

Honky tonk plus emo equals two new formulaic albums

Darryl Worley rocks the banjo on his new self-titled album, but lyrics and subject matter digress

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Darryl Worley rode to the top of the country charts on the strength of 2001's "I Miss My Friend," a record considered to be a fresh breath of honky-tonk air amid a dearth of pop-country sound-alikes. However, its patriotic follow-up, "Have You Forgotten?" led to concerns that the Tennessee native was a little too eager to capitalize on post 9-11 successes by Alan Jackson and Toby Keith. Worley's latest, self-titled recording avoids such obvious pandering but does little to elevate itself above the Music Row pack, which, it seems, is becoming increasingly dependent on a short-list of themes.

The record's opening track, "Awful, Beautiful Life," is typical. Over a rolling, banjo-driven backing track, Worley recounts a home life that's "crazy, tragic, sometimes almost magic." In the meantime, he works in references to drinking, church, family dinner, mom, football, a domestic disturbance and a cousin fighting overseas (fortunately, "Iraq" rhymes with "make it back"). Not that there's anything wrong with singing about these things. It's just that, more and more, such weary refrains are standing in for the gritty, realistic view of domesticity that Nashville songwriters were once famous for. (Think Loretta Lynn's "The Pill" or George Jones's "Good Year For the Roses.")

Given his emotive, Merle Haggard-like baritone, in Worley's case this seems particularly sad.

Simple Plan, 'Still Not Getting Any'

There are so many bands that Simple Plan sound a bit like, it's easier to define them with musical math. Simple Plan's new album "Still Not Getting Any" is Blink 182 plus Good Charlotte divided by Dashboard Confessional.

What it really equals is a solid album, thanks in part to the production prowess of the legendary Bob Rock, who's worked with everyone from Metallica to Bon Jovi.

For all of their sophomoric songwriting, Simple Plan is too tight to ignore. It's a flawless creation of teen anthems with a knowing nod to the forlorn high schooler, me-against-the-world turmoil.

Simple Plan, hailing from Canada, knows the pain of young Johnny Everykid, and the five-piece band stuffs vague lyrics about overcoming a "big bad something" into every song.

"Shut Up" is a cascade of guitar sound strutting through a real catchy melody, then giving way to lead singer Pierre Bouvier often nasal vocals.

And "Welcome To My Life," another top track, pours on more of the same. "Do you ever want to run away? / Do you lock yourself in

your room with the radio on turned up so loud, that no one hears you screaming?" Bouvier opines. You can almost visualize him little Johnny's chin, helping him make it through another session of taking out the garbage, or whatever.

There are a few misses. "One" has a fully annoying violin back-up section, and we all know that if bands like Metallica can't make the marriage of rock and opera night work, no one can.

Overall, this is real good stuff from a pretty good band that is exceeding expectations.

Additionally, "Still Not Getting Any" represents one of the industry's first DualDisc releases. One side of the disc is the regular full CD, the other is a DVD containing photos, a short video about the guys in the recording studio with Bob Rock and piecing together the album tracks, and a high-quality surround sound version of the new album.

It's neat, in theory, that you could throw this disc in your computer or DVD player (or Xbox even...) and listen to the CD on one side, then flip it over and check out the DVD video action.

But there's a big problem. The video quality is horrid. It looks to be a matter of video compression by the appearance of the fuzzy footage. It's nowhere near the usual DVD video quality and it makes one wonder if there's actually enough information storage space on the DVD side of the DualDisc for full resolution DVD video, or whether this is a new format that's better suited for the desktop only, or the dustbin.

Sophisticated visuals make new Pixar film simply 'incredible'

'The Incredibles' may be hard for youngsters to sit through but it is sure to entertain audience members of most ages

BY CHRISTY LEMIRE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Just when you thought computer-animated extravaganzas had devolved into little more than a litany of played-out pop culture references and some swaths of bright color, "The Incredibles" comes onto the scene as a smart, sophisticated, much-needed reminder of the best the genre can be.

The story of a family of superheroes trying to live a normal, suburban life undoubtedly will call to mind the "Spy Kids" trilogy. But the latest release from Pixar Animation ("Finding Nemo," the "Toy Story" movies) has a brain, a heart, and, best of all, a strong script beneath the striking visuals.

The crimefighter formerly known as Mr. Incredible (richly voiced by Craig T. Nelson) misses saving the day after 15 years away from the job. He and wife Elastigirl (Holly Hunter, with a sweetness in her gravelly drawl) were placed in a relocation program after litigious citizens resented being rescued against their will.

So now they're just Bob and Helen Parr, living in a Frank Lloyd Wright-style house with their three kids: Violet (Sarah Vowell), who can turn invisible and create force

fields; Dash (Spencer Fox), whose name reflects his superhuman speed; and baby Jack-Jack. (Jack-Jack Parr, I kid you not.)

Bob spends his days cramming his giant frame into a tiny insurance office cubicle, so he's only happy to get sucked back into the crime-fighting life when the mysterious Mirage (Elizabeth Pena) comes to him with a top-secret assignment.

He thinks he's traveling to a remote island to take down a monstrous, multi-tentacled, metallic orb (reminiscent of Doc Ock from "Spider-Man 2"), but he's actually helping a self-styled superhero named Syndrome (voiced by Jason Lee) perfect his plot for global domination. Syndrome used to be just a kid named Buddy who looked up to Mr. Incredible; now, with wild hair and a pronounced chin that make him look like an evil version of Philip Seymour Hoffman, he's out for revenge against his former idol and the rest of the world. (His plan for flying an aircraft into a major metropolis, though, is a little unnerving, even three years after Sept. 11.)

Helen, Violet and Dash get dragged into the action when they try to save the family patriarch.

But at two hours, the movie could be tough for youngsters to sit through.



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