

NEUROSIS *Given to the Rising* (Neurot)

The best from the Bay Area bonecrushers since 1999's *Times of Grace*. "Hidden Faces" and "Water Is Not Enough" may be the heaviest songs of the year. When Scott Kelly screams "Feeders seething, woe is them," I have no idea what the fuck he means, but I like it, and I want to sing along. — *VS*

OF MONTREAL *Hissing Fauna, Are You The Destroyer?* (Polyvinyl)

The year has been fraught with breakups galore. On all sides, formerly stable tenements (including my own) have collapsed of their own weight. Through it all, *Hissing Fauna* has been a primal scream, a salve, a way to simply cope. Upon hearing Kevin Barnes (who wrote the entire album) whine "I need help, c'mon mood shift shift back to good again," suddenly it feels as if breaking up is, dare I say, a creative boon. — *CA*

OM *Pilgrimage* (Southern Lord)

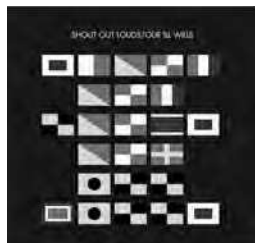
Continuing in the same musical direction as the last two Om CDs, this one has more dynamic variation yet retains the metaphysical lyrics and trance-inducing melodies. — *VS*

PETER BJORN AND JOHN *Writer's Block* (Almost Gold)

This release from Peter Morén, Björn Yttling and John Eriksson is a testament to the creative indie/rock constructions imported from overseas and introduced to this nation's scenesters. The first single, "Young Folks," is a modern pop duet that reflects the dealings of requited love between Morén and Victoria Bergsman while wrapped in subtle melancholic tones. Throughout the album, the simple lyrical assemblies become a perfect foil to the lo-fi and often up-beat instrumentation. — *ZK*

SHOUT OUT LOUDS *Our Ill Wills* (Merge)

When the Shout Out Louds missed their WOW Hall billing last October due to motor vehicle breakdown, we all missed out. The bad news is Sweden is a long way from Oregon. The good news is *Our Ill Wills* will keep us comforted through the dark, dreary winter (as any Scandinavian recording should). One sip of "Impossible"



and you're hooked. Sure, Adam Olenius' vocals sound like Robert Smith incarnate, but that's unfailingly a *good thing*, no? — *CA*

SPOON *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga* (Merge)

Spoon frontman Britt Daniel may have sat on my sweater at a cocktail party in Portland last June, but that didn't influence my choosing them for this list. Spoon has been a workhorse throughout this year's tour circuit, appearing at literally every major festival, on every latenight talk show, in the pages of *The New Yorker* (and every other music rag). Luckily (for overexposure's sake), *Ga Ga* is one of their best yet. — *CA*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN *Magic* (Columbia)

While other songwriters of The Boss' generation threaten to sink into the shameful mire of "adult contemporary," albums like *Magic* can restore a music lover's faith in the greats. Catchy hits like "Radio Nowhere" remind us of why Springsteen has remained swoon-worthy since he first rolled up the sleeves of his white T-shirt in the '70s while jammin' ballads like "Last to Die" and "Long Walk Home" remind us why we should never turn our backs on an artist who has managed to capture the rock 'n' roll essence of American life successfully for decades while never neglecting the quiet agony that lies beneath. — *AV*



ROCKY VOTOLATO *The Brag and Cuss* (Barsuk)

The Brag and Cuss is the 2007 release from Rocky Votolato — who by all rights should be heir to the sorta-alt-country-but-sorta-not throne, were there such a thing — but I fell in love with his songs this year on account of something older: the title track from 2003's *Suicide Medicine*, an emotional throat-ripper of a song that really tore Votolato's throat out at a homecoming show in Seattle last April. It was raw and bare and stark and dark, and with it Votolato leapt into both my current rotation and my list of favorite singer-songwriters. This album, last year's *Makers*; just pick one — they're all worth a try. — *MT*

CD picks chosen and written by Chuck Adams, Zach Klassen, Jeremy Ohmes, Vanessa Salvia, Molly Templeton and Adrienne van der Valk

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