

Mask" occasionally strip away the veneer. "Peace in our time / Oh thank you, Herr Hitler / Tell that to the Polish / Tell that to the Jews," sings Hitchcock, exposing an undercurrent of sharp social criticism. Far from being a frustrated editorial columnist, Hitchcock can launch a rowdy knees-up when he gets cooking. "Brenda's Iron Sledge" from *Black Snake Diamond Role* rocks with wicked guitar licks and throbbing bass. Though *Black Snake* features several guests (including **THOMAS DOLBY** and all former Soft Boys), *I Often Dream of Trains* was strictly solo. The quirky vocals-only "Uncorrected Personality Traits" warns against the latent sexual side effects of a child's over-involvement with either parent. "Trams of Old London" and "Heart Full of Leaves" carry an autumnal stillness, but "Sometimes I Wish I Was a Pretty Girl" is fit to explode from its agitated acoustic shackles. Meanwhile, *When Thatcher Mauled Britain* collects 39 rarities. *Part I* ranges from the ghostly "Autumn Hair" to the rootsy "Take Your Knife Out of My Back" and the up-tempo (but unfinished) "Victorian Squid." *Part II* shifts gears with ambient experiments like "Mr. Deadly." Listeners might have trouble identifying country influence during the dubby "Pit of Souls (Country Version)." "Sleeping Knights of Jesus" notwithstanding, Hitchcock's country must lack a Nashville. (yeproc.com)

_____ jason holstrom _____

THE THIEVES OF KAILUA
(MILL POND)

With lilting, summery harmonies nodding lovingly toward timeless Beach Boys confections, you can smell the salt air during "On the Waikiki." Ukulele and slack key guitar during "Return of the Tourist" leave California surf far behind, planting listeners upon Hawaii's pristine beaches for 31 minutes in paradise. Gentle tropical rain falls during "Clouds Roll In." "Crystal Green" features plucky surf guitar drenched in reverb. The super-catchy "Age is in Ya Head" reminds listeners that life is for living. Our narrator (the Purest Tourist) stews during the title track, imagining that local purse-snatchers have developed photos from his pilfered camera and hung them in their cabanas. If you're someplace dreary and snowbound for months of the year, Dr. Holstrom prescribes daily doses of *Thieves*. Call him in springtime. (millpondrecords.com)

_____ hopewell _____

BEAUTIFUL TARGETS
(TEE PEE)

Former **MERCURY REV** sideman **JASON RUSSO**'s music with Hopewell grows more ambitious and beautiful with each release. The pop-hero promise of *The Notbirds* EP is surpassed by the lovely and delicate "In Full Bloom," with a gently arching melody rising above a piano and string arrangement bursting with springtime color. The band flaunts its more ragged edges with the glam-and-Jam inspired "All Angels Road," with stomping drums, stabbing guitars, and Russo's thundering

piano. The giddy snap of "Bethlehem" masks beatific musings such as, "The rain that falls on you is the same rain falling on me, too." If intelligent and forward-thinking music like Flaming Lips' quirky psychedelia and The Decemberists' orchestral pop can reach a mainstream audience, Hopewell's combination seems deserving of a place at the table. (hopewell.tv)

_____ th' legendary shack*shakers _____

SWAMPBLOOD
(YEP ROC/REDEYE)

Th' Shack*Shakers release their fourth LP after having established themselves as reliable fixtures in the psychobilly genre, stacking up against heavy hitters such as Reverend Horton Heat and Southern Culture on the Skids. "Hellwater" rambles through Creedence Clearwater Revival's territory as bassist **MARK ROBERTSON** anchors a revved-up "Born on the Bayou" groove and **COLONEL J. D. WILKES** blows a greasy harmonica duet with **DAVID LEE**'s gritty guitar licks. The title track for this final installment of the "Tentshow Trilogy" features a Tony Joe White blues riff and freight-train harp. Wilkes's themes again emphasize sin, judgment and the mythical American South. Graveyard crows herald "Easter Flesh," which charges forward with gothic fervor and a grim invitation to bloody rebirth attained by thrusting "your hand through the hole in the side of the Lord." (yeproc.com)

_____ nick luca _____

FRACTIONS
(FUNZALO)

Luca has long been a local hero within Tucson, Arizona's close-knit musical community. Working alongside **CRAIG SCHUMACHER** at WaveLab studio, Luca has built a lengthy resume that includes appearances with **CALEXICO**, **NEKO CASE**, **IRON & WINE** and many others. Recent sideman duty with **X**'s **JOHN DOE** and a busy release schedule with Funzalo are boosting Luca's recognition beyond home turf. Though unlikely to win vocal competitions, his plain-sung delivery rings honest and true with the Badfinger jangle of "Pretty Mama." Luca's eclectic taste in covers is revealed with a reverent rendition of **LOU REED**'s well-traveled 1972 #16 "Walk on the Wild Side" and the cheeky disco vibe of Jonathan Richman's "I Was Dancing in the Lesbian Bar." Bassist **CHRIS GIAMBELLUCA**, a veteran bandmate from the jazzier **NICK LUCA TRIO**, anchors "Bitten."

_____ mae _____

SINGULARITY
(CAPITOL/EMI)

With its move from positive indie-punk purveyors Tooth & Nail to **THE BEATLES**' label, Mae continues to write catchy, emotional rock-pop featuring **ZACH GEHRING**'s crunchy guitars, **JACOB MARSHALL**'s unrelenting drums and harmony-filled, anthemic choruses. If only it weren't so flawless, artificially sweetened and generic. **DAVE**

ELKINS' vocals are so inhumanly pitch perfect that I'd suspect Antares Auto-Tune should get a singing credit. Heart-swelling material such as "Brink of Disaster" would likely impress better in concert. As with 2005's conceptual *The Everglow*, the band aren't lacking ambition or empathy. The insightful "Waiting" focuses on ways people sabotage themselves from achieving their dreams. "On Top" could have been an outtake from Jimmy Eat World's *Futures*, while "Sometimes I Can't Make it Alone" sounds like a poppier attempt at a Pearl Jam stadium anthem. (whatismae.com)

_____ marillion _____

SOMEWHERE ELSE
(MVD AUDIO)

Marillion again validate the trust of their active and generous audience, which financially supported creation of the band's 14th melodic prog epic. *Somewhere Else* is more contemplative than either *Marbles* or 1994's *Brave* (this line-up's standout album), but burns with smoldering intensity. "Voice from the Past" waltzes atop **MARK KELLY**'s sparkling piano, while vocalist **STEVE HOGARTH** half-whispers about "a beautiful soul, gone." Hogarth laments those lost to "the ill fortune of geography," yet values goodwill above charitable donation. During the Rush-like "The Last Century for Man," he raises alarm for global survival, singing, "If you are not outraged, you haven't been paying attention." Guitarist **STEVE ROTHERY** hits hardest on the anti-materialistic "Most Toys" and Rush-like "The Wound." Bassist **PETE TREWAVAS** captivates with subtle melody during "Thank You, Whoever You Are." (marillion.com)

_____ willy mason _____

IF THE OCEAN GETS ROUGH
(ASTRALWERKS)

Following the ageless folk of his debut *Where the Humans Eat*, the 22-year-old Mason continues growing into his old man's voice. Years of touring with just a backpack and an acoustic guitar infuse "Gotta Keep Walking" with a sense of homebound longing. The song nonetheless illustrates a spiritual seeker who knows he's heading in the right direction, if not actually on the path itself. "All the other troops walked toward the bomb / But I just wandered off," he sings. "Save Myself" boosts the pop quotient, brimming with the charming bounce of The Beatles' "Getting Better." Mason's youth surfaces here, rejecting elders "when they teach us lessons that they don't believe." The gentle "When the Leaves Have Fallen" is a love song for the end of the world. (willymason.com)

_____ jonah matranga _____

AND
(LIMEKILN)

As fresh as this music is, it's tough to believe that Matranga's a 16-year veteran with at least one bona fide classic to his credit. **FAR**'s final release, 1998's *Water and Solutions*, is duly praised as a bedrock album for the emocore