



Boy In Static

Coming Through Clearly

Alexander Chen's choirboy voice – sweet and clear, occasionally touched with vibrato – is impossibly well-suited to his sometimes dizzy, sometimes melancholic pop songs, which are spare enough to show their carefully composed framework but lush enough to dip and rise with heart-swelling urgency. Chen is half of **Boy in Static**, which used to be a one-man band but has added touring player Kenji Ross to the permanent lineup. The now-duo's new album, *Candy Cigarette*, suggests influences from the Magnetic Fields to '80s pop to Stars to a certain sort of self-aware, accessible and cinematic rock; were John Hughes (RIP!) still making movies, songs like "Half-Lives" and the handclap-decorated, male/female duet "Toy Baby Grands" would fit right into those soundtracks. Chen told tinymixtapes.com recently that his songwriting approach is to "take things and exaggerate them," and you can feel the kernels of everyday life from which his songs burst. There's sunniness and shadow in the melodies, which play out in violins, toy pianos, drum machines, synths and loops that share space with restless rock guitars. Boy in Static's airy bedroom pop manages to suggest the intimacy of journal pages without ever feeling claustrophobic or self-indulgent; Chen is telling stories that

come from his life but leaving just the right details out and letting his listeners in. Boy in Static, Truffle Hunter and The Blast Majesty play at 9 pm Wednesday, Aug. 19, at Joe's Bar and Grill. 21+. – *Molly Templeton*

B&B's Folksy Americana

At first listen, the only thing that seems to unify the music of **Birds & Batteries**, stylistically speaking, is the voice of singer-songwriter Mike Sempert, a nasally, slightly narcoleptic croon that registers somewhere between Neil Young and Randy Newman. Like a hippie on Halcion, this Bay Area band's music wanders all over the place, traipsing from languid backwater folk to synthesized space jam to a kind of '70s-inflected mellow rock that isn't afraid to stretch out in sleepy backbeats and sustained chords that occasionally go crunchy with fuzz. As earlier generations of young musicians tapped everything from *The White Album* to *Loaded*, Birds & Batteries rummage the best of their parent's record collection – from Steely Dan and Fleetwood Mac to Dylan and Neil Young (witness their lilting cover of "Heart of Gold" on YouTube).

Formed in 2005 when Sempert, hauling an 18-song demo, relocated to San Francisco from Boston, the band – currently including drummer Brian Michelson, bassist/keyboardist Jill Heinke and pedal steel guitarist Christopher Walsh – achieved indie-crit success with their albums *Nature Vs. Nature* and *I'll Never Sleep Again*. The latter was as praised for its genre-defying spirit as the exotic experimentalism it exhibited. And yet, for all their shambolic shimmying around styles, there is an undercurrent of folksy Americana to this outfit's music. Call it trip hillbilly or Crazy Horse-ing around, quirked up by a heavy, staticky, latter-day dose of the DIY ethic that gave us everything from Daniel Johnston to Magnetic Fields. Birds & Batteries and Baitball play at 9 pm Thursday, Aug. 20, at Sam Bond's Garage. 21+. \$5. – *Rick Levin*



Birds and Batteries

Noise and Roll

Thee Oh Sees are the kind of group who'll assault your eardrums with a song constructed of static and cacophony and then follow it up with a bouncy surf punk love song made for the mosh pit. Lurking somewhere in the sludgy swamp between the Kinks and No Age, Thee Oh Sees brew their '60s mod rock, basement punk and white noise into a kind of aural moonshine. It might burn your nostrils, but ultimately it goes down smooth enough to keep you listening for more than a few minutes. Sometimes the guitar melodies bounce and snap like a Chuck Berry ditty; other times, like a true noise outfit, the band's songs screech and squawk to make any melody seem almost indecipherable. All of it sounds so-low-it's-subterranean, a sound quality that in 2009 is almost always an aesthetic choice, not the result of a small recording budget. Still, it's as important a contributor to Thee Oh Sees' gleeful cacophony as the choppy vintage rock and roll guitar riffs are. And it's the combination of the two sounds that render Thee Oh Sees both innovative and listenable – something most noise bands fail to achieve. Pure noise is basically conceptual art: fascinating to check out for a few minutes in a museum, but too grating to endure as a regular fixture in your home. Bands who ape the '60s punk sound, on the other hand, often come off as overly derivative. But Thee Oh Sees bridge the gap between melodic, tried-and-true rock tunes and the intriguing experimentalism of a noise act. Thee Oh Sees avoid both these pitfalls, and that's what makes them such a fascinating – and important – band to watch. Thee Oh Sees and Leo London play at 9 pm Wednesday, Aug. 19, at Sam Bond's Garage. 21+. \$5. – *Sara Brickner*



What We Do is Secret

Subrosa's press material describes the band as "PJ Harvey + Kyuss + Appalachian murder ballads + Coven." The first two references are the ones most apparent to me. Listening to Subrosa (Latin for "under the rose," meaning "in secret") forced me to try to identify what it is that I like about Kyuss. I always assumed it was the heat and wide-open spaces of Palm Desert, Calif., that gave their music a sludgy, toostoned-and-hot-to-move vibe. I've heard a few bands over the years that claimed to be influenced by Kyuss, but none that pulled it off as well, or as obviously, as Subrosa. Yet here's this band that came out of nowhere, from Salt Lake City, and they have managed to combine two of my favorite touchstones in rock, and pretty well, too. Utah's not much different than the California desert, so maybe dust and the sun's anvil are the best explanation.

Listening for the Kyuss-y riffs on their debut album, *Strega*, though, is like looking through the jailhouse bars at old friends who did something and now you just don't recognize them anymore. Though the doominess and feedback fuzz of Kyuss is always present with Subrosa, it's not as up front. One unique aspect of Subrosa is the electric violin; it gives an air of eeriness to their songs. And things get weird fast, starting on track three. "Christine" conjoins a massively heavy riff with tinkling sounds that may have come from a haunted music box. In between every down-tuned guitar line are singer Rebecca Vernon's desolate howling vocals ... as Polly Jean-ish as you're likely to find in any camp, either indie or metal. Subrosa is signed to Sweden's ever-heavy label I Hate Records. *Strega* was remixed by Devo "Magnus" Andersson, bassist for Marduk. Subrosa, The Ax and Rollie Fingers play at 8 pm Thursday, Aug. 20, at Epic Space. \$5. – *Vanessa Salvia*



Danny Barnes

Old-Time Music Jubilee

Any chance to see Danny Barnes play is a good time in my book, and he's just one of many performers worth getting excited about at the upcoming **Jug-R-Not Music Festival**. Jug-R-Not is held at Trailhead Park in Cottage Grove and is a benefit for Bohemia Park. Last year's inaugural Jug-R-Not festival was made possible by anonymous donors who wanted to celebrate the opening of the new Bohemia Park in the heart of downtown Cottage Grove. This year's proceeds will hopefully enable next year's Jug-R-Not festival to be held in the new amphitheater being built in the park.

These anonymous donors appreciate good fun and old-timey style music, apparently. Music kicks off right after the lunch hour with The Huckleberries. I can't tell from the press material if this is the English band that plays jigs and reels and other global stompin' rhythms or a more local band by the same name, but either way the band promises to be an excellent kicker-offer to the day. Closing out the festivities is Hillstomp, a band that will take all of the energy of the day's previous shows, throw in some punk rebellion for good measure and wrap it all up in a sweaty, danceable package. Prior to that is Danny Barnes' "banjo madness." If the appeal were just Barnes' hellfire playing, that would be one thing, but he's lived a lifetime as a Bad Liver (his former band), solo performer and collaborator with the likes of Laura Veirs, Pete Krebs, Dave Matthews, Jeff Pinkus (Butthole Surfers) and Bill Frisell. There's nothing Barnes can't do with a banjo or with his unstoppable songwriting imagination. Great fun, for sure. Jug-R-Not Music Festival begins at 1 pm Saturday, Aug. 15, at Trailhead Park (10th and Main), Cottage Grove. \$3. For more info, see www.jugrnot.org – *Vanessa Salvia*