

MÚM

Go Go Smear The Poison Ivy Fat Cat



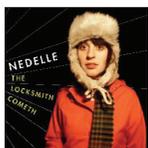
The recent departure of founding member Kristín Anna Valtýsdóttir has left Icelandic ambient outfit múm with only two of its original four musicians. The peaceful vocals and electronic beats are not lost, but the touring lineup

has expanded with the addition of five players who bring delightfully eerie violins, viola, cellos and whistles to their already atypical glitch ballads. The band recorded a portion of *Go Go Smear* in a music school in a small fishing town on Iceland's western fjords, making use of the institution's myriad of instruments. Opening with "Blessed Brambles," the half-whispered vocals and hauntingly triumphant arrangements make hairs stand on end, and the poignant, spectral "A Little Bit, Sometimes" would be most at home scoring a scene in a mad scientist's laboratory as he toils over his latest creation. For just a moment, though, with songs like "They Made Frogs Smoke 'Til They Exploded"—about animal cruelty—the album becomes seemingly more playful, the beats more reminiscent of DNTEL than Sigur Rós, with chirpy vocals and a fleeting pop feel. Closing out affairs are the choral chamber chants of "Winter (What We Never Were after Me)," which harbor a lingering feeling of the vastness—and isolation—of the open seas. **LH**

Link www.randomsummer.com
File Under Electro Viking ghosts
RIYL Sigur Rós, Jem, Röyksopp

NEDELLE

The Locksmith Cometh Tangram 7s



Quirk and craftsmanship pervade singer-songwriter Nedelle's third album, a record whose lightheartedness and humor belie a frequently transcendent beauty and understated lyrical poignancy.

These tracks, sparsely arranged and ardently sung, teeter on the edge of twee without falling victim to their own innocence, finding a lustrous balance between the often absurd naiveté of their subject matter and the sterling wit of their delivery. It is this balance—between the self-awareness of the singer and the regressive syntax of her songs—that elevates *Locksmith* from the ironic charm of most indie pop to something of a minor masterpiece. "I Hate A Mountain" bounces bazuki band textures over wide-eyed vocal refrains and carnival chords, an effect that manages to be evocative—of childhood, of Broadway, of the wilderness—without making much sense. Layered harmonicas and acoustic guitars groove over a third-grade-music-class rhythm section (more woodblock!) on "Ghost Ships," the polka percussion marching confidently towards kitsch while Nedelle trades hooks with a phantom backup chorus. What's amazing in these numbers is the unwavering control with which the songwriter matches minimal, spacious orchestration to the limitations of her voice. Nedelle is neither a diva nor a smoky-lunged crooner. And in a genre where words take artistic precedence over instrumental inventiveness, it is a testament to the musician that her compositions hook the ear rather than catch in the throat. **BENLASMAN**

Link www.nedelle.com
File Under Kit-Kat Power
RIYL Joanna Newsom, Cat Power, Regina Spektor

THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS

Challengers Matador



The New Pornographers are what the Decemberists would sound like had Colin Meloy been raised on a steady diet of three-minute power-pop singles and various British Invasion hits.

Although song titles like "Mutiny, I Promise You" conjure up those stereotypical seafaring images Russell Baker might use to introduce *Masterpiece Theatre* episodes, tandem vocalists Carl Newman and Neko Case are not nearly so Old World. For instance, a keyboard-heavy and new wave-y "All The Things That Go To Make Heaven And Earth" comes off like the Cars—albeit after Ric Ocasek has completed English Lit. With "Entering White Cecilia," Newman puts on a Peter Noone British accent, and after just a few seconds, you know you're into something good; it just has the sort of shuffling beat that makes you want to skip like a true English dandy. "Go Places" stands out above everything else because Case sings its upbeat lyric over jaunty piano. *Challengers* is, per usual (despite the mandolin-flavoring of its title track), an uncluttered and seriously pleasurable guitar-oriented offering of straightforward pop-rock. **DM**

Link www.thenewpornographers.com
File Under Canadians rakin'
RIYL The Decemberists, the Shins, Spoon

OFFICE

A Night At The Ritz New Line



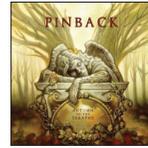
There's been a baffling amount of hype surrounding this band since their song "Wound Up" grabbed a coveted iTunes "Download Of The Week" designation last May. The track thrust the

then-unsigned, Chicago-based outfit toward some high-profile appearances, including ones at SXSW and Lollapalooza. This, their first label release, comprised mostly of remastered old songs and two new ones, essentially functions as yet another primer for a band that has been priming since 2001. There'd be a bit more tolerance for biding one's time had their music been more absorbing, but they simply crib the best features from early new wave (tinny synthesizers, viral guitar lines, ersatz-Anglo vocals) and give it an adult-alternative spin, which more or less sounds like Snow Patrol covering *Door To Door*-era Cars. The record isn't entirely without appeal, providing no less than four melodies—with the hooky "Oh My" leading the way—that are hard to shake off. But *Ritz*, which Office is hoping will break them from the ranks of hometown heroes to a more national audience, ultimately sinks under the weight of its own ambitions. It seems there's more time spent here pandering to the iTunes signalization of music method than there is at forging an identity of their own. **KK**

Link www.reachoffice.net
File Under Blunder-Miffilin
RIYL The Cars, the Knack, Snow Patrol

PINBACK

Autumn Of The Seraphs Touch And Go



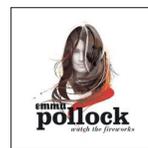
Another season, another Biblical reference. Three years after Pinback's well-received *Summer In Abaddon*, this is another solid collection of quirky indie-pop. This album, however, follows more of a definite arc than on previous

efforts, spanning the band's jittery electro spasms into epic rockers. What separates it from other Pinback records, however, is its precision. Although the San Diego duo (Rob Crow and Zach Smith) have always crafted nuanced, occasionally morose heartstring tuggers and uplifters, the sound layers on *Autumn* are somehow more effective. For instance, the somber piano and bouncy guitar/bass on both "Devil You Know" and "Torch" work together in a way that, independently, would each make their own song, but together, hone in on some undefined emotion between contemplation and satisfaction. This might be because in the three years between records, both members have been busy with outside projects. Smith has performed with and worked on an as-yet-unreleased album with his former band, Three Mile Pilot, and Crow has put out several solo releases, including the metallic *Goblin Cock* and jazzy *Ladies* collaboration with Hella's Zach Hill. With so many active outside influences, they had to creep up somewhere, and for the most part it's what keeps the album interesting throughout. But as they keep progressing, it only makes us wonder: What will winter bring? **KG**

Link www.pinback.com
File Under Goblin Pop
RIYL Dismemberment Plan, Minus The Bear, Postal Service

EMMA POLLOCK

Watch The Fireworks 4AD



Somewhere between the alt-rock boom of the '90s and the indie-pop fizz of the '00s, popular music shed much of its excess seriousness for a more subdued sincerity, with artists opting to give listeners a knowing wink in lieu of an expectant stare. Such is the lesson learned from, and largely ignored by, Emma Pollock's new record, *Watch The Fireworks*, which finds the former Delgados frontwoman treading water somewhere between the languorous atmospheric of her native Glasgow's pop pedigree and the rapidly depreciating influence of last decade's stateside singer-songwriters. The album plays like a prolonged bout of indecision between the established paradigm of the past and the unfulfilled promise of the present. Ultimately, it resembles the Vaselines covering U2. The problem here is not lack of professionalism—indeed, these songs burst with thick licks, verdant guitar textures and beefy percussion—but an absence of personality. Pollock's voice runs across the record like a draft through a heavily insulated house. Still, several tracks on *Fireworks* manage to sidestep this troublesome anonymity to produce propulsive, tantalizingly anthemic pop. The brilliant "Acid Test" twists like a lost Pixies single while "Adrenaline" aspires to the kind of hair-in-the-face bliss evoked by the best of the singer's Glaswegian peers. Unfortunately, it's not enough. If this album is Pollock's version of fireworks, she'll want some dynamite for her next. **BEN LASMAN**

Link www.emmapollock.com
File Under Scotland Yawn
RIYL The Cranberries, the Sugarcubes, the Vaselines