

The real deal

Laura Marling's new CD gives hope for the future of pop music



LAURA MARLING, "I Speak Because I Can" (Astralwerks) ★★

— If ever there's been a more telling sign of the dumbing down of pop culture, especially music, witness that Taylor Swift and the Jonas Bros. are considered wildly talented young musicians. It's enough to make you want to burn it down. But then someone like Laura Marling enters the picture, a 20-year-old British folk artist on her second full-length effort, an album so stunningly mature, dark and emotional, it could give anyone hope.

"I Speak Because I Can" is a stunner and proves she isn't just some prodigy who was hoisted up by the blogosphere. She's a

bustling, intelligent artist, whose 10 songs easily could have flowed out of her as tragic novels as much as they could songs, and cuts such as the biting, seemingly bitter "Hope in the Air," the Euro-folk painted "Alpha Shallows," the teary, slightly self-deprecating "Goodbye England (Covered in Snow)," and "Rambling Man," where she frets, "It's hard to accept yourself as someone you don't desire," show a depth and sincerity that's basically absent from mainstream music. Marling wisely chose Mumford and Sons to back her, who breathe even more wit into this excellent document, something that, if there was any justice, would have Marling on the Grammy stage next year. (Brian Krasman)

Laura Marling plays the Warhol tonight at 8. Middle East open the show. Tickets are \$15. Call 412-237-8300.



MINUS THE BEAR, "Omni" (Dangerbird) ★★

— Minus the Bear's willingness to experiment and try new things is obvious in just moments into their fourth album "Omni." Not satisfied with remaining rigid in their jangly math rock, they pump in elements of '70s funk, psychedelics, and dance grooves that dress up an album that's practically dripping in erotic storytelling and evening get-togethers.

The results are mostly a success. Their angular backbone remains; it's just that it gets some new clothes to wear. "My

Time," where frontman/guitarist Jake Snider smoothly begs, "Touch me in the dark," gets the bed sheets unfurled for what's next, that being watery "Summer Angel" and "Hold Me Down," which sound like they were ripped from Steely Dan's playbook, powder-fueled "Into the Mirror," featuring seductive backing from Rachel Flotard; and closer "Fooled by the Night," a twisting, turning song that documents the mistakes people make when the lights go down. What doesn't work is when they go too far off board, such as "The Thief," which sounds like bad MTV fodder, and "Animal Backward," which never finds its legs. Still it was a worthy risk the band took, one that's sure to pay further dividends with album five. (BK)



"HOUR OF 13, 'The Ritualist' (Eyes Like Snow) ★★

— Hour of 13's second album "The Ritualist" almost never came to pass. The band fell into dispute with their former label, and the duo even temporarily parted ways, thus robbing the world of one of the finer throwback doom metal bands going. Luckily, cooler heads prevailed, which led to this eight-track cauldron of witchcraft that could be enjoyed by anyone who claims Dio, Pentagram, Black Sabbath or the Devil's Blood as their

favorites. Phil Swanson's soaring, threatening vocals stay clean throughout, a refreshing approach that's actually finding its way back among other bands of this ilk. The dark arts are prevalent in Chad Davis' work, as he provides the evil canvas for these tales that peak on the title track, where Swanson warns that his subject matter will "strip away your mortal soul"; "Possession," which claims a slower, more chilling pace; and the Iron Maiden-friendly, inexplicably violent "The Crawspace," which will make you hesitant to ever go into the attic again. (BK)



DANIEL LIONEYE, "Vol. II" (The End) ★★

— If you like noise and distorted composition followed by incoherent lyrics, then have I got an album for you. Slightly less than 34 minutes of recorded sounds of people flailing their arms rapidly over guitar strings and banging on drums will fill your CD or mp3 player should you select "Vol. II" from Daniel Lioneye.

The only track of calmness is the 61 seconds of "Saturnalia." Feel free to turn up your radio or headset, then have it

blasted into oblivion by the next track, "Neolithic Way." This record no doubt will be on the top 10 list of albums for people who like to bang their heads on walls and hate their parents. Not to go all Clubber Lang on the future of someone having this record, but my prediction ... pain. That being said, it makes a great gift for Mother's Day. The CD case doubles as a container for good music. Normally, I would put up a disclaimer before a review like this, but sarcasm and wisecracks look a lot better. (Michael DiVittorio)



ANARBOR, "The Words You Don't Swallow" (Hopeless) ★★

— This soulful pop-punk group is going to be OK. "The Words You Don't Swallow" is Anarbor's first full-length album, and like many rookie efforts it shows promise and some mistakes.

Slade Echeverria's vocals really shine in "The Whole World" and the high energy "Mr. Big Shot." "Drugstore Diet" features a sweet guitar solo about two minutes in. However, guitar work on "This Can't Be Healthy"

is questionable. The hook and other parts of the song are great. Step it up, guitarists Adam Juwig and Mike Kitlas. Echeverria is "Going to jail!" details an interesting encounter with law enforcement. Other musicians and athletes could probably sympathize with the song. Skippable tracks are "Gypsy Woman," "Let The Games Begin," and "I Do What I Do," which is a cool name for a weak song. Hope the record label signed Anarbor to some type of long-term deal. There's still some development that needs to take place, but the band will be a solid contributor to its music genre. (MD)



MURS & 9TH WONDER, "Forever" (SMC) ★★

— Murs is a West Coast hip-hop storyteller. His partner, 9th Wonder, is a North Carolina producer and deejay. Together they are a couple of guys making some cool, head-bobbing music.

"Forever" is the duo's fourth collaboration, and one of multiple albums expected to be released by Murs this year.

"The Lick," featuring Verbs, features a slick melody and simple bass line, and tells a story similar to Snoop Dogg's "Lodi Dodi," only with more details. "Asian

Girl," featuring 9thmatic, is an ode to women of the Far East. "Let Me Talk," featuring Suga Free, is a hilarious take on arguments couples have at times. It begins with the man trying to avoid the confrontation, blaming it on the "cycle of the moon," and eventually leads to an all-out verbal onslaught, including taking shots at other family members. With cookout season fast approaching, this album will blend in, as one California writer noted, like barbecues and backyard parties. West Coast rapping legend Krupp also accents two songs on this 10-track effort, but only one, the title track, is worth mentioning. Another skippable track is "West Coast Cinderella." (MD)

Higher calling



Dance rockers the Higher will perform at Diesel on the South Side Tuesday night at 7. Also on the bill are Between the Trees and Goodnight Caulfield. Tickets for the all-ages show are \$12 in advance and \$14 at the door. Call 412-431-8800 for more information.

'3D Dot,' 'Nier' owe debt to 'Zelda'

By LOU KESTEN
Associated Press Writer

Nintendo's "The Legend of Zelda" is one of the most beloved series in the history of video games, but few competitors have tried to duplicate its winning formula. Blending epic drama, fast-paced action, devious puzzles and basic role-playing, the "Zelda" franchise is really a genre of its own, with each new episode deftly mixing familiar and fresh features.

This year, other publishers have tried to capture some of the "Zelda" magic. The trend started in January with THQ's "Darksiders," which excelled by blending the devious dungeons and demanding boss battles of "Zelda" with the splashy gore of "God of War."

"3D Dot Game Heroes" (Atlus, for the PlayStation 3, \$39.99) is a far more blatant imitation of "Zelda," particularly the 1987 classic that launched the series. It takes place in a land called Dotnia, modeled on Nintendo's Hyrule. The king has grown weary of a mere two dimensions, however, so Dotnia's flat landscape and architecture have been translated into a heavily pixelated 3-D, so everything looks like it was made out of Lego blocks.

Of course, an evil genius is on the loose. So the hero has to fight monsters, explore temples and unearth artifacts that will help restore peace. You begin with a simple sword, and along the way you collect weapons and devices straight out of the "Zelda" arsenal: bombs, arrows, a boomerang and the ever reliable grappling hook.

The developer, Japan's From Software,

has made only the slightest effort to disguise its inspirations. Your health, for example, is represented by apples rather than the hearts found in "Zelda." But the wit on display, with frequent references to games dating back to the 1970s, turns "3D Dot" from a slavish rip-off to a knowing homage.

It does venture further afield than the games of the 8-bit era, with side quests and minigames to distract from the main mission. On the other hand, that looseness makes it easy to miss vital areas or get lost entirely. "3D Dot" isn't as satisfying as the best "Zelda" adventures, but it's as close as you'll get on the PS3.

"Nier" (Square Enix, for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, \$59.99) is more reminiscent of later "Zelda" installments. It's structured like the 1998 landmark "Ocarina of Time," with a central hub surrounded by more exotic cities and dungeons, which open up gradually as the hero becomes more powerful.

But "Nier" doesn't merely settle for "Zelda" mimicry; at times, veteran gamers will be reminded of "Resident Evil," "Castlevania," "Ico" and even the ancient text adventure "Zork."

That variety ensures that "Nier" never gets stale, but it also benefits from an unusually tenderhearted story. Its gruff hero isn't interested in saving the world; he merely wants to find a cure for his ailing daughter. The supporting characters include a talking book that sounds like Alan Rickman and an astonishingly foul-mouthed woman who's fighting her own demons.

'Final 24' docs offer insight into the last day of several celebrities

"Janis Joplin: Her Final Hours" (MVD Visual) ★★
"Keith Moon: His Final Hours" (MVD Visual) ★★
"Nicole Brown Simpson: Her Final Hours" (MVD Visual) ★★
"Versace: His Final Hours" (MVD Visual) ★★
— Trust me when I tell you that the "Final 24" television series is nowhere near as morbid as it sounds. Rather, this well-crafted collection of 60-minute documentaries about the final 24 hours of various celebrities provides interesting insight into some of the higher-profile deaths in recent memory. The first four installments are available on DVD — with 10 more scheduled to drop between now and October — and focus on music greats Janis Joplin and Keith Moon, Nicole Brown Simpson and famed fashion designer Gianni Versace.

In addition to a series of interviews with friends, family and acquaintances who knew the subjects in question, there are dramatic re-enactments of many of the events being discussed in the documentary. These dramatic sequences are effective without being cheesy and many of the actors involved bear a strong resemblance to those people they are portraying. And though many viewers might know (or at least think they know) the details surrounding the deaths of Joplin, Moon, Simpson and



Versace, the detail with which the productions are put together almost certainly will shed some new light on each of these cases.



The Joplin and Versace installments are the strongest of the four. Balancing the details of the fateful "Final 24" in each case with interesting background material on their respective rises to prominence provides for two fascinating documentaries. Though we are aware that Joplin's life will be cut short in 1970 by a hot shot of almost pure heroin and Versace will be gunned down in the street by a crazed fan in 1997, both documentaries manage to build sufficient suspense en route to the inevitable tragic conclusions.



The Simpson documentary is almost as good — even though she wasn't a celebrity prior to her 1994 murder — and interviews with her sister and former neighbors paint a vivid picture of what she was like before, during and after her marriage to football great O.J. Simpson. Those looking for proof of O.J.'s guilt will be disappointed, because no definitive blame is alleged.



The least enjoyable installment, though still very watchable, is the one involving Moon. The crazed drummer for the Who, who died in his sleep in 1978 after overdosing on a prescription medicine that helped curb his alcohol usage, was a larger-than-life character, and I don't think "Final 24" captures that as well as it might have. A lengthy interview with his live-in girlfriend at the time of his death is a bonus, but I was hoping for more insight into "Moon the Loon." — Jeffrey Sisk