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music spectrum

REVIEWING MUSIC ACCORDING TO A SPECTRUM OF STYLES
AND DISCUSSING THE CONNECTION TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

saturday, february 04, 2006

The Shawano Snowy Retreat Issue (February)



This is called the Shawano Snowy Retreat Issue, because most of the writing happened during my off-time during my personal pastoral retreat up here in the central part of Wisconsin. I've been at a retreat center looking out on a frozen Shawano (shaw-no) Lake with a nice blanket of snow coming down one day. After spending a good part of each day doing things like prepping for

sermons, writing Bible studies, etc., it was good to also think about some tunes!

I'm hiring! I need someone to spend about 3 hours doing some cut-and-paste computer work to help me update the Spectrum index page. In exchange for your help, I can offer you \$10 and 10 CDs from the Giveaway Closet. Experience with Word and Excel is necessary. A little knowledge of HTML code is helpful, but if you've worked with anything like Blogger or other sites, it'll be no problem. If you'd like the job, please email me, [benjamin\[at\]musicspectrum.org](mailto:benjamin[at]musicspectrum.org).



Thanks for reading!

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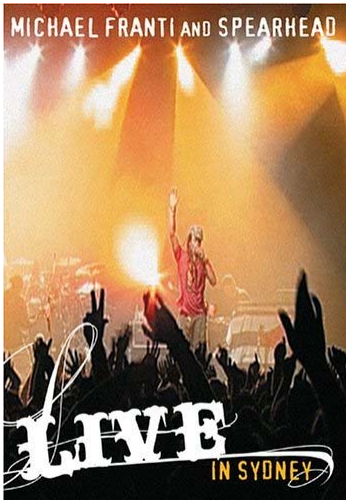
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Hip Hop/Rap and Funk Rock and Jam and . . . : Michael Franti & Spearhead *Live in Sydney* DVD/CD



Watching Michael Franti on the new *Live in Sydney* DVD/CD DualDisc you realize that Franti is leading a polytheistic worship service complete with a liturgy of highs and lows, crowd participation with hand movements like any youth gathering, and plenty of singing along. Within this interfaith service, there are kernels of truth (from a Christian perspective) which form a common ground with Franti's perspective. Meanwhile, watching Franti you realize the passion and excitement that could be applied to the worship of Jesus. Franti looks like he's completely focused on leading the crowd in a freeing hop through riddim, rhyme, and message.

These observations of Franti's worship leader-like position come from watching the DVD. The filming suffers at times from poor lighting, but it still transports you to Sydney. As Franti and MC Radio Active hop to the beat, asking the crowd to scream, you'll find yourself hopping in front of the TV and screaming.

The audio side of the disc makes this impressive set portable. It's a nice feature considering that once you've seen a concert DVD, a lot of times you'd like to listen to the music even when you can't watch the DVD. However, the audio levels are a bit low at times, especially on Radio Active's mic. A couple of times when Franti turns it over to Radio it sounds as if we're only hearing his beatbox through other mics and not his own. Radio Active's beatboxing shouldn't be missed either. From just adding some light atmospheric sounds to full-on beatboxing to doing his own vocal turntable scratching of his own vocals, Radio Active brings the house down. The audio level problems seem like a dis on Radio's valuable contributions to the sound of Michael Franti & Spearhead, but the DVD does make up for it some in the Extras with an extended beatbox that was edited out of the main film/audio.

Franti, working with Spearhead, blend rap, reggae, hip hop, R&B, soul, rock, and folk in a funk rock and Jam Band groove. Perhaps because it was filmed in Sydney, the crowd

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appears to mainly be white, but perhaps that serves as a reminder that Franti's message transcends color lines, a message of reconciliation for all races. This is one of the kernels of truth that resonates with Christianity. The closing song, "Never Too Late," is like an absolution song. Franti's lyrics act almost as if words of Christ letting us know that it is never too late to be forgiven and reconciled with one another and with Him. Like the words of the father to the Prodigal Son, the chorus says, "It's never too late to come home." Plus, it is a song about transforming our views of one another.

Another kernel of truth comes on "Every Single Soul" where Franti sings about "every single soul is a poem written on the back of God's hand." It's a beautiful image to think of God being the Poet, and we are His work of art.

Now Franti departs from Christianity on many other matters. The DVD Extras also includes a video from the recording of "Ganja Babe," a song about loving a woman who smokes pot. There's the crux of the problem with Jam Band culture: the ideals of the message sound a lot like Jesus until they don't—and then they really don't.

Weeds Soundtrack

"Ganja Babe" is featured on the soundtrack from the Showtime series, *Weeds*. I don't have Showtime, so I can't even speculate about what kind of weeds we're talking (OK, so I know from the show synopsis that the main character is a widow who becomes the pot dealer to support her family). However, I can tell you that the soundtrack is a great mix of jazz standards, new artists like Sufjan Stevens and Nellie McKay, some rockers, but mainly leaves you with a Jam Band collection feeling. Franti fits right in! Drug references aside, this is a great selection of music that will make you enjoy a wide-range of styles. *Music from the Original Series: Weeds* is available on [Rykodisc](#).



Thank you to the [Michael Franti & Spearhead](#) and [MVD – Music Video Distributors](#) for the review copy.

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Country-influenced Rock: John Coinman's *Songs from the Modern West*



Here are all of the artists that come to mind while listening to John Coinman's *Songs from the Modern West*: Warren Zevon, Ralston Bowles, Tom Gillam, Chris Rhea, Greg Brown, Neil Young, Rodney Crowell, the Silos, and J.J. Cale.

It's not that Coinman's exactly like any

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 - Gigante Med
 - Gorgeous PR
 - Greentrax Re
 - ISLPR Public
 - Just Music
 - Lex Records
 - Lotos Nile Me

one of these artists. Instead, whatever sounds, power, and emotion those artists can evoke are all wrapped in what I hear in Coinman's music—Country-influenced Rock of the singer-songwriter, folksy, bluesy kind.

Coinman's got a clear-toned voice that speaks of the grit, grime, grease, and grists of the Country music mill. He can paint a beautiful desert picture, reveal a dark story, get the blues out of the notes, and hit that sing-a-long style.

Teddy Morgan, cowriter on three songs, adds barroom electric guitar that can also scale back to be like Bo Ramsey to Greg Brown, a guitarist punctuating a singer-songwriter's poetry. Neil Harry's pedal steel guitar comes along to help with this as well. Kicking up the dust in rhythmic clouds are the drums of Larry Cobb, such as on "Once This was the Promise Land."

"Promise Land" comes in a line of Country songs (James McMurtry, Eliza Gilyckson, Matt Angus) that dare question the good ol' Texan boy now living on Pennsylvania Avenue. At times, Coinman's rocking protests could be talking about the Great Depression, but there's a reason Coinman called the album *Songs from the Modern West*: it's a modern *Grapes of Wrath* of economic harsh realities facing those living this empire.

Free CD!

Due to the generosity of Red Haired Girl Publicity, there's one free copy of Coinman's CD, along with some other discs, that can be yours—without paying for postage. Liz Winchester (the Red Haired Girl) sent some stamp money! Email me now (see contact info) to get the CD.

Thank you to the [John Coinman](#) and [Corazong Records](#) for the review copy.

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College/Art Rock: Stone Jack Jones' *Bluefolk*



Patty Griffin.

Stone Jack Jones plays psychedelic bluegrass. The imagery, meanderings, and poetry often come from similar territory as psychedelic rock, but the instrumentation and melodic influence come from Appalachia. On *Bluefolk*, at times you can hear the sounds of spoken word/speak-sing poetry of Jim Morrison, the recent darling Devendra Banhart, or the 60's psychedelic folk of Simon Finn. Layered with this are some Daniel Lanois-like atmospheric guitars and incredibly lovely background vocals from guest

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"Bread" kicks off with a drum machine beat, but Jones' banjo makes this song more akin to Sufjan Stevens than a hip hop dance track. Said to be an anti-war song, you can follow the poetry to be about Abraham searching for his lost son. When Abraham says he's looking for the "almost murdered one," you might be thinking of Isaac whom Abraham almost sacrificed before God stepped in. However, the song actually seems to be about searching for Abraham's other son, the runaway, Ishmael, said to be the father of the Muslims.

A song, a dream of reconciliation between Isaac and Ishmael, Jews and Muslims, the imagery actually borrows much from the New Testament. While the invitation to "eat my bread, drink my wine," could be simply related to the importance of table fellowship in the Middle Eastern world, the echoes of Jesus at the Last Supper are unmistakable. Abraham is looking for his son who is "the beloved one," "the almost murdered one," "the light," "blessed," and "the mercy one." There's some parallels in those descriptions between Abraham's son and Jesus, a son of Abraham who is the Messiah. Finally, "I'm bursting through the roof of love" recalls Jesus healing the paralytic who was let down from the roof by his friends.

In this borrowing of New Testament imagery to speak about reconciliation between Jews, Muslims, and the Western world's intrusion into the Middle East, perhaps there's a (un)intentional truth spoken in the way the poetry is crafted. The Gospel of Jesus is the message which will bring about peace, and at the very least, this song should remind Christians that we have the words of mercy which this world so desperately needs.

Bluefolk will be released on February 21.

Thank you to the [Stone Jack Jones](#) and [Fictitious Records](#) for the review copy.

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Guitar Rock: The Weather Machines Take Out the Cars Before the Cars Even Hit the Road



The Weather Machines have predicted that it's good driving weather. They're taking the Cars out for a spin.

On their debut disc, *The Sound of Pseudoscience*, the Weather Machines from Rapid City, South Dakota, travel back to the 1980's to a time when Ric Ocasek's strange haircut seemed cool. With their

guitars tuned low, the keyboard primed high, and a pounding-pop bass entrance, "Strains of Saints" is a ballad, but you can hear all of the Cars influence. Actually, with the punk rhythm of "Mission: Satellite!" the Weather Machines go back to 1978 when the Cars released their self-titled album which was still edgy before the new decade made them let the pop balloon rise.

Just as the second side of *The Cars* featured three songs that segued into one another, *Pseudoscience* lets "Last Stop" kick off as the last chord of "Me Too Iguana" is still humming. "Last Stop" is where this album really comes together. Jason Ward is in perfect Ocasek mode of letting the pop vocals out with just enough stutter that it's Ramones-like. J. Waylon Miller completely smashes the fills on the drums, taking this backbeat 60's song to a place where it makes the lyric come true: "I couldn't get that beat off my one-track mind."



Speaking of the Cars, they've also decided that it's good driving weather—again. After 17 years, the Cars (the New Cars) will be touring and recording. Since Ocasek has opted not to be part of the reunion, the band has enlisted [Todd Rundgren](#) as frontman. Rundgren is no stranger to playing around with the pop keyboard sound and making it rock. If you click on the picture, you can see a short

video clip (.wmv) featuring a teaser of the band's brand new single. That brief clip shows that Rundgren's voice will lend itself well to the task. You have to wonder if the upcoming tour will prove to have enough punch in the music or will it simply be a rehashing of K-Tel hits—not to be remastered? I'd have to think that Rundgren wouldn't be part of something that would be just karaoke. More details to come. . . .

And with the Cars' upcoming tour, the Weather Machines would make an excellent choice as opening band. A tough slot for any band to fill since the crowd will be there to reminisce like a giant Have a Nice Day Café, but the Weather Machines could catch their attention. It'll sound familiar to anyone who stopped listening to music the day the Cars broke up (a newsworthy day, but certainly I hope there's no one who thinks that in a Don Mclean "American Pie" sort of way that it was the "day the music died"). However, the Weather Machines also prove what can be done with that old sound (it's really been 28 years since the "Good Times Roll"ed).

Thank you to the [Weather Machines](#) and [Tigers Against Crime!!!](#) for the review copy. Thank you to Art at [Special Ops Media](#) for his help.

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Garage Rock: Chariots Race's *Existence* EP



Hüsker dü Hüsker Dü? (Do you

remember Hüsker Dü?) Hopefully you remember the seminal indie band of the 80's.

Hüsker dü Chariots Race? (Do you remember Chariots Race?) Maybe not, or at least not yet. Guitarist Greg Steffke's lead vocals paired with Erin Wolf's voice create that falsetto wash common in Hüsker Dü. Add to that guitar licks which pick up tones from the Minneapolis indie bands the Replacements and Soul Asylum. Run that through the early 90's with bands like Mother May I, Ned's Atomic Dustbin, and others blasting out the power rock of the 80's with a new spinning intensity. "Western Thrill" sounds like the sound of Galaxie 500 with its atmospheric guitars, but Chariots Race has taken that 500 down off its blocks in the field and has moved it back onto the road. The song actually culminates in a classic rock guitar solo (is that Black Sabbath?).

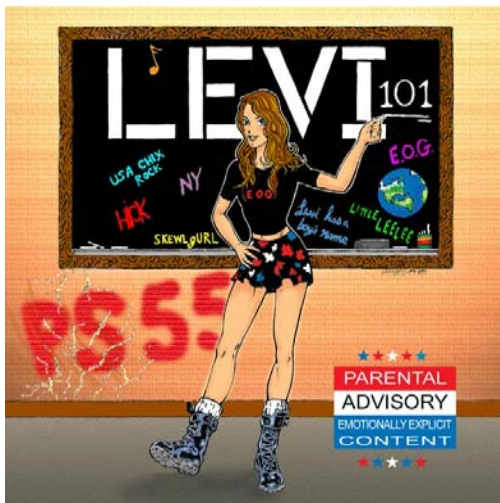
Marian the Librarian, I mean, Brian Simons plays bass guitar, girding the rhythms with the pluck of punk, the slap of jazz funk, and the energy of rock. Simons by day is a reference librarian at the [Manitowoc Public Library](#) who sometimes has to do research projects for a local pastor in town (me!).

When "Covent Garden" starts with a rhythm played on the side of the drums and a vocal sung through a tin can, and then jumps into the rushing water, you're ready to go flying down the rapids with them. This is the kind of thing that makes me hope that you'll all hüsker dü them.

Thank you to the [Chariots Race](#) and [Divot Records](#) for the review copy.

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Hip Hop/Rap: Levi's *Levi 101* and *Another Jennifer*



Levi (Jennifer Wilcox) is an indie Hip Hop artist from New York who doesn't need a backup singer for the choruses and doesn't need an MC to smash out the raps. Levi is both herself. She's got clear-voiced raps that easily shift into a soulful R&B. This is most apparent on her 2004 release, *Another Jennifer*. Songs like "Made It to 18" and "How You Like Me Now" showcase her vocal range—from a little guttural soul to big ol' R&B lungs. Yet, there's no question that the MC is on the stage when Levi grabs the mic for "You Belong," "Hick," and "Ridiculous."

The rap-sing style of the title track (which tells the story of why she goes by Levi) invites you to groove along with her. Levi is backed up by the guitar of Mike Borgia which can rock out on a classic-sounding lick or jam out on a throwdown acoustic ("Lotsa Nothin").

Of course, I'm supposed to be here telling you about the new disc from Levi, *Levi 101*, the one with the "Parental Advisory: Emotionally Explicit Content" label on it. Unfortunately, overall this sounds like a sophomore release—not quite clicking. "Little Leelee" with its whistled melody and rapped life story comes on strong as the first track. However, tracks like "Contagious" and "That Wasn't Love" darken up the guitar sound which is a little overpowering for Levi's raps while also sounding less fresh and too derivative.

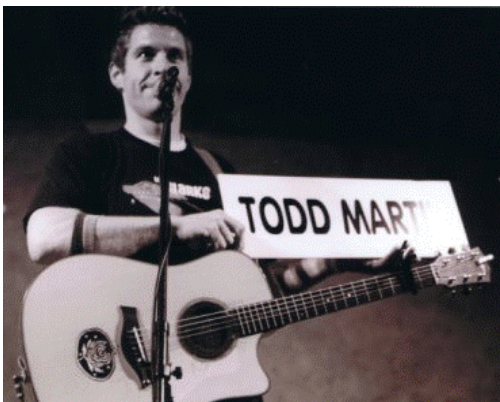
Yet, what draws me to Levi's music is that her raps are down-to-earth and positive. There's lots of negative things in songs like "Little Leelee," exploring the tough parts of her childhood, but Levi has a way of lifting up the spirit, providing hope. Going back to *Another Jennifer*, the title track is about realizing that there are a lot of Jennifers in the world, but that she was going to be one of a kind. "Hick" is about being a country girl (from upstate New York), coming to big city (NYC), and not letting that big city kick out the hick. Even as she's talking about lovers and relationships in "You Belong" and "Made It to 18," there's a sense that she knows that there's a lot of empty promises in her world of modern relationships.

Levi was surprised when I wanted to find a way to use some of her songs in Bible studies because of their positive message. I may not find that everything Levi sings about matches what we teach in the Church, but in her music, I hear the voice of a strong young woman trying to stay strong against the world's pressures. Those Bible studies or [SongDevotions](#) haven't been written yet, but that would be their theme: where Levi tries to remain strong on her own, Christ comes to make women—and men—strong against the ways that the world may drag us down.

Thank you so much to [Levi](#) for the review copies.

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Country-influenced Rock: Todd Martin's *Time for Good*



He's got a bit of Peter Dinklage's voice lent to a Country-influenced singer-songwriter rock that pushes along on the opening track "Save Myself" with this great walking-down-the-chords bridge. Todd Martin sounds like a singer-songwriter who comfortably lands in a band sound on *Time for Good*. Contributions from band members do not sound like add-ons, especially Brian Factor's drums which shape, punctuate, move, and push the rhythm. Martin has let his songs get fully formed in the hands of his fellow performers.

There's some John Mayer acoustic guitar elements, rock songs with a jazzy feel, such as on "Out to Sea," which then also brings in a Country two-step. That two-step comes again for "Punchline," with some beautiful banjo and slide guitar (Dave Chaffant). With "Paper"

and the story of the Fall into sin in the modern world, you've got the throwdown rhythm like the Old 97s.

Martin tells the kind of stories you tell each other in college late at night in dorm rooms. The little scenes of life take on huge philosophical, psychological significance. I'd be lying if I said I had outgrown such observations. When Martin sings about a picture of a girl from high school ("Love Scene") or Ferris wheels and swing sets ("Diamond Friendships"), I still see how I try to hold onto a feeling of the moment, the importance of shared experience, or a connection to the past that was just a fleeting time.

Thank you to the [Todd Martin](#) and [Divot Records](#) for the review copy.

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Jam Band: Hanson's *The Best of Hanson: Live and Electric*



Hanson has been the butt of many jokes, mine included. In fact, they were thoroughly put down in the premiere episode of CBS' *Love Monkey* in Tom Farrell's (Tom Cavanagh) speech championing the pursuit of true music over being a money-grubbing record label. Farrell is then immediately fired by the label boss who



supposedly discovered Hanson. The scene worked because most serious music enthusiasts side with Farrell in thinking that Hanson isn't worthy of our attention and are just the product of music industry executives trying to cash in on the market of the next big thing.

Now let me tell you what my diet has consisted of lately: humble pie, crow, and foot in mouth, while I swallow my pride and eat my words. *The Best of Hanson: Live and Electric* completely surprised me. Yes, there's a lot of pop filler, screaming girls in the crowd, and some teen idol posturing, but there's also some jamming, grooving, and rocking. I know that no one else in their wildest dreams would call Hanson a Jam Band, but I put them in that category to signal that there's a lot of groove shaking in what Hanson does, especially on these live tracks. So hopefully calling them a Jam Band got your attention, and you'll listen again.

"Where's the Love" sounds like the pop hit it is because of the melodious vocals, but with the groove guitar on hand, it shakes right into the funk breakdown bridge. There's some Southern Rock coupled with rap-sing on "Look At You," a blues vamp that could induce a Jam Band to hip swaying.

OK, so the soloing isn't plentiful or lengthy, and often it depends on additional band

member Aaron Kaplan (electric guitar) and Pete Griffin (bass), but there's more jam in these songs of Hanson (published incidentally by Jam N Bread Music) than you might imagine. Skip over the pop ballads that would've sent you to the lobby for a beverage if you had been in the audience, but then start again at track 9 for their cover of U2's "In a Little While," a nice tribute with Taylor Hanson's voice going from its typical Bryan Adams timbre to grab some of Bono's voice-cracking passion. Skip over "MMMBop" with the screaming girls singing along, but then jump back in for track 13, "Rock 'n' Roll Razorblade," which lives up to its name through the piano chaos bridge which builds up the songs through Who/Boston-like style and sounds like a song that is ready to fight the record label boss (such as the one that fired Farrell and supposedly discovered Hanson).

Thank you to the [Hanson](#) and [3CG Records](#) for the review copy. Check out what Tom Farrell is listening to at [True Vinyl Records](#). (This is really an outlet of "Morning Becomes Eclectic" Nic Harcourt, *Love Monkey's* music supervisor, to showcase some more great music).

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Folk-influenced American Rock: Megan Slankard's *A Little Extra Sun* EP



Adam Rossi (keyboardist for LUCE) produced Megan Slankard's 5-song EP *A Little Extra Sun* in such a way as to electrify her acoustic-core songs, lend some edge to her airy melodies and vocals, landscaping her songs with altitude changes, whirling butterflies, and shifting light and shadow.

With Rossi at the helm, Slankard can be compared to Shawn Colvin and Margaret Becker whose songs retain a folk singer core base coat even as production can color and shade those songs for variety. If Slankard explored her guttural growls that appear sporadically on *A Little Extra Sun*, she'd also find comparisons to Sarah Masen and Jennifer Knapp coming her way. This would also help her to keep her songs from floating away into airy pop without only relying on production to do this. "Riley" is where Slankard shows some of this spunk, and this may be the best sign of the things that should come from this young singer-songwriter.

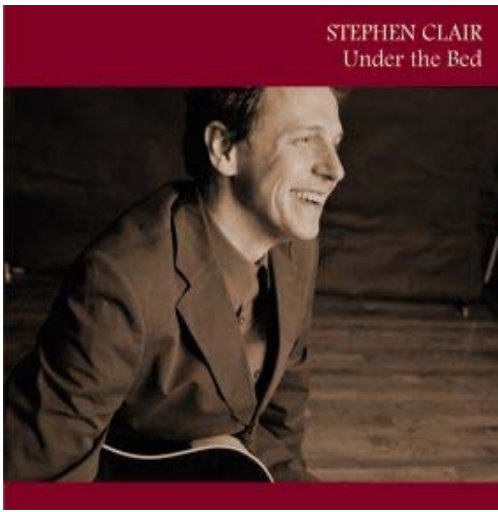
Thank you to the [Megan Slankard](#) for the review copy. Find info about Adam Rossi's band by clicking here: [LUCÉ](#).

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Shelving 2005: The Singer-Songwriter Shelf

I'm still trying to shelve the CDs that the Music Spectrum office received in 2005. Here's a

look back at 2005 discs that are still spinning in my ears.



It's not just that his voice sounds like James McMurtry; he can also weave a story out of small elements of setting and things in the room. [Stephen Clair](#) sings with McMurtry's slightly deep, stilted Lou Reed phrasing that can then just as easily break open into Country melody. On *Under the Bed* ([Valley Entertainment](#)), "Gone Ten Years" tells of driving with his Grandpa, wondering if he's still driving in the life after. That sentimentality which is grounded and never syrupy, walks in the footsteps of David Wilcox's songwriting. Other places

Clair kicks up the tempo to rock the Country like McMurtry for "It's a Riddle." Actually, "My Heart's Not Broken" actually sounds very similar to McMurtry's "Dusty Pages" (*Candyland*) as it starts. Now, I'm very happy to make such a strong comparison between Clair and McMurtry, because there's never enough McMurtry songs. So I've been eager to hear someone else tap into this same well, unleashing good, pure, Artesian songs.

[Collin Herring's](#) *The Other Side of Kindness* (Gravestone Picnic Records) jumps from the gate with "Back of Your Mind," a Son Volt/Drivin' 'n' Cryin' burner with hints of Paul Westerberg cracks in his voice. "Aphorism" comes with the AltCountry of Jason Walker, while the atmosphere recalls Sam Roberts (although some people agree when I said [Roberts is AltCountry](#)). Eleanor Whitmore's haunting violin paints the foreboding scene of "Lazy Wind," which has hues of Neil Young. Herring lands among other emerging AltCountry voices like [Greg Hobbs](#), but with those dark tones of Young. Herring reaches into the other side of AltCountry—rock 'n' roll's growl, such as the guitar screams on "Into the Morning."

Like a lot of Country songs, "That Thing in Reno" celebrates the gambling, drinking, and hooking up party in Reno—except that the speaker also admits that that thing in Reno was a big mistake, caused him to lose his woman back home, and now he's addicted to the gambling. [Greg Winkler](#) tells tales like this, opening up the conscience even as you're enjoying the song. He sounds like Greg Brown with less resonance in his timbre and more twang in his folk. As an album *Laugh a Little Longer* ([Slothrop Music](#)) starts with "Reno" which may give a little bit of the wrong impression, because the rest of the album is a lot less Country. "Still Ann" goes with an American Band Rock sound like Echelon or Jonathan Rundman with a grooving bass rock but a folkman's voice like Lloyd Garrelts (Echelon) or Rundman—clear, no growl, little fragile and open, which invites you to rock without the posturing. This is definitely the highlight of the album. "Green Pick Up Truck" tells a tale in John Wesley Harding's halting, conversational singing style. The title track, however, sounds like James Taylor which takes too much of the edge of Winkler's folk.

[P.J. Olsson](#) is a folksong hipster whose "in the corner of the coffee shop" melodies are

mixed and jammed up with some of the funk of Michael Franti (see review this issue), the Soup Dragons 90's drum machine rock, or the rapster posturing of the Beatlesque rock of the New Radicals. Olsson's songs on *Beautifully Insane* ([Brash Music](#)) resemble troubadour tunes, but they are mixed by DJ P.J. while giving a shout out to Grandmaster Flash as a "Soul Soul Superstar." Olsson sings, "Gimme some backbeat now," and he's a singer-songwriter who knows what he would've done had he been able to have the late Jam Master Jay on stage with him. Olsson lets loose a song of pop beauty with "Medicated" while calling someone a bxxxh. How he puts that much sweetness in a line like "I'd rather be medicated than to/Be a bxxxh like you" is a little disorienting—singing along with a breezy tune and suddenly saying something cruel—but it leaves you with the feeling that Olsson's actually breaking the truth gently, speaking the truth in love (sort of). The person addressed is acting horribly, and Olsson's trying to admonish without smashing down.

Coming from a fragile place, [Kelly Snyder's](#) sings at the piano as if she's either in a NYC apartment drowning out the city noises ("Nothing's Ever Right" speaks of "clammy sidewalks" on a rainy day) or in a lake home overlooking the water ("Fall" includes the line "Lookin' across the bay"). Her *Oxygen* album ([Mother West](#)) finds comparisons to the piano-led tunes of Rufus Wainwright, Charlotte Martin, and Rachel Yamagata. "Rescue Me" hits at Wainwright-like series of concluding chords early in the tune, and periodically throughout, as if the song will be over before it starts which matches the hopeful-turning lyric. A light dance beat is the backdrop for "I Don't Know," which has a R&B chorus where Snyder can show a little scat in her vocals. Additional production adds creepy whistling bottle rockets on which increases the ache in the tune. Like vamping over a George Winston piano line, Snyder adds her soulful melody to "So Bad" which deeps down deep into longing.

[Toshi Reagon](#) wields her acoustic guitar with blues intensity, busts out a Gospel voice, arms herself with R&B attitude, settles in to do the old blues street corner stomp, or fronts a full rock band. On the recent release, *Have You Heard* ([Righteous Babe](#)), you can hear echoes of Greg Brown, Janis Joplin, and label boss Ani DiFranco. Daughter of former Sweet Honey in the Rock vocalist, Bernice Johnson Reagon, it's no surprise to find those Gospel elements in Reagon's writing. I love the title track for its prophetic look for signs of the Lord, although as far as I can tell, theologically Reagon and I divide when she apparently refers to God as female. While we might not be talking about the same God, I'd at least point to how her songs often mention the search for love, a search common to all people, a search which leads me back to my God.

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Astralwerks Beat: The 101ers

A Monthly Check-in on Sounds Coming From Music Spectrum Supporter, Astralwerks



I suppose grudgingly I'd admit it was fortunate that my mom didn't dress me in black leather, torn jeans, safety pin piercings, and a

Mohawk when I was three as the Sex Pistols began to break open what would be the Punk scene. However, that also means that by the time I knew enough about what was going on Sid and Nancy were dead, Johnny Rotten was looking for PiL, and *London Calling* had been mellowed a bit for "Rock the Casbah." Punk was becoming something else, the New Wave which seemed less connected to the past musically than what Punk had meant originally.

So now as a child born to late for the Punk explosion, let alone seeing how rock 'n' roll was a ticking time bomb waiting to go off in 1976, now it's time for *Elgin Avenue Breakdown Revisited*, a reissue of the 101ers album along with extra rare tracks, alternate takes, and live cuts. The 101ers were Joe Strummer's band before he left to help form the Clash. In Strummer's voice, guitar, writing, eclecticism, and passion, you can hear every bit of what would lead to "Clampdown," "Train in vain," and "London Burning."

Elgin Avenue is therefore a history lesson, because the 101ers are not punk. They are a rockers rockabilly band, the mid-70's chapter of the oft-repeated rockabilly groove-bounce. It started way back with the old bluesmen who didn't just play their acoustic guitars quietly into the night. Then came Sun Records and Elvis, Johnny Cash, and Jerry Lee Lewis. Watch *Walk the Line*, and you can see all of punk rock's predecessors jump, jive, and boogie in their edgy performances. Then came the Beatles who found their sound in the old rockabilly covers they banged out at the beginning. Finally, Strummer and the 101ers write their own rockabilly chapter with music which feels as if it could explode anytime.

"Keys to Your Heart" is pitch perfect 50's rock beat with enough of Strummer's muddy snarl vocal to be something too dangerous for the *Leave It to Beaver* era. Two version of "Keys" are included with version 2 being a faster re-recording for the BBC and stronger for its tighter feel. As the first tune Strummer ever wrote, it shows that Strummer was extremely gifted from the git-go.

"Letsgetabitarockin" has the speed of punk, the slur of words over the frantic sock hop beat. "Rabies (From the Dogs of Love)" has a fat guitar plunking out a pop rock progression seen just a couple of years later on the Cars' debut album. Chuck Berry's "Maybelline" is one of many Berry covers the 101ers played live, and here they smash through the song like duck-speedwalking. Included also is Van Morrison's "Gloria," the band's traditional set closer showing both how raw Them (Morrison's band) was and how Strummer's band was taking all of that R&B-influenced energy and just breaking on through to the other side.

Thank you to the [Astralwerks](#) for the review copy.

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