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Theatrical 'Harlequin' meshes cabaret, pop

CD review

Jacquelyn Lewis
Pulse Editor

"Must ... have ... new ... music," has been the plaintive wail of my overworked brain as of late. When this craving hits, I usually snatch up any new-ish selection lying on the Pulse desk, glistening in the Emerald office's inviting (OK, fluorescent) light. However, this time, any random album simply would not do. I needed something good to carry me through Dead Week — something truly fresh and inspiring.

Suddenly, I remembered two unopened CDs I had hastily shoved in my messenger bag two weeks ago. One, titled "Harlequin," was given to me by Alaskan singer and pianist Rory Merritt Stitt during May's Boifest. I saw Stitt perform during the show and immediately fell in love, so I already knew this album would quench my musical thirst. The other CD, "Give Up," by The Postal Service, was sent to me by a trusted friend at Sub Pop Records. And lo, my ears had found their salvation.

Different is what I wanted, and different is what I got. "Harlequin" is a breathtaking explosion of cabaret-in-

spired pop, complete with a piano, wurlitzer, harmonium, guitar, drums and bass. The tracks are novel — taking the listener on an emotional rollercoaster. However, Stitt's talent shines brightest in the CD's more melancholy songs. Lyrics from "unlaced," induce happy, self-indulgent swooning: "You, you were beautiful/Your flesh smelled like London/Dirty and cultured all at once and history/The smell of islands and repressed sexuality." Ahhh, yes. "Jaded," the seventh track on the album, is perhaps the best example of Stitt's work, showcasing his amazing vocal range, mind-boggling piano skills and lyrical prowess.

Unfortunately, everyone can't share in my immediate rapture. "Harlequin" is hard to come by — only available at www.rorymerrittstitt.com or at Stitt's shows. But don't despair: Stitt is scheduled to perform at the Eugene/Springfield LGBT Pride Celebration at Alton Baker Park on June 21. I highly recommend seeing him there, as he is an animated, theatrical presence and one of those rare performers who sound even better live than in recorded form.

I thought "Harlequin" would be a permanent fixture in my CD player for the next few weeks, but it looks like the album will have to share time with rock duo The Postal Service's new re-

lease, "Give Up." The band members, Benjamin Gibbard and Jimmy Tamborello, have years of band experience under their belts, and it shows. Gibbard, who hails from Death Cab for Cutie, wrote most of the lyrics, and both provide vocals. Tamborello even donned an accordion for the track "This Place is a Prison."

I'm a sucker for sad-but-not-mushy songs, and I immediately latched on to "The District Sleeps Alone Tonight." The first lines grabbed me: "Smear in black ink: your palms are sweaty and I'm / Barely listening to last demands / I'm staring at the asphalt wondering what's buried underneath where I am."

The rest of the tracks are equally stellar, making it difficult to designate other standouts. The entire CD presents a strange blend of 80s-inspired production, indie rock and electronica — but it works. A listener can dance or cry to this music with equal ease, and of course, I did both.

And thus, my quest for musical satisfaction is complete for the present — satiated by "Give Up" and "Harlequin." Now I can leave the sifting of promotional CDs to the Emerald's summer staff.

Contact the Pulse editor at jacquelynlewis@dailyemerald.com.

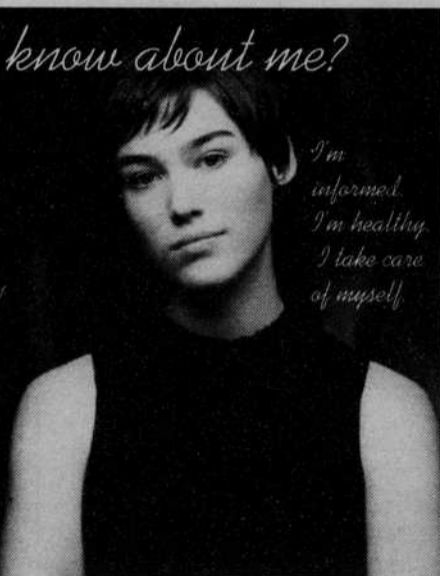
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Eleven Eyes

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Eleven Eyes is associated with local hip-hop and poetry scenes — the band has played at poetry slams around town and provided music for local hip-hop artists' free-styling.

He said music on "Depth Perception" also contains "critical com-

mentary" — an allusion to the track "052402," which runs eight-and-a-half minutes and includes samples of President George W. Bush saying: "If this were a dictatorship, it'd be a heck of a lot easier."

"People should think about that when they're sitting at the bar," McLaughlin said. "It's probably good to have that running through their minds."

While Eleven Eyes has mostly been playing around the Eugene and Corvallis area, McLaughlin said the band is looking to expand out and plan a larger tour.


"We're moving in that direction," he said. "It's definitely what we're looking toward."

Contact the Pulse reporter at aaronshakra@dailyemerald.com.

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