



The New Year:  
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[Touch & Go; 2008]  
Rating: 7.5  
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Change comes slow in the Kadane camp, but the latest album from brothers Matt and Bubba and their friends in the New Year shows some chances taken and a subtly expanded palette. After two records that quietly and resolutely plumbed desolation and depression, the songs from their self-titled third album hit on a surprisingly hopeful note-- but even that hope carries its own complications and shades of gray. Opener "Folios" builds from a simple acoustic strum in a lifting, almost yearning melody. It's buoyed by the barest scraps of organ before it opens into a clean, sparse three-guitar pluck, before Matt Kandane sings in his usual hushed tone: "I don't think the good years I've got left can wait... so what are we stating for?" Advance track "The Company I Can Get" shows off more of the relatively sunnier New Year, lurching in a familiar progression and swaying tentatively but determinedly, like couples at a grade-school dance. A few keyboards flutter impatiently behind its mostly lethargic pace, but it's a tempo that fits the tone: A guy in a car, tempted to drive off into the sunset, grudgingly realizes how much he needs others.

"X Off Days" is downright surging in comparison. Kadane sings of planning a vacation without a whole lot of romance ("It's not like it's some kind of great escape/ When you only manage not to suffocate"), but a gorgeous ringing and layered guitar passage gives the listener all the air they need. "The Door Opens" is the record's real surprise, as off-time blurs of keyboard and a staccato single-note guitar line push things forward. Drums shuffle insistently without ever losing their cool, and those guitars lead into more abstract, textual territory as the rhythm pulses.

Other curveballs on *The New Year* are quiet ballads like "Wages of Sleep", lead by a jaunty and drumless guitar pluck that preaches the healing properties of getting your eight to 10 hours; it's here that Kandane sings of "a feeling that things may work out halfway all right" in cautious monotone, as if that's all they would dare allow themselves. Another breath of relief comes in "Seven Days and Seven Nights", which patiently builds to a precise and lovely jangle. The gradual and hesitant payoffs of these songs give the feeling of standing on a precipice, while their brief but gorgeous outros are like looking out on a limitless horizon.

The latter half of the record could have used more of these moments, as ballads "Body and Soul" and "My Neighborhood" drag on with minimal percussion. While the band is easing its vice-like restraint and begin to loosen up and rock out a little more earnestly (not unlike their former band Bedhead did on their third record, *Transaction de Novo*), what continues to set them apart is the way they put these pieces together, and how they use their average, everyman voices to demonstrate how complicated average struggles are. Up until now, they sang of desolation and addiction, but *The New Year* shows that hope can be just as hard-- maybe harder.

**MySpace:** <http://www.myspace.com/thenewyear>

**MP3:** *The New Year*: The Company I Can Get

- Jason Crock, September 10, 2008

