

Mountain Goats
Transcendental Youth



John Darnielle of the Mountain Goats is not known for range; there is a sameness to his rhythmic-guitar playing and vocal melodies. But it's always been about his words: shocking, personal, utterly unique and spit with venom. Prior to 2012 the Mountain Goats' formula had grown a bit stale, but with his latest release *Transcendental Youth*, Darnielle has reignited the fire in his belly, reminding us he's one of the best songwriters of his generation.

TRACK: "Amy aka Spent Gladiator 1" (a tribute to Amy Winehouse)

— William Kennedy

Perfume Genius
Put Your Back N 2 It

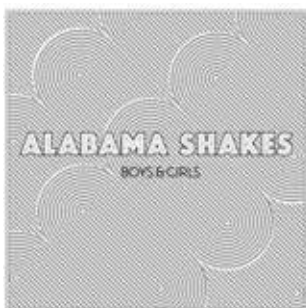
Don't let the terrible title scare you; Mike Hadreas aka Perfume Genius' latest release is a beautiful and gentle gem of a record. Based almost entirely around Hadreas' sparse piano playing and feminine voice, the songs are sad, soulful and entrancing: sucking the air out of the room and absorbing your attention like only good music can. I was underwhelmed with Perfume Genius' earlier records, but *Put Your Back N 2 It* and its textural indie-rock-torch-ballads rank tops with me this year.

TRACK: "Hood"

— William Kennedy

Alabama Shakes
Boys & Girls

These days with so many aloof, wispy-voiced, guitar-strumming, bearded troupe bands, it's nice to listen to something that really makes you feel something. That's how I felt the first time I heard the voice of Brittany Howard, lead singer of the Athens, Ala., band Alabama



Shakes. Part-Janis Joplin, part-Aretha Franklin and part-Amy Winehouse, Howard's voice leads the band's soulful, riff-heavy, tightly written freshman rock album with earth-shattering power, emotion and grit. The record swings from inspirational ballads ("I Found You," "Hold On") to languid melodies ("Boys & Girls") to the deliciously bitter ("Heartbreak") with ease and grace.

TRACK: "Hold On"

— Alex Notman



Fergus and Geronimo
Funky was the State of Affairs

Like Holy Modal Rounders to the hippies, or Pavement to alt-rockers in the '90s, Fergus and Geronimo poke fun at the social mores of the hipster generation, mixing ironic "I buy vinyl" genre tourism with tongue-in-cheek songwriting. But unlike the more overtly juvenile Ween, Fergus and Geronimo made a really great record in addition to the jokes. Expect techno-pop, '60s garage-rock, punk, jazzy saxophone squawk and a trippy sampled voice interlude from "Heather Strange," a "23-year-old human earthling": "Really I'm just looking for a man whose cerebral capabilities haven't been fried by LCD screens yet."

TRACK: "No Parties"

— William Kennedy



Fiona Apple
The Idler Wheel Is Wiser Than the Driver of the Screw and Whipping Cords Will Serve You More Than Ropes Will Ever Do

Not only is this my favorite album of 2012, it's the best album Fiona Apple has ever ripped from her heart. *The Idler Wheel* feels bold, wise and liberated, in spite of, or perhaps because of, her continued struggles with anxiety and depression, and at times, it's as if you can hear white-hot sparks firing off in her brain. Apple's robust classical voice is better than ever, her piano laughs and weeps, accompanied by celestas, bouzoukis, marimbas, koras and a "truck stomper" (basically, someone stomping around on the hood of her brother's truck). The use of timpani drums on the track "Hot Knife" adds booming big-band texture to playful and sharp lyrics: "If I'm butter, then he's a hot knife." No one combines humor and bitterness like Apple, especially on "Every Single Night," when she wails "I just made a meal for us both to choke on. Every single night's a fight with my brain." Keep up the good fight, Fiona.

TRACK: "Hot Knife"

— Alex Notman

Nutcracker Time in Eugene!

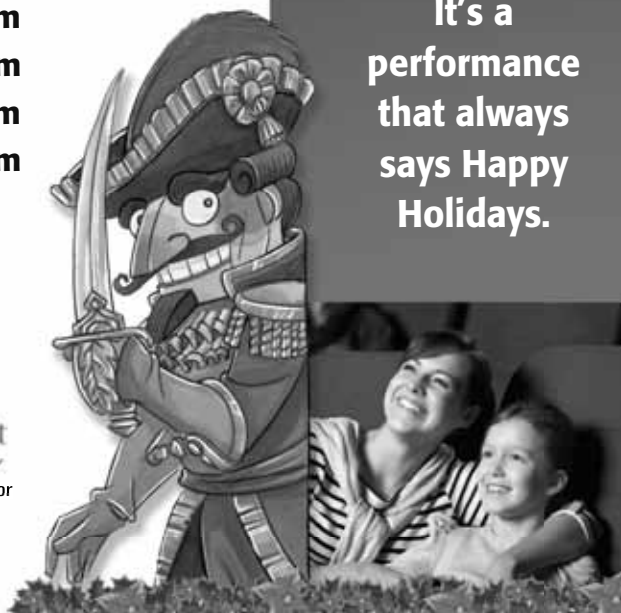
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Dec. 22 - 2:00pm
Dec. 22 - 7:30pm
Dec. 23 - 2:00pm

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