

than come back as **RUTS D.C.**, the trio the group morphed into for three years after singer **MALCOLM OWEN** died, July 14, 1980 (a heroin OD, aged 26, having knowingly sung anti-smack songs), they arranged for superfan (as was the entire 1979-1982 D.C. punk scene) Rollins and cool female singer **MOLARA** to stand in for Owen. Rollins was not the ideal replacement; Owen's appeal was as a "man of the people" charismatic, extroverted friend to all, and Rollins would disdain such description. His crotchety bark isn't as tuneful as Owen's bonhomie-bellows, either. But Hank knows The Ruts by heart, and the palpable thrill in his eyes in inspired performance totally feeds the emotion! And the original trio? We won't hear playing of this caliber again, from the ungodly "Savage Circle" to "Staring at the Rude Boys" (see the 1980 Youtube video!) and deep reggae groove of "Jah War" with Molara. There's also plenty of interviews with the players, plus a few songs each by old friend bill sharers, answering the call, like **THE DAMNED** (a ferocious "Machine Gun Etiquette!"), **UK SUBS**, **TOM ROBINSON**, **TV SMITH** of **THE ADVERTS**, **JOHN OTWAY**, and, fittingly, the black reggae band that issued The Ruts 1979 debut single "In a Rut" and did Rock Against Racism tours with them, **MISTY IN ROOTS**. Oh to have been there! Listen in at: (myspace.com/therutsofficialpage)

#### rachel sage

##### CHANDELIER

(MPRESS)

Critics understandably marvel at New Yorker Sage's multi-talents: her dance and theater background, self-taught evident piano skills, breathy voice, tunes, thoughtful lyrics, self-production, Mpress label... she even designs the sleeve to this, her eighth album in 12 years. It's impossible not to like someone that's able, vivacious, pretty, and driven yet charming, not obnoxious—and her LPs reflect that magnetism. Having evolved into a first mistress of folky/jazzy alterna-piano pop, she's bound to eternal iffy comparisons to Tori Amos, Fiona Apple, Kate Bush, and Sarah McLachlan, but I'm always thinking vintage Joni Mitchell and Suddenly, Tammy! *Chandelier's* prevalent strings (and eventually horns) abet her piano's richness of tonality for her romance-vulnerable deliberations; the closing "Chandelier" is a particularly affecting treatise on appreciating what's yours while it is (love, performing, etc.), but don't miss the sweet "My Word" and the opening distress over a lying married guy, "Vertigo." (mpressrecords.com)

#### the sleepers

##### COMEBACK SPECIAL

(PRAVDA)

I picked this up expecting San Francisco great '70s post-punk pioneers Sleepers (myspace.com/sleepers), but this is a new Chicago band's second LP. But even if the new Sleepers can be faulted for egregious Google failure, *Comeback* ain't bad, early '70s metal-flavored rock 'n' roll without the sludge. What if MC5's Wayne Kramer and

Fred Smith had joined Rolling Stones for those Chuck Berry covers? Or if New York Dolls had boogied with AC/DC and Black Crowes guitars and a double-tracked Robin Zander (Cheap Trick) on vocals? You'd get this shakin' fist-in-the-air stuff—roaring, stomping, heavy, "Filthy" rock 'n' roll—with songs such as "Loaded" and "Jailbait" (careful, boys!) channeling the riff from Dead Boys "Caught With the Meat in Your Mouth"/Rocket From the Tombs' "Never Gonna Kill Myself Again." You'll want to cruise with them on their "Detroit Ride"—just watch the underage girls. (pravdamusic.com)

#### spanish prisoners

##### SONGS TO FORGET

(EXIT STENCIL)

Most albums you can neatly peg, but after seven plays of **LEONID MAYMIND's** debut LP, he's escaped seven attempts to pin his Brooklyn's collective down, like Shaquille O'Neill trying to guard Muggsy Bogues years ago. Maymind, whose parents fled Iron Curtain-era Latvia with him just before the U.S.S.R fell apart, is one of those squirrely artists that runs the gamut from a weird freak-folk (with spry banjo, dobro, accordion, Wurlitzer, Neil Young-ish harmonica, etc.) to an even more skewed inversion of rough-hewn, '70s influenced indie-rock. No wonder he once backed **DANIEL JOHNSTON**; they've both got a nice artistic screw loose. The closest you get is Jeff Tweedy attempting Alex Chilton's more adventurous excursions ("Kangaroo" etc.), but Maymind is a man of multiple muses/voices. Best: just his chilling voice and piano on the closing striker, "The Ballad of an Unfolding." (exitstencil.org)

#### sudden ensemble

##### LIFE IN A BIRDCAGE

(BOX 13)

Though I'm not sure what makes this ensemble so "sudden" (the same mystery that once surrounded Suddenly, Tammy!), it's not hard to discern why the Jersey City, NJ boy-girl duo's previous debut LP became a favorite of gold-eared legendary Brit DJ **JOHN PEEL** before his death: They play a corrosive yet alluring, disconcerting inversion of melodic pop. On the opening "Zero Gravity" they're like Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit" had it been perverted by Velvet Underground. On "Speed Trackers," it's more Sonic Youth and the Reid brothers heisting the focal riff of Big Star's "On the Street" of *That '70s Show* notoriety. They excel at noisy distorted pop ("All the Satellites," the standout "Bonfire"), but even a pop-Kinks ditty such as "See Me Soon" seems refracted through a bad-trip *Bad Moon Rising*/"Death Valley '69" mirror. Anti-pop-loving pop is often highly entertaining. (myspace.com/suddenensemble)

#### tears run rings

##### ALWAYS, SOMETIMES, SELDOM, NEVER

(DISASTER CLUB/CLAIRECORDS)

Although it seems weird to consider the term, *Always* is pure "retro"-shoegaze. Come again? Isn't the genre too recent for

such terminology? As an original fan of the field, it's shocking to note that 2008 is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of My Bloody Valentine's jumpstarting *Isn't Anything* (although, as ever, there were multiple antecedents, like Cocteau Twins). So, odd as it seems, this painstaking reconstruction is as aged as a slavish '77-style punk group in 1997. The difference is that shoegaze's cognoscenti hipness lasted five short years, and there's only been tiny cult pockets of approbation since. Too, the endlessly expansive possibilities of modern neo-psychedelia (a scratch definition) have proved more infinite for dream pop than any monkey-can punk. So Tears Run Rings may be a dead ringer for Slowdive, right down to their torrents of cascading, distorted, and delayed guitars and ubiquitous male-female cooing, with slight seasonings of Moose, Chapterhouse, and Kitchens of Distinction. Yet, however unoriginal, TRR verge on the precipitous extraterrestrial heights of "Slowdive," "Morningrise," "Catch the Breeze," and "Spanish Air." You'd never know this quintet was filesharing, trading tracks from scattered domiciles in L.A., Portland, and Seattle. It sure doesn't sound mailed; it sounds *nailed*, in shimmer guitars from heaven, and melodies from childhood lullabies. You, shoegaze fan? You live for this, still, even 20 years on. (clairerecords.com)

#### water fai

##### GIRLS IN THE WHITE DREAM

(WHITE SHOE)

Who'd have thought that the postrock movement would spread so far? Osaka, Japan all-female foursome Water Fai have audibly been listening to Mogwai and Tortoise, but they don't trace templates; they add an entirely dreamy, sweet, cute, and highly Japanese fragrance to what has often been a less forgiving style. Their debut LP (originally self-issued back home two years ago) isn't lazy, but it can make you feel sleepy, afternoon siesta-like, in the way that a warm meal or a good pie can. They use the most delicate little ringing electric guitar picking to form sonic tickles in no hurry, while relegating vocals to cooing harmonies or humming that seem directed to an unseen baby. The effect is just plain lovely, like water dripping into a quiet fountain, and as hypnotic as the gentlest reggae. (whiteshoerecords.com)

#### jason willett

##### THE SOUNDS OF MEGAPHONE LIMITED

(MT6)

For those unfamiliar with Baltimore institution/record store owner Willett, the presence of friends like his ex-**HALF JAPANESE** bandmate **JAD FAIR** and members of **BOREDOMS** and **RUINS** are barely a clue to this 20-track, hour-long compendium, from his last 12 years of work with a half dozen different bands on his Megaphone imprint. Whatever the groups—like **X-RAY EYES**, **ATTITUDE ROBOTS**, **JAUNTIES**, and the fave **CAN OPENERS**—Willett and conspirators kick up a cacophonous din, full of the bleatings of mutant jazz and the calamitous racket of Captain Beefheart. Every