



MAJOR-LABEL RELEASES



Billy Corgan

The Future Embrace Reprise | Warner

We could call *The Future Embrace* Billy Corgan's first solo album. But who are we kidding? Corgan, former dictator of Smashing Pumpkins and Zwan — and one of rock's

most notorious control freaks — has basically been making solo albums for 15 years. Maybe he just didn't want to admit it until now. Or maybe he's just more comfortable in his own skin these days. Either way, *The Future Embrace* finds Corgan facing his brave new solo world by embracing the past — his own and others'. The densely layered afterburner guitars, the reverb-laced production, the melancholy and infinite sadness of his old band; they're all here in full effect — along with Corgan's instantly identifiable whine, natch. But instead of being set against the Pumpkins' kinetic alt-rock attack, they're usually coupled with beatboxes, beepy keyboards and atmospheric electronica and goth flourishes. These components add an extra layer of claustrophobia, paranoia and alienation to tracks like *Mina Loy (M.O.H.)*, *The Camera Eye* and even a cover of The Bee Gees' *To Love Somebody* with guest bleatings by Robert Smith. Not only is that a fitting duet, it's a telling one — with their seductive (if sometimes watery) grooves and dark melodies, these 12 songs channel the moody brooding of '80s outfits like The Cure, New Order and Depeche Mode more often than they rekindle the '90s firepower of the Pumpkins. That certainly makes *The Future Embrace* a first for Corgan.

★★★

> DS



54•40

Yes to Everything True North | Universal

"I know you still love me," brags 54•40 frontman Neil Osborne right off the bat on *Yes to Everything*. Well, yes and no. Sure, Canrock fans still love 54•40 for classics like *One*

Day in Your Life and *Ocean Pearl*. But can anyone name a song from their last album? Or name their last album, for that matter? Didn't think so. And much as we'd like for this 10th studio set (and first without longtime guitarist Phil Comparelli) to reverse that trend, it seems doubtful. Not that there's anything horribly wrong with *Yes to Everything* — these 11 scrappy tunes are all reasonably hooky, decently rocking, competently performed and smartly produced. Trouble is, they're not especially inspired or innovative. Aside from rare moments of invention — like, say, the tinkly country piano on *This is Here, This is Now* — this is essentially 54•40 by the numbers. And good as that is, it might be asking too much of fans to expect them to say yes to that one more time.

★★★

> DS



Stripper's Union

Local 518 Universal

Is there such a thing as a Canrock supergroup? If so, Stripper's Union is it. Not to be confused with hip-hoppers Sweatshop Union,

this outfit stars Tragically Hip guitarist Rob Baker and former Odds frontman Craig Northey, backed by members of both bands and other vets whose credits range from Doug and the Slugs to Bryan Adams. On *Local 518*, they pool their considerable talents on a

13-song slate that's far more eclectic and eccentric than you'd figure. Granted, most of it's the sort of sharply witty, loose-limbed guitar-rock you might expect from Northey and Baker. But there's also some punchy funk, a serving of Beatle pop, a dash of Dixieland, some folk-blues, a few Latin grooves and even some dubby production. And with Northey's dry vocals at centre stage, it often sounds more like an adventurous Tom Petty disc than either of their regular gigs. That may not be enough to make hits of *Shake it Off*, *Bullet Proof White Limo* and *Local Bear*, but it does make them well worth a listen.

★★★1/2

> DS



Cowboy Troy

Loco Motive Warner

Meet the new disposable hero of hick-hopprisy. Texan Cowboy Troy, the latest product of the Big & Rich stable, is — and we quote his publicity on this — "the world's only

six-foot-five, black rapping cowboy." So if you're in the market for an album by a six-foot-five, black rapping cowboy, well, you can't do better than Troy's entertainingly lightweight debut *Loco Motive*. Produced and mostly co-penned by B&R, this 12-cut novelty is an eccentric culture-clash hybrid of old-school hip-hop and rootsy Nashville hayseed-rock, with some heavy metal and funk guitars thrown on to the BBQ to add sizzle — imagine Kid Rock with a little more LL Cool J in his DNA and you're in the ballpark. Trouble is, Troy is no LL. His rhymes are of the booty-cutie variety, his voice is monotonous and his stiff, by-the-beat flow makes Vanilla Ice seem like Ice Cube. Despite that, loopy, hook-filled cuts like the hit *I Play Chicken With the Train* and *Crick in My Neck* will put the hoot in hootenanny this summer. But we doubt you'll kick up your heels if you hear them next year.

★★★

> DS



Reggie & The Full Effect

Songs Not to Get Married To Vagrant | Universal

Tough to ignore a title like that — never mind the cover pic of a trailer

home ablaze. But *Songs Not to Get Married To* has plenty of well-done romantic steak to go with the sizzle. This Kansas City outfit fronted by Get Up Kids keyboardist James Deweese serve up a baker's dozen slices of guitar-chug screamo-metal (and the odd foray into brooding electronica) with all the cathartic vocals, churning beats and emotional scarring ("How could you do this to me?") allowed by law. Whether it's meant to be sincere or sardonic is anybody's guess, though we're leaning toward the latter. If it's the real deal, we'd hate to be his ex — but we would thank her for making this disc as insistent as its title.

★★★

> DS

Reeves Gabrels

Rockonica Favored Nations | Fusion III

David Bowie's old guitarist tries to make a name for himself once again with his third solo disc. And listening to these 10 tracks of moody, majestic modern rock built from guitars, guitars and more guitars, it's easy to hear why The Thin White Duke drafted Reeves Gabrels for most of his '90s albums. Thing is, it's also easy to hear why Bowie didn't hire him as a singer or songwriter — like many sidemen, his voice is subpar and his songcraft tends toward self-indulgence. Still, if you want to hear a master craftsman show his stuff, *Rockonica* will fit the bill.

★★

> DS

ROCK + POP

Hurst

Wanderlust Roundrock

STYLE: The return of the prodigal songsmith.

SUBSTANCE: Turns out Thomas Wolfe was wrong — you can go home again. You can if you're Trevor Hurst, anyway. The erstwhile Econoline Crush frontman recently relocated back home to Winnipeg from L.A. And despite its seemingly ironic title, *Wanderlust*, the debut EP from his solo outfit Hurst, also marks a homecoming of sorts for Virden's favourite son. Forsaking EC's samplers and sequencers for six strings and the odd synth, Hurst and new songwriting partner Ross Childress (formerly a guitarist for Collective Soul) get back to basics with seven short, sharp shots of guitar-fuelled modern rock. Judging by this, coming home was the best move Trev has made in a while.

STANDOUTS: With its fuzzy guitar lick, low-grinding bass and hooky chorus supporting Hurst's sensitive yet soaring vocal, opener *Tin Cup* is a great place to start.

ON THE WEB: www.hurstband.com

★★★ out of ★★★★★

Harlequin

Harlequin II Independent

STYLE: Rock 'n' roll resurrection.

SUBSTANCE: The boys are back. Well, one of the boys, anyway. Two decades after the last album from local rock mainstays Harlequin, singer George Belanger returns with a revamped lineup, a new songwriting partner in guitarist James Brose — and most importantly, a new disc of original material. *Harlequin II* finds Belanger and Brose reconnecting with the commercial sound of the band's early '80s heyday, with nine tracks of melodic, guitar-driven pop-rock, highlighted by searing solos and George's warm rasp. Here's hoping we don't have to wait two more decades for the next instalment.

STANDOUTS: The radio-ready anthems *Don't Break*, *Do What You Say* and *Sometimes I Feel* show George hasn't lost it.

ON THE WEB: www.harlequinii.com

★★★ out of ★★★★★

Knuckleduster

Drown Independent

STYLE: Rock that packs a punch.



SUBSTANCE: It's Round 3 for heavyweights Knuckleduster, and these bruisers are a long way from on the ropes. In fact, they sound like they're just hitting their stride. The 10-song *Drown*, their third independent album, finds the long-running foursome delivering a strikingly confident and impressively muscular combination of hard-hitting beats, gigantic guitar riffs and darkly powerful vocals. Basically, these cuts are as solidly built and competently performed as anything you'd find on a major label. Which is to say: These guys are definitely punching above their weight.

STANDOUTS: The grinding axe 'n' searing howl of *Chicken*, the plodding wallop of *Pussy* and the staccato crunch of *Read My Lips* all bring it. Bonus points for the turbocharged cover of the Manitoba's Wild Kingdom classic *Had It Coming*.

ON THE WEB: knuckledusterband@hotmail.com

★★★1/2 out of ★★★★★

Equal in Dust

Equal in Dust Independent

STYLE: Raw power trio.

SUBSTANCE: With barely a year of gigging under their belt, Equal in Dust still have a long way to go. But they're off to a decent start, judging by their self-titled debut EP. Deftly balancing rumbling basslines and heavy-handed percussion with electroshock guitars and tortured Corganesque vocals, this impressive threesome generate a relentless wall of power that is dark, deadly and decidedly heavy. Give them some time and experience and they could evolve into thrash-masters without equal.

STANDOUTS: All five cuts are fairly consistent, but we're partial to the crunch-frenzy of *Don't Give In*.

ON THE WEB: equalindust@hotmail.com

★★1/2 out of ★★★★★

SINGER-SONGWRITERS

Petkau

Don't Say a Word Head in the Sand

STYLE: Pop-rock songcraft that balances art, heart and smarts.

SUBSTANCE: It's one thing to make a disc that sounds exceptional. It's quite another to make a disc that is exceptional. As a veteran recording engineer and producer, Mike Petkau certainly has no problem achieving the former. His solid second release *Don't Say a Word* confirms pull off the latter too.



"Hell no, I ain't happy."

> Drive-by Truckers

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Scene and Heard

The latest crop of local CDs

These dozen cuts of sharp singer-songwriter pop-rock are amply and artfully decorated with fat-free arrangements and ear-catching sonic manipulations — but the knob-twiddling never overshadows the bittersweet melodies and earnest emotions at the heart of the matter. Meanwhile, Petkau's gruff, unvarnished vocals and chunky guitars give the whole affair an earthy, folksy richness that adds even more power to his musical arsenal. So take Mike's advice — shut up and listen.

STANDOUTS: The smoky, rising tension of *I Claim These Streets* gets the disc off on the right foot. The off-kilter rocker *Patch Me In* makes a fine centerpiece. And the icy classical strains of *Winter Waits* send you off in high style.

ON THE WEB:
www.mikepetkau.com
★★★★1/2 out of ★★★★★

Michael Johnston *Curious Heart* Idle Free

STYLE: Pretty, rootsy piano-pop that's also pretty smart.

SUBSTANCE: Michael Johnston is a hard guy to pin down. A former Torontonian now living in Winnipeg, the singer-songwriter and pianist wrote his debut disc here, there and almost everywhere — including Slovakia, where he spent a spell teaching English. Thankfully, his music is a tad more firmly rooted. With a dusty, plaintive voice, a delicate touch and a way with a melancholy melody, Johnston specialises in rootsy piano-pop ballads. Some

are as direct and simple as lullabies. Others are nearly as bouncy and catchy as Ben Folds. One even borrows the bridge from *Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head*. But with the help of an all-star cast including Oh Susanna, Reid Jamieson, Skydigger Andy Maize and former Rheostatics drummer Don Kerr, Johnston weaves them all together into a unified and likable debut disc. Check him out while you can — we'd bet this guy is going places.

STANDOUTS: You gotta love a tune subtitled *Missin' Manitoba and You*.

ON THE WEB: www.michaeljohnston.ca
★★★★1/2 out of ★★★★★

COMPILATIONS

We Rock for a Reason Various Artists Freq 107

STYLE: Good 'n' loud.

SUBSTANCE: Partial as we are to rocking for no good reason at all, we must nevertheless give it up to Freq 107 for putting out this disc to fill United Way coffers. Likewise, we give props to the 15 artists on *We Rock For a Reason* — a mix of spiritual alt-metal Yanks like Breaking Point, Alter Bridge and 12 Stones, with local representation from Broken Halo, Vanderveen, Driver, Drivenation, I-Witness, Volume, Projektor and WHY. Why? So you can support a good cause and the local scene at once. What more reason do you need to rock?

STANDOUTS: The Turtles-inspired piano-pop bounce of Volume's *Wise*; the jazzy, hip-hoppy funk-pop of Broken Halo's *Gagged and Bound*; the charging wall-of-guitar pop-rock of Projektor's *Getaway*.

ON THE WEB: www.freq107.com
★★★ out of ★★★★★

JAZZ

Jennifer Hanson *How the Night People Pray* Independent

STYLE: Lady slings the booze.

SUBSTANCE: Think Tom Waits and Rickie Lee Jones have a monopoly on bluesy boho-jazz balladry? Think again. Ex-Winnipegger Jennifer Hanson gets in on the action with her sophomore set *How the Night People Pray*. Teaming with songwriter Graham Shaw and tastefully backed by a rotating cast of local VIPs from Ron Paley to Spider Sinnaeve, the breezy-voiced Atlantian lets her hair down on a winning slate of drunkard's waltzes and last-call laments.

STANDOUTS: Beautiful as Hanson's voice is, Shaw's magnificently memorable songcraft comes close to stealing the show. Each of these 10 cuts is such an exquisite little gem it's tough not to think his name should be on the cover next to hers — or better still, on another solo album of his own.

ON THE WEB: www.jenniferhanson.ca
★★★★ out of ★★★★★

HIP-HOP

Skratch Bastid | John Smith | Pip Skid

Takin' Care of Business First Things First

STYLE: Cutting up the Peanuts and Corn.

SUBSTANCE: It's east meets west as Winnipeg rappers John Smith and Pip Skid hook up with Halifax DJ Skratch Bastid for *Takin' Care of Business*. Smitty and Pip drop their usual gritty, off-kilter rhymes over some righteously bumptious backing grooves. Skratch supplies the slice 'n' dice with his outrageous prestidigital stylus manipulations. And even though they don't kick out the BTO title track, they do live up to its title.

STANDOUTS: *Collecting Empties* and *Step to Gettin'* are catchier than West Nile Fever is gonna be

this summer, and *Non-Stop* is hilariously filthy — but the bragadocious *I Run Winnipeg* says it all.

ON THE WEB: www.skratchbastid.com

★★★★1/2 out of ★★★★★

SKA + PUNK

SubCity Dwellers *Out on the Streets* Steel Capped

STYLE: *Skadinista!*

SUBSTANCE: If you like your ska-punk nice 'n' smooth, stay away from SubCity Dwellers. To butcher a line from Ike and Tina, they don't do things nice 'n' smooth — they do 'em nice 'n' rough. On their six-song EP *Out on the Streets*, that translates into a combo platter of snappy rhythms, crisp horns and choppy guitars, topped by the mush-mouthed gurgles of a singer who clearly graduated from the Joe Strummer School of Enunciation.

STANDOUTS: Scrappy cuts like *1st and 55th Ave.* wouldn't sound out of place on a Rancid record, while reggae-groove changeups like *Dubcity* would go nicely on Side 5 of The Clash's *Sandinista!*

ON THE WEB: www.steelcappedrecords.com

★★★★1/2 out of ★★★★★

ROOTS

House of Doc *Prairiegrass* MNW | Universal

STYLE: Mountain music for the flatlands.

SUBSTANCE: With a lineup of three siblings and two in-laws, new-grass string-band House of Doc are truly the family that plays together. So it only seems right that their gorgeous and rustic second album *Prairiegrass* is a tribute to family, home and tradition. And it also seems fitting that these 11 heart-warming tales of immigration, marriage and the Depression are performed with the easy intimacy of a backporch jam and graced with the sort of supple, natural harmonies only kinfolk can produce so effortlessly. Consider it a gift from their house to yours.

STANDOUTS: From the gentle strains of the haunting *Gravestones in Namaka* through the zippy banjo licks of the good-riddance ditty *I Was Lonely* to the stirring a cappella gospel *Wait In Line*, this is a striking and unforgettably beautiful work.

ON THE WEB: www.houseofdoc.com

★★★★ out of ★★★★★

TOP OF THE CHARTS

POP SINGLES

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|------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. SPEED OF SOUND | Coldplay |
| 2. LONELY NO MORE | Rob Thomas |
| 3. HOLIDAY | Green Day |
| 4. INCOMPLETE | Backstreet Boys |
| 5. HOME | Michael Buble |
| 6. OLD SKOOL LOVE | Divine Brown |
| 7. DON'T PHUNK WITH MY HEART | Black Eyed Peas |
| 8. PIECES | Sum 41 |
| 9. LET ME GO | 3 Doors Down |
| 10. YOU AND ME | Lifeshouse |

Source: Nielsen SoundScan

BEST-SELLERS

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| 1. X+Y | Coldplay |
| 2. MONKEY BUSINESS | Black Eyed Peas |
| 3. GET BEHIND ME SATAN | White Stripes |
| 4. IL DIVO | Il Divo |
| 5. IT'S TIME | Michael Buble |
| 6. OUT OF EXILE | Audioslave |
| 7. ROCK OF AGES | Def Leppard |
| 8. AMERICAN IDIOT | Green Day |
| 9. LOVE.ANGEL.MUSIC.BABY | Gwen Stefani |
| 10. MEZMERIZE | System of a Down |

Source: Nielsen SoundScan

C&W SINGLES

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. MAKING MEMORIES OF US | Keith Urban |
| 2. FIRST CARS & FREEDOM | Rascal Flatts |
| 3. LOT OF LEAVIN' LEFT TO DO | Dierks Bentley |
| 4. YOU'LL BE THERE | George Strait |
| 5. SOMETHING MORE | Sugarland |
| 6. GOOD AS I ONCE WAS | Toby Keith |
| 7. KEG IN THE CLOSET | Kenny Chesney |
| 8. MISSISSIPPI GIRL | Faith Hill |
| 9. IF SOMETHING SHOULD HAPPEN | Darryl Worley |
| 10. THAT'S WHAT I LOVE ABOUT SUNDAY | Craig Morgan |

Source: Billboard.com

DANCE TRACKS

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|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. ONE WORD | Kelly Osbourne |
| 2. LISTEN TO YOUR HEART | DHT |
| 3. SINCE U BEEN GONE | Kelly Clarkson |
| 4. COME RAIN COME SHINE | Jenn Cunetta |
| 5. HOLLABACK GIRL | Gwen Stefani |
| 6. WHEN THE DAWN BREAKS | Narcotic Thrust |
| 7. MR. BRIGHTSIDE | The Killers |
| 8. SO MANY TIMES | Gadjo |
| 9. INSPIRATION | Ian Van Dahl |
| 10. STAY | Mynt feat. Kim Sozzi |

Source: Billboard.com

UNDERGROUND

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. JADE DEAD EYES | Port Amoral |
| 2. I DO MY OWN STUNTS | Mood Ruff |
| 3. HOPELESS | GruF |
| 4. OUR THICKNESS | Russian Futurists |
| 5. AND EVERYTHING ELSE ... | Nobody |
| 6. THE MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS | Caribou |
| 7. GIMME FICTION | Spoon |
| 8. FACE THE TRUTH | Stephen Malkmus |
| 9. NO BUSINESS | Negativland |
| 10. DON'T SAY A WORD | Petkau |

Source: UMFM 101.5

