

**3 Leg Torso**



**Sunlight and Shadows**

Sometimes a record sounds exactly like what it is. (Sometimes, of course, it doesn't. At all.) *Plastic Bag in the Tree*, a brand-spankin' new album from **Flash Hawk Parlor Ensemble**, sounds like a bunch of pals sitting around playing all kinds of things: delicate Massive Attack and Radiohead covers ("Teardrop," "Amnesiac/Morning Bell"), meandering instrumentals, quirky originals and seemingly whatever comes into their collective head. Even when what comes into that head is "Chris Walla: Duet for Moog and Hurdy Gurdy in G Major-ish." Many of the songs have great titles, but this name-check of the Death Cab for Cutie guitarist/producer might take the cake.

As it turns out, FHPE pretty much *is* a bunch of pals sitting around – or at least neighbors. It's an accidental group that was born when Chris Funk (of The Decemberists) moved into a new house in Portland and sat around on his porch on summer evenings, playing various things. "He soon found out," the press release explains, "there was in fact an unusual amount of musical activity on his block." Funk enlisted his neighbors, "closet folksmen and recovering band geeks," and is now bringing them to town (or maybe just some of them; there are 14 players listed in the credits for *Plastic Bag*). This is music utterly perfect for Sam Bond's: playful, flexible, moody, classic and timely at once, setting things like banjos and Moogs side by

side in a way that's almost giggle-inducing. But you wouldn't be laughing at Flash Hawk Parlor Ensemble; this is a good-natured, good-times joke they're sharing with us.

Sharing the bill with FHPE is another Portland act, **Horse Feathers**. Justin Ringle and Peter Broderick's duo recently came in second in *Willamette Week's* "Best New Band 2007" poll of Stumptown music insiders. Horse Feathers' quiet, intimate, singer-songwriter-esque melodies immediately bring to mind Iron & Wine and Bonnie "Prince" Billy, among others. These are songs that feel like listening to someone tell you a secret you can't quite understand; underneath beautiful phrases, both lyrical and instrumental (like the perfect strings on "Hardwood Pews" and "Blood on the Snow" from *Words Are Dead*), are dark thoughts and crisp musical richness. Ringle's versatile voice breaks words at just the right points, half disguising tales of violence and bitterness that are still hinted at by a throbbing cello or melancholy violin.

Flash Hawk Parlor Ensemble, Horse Feathers and Tom Heint play at 9:30 pm Saturday, June 9, at Sam Bond's Garage. 21+ show. \$5. – *Molly Templeton*

**Tango, Torso Style**

Portland's **3 Leg Torso** formed in 1996 as a three-piece that featured violin, cello and accordion. Noticing their lack of percussion, they added a few more members and proceeded forward with their musical

future. The quintet, like many fledgling bands, had a mission: to create "original modern chamber music for their unique instrumentation."

Not only have the boys successfully reached their goal, they've gone far beyond what they set out to do.

The quintet plays instrumental music that dabbles in Latin and European flavor. European influence gives the band a heavy accordion sound that recalls composer Yann Tiersen's work on the *Amelie* soundtrack.

While a track featuring their accordion motif may inspire you to find the closest Parisian coffee spot in town for a quick European-culture fix, other songs will make you dance. If "Zemer Attic" on *Astor in Paris* doesn't get your hips moving, nothing will. Maybe it's the dancer in me, but every song inspires choreography in my head. Because there are no lyrics or vocals to dictate the direction or feel of the song, you're allowed to interpret it any way you please.

There's no denying the dance-ability factor in 3 Leg Torso's music, but some songs are so hurried that any attempts at dancing would just look silly and spastic. "Giant Stomp," with its bouncy xylophone, is so fast and furious that it's better suited for a Warner Bros. cartoon than the dance floor. "Flight of the Bumblebee," anyone?

To its credit, 3 Leg Torso has been described as "cinematic" and has found places on the big screen to showcase its music. The band has worked with independent filmmakers and scored *The Dowager's Feast* and *The Dowager's Idyll*. (Not to mention their contributions to a United Nations documentary in Thailand and a Bosnian television series.) Well, at least they aren't featured in car commercials yet. 3 Leg Torso plays with Bright Red Paper at 8:30 pm Sunday, June 10, at Sam Bond's Garage. 21+ show. \$5. – *Amanda Burhop*

**Diamonds in the Rough**

The low-fi movement was one of the musical watersheds of the '90s, not only because it helped redefine the rules of what records were "allowed" to sound like, but also for introducing us to some of the era's most influential artists, such as Sebadoh, Guided By Voices and Palace. Still, it was largely an aesthetic born out of necessity; as technology tried to catch up with an accelerating DIY culture, many

struggling musicians had no option but to resort to the humble four-track.

In the '00s, more than ever before, technology has been dropped into the hands of the people, and now anyone with a little knowhow and a hand-me-down computer can churn out a pristine-sounding album. That being said, you might say that a modern musician who consciously chooses to produce coarse, low fidelity records is a little bit off his rocker, and in the case of **Ariel Pink**, you'd probably be right.

Like Captain Beefheart or Daniel Johnston, Los Angeles-born Ariel Pink is a quintessential outsider artist, but a closer inspection of his catalog reveals that he is also one of the true pop geniuses of our time. Spellbinding albums like *The Doldrums* and *House Arrest* display an uncanny knack for songwriting as Pink melts down sweeping '80s synths, broken '60s harmonies and murky psych freak-outs into a gratifying pop stew. There are beautiful melodies and universal hooks at play within Ariel Pink's music, though sometimes you have to dig a little to discover these diamonds in the rough.

Ariel Pink plays with Ghostleaf and DoublePlusGood at 9 pm Wednesday, June 13, at the WOW Hall. \$7 adv., \$8 door. – *Josh Blanchard*



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