



SPOON

Transference (Merge)

Onetime local underdogs Spoon were recently calculated by Metacritic to be the most critically acclaimed band of the last decade on the strength of four indisputably great albums – *Girls Can Tell* (2001), *Kill the Moonlight* (2002), *Gimme Fiction* (2005), *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga* (2007) – each one reacting to and building upon what came before it. Following the breakout commercial and chart success of its pristine predecessor, *Transference* takes a slight retreat as Spoon's first self-produced album. While even the band's most marketable material has been spiked with acute studio experimentation – the background chatter and double-tracked vocals in “Don't You Evah” for example – left to their own devices, those details dominate the band's seventh album, style consistently disguising a lack of structure and self-sustaining songs, which separates the LP from its most obvious comparison point, 1998's *A Series of Sneaks*. “Is Love Forever?” bears a classic Spoon stamp, Jim Eno's percussive bounce locked with taut, staccato guitar and frontman Britt Daniel's robotic echo-chamber vocals, but never builds beyond that. Likewise, opener “Before Destruction” gets lost in a demo stage, the peripheral sonic details unable to bring the bigger picture into focus. Five-minute “The Mystery Zone” could pass for an extended DFA remix, slowly developing behind a spacious, swaggering bassline and space-needle guitar break – ghosts lingering in its keyboard accents – but the effect gets negated by a truncated ending. There are notable exceptions: the shimmering disconnect of the downtrodden “Who Makes Your Money,” the glorious Krautrock build of “I Saw the Light,” and the surprisingly delicate piano lullaby “Goodnight Laura.” “Written in Reverse” should be earmarked for a future hits compilation, shattering-glass piano and guitar capturing Daniel at his most jaded and cool, effortlessly shifting from his cocksure falsetto and cryptic beat poetry to a full-throttle scream, while the 30-gallon tank and midnight streak of “Got Nuffin,” the lone holdover from last year's EP of the same name – recorded at Brooklyn's Rare Book Room – still burns with white heat. *Transference* is a good album, just not in league with what's become par.

★★★★

– Austin Powell

SUNSET

Gold Dissolves to Gray (Autobus)

The Glowing City (2008) lifted Sunset into a new sphere, moving the project from Bill Baird's intriguingly manic but often solipsistic Beck-isms to a vision that encompasses more of the full band. Accordingly, *Gold Dissolves to Gray* offers a realization of the band behind Baird while still surfacing the former Sound Team bassist's unique subtleties and psych-pop elusiveness, the limited-edition vinyl flirting with Harry Nilsson's *Pandemonium Shadow Show* in spirit if not always sound. Shifting between ethereal daydreams (opener “Sunshine Hair,” “Gold Dissolves to Gray”) and gleeful genre spins (ragtime bounce of “Garden of Eden,” string-band roll of “Hill Country Smog”), Sunset remains an ever-evolving and suavely unpredictable outfit. “Rivers of Babylon” juxtaposes piano with a contemplative vocal hum, and “Green Truck” wheezes wildly synthetic, but Baird remains at his best on such tunes as “Our Dreams Did Weave a Shade,” melding his calm wistfulness into an easy and infectious pop flow.

★★★★

– Doug Freeman



DJ JESTER THE FILIPINO FIST

The Inside Story

In the seven years since San Antonian-turned-Austinite mixmaster Jester released debut disc *River Walk Riots*, the



Recording Industry Association of America has, in no particular order, launched multiple lawsuits against the record-downloading public, watched its sales figures plummet from an all-time high in the 1980s, and become the victim of counterlawsuits and boycotts by an enraged, cash-strapped, and increasingly P2P-happy consumer populace. Tough tamales, guys. In the interim, ad hoc mash-uppers Girl Talk, Car Stereo (Wars), and their MacBooking legions have effectively neutered the bloated and corporatized behemoths of yore, leveling the funkability field and ushering in a new era of groove. Jester's newest is an impeccably mixed 40 minutes of hi-pro flow that, true to form, ranges far and wide, kicking off with the Violent Femmes before a seamless transition into the Who's “Eminence Front,” Zeppelin's “Good Times, Bad Times,” and the Cure's “Lullaby.” From there on out it's a relatively chill peripatetic sojourn that mix-matches everyone from Yacht (“Psychic City”) to Lord Finesse (“Return of the Funky Man”) before finally spinning down via Beck (“High 5”), Backstreet Boys (“I Want It That Way”), and Prince's “Purple Rain” guitar skronk.

★★★★

– Marc Savlov

ARSON OPTICS

Plant the Seed (Word Power)

Raised in West Lake but born in Pittsburgh, Pa., and currently operating out of Los Angeles, Arson Optics (né Aaron Krueger) fell in with locals Mirage and the Melodicscience crew at age 16 and – with the exception of 2008's



decidedly Houstonian *Lion Heart* and collaborations with candy painter Cory Mo – has rarely strayed from the 78723 style. On the self-produced *Plant the Seed*, AO incorporates a heavy dose of instrumental soul samples (“Reach Out,” “Hold Your Ground,” “Eye of the Beholder”) with his Chamillionaire-style flow, mixing blunted ballads including “Play in the Clouds” with the one-man playground hustle of “Tell Me How You Like It” (“All those that follow show time like Apollo”). ATX dark horse KaiZen's laid-back stylings set the bar on the slumming “On That Corner,” but Optics has done plenty to *Plant the Seed* on solid soil.

★★★★

– Chase Hoffberger

YELLOWFEVER (Wild World)

Following a series of self-released EPs with a full-length debut on the Vivian Girls' label isn't a bad place to land. Austin trio YellowFever definitely has the same reference points and aesthetics as the Brooklyn gals, like those delightful minor-key harmonies tempered with more shape and structure, less amorphous reverb. If YellowFever's songs were furniture, they'd be IKEA: efficient, easy to put together, and don't take up a lot of space. Older songs “Ratcatcher,” “Psychedelic,” and “Donald,” although essentially just a spare bassline/guitar riff and drums, still manage to get stuck in your head, and newer songs “Joe Brown” and “Culver City” spend a little more time on pop composition. In the end, you feel sated – it's a solid, metronomic collection – but it'd be nice to hear YellowFever amp it up a bit.

★★★★

– Audra Schroeder



S.a., esse

HICKOIDS

The Hairy Chafin' EP (Saustex)

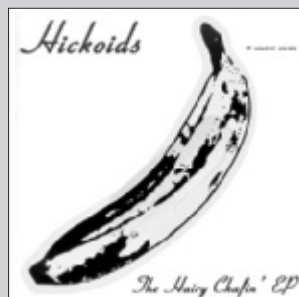
TEXAS MUSIC EXTRAVAGANZA

The San Antonio Sound

LARRY LANGE & HIS LONELY KNIGHTS

San Antonio Serenade (My Tee Fine)

Just when you thought the Hickoids were putting their tattered boots up and relaxin' following the reissue of *Waltz a Crossdress Texas*, they uncork the five-song *Hairy Chafin' EP*. It's irresistible hokum from the Lone Star State's finest purveyor of hard corn-punk, lifting the Velvet Underground's ubiquitous banana cover for art. Peel it slowly, and pop goes the ear. “Cool Arrow” is core axis Jeff Smith/Davy Jones' tip of the shredded straw hat to Augie Meyers, pure San Antonio Chicano rock. Meyers is prominently featured in the *Texas Music Extravaganza*, filmed last year at Leon Springs Dancehall in San Antonio with a dazzling cast of performers playing tribute to the music he and Doug Sahn made. It's an impressive lineup, starring Shawn Sahn, Flaco Jimenez, Raul Malo, Vato Valley Boys, BCH with Byron Berline, the Krayolas, and Adam Aguilar. The extravaganza redefines contemporary Tex-Mex not only through Sahn's and Meyer's music (“She's About a Mover,” “Dinero”) but by the musicians they influenced (Raul Malo's “All



You Ever Do Is Bring Me Down”) and the songs that taught them (“Volver, Volver” à la Flaco). The DVD dances with visual flair, and the soundtrack preserves it. Larry Lange & His Lonely Knights are an Austin outfit expanding their Highway 90 swamp pop and paradise-by-the-dashboard-light belly-rubbers south to Bexar County. *San Antonio Serenade* gets on disc the sound Lange and his compadres have created in reviving classic Chicano soul S.A.-style, favorites known no farther than the shadow of the Alamo itself (Doc & Sal's “Laughing to Keep From Crying,” Spider & the Playboys' “Tell Me Darling”), plus contemporary offerings (Oscar Martinez's “Whatsa Matter Con You,” Jerry Butler's “Never Gonna Give You Up”). The Knights' secret weapon is Joanna Ramirez, whose rendering of “Poquita Fe” makes it a weeper of the first order. Whatever's gotten into the water of San Antonio, keep it there.

(Hickoids) ★★★★★

(Texas Music Extravaganza; Larry Lange) ★★★★★

– Margaret Moser