up with "Sweetest Melody," the best track here.

While I'm fairly certain most of you have never heard of Mugison before reading this review, I'm 100 percent positive that you should give his stuff a listen. You won't regret it. (JS)



**LEVIATHAN, "A Silhouette in Splinters" (Moribund) ★★☆☆** — Black metal experimentalist Wrest is known for explosive, powerhouse numbers that can feel like a shroud of angry wasps, but "A Silhouette in Splinters"

shows his other side.

Released on limited vinyl in 2005, this dark, ambient nightmare is almost never coarse or heavy, has hardly any rib-grinding shrieking, but could turn haunted houses from ho-hum to something that could damage children's psyches for years. The songs are long and take some time to get into the meat of the issue, which it does on the unsettling, synth-dressed "It Comes in Whispers: Part II" and the ghostly and scarring "Particular Dis-ease," where he finally howls behind the drapes of noise.

The title track sounds like a windstorm of plague, and despite its funny title, "Shimmering With Horn of Woe" could make you loathe the night as the bent guitars and stretched sounds burrow into your confidence. (BK)