

Teenage Fanclub, *Bandwagonesque*, DGC RECORDS 1991. By Kris Bluth.

With the exception of the Beatles and (insert your favorite group here), most bands are Greatest Hits bands; one album is all you really need. Teenage Fanclub has a perfectly decent compilation out (*4766 Seconds: A Short Cut To...*), but they left off a song called "Alcoholiday." Imagine yourself on a swing. You reach maximum height, the chain jerks taut and you pendulum backwards as you sing lyrics like "Gone to bed, but I'm not ready/Baby I've been fucked already." Or better yet, pretend you're jumping on a trampoline.

Don't know what the hell I'm talking about? That's OK, but check out *Bandwagonesque* anyway.

Ed Cole, *Forgotten Hits*, SELF-RELEASED 2004. By Robert Jacobs.

This is a solid rock record without resorting to any of the solid rock "clichés." With big doses of Meat Puppets mixed with a little Frank Black, Ed and his College Girls of Tora Bora dish up some fine indie rock. Standout tracks are number four and number six. Track four, "Logic," has a heavy "low rider" vibe crossed with the Police, circa Regetta De Blanc. "I Wish it Were Still Summer" is probably the most interesting track. With a gorgeous-sounding acoustic guitar holding down the meat of the song, the bass and drums shimmer in an appropriate, rain-like fashion. The vocals drone, yet catch the ear with their rhythm. Fans of Radiohead, The Pixies and Pavement will certainly enjoy this CD. The fault in the album might come in the wordiness of the songs. The vocals could also be a little more up front. On the whole, though, the CD makes for an excellent companion on long road trips.

Iron & Wine, *Our Endless Numbered Days*, SUB POP RECORDS 2004. By John Edward Royall.

Iron & Wine's *Our Endless Numbered Days*, the sound record from the Miami-based but South Carolina-born songwriter Sam Beam, is rooted in an essentially Southern worldview. The haunting, bittersweet lyrics show an intense awareness of the rhythms of life and death, as on "Free Until They Cut Me Down" and "Passing Afternoon." When Beam sings "Naked as We Came" in his sweet whisper, over a pretty melody picked on guitar, "One of us will die within these arms/naked as we came/one will spread our ashes around the yard," you can't help but feel that it is one of the most beautiful things you have ever heard.

Where Beam recorded his stunning debut, *The Creek Drank the Cradle* at home by himself on a four-track recorder, *Our Endless Numbered Days* will work its way into you bodily, into your bones and sinews, as hard to remove from those nooks as it will be to remove the CD from the stereo.

The Darkness, *Permission to Land*, ATLANTIC RECORDS 2003. By David Bischoff.

An arched eyebrow short of Spinal Tap, England's The Darkness somehow manages to produce hard rock that's both funny and catchy. Hailed as the savior of heavy metal, there's not much 21st century in this mix, but a hell of a lot of refined '70s and '80s pop metal. One moment, you've got Axl Rose's stutter, the next you've got Cheap Trick's bounce. From Queen's soaring choruses and guitars, through Def Leopard's hooky approach and polished production, The Darkness dodge and dart even further back into solid '70s crunch, led by Justin Hawkins' loony high notes and low blows. With a sly wit and delicious lyrics ("Love on the Rocks with no Ice," "Get your Hands off my Wife, Motherfucker"), these guys bring Brit smarts to low IQ head-banging. High marks.

Prince, *Musicology*, NPG RECORDS 2004. By Todd Cooper.

"There are many kings . . . but there is only one Prince," Alicia Keys said while helping induct Prince Rogers Nelson into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame this March. It seems as if his royal badness has already claimed 2004 as his year. Besides stealing the show at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame (with that blazing solo during the George Harrison tribute) and the Grammys (duet with Beyoncé), he has launched his first arena tour in six years, playing his classics for the "last time." If that's not enough, he has a new studio album, *Musicology*, that he is giving away to everyone that attends his show. He also worked out a deal with Sony to have it available in stores everywhere. It's obvious Prince is ready to be heard again.

After a couple brilliant instrumental excursions (*Xpectation* and *N•E•W•S*), *Musicology* brings it back to the essentials, schooling listeners on the craft of music. In this age of studio magic and lip-syncing, Prince is keeping the "old school joints for the true funk soldiers." The reminiscent title track opens with the feel-good funk from "back in the day." And it don't stop there. His flawless voice and genre-jumping will remind you why you loved his music in the first place. From high-energy funk/rock ("Life 'O' the Party," "If Eye Was the Man In Your Life"), to his trademark mellow-smooth R & B ("Reflection," "Call My Name"), he can still do it all.

Musicology is not exactly the Prince you remember from 20 years ago. He's toned the explicitness way down, but it's still "sexy," just without the "m.f." He recently told *Newsweek*, "It's not me anymore. Don't follow me way back there. There's no more envelope to push. I pushed it off the table. It's on the floor. Let's move forward now." So he leaves it up to innuendo. He croons in "On the Couch," "Lovejones is on the tv again baby / I wanna go down south."

It's actually refreshing to see an artist recognize when something is played out. Prince proves himself to be an artist of substance that needs no gimmick.



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