

MUSIC

REVIEWS



THE SMELL OF OUR OWN
The Hidden Cameras • Sanctuary Records

Too bad The Hidden Cameras had to cancel their show at The Blackbird in June—Portland certainly could use a dose of the trippy orchestral homo-pop stuff the band's shooting off.

Their latest release, *The Smell of Our Own*, is catching the eyes and ears of the queer folk and the indie-rock straight kids, too. Title of the first track? "Golden Streams." You can probably surmise the topic at hand: "My golden wand waves down your golden rod/Our gold held high in sunny breezy sky/Then a stream of gold released from golden stone erupts late at night and melts the winter ice."

Sporting more than a dozen members, some of whom strip down to Speedos and masks during live performances, The Hidden Cameras are a juicy and strange concoction—think Belle & Sebastian do *Godspell* after overdosing on the latest *Queer as Folk* episode.

Lead singer Joel Gibb calls his band's sound "gay church folk music" and warns: "[Our] dancers are there to take away some inhibitions. It's about enjoying yourself and your body."

While Gibb and his troupe of Canadian lovers shout their love of God and Man from the rooftops, the band also tackles the heart-break of the queer community ("He places a blossom in my hair/and undress me/He tells me that I'm the only one/that can carry his disease"). If hedonism is alive and well, so is consequence.

Let's hope we can get The Hidden Cameras back to town to fill our hearts (and pants) with song.

—Cori Taratoot



GRAND
Erin McKeown • Nettwerk Records

Erin McKeown's anticipated third release, *Grand*, has finally seen the light. It's a gloriously innovative album filled with vibrant, delicious puns, acerbic irony and wonderfully complex lyrics, showcasing the same flair of sophistication established in 2000's *Distillation*.

The 25-year-old started playing piano at the ripe age of 3 and has since covered a wide range of instruments, including electric and acoustic

guitar, bass, piano, organ, banjo, accordion and mandolin. The result is a striking if challenging mix she labels "oddball pop cabaret rock."

The cute and sassy McKeown leaves no style untouched on *Grand*'s impressive track list. Her crystal voice meanders from bouncy and titillating to sultry or taunting while skillfully and effortlessly blending pop, folk, jazz, swing, blues, lounge, surf....

Accompanying the singer are drummer buddies Brian Jones (Agents of Good Roots) and George Javori (Natalie Merchant, Shiva-ree) and, of course, steadfast producer (not to mention bassist and guitarist) David Chalfant.

A natural entertainer, McKeown has a knack for the theatrical and admits to feeling drawn to artists like Edith Piaf and Judy Garland. *Grand*'s rendition of the lush "Lucky Day"—the pivoting point of the whole album—was directly inspired by Garland's Hollywood days.

"Judy Garland is a touchstone for this record," McKeown told Tower Records online, "influencing the time period, the language, the colors. I don't think of her as the lady from *The Wizard of Oz*, nor do I think of her as a strung-out addict. I imagine her in the full glory of her concert years, an amazing singer and a master entertainer."

Grand is the best of the modern and the old-fashioned. What more can we ask for?
—Els Debbaut



EVERYONE ELSE KNOWS YOU'LL BE FINE
Luster • Self-released

In response to readers' flabbergast over the *Rolling Stone* "Women in Rock" issue with its Britney-Shakira-Avril cover, *San Francisco Weekly* decided to run a piece titled "Joan Jett Set" in its 2003 "Listen Up" supplement.

The paper sought credibility (their writers were, ahem, male) and so off they went, scouring the Bay Area music scene for experienced, intelligent female musicians. There they found Jen Daunt and Kate Howser, the power couple of Luster.

It seems the lesbian rockers know a little bit about gender equality in the music industry. "When they see that we have two female vocalists," commented guitarist Daunt, "they always ask me to turn my amp down, and I know they never ask the guys to turn their amps down. I've come across just as much sexism in San Francisco as anywhere."

If Luster is at all downcast about the state of rock 'n' roll, you don't hear it in the music. Maybe it's the bliss of being in a band with your significant other, but the trio (drummer Ted Koterwas makes three) manages to create straight-up indie pop with only the slightest hint of angst.

Everyone Else Knows You'll Be Fine features 11 tracks of fuzzy rhythm guitar, twin harmonies and perky progressions reminiscent of Portland's Rebecca Gates and the Spinanes (circa 1993 *Manos* era).

Luster seems to be on the righteous track—where music is music, and girls with guitars kick ass.

—CTJ

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