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The Shins, *Chutes Too Narrow*, 2003, SUB POP RECORDS by Amy McCullough
OK, I admit it. I love the new Shins album. Maybe it's *not* that hard to admit, since everyone's been raving since its release last October.

Yeah, I liked "New Slang" from their debut *Oh, Inverted World* (just like everyone else) but even that and seeing them at Seattle's Bumbershoot last summer didn't have me running out to buy *Chutes Too Narrow*. I did buy it eventually, though, and it's been in my stereo ever since.

Singer James Mercer reminds me of label mate Jeremy Enigck (Sunny Day Real Estate) when he yells. These New Mexicans emulate obvious heroes such as the Beatles and Beach Boys, but are truly original on *Chutes*. Plus, "Gone for Good" sounds an awful lot like that earlier gem, "New Slang."

Sure, I'm a little burnt by having to agree with everyone, since popular approval is usually a pretty good indicator that something sucks, but everyone seems to be right on this one. Produced by Phil Ek of Built to Spill/Modest Mouse fame, *Chutes Too Narrow* is anxiously waiting to change your mind about the Shins.



Aerosmith, *Honkin' on Bobo*, 2004, COLUMBIA RECORDS by David Bischoff
Credit this band's power and position with the record company that gained them this opportunity. If you are a blues and roots-rock fan – and so many of us are in the Pacific Northwest – this is a must-own CD.

After so many years, these rockers somehow manage to put about 150 percent of themselves into their music. Not only is their live act still the best classic rock review since The Who, Aerosmith still produces quality studio albums. *Honkin' on Bobo* is remarkable in multiple respects. First, it is simply a grand collection of covers. Aerosmith turns the amps past eleven and rock and brawl their way through wonderful tunes like "Road Runner," "Shame, Shame, Shame" and a smokin' "Stop Messin' Around." Second, this is an American band. These guys get to the soul of the blues and rock and communicate it.

Next, and perhaps most importantly, somehow Aerosmith takes these great, old songs and through some alchemy turns them into their own modern statements, without losing an ounce of primal blues power. Oh, how I'd like to hear some of the fifties greats do their stuff again in a high-tech, 21st Century studio with a Chicago and Delta moxie. As this won't happen, *Honkin' on Bobo* will do nicely.

Too bad "Son" House and Robert Johnson aren't around to hear it.

Caustic Resin, *Keep On Truckin'*, 2003, UP RECORDS by Sean Campanella
Does the idea of really heavy, psychedelic metal intrigue you? Boise's Caustic Resin has been blowing apart speakers for 15 years, and their latest release, *Keep On Truckin'*, offers everything that staunch connoisseurs of the rare metal-experience crave: acid-induced dementia, veiled sorcery and a slow-ride across an apocalyptic, high-desert landscape.



Similar in style to Black Sabbath, the music is driven by dense, viscid guitar-playing; it drones and plods, searches out strange melodies, and reverberates to ear-smashing levels, only to become quiet and spacious, allowing plenty of room for Brett Netson's voice to writhe and flail like a green tentacle, recalling not only Ozzy but Procol Harum's Gary Brooker as well.

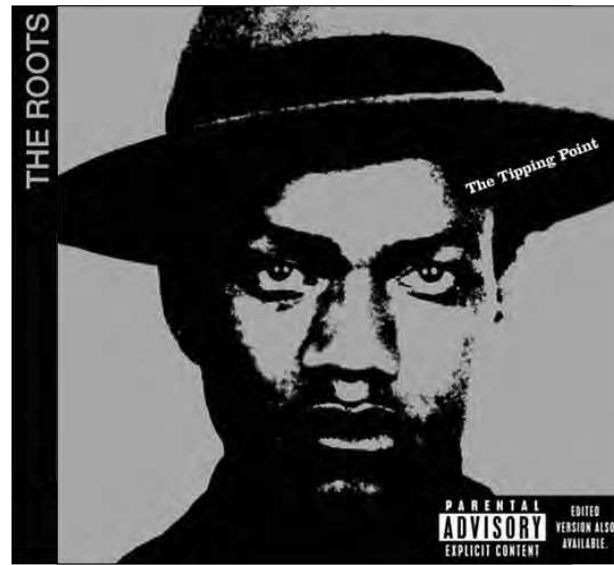
The first four tracks are merely a warm-up for three, count 'em, *three* consecutive 10-minute songs about trucking: "Drive #47," "Keep On Truckin'" and "Drive #49" – those songs themselves are an album within an album. Half an hour later you definitely feel like you've journeyed, but only a vivid, insistent imagination might tell you where to.

Meanwhile, whatever gruesome, alien transformation Netson has been going through is nearing completion, and slime is beginning to pool. The final track, "8th St.," suggests that it may be wise to bail out of the passenger seat before it's too late.

The Roots, *The Tipping Point*, 2004, GEFEN RECORDS by Todd Cooper
If you know The Roots, then you don't need to read this review to know this disc is worth copping. I immediately knew that I loved this album when the needle hits the record and a Sly & The Family Stone sample ("Everybody is a Star") opens the album.

The Tipping Point (borrowed from the Malcolm Gladwell book) is The Roots' seventh album. This collection is the result of days and days recording extended studio jams that were later edited down and finessed for its release this Tuesday. Unlike their Grammy-nominated *Phrenology*, it sounds more raw groove than experimental. The listener will not be disappointed though. From the soulful, laid-back "Star" to the stripped-down "The Web" to the straight-crunk "BOOM," the band keeps it fresh from track to track. Their lead single, "Don't Say Nuthin'" sets it off with a pop-lockin' mumble funk that will have you scratching your head. What the hell is Black Thought saying? "Stay Cool" sounds like a soundtrack to a pimp walk and comes off just as confident. ("There's not another soundsystem rocking steady as us.") The highlight of the album is when you hear "One-Take Dizzle" (comedian Dave Chappelle) grab "The Mic" (the hidden track.) The Roots are obviously big fans of Chappelle's Show. (Who isn't, right?) They end the track with Dave's impersonation of Samuel L. Jackson that will keep you laughing after the album is over.

Even though *The Tipping Point* doesn't exactly break new ground, it is the kind of quality, organic hip hop you expect from the legendary Roots crew.



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