

Elliott Smith *New Moon*

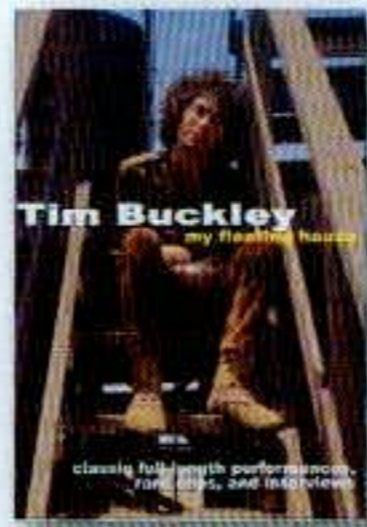
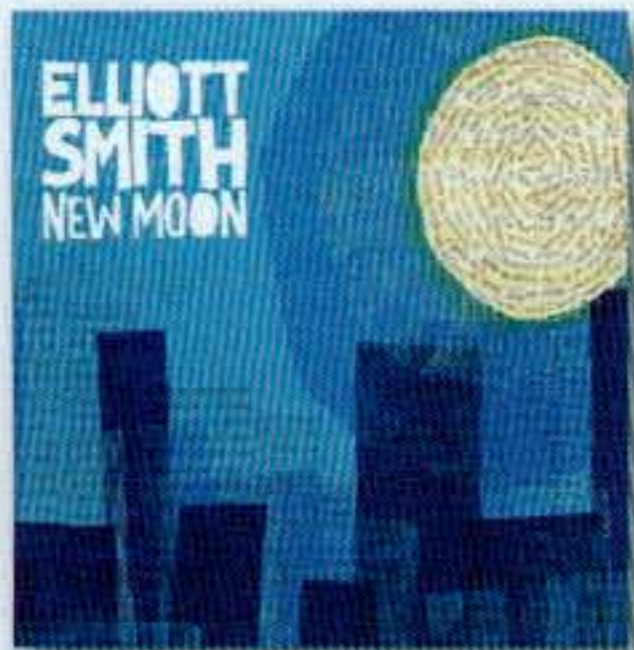
KILL ROCK STARS

IN HIS LIFETIME—and perhaps even more so since his death—Elliott Smith was proclaimed, by critics and casual fans alike, the modern-day incarnation of Nick Drake. Like so many easy comparisons, however, this one doesn't quite hold water. Drake sang in a dusky baritone; Smith, a frail alto. Drake used a variety of esoteric alternate tunings and was a virtuoso fingerstylist; Smith tuned his acoustic down one whole step and was primarily a strummer. Drake became widely known years after his 1974 overdose from antidepressants; Smith's 2003 death from a stab wound (widely regarded as a suicide,

though still under investigation) came at the peak of his popularity.

That said, *New Moon*, which collects 24 Smith songs recorded between 1994 and his 1997 mainstream breakthrough, *Either/Or*, is as coded and tragic a swan song as Drake's *Pink Moon*. Metaphorical references to drug use, depression and the specter of death float throughout the set's spare, lo-fi tracks—many of which, including an early version of "Miss Misery," the Oscar-nominated song from the soundtrack to *Good Will*

Hunting, have circulated for years as demos and under different titles. In contrast to *From a Basement on a Hill*, the controversial, ham-fistedly produced posthumous album released in 2004, *New Moon* is a respectful send-off to someone who—in this regard, at least, like Nick Drake—was one of his generation's most gifted artists. —Aaron Burgess



Tim Buckley *My Fleeting House* (DVD)

MVD VISUAL

>>> Tim Buckley was only 28 when he died, in 1975, of a drug overdose. But while he never attracted more than a cult following, his influence on subsequent generations of musicians—including his equally gifted (and equally tortured) son Jeff—has been considerable. And that is what makes this new DVD, with 14 songs that represent the cream of live performance footage from every phase of Tim's career, important as well as compelling. Also included are interviews with Buckley lyricist Larry Beckett, guitarist Lee Underwood and biographer David Browne, each of whom sheds interesting light on their late colleague's life and creative process. But the music remains the central attraction, especially the enthralling solo acoustic performances of "Pleasant Street" and—in a clip that originally appeared on television's *The Monkees* (!)—"Song to the Siren." Highly recommended. —Mac Randall



Townes Van Zandt *Our Mother the Mountain;* *Townes Van Zandt; Delta Momma Blues; Flyin' Shoes*

FAT POSSUM

>>> Texas singer-songwriter Townes Van Zandt

(1944–1997) was at his bittersweet best in the 1960's and Seventies. The reissue by Fat Possum of these four albums, all recorded in that period, is welcome, indeed, as is the news that there are others on the way. This batch is packed with songs that have become acoustic standards, among them "Tecumseh Valley," "For the Sake of the Song," "Be Here to Love Me," "Waiting Around to Die" and "Flyin' Shoes." These and other songs remind us that Van Zandt, best known for his honest, often gut wrenching lyrics, was also a fine blues and folk fingerpicker. Burdened by mental illness, alcoholism and drug addiction, he truly lived for the sake of the song. —Isaiah Trost



Richmond Fontaine *Thirteen Cities*

EL CORTEZ/UNION RECORDS

>>> This album, by the Portland, Oregon-based quartet Richmond Fontaine, is destined to be regarded as an Americana classic. As the title indicates, the songs relate to specific cities in the Pacific Northwest, California, the Rocky Mountains and the Southwest, all well known to the band. There is heartbreak, resignation and humanity in the cracked vocals of lead singer Willy Vlautin as he unfolds a dusty-highway odyssey of life on the margins. Sparse, powerfully forlorn arrangements, with trumpet, clarinet, tremolo guitar and accordion filling in the space created by the acoustic guitars, complete the picture. —Isaiah Trost