



Music in Brief

Reviewed by [Noel Murray](#)
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For 25 years, the North Carolina-based Sugar Hill Records has been releasing sophisticated string-band music by top-shelf singer-songwriters like Ricky Skaggs, Guy Clark, Townes Van Zandt, and Dolly Parton. The four-disc, 81-track box set *Sugar Hill Records: A Retrospective* was compiled personally by label founder Barry Poss, and designed to present the full range of what Sugar Hill stands for. Though Poss' vision is limited to tasteful, earnest folk music, this set contains the best of what the tasteful, earnest folk-music crowd has to offer... **B+**

One of Sugar Hill's brightest hopes is **Chris Thile**, the Nickel Creek mandolin virtuoso who blends bluegrass, jazz, and alternative rock in ways that are formally imaginative, yet rooted in traditionalism. Thile's latest solo release, *How To Grow A Woman From The Ground*, packs some cheap thrills via zippy covers of The White Stripes' "Dead Leaves And The Dirty Ground" and The Strokes' "Heart In A Cage," but far better are Thile's originals, like the breakneck instrumental "Watch 'At Breakdown," the mournfully lovely ballad "Stay Away," and the freeform, breathtaking "The Beekeeper." This is the record Thile has been trying to make for a decade... **A-**

David Eugene Edwards took on the name **Woven Hand** a few years ago for recording projects with more of a lo-fi, rootsy feel than the gothic country rock of his band 16 Horsepower, but on Woven Hand's third album, *Mosaic* (Sounds Familyre), he layers his dark acoustic balladry with tribal drums and ominous hum, coming on like a rustic version of Bauhaus. Woven Hand makes even the overtly Christian anthem "Winter Shaker" sound bleak, and his prettier songs—like the rippling "Whistling Girl"—are suffused with profound fear and regret... **B+**

It's hard to believe that a warts-and-all art-pop band like **Ween** would have a lot of leftovers to pick through, but the outtakes collection *Shinola (Vol. 1)* (MVD Audio) features 12 previously unreleased Ween songs, almost all of which are good. Alongside Zappa-esque nonsense like "Tastes Good On Th' Bun" and prog parodies like "The Rift," *Shinola* includes sublime tracks like "Boys Club" (intentionally insipid pop with an undertone of real anger), "Gabrielle" (a Spoon rip-off with a touch of Thin Lizzy, straight as a rod), "Did You See Me?" (a mesmerizing Pink Floyd homage with David Gilmour-style lead guitar) and "Israel" (a jazzy spoken-word piece that may be a parody of Wynton Marsalis' attempts at prize-winning pop art). They never run out of ideas, those Ween boys... **B+**

If Ween ever wants to record another country album, it should consider recruiting **Dan Reeder**, a gruffly witty singer-songwriter whose sophomore LP *Sweetheart* (Oh Boy) offers bone-dry folk ditties like "Waiting For My Cappuccino" and "Pussy Titty," both of which are funnier and more pointed than their titles should allow. On the album's best song, "You'll Never Surf Again," a doctor's amusingly somber pronouncement prompts Reeder to think about all the Hawaiian beaches he isn't going to see... at least not atop a board. **B**