

'Quixote' boasts originality; Hotwire just faux hard-rock

By Ryan Nyburg
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Another day, another round-up of recent music. The life of a music critic is a grand one, no doubt about it.

First up is the latest from Psychedelic Breakfast, entitled "Bona Fide." There is really only one thing that needs to be said about this album: It contains a four-minute drum solo. Unless

CD reviews

you are a drummer or are actually watching the drummer play, drum solos are pointless. I've only found a few in my life that have held my interest longer than it takes to hit the fast forward button, and the one in "Bona Fide" is not one of them.

Apart from that, the album is a rather bland mix of studio and live tracks from a band that seems to sorely miss the 1970s. They cover the Allman Brothers Band, play endless jams and generally come off as an above average bar band. The chops are there, but the creativity is not, and the album contains nothing that bands like Phish and the String Cheese Incident haven't done better.

Next up is the latest from Ethan Daniel Davidson, "Don Quixote de

Suburbia." A folk rocker who writes original, socially conscious lyrics while avoiding Dylanesque clichés? Be still my beating heart. It has been too long since I've heard a new singer-songwriter with this kind of lyrical talent, so it's difficult to keep in mind that the album is far from perfect.

The biggest problem is the lack of conciseness, as many of the songs stretch on long after the ideas — and the listener's patience — have run out. To top it off, many of the tracks feel like filler material rather than well-constructed songs. But Davis is a distinct talent, and will probably be someone to watch. He'll be playing at Sam Bond's Garage tonight at 9 p.m.

For those of you who prefer a songwriter with a sweet tooth, there is the sugary pop of Warren Zanes. His new album, "Memory Girls," is chalk full of innocuous pop melodies and hooks, yet is a little deeper and more thoughtful than most of the songwriters in this vein.

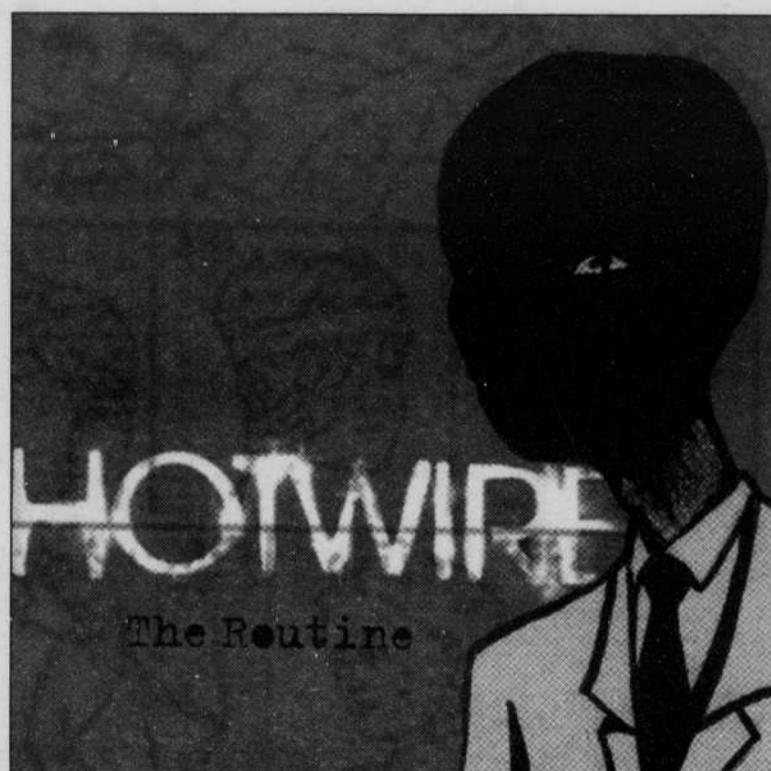
Zanes' lyricism is what saves the day from pure sugar rush overload. Many of the songs are darker than their light melodies and gentle crooning would suggest. "Did You Recognize My Love?" for example, sounds as if it should be sung in French by some bitter Parisian with a cigarette clamped firmly between

his lips. While Zanes' touch is often a little too light for his own good, his album is still great stuff for fans of Burt Bacharach or the ballads of Elvis Costello.

But who needs interesting lyrics, well-crafted arrangements and interesting, distinct songwriting personalities when you have Hotwire's debut album "The Routine"? Why do these cookie-cutter "hard rock" acts keep pouring onto my desk? Did I commit some kind of dreadful sin in a former life?

Hotwire comes from the same suburban Los Angeles area that brought us Incubus and Linkin Park. I say we find this neighborhood and keep something like this from happening again. The ant-like conformity of suburbia must infect bands coming from these places, because so many of them seem to use the same vocal tactics (scream, croon, scream), the same lyrical content ("I'm miserable, life sucks, you suck, I love you") and the same riffs (watered down Korn or pumped up Black Flag).

The hell of it is the album really isn't bad. It's just boring, repetitive and unoriginal. The music has been wiped clean with great production values, leaving it weak and gutless. Okay, maybe it is bad, but it doesn't get under my skin like a bad case of scabies, unlike a certain Christian



Courtesy

Suburban Los Angeles rockers Hotwire released their first album June 3.

rock band I could mention.

Hotwire will, without a doubt, be successful. At least for while. But they

won't last, and for that I am grateful.

Ryan Nyburg is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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charged rhythm and expertly layered melodies. "Come Downstairs and Say Hello," the album's longest track at 5:16 — and arguably its finest — casually swims around in slow guitar riffs for three minutes and ramps up to a propulsive, summery medley of woodwind riffs, rapid-fire bongo work and earnestly emotive vocals.

Sitting neatly between new wave and late-nineties radio rock, "Homecoming King" could have easily appeared on a Goo Goo Dolls record, save some of the synthesizer work a la the Cure's "Close to You." The short-but-sweet "Ramona" borders on the simplistic — but enjoyably so — and boasts some of the album's most intimate lyrics: "When I was younger and thought of myself / I never dreamed

I'd become like this / A snap of your fingers, an end to the arguments / Anything for you, love."

"Jesus on the Radio" takes up just 137 seconds of the album's 49 minutes, but nonetheless proves to be one of the best pieces on the record. The bluesy song, driven by a banjo and a jew's-harp, was written in an hour before a sound check at a Guster show.

For help writing and performing the last listed track, "I Hope Tomorrow

is Like Today," Guster brought aboard pop-rocker Ben Kweller, who recorded the infectious single "Wasted and Ready" among others on last year's excellent release "Sha Sha." The simple ballad, based on piano and guitar, simmers more with Kweller's style than with Guster's, but the song slips perfectly in the penultimate slot.

"Two at a Time," the syrupy (un-listed) coda, is a simple Noah's Ark

homily that closes the album nearly perfectly in a bath of strings and synth pop effects.

Guster — which is playing a free show in Portland's Pioneer Square July 17 at 11 a.m. — kept fans waiting for a long time, but "Keep It Together" proves that the band spent the interim well.

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his face. From every teen boy's fantasy "Genie in a Bottle" — ready to emerge at any moment with innocent sexual desire — to the diiiiirty girl, Aguilera gets paid millions to

flounce around MTV stages in butt floss, gyrating her hips and feeling herself up in rooms of half-naked men. Oh, you rebel you.

Well, no matter. You're all well into your 14th minute of fame, and when you crash I will cackle with glee. Until then, you can find me locked tightly

in my room, remembering the old glory days — my glory days — of grunge, filled with icons of a time when music meant something beyond a dollar sign and a BMW.

When I'm feeling down, I crack open my old CD case and blast Nirvana, from Bleach to Unplugged. I sing

along to Blind Melon — heroin-induced lyricism about bad fathers and "No Rain." For me, grunge was about taking every stupid thing in the world and throwing it back in society's face. It was long hair, flannel shirts and screaming into the microphone. It was pure and brutally honest, and it wasn't

a marketing tool for aging ad reps.

A spirit like that will never die. So in my world, pop is dead. Sorry kids.

Contact the managing editor at janmontry@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.



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