



JACK WHITE

Explosive Blunderbuss

Pop music abhors a vacuum. After K. copped for the Big Sleep in 1994, the scene went supernova and collapsed, opening up a black hole that snuffed the uber-hip underground. Goodbye yellow brick road, shit happens. Consequently, Billboard bought the farm. American idols gobbled down American pie and farted out teen spirit. Radio, scared clueless, filled the dead air with the stink of shit – sexless pap, dandruffy disco, syndicated sit-and-spin for twisters and shouters stranded on the dark side of the moon. Baby Spears hopped the rehab fence. Then emo crashed the party and the music died.

It might have gone on a lot longer than it did, that tone-deaf temporal sump – years, maybe decades, of pneumatic smarm and saccharine schtick – but then, just in time for the fin-de-siècle, the White Stripes hit the scene, a punk-rock duo of **Jack White** on guitar and vocals, and his sister-lover, Meg White, on drums. Remember the first time you heard them? Starting with their eponymous drop in 1999, the Stripes strung together these melodic pearls of perfect pop, one after the 'nother. Those songs beckoned the jaded and disenfranchised – Nirvana-heads, pubescent pups, Cristgau critics – welcomed us back into the fold, with a fierce, raw, nervy assault of infectious guitar-driven pop rock. White reached down deep into the vaults of three-bar Delta blues and spun that mud anew, refashioned it with grit and wit for the new millennium. Songs about boys and girls making icky thump, waltzes for seven nation armies and little birds. We got behind it.

The Stripes officially disbanded early last year, a bittersweet farewell though hardly a reason for despair; White, frenetically ambitious, cultivates several gardens: Along with Brendan Benson, he fronts an excellent outfit, The Raconteurs; with Kills singer Alison Mosshart, he formed The Dead Weather; produced and played on Loretta Lynn's 2004 album, *Van Lear Rose*. Then, last month, White released his first solo record on his Third Man Records label.

Written and produced by White and featuring a slew of guest musicians, *Blunderbuss* is a jagged, scattershot journey across the subliminal soundscape of White's inimitable style and indelible substance – a sort of magical mystery tour, with pins poked higgledy-piggledy into the scavenged map of White's brilliantly idiosyncratic artistry. Employing a stripped down, almost anachronistic sound – you can hear the hiss of analog tape, the breathy whir of the Rhodes piano – *Blunderbuss* trades the explosive accessibility of the Stripes for a more subdued, sophisticated approach.

The sepia tones and melancholy refrains of songs like "Love Interruption" and "Blunderbuss" evoke an atmosphere that is at once intimate and out-of-time, like staring at old portraits in another family's photo album. Other songs, like the fantastic "Weep Themselves To Sleep," veer toward the anthemic before White's fragile vocals – all urgency and need – ground them in some private hurt.

Blunderbuss might be White's most personal and challenging album to date, and as such, it's sure to confuse those fans expecting *De Stijl II*. They'll get over it. This one's a slow burn, but it gives off the warm glow of endurance.

Jack White plays Monday, May 28, at Hult Center; SOLD OUT (but worth dropping money on, if you know what we mean). – *Rick Levin*

Music from the Middle Ages and the Middle East

The UO isn't the only place to hear exotic sounds this summer. Saturday, June 2, Cozmic hosts a concert of Middle Eastern music and dance starring a UO doctoral graduate, the dancer-choreographer **Elena Villa** (who creates a fusion of Spanish and Arabic dance forms including flamenco and belly dance), Eugene's own excellent world music band **Americanistan** accompanying a quartet of belly dancers, plus the Boise-based ensemble **District 19 Flamenco**, featuring dancer **Julianna Marie Thomas** and guitarist **Derren Davidovich**, who specialize in the fiery Spanish musical form whose roots stretch back through the Roma (gypsy) diaspora from India.

What is it about June 2? That's also the night the great Hawaiian singer and slack key guitarist **Ledward Kaapana** performs at The Shedd. For four decades, the Grammy-winning Big Island native has captivated listeners with his plaintive falsetto voice and mastery of the dreamy finger-style guitar music that evolved from the 19th century and earlier encounters between European sailors and Hawaiian natives. His important bands Hui Ohana and I Kona and his many solo projects (including collaborations with Alison Krauss, Chet Atkins and other pop musicians) have solidified Kaapana's deserved reputation as one of the islands' most intoxicating voices. – *Brett Campbell*

Seven Deadly Synths, or an Exploration of Aural Psychology

Have you ever stopped nodding along to a drum beat only to realize that you have no memory of consciously deciding to start? It takes perfection in multiple facets – tempo, timbre, melody, etc. – in order to actively hypnotize your audience, especially if they are unwitting test subjects. I'm fairly certain you can get paid for agreeing to take part in a similar psychological study somewhere, but that shouldn't stop you from paying a cover to see the indie outfit **Birds and Batteries**.

The Bay Area group's sound is characterized by virtual blankets of synth and pop production falling out of nowhere to smother the growing fire that so desperately wants to erupt out of lead songwriter Mike Sempert. B&B goes far beyond other, similar indie-electro outfits of the time – Starfucker et al. – in that the emphasis on fusion is strong, and it creates a potent mixture of years past and days present; like David Byrne fucking Passion Pit in the face until a new sonic hole, composed of cascading psychedelia and languid buildups, is ripped open.

In truth, this is the music that's going to confuse your body and your mind. You'll be in that daze – nodding aimlessly at the stars flying through your inner circuitry – when a fluid-yet-oddly-abrupt change in pace'll hit like a kick in the teeth and you'll be dancing, and you'll be sweating, and you'll be content closing out the rest of your life on a couch with soothing beats and flustered synthesizers reminding you that there's value to lethargy, and there's no point in sloth if we can't be conscious of what put us there.

In this case, it's Birds and Batteries.

Birds and Batteries play 10 pm Thursday, May 24, at Luckey's; \$5. – *Andy Valentine*



BIRDS AND BATTERIES