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FEATURES

Firewater's new CD offers sarcastic perspective on life

■ 'Psychopharmacology,' the band's newest release, is a refreshing alternative to current mainstream rock



Firewater 'Psychopharmacology'

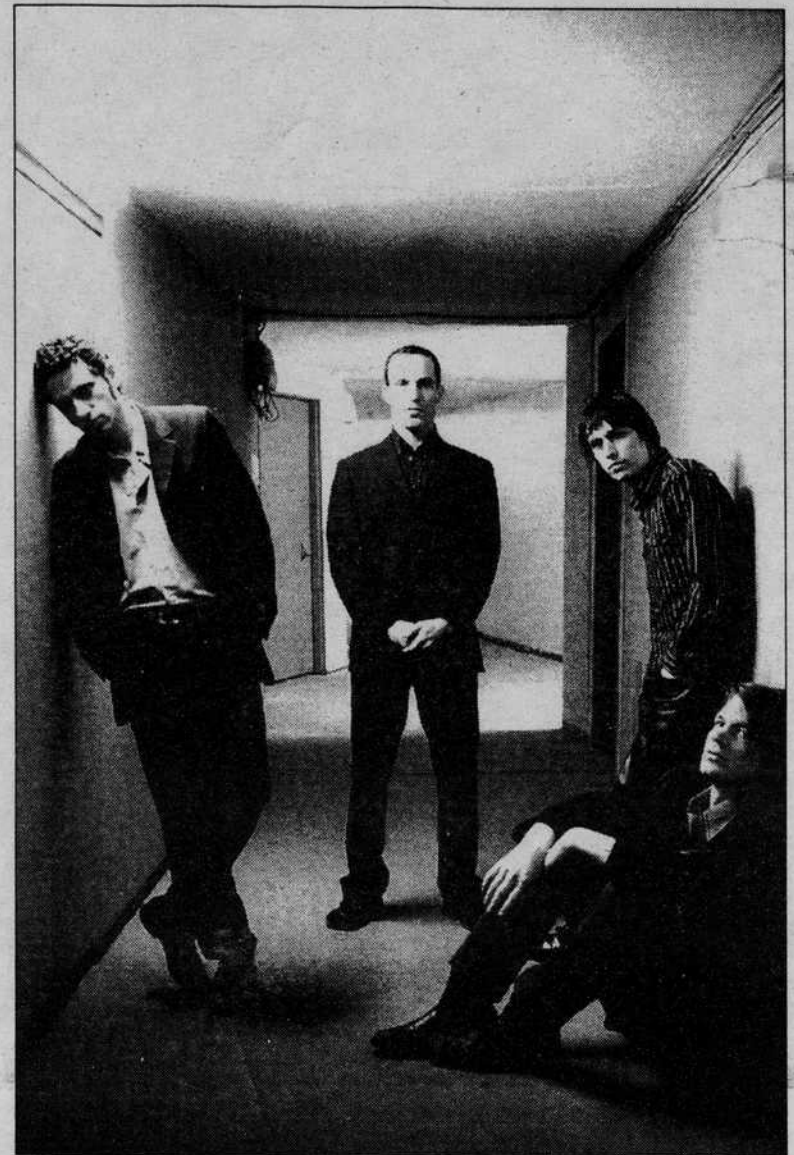
Jet Set
★★★★☆

By Michael J. Kleckner
Oregon Daily Emerald

Every so often, hearing new music produces a giddy, excited feeling, often accompanied by a faster heartbeat and the thought, "Where has this band been all my life?" I remember that feeling years ago when I first heard King Black Acid in concert (and then promptly bought all their CDs) and more recently, when I heard The Strokes' "Is This It." What can I say? I like drug-addled music.

My latest discovery is similarly intoxicated, but it's a lot more pop as well. Firewater's new CD, "Psychopharmacology," tripped across my CD player and hasn't yet left. This is the New York City-based band's third release; their first was 1996's "Get Off The Cross (We Need The Wood For The Fire ...)." Like that title, this band seems intent upon deadpan irreverence at every opportunity. In today's all-too-serious "alternative rock" world of emotive, intense Pearl Jam copycats, the lightness and lazy vocals are refreshing.

The joy in Firewater's poppy, slightly twangy music is reminiscent of Cake or Cracker, but it also recalls the seriously twisted humor of Robin Hitchcock and the swelling sounds of early-1990s bands Jellyfish or Dada. Add to that the whiskey-soaked haze of Morphine, and you have a sense of the



Courtesy Photo

feeling Firewater pushes through your speakers.

For those who prefer the clean and sober life, fear not; "Psychopharmacology" is not glorifying drug use — at least not openly. The title track is actually a dark, playful examination of the way people use psychoactive drugs as solutions to

their problems. According to the band's press information, lead singer and songwriter Tod A finds America's use of prescription drugs "a little scary." Mr. A also seems a bit scared by ambition and life in general — many of his lyrics ("And maybe I could have a great career /

Turn to Firewater, page 7

Mirah's emotional new album breaks out of singer-songwriter doldrums

■ 'Advisory Committee' is a light but complex release that relies on a wide variety of instruments for texture



Mirah 'Advisory Committee'

K Records
★★★★☆

By Alix Kerl
Oregon Daily Emerald

Singer songwriters are a dime a dozen.

For every Elliott Smith or Joni Mitchell there is a nameless dude at the "coffeehouse" who introduces every song with "This is the one I wrote when..." Then there is Mirah Yom Tov Zeitlyn. The Olympia, Wash., folk star's new album, "Advisory Committee," is a fiery emotional record that doesn't suck.

All of Mirah's albums (she only uses her full name in a joking manner; as an artist she has a singular designation) have a light, romantic feel, but her new album is more complex and confident. Mirah's

first full album, "You Think It's Like This, but Really It's Like This" was light and sweet, but not quite sugary. It features beautiful and simple girl-and-guitar songs. "Advisory Committee" carries the same drama but is more well-rounded.

On "Advisory Committee," Mirah and friends use a variety of unusual instruments such as a pump organ, xylophone, Moog and a handsaw to give the album an eclectic feel. In the title song, Mirah provides a mellow moment with the notes of a steel drum and then explodes from a crescendo of drums to emotionally bellow, "Listen for the sound and feel a shaking under / under ground to have the weapons and the time / the will to push off from the side."

In "Monument," Mirah's ballad to the scared child in all of us, she sings, "Aren't you going to come along / aren't you going to fight / aren't you going to hold your hand up to the light?"

The most amazing five minutes and seven seconds on the album are the entirety of "Cold Cold Water," the breathless first track. In this song, Mirah becomes a lost and lonely cowgirl who sets off on a

journey. The lyrics are so poetic that it is a shame to print excerpts. The line "I saddled up my pony right and rode into the ghostly night," makes you want to cry, but the sentence is just a ditty without the cooperation of the strings, voice and guitars. The song is in the style of a spaghetti western, the simple, lone-gunsman western film of yesteryear. Most of those movies were made between 1960 and 1975 and were given the moniker because they were financed by Italian production companies.

In the style of independent music, the album isn't merely a lone CD lying in a flashy jewel case. It is a delightful little package abounding with images and textures. The cover is matte white and carries a haunting scratched image. The typed liner notes are interspersed with magical pictures by Tae Won Yu that show a variety of scenes of unruly plants outside windows. The album was recorded over 10 months during 2000 and 2001.

There are so many magical moments on this CD that it is worth every last penny.

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