

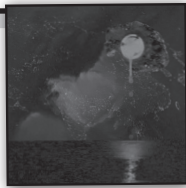
# EARGASM

## CURSIVE MAMA, I'M SWOLLEN SADDLE CREEK 2009

Tim Kasher doesn't put out shit. And if you know that, you know that anything he does with **Cursive**, or his side project band, The Good Life, is both lyrically and musically great. So, if you're a fan, you'll be tapping your toes to Kasher and company's latest effort, *Mama, I'm Swollen*.

What's interesting about this album beyond fantastic indie rock composition is the strategy by which Saddle Creek Records released it. In a year where music is harder to sell and consumers have less disposable income, the Omaha, NE, indie label decided to offer the download on March 1st for only one dollar. On March 2nd it was two bucks, on the 3rd it was \$3, and so on, until it reached full price on March 10th. The reasoning behind this is that the band's previous album, 2006's *Happy Hollow*, was leaked prior to its release. You see, record companies send out promo copies to journalists and critics (leaching scumbags) prior to the official release so the early reviews create a buzz. But some opportunistic writers reciprocated by sharing it with would-be consumers. Fans were already singing along to the songs at shows weeks before *Hollow* was even out. The current move prevented leaks and made the album cheap to those in the know. By the time the buzz had been created by loyal fans, the album was full price. Saddle Creek admits it worked to some degree, but it was a one-off thing.

Several tracks on *Mama, I'm Swollen* are of the lullaby-esque nature that Kasher has developed. **Cursive** continues to lay down layered, rise-and-fall rock on "From The Hips" and "I Couldn't Love You Anymore." The use of horns, introduced on previous albums, adds to the building urgency here. In short, this is worth buying, even at 10 bucks. **By Jon Coen**



## CLIFFORD BROWN/ SONNY ROLLINS/ MAX ROACH QUINTET COMPLETE STUDIO RECORDINGS ESSENTIAL JAZZ CLASSICS 2009

Editors love lists. Articles like "Best Tuberiders Ever" and "Top B-Boys of All Time" are pretty much interchangeable — except for their forms of flow. The only other difference? Volume. A "Greatest 100 Surfers" might start poaching the Great Lakes Masters Funboard division before it hits 50. But being included among the "100 Most Influential Jazz Recordings" out of hundreds of thousands? That's like being declared a pioneer and "The Next Dane Reynolds" all at the same time.

Actually, the Dane analogy is pretty apt. **Clifford Brown** was more than a bebop leader. He was its future. A speed demon maestro of modern riffs and beaming songwriting brilliance — but still able to hold all the clean groove style that made '50s jazz so hip. A mix of tradition and innovation, his trumpet continues to leave marks on the likes of Wynton Marsalis and Arturo Sandoval 53 years later. Not bad for a kid who died at just 25 (car smash, not drug crash). Over four years, he recorded with various quintets — the one fixture being drumming icon **Max Roach**; the last discovery a tenor sax prodigy named **Sonny Rollins**. This re-release represents everything those three ever put down in a studio. That means every track's polished. Precisely timed arrangements and intricately balanced structure across a range of rhythms and styles punctuated by raging improvisation. **Clifford** and **Sonny** trade triple-time blows; **Richie Powell** wildly tickles the keys; **George Morrow** bumps up the bottom end. And, of course, **Roach** torches the kit with his trademark percolating toms and sizzling high-hats. (If you ever wondered where the stereotypically scatted "jazz drum sound" originated, start here.)

It's the type of seminal combination of skill and vision that perfectly captures the peak of a genre of American alt-music that was punk before there was punk, rap before rap, preserved at its high point of popularity — and impact. And unlike most of surfing's greatest players from 50 years back, it will always continue to influence. **By Matt Walker/ Surfing Magazine**



## THE COFFEE PROJECT EASY DOES IT PAPER + PLASTICK 2009

I've known Jake Crown for 15 years now. From our back-in-the-day Beer Olympics puke-offs to passing out in separate gutters across the street from one another — we have shared and lost many a brain cell along the way. I've also had the privilege of experiencing Buddy Schaub take over a room with pants-pissing hilarity and comedic wit. If you've been fortunate enough to meet either of these two chuckleheads on or off stage (Buddy plays in Less Than Jake, Jake in Hometeam/ Rehasher), then you know how close this musical endeavor came to being called "The Comedy Project." Instead, they opted for **The Coffee Project**.

What began with Buddy's ability to play many a musical instrument and Jake's inability to sit still has blossomed like a hot little college freshman girl into a mature businesswoman Daddy would be proud of. Having played together on back porches for over a year and putting to use such small-town subject matter as break-ups and rebuilding, they realized they had enough material to take the next logical step. Sure-thing hits like "Virginia" and "You Always Wanted A Song, Right," enlist the help of Jon Gaunt (who's currently playing with Chuck Ragan) on fiddle, as well as making use of vocal harmonies from Heather Tabor of Bullets To Broadway/ The Teen Idols to make the sound fuller. The result is *Easy Does It*, a straightforward eight-song 10-inch to be released on Paper + Plastick. If you like what you hear, get the vinyl, since it could be a while for Buddy to find time away from his "other band" (who tours more than the Grateful fucking Dead). Until then, catch Jake singing the songs solo up and down the East Coast and from the gutter across the street from me. **By Pratt the Terrible**



## SLIM TWIG CONTEMPT! PAPER BAG 2009

Toronto sound provocateur **Slim Twig** is an enigma: his foot-tall pompadour and shiny black suits evoke a classic rockabilly persona, while his electronic experimentation associates him with the elitist art-rock world. Equally inspired by Elvis Presley and the Wu-Tang Clan, he considers the guitar an instrument of confinement and despises the jovial, communal nature of most Canadian indie rock bands. His day job is acting — mostly in small, independent films — but at night he sculpts material that bears no easy genre definition. **Slim's** also all of 21 years old, and, as of March, still lived with his filmmaker parents.

But all of that had little to no effect on his debut full-length album, *Contempt!* Bathed in dark underworld sound samples and found noises that creep, claw, and burrow their way into your conscience, *Contempt!* resembles the soundtrack to a particularly creepy David Lynch film, sung by a twisted amalgamation of Elvis, Nick Cave, and Jon Spencer. Opener "Young Hussies" rides a bass-heavy beat and spine-tingling noise effects (including shattered glass) to a quirky conclusion; "Patty Ann" sounds like a cast-off RZA beat topped with jittery lyrical tics; and the alarm-clock buzz of "Alley Spying" gives way to fake applause tracks that form the foundation for following song, "Mansion Haunting." That club-lite track features hip-hop-influenced vocals in **Slim's** trademark monotone, before disappearing without a trace on the carnivalesque "Hidden." And swelling strings and hand claps lead to moments of near-rock on "Estate Intrusion," before East Coast hip-hop's lethargic pacing returns on "Gate Hearing! (Redux)" and the evocative "Japanese Machines." But **Slim Twig** isn't simply using samples as a lazy way to construct his own album; instead, he likens sampling to Andy Warhol's pop art "recontextualization and reappropriation." Deep thoughts like that will surely endear **Slim** to the aforementioned art-rock scene, but his professed desire to cross over to mainstream success may take a little more work. Then again, at only 21, **Slim** is spinning his own career out of entirely self-produced yarn — so maybe we're the ones that need to do the catching up.

**By Nick McGregor**

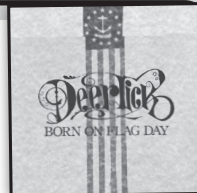


## DEER TICK BORN ON FLAG DAY PARTISAN 2009

**Deer Tick** is described as a "rock, country, and blues cosmic experience." The rock, country, and blues elements are right there in the catalog, but to reach the outer planetary cosmic experience one must till a little deeper into the band's live-show footage. In 2004, Rhode Island's John Joseph McCauley, III, began in his bedroom with nylon strings, a home recording setup, Hank Williams, Sr. blaring, and an urn of hard booze. Chris Ryan, Dennis Ryan, and Andrew Tobiassen (on bass, drums, and guitar, respectively) have since completed the group's majestic wail and brought their Providence-cultivated honesty to the forefront.

*Born On Flag Day*, **Deer Tick's** first album as an official band, differs substantially from debut *War Elephant*, the main anomaly being that McCauley recorded *War Elephant* at the age of 19, operating every instrument on the album. Allegiance to their local community, with indifference towards anything more than basic needs and a venue to fill, litters the album's lyrical substance. Although some may find the shallow end of the poetic pool in McCauley and Liz Isenberg's duet "Friday XIII," it's assuredly one of the catchiest ditties, coupling the soft and saccharine with a loveable bout of emphysema. "Smith Hill" and "Hell On Earth" are deeply dotting and telecast **Deer Tick's** pure commitment to their art, while in the romp that is "Houston, TX" you'll find the stamina which helps make *Born On Flag Day* contagious in all bearings.

McCauley's voice has the gruff splendor one can attain only by touring rigorously and casually playing encores in Texas strip mall parking lots until 5:00 am — they actually do this sort of thing with smiles and grace for their fans. Gram Parsons, Bob Dylan, and Townes Van Zandt would all be proud. All the media you can find on **Deer Tick** demonstrates that their name, followed by "work harder and shut the hell up," should be the epitaph on the headstone of bands everywhere that have bickered and broken up before ever finding the community-oriented devotion **Deer Tick** has achieved. **By Will Tunstall**



## PICK OF THE MONTH

### BEN NICHOLS THE LAST PALE LIGHT IN THE WEST LIBERTY & LAMENT 2009

Any review of **Ben Nichols's** *The Last Pale Light In The West* has to not only serve as an album review, but a book review, as well. The Lucero frontman's first solo effort is admittedly inspired by the novel *Blood Meridian* by Cormac McCarthy (*The Road, No Country For Old Men*). Nichols claims it was easier to make it an overt homage to *Meridian* than to worry about stealing characters.

These seven evocative folk songs are the obvious next step for **Nichols** as a songwriter, even more hauntingly beautiful than his saddest Lucero ballads, complete with melancholy piano and an almost eerie use of accordion. The pedal steel was invented specifically for this kind of music. But you can't discuss the album without the book — an epic tale of frontier soldiers-turned-mercenaries-turned-outlaw killers in the mid-1800s, complete with such harrowing, well-written violence as to make Quentin Tarantino simultaneously second guess and piss himself. Nichols' melodies and McCarthy's depiction of renegade war savages and men spiraling into subhuman actions are both equally chilling. Aside from the title track, each song is based directly on characters from the book. The protagonist, aka "The Kid," ironically gets an upbeat tune on the record despite his cursed life. "The Judge" is a character so brilliantly twisted that the song doesn't even have words.

There are frontier tales of heartbreak, gore, hardship, and misfortune — real buoyant stuff. While **Nichols** brings them all to life, reading *Blood Meridian* before, during, or after (or all three) turns the listening experience up at least 20 notches. **By Jon Coen**

