

Three bands usher in new albums

BY HARRY BURSON
Reviewer

Four years have passed, and the dance-rock bubble inevitably has burst.

Following an immense gap after Franz Ferdinand's rushed sophomore album, 2005's "You Could Have It So Much Better," it's kind of surprising and almost quaint to see the band returning with a new disc titled "Tonight."

Since we last heard from them, their contemporaries either have gone off their rockers (The Killers) or fallen off the face of the earth (The Futureheads). That is to say nothing of the legions of bands following in their wake who managed to have entire careers in the time it took Franz Ferdinand to craft this album (Arctic Monkeys, 1990s).

It's easy to forget that the group was at the forefront of the brief dance-rock revolution. Back in 2004, stealing shamelessly from Gang of Four and Joy Division was still a novel concept — I distinctly remember bassist Bob Hardy patiently explaining the concept of a rock band playing danceable music in the pages of Rolling Stone.

None of that matters anymore — the dance-rock moment has passed, just as the umpteenth garage rock revival did. With its third album, Franz Ferdinand finds itself in a similar place as The Strokes with "First Impressions of Earth" back in 2006: deposed royalty having to prove their relevance in an ever-shifting pop landscape.

Frontman Alex Kapranos realizes this. Part of the reason for the delay is the group's movement through several top-shelf producers before settling on Dan Carey, a veteran who most notably worked with Kylie Minogue. With his assistance, the band fleshes out its angular post-punk sound with heavier bass and drums, synthesizers and a bevy of odd effects.

The music still is unmistakably Franz Ferdinand — driving, moody dance tunes highlighted by Kapranos' singular Scottish burr. From the opening bamburmer "Ulysses" to the acoustic closer "Katherine Kiss Me," the album supposedly tells a story of a debauched night on the town with all its glory and consequences. I'm not sure I believe it is a narrative, but the disc does have a



Courtesy of www.antonyandthejohnsons.com
The College Music Roundup highlights three bands with new discs on the shelves: Franz Ferdinand, Antony and Johnsons and Black Joe Lewis & the Honeybeats.

certain cohesive, sexy, late-night feel.

Like their debut album, this album is solid with 12 great tracks whose only minor fault is their similarity. Even with the shiny new production, "Tonight" doesn't sound that different from the Franz Ferdinand of 2004, except for the eight-minute "Lucid Dreams," in which the band really opens up for a psyche-

delic dance epic reminiscent of the weirder DFA remixes.

This isn't the big step forward that Kapranos probably wanted it to be, but it is an immensely enjoyable album that, with any luck, will earn these guys a chance to make a couple more.

Next in the roundup, we have "The Crying Light," Antony and the Johnsons' follow-up to their 2005

breakthrough "I Am a Bird Now."

Antony Hegarty, the group's focal point, has a love-it-or-hate-it sonorous warble that either will move you or turn you off completely. On "I Am a Bird Now," he doesn't always succeed, sometimes slipping into over-emotive histrionics that evoke Mariah Carey rather than the smoky cabaret atmosphere I think he's aiming for.

Sonically, "The Crying Light" is very similar to the last record. Muted piano and understated orchestration give Hegarty's androgynous torch songs a sense of class.

The first half of the album nearly is perfect: The first three songs are slow, somber and beautiful, building to the welcome R&B shuffle of "Kiss My Name." After the decent title track comes the centerpiece of the record, "Another World," in which Hegarty contemplates his mortality, likening it to the troubled state of the world today. Sure, it sounds kind of corny — maybe it is — but it moves me every time.

From there, the album drops off as Hegarty's warble shifts into overdrive becoming more irritating than affective. Maybe his voice is just too much for a 10-track album, but I find myself wishing this was a great EP rather than a good album. Don't misunderstand — this is a good record, their best yet. Lou Reed likes them, and so should you.

Finally we have the debut self-titled EP from Black Joe Lewis & the Honeybeats. Hailing from the live music capitol, Austin, Texas, the group is an eight-piece hard-soul ensemble fronted by an Otis Redding-style shouter.

Still paying its dues on the road, the band is most famous for playing at Barack Obama rally last year. The first two tracks on the EP are some of the most raw R&B you're likely to hear any time soon. Opening with a Chuck Berry guitar riff, "Gunpowder" kicks off the album in a concise two-minute slice of horn stabs and propulsive drums. Next, "B****, I Love You" plays the dirty soul a bit too much but is so good that I don't care.

The third track is a confusing speech about fishing and the devil that makes you worry the band is short on material — a worry that quickly is pushed out of mind by the bluesy closer, "Master Sold My Baby."

Far superior to King Kahn & the Shrines, and far dirtier than Mark Ronson's beloved Dap-Kings, Black Joe Lewis & the Honeybeats are the real deal. Hopefully we won't have to wait much longer for the full length.



Courtesy of www.moviepicturedb.com
The film "Taken" was released Jan. 30, 2009 and features actor Liam Neeson as an ex-FBI agent searching for his kidnapped daughter.

Neeson earns best actor

BY TYLER GEORGE
Reviewer

Cross a spy like Jason Bourne with James Bond and add an abducted daughter, and the result will be nothing less than Pierre Morel's "Taken," an intense action thriller set in France that will keep you on the edge of your seat from beginning to end.

The hero, ex-FBI agent Bryan Mills (Liam Neeson) has retired from the service and moved in order to make amends with his ex-wife (Famke Janssen) and daughter, Kim (Maggie Grace). Despite his paranoia about his 17-year-old daughter traveling to Paris with only one friend, Amanda (Katie Cassidy). He signs a form allowing her to travel overseas in an attempt to reconnect with his daughter. When she arrives in Paris, she receives a phone call from her father, who then overhears her being taken.

The movie picks up when Bryan finds himself on the phone with the kidnapper and Bryan vows to kill him. An old FBI friend informs Bryan that the kidnapper is part of a sex trade trafficking mob, and he only has 96 hours to find his daughter before she is gone forever.

Upon Bryan's arrival in Paris, the audience is thrust into a non-stop ride along with a father who will do whatever it takes to get his daughter back. Bryan's ex-FBI roots make him a little more apt at finding her. The storyline is a rollercoaster, careening in and out of Parisian streets and past landmarks.

Besides just being a thriller, the movie does have some sentimental value. The fact that Kim gets kidnapped provides Bryan an excellent opportunity to make himself look good in front of his ex-wife's new, rich, arrogant husband Stuart. It also provides a way for him to prove himself to his daughter, who didn't get to spend much time with him in her childhood because of his time-consuming job.

Among the gripping action scenes of this movie, there were some things I could have done without, including the multiple car chases. In this respect, the movie reminded me of Jason Statham in the "Transporter" series. Anyone familiar with any of these movies or Statham's role in them knows that all he does is drive around and make witty comments with his guns blazing in every direction. The film "Taken" reminded me of this series.

Throughout the brief 96 minutes of "Taken," there were four extensive car chases, and Bryan seemed to shoot everyone he crossed no matter whose side they were on. OK, fine: he's an angry father who wants his 'little girl' back. Homicide is still wrong, and he ends up running from the police in Paris because of his persistence.

This week, the outstanding acting award goes to none other than Liam Neeson. Usually, I try to avoid giving it to the main character of a film, but this week, just as it was last week with "Notorious" and two weeks ago with "Gran Torino," no one else really is noteworthy. Neeson takes the revenge-seeking protective father role to a new level and makes you look forward to the point in time when the kidnapers have to deal with the consequences of their actions.

Overall, the movie left me wondering why Neeson, now in his mid-50s, didn't take on a role similar to this earlier in his life. Some 10 years ago, Neeson played Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn in "Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace," and his voice may sound a bit familiar, as he was the voice of Aslan in "The Chronicles of Narnia" film. He pulls off the secret agent roll well, leaving audiences wishing he had done something like this sooner.

Single second ad makes impression

BY FRANKLIN CLINE
Reviewer

If only the young advertising executive up-and-comers from TV's "Mad Men" had the foresight of alcohol peddler MillerCoors, who purchased a one-second commercial that aired in the beginning of the fourth quarter of last Sunday's Super Bowl. The one-second ad consists of a man saying "high life," and it can be viewed at www.1secondad.com.

By most reports, the average going rate for a 30-second commercial during the big game was a little more than \$3 million — not too shabby for NBC, who broadcasted the event, or the NFL. Financially, then, it ap-

pears as though MillerCoors made the right move, especially considering the surprising amount of hype that surrounded the commercial — most of the people with whom I watched the game were aware of its existence — and the genuinely clever "what the heck was that?" factor demanded by its "blink and you'll miss it" nature.

However, even though thousands of faceless executives might disagree or at least take umbrage with this statement, a television commercial cannot be defined solely by its revenue uptake. No, television commercials have artistic merit as well, and here I seek to discover exactly what it means to have an advertisement that lasts only one second.

It's difficult to pick where to start my analysis. We've already covered the art of cost management. Do we talk about the eerie undertone of subliminal messaging, the fact that MillerCoors must have been comforted knowing that they could put their one-second commercial on YouTube and have it be viewed (at the time this piece was written) 63,000 times, or the sheer brilliance of marketing toward confusion? Let's go with the latter.

One of the things that makes a commercial so successful — as a purveyor of information designed to incline one to purchase its featured object, as a little piece of art that does anything you want it to and most importantly as a wholly unique combination of those two

seemingly dissimilar factors — is its comprehensibility. In other words, a successful ad for Toothpaste A explicitly would outline why the consumer should purchase that particular type as opposed to its competition, although a direct reference to a competing force is not necessary. However, MillerCoors has flipped this theory on its head. A perfect advertisement no longer has to tell you what tastes better, is more filling with fewer calories or has no aftertaste. That rhetoric is tired, dated and unhip. No, we have entered into a new age of advertising in which literally all a company has to do is say its brand name, a uniquely 21st-century concept.

I'm sure we could make a few leaps of faith and discover that American intellect and culture slowly have been diminishing, using the chasm between a text-filled hair cream advertisement from the turn of the century versus an actor in a blue-collar jumpsuit saying the brand name of what is ostensibly his favorite beer, a working man's beer, a beer so good that every Nielsen house in the country shook a little bit at the mere mention of the name, mouths watered across America.

The air never seemed so dry before and for one mere second we were united in our thirst, all wholly American in our conflation of needs and desires, one long second of empathy with the dude on the television screen who loves this beverage so much he will stand in front of box upon box of the stuff and proclaim the brand name smilingly and loudly to a hungry camera, and we love it too — the ad has worked.

We have switched brands, thrown all the old food out of our refrigerator just to make room for more and more, and it turns out the economy could be reactivated in a single second, suddenly there are jobs, millions of new jobs, and we have a one-second advertisement to thank for it. Feb. 1 will become a national holiday and all those MillerCoors executives finally have blurred the line between shameless capitalism and total, life-changing art.

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