



From Left: Motion City Soundtrack keyboardist Jesse Johnson, bassist Matt Taylor, lead vocalist Justin Pierre, drummer Tony Thaxton and guitarist Josh Cain.



Photos courtesy of last.fm
From left: Keyboardist Eric Harvey, lead vocalist Britt Daniel and guitarist Rob Pope of Spoon perform in Squaw Valley, Calif. in 2009.

Pop-punks create catchy tunes



BY COREY BOMMEL
Reviewer

Motion City Soundtrack

With so many pop-punk bands creating ironic albums, it's refreshing to find a band that is out there simply making catchy tunes. Motion City Soundtrack's fourth studio album, "My Dinosaur Life," hit the streets last week. This is the album fans of Weezer and similar bands from the early 2000s have been waiting for: Help came in the form of Blink 182 member Mark Hoppus, who produced "Dinosaur" — the first album Motion City Soundtrack has released on a major label.

This album sets a definite sound for the band. Their previous releases, although inspired, lacked the cohesion they have finally found in "Dinosaur." Each band member complements the others perfectly.

The album is chock-full of pop culture references familiar to anyone born in the last 20 years. For example, the band mentions Veronica Mars and Xbox in the same song. Overall, the lyrical theme draws from lead singer Justin Pierre's personal experiences of life, love and loss over the past few years. The pop culture helps put a lighter spin on what would otherwise be a much darker album. Pierre never loses his sense of humor while displaying his inner emotions to the world.

"Dinosaur" is a pure pop-punk album, with an emphasis on the pop. Every song draws you in with self-deprecating lyrics, a fast yet strong guitar and instantly satisfying hooks. Pierre blends pop culture metaphors perfectly, singing his confusion as "Like a slasher film / I'm torn in opposite directions / The plot sucks but the killings are gorgeous." In "Her Words Destroyed my Planet,"

he likens his recent breakup to the destruction of Superman's home planet. "History Lesson" breaks the formula a little, sounding like an O.A.R. song but not detracting from the album's overall flow.

"Dinosaur" does feel repetitive at times, but on the whole, it is one of the best pop-punk albums released in the last several years.

Spoon

Indie band Spoon returned with its newest album, "Transference," after its last foray into the mainstream. In 2007, Spoon's "Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga" searched for widespread appeal, but with "Transference" they take a step away from the limelight. This album is unlikely to draw many new Spoon fans — a direct contrast to "Ga 5."

There are many odd choices that Spoon makes during the first half of this CD. Some tracks mimic a bad recording, cutting short while random lyrics abruptly fade out mid-sentence as the music plays on. Established fans will recognize this as the band's indecision or general inability to pay attention to one thing for an extended period of time.

Many of the tracks are also presented in their rougher demo cuts as opposed to finalized products. It feels unorganized, but after a second listen the band's controlled chaos shines through as intentional.

The album's title stems from a concept in psychology in which a person unconsciously projects their emotions onto another person or thing. Lead singer Britt Daniel uses this to express his musings on love throughout the album. "The Mystery Zone" has Daniel theorizing on relationships and the unknown, stumbling like a drunk from one point to the next without settling on a coherent answer. Daniel is full of resentment and resignation toward a relationship in "Written in Reverse," as he cries out "I wanna show you how I love you, but there's nothing there." Each song displays the focus of a band suffering from attention deficit disorder, obtaining structured instrumentation though improvised medleys.

Those expecting a blockbuster like "Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga" can prepare to be surprised. True Spoon fans, however, can happily welcome another gem of indie rock.

New Guitar Hero disappoints



BY ALEX CARLSON
Reviewer

Guitar Hero's influence on the modern game market has been tremendous. Ever since its PlayStation 2 debut, the Guitar Hero franchise has let millions of wannabe rock stars pick up a plastic guitar controller and rock out to their favorite songs. After a few sequels, spinoffs and the addition of full band capabilities, Guitar Hero quickly began to lose steam to its main competitor, Rock Band. Guitar Hero has made games based on a single band before, such as the Aerosmith and Metallica installments, so it's time for another round. Guitar Hero: Van Halen is the newest band-specific Guitar Hero game.

Sadly, Guitar Hero: Van Halen seriously underperforms. Gameplay will be familiar if you've played a Guitar Hero game before. Players strum, drum and sing along with the notes on screen. The band fails if a player misses too many notes. The game still plays fine, and if you've been following the Guitar Hero series since its humble beginnings, it will be easy to pick up and play.

One major fault of the game is that the gameplay is essentially a cut-and-paste version of the more dated Guitar Hero: World Tour game released in 2008. In Guitar Hero 5, another



Photo courtesy of vanhalen.guitarhero.com

Guitar Hero game released the same year as Guitar Hero: Van Halen, the player was introduced to a better-constructed interface — an easy way to jump into band play without having to deal with logging into profiles. Aside from having all of the songs available for Quickplay from the beginning, Guitar Hero: Van Halen could very well be considered World Tour with a different setlist.

The setlist is another serious issue. If you're a real Van Halen fan, you will be disappointed by the lack of any music or characters of the former band members. This is David Lee Roth

country, and that's it. You won't find any Sammy Hagar, Gary Cherone or Michael Anthony avatars to use, nor will you find any music developed by Hagar. The game lacks credibility and true dedication to its source material because it simply doesn't contain a comprehensive setlist. It's like a big, gaping hole in the Van Halen story.

If you're not a serious Van Halen fan, the setlist still will disappoint due to the guest acts, because they don't have anything to do with the main band. Why is "Stacy's Mom" by Fountains of Wayne on the game? What do Judas Priest and Killswitch Engage have to do with Van Halen? The songs are challenging and some are unique (the first rising note in Tenacious D's "Master Exploder" is downright unforgettable), but you're bound to wonder why they are on the setlist. Guitar Hero: Van Halen fails to appeal to either longtime Van Halen fans or those looking for an introduction to one of rock's most legendary bands.

Additionally, the presentation in Guitar Hero: Van Halen is a disappointment. The avatars of the current band members look stiff and boring. Guitar Hero 5's stunning lighting effects and motion blurs are absent. The menu screens capture almost none of the band's personality. The songs sound OK, but don't expect any kind of enthusiasm in Guitar Hero: Van Halen.

With the music game revolution beginning to wane, Guitar Hero: Van Halen only digs the genre deeper into its grave. The incomprehensiveness of the source material, schizophrenic songlist and omission of everything that made Guitar Hero 5 fun cripple a game that really didn't need to be made in the first place. There's a degree of fun to be had while rocking out to "Jump," but it's so overshadowed by the lack of personality and enthusiasm in Guitar Hero: Van Halen it really doesn't matter.

Unless you're a die-hard fan of Guitar Hero or Van Halen, avoid Guitar Hero: Van Halen.

Popular novel proves too complex for screen



BY KEN DUSOLD
Reviewer

Entering the Downtown Cinema 8, I was filled with excitement about seeing what could be a fantastic and interesting character study. I left feeling un-nerved, depressed and wishing I had the resources to do background checks on all of my neighbors.

"The Lovely Bones," although a wonderful showcase for the underappreciated talents of Stanley Tucci, does not seem to know what kind of theme it wants to adopt. There is an ongoing murder investigation, a strained family unit and a psychedelic interpretation of the afterlife. Because all three storylines play equally large roles, there is too much going on in the

film, and that just leaves us squirming until the credits.

Based on the best-selling novel of the same name by Alice Sebold, "The Lovely Bones" is narrated by the story's victim, 14-year-old Susan (Susie) Salmon, played by Saoirse Ronan. This in itself is rather creepy, but I'll come back to that momentarily.

The story follows Susie as she confronts her own death, her family as they come to grips with their loss and her killer as he begins to crave that familiar feeling of evil.

For those who have not read the novel, the film's plot might seem a bit ridiculous, as it plays around with concepts like the acceptance of death and the idea of heaven somewhat lightly when the inciting incident is the gruesome kidnapping and murder of a teenage girl. For everyone who did read the novel, you probably have your own interpretation of the heaven, or "in-between," Susie experiences. Therefore, like many films based on novels that involve a great deal of imagination, "The Lovely Bones" prob-

ably does not hold up in the eyes of Sebold's fans.

Director Peter Jackson of the wildly-successful "Lord of the Rings" trilogy is no stranger to adapting popular novels into films. So why does his newest film fall short of expectations? Well, because Jackson moves in and out of numerous sub-stories, each with a different film style, so quickly that he fails to keep us attached long enough to know how we are supposed to feel. The melodrama in scenes in which Jack Salmon (Mark Wahlberg) decides to destroy his office out of grief and his wife Abigail (Rachel Weisz) lingers near her murdered daughter's bedroom door are uncomfortably contrasted with scenes of humor in which Abigail's alcoholic, nicotine-addicted mother (Susan Sarandon) puts too much soap in the washing machine and ignores the grease fire that results from her attempt at cooking.

While the audience watches the Salmon family fight to stay together through their coping, and also follow neighbor and



Photo courtesy of rottentomatoes.com

"The Lovely Bones" jumps sporadically from plot to plot, confusing viewers and ultimately leaving them uninterested.

dollhouse-maker George Harvey (Stanley Tucci) as he covers up his disgusting act and begins to give in to his inner need to kill again. This part of the movie is the most effective in holding the audience's attention hostage. Tucci's performance is on par with Anthony Perkins' Norman Bates in "Psycho" as he manages to disarm our heightened sense of fear and hatred to the point that we actually become tense when detectives show up to question him. Now that's scary!

Meanwhile, Susie watches everything on Earth as it plays out while relaying needed background information to the audience. This

plot device — using the victim as a narrator — would work much better if not for additional sub-stories in which Susie explores her afterlife and periodically fawns over the boy she liked but cannot have now that she is dead. The romance just seems out of place in this movie.

Ronan, who became better known following her Oscar-nominated performance in "Atonement," is good as Susie. However, it is Rose Mclver who deserves recognition as a promising young actress for her performance as Susie's sister, Lindsey. Indeed, Mclver shines as a strong and independent character

placed amidst the cloudy haze that is the script.

Had the film focused on Salmon's determination to find his daughter's murderer and Harvey's quick thinking and brilliant criminal planning, it might have been better and much more interesting. Unfortunately, the film bounces from storyline to storyline, giving little opportunity for Wahlberg and Tucci to do proper justice to such compelling characters. And even when the bouncing ceases and the hope for a climactic ending arises, audiences are disappointed by the failure of this picture to fade to black with little more than a whimper.