



It's Been A Long Time, Long Time Now

Elegant composition is lost on our dumb generation. When was the last time you heard Kanye West orchestrate the equivalent of an entire Bavarian marching band single-handedly into a coherent tune that's both catchy and just hipster enough that plaid-wearing fixie-riders would love it? Thankfully **Beirut's** Zach Condon's influences range from USSR-era waltz to modern day electronica, and all the while inherently classical European compositional traditions blast through.

Since Condon began the solo venture in 2006 with the release of *Gulag Orkestar*, the project has flourished into a venerable six-person band and moved away from Tarantino score-esque tracks and into indie-dance-folk land. Sad, really, but that doesn't mean you can't still hear the beautiful, traditional compositions of *Orkestar* and *Flying Club Cup* at a live show. Don't get me wrong, the group's record *March of the Zapotec* was still incredible, howling indie-folk for a larger audience, it just didn't have that same war-torn Europe feel that we all fell in love with back when "Nantes" was released. Maybe I'm just stuck in the past.

The gratuitous use of horns, ukulele, accordion and snare drum are still ever present on the group's latest record *The Rip Tide*. These instruments constitute Condon's domain, and it's nice to hear that he's found a balance between that dancer-pleasing electronica and hipster-kerfuffling traditionalism. Beirut is now poised to please as many people as possible – those older fans and those folks that cut their Beirut teeth with the pop – and that's exactly what the group will continue to do, no doubt, until the memories of old Europe fade and their fingers are withered from playing accordions and synthesizers, quite adeptly, I might add, on every record from here to eternity.

Beirut & Menomena play 8 pm Thursday, Sept. 6, at McDonald Theatre; \$32.50 adv., \$35 door. – *Andy Valentine*

Sad Synths and Future Islands

Many of my favorite singers can't sing. I'm accustomed to sticking odd aural objects in my ear hole. That being said, Samuel T. Herring of Baltimore-based trio **Future Islands** has a pretty weird voice. Its closest corollary is Joy Division's Ian Curtis; melodramatic and theatrical, his spectral moo cow explodes into apoplectic fits – think Springsteen and Waits, or Curtis himself at his most epileptic.

His voice is double-odd in front of the Future Island gauzy-synth backdrop. Here the Joy Division comparison deepens, bridging their late *Closer* era electro-iciness with the warmer, sweeter, more human sound of New Order that followed, complete with Peter Hook-style melodies supplied by William Cashion on guitar and bass.

This is electronic music, but don't expect booty-shakin'. And that's not to say you won't dance. But it's more like before you hit the club, staring into the mirror applying lipstick or touching up your hair wondering what the night holds for you. Or the taxi ride home, the last gin 'n' tonic warming your gut as melancholy cymbals splash the windshield like raindrops, regretting that the night was not what you hoped for.

And it's on this taxi ride home you'll think of Herring's words from 2010's *In Evening Air*: "You couldn't possibly know how much you meant to me," or "you hurt me so bad." You'll wish you'd thought of these lines when you needed the perfect, most honest thing to say.

Future Islands sound like a break-up feels and they play with Black Mountain and Quest For Fire 8 pm on Thursday, Sept. 6, at WOW Hall; \$12 adv., \$15 door. – *William Kennedy*



Staples of Soul

Aretha Franklin is considered the Queen of Soul, but **Mavis Staples** is Robin Hood. Now in her early 70s, Staples got her start singing gospel tunes as a child with her father, Pops, and her sisters as the Staples Singers in 1950. Ever since those early days, Staples has made a career out of sticking up for the little man through powerful songs.

In her youth, she marched with Martin Luther King Jr., helping to provide the soulful soundtrack to the civil rights movement. Staples and her sisters sang everything from Bob Dylan (who allegedly asked for her hand in marriage) covers to original gospel tunes with a message. Her infectious grizzly bear voice belted out timeless hits like "I'll Take You There" and "Respect Yourself," scoring hits throughout the '70s.

Through the years her fight for social justice through song didn't stop; Staples released *Live: Hope at the Hideout*, an album of freedom songs on Election Day 2008. Most recently she paired up with Wilco's Jeff Tweedy for the 2010 release *You Are Not Alone*.

Staples' website says of the album: "The phrasing, the tempos, the arrangements are different, but the messages are the same things I've been saying down through the years. They're about the world today – poverty, jobs, welfare, all of that – and making it feel better through these songs."

Tweedy plays to Staples' strengths throughout the album. The title track is a beautiful arrangement of soulful lyrics backed by Tweedy's gentle guitar. Staples both growls and purrs all the way through; her low vocal range expertly showcased on everything from the Creedence Clearwater Revival cover "Wrote a Song for Everyone" to the rollicking gospel tune "Wonderful Savior."

See this modern day musical Robin Hood tear through 60 years of soul at the Cuthbert Amphitheater 7 pm Wednesday, Sept. 5, with Bonnie Raitt. Tickets \$65.50 reserved, \$35.50 general admission, www.thecuthbert.com – *Jackie Varriano*

