

Animal Collective named for venue

BY HARRY BURSON
Reviewer

Going green is all the rage. This week in the College Music Roundup we have the latest from psychedelic weirdos Animal Collective, power-pop hero A.C. Newman and French dance duo Justice. As nouveau-granola hipster becomes an acceptable lifestyle choice, a constellation of like-minded pastoralists is emerging in the indie-rock universe to fill the niche. Somber folkie Ray Lamontagne and campfire harmonizers Fleet Foxes come to mind.

Emerging from Brooklyn and the avant-garde electronic underground, Animal Collective doesn't immediately seem to fit the bill as bucolic romantics. Yet on their most accessible record to date, the group embraces the easy-going hippie vibe that has been a strong undercurrent in their music since they recorded an album around a campfire back in 2003.

"Merriweather Post Pavilion" is the ninth album Animal Collective released since forming in 2000. Named for a major venue in Maryland, the title of the record illustrates the band's grand but approachable ambition to make music that would be big enough to fill the space and likeable enough to fill the seats.

They might not be packing arenas in their next tour, but Animal Collective loads this disc with their catchiest, most coherent set of songs yet.

The two standout tracks are "Brother Sport" and "My Girls," the latter of which ends with a repeated hippie refrain: "I don't mean to seem like I care about material things/like a social status/I just want four walls and adobe slabs/for my girls" — rather bland hippie rhetoric made beautiful by repetition in a reverberated sea of gurgling synths, tribal drums and joyous yelps.

"My Girls" is great, but it's by no means a conventional song, relying on just a few phrases repeated ad nauseam for about five minutes. Animal Collective have tightened

their songwriting, but not by that much. This becomes a problem as the middle of the record (say, tracks six through 10) blends together. The soundscapes are pleasant, but neither melodic nor legitimately adventurous enough to hold your attention.

The electronics that dominate this record make it a more interesting slice of hippiedom than the studied rusticism of the Fleet Foxes, but don't believe everything you hear — this record is good, but it's not the groundbreaking synthesis that Pitchfork says it is. Surely, the Grateful Dead sounded just as revolutionary to receptive ears. Enjoy the miraculous melodies emerging from the ether, but don't think too hard about it, there's really no need.

Up next: New Pornographers' leader A.C. Newman's second solo disc "Get Guilty."

On the chorus of the opening track, "There Are Maybe Ten or Twelve," Newman repeats the line, "make of that what you will," inviting listeners to make sense of his impenetrable, recursive lyrics.

As the ringleader for Canada's preeminent indie-pop collective, Newman has never been known for particularly great (read: sensical) lyrics, anchoring one of the most memorable songs from 2005's "Twin Cinema" with the phrase, "sing me Spanish techno."

Yet the guy is being marketed as a songwriter, so let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater just yet. According to the label, Newman makes a number of disparate references on the album, to the likes of Donald Barthelme, Jean-Pierre Melville, 10cc, George Benson, Freddie Mercury and Jimmy Webb. Being familiar with half of that list, I can honestly say I don't hear any of it. He could be writing about my life for all I know, but his lyrical style is so muddled and insular it's impossible to tell.

And let's be honest, no one is listening to Newman or the New Pornographers for the words, it's all about the candy-coated hooks. As with his group, the album sounds vintage



Courtesy of www.acnewman.net
New Pornographer's leader A.C. Newman releases solo disc "Get Guilty" with vintage edge.

without any obvious references, a pastiche of what classic '70s pop should have sounded like.

For my money, the New Pornographers still haven't topped 2003's "Electric Version." Here, the hooks are similarly plentiful but not as seemingly effortless. "The Heartbreak Rides" and "Submarines of Stockholm" rank among Newman's best tracks, but clunkers like "The Collected Works" put a bit of a damper on the proceedings.

Any fan of the New Pornographers will find something to enjoy on "Get Guilty," but they might find themselves missing Dan Bejar and Neko Case.

Last, we have the latest from Justice, France's greatest electronica export since Daft Punk. Buying time after their 2007 debut, the new CD/DVD set, "A Cross the Universe," includes a documentary and live album of Justice in concert.

While sonically not markedly different from Daft Punk, Justice has cultivated a fantastically different image. Instead of pretending to be sexless robots, Justice members act like rock stars. With unkempt hair and

leather jackets, the band cultivates a heavy metal aesthetic with song titles and album covers that have more in common with Iron Maiden than Kraftwerk.

The documentary follows in this rock-and-roll vein as Justice prowls around the U.S. shooting guns, eating hamburgers, breaking bottles and, of course, partying with groupies. Sort of like Borat, except replacing a hapless Kazakh ambassador with two svelte French hipsters. Not much concert footage, mainly tour bus horseplay.

The concert disc isn't much different from Daft Punk's two "Alive" CDs: new takes on familiar cuts that aren't ever quite as successful as their original counterparts. Almost every track is dominated by a squelchy synthesizer that was surely rousing in concert but doesn't really translate on recording. Like most live albums, it doesn't have much reason for existing. Unless you are a Justice fanatic or just want a tour memento, you're better off sticking with "Cross."

That's it for this week. See you next time. And don't stop believing.



Courtesy of www.foxsearchlight.com
The late East Coast rapper Christopher 'B.I.G.' Wallace's story is told through the new film "Notorious" which was released January 2009.

Rapper comes to life through film

BY TYLER GEORGE
Reviewer

The latest product from small-time director and esteemed producer George Tillman Jr. is "Notorious," a true underdog story that you definitely should add to your must-see movie list.

Other movies produced by Tillman include the "Barbershop" movies and "Soul Food," but this is the first major project in which he has taken on the role of director. "Notorious" tells the life and death story of Christopher 'B.I.G.' Wallace, one of the first rappers to represent the East Coast and take the rap industry by storm.

The movie begins in the last moments before B.I.G.'s death, but the audience is thrust back in time as his life flashes before his eyes. "In the beginning, God gave a clean slate," is a phrase repeated throughout the movie exemplifying what is important in B.I.G.'s life.

B.I.G.'s own son, Christopher Jordan Wallace, plays the child version of his father and he does a great job explaining how B.I.G.'s childhood gave way to his teen years. This also adds a sentimental touch to the role and meaning to the film that B.I.G. still is very much alive through his son. Jamal Woolard did an exceptional job playing B.I.G. as an adult.

Because this was Woolard's first movie, I had no idea what to expect from him and can heave a sigh of relief that he didn't make the late Mr. Wallace roll over in his grave. He does a great job showing the love and passion that B.I.G. had for music and lyrics, and I can think of no one else I would rather see in his place.

He made the way he felt about music very obvious. You could almost feel his love radiating from the movie screen to your heart. This week's outstanding acting award goes to none other than Jamal Woolard.

Not only does the movie tell the story of B.I.G.'s career as a rapper, it also portrays him as a great father to his son and daughter, which is quite a feat considering the events that take place. It shows the difficulties of being a father at a young age and helps the audience to view B.I.G. as more than just a rapper who wrote meaningful lyrics.

Most people didn't know that this movie conveys the story aspect of B.I.G.'s life

that a documentary released in 2007 failed to show. "Notorious" gives people a more personal experience, showing B.I.G.'s life and personality in great detail.

All around, the script is very impressive, which is something I was worried about. It ended up being

"Notorious" gives people a more personal experience, showing how B.I.G.'s life and personality in great detail."

great — actually one of the better scripts audiences might have heard all year. There were some intricate artistic shots, and the movie wouldn't be the same, and dare I say quite boring, had the cinematography not been done the way it was.

Even if you're not interested in the subject of the development of hip-hop/rap, I would still go see this movie. I have no interest for the subject myself but I needed up captivated by the plot and felt the drama pulling on my heartstrings constantly throughout the film.

In the end, all these elements come together to remind us that, as B.I.G. said, "We can't change the world unless we change ourselves."



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