



Murder by Johnny

For the last week, every time I've thought about **Murder By Death**, I've heard Johnny Cash in my mind. It's like my mental record player skips, or the multi-disc changer lands on the wrong album: I just get Cash. Blame it on MBD singer Adam Turla, whose deep-voiced charms are something like a more theatrical Johnny, but something all his own, too. Last year, Murder By Death released its fourth full-length, *Red of Tooth and Claw*, a concept album which pairs with the band's 2003 *Who Will Survive, and What Will Be Left of Them?* On their current tour, the quartet – joined by former keyboardist Vincent Edwards – is playing both records in thematic order; *Red*, which concerns the story's protagonist's younger years, comes first. "By the light of the moon / I'm coming home," Turla growls as the story begins, on "Coming Home," which sweeps from an atmospheric opening into the grasp of Sarah Balliet's cello and Dagan Thorgerson's drums, which twine and separate propulsively. My first thought about Murder By Death was that *Red* sounded like DeVotchKa gone rockabilly, and I still believe that, but it's an insufficient description. A punk underpinning, a country past, dramatic tendencies and passionate impulses twist through *Red*; you can hunt out the story in the lyrics or just revel in the occasional Waitsian inclinations – and the certainty that the dusty-road, dank-tavern, bad-intention-drenched enthusiasm of Murder By Death will translate even better to the stage than to a slim slice of plastic (or a file on your computer). Murder By Death, The Builders and the Butchers and Fake Problems play at 8 pm Tuesday, Feb. 24, at the WOW Hall. \$12. – *Molly Templeton*

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