

Dusted Reviews



Artist: The New Year

Album: The New Year

Label: Touch and Go

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The New Year - "The Company I Can Get" (The New Year)

It's been four years since *The End Is Near*, the last New Year album, long enough for all the trendy fly-by-night bands to have turned over (er, Kaiser Chiefs? Bloc Party?), long enough for musical fashions to have shifted significantly (out with the post-punk, in with the afro-beat!). Still, here are the two Kadane brothers, doing what they have always done, what has never, except maybe during the brief flourishing of slo-core, been especially fashionable. Here are radiant textures of interwoven guitars, mordant and weary lyrics slipped down into the mix, languid but difficult rhythms in non-standard time signatures. *The New Year* is a bit more strident and rock-oriented in parts than its predecessor, but it's nothing that hasn't been presaged by Bedhead's "Felo de Se." It has a few more piano songs. But really, this is a band and sound that exists on its own terms, its fuzzed guitar and buried vocals surviving intact in a sort of time capsule, unaffected by blog-chatter or the search for the next new thing.

Like all the New Year albums – and most of Bedhead's material, for that matter – this one is a long-distance collaboration between Bubba Kadane, still in Dallas, and Matt Kadane, now teaching at a college in upstate New York. Each writes material, works it up to a certain stage, then sends it on to the other for further work. The time it takes for two self-described perfectionists to get things right amid the pull of other fairly serious obligations accounts for the space between albums. Yet, it also maybe contributes to the lucid beauty of these songs, the simultaneous sense of effortlessness and complexity. These songs are as elegant as solved equations, their difficulty evident but the answer sublimely simple.

There is never any hurry in a New Year album. Songs are allowed to

unspool gradually, over extended intervals, gaining density as they go. "Folios," the first song on the new album, goes on for two and a half minutes before introducing vocals, starting with a series of acoustic guitar chords and augmenting that sound, in increments, with drums, keyboard, electric guitar and bass. "X Off Days" starts with a concise guitar and drum summary of the piece's odd time signature, developing the idea for half a minute before the vocals come in. Even the vocal-oriented tracks subordinate lyrics to other elements of the music, submerging elliptical phrases under waves of guitar and drums. (As before, Chris Brokaw is behind the kit, while Mike D'Onofrio steps in on bass.)

The piano plays a large role on this album. Matt Kane adds church choir flourishes to the stately "Company I Can Get," and pretty much takes over on slower cuts like "MMV" and "Body and Soul." It's easier to hear the words on these songs and they are, as per usual for the New Year, wry, sardonic, smart and non-linear. "Company I Can Get" sums up road trip malaise with the couplet, "*God knows I need all the company I can get / Even the red-neck in the corvette.*" Later, slow-burning "The Idea of You" hitches its most upsurging chorus to the lines, "*God knows, I can't keep calling my mother / Even though I love my mother,*" almost a parody of indie-rock angst. Yet for the most part, the words are better at establishing mood than telling a story. Slog a good 10 times through "Folios," and you will have only the vaguest idea what these guys are going on about, only that it's sad.

Of course, neither the New Year nor Bedhead has ever cared much about how well people understood them, whether they fit in with contemporary trends or really anything except how the music sounds. This is exquisitely made, moodily complicated stuff, and if it doesn't fit into the current landscape, that's more our problem than theirs.

By Jennifer Kelly